

# **REVIEW**

**by Dr. Andrej Todorov Bojadžiev – Professor at**

**Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**

**of dissertation for educational and research degree "doctor"**

**in higher education 2. Humanities**

**Professional field 2.1. Philology**

**Author:** Inna Vasileva Dimitrova

**Topic:** Modern theories about the origin of the Glagolitic alphabet

**Adviser:** Prof. Ph.D. Heinz Miklas - University of Vienna

## **Introduction**

By order No. 121 of July 12, 2019, I was appointed as part of the scientific jury in connection with the defense of the dissertation for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" of Inna Vasileva Dimitrova.

The documents submitted by the author of the dissertation meet the requirements of the Law on Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and its Rules of Procedure.

## **Doctoral student data**

I know Inna Dimitrova from her studies in the Master's program "Old Bulgarian Studies" at the Department of Cyril and Methodius at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2009-2010. She was born in Varna, graduated with a bachelor's degree in English Philology, and since 2015 she is a doctoral student at CMRC. She has worked as a translator, has taught English at the English Club Foundation - Varna, and is currently working again as a teacher of English, but at the University of Library Science and Information Technology – Sofia.

Inna Dimitrova showed a lasting interest in the early history of Slavic writing, and in particular the Glagolitic script. She is the author of 20 publications and reports, 15 of which are directly relevant to the topic of the thesis and present separate problems from it.

Dimitrova is closely monitoring everything related to mediaeval studies, as evidenced by the several reviews of new books for Scripta & e-Scripta.

During her formation as a specialist in the field of Slavic Middle Ages, she was assisted by two specializations in this field – at the University of Vienna, Austria in 2015–2016 and at the University of Nitra, Slovakia (2016–2017).

## **Description of the thesis**

The work presented consists of an *Introduction* (pp. 4–56), two chapters - *Topical Aspects in Studying the Origin of the Glagolitic* (p. 57–162) and *Exploring the Letters for X1 and X2 in the Glagolitic* (p. 162–196), *Conclusion* (pp. 197–201), *Tables and Appendices* (pp. 202–245), and *Bibliography* (pp. 246–275).

Inna Dimitrova points out that the main focus of the dissertation is "directed to solving certain theoretical problems concerning the genesis (creation) of the Slavic alphabet Glagolitic, its characteristic features in typological and individual terms, developed in the research of selected authors from the last years of the XX century so far." (p. 6). The tasks of the study include examining general theories of writing systems, methods of analyzing alphabets, reviewing sources, different theories of researchers, and evaluating them with a view to the applicability of the results obtained from reviewing different approaches (pp. 6–7).

Dimitrova also outlines the fields of her research, explicitly emphasizing that the specific issues related to the paleographic features of the individual monuments, their spelling norms and classification, as well as the stages of the development of the Glagolitic letter (p. 7) remain outside her main topic.

Thus outlined, the subject of the study forms it as a critical bibliographic review in a narrow field, with the possibility of reaching, through data analysis, a typology of research and verifying its applicability through specific analysis.

## **Review of the main parts of the thesis**

The described object, goals and tasks of the dissertation present us a necessary attitude in Bulgarian and Slavic media studies. Recently, topics related to the Glagolitic alphabet and, in particular, its appearance, the first monuments and the possibilities for reconstruction of the original composition of the letters, have been of interest to researchers. This also necessitates the emergence of a critical view of contemporary achievements, a necessary overview of opinions and theories, and a new reading of the sources associated with these studies. Therefore, I believe that the topic of the dissertation is necessary and relevant. Such a reading would help anyone interested in the appearance of the Slavic letter, its original composition, structure and composition.

Inna Dimitrova study follows the classical structure of this type of work – introduction, protection of theoretical framework, review, analysis and evaluation of literature, attempt to apply the analysis approaches through their specific application, conclusion, cited literature and applications.

It should be noted immediately that the doctoral student is well versed in the literature on the subject, which in such a subject is a necessary condition for her development. The individual opinions on the subject are presented in a consistent historical order, tracing from the beginning of interest to the subject up to recent times. This allows Inna Dimitrova to clearly formulate the different strands, and in some cases this has led to a clear definition of development in various issues. Thus, we have separate stories about these different strands, methods, approaches and even "fashions" in the study of the Glagolitic, which are presented in a suitable form by the doctoral student.

We may disagree with the conclusions in the individual parts of this work. In the presence of few written sources for the beginning of the writing, the author had to rely on different hypotheses and

even scientific speculation. However, I believe that such an approach when carefully handling data is justified.

What is interesting about the dissertation is not so much the individual descriptions of the different approaches. Here the doctoral student tried to highlight the most important and put each study in the context of other similar and different ideas. The value in Inna Dimitrova's work lies in her attempt to combine some of the acquired critical knowledge from different approaches in one look at the topic. In this sense, we have an original study, which, as an approach and ideas, can provoke criticism, but in its essence I believe that it is a contributor to the Cyril and Methodius problem and has its place.

The fact that Inna Dimitrova tries to push her own reading into the complex issues of the early verb, is a good illustration of her approach to the question of the two letters for x. And without attracting later sources, I think the idea of textual dependency in the use of the second letter (spider or solar x) deserves careful reading and verification.

## **Critical notes**

Inna Dimitrova devotes 25 pages of her work (13-25) to the topic "Writing research. History. Study Models. " This approach is correct. Indeed, such issues should precede such research. The problem is that some details can be spared to the reader and the critical view can be directed more specifically to the study, narrowing down substantially some private issues.

Dimitrova writes on page 159 of her paper: "It should be noted that the wide field of interpretation of the graphical form does not facilitate the creation of new theories – on the contrary, many theories, because of the lack of clear criteria, see regularities where they cannot, thus falling into arbitrary interpretation. Other of them consider natural phenomena, which are only partially confirmed by the facts." Unfortunately, the author has not been able to prevent herself from such interpretations.

In her work, Inna Dimitrova freely uses sources in a wide range throughout the Middle Ages. Such an approach raises some objections when it comes to reconstructing the original writing system. The poem with the acrostic I am the Light of Whole World cannot be used for the early reconstruction of the Glagolitic despite Mareš, Demkova, Droblenkova, and Dimitrova, because the connection with the earliest Glagolitic tradition of this text, whose witnesses are known only from 15-16th century, could not be proven. This applies to a lesser or greater extent to all works with an alphabetical acrostic, because they all relate to a later era and, although some may play the role of factors in memorizing the alphabet, there is no evidence that they refer to the time of writing or shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, the only such source is Constantine Preslavsky's Alphabetical Prayer, but it did not emerge until the end of the ninth century at best.

This approach of the author "unlocks" the possibility of symbolic interpretations of the Glagolitic letter, a tendency which, as she herself illustrates, has been very popular lately. The problem with this type of hypothesis, if they do not derive directly from the Glagolitic graphics and the order of the letters but are brought from the outside, is that they will always remain cleverly conceived constructive constructs of scholars. They must always be understood as elegant speculative theories. Of course, symbols can be found in the Glagolitic alphabet: the shape of the letter az, the abbreviation of the word Jesus as ѿз, the probable end of the alphabet as a t-shaped cross. However,

it cannot be said that "a significant number of units contain theologically significant elements - in the image, number, sound, name, as well as in the use of some characters" (p. 160). It cannot be said to have "a connection with theological-philosophical terminology in the names of the letters" (p. 161). What is the philosophy behind the name фьрт?

In a critical study, the author's attitude to earlier studies has a major role to play. As noted above, Inna Dimitrova is very familiar with the literature on the subject. What falls short of work is a bolder expression of one's own opinion and attitude to the questions asked. A careful reading of the findings after each part of the study does not always answer the question of what the author thinks. On page 79, she writes: "Thanks to the systematic approach applied in the research, different sides of the original verb were discussed and properly reconstructed ...". First, not all the cited studies take a systematic approach, and second, as Dimitrova himself will point out several times, the reconstruction of the early Glagolitic writing system has been the subject of much discussion in recent times.

The review of the studies undertaken by Dimitrova covers various topics and directions in the use of the sources and their interpretation. Some of them present a contemporary reading of the Glagolitic script and are not directly relevant to the subject. For example, Vasil Yonchev's theory of the composition of the Glagolitic letters is applied by all modern font and graphic designers, but it has no connection with the reconstruction of the early Glagolitic script (p. 111–116) and in my opinion this fact should be explicitly emphasized in the dissertation.

Some of Inna Dimitrova's statements need to be supplemented and clarified because they are brief and may not be properly understood. Thus, at p. 146 she writes that "The relationship between the Glagolitic and the Cyrillic alphabet is not clearly established - in synchronous and diachronic terms." It is not clear which has not been established in this connection - the general outlines, the functions of the two alphabets or the dependence of each other? It remains unclear to the reader and why the question of the phonetic value of Ѧ and ѿ is controversial, since their use in Old Bulgarian monuments is unambiguous (p. 146).

On page 159 Inna Dimitrova writes "Insufficient efforts have been made to clarify the question of why the appearance of the first Slavic letter was different from the popular writing systems at that time ...". I think that Dimitrova also shares the opinion of most researchers that the Glagolitic is a creative work. This is the most important reason for the difference.

In some cases, the author should be more careful. On page 194, she writes: "This supports the hypothesis of the early appearance of the sign (spider or solar x, my note), as early as the Cyril and Methodius era, since for none of the Cyril and Methodius students who made alphabetical works, there is no evidence that he knew the Hebrew language and that he knew the Hebrew books (which were not widely available at the time). " The lack of data is not an argument that the students did not know Hebrew.

Some terms are misused and should be corrected. Some examples. On page 14, Mrs. Dimitrova writes about the letter of Devanagari as an alphabet. In fact, this script is not a pure alphabet and, by some classifications, belongs to the syllable writings. In some places there is some confusion and the thought of the author cannot be clearly traced. For example, on page 77, the following passage made it difficult for us: "They are the following (it is a change in the Glagolitic letter):" regionally, its grapheme is no longer a phonograph, or is no longer a correlate of / dz /. The word "phonograph" has no place here, probably a phoneme.

There are no "reduced vowels" in Old Bulgarian, because accent still does not play an important role in the phonological system. Jer vowels are high and short vowels. One of the language universals is that these vowels prove to be unsustainable in their development – they either drop or lower their vowel (p. 144).

Inna Dimitrova introduces English terms in many places without always clarifying them. In fact, the best practice would be to do the opposite, to apply Bulgarian terminology (or to propose one's own), and in parentheses to clarify where the concept comes from explaining its use. This is especially true of the initial, theoretical pages.

To the ordinary confusion we must give the direct correlation of the letters я and ю with the vowels, i.e. the indistinguishability of sound and the letter on page 144.

Not everywhere the citation follows the same pattern. For example, when listing editions of Old Bulgarian monuments, only a year without an author is indicated (p. 4), elsewhere in the title and year, followed by a comma, elsewhere – a colon, etc. In several places, the author is indicated with only one letter and, after a comma, a page, e.g. I, 84 (p. 16).

From the formal requirements it should be noted that there is no separate list of researches of the author on the problems of the dissertation. This omission is probably due to the fact that much of her previous research, reports and lectures reflect smaller portions of the topics covered in the work. In this sense, we can assume that all the necessary protection requirements are fulfilled.

The paper should be carefully read and corrected for typographical, punctuation and stylistic errors and inaccuracies.

## **Conclusion**

Inna Dimitrova's work has an important feature. It contains original ideas from the author. Despite the critical remarks made, the proposed work meets the important requirement for the ability to conduct research independently. It is undisputed that the doctoral student is familiar with the literature on the subject and has a skills for building independent hypotheses and solutions in the field of early Glagolitic writing.

From a formal point of view, the results of the work also meet the requirements for the thesis defense.

Due to the above, I give my positive opinion on the conducted research and propose to the venerable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" of Inna Vasileva Dimitrova in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology.

12.10. 2019

Reviewer:

(Prof. Dr. Andrej Bojadžiev)