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REVIEWS

IRENA ŠPADIJER, *SVETI PETAR KORIŠKI U STAROJ SRPSKOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI* [ST PETER OF KORIŠA IN OLD SERBIAN LITERATURE]. BELGRADE: ČIGOJA ŠTAMPA, 2014, 413 p.

*Reviewed by Danica Popović**

Irena Špadijer, professor of medieval literature at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, is very well known to all those concerned with medieval Serbian and other Slavic literatures. Apart from her many and noted studies, her two recently published books have attracted the particular attention of the academic community: *Svetogorska baština. Manastir Hilandar i stara srpska književnost* [Athonite Heritage. Monastery of Hilandar and Old Serbian Literature], and the one that is the subject of this review, *Sveti Petar Koriški u staroj srpskoj književnosti*.

The book is devoted to an exceptional literary character which is grounded in historical reality, Peter of Koriša who, sometime in the late twelfth century, pursued a solitary ascetic life in the wilderness of Koriška Gora near Prizren (Metohija). Today the main guardian of the memory of this unusual ascetic figure is the monastery of Crna Reka (southwest Serbia). The cult of the saint still lives in the distinctive, almost medieval setting of this cave monastery. Its focal point is the saint's relics, known far and wide for their miraculous and healing

powers. Peter's original shrine in Koriša, where monastic life died out centuries ago, has been subjected to deliberate devastation and eradication of memory, as are other Serbian monuments in Kosovo and Metohija. The site itself is barely accessible.

The focus of Irena Špadijer's attention, however, is neither this and similar realities nor the issues relating to legends and oral traditions about the life and ascetic pursuits of the Koriša recluse. Nor is the book concerned with issues that fall in the domain of disciplines such as cultural history, ascetical theology, hagiology or even psychology, although its frame of reference involves to some extent all of them. It is important therefore to keep in mind the author's own remark made in her concise and substantive introduction: the subject of her study is a literary, i.e. linguistic work of art, and her method belongs to philology understood in the broadest possible sense – as a discipline that combines linguistic, textological, literary-historical and theoretical perspectives. It

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seems obvious therefore that this book will be a must-read for the historians of medieval literature both for its methodology and for the conclusions it puts forth. Moreover, it will be of interest to other disciplines of medieval studies because it provides a reliable philological and literary basis for a more comprehensive approach to phenomena as complex as the cult of St Peter of Koriša. It is exactly this aspect that this review is concerned with. Without going into issues specific to the domain of the history of medieval literature, I restrict myself to pointing to the relevance that the proposed conclusions have to a more comprehensive understanding of the emergence, content and function of the cult of St Peter of Koriša in the context of medieval Serbian and, more generally, Eastern Christian cultic practice.

Consistently adhering to the philological method, Irena Špadijer begins by addressing textological questions, i.e. by examining the entire manuscript tradition of the literary texts intended for cult purposes. In the research she undertook she had few predecessors to guide her and few firm points of reference to rely on. This is the reason why the first two chapters ("St Peter of Koriša in Old Serbian ecclesiastical poetry" and "St Peter of Koriša in Old Serbian hagiography") embark on a detailed study of the hymnographic and hagiographic works devoted to the Koriša recluse, i.e. of the compositions belonging to the genres of ecclesiastical poetry and hagiography. This time-consuming and highly complex task, which involved the examination of the relationship among the different copies and variant versions of the texts, and the identification of their models, proved worthy of the effort put into it. Apart from enabling the publication of the texts themselves ("Sources in Old Slavonic") – which are appended at the end of the book along with the "Images of the manuscripts" – the effort came up with some very important conclusions.

Irena Špadijer reliably established the existence of two different services for St

Peter of Koriša, which survive in three copies. Her analysis of the relationship between the services is central to understanding the distinctiveness of the glorification of saints in medieval Serbia, which lies in a saint's cult being built in stages and chiefly with liturgical means. The original Service for St Peter of Koriša composed sometime in the early decades of the thirteenth century is particularly important because it is, among other things, one of the earliest works in this genre in Serbian literature, chronologically quite close to the Service for St Symeon penned by Sava of Serbia. One of the author's important observations is that this service has, as it were, documentary value – which lies in the factual data it contains, in recurring information about the grave and relics of Peter of Koriša, and in the immediacy of the description of the hermit's ascetic deeds. This original composition was used a few decades later by the illustrious Serbian writer Teodosije (Theodosius) of Hilandar, whose Service for St Peter of Koriša, as Irena Špadijer demonstrates, is much more abstract in its poetic expression and more universal both in motifs and in messages. Irena Špadijer's observations and conclusions strongly support the view that a spontaneously developed local cult was subsequently codified and reshaped in accordance with the highest standards of the genre, and transposed into a broader, both universally Christian and national, framework. I have no doubts that these observations and conclusions will resound strongly among the researchers concerned with the complex phenomenon of Eastern Christian "canonization", the process of a person's inclusion among the saints.

The hagiographic literature devoted to the Koriša anchorite – two vitae, a shorter and a fully developed one – is discussed with the same scrupulousness in an extensive chapter which brings many new and interesting findings. Irena Špadijer pays particular attention, and with good reason, to the saint's *Life* written by Teodosije of Hilandar.

How influential his literary masterpiece was among later copyists may be seen from the fact that a relatively large number of surviving copies offer the same version of the text in Teodosije's readily recognizable literary style. Without going into the question of literary heritage or Teodosije's poetic expression, which will certainly continue to be an inspiring topic for scholars of Old Serbian literature, I shall point to only some of Irena Špadijer's important findings concerning the cult of St Peter of Koriša. It should be emphasized straight away that her findings will be of great interest not only to Serbian scholars but also to all those who focus their research on the cults of the holy anchorites of the Eastern Christian world.

Searching for literary and historical models which may have influenced the shaping of the cult of St Peter of Koriša, Irena Špadijer carefully examines its South-Slavic context. One of her particularly consequential observations is that the historical figure of Peter of Koriša chronologically and geographically follows four illustrious anchorites (Sts John of Rila, Prochorus of Pčinja, Joachim of Osogovo and Gabriel of Lesnovo) who had lived in the area between Mt Rila and Kosovo between the second half of the tenth century and the end of the twelfth century. On the other hand, her comparative literary-historical analysis of their biographies shows that Teodosije of Hilandar did not look for models for his *Life of Peter of Koriša* in local South-Slavic authors, but in quite another place. Namely, he chose to follow the supreme example set by the *Life* of the founder of eremitism, St Anthony the Great, which has already been identified as the prototype. It is interpreted mostly from the standpoint of chosen hagiographic *topoi* which cover all types of radical ascetic practice as the prescribed road to attaining sanctity. These interpretations show that Teodosije's portrait of St Peter of Koriša, as a whole and in every detail, is so shaped as to conform to the example of the most radical ascetic set by the early Egyptian

hermits. Irena Špadijer's contribution to our understanding of this particular topic consists in her use of a distinctive perspective appropriate to the philological method: a comparative analysis of the structure of the characters of St Anthony and St Peter with respect to literary motifs and composition. A significant contribution to specialist hagiological-hymnological studies is made by the examination of the biblical context of Teodosije's *Life of St Peter of Koriša* where psalms, indicatively, account for two-thirds of all biblical quotations. Drawing on contemporary medieval literary studies, Irena Špadijer convincingly demonstrates that Teodosije's *Life* strongly confirms the view that New Testament quotations functioned as a dogmatic-theoretical, "supratextual" framework of a literary work, while psalms were an expression of the human yearning for attaining virtue and a vehicle for a profoundly personal communication with God.

The literary-theoretical and philological approach also proved productive in the examination of the structure of Teodosije's *Life of Peter of Koriša*, which encompasses the questions of composition, literary characters and types of their discourse, and the symbolism of space. These brilliantly written sections of the book reveal the depth, the understanding and, I would dare say, the remarkable intuitiveness with which Irena Špadijer deciphers Teodosije's idiosyncratic literary expression and manner. On this occasion, I shall only call attention to two important questions. One concerns the conception of space in medieval literature which, as is well known, is never real, but rather iconic and serving the narrative. The symbolism of space in Teodosije's *Life of St Peter of Koriša* is reflected in the way in which the process of the hermit's spiritual perfection is described in terms of, let me quote the author, "topographical relocation" which consists in abandoning the world and withdrawing into the desert, a space intended for higher, ascetic forms of the monastic way of life. Teodosije describes the hermit's

gradual attainment of holiness using concepts such as the hut, the desert, the mountain, the cave, the rock. In addition to being real space references, they are also symbols indicating a particular stage in the hermit's ascetic endeavour with more precision, and Teodosije uses them with fine, spiritually layered nuances of meaning.

Irena Špadijer's lucid analysis of the characters and their discourse in Teodosije's *Life of St Peter* brings to light the hagiographer's literary virtuosity and individuality. Certainly the most striking passages are those of Peter's exchange with the demons that tempt him. They are a consummate example of the ability of literature to describe the abysses and dark alleys of the human soul, to point to the measure of human weakness and the limits of human endurance, but also to the possibility of conquering evil. Such a powerful literary rendition is what distinguishes the Koriša hermit's biography from similar eremitic hagiographies of the Orthodox world and, as Irena Špadijer puts it, makes it transcend its time.

The discussion part of the book ends with the chapter devoted to the attempt to establish dates both for St Peter of Koriša and for his biographer, Teodosije of Hilandar ("Issues of chronology"). The Koriša hermit has hitherto been roughly placed in the twelfth/thirteenth century based on various criteria and arguments. Irena Špadijer relies on her philological examination and

on the analysis of the oldest surviving frescoes in Peter's hermitage to push the life of the Koriša hermit further back into the past, sometime at the end of the twelfth century. As for Teodosije of Hilandar, she proposes the view that the writer flourished in the last decades of the thirteenth century. This view seems to be gaining ground even though the question of arguments for dating remains a matter of controversy: unlike the widely accepted arguments that rest on the analysis of the manuscript tradition, the relevance of certain events and historical context in establishing chronology has been, and apparently will continue to be, the subject of an interesting and inspiring debate.

Irena Špadijer's book is one of those works that will be of enduring relevance and inspiration to researchers. Not only because it addresses some of the big and exciting topics of Old Serbian literature in particular and medieval studies in general, but also because it is exemplary for the thoroughness and scrupulousness of the research method applied. In that sense, it has already provided many of us with a number of firm points of references. But this book has yet another quality, quite rare nowadays, which I feel obliged to mention with particular appreciation. Written with an evident literary talent, a distinctive sensibility and reflectiveness, the book is read with great enjoyment and inner engagement.

ELENA DANA PRIOTEASA, *MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS IN TRANSYLVANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES: ICONOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT*. BUCHAREST: EDITURA ACADEMIEI; CLUJ-NAPOCA: MEGA, 2016, 376 p., 139 ill.

Reviewed by Jovana Kolundžija*

Elena Dana Prioteasa of the Institute of Archaeology and History of Art in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, focuses her research on iconography and medieval painting in Transylvania. It may be interesting to note

that, after a career as a medical doctor and specialist in laboratory medicine, she enrolled in the studies of Art History at the

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