

Nicosia, 20 July 2016

Report for the Habilitation thesis of Dr Markéta Kulhánková
Das gottgefällige Abenteuer. Eine narratologische Analyse der byzantinischen Erzählungen

Dear Professor Jana Nechutová,

I was asked to review the book of Dr Markéta Kulhánková and the following is my report.

This book offers a narratological analysis of six collections of edifying stories (*aka* spiritually beneficial tales) written in Greek and dating from the late antiquity and the Middle Byzantine period. These collections are: the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, the *Historia Lausiaca*, the Dossier of Daniel of Sketis, the *Pratum Spirituale*, the two collections of stories by Anastasios Sinaites, and the *Stories* of Paul of Monembasia. Reference is also made to an edifying story by Neophytos the Recluse (12th c.). Fairly enough, the inquiry into these texts does not aim to be exhaustive but selective and representative.

The book is divided into six chapters, of which the first is a general introduction and the last a conclusion that brings together the narrative strategies employed in the collections. The book is completed with an English summary, the bibliography, and a detailed index.

After sketching out the generic identity and the idiosyncrasies of these and other texts similar in literary character and before proceeding to the core of her discussion, the author interposes a short subchapter on the methodology that she would apply to the aforementioned texts. As she rightly points out, the application of the narratological theory to pre-modern literature, a recent development as regards ancient Greek texts, has not yet quite been extended to treating the large Byzantine literary output. From this perspective only, any such consideration of Byzantine hagiographical texts is an innovative endeavor in our field and, as such, it should be welcome. It should be noted that, traditionally, these texts have been explored for the information they provide chiefly for the history of monasticism, daily life, and spirituality in late antiquity and Byzantium.

Dr Kulhánková examines authors and texts either in the way they treat precise themes/leitmotifs ('holy' arrogance, antithesis between the desert and the world), or in the light of the categories of time (distinguishing between the time of the story and the time of the relation of the story) and of the narrator as identifying or not with the hero and the author. As they intertwine

with and support the relevant theoretical discussion, the fair number of Greek extracts cited in the chapters with a German translation proves extremely helpful for the reader in order to follow the author's points.

The author achieves to bring out examples pointing to the recurrence of major themes and the use of precise techniques that, generally speaking, fare well with the form of short account and the simple style that is typical of the genre of edifying stories. In that respect, the use of time (ch. 4) is a case in point. The author highlights the arguments lying behind the various references to time (the duration of the story, the young or old age of the heroes, the narrator being an eyewitness). It is much to be appreciated that points of differentiation are pinpointed, e.g., in the narrations of Daniel of Sketis which unfold in a complicated fashion and in an extended time-span.

Equally interesting is the analysis of the narrative layers in ch. 5. The authors of collections of edifying stories prove quite inventive either by applying the "Matryoshka-effect" ("onion-like account" technique) or by introducing the author-narrator as a hero in the narrative. These literary devices contribute to making the story more reliable and to serving its didactic purpose.

In the final ch. 6 Dr Kulhánková brings together the various threads of her previous discussion and puts them in dialogue with conclusions reached and points made by other specialists in this particular genre, chiefly John Wortley, no doubt the scholar who has so far studied Byzantine edifying stories in the most systematic way. The points made in the concluding pages of this chapter about the orality of these stories, a question closely related to their linguistic aspect, may be seen as a foreground for a future investigation undertaken by this or other author(s).

All in all, this is the first serious attempt to study a corpus of texts that make up a substantial part of what may be termed 'Greek monastic literature' using the tools of modern literary theory. As a matter of fact, by virtue of the adoption of 'odd and diverse' narrative techniques, these texts cried out for this kind of scholarly consideration. In her discussion Dr Kulhánková demonstrates a good deal of familiarity with modern literary theory and, more significantly, her ability to discern nuances and developments in a literature that has been traditionally seen as 'dry, static and repetitive'. In that respect, her work joins the trend in modern Byzantine Studies which perceives Byzantine literature in its own right and examines authors as distinctive personalities and carriers of ideas.

The bibliography is implemented with almost all titles relevant to the subject. I was able to spot very few omissions.

Some scholars know their subject well enough but lack the independence of judgment to come up with new and original ideas. What Dr Kulhánková has to say in this monograph is fresh and stimulating. In fact, it can be an incitement for further scholarly undertakings to be pursued in the same genre of edifying stories or in other kinds of Byzantine texts.

I will conclude by asserting that, as a habilitation thesis, this work meets the standard requirements placed on habilitation theses in the field of Byzantine Studies.

Sincerely Yours,

Professor Stephanos Efthymiadis
B.A. (Law), B.A. (Greek literature), PhD (Oxon)

Open University of Cyprus
P.O. Box 12794 – 2252 Latsia, Cyprus
www.ouc.academia.edu
E-mail address: efthymiadis@ouc.ac.cy