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Contextualising a Lexicon at a Crossroads

(Явор Милтенов, *Преславските лексикални маркери*. София: Авалон, 2024, 232 pages)

The last published work of the late lamented Yavor Miltenov († 29.12.2023) is an intriguing case study in historical lexicology: the so-called *Preslav* lexical markers in Slavonic texts of the tenth century and their transmission. His work is divided into four parts: **1** Introduction, **2** Evaluation of lexical data, **3** Dialect reflexes of lexemes, and **4** Samples of lexicographic presentation.

The *Introduction*, humbly presented as an 'endeavour', defines the tasks envisaged: critical evaluation of past scholarship (Милтенов, 2024, p. 8) and fine tuning of lexical data with a view to creating and maintaining a dictionary or database of 9–10th-century texts of North-Eastern Bulgarian origin (p. 9) on the basis of editions in print or on the internet (p. 32). Next, it sets out to limit the polysemy of the terms 'Preslav' and 'redaction'. From a philological point of view, *Preslav* cannot be separated from the vast periphery to which its texts radiated in both space and time (p. 14; cf. p. 124: 'This study treats Preslav lexical markers as isoglosses on the map of texts, not on the map of dialects and languages.'). The same point of view shows that while there is a great deal of synonymic variation, none of it is either purposeful or consistent; i.e., instead

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of *redaction*, there is rather an 'openness' (or lack?) of lexical norms (p. 18), parallelled on the level of morphosyntaxis (pp. 20–21). A look at the attitudes of authors/translators, compilers and editors (pp. 22–24) and the pairs of synonymic variants they use (pp. 25–29) reveals that such variation, even including the substitution of domestic words for loanwords, cannot be systematised: free variation (or 'normative asystematism', p. 23) reigns. The introduction closes with a critique of the extant dictionaries and their underlying scholarship (pp. 31–32), and an appeal to establish a hierarchy of indicative values of markers (pp. 33–35), with pride of place for loanwords from Proto-Bulgarian.

The *Evaluation* of lexical data, just as humbly presented as the 'study of an excerpt from the lexical data', represents 'soundings' in a set of texts due to the insufficiency of editions and lexica to cover the entire continuum. It starts from the observation that Preslav lexical markers share the features of *concurrence* and *recessiveness* (Милтенов, 2024, pp. 38–39), i.e., they do not belong to a single text but are shared by others, and all of them tend to disappear in transmission. The criterium of *representativity* is given by the number of texts that share them (p. 40), and the following entries are grouped in this order: **1** forty-three entries for the most widely shared lexemes (pp. 55–91); **2** thirty-three entries for lexemes shared by more than five texts (pp. 92–108); **3** forty-six entries for lexemes shared by five or fewer texts (each entry is provided with a full list of attestations from both earlier reference works and additional reading). These 122 entries can all be related to a *core* corpus of more than 18 texts (p. 123).

The *Dialect* reflexes (Милтенов, 2024, pp. 127–139) show that 23 of the *core* lexemes have attestations in modern dialects: (18 in Bulgaria, of which six also in Macedonia, two also in Greece, two also in Serbia, one also in Albania, Hungary and Romania; three in Macedonia, of which one also in Greece; one in Greece and another in most Slavic languages).

The *Samples* of lexicographic presentation aim to present the lexemes in the widest possible context that can be provided by studies, editions and word indices. The data are taken from **1a** the *Octateuch* in conjunction with **1b** the *Commentated Prophets* (Милтенов, 2024, pp. 144–160), and from **2** the *Homilies* of Constantine of Preslav (pp. 164–165 and 168–186). They reveal what happens when texts codified in one environment (**1ab**, labelled 'neutral' by Miltenov) are received and transmitted in a different environment (labelled 'marked'); in addition, **2** reveals that such accommodation can also be observed in the work of a single author, transplanted into the other environment. After filtering for their high frequency out of both **1ab** 30 words and

14 pairs of synonyms, the 16 sample entries for the *Octateuch* (pp. 144–153) and 19 for the *Commentated Prophets* (pp. 154–160) make it highly plausible that both texts went through the hands of a single group of new readers/transmitters (p. 162). And for **2**, the two sample entries (pp. 164–165) and the 23 sample entries (pp. 168–186) show that the new environment in which Constantine of Preslav worked after 876 did have an influence, even if limited, on his choice of words (p. 187).

The work is complemented, after the references (Милтенов, 2024, pp. 188–209), by a survey of the texts cited in the lexical entries (pp. 210–221), their occurrences in the book (pp. 222–226), and a list of all Protobulgarian and Slavonic lexemes adduced (pp. 227–230).

Yavor Miltenov has superbly demonstrated that text-centred study reduces manuscript-centred 'textology' to irrelevance: the former seems to produce mere probabilities, but they become plausible if the context is well enough defined; the latter claims to produce facts, but they are worthless without contextualisation. He has also demonstrated that 'Preslav' should be considered a shortcut for 'a core of texts from North-Eastern Bulgaria, radiating into a wide periphery', its lexicon showing the double features of 'concurrence' and 'recessiveness'. He has also convincingly demonstrated that fine-tuning of lexicological data can rely on omitting the most widespread words and concentrating, for representativity of samplings, on words of medium and low frequency. The only thing in his work that is too timid and, in places, too shallow is his critical evaluation of past scholarship (see Horace Lunt's *dictum* 'The chief obstacle to progress is the sheer weight of tradition'.).

First, Miltenov fails to criticize the pedestrian positivism that pervaded research into Slavonic and steered it to study not Slavonic itself, but what it is not – dialects. This leads him to leave open the claims of Russian researchers that some of the lexicon of North-Eastern Bulgaria was adopted in Russia. Studies since 2000 have demonstrated that such claims and their ilk can simply be tested by close comparison of witnesses: time and again such collations reveal errors typical of transcription from Glagolitic (see Veder, 2018), which not only date the antigraphs before ca. 1150 but also firmly locate them outside Russia.

Second, Miltenov does not question the ingrained *filiation fallacy* of Slavonic philology, i.e., that all witnesses are descended ultimately from a single archetype. Studies since 1999 have revealed a singular Bulgarian addition to the genres of literary communication – *sibling compilations*. These are texts compiled from recent translations by the scribes of their fair copies, following a project to make

good second use of their text competence and so to become co-authors of new texts: two co-authors are established for the *Scaliger Patericon* and the *Izmaragd*, seven for *On the Letters*, eight for the *Zlatostruj*, and nine for the *Knjažij Izbornik*; the *Commentated Paleja* is expected to show even more collaborators.

Third, Miltenov is unaware of the fact that a Moravian translation into Slavonic, brought to Pliska in 886, was then and there subjected to an invasive copy-edition of its language, entered into all copies made at Pliska up to 893 and after that at Preslav (see Veder & Van der Tak, 2012). The same language was used in the translation of *Patriarch Photius' Epistle to Prince Boris-Michael* of 864, but it was misidentified as Middle Bulgarian (see Veder, 2013). It appears that at the baptism of Moravia (862–863) and Bulgaria (864), two different choices were made for the codification of Slavonic: Sts Cyril and Methodius opted for the usage of their grandparents, but Prince Boris-Michael opted for his own usage – a difference in morphosyntaxis of more than one generation, not to mention the lexicon. If so, then a natural consequence of both codifications coming into contact would be the following development: **1** recognition of differences → **2** acceptance of synonymy → **3** reduction of synonymy, i.e., recessiveness of lexemes. Stage **1** is attested by the fact that before 887 the Old Bulgarian translation of the *Scala Paradisi* of John Climacus (misidentified as Middle Bulgarian, but attested from 1387 to ca. 1620 in 11 Russian copies from a single Bulgarian Glagolitic antigraph; see Veder, 2015) was revised to the Moravian standard (see Veder, 2023), with refinement of the grammar but unfortunate damage to the text.

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Kontekstualizacja leksyki na rozdrożu

Artykuł stanowi recenzję pracy zatytułowanej *Преславските лексикални маркери* [Presławskie markery leksykalne], której autorem jest Yavor Miltenow (Sofia, 2024, ss. 232).

Słowa kluczowe: recenzja; presławskie markery leksykalne; leksykografia słowiańska; synonimia; recesywność; *Преславските лексикални маркери* [Presławskie markery leksykalne]

Contextualising lexicon at a crossroads

This article is a review of a study entitled *Преславските лексикални маркери* [The Preslav Lexical Markers], authored by Yavor Miltenov (Sofia, 2024, 232 pp.).

Keywords: review; Preslav Lexical Markers; Slavonic lexicography; synonymy; recessiveness; *Преславските лексикални маркери* [The Preslav Lexical Markers]

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