

**THE BALKANS IN CHAOS: STORIES AND MEMORIES
FROM VASILIJE PETROVIC, PAISII HILENDARSKI,
AND SOFRONII VRACHANSKI
(NAPOLI: EDIZIONI SCIENTIFICHE ITALIANE, 2003)
SOME *CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS***

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The present article examines the book called „Balcani nel caos: storie e memorie di Vasilije Petrovic, Paisii Hilendarski, Sofronii Vrachanski / a cura di Armando Pitassio. Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane“ [„The Balkans in Chaos: Stories and memories of Vasilije Petrovic, Paisii Hilendarski, Sofronii Vrachanski. Edited by Armando Pitassio. Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane“].

That was the Italian title of a book which was printed in 2003.

Key words: Paisii Hilendarski, First Italian translation, Armando Pitassio, Main features, Slavonic-Bulgarian History

Balcani nel caos: storie e memorie di Vasilije Petrovic, Paisii Hilendarski, Sofronii Vrachanski / a cura di Armando Pitassio. Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2003 („The Balkans in Chaos: Stories and Memories from Vasilije Petrovic, Paisii Hilendarski, Sofronii of Vrachanski. Edited by Armando Pitassio. Naples: *Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2003*“) was the Italian title of a book which was printed in 2003. Armando Pitassio is a retired associate professor of Eastern Europe History at the Faculty of Political sciences at the University of Perugia.

As anticipated in the title, the scholar translated into Italian three works, which evoke the cultural and spiritual tendencies of that age in the Balkanic history. Two Bulgarian authors, and one Montenegrin, are analyzed: Vasilije Petrovic-Njegos, Paisii Hilendarski, Sofronii Vrachanski.

It should be underlined that this is the first Italian translation of Paisii and Sofronii's works. There is another Italian translation of Vasilije Petrovic, made by Domenico Ciampoli in 1901, defined as „obsolete (and, sometimes, incorrect)“ by Pitassio.

In fact the Italian translations from Bulgarian language concern mainly authors from the 20th century. The literature of the Bulgarian Renaissance (Vazrazhdane) is almost unknown to the Italian publishing, especially regarding the early phase of the epoch. It is worth mentioning an unrealized project by Pr. Luigi Salvini: the creation of an Anthology of Bulgarian Prose in two volumes; the second volume would have begun with Sofronii Vrachanski. The project didn't come to light because of Salvini's death. There are Italian translations of works by authors from a much later stage of the Vazrazhdane: for instance, four editions of Hristo Botev poems from 1931, 1958, 1959, 1960 and 2000.

There are also some translations of Ivan Vazov's works, although the novel *Under the Yoke* should not be regarded as a work belonging to the Vazrazhdane, because of its age (1893). The novel was translated for the first time in Rome in 1946 by Olga Miletic-Balabanova, ex lector of Bulgarian language at Rome University. The book was translated again by Lavinia Borriero: the second translation was published in Rome in 1960. Moreover, fourteen short stories by Ivan Vazov were translated into Italian in 1950 and edited by Enrico Damiani.

Such circumstances make Pitassio's work even more significant. The book is structured as follows. It begins with a long introduction, entitled: *Dalla Pax ottomana alla guerra civile* „From the Ottoman Peace to the civil war“, outlining the historical and social context of the Balkan peoples; the book also contains the translations of: *History of Montenegro*, by Vasilije Petrovic (wholly translated); *Istorija Slavjanobolgarskaja*, „Slavonic-Bulgarian History“ (partially translated); *Žitie i stradanija gresnago Sofronija*, „Life and Sufferings of Sinful Sophronii“ (wholly translated). The book ends with an appendix showing: the Nemanja dynasty; the dynasty of the despots Hrbeljanovic and Brankovic; the Balsic dynasty; the Crnojevic dynasty; the Crnojevic dynasty according to Vasilije Petrovic; the succession of the Bulgarian kings according to Ostrogorski; the succession of the Vladikas of Montenegro according to Chiudina; the succession of the late Roman and Byzantine Emperors. An onomastic index follows.

The introduction is arranged into several paragraphs, according to the salient stages in the historical context of the Balkanic world: the 15th century, and the attempts of expelling the Ottomans and unifying the Churches; the inner instability of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, and the consequent worsening of the living conditions in the Balkans; the end of the Venetian republic; in addition, there is a description of the

Patriarchal See of Constantinople, and the Greek Phanariote setting in the 17th century; the religious, linguistic and cultural relationships between the Balkan peoples and the Russian Empire are analysed. All this helps to outline the active role the above-mentioned authors played in their historical cultural context.

Therefore, the authors themselves are dealt with: for instance, this introduction includes further two paragraphs: „From the dynastic claims to those in the name of the peoples“, and „*We* and *they* in the processes of making of the Balkanic identities“.

When Pitassio talks about Paisius, after illustrating his historical background and the scarce biographical notes, and before mentioning briefly the copies and the first editions of his work, the stress is laid almost entirely on the author's anti-Greek spirit, in the way he considers the Greeks the most responsible for the decline of the Balkanic culture, as well as of their own, regarding them as even worse than Turks.

At the end of this introduction, the author points out what led him to translate those texts: „I thought it was useful to introduce the Italian reader to the translations of the texts written by Vasilije Petrovic, Paisii of Hilendar, and Sohpronius of Vraca, enabling him to realize the importance to find an alternative to chaos, destroying the Ottoman Empire. An alternative based on the acceptance and valorization of a religious identity and organization: but the latter, inside the Orthodox Church, was divided into several administrative centres, sometimes accompanied by distinctions of linguistic areas. The making of Balkanic national identities cannot, of course, be exhausted with the role played in it by the Churches and the communities of believers, but the latter can hardly be left out. From this point of view the texts here collected, partly or wholly, seem to me to be useful to understand the phenomenon“.

In the introduction Pitassio, referring to the footnotes, points out his addressing public: „novices regarding the problems of Balkan History“, „students or not“; he also denies absolute reliability to attribute to the scientific value of such footnotes.

His translation of Paisii' History is based on Petăr Dinekov's version: PAISIJ HILENDARSKI, *Slavjano-bălgarska Istorija* („Slavonic-Bulgarian History“), Sofia, Bălgarski pisatel, 1972; it is compared with the original Paisii' work, both the text published by Dinekov in the same edition and the Nicephorus' copy, published by B. St. Angelov in: PAISIJ HILENDARSKI, *Istorija Slavenobolgarskaja. Nikiforov prepis ot 1772 g.* („Slavonic-Bulgarian History. Nicephorus' copy of 1772“), Sofia, Izd. na BAN, 1961.

I want now to analyze some of the main features of translation of Paisii's work.

It should be noticed that, unlike other Italian translations from Bulgarian such as the *Anthology of Bulgarian Poetry* printed in Padua in May 2004, this translation is without parallel text.

As I said, unlike the other two texts here published, Paisii's text contains some abbreviations; instead of translating the entire text, Pitassio interposes some resumes and adds footnotes concerning historical matters.

In order to further explore the peculiarities, I shall focus on some abbreviations.

I will mention: the part beginning with the deluge and ending with the settling of Afet in Europe; the paragraph concerning with the confusion of languages, ending with the settling of the 15 peoples in Europe; the histories of the people from the lands of Skandavia; of the Bulgarian settlement beyond the Danube; of the latter's rebellion against the Emperor Valens; of the Theodosius' attempt to subdue them, of their expansion in Macedonia, Thrace and part of Illyria; the whole history of the kingdoms of Batoja, of Trevelija (except the episode of the blinding of his son), of Asen the Great and the other monarchs, till the Iconoclasm; the wars between Kardam and the Greeks; the Murtagon's accession and his kingdom until the famine and the pestilence; the part beginning with the peace achieved Peter and the Byzantine Emperors, and ending with the kingdom of David; the kingdom of Radomir and the defeat of the Greek army by Joan Vladimir; the entrance of the Greek Emperor in Ohrid and the end of the Bulgarian Empire; the histories of Dolan and Alusian; several sections with respect to Asen's kingdom, including its end, with Ivanko's revolt; the kingdom of Petăr, the death of Ivanko, Joan Kaliman's fight against Mitar; the Greek cities being destroyed by Joan Kaliman, except Salonica; the piece starting with the new war against Latins and the death of Joan Kaliman, and ending with the beginning of Konstantin Sisman's kingdom.

The following chapter, which mentions the Serbian kings, omits the argument for the hypothesis that the relics held in Sofia belong to Dragutin rather than to Milutin.

The next chapter, which finishes the story of Konstantin Sisman, leaves out the Noga's assault against Peter and the war between Svetoslav and the Persians; the events concerning Stefan Uros III Dečanski and Ivan Aleksandăr, until the wars against John Kantakouzenos.

The following chapter omits the translation of the list of seven kings and 33 Tsars and the explanation of the reasons for which the Tsars added to their name the name of Joan, like Joan Mihail, the first converted Tsar.

Besides other abbreviations in the next chapters, I will mention the chapter dedicated to the Saints. The literal translation concerns the 14th, 15th, 17th, 22th, 23th, 28th and 29th Saint (we should remember that Dinekov follows Paisii's text published by J. Ivanov until the 21th Saint, and completes the chapter drawing from the text of the first Sofronii's copy). The history of the martyrs from Mount Athos, Sofia and Bitola, as well as the list of 22 martyrs from the only surviving Bulgarian monastery in the Mount Athos, and the almost entire ending, are also omitted. The preamble, *Utility of the History*, and the epilogue are entirely translated.

Several footnotes provide explanations of personalities and historical events.

Some names are Italianized: Moshos is turned into „Mosco“; Afet into „Jafet“; Telerik is written with the ‘c’ instead of the 'k'.

The methods of translation cannot be exhaustively studied in this paper. I will conclude this review on Pitassio's book, mentioning only a few terms on which the author himself focuses in the introduction.

It is the case of the word *род*, often rendered as *gente* („people, nation“); at the page 43, shortly after, it is translated as *schiatte* („stock“); in the chapter concerning the Serbian kings, it is turned into *stirpe* („ancestry“, p. 74) or *generazione* („progeny“, p. 79). At the p. 89 (concerning with the Bulgarian kings) *Някои от прост род* is translated as „alcuni di umili natali“, some [men] of humble birth; *царски род* as „stirpe imperiale“. At the page 91, the expression *еврейския род* is translated as „agli ebrei“ (to the Jews). At the p. 98 *славянски род* is translated as „stirpe slava“. As Pitassio himself explains in a footnote, at first the word *цар* used by Paisii for the Bulgarian and Byzantine kings is translated as *zar* (a word used in Italian only for the Bulgarian and Russian kings), afterwards as *imperator*, „emperors“.

A deeper analysis of Pitassio's ways of translation would lie outside the purposes of this paper. I just aimed to mention the main features of a book which, thanks to the translation of two extremely important masterpieces of Bulgarian literature, opens a new perspective for the Italian readers regarding the knowledge of Bulgarian cultural heritage.

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