

Olga Mladenova

“Looking back at the linguistic situation of 16th-century Balkan Slavic”

The paper outlines the potential and context of an ongoing empirical study of various dimensions of two sixteenth-century translations from the Greek made almost simultaneously in what is to be 21st-century Bulgaria and Northern Macedonia, respectively. The Greek text in question is *Treasure*, a collection of homilies written in vernacular Greek and first published by Damaskēnos Stouditēs in Venice in 1557-1558. These two translations are the first datable literary efforts in that part of the world after the period of commotion following its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire in 1393-1396. The reason for the interest in the Greek vernacular text was that, being able to understand Greek as a result of relatively wide-spread bilingualism, the translators could make sense of it as opposed to the texts written in conservative literary Greek oriented to prestigious Atticist models. It is noteworthy that elsewhere in the Eastern Orthodox world *Treasure* was either given the cold shoulder (Muscovy), upstaged by another book with a similar function – the *Didactic Gospel* printed in Zabłudów in 1568-1569 (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and, perhaps, Serbia), or just used as an anonymous source, one of several (the Romanian Principalities). In contrast, the ‘Macedonian’ and ‘Sredna-Gora’ translation teams zealously proceeded to translate *Treasure* into their traditional literary language, quite removed by that time from the everyday spoken language but preserving its shared old core. Only in the 17th century a later generation of men of letters, who had used the new Sredna-Gora translation for preaching in the vernacular, saw the need to render the sermons in vernacular Bulgarian *in writing*. The comparison between the two translations can shed light on both the similarities and the differences between the language communities of which the translation teams were members, their mastery of the literary language and their perception of its norms. The evidence they bring about the linguistic situation in the scriptoria where the translations were produced can accurately be interpreted only when multiple questions about the translated original(s), translation process, its participants and their qualifications have received at least provisional answers.