The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in Medieval Studies
of
Divna Manolova
on
DISCOURSES OF SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE LETTERS OF NIKEPHOROS GREGORAS
will be held on
Monday, 27 October 2014, at 14:00
in the
Senate Room – Monument Building
Central European University (CEU)
Nádor u. 9, Budapest
Examination Committee
Chair
István Bodnár (Department of Philosophy – CEU)
Members
Niels Gaul – Supervisor
(Department of Medieval Studies – CEU)
Volker Menze
(Department of Medieval Studies – CEU)
Börje Bydén – external reader and external examiner (present)
(University of Gothenburg – Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, Theory of Science)
Stratis Papaioannou – external reader and external examiner (present)
(Department of Classics – Brown University)
External Readers
Börje Bydén – external reader and external examiner (present)
(University of Gothenburg – Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, Theory of Science)
Stratis Papaioannou – external reader and external examiner (present)
(Department of Classics – Brown University)

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection in the CEU-ELTE Medieval Library, Budapest, 6-8 Múzeum krt.
DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

DISCOURSES OF SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY
IN THE LETTERS OF NIKEPHOROS GREGORAS

The principal objective of the present dissertation is to reconstruct and analyze the discourses of science and philosophy in the letters of the Constantinopolitan scholar Nikephoros Gregoras (d. ca. 1360), a prominent figure on the fourteenth-century Byzantine intellectual scene, well-known to modern scholars as the author of a major work on Byzantine history for the period from 1204 until ca. 1359. The inquiry explores Gregoras’ views on mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy expressed in his letters and, consequently, it reevaluates the existing scholarly perspectives on Gregoras’ intellectual legacy.

By means of contextualization, Part I: Nikephoros Gregoras’ Epistolary Collection offers a survey of Gregoras’ biography and works, as well as a detailed reconstruction of his ‘library,’ that is, a survey of the manuscripts (in particular, of those codices which transmit scientific and philosophical content) he, in all likelihood, possessed, annotated, compiled, and copied. Part I concludes with a discussion of the manuscript tradition of Gregoras’ letters and the context of their preservation and circulation accompanied by a critical commentary of their modern editions.

The main analytical body of the dissertation consists of two large sections dedicated respectively to astronomy (Part II: Justifications of Astronomy) and to philosophy and letters (Part III: Letters and Philosophy). The principal conceptual motivation behind Parts II and III is the exploration of the dialectical relationship informing Gregoras’ intellectual epistolary discourse, namely the relationship between knowledge (mathematical sciences and philosophy), on the one hand, and rhetoric (letters), on the other. Part II examines the status of the astronomical studies in the early Palaiologan period and discusses various strategies Gregoras employed in order to justify the value of this mathematical science. Gregoras’ programmatic effort to defend astronomy’s worthiness is analyzed in the context of the revival of
Ptolemaic astronomy in Palaiologan Byzantium, a scholarly “project” that involved erudites from the two preceding generations, notably Maximos Planoudes and Gregoras’ mentor Theodore Metochites. Importantly, *Part II: Justifications of Astronomy* discusses for the first time after its edition in 1936 Gregoras’ arithmological treatise *On the Number Seven* which, among other things, is an important evidence for Gregoras’ readership of Philo and Macrobius.

*Part III: Letters and Philosophy* offers a discussion of philosophical letter-writing in Byzantium as well as an analysis of the philosophical premises of Byzantine epistology. Importantly, its principal discussion problematizes the question of certainty with respect to the human condition through analysis of three case studies which illustrate Gregoras’ strategies for constructing epistolary friendship. Thus, *Part III* addresses two of the main problems of the dissertation, namely what are, in Gregoras’ view, the possibilities and limitations of human knowledge and, correspondingly, what is the status of science and philosophy as the acquisition of knowledge is at their core *qua* disciplines.

The dissertation concludes that in his letters Gregoras maintains that while there are limits of mankind’s ability to attain knowledge of the perceptible world, due both to the nature of the studied objects and to the faculties of the inquiring intellect, nevertheless, with the help of the divine providence, it is possible to achieve certainty and comprehension. One such example is the study of the heavenly bodies and their movements. Not only are the planets and the stars created by God as signs for mankind to understand, according to Gregoras, but also the regularity of their motion and its mathematical principles facilitate the use of the astronomical science for the attainment of knowledge. Similarly, the ideal friendship, one that manifests itself in the discursive unity of the correspondents, brings certainty and knowledge of oneself and of the other.
CURRICULUM VITAE
DIVNA MANOLOVA

EDUCATION:

2008 – 2014  
PhD Candidate, Department of Medieval Studies  
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary  
Dissertation Title: *Discourses of Science and Philosophy in the Letters of Nikephoros Gregoras*

2007 – 2008  
Master of Arts in Medieval Studies  
Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies  

2003 – 2007  
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy  
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” Department of Philosophy, Sofia, Bulgaria  
BA Thesis: *The Essence of the Soul in Aristotle’s De anima: the Commentaries of Two Philosophical Traditions*  
*(Sophonias the Philosopher and Avicenna)*

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS:

October 1, 2014 – July 31, 2015  
Black Sea Link Research Fellow, New Europe College, Bucharest, Romania

October 1, 2013 – December 1, 2013  
Visiting Research Fellow, Brown University, Department of Classics
October 1, 2013 – December 1, 2013
Doctoral Research Support Grant, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

2012
Medieval Academy of America Etienne Gilson Dissertation Grant

Junior Fellow, Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey

September 1, 2012 – May 31, 2013
Fellow, American Research Center in Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria
Fellowship declined

September 2011 – May 2012
Junior Fellow in Byzantine Studies

Dumbarton Oaks, Research Library and Collection, Washington, DC

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

April 2014
The Problem of Individuality in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, Doctoral level optional course, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” co-taught with Prof. Oleg Georgiev and Dr. Gergana Dineva

October 2010 – July 2011
Teaching assistant, Department of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” Sofia, Bulgaria

February 2010 – May 2010
Academic coordinator of the Center for Hellenic Traditions (now Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies), CEU, Budapest

ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS:


SELECTED PAPERS AND TALKS:


Nikephoros Gregoras’ Phlorentios and Philomathēs, delivered at the international workshop ‘... But How Shall We Converse?’ Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium at Keble College, Oxford, July 4–5, 2014.

Astronomers in Agreement: Platonic and Ptolemaic Planetary Models in Nikephoros Gregoras’ On the Number Seven and Letter 22, delivered at the thirty-ninth annual
Byzantine Studies Conference at Yale University, New Haven, CT, October 31–November 3, 2013.


Knowing the Past, Knowing the Future: Nikephoros Gregoras’ Paraklētikē peri astronomias, delivered at the international workshop Historiographie der Paläologenzeit zwischen Philologie und historischer Soziolinguistik (Approaches to Late Byzantine Historiography: Between Philology and Sociolinguistics), Austrian Academy of Sciences (Division of Byzantine Research), Vienna, June 20, 2013.

Nikephoros Gregoras’ On the Number Seven: Mathematics, Music, and Astronomy in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople, delivered as part of the Koç University’s Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations’ mini-symposium series, Istanbul, March 29, 2013.

Translating Science to Literature: The Case of Nikephoros Gregoras’ Letter-Collection, informal talk, presented in Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, Koç University, Istanbul, December 5, 2012.


Elements of Pythagorean Mathematics in the Letters of Nikephoros Gregoras, delivered at the thirty-seventh annual Byzantine Studies Conference at DePaul University, Chicago, IL, October 20–23, 2011.