

# BOOK REVIEW

## A BOOK ON BALKAN ASTRONYMS

Mladenova, Darina 2006. *Zvezdoto nebe nad nas. Etnolingvistično izsledvane na balkanskite narodni astronimi*. [The Starry Sky above Us. An Ethnolinguistic Study of Balkan Folk Astronomy.] Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 421 pp.

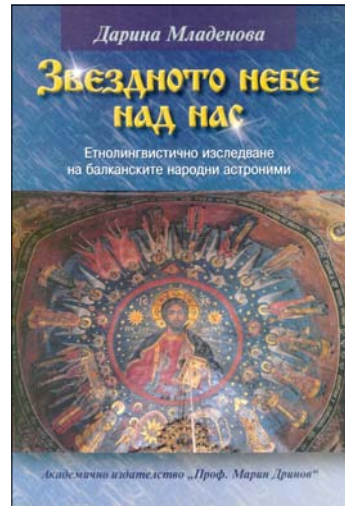
The book mainly proceeds from Darina Mladenova's PhD thesis defended in 1997; on 195 pages the author presents a detailed account of the names attributed to planets, stars, constellations and the Milky Way in the Balkan region, and the dialectic forms of these astronims within the general Eurasian context. The bulk text is followed by 83 pages of citations, 93 pages of maps, literary references and registries, and a 27-page-long review in German. The book is targeted at the wide circle of researchers – Balkan specialists, linguists, ethnologists, folklorists, astronomers and all those interested in the concept of the starry sky in the cultural space of the Balkan peoples.

The point of departure for the book comprises earlier research and materials from five archives, these being:

- 1) Diploma papers on the ethnographic and linguistic studies conducted in the rural villages of Bulgaria, supervised by academician Romanski (evidently the fieldwork of students).
- 2) Archives of the Ethnographic Institute and Museum, comprising purposefully collected aspects the world, including folk astronomy.
- 3) Index file of the ideographic dictionary.
- 4) Private archives of Maksim Mladenov, Bulgarian linguist, dialectologist and ethno-linguist.

The latter allows the suggestion that the author is a second generation researcher of folk culture.

Predominantly, the source material entails a number of historical language glossaries and dialect dictionaries of different peoples. The author has elaborately perused the dictionaries of Romanian (incl. Moldovan, Transylvanian, Romanian and other dialects), Greek, Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Gagauz and Turkic languages, and these of Latin, Old Greek and Old Bulgarian, in addition to the etymological lexicon of Slavic languages, and others. Altogether, there are references to more than a hundred languages or dialects. Earlier researchers have been abundantly used and referred to, the 13-page-long list of references comprises authors from all compass directions,



including more widely familiar names for me as G. Potanin and Uno Harva. The material is presented in a logical structure, proceeding from the particular astronomic object – a planet, constellation or the Milky Way.

The main chapters of the book focus on Venus and other planets (more than 30 pages), the Big Dipper (17 p.) the Pleiades (26 p.), Orion (29 p.) and the Milky Way (33 p.), with a separate section dedicated to other stars and constellations (5 p.). The material in the book is voluminous, presented in a systemic manner, involves comparisons and name parallels, thus being an indispensable resource for a researcher of folk astronomy.

For example, in the section dedicated to planet Venus we can find out that the morning and evening Venus could be either a brother and a sister, or lovers who never meet, e.g., name-wise, *Jankul* and *Janinka* in South-West Bulgaria, and *Janis* and *Maro* in the tales and ballads of Greek origin. By the way, the ballad presented as an example reveals the seasonal specificity regarding the visibility of the planet. This type, prevailingly known in Estonia as the artificial legend of *Koit* 'Dawn' and *Hämarik* 'Dust' by Friedrich Robert Faehlmann, is known in Bulgaria in 50 variants.

Likewise, there is a wide variety of astronyms for the Big Dipper, from 'Seven Men' to the 'Noah's Ark'. Similarly, many different nations have referred to the Pleiades, e.g., one of the more simple name versions for this constellation has been thoroughly dissected in the languages of Bulgarian, Romanian, Albanian, Greek and Turkic peoples, with English and German astronyms given as a comparison. The etymology of the Slavic base type is also observed in a number of different Slavic languages, with certain other name variants being added. The Orion constellation has also been significant for the Balkan peoples, with a large variety of astronyms being noted. The designations for the Milky Way are presented in a similarly elaborate manner as all the other above astronyms.

The 22-page registry of astronyms also includes two Estonian-language names for constellations, *Petruse Rist* 'St. Peter's Cross' and *Suur Rist* 'Greater Cross', tracked down in the research papers of M. E. Rut from Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk).

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