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Memories of Acad. Mihail D. Petruševski (on the occasion of 110th anniversary of his birth)

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This year marks the 110th anniversary of the birth of my professor, Academician Mihail Petruševski. The memories of our long-standing collaboration will remain eternal.

In the school year 1973/74, I enrolled at the department of classical philology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, and the first lecture of Ancient Greek language, which we attended together with the colleagues from the department of History of Art, was held by a professor who taught descriptive grammar of Ancient Greek language at the department of classical philology: as a result of the shortage of lecturers, the professor of historical Greek grammar, Mihail D. Petruševski, taught all the courses of Ancient Greek language. We were incredibly lucky and honoured to be taught a matter that was difficult to memorize, but which with his full explanation was made much more understandable. His first lecture fascinated us: we realized instantly that we would have to work very seriously in order to master the material he was teaching us.

When we were taught, for instance, the present indicative of the auxiliary verb εἰμί, (“I am”), the professor explained the etymological origin of its root, as well as the morpho-phonemic characteristics of the

endings, both separately and when in contact with the verbal stem, using both descriptive and comparative-historical methodology – comparing it with the flexion, above all in Latin, Old Church Slavonic, Sanskrit, as well as in other Indo-European languages. He also identified the broader context when explaining, for instance, the word *δημοκρατία* in the texts that we were working on: he made parallels between the type of democracy in the slaveholding societies and the types of democracy we have in our modern society, in our country and throughout the world.

The impression that his way of presenting the study material left on us was forever engraved in our memory of morphology when mastering the Ancient Greek language, despite the fact that we had no previous knowledge of the language from our earlier education.

At the department of Classical philology, Prof. Petruševski started his lectures and exercises of Greek historical grammar, i.e., phonetics, in the second semester, instead of in the first. We then proceeded with the study of historical morphology of nominals in the following year and of verbs for another year. At the end of these six semesters, we had a comprehensive exam on the complete material of Greek historical grammar.

During the practical exercises in historical phonetics, we worked on Homer and other texts. Every next lesson consisted of a revision of the previously covered material, and a new lecture. Often, during the breaks between classes, the professor would take the more advanced students to the library to instruct them on how to use dictionaries, books and journals. This stimulated us, the students, to work continually, to fortify our knowledge of the laws of phonetics and their usage, by comparing it to Mycenaean Greek language in particular. From the very start of our studies, we had the unique opportunity and privilege to study the oldest, pre-Homeric, Mycenaean Greek language, since in all former Yugoslavia, the faculty of Philosophy in Skopje was the institution that employed Professors M. D. Petruševski and P. Hr. Ilievski, the only experts in Mycenaean. For the students, this had a magical attraction, especially for those who were interested in comparing the ancient with the more recent. Prof. Petruševski taught with a great passion, always highlighting the features of Mycenaean Greek, making comparisons between the velars, labiovelars and especially of the palatal velars in Mycenaean and in post-Mycenaean, e.g. *to-pe-za*, */torpegya/* < **/torpedya/*,

post-Myc. *τράπεζα*, “table”, or *za-we-te*, */kyawetes/*, “this year’s, pertaining to this year”, post-Myc. *σῆτες*, demonstrating its relation to other IE languages, on which topic he had written numerous papers published in the country and abroad. In addition to the phonetic characteristics of Mycenaean, topics from Mycenaean morphology were also simultaneously covered during the studies.

Examination was regular, during the practical exercise classes and before the lectures. And usage of regular and etymological dictionaries was recommended and practiced in the entire educational process.

There were exams at the end of the three school years, and they lasted for five to six hours – so that, as Prof. Petruševski used to say: “I can see whether you have forgotten anything and what, whether you have learned anything, and whether you have broadened and expanded your knowledge”. In the last two semesters we worked on texts, passages chosen from a list of twenty authors in each of the classical languages, as a compulsory reading individual study in the course of the overall studies. His students were taught by him for eight semesters – until the very end of their studies.

My generation and the following generation, which was his last generation of students, were awarded with a special feast and honour – already retired, the professor held an additional semester of lectures dedicated to his discoveries in the field of Mycenology and to his emendations in Homer’s “Iliad” and in Aristotle’s “Poetics”.

The professor told us that in the course of the forty years of his work on the original text and the poetic translation of Homer’s epics “The Iliad” and “The Odyssey”, in order to search for solutions in Macedonia, he visited villages and towns with a tape-recorder, where he listened to, wrote down and recorded folk singers, some of these men and women knew up to 300 songs dedicated to heroic acts and battles. By doing this, he availed himself to the oldest Macedonian lexicon for his poetic translations and compiled a special dictionary of archaic Macedonian linguistic expressions and forms that was handed down to us in the explanations and commentaries on the text and in the poetic translation of both epics. At the same time, the knowledge of comparative grammar, especially of Mycenaean Greek, helped him in the corrections of the original text, for instance, when comparing the Homeric form *ὀλομένην*, “destructive, accursed, wretched” with the Mycenaean *o-wo-*

we, /*olwovens*/, “annulled, damaged”, he changed his opinion on this topic, claiming that it was not related to the already appropriated metric lengthening of *ò-* > *ov-*, but rather an epenthesis of the digamma and a formation of a diphthong with the initial vowel, i.e. **olw-* > **owl-* > **oul-*; at the same time, he held the opinion that the augment of the preterite verbal forms was rarely used in Homer and he had discovered many instances where there was no need for elision of the final vowel before the initial vowel, a syllabic augment with which the indicative of the aorist in the third person singular begins, e.g. that instead of ἄλγε' ἔθηκε it is more likely that this syntagm read as follows: ἄλγεα θῆκε, comparable to the Mycenaean verbal form of the indicative of the aorist in 3rd person singular, *te-ke*, /*t^hēke*/, also without augment. Concerning the usage of the digamma, numerous examples of an unelided vowel preceding a vowel have also been attested, the reason being that the digamma was not written, but was probably spoken or sung. Prof. Petruševski was convinced that Homer, the creator of exquisite works of art, was an especially talented poet, ὁ ποιητής, “the poet”, as he had been called by Aristotle, and that he lived and worked in the middle of the ninth century B.C.

During those lectures, we also read together the complete text of Aristotle's „Περὶ ποιητικῆς“, and in cooperation with us he reread it, reviewed it and had some ideas about the final corrections of the original before the publication of the first issue of the translation „Za poetikata“ (“On poetics”) in 1979. It was rather unfortunate that, at the time, there was no technical expertise in our country for publication of a parallel edition, where one would be able to see the instances in the original text where prof. M. D. Petruševski had intervened. He was passionate about the problems that he encountered and the solutions he found. This passion of his was also expressed in his lectures, in his numerous scholarly papers and in the lectures at many congress meetings, colloquia and symposia. One of his most important discoveries was the emendation at the end of the definition of tragedy in the sixth chapter of Aristotle's „Περὶ ποιητικῆς“. He entered into debates with many scholars who already had doctoral dissertations dedicated to the words he replaced. According to Prof. Petruševski the dramatic element in the definition of tragedy was expressed: at the beginning, with the expression μίμησις πράξεως (“imitation of action”), in the middle, through the expression

δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, (“through acting personae, and not through narration”) and at the end by the definition (in its final stance): *δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων πραγμάτων σύστασιν* (“with sadness and fear accomplishes the composition of such – i.e. sad and frightening – acts”). In one of the more recent issues with a critical commentary, the end of the definition still reads *δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν*, meaning “through sadness and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such – i.e., sad and frightening – emotions”. The recognition of this discovery is slow even today, although Aristotle himself, regularly, explained in detail the stances and expressions of his definitions, and with regards to this particular definition he stressed twice: *μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις*, “the most important of these (parts) is the composition of acts” (1450a15); and (1450a30, 32): *ὁ ἔργον τῆς τραγωδίας...* “the function of tragedy...” *ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον* „but [will accomplish] much better“... *ἔχουσα δὲ μῦθον καὶ σύστασιν πραγμάτων*, „(the tragedy) having a plot and a composition of acts”. Prof. Petruševski wrote about his emendations of the text continuously in the period from 1948 to 1986, and published in domestic and foreign journals, elaborating all aspects of Aristotle’s understanding of poetics, citing many of his other works and attitudes and comparing them to Plato’s thoughts on the matter.

His interpretation derived from the emendation of the two words was described as one of the most original ideas of the 20th century in the article “Catharsis” by Teddy Brunius (‘Dictionary of History of Ideas I’, 269-270), with the conclusion: ‘It (i.e., the conjecture) is almost too elegant and too reasonable to be accepted at once.’.

Among the opponents of this interpretation was the classical philologist A. Ničev, with whom Prof. Petruševski had long discussions and debates in written form, and also a public discussion at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje attended by the students and professors from the department, as well as students and professors from Ss. Cyril and Methodius University. After the long discussion, both professors maintained their positions on the definition of tragedy in Aristotle’s treatise “On poetics”.

Our professor departed from this world before the second edition of his translation of the work “On poetics” came out in 1990.

Prof. Petruševski's conjecture, after the suggestion of our colleague Igor Radev, is now the title of our electronic journal *Systasis*.

My postgraduate studies of Mycenology under his mentorship consisted of preparations, exams and long walks with the professor engrossed in conversations about my master's thesis. In these discussions, he was always precise, never offering any suggestions before checking the answers to the questions he had been asked by me.

The home library of the Professors Mihail and Dušica Petruševski was always available to their students: their books, dictionaries and separate articles could be studied in their home, and we were also be given materials to read outside their home. Thus, we could always consult the latest publications available. We will forever be grateful for their nobility and their desire to contribute to the academic development and advancement of their students. Not many can remain indifferent to such a commitment. And yet, only a few were prepared for a continuous study needed to master these disciplines.

We will always remember M. D. Petruševski and his love of knowledge, as well as his passion for sharing this knowledge in verbal and written form.