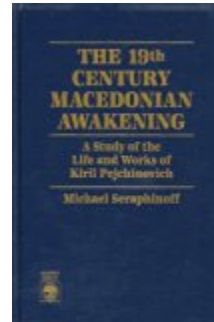


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael Seraphinoff. *The Nineteenth-Century Macedonian Awakening: A Study of the Life and Works of Kiril Pejčinovich*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996. xii + 171 pp. \$28.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7618-0012-5.

Reviewed by Steven Sowards (Swarthmore College)
Published on HABSURG (April, 1996)



Michael Seraphinoff's book on the early nineteenth century Macedonian monk, Kiril Pejčinovich, combines literary and linguistic analysis with historical perspective, to explain how and why a limited body of religious writing deserves our attention as important evidence for the early development of Macedonian national self-consciousness. Contrary to assertions that Macedonian identity is of recent vintage, Pejčinovich's works imply almost two hundred years of linguistic continuity.

The book began as a 1993 doctoral dissertation in Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Washington. Its focus is not primarily historical: Seraphinoff emphasizes textual analysis and to a lesser extent the linguistics of the Macedonian language and its dialects. The original thesis title ("The Works of Kiril Pejčinovich in the 19th Century Macedonian Awakening") perhaps states the study's scope more accurately, because the present book makes no attempt to describe the whole of Macedonia's national awakening, but deals only with the role of Pejčinovich's work.

Pejčinovich was an Orthodox monk of Slavic Macedonian descent who was born around 1771 and died in 1845. As an abbot, he restored and led the Leshok Monastery near Tetovo; and wrote three books, two of them published during his lifetime, and an epitaph in verse.

Recognizing that Pejčinovich is not a widely known figure despite his importance for the "Macedonian awakening," Seraphinoff's first chapter is a capsule biography. Subsequent chapters describe and analyze Pejčinovich's writings, which are significant as early examples of a written Macedonian vernacular: "Ogledalo" ("Mirror," published in Budapest in 1816), the unpublished "Zhitie

na knez Lazar" ("Life of Prince Lazar"), "Utshenie greshnim" ("Consolation for Sinners," published in Salonika in 1840), and the poetic epitaph inscribed by the abbot on his own tombstone in 1835. The final chapter recapitulates many of Seraphinoff's remarks in a strongly-stated conclusion. Readers who are new to the topic could treat this final chapter as a useful guide to Seraphinoff's detailed discussions: it would repay them to read it twice, before and after tackling the body of the book.

For Seraphinoff, the Macedonians are "the Orthodox Slavic people of Macedonia" (p. vii), whose language distinguishes them from both Serbs and Bulgarians, as well as Greeks, Turks or Albanians. Pejčinovich's importance derives from his function as a documented early user of this language. Historians and others involved in arguments about Macedonian identity will find much of interest in Seraphinoff's thesis: that "Pejčinovich's ... words were distinctly meaningful to the Slavic people of Macedonia for centuries past and into the present ... as proof that the modern Macedonian language and literature can trace their lineage through literary works that are centuries old" (p. 139). Seraphinoff's method is "direct engagement with primary texts ... to provide optimal conditions for a fresh interpretation" of Pejčinovich's place in the rise of Macedonian ethnicity (p. x); his goal is "shedding new light on the process by which the Slavic people of Macedonia became increasingly aware of their shared religious, ethical, and cultural values, including their linguistic kinship" (p. xi). Very helpful for non-specialists are the author's original translations from the Macedonian, which accompany every quoted passage.

Seraphinoff is sketchy regarding the mechanism of Pejčinovich's influence, and about reasons for the ab-

bot's interest in writing in the vernacular for a lay audience. He cites other scholars' claims that Pejchinovich's books circulated widely among later generations of Macedonians, and traces possible connections linking the isolated monk with centers of new political and social thought outside the Ottoman Empire, noting that the abbot's books were printed in Budapest and Salonika.

Pejchinovich's linguistic contributions to a growing Macedonian self-awareness resemble the work of Vuk Karadzic and Dositej Obradovic for the Serbs, or Paisi Hilendarski and Sofronii Vrachanski for the Bulgarians, but lack their deliberate secularism. Pejchinovich remains a figure of medieval and Orthodox tradition, and skeptics will ponder how the abbot's work could surmount his own limitations, despite Seraphinoff's careful discussion regarding "Ogledalo" (pp. 56-60). Proof of motive is naturally elusive. While Seraphinoff believes that the moral of a particular story by Pejchinovich "could express the desire of his own people" for liberation (p. 98), it could also express far less: the evidence is lacking for conclusive certainty. Pejchinovich himself never wrote of "Macedonia" or "Macedonian": his contradictory references were to medieval Serbia and to the "common Bulgarian language of Lower Moesia, Skopje and Tetovo" (p. 88). Clearly, Pejchinovich and his works fall far short of full-blown national awareness, despite their

importance for later developments.

The book is pleasantly illustrated with facsimile pages from some of Pejchinovich's books, and a contemporary drawing of the bearded abbot. A map of modern Southeastern Europe shows the location of Macedonia and Tetovo: a larger map of Macedonia and adjacent regions might have been more helpful to pinpoint some of the little-known places mentioned in the text. The Preface includes a short but instructive bibliographical essay on studies of Pejchinovich, and there is a substantial bibliography at the end of the book, citing works in Western European and Slavic languages. Strictly linguistic observations about Pejchinovich's language are summarized in an appendix. The index is short but accurate, and analyzes the content of the extensive and informative endnotes that follow each chapter.

An audience with extensive linguistic training might have more to say about Seraphinoff's treatment of linguistic elements. From a historical perspective, this reviewer found the book logical in its argument, persuasive in its evidence, and significant for its implications about the early stages of Macedonian ethnic development.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

Citation: Steven Sowards. Review of Seraphinoff, Michael, *The Nineteenth-Century Macedonian Awakening: A Study of the Life and Works of Kiril Pejchinovich*. HABSBERG, H-Net Reviews. April, 1996.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=370>

Copyright © 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.