

## Book Reviews

Myrsiades Kostas and Linda S., *The Karagiozis Heroic Performance in Greek Shadow Theater*, Hanover, N.H., University Press of New England, 1988, pp. 248.

Outside of Greece the shadow puppet theater of Karagiozis is barely known. The Myrsiades' joint effort, ~~the~~ recently published *The Karagiozis Heroic Performance in Greek Shadow Theater*, in which Linda Myrsiades has written the text and Kostas Myrsiades has done the translations, is a welcome attempt to bring this rich tradition to the attention of an English-speaking audience. Organized into three chapters and 3 appendices, the book places Karagiozis performance in its historical context (Chapter 1), presents two Karagiozis texts in English translations, *The Hero Katsandonis* and *The Seven Beasts and Karagiozis* (Chapters 2 and 3), and concludes with various appendices which outline the main Karagiozis characters, the mechanics of the stage, and the publishing history of the plays, as well as fifty pages of notes.

No one can criticize the Myrsiades for skimping on information. This book is packed with wonderful anecdotes, bibliographical references and spicy dialogue. Besides meditations on the history of Greek theater (p. 13) or the problematic relation between Karagiozis and the church (p. 18), one learns, for example, that as the bawdy shadow puppet shows became more popular in the 19th century, they also became more threatening: by order of the King supervision by the police was required at performances (p. 23). But especially after reading through the translations, the appendices and the notes, one may be left wondering whom this hodge-podge of information is really meant to serve.

The preface boldly states:

This work is designed to reach two different audiences, the scholarly and the popular, and has relevance for audiences in such fields as oral literature, theater and drama, folklore, comparative literature, Greek studies, Turkish studies, and Balkan studies. The texts are of interest not only to students of the form but to Greek communities in America, Canada, and Australia, many of whose children will find their only access to this rich form of Greek culture and folklore through these English translations (p. ix).

The book seems to fall short of both its scholarly and popular aspirations. On the one hand its scholarly efforts involve a great deal of summarizing of other scholars' work with very little analysis or new insights, and although it is clear that the authors are aware of and utilize a vast bibliography, this bibliography is not easily available to the reader since it is buried in dense notes. (One wishes that all references were listed under a "Works Cited" section at the end of the book). On the other hand its attempt to popularize the topic is undermined by its scholarly pretensions: how many lay readers will be interested in such a detailed chronology of the genre and its practitioners, and even were they to skip the first chapter

and the introductory prefaces to each translation, turning directly to the texts, might they not be put off by the footnoted renditions of Greek puns in English?

The tension between this book's scholarly and popular aims is perhaps best illustrated in the translations themselves. The original text of *The Seven Beasts and Karagiozis* for example presents the challenge of all sorts of dialects and accents. But rather than choosing to present a literal rendition with footnotes or to transpose the dialogue into American dialects and accents, the translator Kostas Myrsiades opts for a middle path. In this way one gets rhymes and puns that have been reworked, for the most part unsuccessfully, in English, with footnotes which explain the original pun. For example in an exchange between Alexander the Great and Karagiozis one reads:

Alexander the Great: Stupid fellow! Why did you strike my breast plate?

Karagiozis: When did you develop it?

Alexander the Great: What, Karagiozis?

Karagiozis: Breast hate.

Alexander the Great: Breastplate, I said (p. 168).

Whereas the word *thoraka* (breastplate) rhymes simply with *koraka* (crow) in the original, the translation introduces a much more complicated rhyme, pairing breastplate with *breast hate*, and then adds a footnote in order to help the reader understand this strange choice.

Similarly one finds dialects and accents that are neither American nor Greek, but rather a mix. Karagiozis' son Kolitiris who is supposed to sound like a little kid with a lisp ends up sounding as if his jaw has been wired together:

Kolitiris: Come on you, before zey glab uz and make muzh of uz (p. 162).

There are moments in which this book succeeds in finding a tone suitable to its double aim. For example by placing the historical Katsandonis text in the context of the larger debate over whether the mountain klephts were brigands or patriotic heroes, Linda Myrsiades limits the discussion and thereby clearly introduces a difficult text to scholars and lay readers alike (p. 45-60). But unfortunately such moments of clarity are outweighed by discussions in which the author tries to do too many things at once and by translations which are neither literal or literary. In an attempt to reach too many different audiences this pioneering book may in fact reach too few.

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Margaret Mullett and Roger Scott (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, Birmingham (England), Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, pp. x+250.

This volume is a handy collection of 19 interesting papers, which were presented by mostly Classicists and Byzantinists to the Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (April 6-10, 1979) at the Centre for Byzantine Studies at the University of Birmingham (England).