

POET BLAZHE KONESKI:  
THE “CONSTRUCTOR” OF MACEDONIAN  
LITERARY LANGUAGE

---

**Abstract:**

The article talks about Blazhe Koneski (1921–93), the founder of modern Macedonian literature, poet, narrator, translator, scholar and a founder of the Faculty of Philology of the University of Skopje and the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His collection of poems “The Embroiderer” (1955) contains real masterpieces of national lyrics. He has created national poetic masterpieces dedicated to love and landscape, philosophical and patriotic poetry. In his writings he uses a variety of folk tradition and the richness of its themes. He has translated into Macedonian many prominent poets such as Alexander Blok, Adam Mitskevich, Heinrich Heine and others.

**Keywords:**

Blazhe Koneski, Macedonian literature, national poetry, folk tradition, sonnet.

**Аннотация:** А.Г. ШЕШКЕН. «“СТРОИТЕЛЬ” МАКЕДОНСКОГО ЛИТЕРАТУРНОГО ЯЗЫКА, ПОЭТ БЛАЖЕ КОНЕСКИЙ».

В статье речь идет о Блаже Конеском (1921–93) — основоположнике современной македонской литературы, поэте, прозаике, переводчике, ученом, основателе филологического факультета университета в Скопье и Македонской академии наук и искусств. Его поэтический сборник «Вышивальщица» (1955) относится к шедеврам национальной лирики. Он создал замечательные образцы национальной любовной, пейзажной, философской и патриотической поэзии. В них были творчески использованы фольклорная традиция — богатство ее мотивов, символики и ритмики — и опыт европейской поэзии XIX–XX вв. Ему принадлежат переводы на македонский язык произведений А. Блока, А. Мицкевича, Г. Гейне и др.

**Ключевые слова:**

Блаже Конеский, македонская литература, македонская поэзия, фольклорная традиция, сонет, элегия.

Blazhe Koneski (1921–93) was a first-rate Macedonian poet, prose writer, translator, scholar, the founder of modern Macedonian literature as well as a public figure. Coming from a simple peasant family, after receiving his education at Belgrade and Sofia universities, he became one of the major figures in the country’s scientific, social and cultural life. He participated in the compilation of the first orthographic code of the Macedonian language (1945), was the creator of “A Grammar of Standard Macedonian” (1952–54), served as the editor of the three-volume “Macedonian Dictionary” (1961–66), and wrote a number of studies on the history of Macedonian literature. He was the rector of the



*Blazhe Koneski*

University of Sts Cyril and Methodius in Skopje (1958–60), the first president of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (1967–75), the first chairman of the Union of Writers of Macedonia (1946), and the editor of the first literary journal in the Macedonian language, “The New Day” (1945–50).

Koneski’s name is associated with the genesis of modern Macedonian literature. He began publishing at the age of 24 and became the author of 16 collections: 15 of poetry and one of prose. He translated Petar Petrovich Negosh’s poem “The Mountain Crown”, and many poems by Heinrich Heine, Alexander Blok, Valery Bryusov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Eduard Bagritsky, Adam Mitskevich, Juliush Slovatsky, Zygmunt Kraśinski, Julian Tuvim, K. Macha, Yan Neruda, P. Brezuch, Yirzhí Volker, Vítězslav Nezval and others. At the

beginning of his career, Koneski was heavily influenced by the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky. From the 1950s onward, the aesthetic basis of his work changed significantly; the range of his exploration in the field of form expanded enormously. He showed an interest in realism, romanticism, symbolism and acmeism but remained indifferent to expressionism and surrealism, towards which many poets of Macedonia gravitated in the second half of the 1950s and 1960s.

Among the most striking Macedonian literary masterpieces of the revolutionary era is Koneski’s poem, “The Bridge” (1945). The poet dedicated it to the revolution and the socialist transformation of the country, the exploits of the partisans and free labor. This poem, imbued with romantic pathos, synthesizes the traditions of folk poetry, the experience of the first national poet, Kocho Ratsin, and modern lyrics. Koneski strove for the maximum diversity of rhythm and stanza, to the extent of combining syllabic and tonic verses within the framework of one work.

Koneski’s lyric poetry of the 1950s and 1960s constitutes the classical foundation of Macedonian poetry, combining simplicity of style and philosophical depth, relying on the traditions of folklore and European literature. It is characterized by musicality and a richness of rhythm and strophe pattern. His poetry collection “The Embroiderer” (1955) marked a new stage in the development of Macedonian literature. It contains love, philosophical and patriotic lyrics, samples of syllabonic tonic poetry and free verse (“The Embroiderer,” “Angel of St Sophia”, “Image”, “Stranger”, “Peace”, “From the Train Window”, “Patient

Deutchin”, “Simply and Sternly”). A consistent motif of Koneski’s lyric poetry was reflection on the poet and poetry. In the programmatic poem “The Embroiderer,” Koneski formulates his poetic credo: to write “simply and strictly” based on national traditions. The second edition of the 1961 collection was supplemented by the “Stern” cycle, in which the motif of performing a feat is closely tied to the formulation of existential problems of life and death, good and evil. The collection was edited by the poet, its composition changed; and it acquired its final form only in 1990.

Koneski’s poetic creativity of the 1970s and 1980s is represented by a number of poetry collections, which are characterized by a wealth of themes and motifs, expressive imagery and the modest beauty of his language and style. It also displayed significant exploration in the field of versification, with Koneski using a variety of styles, from sonnet to free verse (“Notes,” 1974). The poet became the spokesman for the joys and sorrows of his courageous and long-suffering countrymen. His images of simple peasant women in the poetic cycle “The Lives of the Saints” (“The Life of Bona”, “The Life of Tasa Boyanoska”, “The Assumption of Aunt Menka”) are the embodiment of the nation’s tragic fate. In the collection “Epistle”, he discusses the place of the poet and poetry in society, the complex and multifaceted manifestations of poetic inspiration (verse “Poetics”, 1987). Reflections on this subject raise the underlying problems of the philosophy of creativity. Koneski considered “thought” and “rhythm” to be key in his poetry. In his ironically playful poem built on the stylistic device of onomatopoeia, “Ars poetica”, the author expresses the idea of the need to work painstakingly on poetic expression so that it sounds “easy and soft, strong but gentle, sympathetic and ardent with bitter experience and suppressed pain”.

In the collections “Poems Old and New” (1979), “Sources” (1984), and “Church” (1988), Koneski discussed the meaning of life, referring to memories of childhood and youth. Throughout the 80s philosophical ideas increasingly occupied a place in his poetry. Reflecting on the ruthless movement of time, the poet created a collection of sonnets, demonstrating the continuing relevance of this classic genre of European lyric poetry (“Sources”). In the poems “Kocho Ratsin”, “Che Guevara”, “Troy” and in pointedly intimate mini-portraits (“Grandfather Kone” and “Ann”), the poet raises the problem of death and immortality, which became one of the mainstays in his lyric poetry. In a collection written near the end of his life (“The Heavenly River”, 1991), the lyrical hero is captured by the theme of earthly and eternal life, and in his very last poetry collection, “The Black Ram” (1993), one senses a premonition of imminent death.

“The Vineyard” (1955), a collection of short stories on the theme of childhood, urban and rural everyday life, contains one of the first examples of Macedonian psychological prose. One senses that it is based on the traditions of a Chekhov short story. The author pays great attention to the social environment, outlined in several bright strokes, and to portrait, subject and landscape details. The interior space of his prose is always wider than the plot outlined.

The narrative tone and special atmosphere of his stories are underpinned by his concise language and use of understatement. Especially significant are those stories which center around the image of a child naively and directly perceiving life and learning its first, often painful lessons (“Shoes”).

*Translated by Igor Kaliganov*

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Sbeshken A.G.* Poeziia Blazhe Koneskogo (k voprosu ob osobennostiakh stanovleniia i razvitiia sovremennoi makedonskoi literatury) // Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Seriiia 9, Filologiiia, 2007. N 2. S. 49–61.
- Sbeshken A.* Poeziia “prostaia i strogaia” // *Sbeshken A.G.* Makedonskaia literatura XX veka. Genesis. Osnovnye etapy razvitiia. Natsional’noe svoeobrazie. Moscow, 2007. S. 144–53.
- Stardelov G.* Deloto na Blaže Koneski. Ostvaruvanja i prespektivi. Skopje, 2002.
- Stardelov G.* Odzemanje na silata. Poezija na Blaže Koneski. Skopje, 1990.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Blazhe Koneski. Photo.
2. Blazhe Koneski “A Grammar of Standard Macedonian.” Skopje, 1952–54.
3. B. Koneski. “Dictionary of the Macedonian literary language” in 3 vol., Skopje, 1961–66.
4. The cover of the Koneski’s “History of Macedonian language.”
5. The cover of the Koneski’s “Macedonian spelling with spelled river boat” (1950).
6. The Faculty of Philology named after Blazhe Koneski at the Sts Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje.
7. Monument to Blazhe Koneski. Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts.
8. Blazhe Koneski. Photo.
9. The house-museum of Blazhe Koneski in Nebregovo.
10. A bank-note with the image of Blazhe Koneski.