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ALEKO KONSTANTINOV – CHOICE OF THE AUTHOR, METHODOLOGY AND SPECIFIC TASKS RELATED TO A HYPERTEXT RESEARCH PLATFORM IMPLEMENTATION

Aleko Konstantinov is a late 19 century author whose works for the first time opened the Bulgarian cultural space towards the European and American culture. There are three basic arguments to choose this author for the HyperLearning purposes:

- The main motifs in his novelettes, travel notes and feuilletons are related to the travel as a way to define national identity. The inter-cultural communication's initiation became the focal point in Aleko's writings. The result was the creation of the most-emblematic national character, Bay Ganyo, who is a cultural, literary and national focus of each Bulgarian generation.
- Aleko's topics and ideas discuss both the open and the closed character of national culture, the integration and preservation of national uniqueness, the dynamic and controversial contact of the "own" with the "other's."
- Aleko's works affirm the values of the modern European man as a model for the ethical development of the individual in the environment of a post-colonial society. His life and works build an image of a perfect idealist, with clear and firm moral principles, with an active civil position and readiness for social action.

There is a strong demand for a comprehensive digital collection of materials by and related to the author in searchable indexed form, available to any researcher with Internet access. The members of the Bulgarian team have identified this need both in their own research efforts and in their teaching activities. The access to a large number of materials that are part of the cultural heritage remains physically limited in many cases to a single user at a time, since the originals haven't been reproduced in any widely useable form. The access is in fact restricted by availability, even if legally it is more or less free. The indices – traditionally chronological – of archived materials are stored in the archives themselves, meaning that the researcher needs to visit the site just to study the map.

In Konstantinov's case, there are at least three such major "maps" which are to some extent overlapping but not identical – one in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, one in the National Library, and another in the author's museum in Svishtov. Furthermore, the court transcripts of the legal cases Konstantinov has led as an attorney are kept in various collections at the City Prosecutor's Office, the Court of Appeals, the Ministry of Justice, and others. Letters, memoirs, objects, and other memorabilia are scattered around the globe and even a comprehensive map of the sources, where they are located and why – the first step of the project – is of significant research value. One that is freely accessible on the Internet is even more valuable.

The scientific research work is usually comprised of two phases – **learn to use, and use to learn**. The first phase when the researcher is learning how and where to find and obtain relevant materials is extremely important and so far a comprehensive knowledge about the available sources has been an essential virtue of any person considered an authority on the subject. With the advent of the information technology, however, this part of the research process started to appear also extremely cumbersome. It is particularly striking for a person who comes from software development, for instance, to the field of humanities, where the phrase "you can find that on the Net" is seldom heard. On the other hand, the learning process in humanities is inherently hyper-textual. While working with text A, a researcher finds reference to text B, which in turn relates to the event C, documented in source D, and so forth. The traditional retrieval of items A, B, C and D, however, has been time-consuming and costly. An Internet-based hyper-platform can facilitate this process by orders of magnitude. In the case of Konstantinov, where a researcher faces a lot of social, political, economic, as well as geographic references, the proposed comprehensive collection of interconnected material should become indispensable. The **"learn-to-use"** part will be basically transparent for any researcher with basic Internet knowledge, allowing much more **"use-to-learn"** time than previously imaginable.

A completely new option is to use the repository of material combined with the interactivity of the platform to build guided-learning materials in the form of *eLessons* and *eCourses*. A teacher

can thus use the system to build a presentation as a visual aid to their lecture before an auditorium with Internet access, or to develop an entirely "unmanned" teaching course. Since the system will be open to the broader academic community, it will thus provide also an exchange of views on the methodology of studies.

The main challenge so far for almost any Internet-based project to assist humanitarian studies is that scholars either cannot find what they are looking for or doubt the credibility of the source. The project proposed addresses both issues by first, aiming to provide as large as possible collection of materials both by and related to the author, and second, by ensuring that the team is comprised of experienced scholars and publishers, applying the high editorial standards associated with academic publishing.

The project will proceed in two general stages, which will require different allocation of work resources. During the first stage, most of the efforts will be directed at the gathering of material, its digital preparation and availability. Until a "critical mass" of available content is reached and the interface for its efficient usage is tested and proven, the access to the project will be limited to those involved in its development. Only in its second stage the hyper-learning platform will open to the broader public and the team will direct most of its efforts to promote it to the scholarly community and the general audience. In this stage the scholars and researchers actively involved in the project will also contribute an initial batch of original work on the author, utilizing the hyper-learning platform as fully as possible. There is little doubt that during the initial stage, the team involved in the project will find more than enough under-researched material to serve as a base for new studies or critical essays. At the end of the second stage, there is expected to be sustained flow of new contributions from the scientific community, further expanding the project's content base.

The objectives of the Stage 1 (18 months) are as follows:
1. To create a virtual community for collaborative research, teaching and learning on the internet that generates new forms of learning through open access to primary sources and scholarly research.To design the structure of an author hypertext on **Konstantinov** (**HyperKonstantinov**);
2. To catalogue the primary sources concerning Konstantinov's *Bay Ganyo* (*The work **Bay Ganyo** is a key one both for Aleko Konstantinov and for the Bulgarian culture within European context. Its popularity in the country and abroad surpasses any other Bulgarian literary work from the past 150 years. It is a constant source of national self-knowledge in the globalization process*);
3. To implement that part of the hypertext which is dedicated to the management of the topography of annotations to the manuscript pages; the submitting of facsimiles, bibliographical files, transcriptions, critical essays, translations, and audio-visual recordings;
4. To insert in **HyperKonstantinov** an initial core set of digitalized primary sources and scholarly contributions related to the *Bay Ganyo*;
5. To found an editorial board responsible for evaluating the contributions submitted for publication;
6. To establish collaborative relationships with other research groups that are working on Konstantinov, and with public institutions and individuals who possess other manuscripts by Konstantinov or other relevant primary sources;
7. To organize a public seminar on the *Bay Ganyo*, which will be made accessible via Live Web-Casting through the general HyperLearning site, and from which recordings will be inserted successively in **HyperKonstantinov**.

The practical implementation of these objectives pass through the following activities:
Activity I. Build a comprehensive list of the available material to be processed and included – where it is located, in what form, the best ways for its digitization, display, indexing and hierarchical presentation.
Activity II. Procurement of the hardware and development of the software needed to carry out the work identified in Part I. Assembling a team, assigning tasks, and preparation of the digitized material.
Activity III. Development of the user interaction with the content prepared in Parts I and II.
• indices with various degrees of complexity, systems for search and retrieval of documents;

• various display options for various types of content – graphical, textual, multimedia; options for efficient bandwidth usage – partial display, abstracts, thumbnails;

• personalized user workspaces: saved searches, virtual "personal bookshelves" with hyperlinks to materials each registered user has gathered for specific purposes;

Activity IV. Development of a system for scholarly contributions – an interface for submitting original critical works, essays and other academic texts to the editorial board for peer review and subsequent online publishing.

Activity V. eLessons and eCourses: development of a teaching system for building a "virtual lecture" including parts of the available material and critical contributions in the form of an interactive online presentation and the subsequent combining of a number of lectures into a whole course of study.

After the first 18 months (First stage), the team aims to have at least one third of the planned materials in each category processed, and the interface for their access and display to be ready. The software for the personalized experience – personal bookshelves, eLesson and eCourse builders – is also planned to be developed over the first 18 months. It will be later extended and fine-tuned mostly with user feedback.

In practice during the First stage all the documents, archive material, and objects, manuscripts, letters, memoirs and published works will be digitized and accessible in HyperKonstantinov. Primary sources will be digitized in color and in high quality. The texts and the multimedia contributions will be encoded according to standards chosen in collaboration with partners working on MEDIS (Multimedia Encoding and Documents Interoperability Standard).

A complete bibliography of texts *from* and *about* Aleko Konstantiniv (AK) will be included. The critical texts (1895 to present) will be selected on the principle "the best and the newest." Another important task of the AK part of project is to compile a selection of interpretations created in painting, graphic art, and especially in cartoons. These visual readings contain many profound discoveries on the Bulgarian character and its attitude towards Europe. During the first 18 months, pilot clips will be prepared to complete the multimedia integration of the AKPS within the hypertext. There are two goals: to show the cinematographic reading of the text in time, and to create a visual perspective for future readings. The core of the work is the feature film and the TV version of "Bay Ganyo". It will feature material from the Bulgarian National TV Archive, which has a computerized catalogue (about 37% of the archive data is entered into the ISIS software.)

Six monthly seminars are to be transmitted via Webcasting. The general topic of the seminars will be "Aleko Konstantinov. Bay Ganyo" and each seminar will have a different subtopic and a keynote speaker. The keynote speaker in each event will be a leading Bulgarian authority on the subject or a guest speaker from a European country. Each event will have a moderator, who will be one of the associate directors of the project from the Bulgarian part. The event will be broadcasted live and will be accessible to the university centers with organized groups of researchers, who will have the option to participate in real time. Initial contacts are established with such centers in Gent (Belgium), Lille (France), St. Petersburg (Russia), Open University (London), Northwestern University (Chicago, USA), University of Pittsburgh (USA). The goal of the seminars will be to create a bridge for the humanitarian knowledge through reading, reflection, and speaking on the chosen author and work. The results will be published and archived.

During the Second stage of the project (beyond the first 18 months) the rest of the author's works will be gradually included in HyperKonstantinov. The *Virtual Collaborative Learning Communities* network in Bulgaria will be further developed and enhanced, and a Workshop dedicated to the gaps in the researches undertaken so far on Aleko Konmstantinov and its work will be organized in order to identify the thematic and ideological scope of this area, within which any new reasearch would represent an added value. On-line seminars will be held with other HyperLearning teams, interested in comparative studies on the differnet authors included in the project (among which is Aleko). Subjet themes of interest to the international research community and which, if developed, would contribute to the European cultural area, will be identified. One edition of the HLOM (HyperLearning OnLine Magazine) will be dedicated to Aleko Konstantinov. A HyperKonstantinov Virtual Library will be created and a PrintOnDemand service will be established to meet the HyperLearning needs. Workshops and

seminars will be organized on regional and international levels - on-line or at a suitable place as appropriate.

The placement of Aleko Konstantinov in a Hyperlearning environment creates a new ground for academic, humanitarian, and civil education, which will be accessible for national and international cultural and scientific centers; it enables a comprehensive collection of presently scattered archive and documental heritage. The Hyperlearning platform is a unique environment for new research and learning; it combines and creates a rich and ever-growing *critical context,* which would be unthinkable in terms of volume, means of usage, and efficiency if it had to be done in "paper technology." HyperKonstantinov is posed to form an authoritative and unique Center for generation of new knowledge. The final goal is to create a learning environment, channeling the interests and intellectual energy of researchers, students and citizens, in which young people gain experience "*to understand themselves, and to understand others through a better understanding of the world*." (UNESCO Report, 1996, p. 45)

2nd H-L Workshop
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