

DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ: A TAPESTRY OF THOUGHT — PHILOSOPHY, ART, LITERATURE AND FEMINISM

INTRODUCTION

While a significant number of women in Serbia today hold doctoral degrees across the academic spectrum, just a little over a century ago, such an accomplishment was almost impossible to achieve. It was the philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević who emerged as the inaugural woman to obtain a doctorate from the University of Belgrade in 1922, defending a thesis entitled *Bruno's Doctrine of the Minimum*. A mere two years later, she followed up this academic achievement with another indelible mark: she became the first female university professor in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes when she was appointed Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy.

Recalling these achievements, this collected volume serves a dual purpose. First, it aims to illuminate Atanasijević's long-neglected theoretical contributions to the interpretation of ancient philosophy. Second, it provides an overview of her extraordinary body of work by delving into intricate interdisciplinary inquiries that reflect her profound contributions to literature, art and feminism. Correspondingly, the collection of essays is divided into two distinct thematic sections: "Ksenija Atanasijević – Themes from Ancient Philosophy" and "Ksenija Atanasijević – Literature, Art and Feminism in Focus."

The first section opens with a chapter from Irina Deretić, with the question "What is philosophy for Ksenija Atanasijević?" Deretić thoroughly examines Atanasijević's unique approach to philosophy, tracing her intellectual progress from traditional metaphysical views to a more ethical and humanist framework. Deretić's analysis offers a comprehensive

survey of Atanasijević's understanding of philosophy, her approach and engagement with philosophical problems, carefully noting Atanasijević's methodological shifts. By illuminating Atanasijević's philosophical journey, the chapter provides a better understanding of her role in the history of Serbian philosophical thought. Deretić thus sets the stage in the volume for a chronological exploration of Atanasijević's perspectives on Pythagoreans, Empedocles, Epicurus and the Stoics. In "Pythagorean Thought in the Modern World: Exploring Atanasijević's Perspective on Its Relevance," Aleksandar Kandić reflects on the influence of Pythagorean philosophy on authors from Antiquity to the modern era, providing novel and independent evidence in support of Atanasijević's views of Pythagorean teaching practices and their relevance for modern scientific theories. The enduring relevance of Ksenija Atanasijević's interpretation of Presocratic thinkers is also clearly demonstrated in Sandra Šćepanović's essay, "Ksenija Atanasijević on Empedocles." Šćepanović highlights Atanasijević's original insights, particularly in understanding Empedocles' concepts of Love and Strife, as well as the interplay between this Presocratic's physics, ethics and theology. The author aligns Atanasijević's interpretations with modern scholarship, underscoring her innovative approach to Empedocles' eclecticism and the complex union of his philosophical and religious ideas. This analysis not only validates Atanasijević's interpretations but also affirms her lasting impact in the study of early Greek philosophy. In "Ksenija Atanasijević on Aristotle's Concept of Friendship," Tamara Plečaš and Marija Petrović examine Atanasijević's analysis of Aristotle's understanding of friendship. They highlight Atanasijević's nuanced approach to Aristotle's views, pointing out that she deliberately refrains from explicitly criticizing his assumptions about gender inequalities. Nevertheless, Plečaš and Petrović underline that Atanasijević's intention was to emphasize the universal importance and transformative potential of friendship. Following, in "Atanasijević on the Divisibility of the Atom in Epicurus and the Early Atomists," Pavle Stojanović assesses Atanasijević's claim that Epicurus' theory of 'the minimum' originated from earlier atomists, Leucippus and Democritus – a notion that met with controversy and harsh criticism from her mentor, Branislav Petronijević. Stojanović contends that Petronijević's objections fail to refute Atanasijević's thesis, while nevertheless highlighting certain weaknesses in her formulation and defense. Petar Stevanović, then, provides a fresh perspective on Atanasijević's views regarding Seneca's consistency between his philosophical theory and political activity, while shedding light on the place of Seneca's thought within the Stoic school of philosophy. Stevanović's "Ksenija Atanasijević on Seneca's Consistency" underscores Seneca's excellent knowledge of human psychology, both illuminating Atanasijević's reading and enriching our understanding of Stoic

teachings, not only in ancient Greece and Rome but also in the modern era, when Stoic philosophy experienced a revitalization.

The contributions from the second part of the thematic compilation take us beyond Atanasijević's philosophical lens, examining her contributions and impact on the fields of literature (Nemanja Radulović, Jovana Ivetić and Tamara Babić), art (Stefan Žarić, Miloš Ćipranić), and feminism (Zorica Mršević). Again, the contributions unfold in chronological order: the chapters open with explorations of Atanasijević's writings on the Middle Ages and progressively advance towards her insights on more contemporary themes. In the first chapter of the second part of the book, "Through Theses on Medieval Literature: Thinking with Confessional Voices," Jovana Ivetić explores Ksenija Atanasijević's perspective on identification in medieval and confessional literature. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Toril Moi, Rita Felski, and Amanda Anderson, Ivetić illustrates how Atanasijević's feminist criticism deconstructs stereotypical narratives about the Middle Ages. Ivetić asserts that, through her analysis of medieval literature, Atanasijević provides valuable insights into the role of identification in understanding literary characters and challenges prevailing notions about medieval texts. In "Ksenija Atanasijević and Rabindranath Tagore," Nemanja Radulović explores Tagore's reception in Europe in the interwar period, subsequently shifting focus towards the local landscape and the intellectual contributions of Ksenija Atanasijević. Radulović deftly navigates through Atanasijević's nuanced critique of Tagore's ideologies, including both affirming and dissenting perspectives. Furthermore, Radulović explores the intricacies of Atanasijević's discernment of feminist undertones within Tagore's philosophy and the broader realm of Indian thought. In "Ksenija Atanasijević as Interpreter of Njegoš" Tamara Babić illuminates Petar Petrović Njegoš's unique standing among fellow philosophers and poets in Ksenija's studies. Babić makes a compelling case to establish Atanasijević as a valuable source for future interpretations of this remarkable poet. Her exploration of the topic moves in chronological order within the historical context of academic studies of Njegoš, offering insights into her significant intellectual relationships with Branislav Petronijević and Anica Savić Rebac. The chapter by Stefan Žarić, "Visualization of Ksenija Atanasijević in Aleksandra Lalić's Fashion Design," has a two-fold purpose. First, it examines how Ksenija Atanasijević's personality and philosophical ideas influenced Aleksandra Lalić's fashion designs, unveiling interesting connections between Atanasijević's philosophy and the realm of fashion. Second, the paper advocates for the exploration of fashion as a potential academic discipline within a national philosophy, paving the way for future interdisciplinary studies. Žarić's text

takes readers on a journey on the interweaving paths of fashion and philosophy, emphasizing the significance of understanding the former as a notable aspect of cultural expression and its potential role in shaping the latter. Miloš Ćipranić's "A Portrait of Ortega y Gasset" delves into Ksenija Atanasijević's unique approach to creating verbal portraits, focusing on her insightful portrayal of José Ortega y Gasset. Ćipranić highlights Atanasijević's skill in transcending traditional forms of portraiture, offering a rich multidimensional perspective that integrates Ortega y Gasset's philosophical ideologies with his essence. The essay underscores the depth and versatility of Atanasijević's literary mastery, demonstrating her ability to vividly capture and analyze the intellectual spirit of her subjects. In the final chapter of this volume, entitled "Women as the Focus of Ksenija Atanasijević," Zorica Mršević examines the depiction of female characters in Atanasijević's work, highlighting their significance and tragic dimensions. By examining Atanasijević's viewpoint that women, with their inherent complexity, play significant roles in myths and across literature, Mršević demonstrates that Ksenija regarded women as glorious expressions of thought and emotions, affirming their subjectivity and dignity.

This volume seeks to highlight the diverse contributions of Ksenija Atanasijević, spanning the realms of ancient philosophy, art, literature and feminism. Through a wide-ranging collection of essays, the book illustrates Atanasijević's profound impact in each field, providing readers with an illuminating exploration of one aspect after another of this thinker's intellectual legacy. Still, this modest volume catches but a glimpse of her extensive work, fully acknowledging that Atanasijević's enduring legacy will undoubtedly continue to inspire profound philosophical thought.

Jelena Pavličić Cerović
Marija Petrović
Tamara Plečaš
Milica Smajević Roljić