

Opinion

on the works by **Goran Tasev Blagoev, Julia Ivanova Zlatkova and Iveta Kirilova Rasheva,**

applicants in the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor** for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section of the Institute for Balkan Studies with *Professor Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology (IBSCT)

in Professional Field 3.1. **Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies**

by **Associate Professor Dr. Ekaterina Anastasova,**

Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Three applicants were admitted to the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor** in Professional Field 3.1. **Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies**, promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 55/19 June 2020, p. 89, for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section of the Institute for Balkan Studies with *Professor Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology. They are: **Goran Tasev Blagoev, Iveta Kirilova Rasheva and Julia Ivanova Zlatkova.** All three applicants met the minimum requirements and have submitted monographs as their habilitation works, in compliance with the requirements under the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB). I shall examine the applicants in alphabetical order.

1. **Goran Tasev Blagoev**

Goran Tasev Blagoev acquired his academic and educational PhD degree in Folklore Studies in 2004 with his dissertation work *The Qurban Tradition in the Culture of Bulgarian Muslims*. He is the author of two books: *The Qurban in the Tradition of Bulgarian Muslims* (Sofia, Prof. M. Drinov Academic Publishers, 2005), published on the basis of his dissertation work, and *Stories for Weeping and for Hope* (Sofia, Ciela, 2011), accepted by the panel as a collection of studies. Goran Blagoev is the author of 12 articles and 9 studies (7 of which in the *Stories for Weeping and for Hope*). The applicant cites his activities as part-time lecturer at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia and at the Paisiy Hilendarski Plovdiv University (2006–2018) as relevant professional experience.

The applicant meets the necessary minimum requirements and has submitted as habilitation work the monograph *Church and Identity in the Balkans: the Bulgarian Exarchate and Vardar Macedonia until the End of World War II*. Sofia, Paradigma, 2020, 384 p., ISBN 978-954326-428-5.

The monograph consists of Introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion entitled “Instead of Epilogue”, biographical notes, references and illustrations (404 p.). The book examines a broad chronological period (1878–1945) and it traces the establishing of the Macedonian Church as an institution, which fits in the contemporary debate on the Macedonian identity with its topical relevance for Bulgarian society. I would summarise the qualities of the book as pleasant reading, which would be undoubtedly interesting and informative for the

inquisitive mass reader interested in that topic. However, that should be a reader who is not “tempted” by the numerous in-depth studies on the issue. From the viewpoint of the academic discourse, the book describes events and documents, reproducing the facts, logic and concepts of works on the issue, which are sufficiently known in Bulgarian historiography (e.g., by Ivan Snegarov, Ivan Bozhilov, Vera Boneva, Svetlozar Eldarov, and others), i.e., the book tends to have a compilative and descriptive character. The author’s failure to address the issues in the sources (and the absence of primary sources), as well as the absence of new materials and of independent interpretations, raises the question both of the originality and of the academic contribution of the monograph.

On the grounds of the arguments adduced above, I assess the book submitted as habilitation work as interesting and useful for the broad public. However, I need to indicate the fact that it does not comply with important requirements under the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) on “habilitation work”: this must be a “scientific work that does not repeat or summarise existing knowledge” and contains “scientific contribution and originality of the works submitted.” These conclusions prompt me to refrain from recommending Goran Tasev Blagoev for the academic position of Associate Professor.

2. Julia Ivanova Zlatkova

The applicant Julia Ivanova Zlatkova obtained her PhD academic degree in 2007 in Medieval General History with a dissertation on *Female Monasticism in Early Byzantium (4th–7th Century)*. She has claimed professional experience with her work as Assistant Professor at the Institute for Balkan Studies with Professor *Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology in 2008.

Julia Zlatkova is the author of 6 articles and 8 studies, she meets the minimum academic requirements and has submitted as habilitation work the monograph *Konstantin Leontiev and the Balkans*, Sofia: Avangard Prima, 2020.

The monograph *Konstantin Leontiev and the Balkans*, Sofia: Avangard Prima, 2020, SBN 978–619–239-460-8, consists of Introduction, four chapters, Conclusion and references (297 p.). The topic chosen is a serious challenge because the personality, works and religious-philosophical views of Konstantin Leontiev have been the object of keen interest and polemics, being also connected with fierce criticism and devout followers. It is sufficient to mention the names of individuals like L. Tolstoy, V. Rozanov, V. Solovyov and N. Berdyaev, and contemporary scholars like V. Kosyk, D. Stamatopoulos, and others. Forgotten and “resurrected,” Konstantin Leontiev continues to be topical and relevant. The author was undoubtedly inspired not only by Leontiev’s philosophy and works, but also by his views on the Bulgarians, which earned him the qualification of “Bulgarophobe.”

The author has traced K. Leontiev’s notions about the Balkans and the Balkan peoples (11–124), his political positions, his concepts on the Church and Eastern Questions (125–226), as well as his philosophy on the future of the Balkans (227–376).

The book is actually a presentation of K. Leontiev’s life, works and philosophical-religious views before Bulgarian readers, because it is “difficult to find another author who has written more about the Bulgarians” (p. 10). At the same time, the author justly points out that Leontiev’s personality and works have been the object of research interest in Bulgarian science and journalism (12–13).

The monograph indisputably evokes interest among the Bulgarian reading public as it can become familiar with the personality and philosophy of one of the eminent representatives of Russian philosophical-religious thought. The positions of Julia Zlatkova are debatable, e.g., her agreement with K. Leontiev's notion on the New Middle Ages (281–282) in the context of globalisation, post-industrialisation, etc. However, both the historical-descriptive approach and the absence of new conclusions (which – undoubtedly – is a complicated task with such a strongly discussed personality as K. Leontiev) tend to characterise the monograph as an informative reading for Bulgarian readers, summarising already existing facts, positions and interpretations (moreover, sufficiently familiar to the specialised audience). This finding is in contradiction with the requirement under the ADASRB, namely that the habilitation work must be a “scientific work that does not repeat or summarise existing knowledge.”

The arguments presented so far give me grounds to refrain from recommending Dr. Julia Ivanova Zlatkova for the academic position of Associate Professor.

3. Iveta Kirilova Rasheva

The applicant Iveta Kirilova Rasheva obtained her educational and academic PhD degree in 2010 in Bulgarian Literature with dissertation on *The Vita of the Holy King Stefan Dečanski by Gregory Tsamblak in the Russian Manuscript Tradition*. She claims as professional experience her work as Assistant Professor at the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences since 2013.

The applicant has 30 specialised articles and reports, she meets the minimum requirements under the law and she has submitted as habilitation work the monograph *Our Renaissance Anachronic “Story” about the Christianisation Mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Bulgaria*. Sofia, Ongul Publishers, 2020.

The monograph *Our Renaissance Anachronic “Story” about the Christianisation Mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Bulgaria*. Sofia, Ongul Publishers, 2020, ISBN 978-619-7373-77-6, consists of “Instead of Introduction,” six chapters, two annexes (illustrations), conclusion and references (183 p.). The book is an interesting attempt at tracing and researching constructions and mechanisms that create, define and maintain the “appropriation” of Cyril and Methodius during the Bulgarian National Revival period and their “imagined” Christianisation activities (after the term used by Benedict Anderson) as an important part of the formation of the Bulgarian national identity. These processes, qualified by the author as “*anachronic story* about the Christianisation mission of the Holy Brothers,” are analysed as one of the principal *topoi* in the construction of the *we-others* opposition in Bulgarian society during the Bulgarian National Revival period. This traces the creation of a stable mythologem which (by acquiring new and different scientific and pseudo-scientific dimensions) continues to be extremely topical and relevant to Bulgarian society in our days as well. The monograph examines the emergence and the projections of that mythologem (7–20), its place in the *History* by Paisius of Hilendar and its ethnos-preserving function (21–36), its presence in different strata of Bulgarian culture – historiography of the National Revival (37–56), journalism and the sustainable *loci communes* in the festive rituals connected with 11 May (57–76), literature – lyrical and epic works, drama, translated works (77–122) and the fine arts (123–136). Critical comments could be made (e.g., comparison of the Bulgarian facts with the place of the mythologems about the saints in other Slavonic Renaissance societies and cultures), but the monograph is undoubtedly an interesting attempt at identifying the

problems connected with the mythologem about Cyril and Methodius in Bulgarian society during the National Revival period.

Such a broad, multilateral and interdisciplinary study (involving history, literature, drama and fine arts) of one of the significant phenomena in Bulgarian culture undoubtedly constitutes a contribution. The contemporary constructivist methodology in research on cultural facts, applied by the author, is also important as it protects her against using and repeating accepted clichés and traditional conclusions.

It is my opinion that the habilitation work of Iveta Rasheva is original and constitutes a contribution. The choice of issues to be addressed and the author's theoretical-methodological approaches correspond to the competition's professional field (3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies), as well as to the profile of the Institute's Section (Culture in the Balkans), which had announced the competition. Obviously, Iveta Kirilova Rasheva is a promising specialist whose work in the sphere of the study of Balkan culture will be interesting and a contribution. This gives me grounds to recommend Iveta Kirilova Rasheva for the academic position of Associate Professor.

Based on everything written so far, I hereby recommend to the panel to vote for Dr. Iveta Kirilova Rasheva to take the academic position of Associate Professor in the Culture in the Balkans Section of the Institute of Balkan Studies with *Professor Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology (IBSCT).

/sg./ Ekaterina Anastasova

31 October 2020, Sofia