

# Opinion

by

Prof. Dr. Roumiana Ilieva Preshlenova

on the applicants in the competition for the position of **Associate Professor** in Professional Field 3.1. ***Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies*** (promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 55/19 June 2020 for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section of the IBSCT

Three applicants were admitted to take part in the competition. In the opinion of the Academic Panel, they meet the minimum requirements under the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB). The dissertation works of the applicants and publications used in earlier procedures have been excluded from the activities reviewed.

**Dr. Goran Tasev Blagoev** has BA in Theory and History of Diplomacy and MA in Ethnology from the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, as well as PhD in Folklore Studies, with dissertation on *The Qurban Tradition in the Culture of Bulgarian Muslims* from the Institute of Folklore Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His dissertation is published in Bulgarian (*The Qurban in the Tradition of Bulgarian Muslims*, Sofia 2005, Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House, 334 p.). The applicant's further studies are in the sphere of cultural anthropology, and of the Bulgarian Church and culture. The first thematic circle comprises publications studying the everyday religiosity of Muslims (including in Golo Brdo, Albania), and of Christians to a lesser extent (Nos. 1–7, 9–10 and 12 from the list of publications). In these publications the author uses diverse source material, including results from his own field studies and interviews, with a view to revealing the importance of religion as the principal marker of group identity.

The second thematic circle – history and present state of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – comprises articles in specialised editions (Nos. 8, 11 and 13–20 from the list of publications), one article in co-authorship with S. Grebenarova, ten studies in a volume (*Stories for Weeping and for Hope*, Sofia 2011, Ciela Publishers, 427 p.), as well as the author's monograph entitled *Church and Identity in the Balkans. The Bulgarian Exarchate and Vardar Macedonia until the End of World War II* (Sofia 2020, Paradigma Publishing House, 382 p.). In these publications Dr. G. Blagoev studies the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in several different aspects: its role for the unification of the Bulgarians outside the political borders of Bulgaria, its importance for building the national identity, inter-Balkan relations through the prism of canon law, the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church and of the Soviet Union, informal Church diplomacy, the Church under the influence of State Security and the political situation, etc. The author gives a summary account of the achievements of Bulgarian historiography in his study on the early stages of the Bulgarian Church, followed by an analysis of unused archive documents from the Central State Archives and the State Archives in Lovech, memoirs, the *Church Gazette*, etc. A shortcoming of the monograph is the absence of the archive sources used in the list of references at the end of the book, as well as the lack of publications in foreign languages, with the exception of two titles in Russian. A contribution by the author can be perceived in the comparison between Banat as a territory under the influence of Serbia/Yugoslavia and Romania, on the one hand, and

on the other – Macedonia, where the interests of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece and the USSR were intertwined until the end of World War II. Although the monograph is part of a bigger research project, even in its present form it has an academic contribution in the research of important issues of the Bulgarian national identity from the perspective of Balkan studies.

Dr. G. Blagoev's teaching activities at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia and at the Paisiy Hilendarski Plovdiv University comprise new culturological courses and classes in Balkan studies, e.g., History in the Media and in the Cinema in the MA Programme *The Balkans between Two Civilisations: Christianity and Islam*, Faith and Vision in the MA Programme *Contemporary Theology*, Visual Anthropology. Ethnological and Documentary Cinema in the BA Programme *Ethnology*, History in the Media and in the Cinema and The Balkans as a Cinema in the MA Programme *Christianity and Islam in the Balkans*, etc.

Dr. G. Blagoev's research and teaching activities are complemented by his media work of national significance in the Bulgarian National Television, which is evident from his professional biography: he is the author and producer of the *National Calendar* series of broadcasts, Responsible Programme Editor of the *Society* Division, Responsible Editor of the *Religion and Ethnoses* Desk, anchor of the *History.BG* broadcast, author and presenter of the *Faith and Society* broadcast. Dr. G. Blagoev has participated in specialised international events in Bulgaria and abroad (Belgium, Serbia), in initiative committees for national celebrations, he is member of NGOs: the Western Outlands Association, the Intercultural Dialogue Foundation and the Public Council of the Sofia City Library. His publications have been cited by 17 different authors in specialised academic publications, among whom also the world famous expert on Balkan studies Maria Todorova.

Assistant Professor Dr. **Iveta Rasheva** has MA in Bulgarian Philology and History from the University of Veliko Tarnovo and PhD in Bulgarian literature with dissertation *The Vita of the Holy King Stefan Dečanski by Gregory Tsamblak in the Russian Manuscript Tradition*. Her academic publications shed light on various aspects of Bulgarian medieval literature and history: Gregory Tsamblak, St. Cyril and St. Methodius, St. Clement of Ohrid, the conversion to Christianity of Prince Boris I and the Bulgarians, as well as the interpretation of those personalities and events during the Bulgarian National Revival period. The author traces the passage of medieval themes and plots into and through the writings of Paisius of Hilendar, as well as their reception in the Modern Bulgarian literature (Kuzman Shapkarev, Evtim Sprostranov, Stoyan Mihaylovski, Nikolay Raynov and Vladimir Svintila). A second major thematic circle in her publications emerges around the Bulgarian ancient icons painted in Jerusalem (*йерусалимски*), which she has studied also in connection with the Bulgarian *hacis*. They result from her participation in a project of the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre, implemented jointly with the Jewish University in Jerusalem (2017–2019).

The applicant's habilitation work is an illustrated edition on *Our Renaissance Anachronic "Story" about the Christianisation Mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Bulgaria* (Sofia 2020, Ongul Publishers, 182 p.) in which she summarises and develops further her earlier research on the mythologem on the participation of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in the conversion of Bulgaria to Christianity, associating it with the building of the Bulgarian national identity during the Bulgarian National Revival period and later. The author's monograph is more than laconical: it has no introduction, Chapter I

consists of 13 standard pages, Chapter II – 14 standard pages, Chapter III – 20 standard pages, Chapter IV – 19 standard pages, Chapter VI – 14 standard pages. The conclusion is formal. The publications by Assistant Professor Dr. Iveta Rasheva, submitted for the competition, portray the author as specialist in Old-Bulgarian literature and as researcher with academic interests focused on Bulgarian literature in the Middle Ages and Bulgarian National Revival in its functions of an element structuring the Bulgarian national identity.

The teaching activities of Assistant Professor Dr. Iveta Rasheva, according to the academic CV submitted by her, comprises experience as secondary school teacher of literature and history, and as part-time assistant lecturer in Old-Bulgarian literature during her PhD studies at the St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo.

Assistant Professor Dr. Iveta Rasheva has MA in History from the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia and PhD in medieval general history from the IBSCT – BAS for her dissertation *Female Monasticism in Early Byzantium (4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> Century)*. Her publications on Early Christian female monasticism, and on women more generally, according to evidence from Late Antiquity hagiography, constitute a contribution. The theme about Konstantin Leontiev emerged in her research production since 2012, and started to dominate. He is also the central figure in the monograph *Konstantin Leontiev and the Balkans* (Sofia, Avangard Prima, 2020, 297 p.). The captivating style and the presentation of K. Leontiev's documentary and literary heritage in a Balkan context, about whom there is no monographic study in Bulgarian historiography, constitute a contribution by Assistant Professor Dr. Julia Zlatkova. The narrative about Leontiev's personality and his retold impressions prevail over analyses and conclusions. The formulation that “the aim of this study is to contribute to the decryption of the ‘phenomenon’ Leontiev” (p. 14), and the claim that his writings could be conducive to “unravelling both our national history and character, and the history and character of the neighbouring Balkan nations” (p. 279), evoke dismay. The object of humanitarian studies is to seek, interpret and popularise sources, not divination. A considerable part of the text and four of the six pages of the Conclusion are devoted to Leontiev's religiosity, his “predictions and prophecies,” his influence on Russian intellectuals or their opinion about him (p. 279-282), which is irrelevant both to the book's topic and to the Balkans. The author's thoughts about a “new mixing of races and cultural types,” about New Middle Ages with the rebirth of epidemics and pandemics, are intriguing, but out of place in a study on the Balkans in 1863–1874. The book does not indicate the source of any of the 17 illustrations included.

Assistant Professor Dr. **Julia Zlatkova** has participated with a paper in 19 academic fora in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Russia and Croatia. She taught history in a secondary school of the arts and had a course on Early Christian monasticism at the Training Centre of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Of the three applicants Dr. Goran Blagoev has the broadest spectrum of research interests, teaching activities and active media presence, he is closest to the IBSCT's research profile and standards. Therefore I propose to recommend him to the Academic Council as eligible candidate for the academic post of Associate Professor in the Culture in the Balkans Section of the IBSCT.

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/sg./ Prof. Roumiana I. Preshlenova, Dr. habil.