ACADEMIC REVIEW

by **Prof. Dr. Evdokia Boyanova Borisova – Shumen University "Bishop Konstantin Preslavsky"** – Shumen, member of the scientific jury for the academic position of "professor" in the sphere of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology ("Balkan Literatures and Cultures") in a competition announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" (IBCT) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – Sofia for the needs of the department "Cultural History of the Balkans", published in the *State Gazette* No. 63, dated 1.08.2025.

Assoc. Prof. Antoaneta Balcheva is the only candidate in the competition for "professor" announced by the IBCT at the BAS. The complete list of scientific publications related to her academic development at the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology includes 3 monographs, one of which was published on the basis of her dissertation defended in 1997 on the topic "The Nature of Romanticism in the Slavic South"; a total of 68 articles and studies, and numerous reviews. In addition to her research activities, she has also been involved in a number of international and national scientific and educational projects, editorial boards, and collective publications and scientific collections. An integral part of this activity are the conferences, symposiums, and round tables she has organized, her membership in authoritative scientific communities such as the Academic Circle of Comparative Literature (ACCL), the Bulgarian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Croatian National Council for Historical Sciences, (Hrvatski nacionalni odbor za povijesne znanosti (HNOPZ) etc.

The publications presented by Assoc. Prof. Balcheva in this competition – 23 in total – include one monograph, 19 articles and studies in thematic scientific collections and periodicals, 3 articles published in editions referenced in world-renowned databases, and the edition of 6 thematic collections and 1 collective monograph.

Her research **The Culture of Travel. Intertwined Texts and Destinies of Bulgarians and Croats from the Late 19th to the Mid-20th Century. Sofia: Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, 2025, ISBN: 978-619-7179-64-4, pp. 274.** is the main monograph with which she is participating in this competition. This book has an authoritative historical background and significant accumulated knowledge, reflecting the enormous work done on the joint project of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – Sofia and the Institute for the History of Croatian Literature, Theatre and Music at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb over a period of years. The project is entitled "Bulgarian and Croatian Cultural Routes in Southeast Europe. Intersection points and mutuality". The collected, classified, and excerpted material for the book is enormous in volume. But the study sets itself a much more ambitious scientific and research task, namely to penetrate the cultural-psychological and mental characteristics reflected in the collective psychology of the traveling

person in the Balkans. Moreover, this traveler is both the erudite, representative of the so-called cultural and diplomatic (political) elites, and the ordinary scholar and traveler, referred to in the language of literary cultural studies as a "flâneur." This study achieves its goals with depth, artistry, erudition, and big-picture thinking.

The imaginary modus called "the traveling man," which comparative and semiotic studies of literature often overuse due to its excessive exploitation, is defined here by the author in a very intelligent and measured way through the prism of processuality, namely: the act of traveling is an existential "modus vivendi" for the Balkan person. But travel here is also interpreted as a mirror of identities, as an experience of the phenomena of "modernity" and "postmodernity," as the embodiment of a multicultural literary policy.

In the introduction, the author A. Balcheva explains the uses of the phrases "travel culture/culture of travel/Reisekultur/la culture du voyage," looking at their cognitive and psycho-aesthetic characteristics. More important is how the act of traveling is embedded in this mode of the traveling person — not simply as a body moving through space, but also as a traveling consciousness, a traveling spirit. This act is philosophically and aesthetically understood as a behavioral gesture, as a culture of perceptions, as an existence and a state, as a story written by the traveling person. And on a purely pragmatic level, it is about the benefits of traveling as an accumulation of information or as an exchange of ideas, goods, human assets, wealth. As the shaping of destinies. Travel in this book is examined as a literary theme, as a theme in art in general, as an economic or political gesture, as a habitus. Significant names from the field of cultural anthropology are cited, such as James Clifford, Raymond Williams, Karl Sauer, John Key, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Le Goff, Michel Butor, Yuri Lotman, Eric Hobsbawm, and many others.

The title is brilliantly articulated, announcing an exploration of the phenomenon of travel as a characteristic of ancient, classical, and modern man; as the essence of mythological consciousness, as an act of knowing the world, nature, and the gods. What is more, in times like today, when even concepts such as "communication," "interaction," and and "dialogue" are being abused, the author chooses a very interesting perspective through the metaphor of "intertwined texts and destinies," tracing the touches, the communication and dialogue that takes place (but also does not take place) between cultures. Sometimes the dialogues are thwarted, silent, but they are a fact.

Here we examine the cultural and historical relations between Bulgarians and Croats. Probably because they are obviously the closest in terms of genes, spirit, and character among the peoples and cultures of the Balkans; because they are southern Slavs, Christians, thalassocracies inhabiting the two vertical shores of the peninsula. They symbolically point to the ideal directions of the East (us) and the West (the others). We and the Croats are like two shores, two seas, two fateful directions of the world, drawn on a peninsula with a central position on the Silk Road and history, between Europe and Asia. The intertwining is beautiful, the author suggests, and our

interpretative analogy in this review is with the medieval concept of "word weaving," depicting the verbal perfection of the written style in its sublimity and the glory of the divine. Or, as Michel de Certeau said: "The **art** of "turning" phrases finds **an equivalent** in **an art** of composing **a** path. "The art of sculpting sentences has its equivalent in the art of sculpting routes". (De Certeau, Michel. The Practice of Everyday Life. Sofia, Lik, 2002, p. 186). This successive discovery of modern man (which, incidentally, was already known to the ancients, believed in by the Enlightenment man, and also by the hero of Romanticism) is associated here with texts from a Croatian and Bulgarian cultural era that was significant for the author. This is from the end of the 19th century, the time of positivism and documentary writing, but also of belated Bulgarian and Croatian Romanticism, of the Belle Époque and modernities – until the end of the Great War, and then, until the middle of the century, after the dramatic end of World War II for Bulgarians and Croats.

Taking into account the inevitable characteristic of travel literature in its hybrid form, Balcheva precisely handles the conceptual apparatus of literary genre studies, highlighting the different formats of literature on and about travel. These are: *"travel literature and travel writing; récits de voyage, Reiseberichte, libros de viajes*" – stories about real or imaginary journeys, travelogues, travel-themed novellas, ancient epics, adventure novels, poems, lives of saints, stories of pilgrimages, pilgrim chronicles, etc., in which the artistic, magical-fictional, or documentary-descriptive elements are present in varying degrees.

Travel is presented as a key theme, motif, and topos, incorporated into the behavior of symptomatic images and personalities from Bulgarian and Croatian history and culture in the context of typical Balkan stereotypes and oppositions such as: one's own and foreign, center and periphery, West-East, national and supranational. Travel is interpreted through the lens of various discursive practices in the "long 19th century" and the "short 20th century," in the field of the "accelerated" and "condensed" flow of time and events (urbanization, industrialization, informatization). Travel is a symbolic reality, incorporated as a procedure in the modern project; it is part of the personal individual paradigm and the author's myth, seen as an adventure and a modern experience. It is "the poetry of modern civilization" in the words of the author, a modern role (and, as we are convinced today, a postmodern and even post-postmodern one). The theme and subject of this book are extremely relevant and productive.

The first chapter covers a broad field of knowledge: **Bulgarian-Croatian dialogues from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.** It covers texts, personalities, and cultural themes associated with the names of intellectuals such as Nikola Andrić, Marian Alković, and Franjo Horvat-Kiš. We encounter the image of a familiar yet unfamiliar Bulgaria in the travelogues of Marian Alković and Franjo Horvat-Kiš; and that of Sofia in the texts of Nikola Andrić. Particularly interesting is the interpretation of the sacred object without which the traveler cannot survive—the watch. This modern diabolical symbol becomes an amulet, a sacred object of inestimable value, a metaphor for conquered time and space. Of particular interest are the specific personal sketches dedicated to traveling educators, intellectuals, and clergymen, such as the sketch about I.

Shishmanov and J. J. Strossmayer, for example, whose dialogue embodies the ideas of the Enlightenment, but also the dialogue between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. This is also a historical dialogue that marks spiritual educational schools: Zagreb, Robert College, Nikolaev, etc. It should not be overlooked that a whole host of Bulgarian intellectuals, artists, and politicians graduated from Zagreb universities; they were among the builders of the new Bulgaria, which means that the Croatian contribution to the foundations of the third Bulgarian state is extremely significant. The outline of the travels of Al. Bojinov, S. S. Bobchev, and A. Protich and their "Zagreb days" is in fact a projection of the spiritual trajectory of our European identity. And Nikola Andrić's "pilgrimages" turn out to be unexpectedly not so much religious as cognitive and modernizing procedures for the formation of the future modern civil society of tolerance and understanding. To travel means to be able to see the world through the eyes of "the other." A compliment to us Bulgarians, for example, is the observation of the superior "Western European charm" of Bulgarians and the capital Sofia compared to other Slavic and Balkan peoples and cities. The author's abundant citations in her footnotes are impressive, in which, as Prof. N. Georgiev claimed, our civilizational memory is hidden. This is a sign of Dr. Balcheva's rich erudition, but also of the productivity of her chosen topic.

The second chapter, **The Travelling – "A Poetry of Modern Civilization"**, covers texts by key Bulgarian and Croatian intellectuals who shaped the face of the modern age, examining them both as writers on travel and as traveling intellectual heroes. The opus dedicated to Antun Matoš is extremely valuable, examining travel as an act through the prism of the personal-existential: as a confession, a revelation, meditation, healing of complexes and obsessions, as flânerie, as an expression of the social styles of the era, but also as social self-expression and as an interpretation of the national utopia. Matuš's flânerie is set in the European cultural environment – Vienna, Rome, Paris, but also in his native pastoral setting. This Croatian writer and poet is seen in an interesting and hitherto unexplored light – intertextually and dialogically oriented towards the work of Pencho Slaveykov, and this is one of the contributions of this book. Unlike Slaveykov, Matoš depicts the extremely modern figure of the stranger, the wandering flâneur, the so-called "mobile individual" – a post-Romantic traveler, actually floating in space (because travel provides a temporalized space), who longs to reconstruct his own wholeness, to build his new identity. This character is very different from the romantic artistic poses of Pencho Slaveykov or Vazov's wanderer, who longs for pure beauty in the "homelessness" of exile. Pencho Slaveykov's journey to Italy is a plot seen here as a rush towards the new identity of the Bulgarian intellectual. There, however, Slaveykov himself assumes the role of a political victim.

The third chapter is: **The Emotional Mapping of "Yourself" and "Others"** and examines the theme of Venice in 19th-century Croatian literature. For me personally, this is one of the most interesting works in the book, providing a truly enjoyable reading experience. Venice, like ancient Palmyra or the so-called "Venice of the Adriatic," exists in the imagination of travel writers S. S. Kranjčević, I. K. Sakcinski, Antun Nemčić, and Adolfo Weber Tkalčević, as well as Janko Polić Kamov, Milan Begović, and August Šenoa (called the Dalmatian Manzoni). The

studies on the work and biographies of these writers present the book as an indispensable source of knowledge about Croatian literature and culture for Bulgarian readers. In the opus "The Encounter of Bulgarian Writers with the Black Sea Coast in the First Half of the 20th Century", the exceptionally broad excursus into Bulgarian literature makes a wonderful impression, especially the insight into the metaphysical contemplations of Ivan Vazov, Anton Strashimirov, Anna Kamenova, Kiril Hristov, and Dora Gabe, as well as the outline of little-known Bulgarian artists such as A. Strashimirov and K. Hristov in their role as travel writers. The author achieves a very dense and productive symbiosis between literary interpretation and artistic ekphrasis, talking about such extraordinary writers and artists in our culture as I. Milev, N. Rainov, A. Mutafov, M. Zhekov, who join forces in the great theme of the sea and travel. And this is despite the prejudice that Bulgarian literature, you see, is far removed from the maritime theme compared to cultures such as Greek, Turkish, Dalmatian, and Albanian. These travelogues, as well as the paintings of Bulgarian artists dedicated to the sea and sea voyages, largely rehabilitate Bulgarian culture from its complexes that it is not (sufficiently) thalassocratic. A few years ago, Professor Hussein Mevsim devoted a magnificent study to the work of the great Bulgarian marine painter Petar Dachev, for example. In this spirit, this book fills in the gaps and breaks down stereotypes. Of particular significance are its readings of Bulgarian and Croatian texts and works from the interwar period.

The fourth chapter is entitled: **Rhetoric of Travel from the 1930s to the 1960s.** It examines depictions of Croatian lands in the works of three Bulgarian intellectuals – Olga Chavova, Bogdana Dochova, and Vera Ploceva. This is an unread page in Bulgarian-Croatian cultural relations with a particularly significant contribution, through the study of archives and filling in the blank pages in our cultural cartography and literary history. Particularly interesting and completely unexplored until now is the territory of Bulgarian women's travels and female travel writers; there are only a few pages and stories dedicated to it. We find truly innovative content here, and science owes a debt to Bulgarian cultural history with regard to these authors. The 1920s and 1930s were truly the heyday of the travelogue genre in Bulgarian literature, when the eccentric figure of the flâneuse, the pilgrim, the traveler, the vagabond, who literally blew up the Balkan mentality, was formed. It seems that apart from Bagryana, no other female figure comes to mind. Moreover, the places of female wanderings are the sea, Dubrovnik, beloved Italy, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Here we also sense a very feminine, almost erotic feeling, a recognition of Croatia through its handsome men, through the Dinaric type of beauty. This is a very original interpretation of the identity of the traveler from the 1930s, who sees the homeland as a masculine-earthly presence. Here, Balcheva sheds new light on the interpretation of Vesna Parun's ontological journey and her lyrical poetic travels, especially in her travelogues about Bulgaria. In Lyubomir Mihaylov's opus on Dalmatia and Zagreb, the semiotic mechanism of interpretation is set in motion, incorporating medieval and modern Croatian history, while his messages interweave dialogical fields that radiate a contemporary mentality. It is particularly important to highlight the author's valuable research into archival materials from the works of L. Mihaylov and St.

Chilingirov. Stilian Chilingirov and Croatia is a topic that particularly intrigues me, as a native of Shumen.

This book writes a new page in the cultural interpretation and study of our great encyclopedist, controversial intellectual, and Shumen native Stilian Chilingirov, who, despite all this, carries the provincial complex of underappreciation and misunderstanding. The myth of Slavic unity, so close and ideologically shared by Chilingirov, undoubtedly fits into the current topic, especially since our literary science attempted to rehabilitate itself a little over ten years ago in front of Chilingirov, marking his work with a scientific conference and a collection of studies.

"Milan Begović and the Cultural Transfer of Models to the Bulgarian Theater Scene" is a truly magnificent conclusion to this book and stands out not only because of its perspective on the performing arts, but also because of its absolutely valuable characteristics. According to the author, Begović is considered the pinnacle of Croatian modernism, embraced by "young people" who see him as a kind of manifesto of aestheticism. Bulgarian readers are introduced to names such as Petar Skok, Milan Marjanović, and Ksaver Šandor Gjalski. This chapter provides an artistic and beautiful conclusion to the discourse "intertwined texts and destinies", interweaving the different types of art: literature, painting, architecture, urbanism, and theater.

This book traces, compares, and analyzes the different yet similar travel and descriptive practices of Bulgarian and Croatian authors, as well as the intersection and comparison of eras, styles, ways of life, and cultural production. It can safely be said that this is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the topological poetics of Bulgarian literature and culture, historiography, and literary studies. Thus, the author, A. Balcheva, stands autonomously among the names of: S. Igov, N. Daneva, E. Getova, S. Gyurova, V. Ruseva, St. Elefterov, V. Stefanov, K. Baklova, Pl. Antov. The study deals with over 450 titles of bibliographic sources, rich excerpted material, archival documents, photographs, etc. The study draws on over 450 bibliographic sources, rich excerpted material, archival documents, photographs, etc. Extensive in terms of information and thorough in terms of theory and conceptuality, this book is a true intellectual challenge and illustrates competence and innovation.

In conclusion, I would like to note that all documents and materials provided by Assoc. Prof. Antoaneta Balcheva for the current competition for the position of "professor" meet all the requirements of the of Academic Staff Development Law in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing regulations, and the regulations of the IBCT – BAS. The candidate has provided a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials dedicated to her previous procedure for "associate professo". The candidate's publications contain a sufficient number of contributions, as recognized by the professional community, and their subject matter fully corresponds to the scientific field in which the competition is held, namely: "Balkan Literatures and Cultures". I categorically state that there is no plagiarism in Antoaneta Balcheva's scientific works and no inconsistency with the scientific data provided.

Based on the reasons set out above, I propose that Assoc. Prof. Antoaneta Balcheva, the only candidate in the competition, be appointed to the academic position of "Professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Balkan Literatures and Cultures), competition announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" (IBCT) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – Sofia for the needs of the "Cultural History of the Balkans" Department.

05. 11. 2025

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr. Evdokia Borisova