

## Opinion

by **Dr. Krassimira Daskalova, Professor (Modern European Cultural History),**

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in 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, for the needs of the Culture in the Balkans Section of the Institute for Balkan Studies with *Professor Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences**

Three of the four applicants who had submitted their documents for participation in the promulgated competition were considered eligible. They are: Dr. Julia Zlatkova, Dr. Goran Blagoev and Dr. Iveta Rasheva.

**Dr. Julia Zlatkova** participates in the competition with one monograph (298 p.), as well as 7 studies and 7 articles with a total volume of 306 pages. Six citations of her publications have been identified in specialised editions, reviewed and indexed in world famous academic databases or in monographs and collective volumes, and one citation in a non-reviewed journal (a total of 10). The total volume of Dr. Zlatkova's publication exceeds 600 pages. Interdisciplinarity is one of the qualities that distinguish Dr. Zlatkova's publications. They can be positioned between cultural history, philosophy and theology, and they are in two main thematic circles of historical knowledge: (1) female monasticism during the Early Christian period, and (2) reassessment of Bulgarian issues in the texts of Konstantin Leontiev and outlining his place in the world of Pan-European ideas presented in a comparative plan with the philosophical concepts of individuals like J. Ortega y Gasset, O. Spengler, N. Berdyaev and other 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century authors. Both sets of issues in the focus of Dr. Zlatkova's research are innovative for the Bulgarian academic context. There are very few studies in Bulgaria on Early Christian asceticism from a gender-sensitive perspective. Dr. Zlatkova presents the history of the first female monastic communities in the Eastern Roman Empire, taking into account the regional differences between them; she considers the role of kinship and family relations for the constituting and operation of the monastic communities, the cooperation between monks and nuns, and the role of double monasteries during the Early Christian Age. New themes elaborated by Dr. Zlatkova comprise the legendary female figures in Late Antiquity hagiography, the role of women from the aristocracy in the monastic movement and their relations with the Church Fathers. However, the applicant's explanation of her reorientation to the life and work of Konstantin Leontiev, presented in the submitted information on contributions, evokes dismay: "Zlatkova's refraining from these issues and her orientation towards the works of K. Leontiev is due both to her interest in him over many years and to her reserves to the feminist ideology dominating the field of women and gender research." As a person working on the history of women/genders, I fail to understand precisely what Dr. Zlatkova's "reserves" towards the "feminist ideology" are and how these "reserves" have changed her orientation in favour of the works of the hyperconservative Leontiev?!

The monograph proposed for habilitation *Konstantin Leontiev and the Balkans* (298 p.) consists of Introduction, four chapters (with nine sub-chapters), Conclusion and bibliography

with primary sources (about 60 titles in Bulgarian, Russian and English) and secondary literature used (more than 100 titles in Cyrillic, 24 of which in Russian), 31 titles in English and 10 in Greek. One is immediately favourably impressed by the historiographic knowledge, information and presentation of “the state of the art in the field.” The first two chapters present the motley social and cultural context, and the everyday life of the Ottoman subjects from the Balkan provinces of the Empire during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Konstantin Leontiev was Russian Consul there. However, I fail to understand why Leontiev’s Orientalist power discourse has remained unnoticed by the author, especially after the huge influence of the post-colonial research that sprouted in the humanitarian field after Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, the studies of Maria Todorova (*Balkans, Balkanism*), of Larry Wolff, Vesna Goldsworthy and other historians and theoreticians of culture. Chapters Three and Four discuss Leontiev’s philosophical-historical views and his ideas on the Eastern and Church Questions, demonstrating detailed knowledge of his texts and written in a precise, concise and easy to read style. The author insists on the universal character and validity of Leontiev’s philosophical-historical concepts which – in her opinion (unknown how) – are valid “for the entire world and for all times and ages” (Summaries of the academic works, p. 1). Although I can accept Dr. Zlatkova’s evaluation of the material preserved in Leontiev’s works on the political, social and Church history of the Bulgarians and the interdisciplinary character of his heritage, the fascination by anachronic (a-historical) views on Bulgarian folk psychology could have been interpreted more critically, through the prism of the latest culturological theories and through the opinions of methodologists of history.

A positive impression of Julia Zlatkova’s publications stems from the varied character of the source material and secondary literature in several languages. The author successfully defends theses (pointed out by other specialists in Balkan studies before her), which stand aside from the universally accepted opinions of many mainstream historians. For example, Julia Zlatkova (together with Nadya Danova, Nikolay Aretov and Olga Todorova before her) demonstrated the false national romantic myths of some Bulgarian intellectuals from the National Revival period, e.g., like Petko R. Slaveykov, about the burning of Bulgarian books by the Greeks. I would address critical notes to the applicant’s publications dealing with important aspects of the formation and functioning of the Bulgarian cultural memory, without defining clearly the main terms used: cultural memory and collective identity. In addition to the cultural memory issues about which there are whole libraries with research (the works of Jan and Aleida Assman could be a very useful start), there is a special trend in historiography that studies the “history of concepts” (*Begriffsgeschichte*) precisely because professional historians have realised the importance of knowing the history and the uses of historical categories in the different historical periods and contexts. Good knowledge of history and of the uses of the concepts can guarantee adequacy of the academic discussions connected with the historical past. Naturally, these critical notes do not diminish the positive impression of Dr. Zlatkova’s work, they are merely aimed at suggesting approaches to future studies on the archaeology of historical knowledge.

Dr. Zlatkova has a working command of English, Russian, Greek and French, and she is a scholar with visible presence and reputation both in Bulgarian and in international academic life. This is evidenced by her publications in foreign languages, her participation in international conferences and projects, by the postgraduate PhD course connected with Early Christian monasticism, taught by her at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

**Dr. Goran Blagoev** has three published books on various issues and with different timeframes of culturology (modern cultural history, but also historical anthropology and cultural-anthropological research) and 15 articles, four of which in co-authorship. His first book is connected with his PhD dissertation and will not be discussed here. His second book exceeding 400 pages, entitled *Stories for Weeping and for Hope*, Sofia 2011, Ciela Publishers, contains studies and articles with references and literature, which have the qualities of academic publications and are based on new archive and published sources on the problems studied. The volume of the applicant's publications submitted for the competition is impressive and of the order of several hundred pages,

Eleven citations of his works are mentioned (including in publications in English and Polish) in monographs and collective volumes with academic reviewing and 9 citations and/or reviews in other reviewed texts. Goran Blagoev is one of the recognisable faces of Bulgarian humanitarian studies: not only through his research activities, he is also known to the broad public with his intellectual position on a number of important issues of religion and on Bulgarian Orthodox culture, with his journalism, editorial and producer's activities in the Bulgarian National Television, where he worked for 30 years; with his authorship of dozens of documentary films, with his teaching activities (2006–2018) in various departments of the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia and in the Paisiy Hilendarski Plovdiv University, where he offered innovative courses for the Bulgarian academic context, e.g., courses on visual anthropology and history in the media and in the cinema (and specifically presentation of Balkan history in the cinema). He has a working knowledge of Russian, English, Serbian and French.

Goran Blagoev's publications refer to several thematic circles: (1) Traditional culture and identity of the Muslims in Bulgaria; (2) The Bulgarian spiritual and cultural presence in Jerusalem – a set of issues to which he has made an important contribution with his study on the project of Christian Orthodox Bulgarians to Jerusalem from the time after the founding of the Bulgarian national state; (3) Mount Athos, the Bulgarian monks on Mount Athos and its contacts with the Bulgarian lands over the centuries (some of the publications on the topic use documents from the military archives, which are unfamiliar to the historical guild and they shed light on little known pages of the modern Bulgarian history; (4) The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Macedonia (19<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> century).

Goran Blagoev's proposed habilitation work entitled *Church and Identity in the Balkans: the Bulgarian Exarchate and Vardar Macedonia until the End of World War II*, Paradigma Publishers, 2020, 335 pages, "biographical notes" (30 p.) about the personalities mentioned in the text, list of abbreviations and 5 pages list of references (about 70 Bulgarian, Russian and Macedonian titles). The book basically addresses the issues of the constructing and consolidation of the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of Vardar Macedonia from the time after the First Bulgarian State was destroyed in 1018 until the end of World War II. From the very beginning of the book, the author defines his principal idea, namely that "a new ethno-cultural identity was born and developed within the Bulgarian Exarchate and on the basis of its heritage, giving also life to the youngest church in the Balkans: the Macedonian Archbishopric (p. 10). Although **Chapter One** starts from the Middle Ages and the fate of the Ohrid Archbishopric, the author's narrative gains substance later, about the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially about the 1870s, when the dioceses subordinated to the Bulgarian Exarchate were constituted. It becomes clear that before the onset of the Russo-Turkish War, the Exarchate had only three metropolitan centres (Veles, Ohrid and Skopje) and only 7–8 functioning

church communities. *Chapter Two* starts with the finding that the 1878 Liberation and the establishing of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia took part of the “diocese of the Bulgarian Exarchate” (p. 65). Two centres of the Bulgarian Exarchate emerged, with two Synods (in Sofia and Constantinople). The information about Bulgarian schools in the European part of the Ottoman Empire, supported by the Exarchate and the Bulgarian State, is interesting, compared to those of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek State for the Greeks; interpretation of the participation of Russian diplomacy in Greek-Bulgarian Church relations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is proposed. Goran Blagoev pays attention to the unequivocal relations of the Exarchate with the Internal Macedonian-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Organisation (IMARO), created in 1893, demonstrating not only how the Bulgarian religious power in Macedonia lost positions after the coup of the Young Turks (1908), but also how the hopes of Macedonia for autonomy were subdued. The author traces the changes that took place during the Balkan Wars, when most of the metropolitan bishops of the Exarchate were not in their dioceses; as well as the conflicts with the Serbian military and religious authorities, and the restoration of the Exarchate power in Macedonia (1915–1918). *Chapter Three* examines the fate of the “sold dioceses” and the advocacy of the Bulgarian metropolitan bishops from Macedonia, who believed that with the mediation of the Ecumenical Union for International Friendship they could guarantee through the churches “the national rights of the Bulgarians left in the lands shared between Serbia and Greece...” (p. 131). Based on already published studies and some new archive sources, as well as materials (Bulgarian and Serbian) from the periodic press, the author has presented the constituting of the new Church-religious organisation in Vardar Macedonia – “Southern Serbia.” The dynamism in the relations between the Bulgarian and the Serbian Churches and between the political regimes in the two neighbouring countries is shown. The last *Chapter Four* studies the measures for restoring the structures of the Bulgarian Church in Vardar Macedonia. The author demonstrates how the Bulgarian authorities (supported by the government of the Third Reich) used Orthodoxy in the early 1940s not only for the consolidation of the new military and state administrative power of the Bulgarians, but also for legitimising the national-cultural identity of the population along the Vardar River – similar to the measures introduced in those places after 1918 by the Serbian military, administrative and Church authorities. The new archive documents and materials from the periodic press are of particular interest as they demonstrate clearly the financial support of the Bulgarian State for the education of several dozens of Macedonian Bulgarians in the Sofia Seminary, and the relieving of the problem with the low educational level of the candidates to become priests in the new territories. Another important issue that the Bulgarian Church authorities in Macedonia had to resolve was related to the ideological bias and preferences of the priests they found there (left-wing ideas and Macedonianism, sympathisers of the Soviet Union, Anglo-American supporters, etc.) in uninterrupted efforts to encourage the Bulgarian cultural-national identity before the final termination of the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Church in Vardar Macedonia.

Naturally, every reader has his/her own view on the historical phenomena, and it seems to me that the decision to include a chapter on the Ohrid Archbishopric as “legitimation for the cultural identity of the population in the Macedonian lands” from the 11<sup>th</sup> century until 1878 is not sufficiently argued. The implied continuity has not been defended with the power of the Ohrid Archbishopric (since the 11<sup>th</sup> century), the dynamism of the dioceses included in it over the centuries (and the power struggles waged there with the Patriarchates of Peć and Constantinople), its liquidation in 1767, the idea of its restoring in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the

dioceses included in 1870 in the composition of the Bulgarian Exarchate. There is a certain one-sidedness in the presentation of the problems of the Exarchate in Vardar Macedonia during the wars (1912–1918) and the Bulgarian rule in the territories occupied in the 1940s.

I would add to the merits of Dr. Blagoev's candidacy his popularising publications that actually belong to the genre of "public history", "public outreach" – well known in the West – in which professional historians make specialised knowledge accessible to the broad public, without burdening them with voluminous scientific and reference apparatus. Every self-respecting academic tradition considers this to be an asset for the dissemination of professional knowledge. These texts of Goran Blagoev contain serious source material (primary and unused so far in many cases) and – in contrast to the works of many professional popularisers from the historical guild – they are far from dilettantism. I would add to Blagoev's broader public sphere also his already mentioned documentary historical and anthropological films, interviews and university teaching (at different educational undergraduate and postgraduate levels), which enrich his portfolio. Dr. Blagoev's participation in various civil and public organisations and initiatives also create a favourable impression.

**Dr. Iveta Rasheva** has submitted for the competition one book, 30 articles of which she is the only author (3 of which in Russian) and 1 article in co-authorship (8 citations). Her publications are in several thematic circles, and part of them outline new research "tracks": (1) The cult of St. Stefan Dečanski and his reception in Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia, to which the applicant's PhD dissertation is devoted, and 9 more articles offering different perspectives to these issues, which have not been addressed in the dissertation; (2) The Bulgarian ancient icons painted in Jerusalem (*їерусалимски*) to which four of the articles are devoted (resulting from an international project with the University of Jerusalem) and an exhibition of which she was curator; (3) The cult of Clement of Ohrid – in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (and his choice as patron of the University of Sofia) is studied in four of the articles submitted for the competition; (4) The "anachronism" concerning "Boris" Christianisation by St. Cyril and St. Methodius at the time of the First Bulgarian State and the narrative about that anachronism during the Bulgarian National Revival period (11 articles, one of which in Russian and a habilitation work).

The issue to which Dr. Rasheva's habilitation work is devoted is also innovative (*Our Renaissance Anachronic "Story" about the Christianisation Mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Bulgaria* (Sofia, Ongul Publishers, 2020). It comprises 140 pages text, 2 annexes with illustrations in a volume of 32 pages and 10 pages for a list of references, comprising both primary sources for the issues researched, and academic studies: a total of 140 titles in Bulgarian, connected with the theme of Dr. Rasheva's habilitation work). **Chapter One:** *The Birth of a Bulgarian Mythologem from the Bulgarian National Revival period. Projections* (p. 7–19) is introduction into the issues of the Christianisation mission of Cyril and Methodius in Bulgaria; **Chapter Two:** *Ethno-Preservation Function of the Anachronism in Paisius' Narrative about the First Slavonic Teachers* (c. 21–35). I would like to point out that the principal term "anachronism" and the preference given to it over other definitions of the approach used by Paisius are not clearly defined. In subsequent chapters (Three, p. 47) Dr. Rasheva uses the expression "authoritative fiction", and in the fourth chapter (p. 67, 73) – "legend-anachronism" and mentions in passing its transformation into a "mythologem"; in the fifth chapter – also the transformations into "anachronism-

mythologem” (p. 79). Unfortunately, these hastily mentioned interesting intuitions are not accompanied by serious theoretical analysis of that concept, which is important for the study. **Chapter Three:** *The Concept of the Participation of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in the Concept of the Conversion of Bulgarians to Christianity in the Historiography of the Bulgarian National Revival* (p. 37–56) offers interesting reading of some of the best known historiographic texts from the National Revival period: starting with Vassil Aprilov, Hristaki Pavlovich, Spiridon Palauzov, Todor Burmov and Marin Drinov, and of Rakovski and Karavelov as well. The title of **Chapter Four** is: *The Penetration of the Mythologem in Bulgarian Publicist Works from the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (The Legend about the Conversion of Bulgarians to Christianity in National Revival Speeches Pronounced on 11 May)* (p. 57–75). It starts with a few words about the emergence of the Bulgarian periodic press during the National Revival period, which are not merely insufficient in view of the research problem stated in the title, but they also contain mistakes on the first page. This is probably due to the fact that Dr. Rasheva has not used the works on the issue by some of the eminent historians of books and periodical press during the National Revival period, e.g., Docho Lekov and Annie Gergova. The latter recently published a huge work devoted precisely to the literature of the Bulgarian National Revival. (Not to mention how useful it would have been to use reference publications, e.g., the one by Manyu Stoyanov about the literature of the Bulgarian National Revival, which would have given an opportunity to the author to achieve greater substance in the presentation of her theses.) In my opinion, the last two chapters of the book bring the greatest contribution. **Chapter Five:** *Anachronism as a Construct in National Revival Literature* (p. 77–122) traces how the idea of the conversion of the Bulgarians to Christianity by Cyril and Methodius is present in the lyrical works of creative figures during that time, ending with the song *March on, My Revived People!* by Stoyan Mihaylovski, although written in the 1890s; examples from seven epic works follow (written by National Revival and post-1878 authors): five short stories, one short novel and a legend that also spread the idea of Cyril and Methodius as Bulgarian converters to Christianity, and finally in drama works and – through translations – in the literature of other Slavonic peoples. **Chapter Six:** *The Interpretation of the Anachronism about Our Conversion to Christianity in Bulgarian Fine Art during the National Revival Period* (p. 123–137) examines not only the ways in which fine arts during the Bulgarian National Revival present the Christianisation role of Cyril and Methodius – in lithographs, in paintings and sketches by Nikolay Pavlovich, in icons and medallions, but reaching the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well, to trace the treatment of the issue studied in prints and book illustrations.

I would like to draw attention to the fact that although – as I mentioned already – the issues studied by Iveta Rasheva are innovative (here I shall also cite an example with the “reflection of the millennial anniversary of the Assumption of St. Clement of Ohrid on the Bulgarian mentality”), they are not in line with the contemporary interdisciplinary standards in humanitarian studies and fail to take into account world theoretical-historical studies (e.g., the issues connected with the formation of the nation and the collective identities), which are of particular importance for the issues researched by the applicant; even fundamental terms (e.g., “myth”, “mythologem”, “national mythology”, “Bulgarian mentality”, “ethnic identity”, etc.), with which Dr. Rasheva operates in her publications, are not defined. Precisely due to the lack of theoretical clarity, in her habilitation work there are strange statements of the type: “Paisius was the first among the representatives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia during the National Revival period, who had set themselves the task of restoring the historical memories and of building over the national mythology so as to boost national

pride, to legitimise and sanction our nation, and then to present it to the rest of the world” (p. 11). A number of logical questions arise: What historical memories are referred to? Of whom? Created when, with what means and recorded/memorised where? When was the “national mythology” created so that Paisius could build over it? Or that the “Western European model of national identity examines nations as cultural communities whose members are united by shared historical myths, symbols, traditions, they are ‘big families’”(p. 13). Although Anthony Smith is cited as a source, a unique “Western European model of national identity” is out of the question, here the French and the German models of nation and national state are totally mixed up, etc., etc. (I already mentioned above my reservations about similar publications that lack theoretical foundations.) A somewhat negative impression stems from the style of expression in some of the texts, where the author identifies herself with the historical figures and events that constitute the object of her research: e.g., she refers to “*our* intellectuals” (p. 13), “the motive for *our* conversion to Christianity...” (p. 21), “...*our* new, modern historiography” and “*our* National Revival historiographers” (p. 37), the author uses terms that were coined during the era of national romanticism and do not betray good professional taste in a habilitation work (e.g., “Turkish yoke” on p. 42 and 45, “slaves until yesterday” on p. 80; “the Holy First Teachers” on p. 44; not to mention expression like “... it is known in all four directions in **lands that ethnically belong to us**” – p. 73. And something connected with the technical presenting of the publications: the different articles are not presented in one file, each page being scanned separately, which makes the reading of the texts submitted for reviewing slower and more difficult.

**In conclusion:** For the first time in my long professional experience I am in the difficult situation of reviewing the works of three authors for one competition. It is my hope that the proposed reading of these interesting studies by the three applicants will help the academic panel to reach the final decision and to choose the best candidate for the announced position.

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