

Review

by

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in the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor**, announced by the Institute for Balkan Studies with Professor *Alexander Fol* Centre of Thracology (IBSCT) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, in the sphere of Higher Education, 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, 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,

with applicants: (1) **Goran Tasev Blagoev**, (2) **Iveta Kirilova Rasheva**, (3) **Nevena Yosifova Gramatikova** and (4) **Julia Ivanova Zlatkova**

The number of applicants in the competition suggests the serious authority of the Institute for Balkan Studies with Centre of Thracology, especially against the background of the declining social prestige of humanitarian studies and the diminishing number of people willing to devote themselves to them. The panel at its first meeting discussed the information and documents submitted by the applicants with a view to checking compliance with the minimum national standards. After a discussion, Nevena Yosifova Gramatikova was not admitted to take part in the competition.

The postgraduate education of the applicants does not become specifically clear from the documents submitted; they all have a PhD degree, but only from Goran Blagoev's submitted diploma it becomes clear that it is in the sphere of folklore studies. From the information on the minimum requirements and with the help of Google search I found out that Blagoev has graduated History from the University of Sofia, Iveta Rasheva – Bulgarian Philology from the University of Veliko Tarnovo and her dissertation is on Old Bulgarian literature. Nevena Gramatikova has graduated History from the University of Sofia, and a quick search for Julia Zlatkova revealed that she is Assistant Professor at the IBSCT. It seems to me that the old (?) practice of applying with CV was rational.

All three applicants admitted to the competition have their strong and not so strong assets, their work is connected with the cultural history of the Balkans in the broadest understanding of that research sphere. Insofar as I am familiar with the IBSCT Section for which the competition was announced, it traditionally consists of researchers educated and specialising in the culture of one of the Balkan peoples, knowing it well, and working with its language (this being true of the Institute as a whole, I think). I am afraid that the applicants do not comply to a full extent with that very good tradition, in my opinion.

Goran Blagoev participates in the competition with his monograph *Church and Identity in the Balkans: the Bulgarian Exarchate and Vardar Macedonia until the End of World War II* (Sofia, Paradigma, 2020) and with a series of articles. Goran Blagoev has published his dissertation *The Qurban in the Tradition of Bulgarian Muslims* (Sofia, Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House, BAS, 2005), as well as the book *Stories for Weeping and for Hope* (Sofia, Ciela, 2011).

The monograph *Church and Identity...* summarises earlier studies and observation (Snegarov, Markova, Temelski, Boneva, Iliev, Petkov, Konstantinova...) and in this sense it is in the spirit of historiographic literature. My apprehensions concerning potential journalistic writing

proved to be unfounded. The “Comparative Table” presented by Prof. Orlin Sabev is precise; it seems to me that, as its author also points out, that there is no plagiarism – these passages essentially present facts (events, texts, etc.). Blagoev’s text is indeed close to the writings of the researchers cited by him. It is noteworthy that G. Blagoev adheres entirely to the preceding researchers and he practically does not work with sources, not only with archive documents, but even with the 19th century periodical publications. References to archive documents appear for the period after World War I. It is difficult for me to discover the new facts and ideas that the work offers, I fear that the tensions and the conflicts among Bulgarians at the time of the Church struggles have been subdued, especially with respect to the period prior to the establishing of the Exarchate. No attempts are likewise seen to highlight the issues in the dominant theses. Little known information is found for later periods, especially for the time of the annexing of Macedonia to Bulgaria during World War II; it seems to me that elements of contributions in the work can be sought here. On the whole, both the monograph and Blagoev’s other publications are entirely in the spirit of the (dominating?) line in Bulgarian historiography, which is markedly patriotic, treats the arguments of other authors critically, very often he is not interested in them or ignores them, without trying to place the events and processes studied in some more general (Balkan, European) context. A strong point in Blagoev’s candidacy is that he is a figure enjoying public recognition and he could contribute to the popularising of the Institute’s activities before a broader public. On the other hand, some recent public acts of Goran Blagoev tend to undermine his prestige in the eyes of at least a part of the audience.

Julia Zlatkova participates in the competition with her monograph *Konstantin Leontiev and the Balkans* (Avangard Prima, 2020). This is a book written with erudition, stepping on enormous literature and examining a phenomenon that is little known in the Bulgarian context. In this sense, this book was most interesting to me among the monographs submitted for the competition, because a lot can be learned from it about Leontiev’s activities and works. However, I felt the strongest urge to argue with that monograph. Zlatkova’s approach seems apologetic to me, even occasionally loving; perhaps a somewhat critical attitude would be useful to the author, as well as a more cautious use of superlatives. Leontiev is undoubtedly a significant phenomenon in the Russian context, his ideas are obviously somewhat original (although it is possible to seek their roots outside the Russian context, e.g., with the “theory of the triune process” – which is practically not done in the monograph). The book failed to convince me that Leontiev was such an important writer, even less that his texts abound in “prophecies”, as Zlatkova often writes, following some older Russian thinkers and journalists today. I am aware that my comments, which I do not have the opportunity to expand fully, are also prompted by the fact that I do not accept the enormous majority of the ideas of that Russian author. In some places Zlatkova trusts her sources excessively and repeats their inaccuracies. In some cases this concerns summary findings, e.g., studying the Enlightenment practically as a consistent atheist philosophy. In one place there is confusion between the teacher and man of letters from the National Revival Period, Dimiter Blagoev (1840–1875), and the founder of the socialist movement Dimiter Blagoev – Dyadoto (1856–1924) (p. 66). If the competition is viewed as an opportunity for career development, J. Zlatkova is indisputably eligible for the academic position of Associate Professor.

Iveta Rasheva participates in the competition with the monograph *Our Renaissance Anachronic “Story” about the Christianisation Mission of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Bulgaria* (2020). The issues addressed in this book are best familiar to me and closest to my work. This is the shortest of the three books and it can also be viewed as an extended study. The author has a clear preliminary notion, she builds a streamlined structure and examines a

considerable volume of material, occasionally without a deeper analysis. In view of the author's interest in presenting her observations in tables and schemes, I expected her observations on the speeches delivered on 11 May to be addressed in greater detail, with statistical information (number, recurring accents, etc.). Some of her conclusions, which may be correct, do not sound well substantiated. The selection of texts to be analysed is not exhaustive and the question arises whether it would not be sensible to examine also the history textbooks from the time of the Bulgarian National Revival. The chapters in the book do not have identical chronological timeframe: some end in 1878, others examine works from the first half of the 20th century as well. Among the later works it is interesting to note Georgi Karaivanov's insufficiently analysed series *Ancient Bulgaria* (first and foremost the legend of Konstantin Petkanov), as well as some little known texts by Nikolay Raynov. In the future, the author will probably also provide complete bibliography of her texts and the theme explored by her (admittedly, a very labour-consuming and ungrateful task).

Conclusion

All three candidates are eligible for the academic position of Associate Professor, the issue of their grading is rather difficult and delicate. (Before that, I would mention in parentheses that the academic interests of all three applicants are connected in some way with religion, and even with the Church. Although this is not a representative sample, it is worth considering outside the context of the concrete competition.) The issue of the choice of one applicant, especially in this concrete case, depends on the needs of the Institute and its Section, as well as on their expectations. If the aim is to find someone who would make the work of the Section (and of the Institute) more visible, then **Goran Blagoev** would be the most suitable choice; on the other hand, he can hardly be expected to become seriously involved with the projects on which the Section is working. On the other hand, he is the author with the biggest number of publications: three books, combined with teaching experience at the University of Sofia, which gives him an advantage over the other applicants. If an in-depth researcher is sought, then **Julia Zlatkova** is probably the most suitable choice; the problem with her is that her ideas are rather debatable, but expressed too categorically, which does not make her the perfect candidate for teamwork. It seems to me that **Iveta Rasheva** is most suitable for teamwork; apprehensions vis-à-vis her are connected with the insufficient depth of her observations, occasionally very hasty. With many reservations and not categorically, I would recommend to the panel and to the Institute for Balkan Studies with Centre of Thracology to choose her. I shall be interested to learn the opinion of the colleagues in the panel, and I am open to other opinions as well.

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