

## STATEMENT

from

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariyana Piskova*, Archivist lecturer at the Department of History of the Southwest University "Neofit Rilski" Blagoevgrad

*Regarding:* the public defense of a dissertation work for the acquisition of the scientific and educational degree "doctor" on the topic: "Vasil Levski in art and documentary cinema: Narratives and interpretations" with author Rumen Ilkov Skrinski

### **Applicant data**

Rumen Skrinski has completed a bachelor's program in Cultural Studies and a master's program in Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and since 2019 he is a doctoral student at the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

### **Description of the candidate's scientific works**

For the purposes of this competition, the candidate Rumen Skrinski has submitted 3 publications on the subject of the dissertation out of a total of five articles. One of them is related to the narration and interpretation of the national hero Levski through the micro-narratives about the grave (the mortal remains and sanctity). In another publication, the reflection of Vasil Levski's image on the Facebook social network is sought. The third publication explores the use of the historical past as a symbol to legitimize political power. Rumen Skrinski is also the author of films, among which is the documentary short film about Levski "The Last Road to Lovech" (February 18, 2021).

### **Evaluation of the candidate's scientific results and contributions**

The dissertation is dedicated to the current and unexplored topic "Vasil Levski in feature and documentary cinema: Narratives and interpretations". There are only cursory and fragmentary attempts at analysis, and therefore the study of the image of Levski not only in historical narratives, but also in films is an indisputable contribution of the doctoral student.

The doctoral student substantiates the hypothesis about the role of artistic-aesthetic, cinematographic and television concepts in the mystification and legendarization of the "Levski" narrative.

In the first chapter, an overview of the literature dedicated to the study of narratives about public perceptions of Levski is presented and the relevant stages are outlined. This necessary and introductory analysis covers the mythologizing of the image of Levski, his confirmation as a national hero, as well as the narrative of the Orthodox Church and the public attitude towards the canonization of Deacon Levski.

The second and third chapters are devoted to the narrative surrounding Levski's image in Bulgarian cinema (including television productions).

Due to the impossibility of analyzing all film and television productions about Levski, in the dissertation they are reduced to certain documentary, documentary-artistic and adventure productions. Of the documentaries, a special place is given to the films of the director and producer Andrey Altuparmakov - "Levski before the court of the Gate and of history"; "It is worth eating", "The Forgotten Ways of the Apostle", "Za Levski", etc.

The documentary-artistic film and television productions are presented with two awarded as the best - "Black Legend" by Docho Boyadzhiev, based on the script by Georgi Mishev and the short historical-popular film "1872".

From the group of adventure film narratives, only three films were analyzed - the first film about Levski, "The Rebellion of the Slaves" (1933) by Vasil Gendov, the miniseries "The Demon of the Empire" (1971) by Vili Tsankov and "Deacon Levski" (2015) by Maxim Genchev. Created in different periods of Bulgarian cinema, they do not aim for historical credibility, but rather are fairy-tale-legendary and model the narrative of the national ideal. The doctoral student's analysis is comprehensive and affects not only the films, but also the context, the time in which they were created, the cinematic techniques, and also the reaction of the Turkish side to the first two films, as well as the public reaction caused by the contemporary reading of Levski created by Maxim Genchev .

To Levski in the films, Rumen Skrinski adds the theatrical Levski through two of the productions of the television theater "Vasil Levski" 1988 and "The Last Supper of the Deacon Levski" 2003 and summarizes that in both the presentation of Levski is truthful, with historical credibility.

In his dissertation, Rumen Skrinski devotes a well-deserved place to archival sources and their use for the purposes of documentary-artistic narratives about Levski. The films of Andrey Altuparmakov, some of which are scripted by Prof. Doino Doinov, are the most highly rated. They are based on archives and, according to the PhD student, correctly and fascinatingly interpret the documentary evidence, instead of showing long interviews. The 2007 film "Levski on Trial of the Porta and of History" is particularly noteworthy, which also contains a commentary on the attempt to purge the Turkish archives in 1931. The trial in the film is not presented in isolation, but in the context of the complex foreign policy relations between the Porta , England and Russia.

A special place in the dissertation is devoted to the newly discovered Ottoman archives, among which are parts of Levski's documentary heritage. Another big topic that is periodically renewed is related to the place of Levski's grave, traced by Rumen Skrinski and through the films dedicated to it.

And in the concluding part of the second chapter of the dissertation, "Levski - from the allegories of the divine to ancestral memory and songs" is presented. The examples cited by Rumen Skrinski are for the films "Levski - Gospel, Path and Immortality" and "Levski and the Faith". As of 2017, two film examples The Birth of the Apostle and The Songs of Levski have been identified rather as representing the romantic-poetic understanding of Levski.

In the last third chapter, the suggested images of Levski are systematized based on the films examined in the dissertation and evidence for the research hypothesis is presented.

To the question "Is he a demon of the empire?" (which is the title of the first paragraph in the chapter), the answers stand out: heroism is rather childishly presented; feeling that Levski's only task is to outsmart the Turkish authorities with his tricks; the strategist of the insurgent process cannot be perceived as an exponent of the national-revolutionary doctrine, and in general the qualities of the historical figure are not instilled convincingly.

The second paragraph seeks an answer to the question "Is there an Apostle in "Deacon Levski?"" Here Rumen Skriniski substantiates his hypothesis of mythologizing Levski and the created heroic figure of the Apostle through the films "Deacon Levski" and "The Demon of the Empire".

In a separate paragraph, the image of the Apostle approaching Jesus is presented, who, although he renounced the spiritual hierarchy and his dignity, did not renounce Christian morality. And of course Levski's personal world is not left out.

The conclusion is short, as Rumen Skriniski himself defines it, and in turn poses questions, some of which only seemingly remain open. And although it is noted that this is a conclusion to the third chapter, it actually traces the formation of the narrative about Levski from his loading with myths, legends and folklore references through his transformation into a heroic figure and his transformation into a metaphor of the national spirit, as well as into legend and part of the national mythopoetic pantheon.

Based on an analysis of Levski's cinematic image, the doctoral student asks a rhetorical question, is it possible for historical figures not to become heroic in Bulgarian cinema? Also, is it possible to film a story about Levski without clichés and with measured pathos...

In its entirety, the dissertation work has achieved the goals and tasks it set for itself. The text is factually dense and testifies to the good and thorough research and knowledge of the researched topic by the doctoral student. There are 132 bibliographic sources with a scope that covers the researched issues. In places it would be more correct to use the original sources to avoid inaccuracies. Thus, for example, the conflation of the two different Acts: the Cinematography Act, 1946 and the Cinematography Act, 1948 (p. 60) and misrepresenting them as one which had undergone a change could have been avoided by direct inquiry and citation of the promulgated laws in the State Gazette. Also, knowledge of the laws themselves would allow to avoid another inaccuracy, such as the statement that the Foundation "Bulgarsko delo" was transformed into the State Enterprise "Bulgarian Cinematography" in connection with the Law on Cinema Culture adopted in 1946. (p. 60). In fact, the foundation was liquidated by virtue of the Cinematography Act of 1948, and its functions were transferred to the newly created State Enterprise "Bulgarian Cinematography".

In general, the presented text is a success for the author and has all the qualities of a serious and thorough scientific study.

### **In conclusion**

All that has been said about the dissertation gives me the reason to express my positive opinion on awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Rumen Ilkov Skriniski.

*March 2, 2023,*

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariyana Piskova*