

A c a d e m i c R e v i e w

by Prof. Georgeta Nazarska, Ph.D., ULSIT, Sofia,
for the scientific works of Valentina Milchova Mitkova, Chief Assistant Professor,
Ph.D.,
presented for her participation in a competition for the academic position of
Associate Professor

This academic review has been prepared on the basis of Order No. RD-38-637/ 09.12.2022 of the Rector of the “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Sofia University regarding a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor under Professional Field 3.5. ”Public Communications and Information Sciences”, specialty “Book Studies, Library Studies, Bibliography – History of the Book”, announced in the State Gazette (No.92/18.11.2022) and opened for the needs of the of the “Library Studies, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy” Department at the Faculty of Philosophy of the “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Sofia University.

The complete folder of documents and publications of the sole candidate, Chief Assistant, Ph.D. Valentina Milchova Mitkova, presented for participation in the competition, was provided to me as a member of the scientific jury. Their number and content meet the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Law, the Regulation for its Application and the Regulation for the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Sofia University.

1. Evaluation of the scientific results and contributions of the candidate

Chief Assistant Professor Valentina Milchova Mitkova, Ph.D., is a graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy at the “St. Kliment of Ohrid”, where she successively obtained: Bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies (2003), Master's degree in “Art and Contemporary Times, 20th-21st centuries” (2005) and Doctoral degree in Professional Field 3.5. (2014), defending under the scientific guidance of Prof. Krassimira Daskalova, Ph.D., a dissertation on “Authorship and Canon in Bulgarian Literature, 1878-1944. Female Authors”. In 2009, she participated in the International Summer School in Lyon under the “Matilda” Master's Program. Since 2018 she has been working as a Chief Assistant Professor in the “Library Studies, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy” Department at the “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Sofia University.

Dr. Mitkova is an author of a total of 1 monograph, 10 studies and articles and 6 reviews published in scientific journals and book collections. In the current competition, she applies with 13 selected publications: 1 monograph, 7 studies and articles and 5 reviews. The presented publications are related to the scientific fields of the History of the Book and Reading, Women's and Gender History, and Media Studies. They focus on the problems for the so-called female authorship, the place of women in the public field of literature and periodicals, the typology of periodicals in Bulgaria in the 19th-20th centuries.

The habilitation work “Gender, Periodical Printing and Modernization of Bulgaria from the end of the 19th to the 1940s” (“St. Kliment Ohridski” University Press, 2022, 261 p.), with which Dr. Mitkova applied in the competition, represents a summary of her ten-year research on the subject, which is as much known through individual personalities and publications as it is not developed as a monograph, over a ‘long duree’ and in a comparative perspective. In fact, it

represents a pioneering attempt, comparable to already implemented similar projects in the neighboring Balkan countries.

The book combines the approaches of social history (including History of the Book and Reading and Women's and Gender History), Feminist Theory and Criticism, Sociology of Culture (literary creativity), Cultural Studies, and Media Studies. The interdisciplinary field allows the author to combine research methods characteristic of the humanities and social sciences.

The structure of the monograph includes Introduction, three chapters, Conclusion and Bibliography. The first chapter "Women's Periodicals in the Context of Contemporary Feminist Studies" substantiates the author's research approach to the analysis of Bulgarian women's periodicals. Dr. Mitkova recalls the concepts created by Feminist Theory and Criticism about the marginalization of the so-called women's writing and about 'gender guardianship' in art (including literature). Bourdieu's theory of the 'social field' is invoked, as the cultural androcentrism prevailing in pre-modernity, relegating women authors to the periphery of the 'literary field' and social stereotypes modeling women writers as mentored and taught by men, is explained by their deprivation of access to 'cultural capital'. In the following chapters of the book, these practices are illustrated in detail with Bulgarian examples.

The second chapter "Women's Periodicals in the Context of Bulgarian modernization" is based on the theory of modernization, tested in the sphere of culture and particularly in the media environment. Dr. Mitkova convincingly argues in a native context the established statement about the periodical press as a construction of a new public environment in the Modern Times and a conductor of modernity, spreading its transformational potential from the urban (literate and educated) center to the rural periphery (subjected to patriarchy). Looking at the so-

called literary feminism during the Bulgarian Revival Period, she traces the transfer of ideas and knowledge from abroad, including feminist ideas.

The third chapter “Women's Periodicals from 1878 to the 1940s: Strategies for the Emancipation and Modernization of Bulgarian Women” is intended as a broad panorama of the Bulgarian women's periodical press and has a contributing character. In it, the author defends her view that, as in the Western Europe and the USA in the 18th-20th centuries, newspapers and magazines for women in our country become a cultural space for communication, a place for constructing collective (female) identities, a means of stimulating public (feminist) activism, tool for emancipation in the labor market (in the form of women's entrepreneurship and hired journalistic work), media motivating the improvement of women's creative writing.

Choosing among the numerous typologies of feminisms, that of Karen Offen, Dr. Mitkova divides her chosen ‘representative projects’ (p.13) from the Bulgarian women's press into individualistic (explicit) feminist ones (‘Women's World’, ‘Women's Voice’, ‘Equality’, ‘Woman Citizen’, ‘Women's Work’, ‘Prosperity’ and ‘The Dissatisfied’) and relational feminist (housewife) (‘Bulgarian Woman’, ‘Fashion and Household’, ‘Economy and Household’, ‘Newspaper of the Woman’). This decision was probably dictated by the connection of the early publishers and editors with the Bulgarian Women's Union and its derivatives – they were their founders, main figures and ideologues for half a century.

The author characterizes each of the selected titles through a detailed overview of its systematics and profiling, content analysis of the content of chosen volumes, and, where possible, portrays the main editors and publishers, comments on editorial policies, indicates the (possible) reception of foreign modern examples. This chapter does not mechanically follow chronological frameworks and looks for

‘remnants’ of women's editions in those published by the communist regime (the 1960s).

Along with the indisputable factual contributions, it can be noted that not everywhere in the last chapter does Dr. Mitkova touch upon the questions of reader reception, of the relationship of feminists with other ideologies (conservative, liberal, and left) propagated through the printed media, of the significance of gender guardianship (especially in the cases of the Karshovski and Cholchevi families). It would also be valuable to compare self-publishing women entrepreneurs with their counterparts in a foreign context. I would also argue for the simultaneous use of the terms ‘cultural modernization’ and ‘women's emancipation’, provided that both are part of social modernization in the public sphere.

In addition to her contribution, conceptual and exemplary written habilitation, Dr. Mitkova presents 7 articles and studies (one in press) and 5 reviews. For the most part, their content coincides with parts of the monograph (Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11). The focus of the reviews is different, which shows Dr. Mitkova's ability to write operational scientific criticism for current scientific production on women's history by authors from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

2. Assessment of the pedagogical activity and publications of the candidate regarding the fulfillment of the national minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.5.

Since 2018, Valentina Mitkova was appointed after a competition as a Chief Assistant Professor in the “Library Studies, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy” Department of at the “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Department. To this day she had been teaching in Bulgarian and English in the bachelor's majors

“Library and Information Sciences” (Faculty of Philosophy) and “Book Publishing” (Faculty of Journalistic and Mass Communication) and in the master's programs of the Faculty of Philosophy: “History of the Book and the Reading” and “Matilda”. She has a full academic horarium and successfully works with students, incl. lead their practical activities.

The submitted documents and materials show that Dr. Mitkova meets the national minimum requirements for the “Associate Professor” academic position in Professional Field 3.5. She has a defended doctoral thesis in 2014 (reflected in the NACID database and scored in section A of the national minimum requirements with 50 points). Her publications in the competition are one monograph and twelve scientific articles, studies and reviews in Bulgarian and English, of which in: refereed scientific journals (8), non-refereed scientific journals (1) and peer-reviewed scientific collections (3). The targeted publications carry 100 points in section B of the national minimum requirements (with a minimum of 100 points) and 315 points in section D of the national minimum requirements (with a minimum of 200 points). The indicated 10 citations of publications of the candidate for the academic position are of her articles published in the refereed “Aspasia” journal. Placed in the works of famous Bulgarian and foreign researchers, they testify to the recognition of the author in the scientific field and with 105 points satisfy the national minimum requirements in section D (with a minimum of 50 points). Thus, in the current procedure, it collects 570 points from the national minimum requirements (with a minimum of 400 points).

Recently Dr. Mitkova has been working in the teams of four scientific research projects, funded by the Ministry of Education and Science, carried out within the framework of “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Sofia University and dedicated to the institutions of memory in Kyustendil and Lovetch. They probably help to develop her research interests.

To date, Dr. Mitkova has participated in 8 scientific conferences in the country, where she presented papers dealing with current scientific topics that concern her.

The candidate in the competition is a member of the Bulgarian Association of University Women, a branch of Graduate Women International (GWI), and since 2020 she has been involved in the editorial board of the “Aspasia” journal – an authoritative and specialized publication on women's history and gender in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

I declare that I have no joint publications with the candidate and that I have not found any examples of plagiarism in her work.

3. Critical assessments, remarks and recommendations

I believe that Dr. Mitkova has already found at the intersection of Book History, Women's and Gender History, and Media Studies – a promising field of study where she can develop her interests. I hope she could turn to less studied but significant periodicals to present microhistorically, apart from content analysis. It would be valuable if Dr. Mitkova continued her activities with women's magazines in the 1940s-1980s, empirically verifying the validity of some popular theses about their feminist character.

Conclusion

Based on the punctual and transparent procedure, the compliance of the submitted documents with the requirements of the current Development of the Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria Law and the Regulations for its implementation, the implementation of the national minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.5., the availability of sufficient number and original scientific works, the lack of plagiarism, the

evidences of citations and recognition in the scientific field of the applicant, I give my **positive assessment** of the scientific achievements and pedagogical activity of Chief Assistant Professor Valentina Milchova Mitkova, Ph.D.

I declare that I will **vote positively** for her choice of the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.5. for the needs of the of the “Library Studies, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy” Department at the Faculty of Philosophy of the “St. Kliment of Ohrid” Sofia University.

Sofia, April 3th, 2023.

Reviewer:

(Prof. Georgeta Nazarska, Ph.D.)