

## REVIEW

of the scholarly activity of the Chief Assistant Professor **Dr. Valentina Milchova Mitkova** in connection with the competition for Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.5 Public Communications and Information Sciences (Book Studies, Library Studies, Bibliography – History of the Book), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in State Gazette no. 92 of 18.11.2022.

**by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgi Valchev, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski",**  
Department of "History and Theory of Culture", member of the scientific jury

### ***General characteristics of the scholarly production submitted for the competition***

The scholarly production presented by Dr. Valentina Mitkova for the competition fully covers the specifics of the Professional Field 3.5 and corresponds to the theme of the competition - History of the Book. All the necessary documents are filled in according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff and the rules for its implementation of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Dr. Valentina Mitkova applied for the academic position of "Associate Professor" with a monograph entitled "Gender, Periodical Press and Modernization in Bulgaria (from the end of the 19th century till the 1940s)", University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2022). In addition to her habilitation thesis, the candidate submitted nine articles and three studies in Bulgarian and English. One study and six articles were published in authoritative international journals on women's history, indexed in the world databases Scopus and Web of Science.

### ***Teaching activity***

In her capacity as Chief Assistant Professor in "Library and Information Studies" - a degree program of the Faculty of Philosophy - the candidate had already gained extensive teaching experience, as for more than five years she had been leading seminars in the mandatory disciplines "History of the Book", "Manuscript Traditions in the History of Book and Reading", "Printed Book and Reading (15th-20th centuries). In addition, Dr. Mitkova offers lecture courses in English in a MA degree ("Gender Hierarchies in the Field of Intellectual Activities:

Women and the Literary Canon" and "Gender and Popular Culture in a Comparative Perspective: Eastern Europe and the West"). The first of them was included as a mandatory course in the curriculum of the European Master's Program "Matilda: History of Women and Gender".

### ***Research activity***

The two main thematic areas in which Dr. Mitkova's research interests are focused - History of the book and History of Women and Gender, were first outlined by the candidate's doctoral thesis entitled "Authorship and Canon in the Bulgarian Literature (1878-1944): Women Authors" (2014). In recent years, she has mainly concentrated on the problems related to the development of the women's periodical press, interpreted as a form of modern publicity in the context of the overall Bulgarian modernization from the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. More generally, Dr. Mitkova's studies refer to various aspects of the larger themes of women's authorship and the existence of gender hierarchies in the field of intellectual activities.

Although with a clear focus, Valentina Mitkova's research is not limited only to the field of feminist studies. She took part in several scholarly projects, within which research perimeters fell modern regional and national cultural institutions (libraries, museums, archives)

### ***Evaluation of the contributions in the habilitation thesis***

Dr. Valentina Mitkova's habilitation thesis "Gender, Periodical Press and Modernization in Bulgaria (from the end of the 19th century till the 1940s)" is a serious and in-depth study that bridges the gap between the scholarly fields of History of Women and Gender and History of the Periodical Press, located in the broad context of the modernization processes of the Bulgarian society and culture during the specified period. The intersection of these two fields creates a particularly alternative public sphere, interpreted by Dr. Mitkova with confidence, as she skilfully combines in-depth theoretical knowledge of feminist issues with professional awareness in the field of book publishing and periodical press.

The first chapter of the book - "Women's Periodicals in the Context of Contemporary Feminist Studies", outlines the conceptual framework of the study. Whithin this framework, Dr. Mitkova successfully opposes the concept of gender tutelage – a pattern in the androcentric literary tradition - to that of feminist literary criticism, which allows her to analyze women's authorship in Bulgaria. Her conclusion that, despite the modernizing pathos of the time, women's writing was persistently interpreted as secondary in the plan of the "patriarchal notion

of the male power and authority " (p. 47) is entirely relevant. The categorization of women's periodicals in two main types - "individualist feminist" and "relational feminist" (following Karen Offen's typology of feminisms) also fully corresponds to the needs of the analysis. The first group of periodicals set ambitious emancipatory goals, while the second modestly confined their efforts to the modernization of the women's world, understood in its traditional dimensions. However, both types of women's periodicals, analyzed in the context of the overall Bulgarian modernization, had their own cultural meaning, social significance and public value.

The second chapter of the monograph focuses on women's press namely in the context of the Bulgarian modernization. The author's analysis starts from the work of two of the most prominent literary men from the Bulgarian Revival period, actively involved in the debates related to the "women's question" - P.R. Slaveykov and L. Karavelov. Both ranked among the most consistent promoters of the development of women's education. Well argued, both Slaveykov and Karavelov stood behind that idea interpreted as a key element of the social progress, although standing on their traditionalist, conservative positions about women's roles in public life. Dr. Mitkova truthfully outlines the contexts in which Bulgarian women at that time developed their social activity and began writing: while supporting girls' education, establishing various women's charitable societies, giving public talks, etc. Those new social activities rose women's public reputation, gained them greater public visibility and began, albeit very slowly, to change the existing mentalities and stereotypes in Bulgarian society, still dominated by tradition. Further in this chapter, the author traces the existing gender inequalities in the field of professional realization, education and political citizenship of women. The creation and the organized manifestations of the modern Bulgarian feminism are described in detail, without omitting the first splits and conflicts among the activists. At the very end of this second part of the text, Dr. Mitkova briefly traces the development of the Bulgarian periodical press as a modern form of publicity in the nation-state, locating women's periodicals in its broad framework and dividing them into two types - explicitly feminist and relational feminist.

The last third chapter of the monograph is devoted to the specific analysis of these two types of periodicals, published in the period from the establishment of the Bulgarian nation state till the 1940s. A total of 11 periodicals fall within the scope of the analysis, 6 of them being assigned to the first type, and 5 included to the second. Whithin the context of the mentioned typology, the author examines their strategies for the emancipation and modernization of Bulgarian women. The "alternative public sphere" women's press created allowed women to live simultaneously in their dual roles of authors and audience, of political subjects and everyday actors, contributing to the creation of the new modern image of the country. The topics

and problems commented on in them, as Dr. Mitkova convincingly proves, were directly dependent on their editors' social and professional profiles. The latter, according to their own views, discussed topics related to women's political representation, professional realization, the development of girls' education and access to different educational levels, women's suffrage and full citizenship, the international women's movement, peacekeeping and many more. The different positions taken on these issues created visible tensions and outlined the first dividing lines between the different types of feminisms, commented objectively by Dr. Mitkova. Among her findings is that, despite their differences, women activists stood for a general feminist intransigence towards gender discrimination.

The second part of this chapter focuses on relational feminist or "household" periodicals, which were no less problematically curious. From an anthropological point of view, they are a valuable source for the country's modernization processes, and I must admit that they aroused a certain interest in me, since their contribution to women's emancipation in Bulgaria was no less than that of the explicitly feminist periodicals. Unfortunately, most of them did not enjoy a long publishing life and ceased to exist too quickly. Respectively, the influence they had on public attitudes regarding feminism and women's important role in the modernization processes of Bulgarian society was not sustainable.

Dr. Mitkova's monographic study has another valuable quality that must be noted, as it is still rare in the practice of Bulgarian social sciences and humanities. The author makes efforts to position her research in the much broader context of the neighboring countries, which opens up a broad comparative research perspective.

In conclusion, I would add that the habilitation thesis represents a definite achievement for its author Dr. Valentina Mitkova. Well structured, despite the apparent "asymmetry" of the volume of the first two chapters compared to the third, with a consistently maintained research perspective, the text is written in a good academic style and language. Its parts are logically connected, and the texts is a valuable contribution to academic research in this field of knowledge.

## ***Conclusion***

Everything that has been said so far gives me the reason to strongly support Dr. Valentina Mitkova's application for the competition for the selection of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Book Studies, Library Studies, Bibliography – History of the Book)

I declare that I have no publications in common with the candidate, I have no conflict of interest and I have not detected plagiarism.

**Sofia, 04/03/2023**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgi Valchev**