

## R E V I E W

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for the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of professor at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

on 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and cultural sciences (Theory and history of culture - History of Bulgarian culture 15th–19th centuries and cultural heritage (public policies, management and socialization),

announced in the State Gazette, no. 35 of 18. 04. 2023

For participation in the announced competition only one candidate submitted documents - Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgi Alexandrov Valchev.

The scientific and teaching career of Georgi Valchev is associated with the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski". After successfully defending his doctoral thesis in 1998, since 2002 he has been a chief assistant, and since 2010 - an associate professor in the department. Valchev established himself as an undisputed expert on the problems of the Bulgarian Revival culture and cultural heritage. He produced 4 monographs, 37 studies and articles, compiled and edited 10 collections of studies. Valchev participated in numerous national and international conferences and scientific projects. He has been a scientific supervisor of four successfully defended PhD students. G. Valchev has lecture courses in the bachelor's and master's degrees in the Faculty of Philosophy and in the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, among which "History of cultural institutions in Bulgarian", „Tradition and oblivion – bulgarian culture 15-19 century", „Tradition and modernization – bulgarian culture 18-19 century”, “The Symbolic capital of the Bulgarian Revival”, “Cultural landscape”, “Culture and regional identity" etc; he is head of the MA program "Management and socialization of cultural heritage". Valchev has significant organizational and management experience gained from working in municipal structures and at the University - head of department, deputy dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and vice-rector. His high level of professionalism and responsibility are also manifested by

his membership in organizations such as All-Bulgarian Committee "Vasil Levski", National Forum "Cultural Heritage", Union of Scientists in Bulgaria and Alliance Française.

For participation in the competition, Ass. Prof. G. Valchev submitted 2 monographs and 11 studies and articles, 3 of which are in English. All of them fit the profile of the competition and are dedicated to problems of the theory and history of Bulgarian culture and cultural heritage. The production not only covers, but is above the points required according to the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the current Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria - 688.75 out of the required 550 points. The scientific production has an original character and no element of plagiarism is detected.

The attached studies and articles are dedicated to the modern challenges to professional education and the possibilities for professional accomplishment in the field of cultural heritage, Internet technologies and museum work, as well as to notable personalities - Al. Exarch, V. Levski, Z. Stoyanov and their remarkable researcher - Prof. N. Genchev.

The monograph "One Hundred Years of Tourist Association "Sarnena Gora". Historical development". Stara Zagora, Kota, 2003, presents the history of the tourist movement in Stara Zagora. The topic is examined in the context of the modernization processes in the Bulgarian society and through the prism of the development of a new approach towards the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

The main work of Georgi Valchev, presented for acquiring the academic position of "professor" is "History and its public uses. Cultural and political uses of Bulgarian history. From the Revival to the end of the First World War". The study is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. In the introduction, after highlighting the ambivalent nature of historical knowledge and the past as such, the author states his main goal, namely: "to describe precisely this state of existence of the

past beyond the 'official' academic historical narrative." In other words, to present the essence and the "competition" between the two narratives about the history of the Bulgarians and building national identity – the one on the glorious medieval past and that on the heroic renaissance era. The research itself is understood as an experiment containing serious risks, but also an opportunity to present the diverse cultural and political manifestations of history in the various spheres of public life and to offer new keys for their explanation.

The combination of the historical and the cultural approach to the past represents the canvas on which G. Valchev bases the research and which opens up a wide opportunity to build on what has already been achieved. His many years of research and teaching activity have given him the advantage of having a thorough knowledge of the existing works on the topics, which are conscientiously noted in the attached bibliography - over eighty titles, including from Internet sources. Both published and unpublished archival sources from the Bulgarian Historical Archive (BIA) at the NBCM, from the Military History Museum - Pleven and from the State Archives - Plovdiv, as well as nine periodicals, were drawn.

The author focuses on a chronologically long historical period, including two epochs of the development of the Bulgarian society – that of its revival in times of foreign political domination and that of the first cycle of independent development until the end of the Great War. This is an extremely dynamic period in which the Bulgarians are building their historical identity, their specific place among the Balkan peoples, fighting for and defending their political freedom, as well as their right to statehood and national unification. Each of these activities seeks its roots and foundations in the past, which logically stands at the center of public interest.

Very ingeniously, the first chapter dealing with the time of the Revival is entitled "The Past as Future." It presents and explains why the medieval narrative of the Bulgarian past is at the center of Paisius of Hilendar history, of the journalism of Georgi Rakovski and in the artistic works of Nikolay Pavlovich. These seemingly incompatible

creators of ideas about the Bulgarian past are examined in the context of the ongoing processes in the Balkans and in Europe, the evolution of their views and the degree of social impact. It is concluded that under Paisius of Hilendar, history was exploited with compensatory purposes to legitimize the right of the Bulgarians to be equal to the other Christian peoples of the Balkans, by emphasizing their glorious past and their contribution to the cultural development of the Slavs during the Middle Ages. Under G. Rakovski, the Bulgarians were placed at the centre of the cultural development of the Balkans and Europe even before the emergence of the ancient Greek civilization, thus their right to an independent existence and a state was substantiated. Rakovski's contribution to the popularization of the knowledge about the past through the use of visual means, most effective in the circumstances of mass illiteracy, is highlighted. The merits of the work of Nikolay Pavlovich in this regard is also emphasized. According to the author, the Bulgarian revolutionary intelligentsia managed to free itself from its dependence on legitimizing the nation's future through its past only in the last decade before the Liberation. The bearer of this new tendency is mainly Hr. Botev, who puts the stake on the making of history, and its visual realization are the works of Henrich Dembicki.

The cycle of the rise and fall of the Revival as a major component of historical memory is traced in the second chapter. It examines the processes in the first post-liberation decades, in which two main trends dominate – final distancing and break with the Ottoman heritage and continuation of efforts for national liberation and unification. These two tendencies focus the attention on the heroics and pathos of the struggles against the Ottoman power and push the topic of the medieval past into the background. A conclusion could be drawn that this use of history is not the result of any deliberate and purposeful governmental or state policy, but of the intuitive feelings and visions of former revolutionaries, intellectuals, public figures. They used the literature, periodicals, mass celebrations of events from the recent past as channels to influence the society with the aim to build a collective memory. At the center are two titans of the era - Ivan Vazov

and Zahari Stoyanov, who managed to impose on the public consciousness the images of the national revolutionaries as a role models that should be followed by the new generations and to suggest to them that they have a duty and responsibility to continue and accomplish their vows for a free, independent and united Bulgarian state. Rightly and accurately G. Valchev notes the merits and contribution of Zahari Stoyanov for creating a new holiday calendar, using the symbols of the Revival to achieve specific political goals of the current agenda of Bulgarian society.

The institutional manifestations related to the interpretations and use of the Revival past have not been left without attention. Attention is paid to the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and to the activities of Metropolitan Metodiy Kusev of Stara Zagora, as well as to those of the municipal and central authorities during the construction of Vasil Levski monument in Sofia.

The last case occupies a key place in the narrative, as the author defines it as indicative for "gradual distancing of the state from the efforts to impose the heroic narrative of the Bulgarian revival", as a glaring sense of hypocrisy and falsehood, since the Revival era has already become a moral antipode, in complete opposition to the modern reality". The opening of the monument is also associated with the country's new foreign policy course of rapprochement with Russia, which forced the political elite to demonstrate a dose of patriotism "masked behind lavish celebrations". The change itself is accepted as "necessary" and, as indicated, at its centre is Prince Ferdinand who seeks to strengthen his position on the Bulgarian throne and obtain the necessary recognition from the Russian Empire. The new Bulgarian prince clearly realized that in order to increase his popularity in the Bulgarian society, he must support the collective patriotic drive and the existing heroic narrative of the Bulgarian revival. On the other hand, he was aware that he could not win the favor of the Russian Empire (which persecutes its own revolutionaries in the cruelest way) with his official toleration of this heroic narrative. However, he was able to cope "completely successfully" with this task.

The idea thus developed raises several questions. If in 1895 the Bulgarian state "distanced itself" from the Revival era, then when and how did it engage in the enforcement of its heroic narrative? Can the opinion of an intellectual, in the person of the then director of the "Salza i Smiach" troupe, Radul Canelli, be considered authoritative and defining, and does this mean that the Revival is really an ideal and idealistic era, contrasting and standing above every subsequent one? Is the opening of the V. Levski monument really a means to win the trust of the liberating Russia and who is at the heart of the new course? The author's claim about the decisive role of Prince Ferdinand in changing the foreign policy course in the period 1894–1896 is reasonable but it is presented without any evidence. The Prince desperately needs Russia's favourable sanction, not only because in this way he will personally establish himself as the supreme Bulgarian suzerain, but also because the country itself will strengthen its uncertain international status after the Unification of 1885. Without the achievement of this goal, the path to Bulgaria's future political independence seems completely impossible. In fact, already in 1999, P. Stoyanovich presented this notion in his book "Between Danube and Neva. Prince Ferdinand I of Bulgaria in the eyes of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy (1894–1898), which did not prevent another author from claiming, two decades later, that this deed was done "entirely by the Prime Minister Konstantin Stoilov" (V. Metodiev, *A Very Good Person. Konstantin Stoilov and Political Virtue*. S., 2019). Is 1895 really the turning point? As it is clear from the subsequent presentation, at least until the end of the 19th century, attempts to impose and substantiate the Revival era continued through the new literary works from the pen of Ivan Vazov and through the fictional and historical sketches of its "living personification" - Stoyan Zaimov.

In the last chapter, G. Valchev reveals that practically until the beginning of the wars for national liberation and unification, the history of the Revival era continues to be on the agenda of society and permanently engages the state and its supreme representative - prince/king Ferdinand, but now with an emphasis on the role and contribution of Russia for the Bulgarian liberation. He proves his views through the

activities of St. Zaimov, who in his multiple roles as a high-ranking civil servant, chairman of the Supreme Committee of the Militia Associations and founder of the "Tsar Liberator Alexander II" committee, became the main driver of a series of projects in celebration and appreciation of Russia (the museums and Skobelev Park in Pleven, the memorial in the village of Shipka, the "Tsar Liberator" monument, the "St. Alexander Nevsky" cathedral). The author claims that Zaimov/the veterans are practically used by Prince Ferdinand and the authorities, who do not need the heroes of the recent past, but a truce and Russia's diplomatic support for declaring Bulgarian independence. The conclusions are generally accurate, but quite generalized. Zaimov's active actions actually took place after the restoration of Bulgarian-Russian diplomatic relations and after the main Russian demands related to the baptism of Crown Prince Boris and the resolution of the issue of officers-emigrants were met. The gestures made can also be explained and justified with the understanding of the monarch and the ruling cabinets, extreme and moderate Russophile or pro-Western, that the solution of the national question inevitably goes through a war with the Ottoman Empire, which is impossible without the alliance with Russia. The question remains, however, where does the narrative of Russia's liberation mission fit in? Is it part of the story of the Revival or does it have its own, primarily political motivation, some third story about the Bulgarian past. In this regard, answers can be sought in the royal archives and in those of the official state institutions.

A painting by the artist Emil Holarek from 1892, dedicated to the blinded warriors of Samuil, and especially the processes in public building in the first decade of the 20th century, where inspiration was clearly sought from the heritage of medieval Bulgarian architecture, give the author reason to conclude that it was at this time that a pushback from the Bulgarian revival began in the cultural life of the country and the return of the medieval past started. The main argument and explanation of this trend is sought in the aspiration of Ferdinand I to seek and impose a bond between the medieval and modern Bulgarian state and, accordingly, between its ruling dynasties, is pointed out. This aspiration is evidenced by the series of "medieval" portraits of the princely/royal family,

by the support for scientific research and archaeological excavations of the medieval Bulgarian capitals, by the printed jubilee stamps with the image of the monarch and the modernization of the country. The author objectively notes that behind all this is not an obsessive mania for greatness, but a deeply conscious, well-thought-out and completely consistent and purposeful power project.

The brief conclusion lays a bridge to a future study dedicated to the interwar period, during which the two historical narratives - the Revival one and the Medieval - finally split and the Medieval, with the help of the state, established itself as the leading. Among the reasons pointed out is the desire of the Social Democratic/Communist Party to "privatize" the era and the heroes of the Revival. I allow myself to disagree with the conclusion that "the soldier's uprising ... leads to the abdication of King Ferdinand...", since this is a result of the demand of the victors and the government of Al. Malinov; the military riot exploited by R. Daskalov to carry out a coup d'état, although with a certain anti-monarchist charge, did not achieve this goal.

The monograph, as well as the other studies of Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev, are written in a highly scientific style, logical and convincing, but at the same time in emotional and captivating way. The presented documents and materials, his scientific and teaching qualifications are undoubtedly at a very high level. All this gives me the reason to present my positive vote for awarding Georgi Valchev of the academic position of "professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" according to 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and cultural sciences (Theory and history of culture - History of Bulgarian culture 15th-19th century and cultural heritage (public policies, management and socialization)).

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