

REVIEW

by **Assoc. Prof. Petko Hristov, Ph.D.**

from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

for a competition procedure for academic position **Professor** in professional area 3.1. Social Sciences, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture. History of the Bulgarian Culture of the 15 – 19th Century and Cultural Heritage (Public Policies, Management and Socialisation)), announced in State Gazette No. 35/18.04.2023.

There is only one applicant for the competition for academic position *Professor* in professional area 3.1. Social Sciences, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture. History of the Bulgarian Culture of the 15th – 19th Century and Cultural Heritage (Public Policies, Management and Socialisation)) – Assoc. Prof. Georgi Aleksandrov Valchev, lecturer at the Department of History and Theory of Culture, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

I. Evaluation of compliance of the application with the minimum requirements

The applicant has presented the required by the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) reference with scientometric indices as well as documents supporting these data: a list of publications, abstracts of the publications with which he participates in the competition as well as a list with their citations, a list of research projects in which he is a member or which he leads, a list of the lecture courses in the BA programmes “Cultural Studies” and “Communications Management” as well as in the MA programmes “Management and Socialisation of Cultural Heritage”, “Cultural Anthropology” and “Arts and Modernity (20th – 21st century) at the Faculty of Philosophy. The information is presented in a table by sections, and after familiarizing myself with it, I confirm that Georgi Valchev not only fulfils the minimum national requirements according to the LDASRB and the requirements of the Regulations of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for its application regarding the

occupation of the position of *Professor*, but also exceeds them, as in group A there are 50 points (minimum requirement of 50), in group B – 100 points (minimum requirement of 100), in group D – 228.75 points (minimum requirement of 200), in group D – 110 points (minimum requirement of 100), and in group E – 200 points (minimum requirement of 100).

II. Research activity

Georgi Valchev has comprehensively presented all the documentation required by the LDASRB and the Regulations of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for its application, including a complete list and summaries of the publications submitted for participation in the competition (different from the ones submitted for his habilitation). The publications enclosed are united around two main thematic fields, which are related to the research work and academic contributions of Georgi Valchev in the field of history of the Bulgarian culture and of cultural heritage. The list includes the monograph *History and Its Public Uses. Political and Cultural Uses of the Bulgarian Past from the National Revival to the End of the First World War* (in print at the University Press “St. Kliment Ohridski”, 2023) representative of the applicant’s main research pursuits, the published monograph *One Hundred Years of Tourist Association “Sarnena Gora”. Historical Development*, as well as 11 studies and articles in Bulgarian and English, four of which are co-authored. Apart from the publications submitted for participation in the competition, the list of various other forms of academic activity is impressive – editorial work, participation in scientific forums in the country and abroad, management of research projects, etc.

The main monograph submitted by Georgi Valchev for the competition is the book *History and Its Public Uses. Political and Cultural Uses of the Bulgarian Past from the National Revival to the End of the First World War*, in print at the University Press “St. Kliment Ohridski”. It is an original monographic study, different in topic and content from his other monograph (*One Hundred Years of Tourist Association “Sarnena Gora”. Historical development*, published in 2003). The study, which covers the chronological range from the Bulgarian National Revival and the post-liberation development of Bulgaria to the end of the First World War, focuses on the changing symbolic use of the past, both in the early decades of national romanticism before the Liberation of Bulgaria and afterwards – in the further social development of the Bulgarian state when the construction of the historical narrative was also

used for political purposes. The chronological principle also underlies the structure of the monograph, consisting of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. For the needs of his research, Georgi Valchev used archival materials from the funds of the Bulgarian Historical Archive at the SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library, the Military History Museum in Pleven and the Plovdiv State Archive, as well as published archives and periodicals from the era. The author's interdisciplinary approach, combining elements and achievements of political history, history of literature, journalism, fine arts and architecture, regional history and the possibilities presented by ethnographic field work, makes a special impression.

The main emphasis in the research analysis is on the evolution of the public perception of the past and the transformations of the dominant historical narrative – from that of our brilliant medieval state tradition, through the other – the heroic time of the National Revival and the poetization of the “forgotten” national heroes whose deeds are still among the foundational symbols in the processes constructing the Bulgarian national identity, to the political speculation with a number of historical images and symbols. The extension of the analysis, not only over the documentary and epistolary heritage but also over the visualisation of the dominant national narrative of the recent and more distant past, is among the achievements and contributions of the monographic study of Georgi Valchev.

Stating in the introductory part that “the past is all around us”, Valchev sets as his main goal to “describe exactly this state of existence of the past that is beyond the ‘official’ academic historical narrative” (p. 8); this would expand, according to him, the research field in the direction of its multiplicity and would make more visible the diverse cultural and political manifestations of history in the various spheres of public life. Following Benedict Anderson's theoretical model of the creation of modern nationalisms, in the **first chapter** of the monograph, the author seeks an explanation of the reasons for the appearance of Paisius of Hilendar's “Istoriya Slavyanobalgarska” (Slavonic-Bulgarian History) and the beginning of the structuring of the historical narrative about the glorious medieval past of the Bulgarians, used as a way to legitimize their right to equality with the rest of the Christian peoples of the Balkans whose national projects were launched at an earlier stage. The Paisius' history, which is neither the first nor is scientifically reliable in many assertions, conveys messages that later became persistent stereotypes throughout the Bulgarian National Revival in the cultural and political uses of the historical narrative. Valchev continues the presentation of the Bulgarian National Revival

narrative about the past by analysing the work of Georgi Rakovski in the field of history which marks a new stage in the uses of history, far exceeding what was originally done by the Athos monk. And while the pathos of Paisius was inspired by the need to emphasize the merits of the Bulgarians for the cultural development of the other Slavic peoples from the medieval period and the distinction from Hellenism, the already advanced process of forming national self-awareness in the circles of the Bulgarian society requires, in addition to cultural, also political legitimization of the right to an independent national existence alongside the rest of the Balkan peoples. Rakovski radically changes the concept laid down in Paisius' account of the past of the Bulgarians, placing them at the base of the cultural development of the Balkans which made possible the later appearance of the ancient Greek civilisation, thus hinting at their claim that they predetermined all subsequent cultural development of Europe – ideas appearing periodically in the public narrative about the past, according to Georgi Valchev, in the 1930's, but also in full force in the 1970's and 1980's.

The first chapter ends with the analysis of the work and contributions of Nikolay Pavlovich for the popularization of the narrative of the Bulgarian medieval past through the expressive means of painting, who laid the foundations of the historical genre in Bulgarian fine art. The beginnings were laid with the lithographs of the then young Bulgarian artist, illustrating Rakovski's book "*A Few Words about Asen the First, the Great Bulgarian Tsar, and his son Asen the Second*" (published in Belgrade in 1860). A contribution of Valchev's monographic study is the tracking of the transformation of the visual narrative of the Bulgarian past into an extremely powerful means of influence and its wide use by Bulgarian revolutionary activists in political propaganda in the last years before the Liberation.

In the **second chapter**, the author presents and analyses the changed social and political conditions in the young Bulgarian state after the Liberation, when with the efforts of authors such as Ivan Vazov, Zahari Stoyanov and Stoyan Zaimov, the construction of the historical narrative of the recent past of the revolutionary struggles in the last years of the Bulgarian National Revival and the people's heroism in them begins. The focus of public attention is shifting from medieval Bulgarian history; the efforts of authors such as Paisius and Rakovski to present the glorious past of Bulgarian kings and patriarchs as an argument for cultural emancipation and political liberation are being displaced by efforts to create a historical narrative of the heroic time of the Bulgarian National Revival and its active transformation into an independent historical

epoch. Valchev analyses in detail significant publications in belles lettres, memoir literature and periodicals that became a significant factor in the propagating and imposing the new socio-political ideas and the new heroic pantheon. He pays the greatest attention to the work of Zahari Stoyanov in which, according to him, the construction of the new National Revival heroic pantheon is a complete, well-thought-out and consistently followed project, which to a large extent has been successfully implemented.

A contribution of the study is the special attention paid to the creation of the new public ritual practices that began to sanction the new places of memory and a new festive system in the decades after the Liberation; they are analysed in the context of the fierce public disputes generated by the first political claims of inheritance of ideas and work of the Bulgarian revolutionaries from the late Bulgarian National Revival. Valchev examines at length the rich public activity of Stoyan Zaimov, who, due to the circumstances, became a main actor in the public events organised by the state and dedicated to the Bulgarian National Revival. For the first time, in this part of the monograph, the solemn celebration on Buzludzha in 1898 organised by Metropolitan of Stara Zagora, Metodiy Kusev, and the charity committee “St. John the Merciful” managed by him, is closely studied; the event is a response to the attempts of the emerging social democracy in the person of Dimitar Blagoev to politically use the ideas of the Bulgarian revolutionaries and the heroism of the National Revival.

The last, **third chapter** of the monograph, analytically traces the processes of another change in public attitudes towards and expectations from the construction of the dominant historical narrative, of the gradual fading of the popularity of the National Revival heroic era and of the conscious return of medieval topic to the focus of public attention under the direct influence of the monarchical institution and of King Ferdinand personally. The distinct social and state-building tendency to search for parallels and a symbolic connection between the ruling dynasty of the Coburgs and the royal dynasties from the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom is brought to the fore. The significant legacy of the first generation of Bulgarian architects graduated in the West, who created the new public buildings in Sofia, drawing inspiration from the construction traditions and practices inherited from the Bulgarian Middle Ages, is presented in detail. Although pushed in this direction by the official authorities in the spirit of national romanticism, their activity organically fits into the trend of secession, which was fashionable at the time throughout Europe.

Georgi Valchev shows how the symbolic uses of the past, encouraged by the monarch, bring back to the fore in the public life of the country dreams of the splendour and grandeur of the Bulgarian Middle Ages. The author traces both the creation of a series of commissioned portraits in this style of the representatives of the royal family by authors such as Anton Mitov and Ivan Mrkvička, as well as the organization of the first scientific studies and archaeological excavations in the old medieval Bulgarian capitals by the Russian scientist Fyodor Uspensky and the French archaeologist Georges Seure, personally invited by the monarch. The conclusion is that these processes from the beginning of the 20th century stimulated public interest in cultural heritage and encouraged the creation of institutions that began to take care of its identification, research, preservation and promotion in the young Bulgarian state. These processes are also a marker of the cultural heritage's increased ideological and political use.

The study of cultural influences in the decades after the Liberation, when with the participation of prominent Bulgarian intellectuals and a number of famous scientists from Europe, who were fully involved in the construction of the cultural and educational institutions of the young Bulgarian state, the foundations of museum work in the country and the planned study of the Bulgarian cultural heritage were laid, is present as a main theme in the publications presented by Georgi Valchev for the competition. In the field of cultural history, the memoirs of Hadji Gospodin Slavov, published under Valchev's editorship, are impressive; with this a valuable source was introduced for the development of the Bulgarian society and culture in the National Revival period. Another impressive work of Valchev is his research on Alexander Exarch, presenting the ideological evolution of the Bulgarian intelligentsia during this historical period.

The studies of the problems related to the contemporary policies in the field of cultural heritage, of the attempts to transform cultural heritage into a resource for the development of cultural tourism in the country, of the changes and the current state of museum management and of the processes of selection, recognition and construction of cultural heritage, as well as the creation of a model for the presentation of the regions in Bulgaria (in co-authorship), are also a contribution. Valchev's research interests in our cultural heritage, its promotion and preservation which began with the study of the history of the tourist movement in Stara Zagora as a specific phenomenon of modernity and a direct consequence of the development of the cities and the urban way of life, are a sustainable vector in his long-term scientific research. In this current

thematic field, I would like to highlight his research on “Professional Development in the Field of Cultural Heritage through Formal Education Carried out at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (co-authored with Ani Istatkova-Ivanova), which identifies the fundamental segments of the educational system in the field of cultural heritage, determines the existing educational deficits, and outlines the possible directions for overcoming them. For me, as a graduate of the Faculty of History, it was particularly interesting to read Valchev’s comments on “The Short Funny History of the Bulgarian People” by Prof. Nikolay Genchev – an attempt at an ironic reading of Bulgarian history by the great Bulgarian scholar, who raises more questions than gives answers to some of the most controversial moments in this history.

In general, the research activity of Georgi Valchev presented in the publications, is a serious contribution in the field of researching the history of Bulgarian culture and cultural heritage, the presentation and popularization of the cultural heritage not only before the scientific community and students, but also among the broader public. The attached reference for **citations** is indicative of the scientific value of his research work – a total of 12 citations, of which one is in a publication referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases, 8 are in peer reviewed monographs and collective volumes, and 3 are in peer reviewed journals. Also indicative is his participation in nine scientific conferences and seminars in the country and abroad. Special mention should also be made of Valchev’s participation in two international scientific and educational projects funded by the ERASMUS+ programme (one of which is managed by him) and three national ones funded on a competitive basis by various institutions.

III. Teaching activity

Georgi Valchev began his teaching activity in 2002 as an assistant professor in the Department of History and Theory of Culture; in the period 2003 – 2011 he was the scientific secretary of the department, and from 2011 to 2019 he was a head of it. In the period 2011 – 2015, he was vice-dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and from 2015 until now he is also vice-rector of the university. The lecture courses he leads are part of the bachelor’s degree curriculum at the Department of History and Theory of Culture – “History of Cultural Institutions in Bulgaria”, “Tradition and Modernisation – Bulgarian Culture of the 18th – 19th Century”, “The Symbolic Capital of the Bulgarian National Revival (Historical Pantheon, Personal Models and Social Practices” and others, as well as the

course “Culture and Regional Identity” at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications, Communication Management degree. He is leading the Master’s program “Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage” with lecture courses on public policies in the field of cultural heritage, cultural diversity and cultural boundaries, cultural landscape, cultural stereotypes, and cultural spaces. Students and doctoral students invariably highly appreciate the quality of Georgi Valchev’s lecture courses and regularly refer to him when choosing an advisor for their dissertation study. He was an advisor of four doctoral students who have successfully defended their dissertations.

V. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks and recommendations, but I want to pose two questions to the applicant:

1. To what extent did the processes of reflection on the past, construction of public historical narrative and the political speculations on it after the Liberation of Bulgaria, studied in his monograph, influenced the academic historical studies during the researched period?
2. Does Valchev see parallels with the construction and public (including ideological) use of the academic historical narrative in recent decades, for example in the early 1980’s or in the years of democratic transition in Bulgaria?

VI. Conclusion

Georgi Alexandrov Valchev fulfils all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, both regarding the scientometric indicators and the procedure. His research and teaching work, his scientific results, his active commitment to the development and activities of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in his capacity as vice-rector, but also his continuous work with the students and doctoral students of Cultural Studies degree, give me every reason to convincingly recommend him for the academic position of *professor* in professional area 3.1. Social Sciences, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture. History of the Bulgarian Culture of the 15th – 19th

Century and Cultural Heritage (Public Policies, Management and Socialisation)), and I will vote with conviction for this.

I declare that I have no conflict of interest with the applicant and I did not detect plagiarism in the academic publications submitted for the competition.

August 5, 2023

Signature:

Assoc. Prof. Petko Hristov, Ph.D.