

REVIEW

By Prof. Ph.D. Raina Dimitrova Gavrilova, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History and Theory of Culture (retired from 01.07.2023), professor since 2016, scientific field 3.1. (Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences),

of the materials submitted in the competition for the academic position of professor, by scientific field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies (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 April 18, 2023, with candidate associate professor Ph.D. Georgi Alexandrov Valchev.

I. General description of the presented materials

The following materials have been submitted for the competition: curriculum vitae in European format; diplomas of completed education and acquired scientific degrees and titles; certificate of held academic positions; certificate of participation in projects; full list of publications and list of publications on the topic of the competition, prepared by the candidate; a list of contributions; a certificate of compliance with the minimum national requirements under Article 2b of Law on Development of the Academic staff; a list of noted citations; a certificate of the courses taught and supervision of doctoral students; a summary of the publications and the texts of eleven articles and studies, two monographs – one as the main work for the competition and one earlier monograph not submitted for acquirement of the academic position "associate professor".

II. Applicant data

Georgi Valchev graduated in history at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and defended his doctorate (1998) in the department of "History and Theory of Culture", Faculty of Philosophy, of the same university. Since 1992, he has been working as a specialist, chief expert and director of the "Education and Culture" Directorate in the Municipality of Stara Zagora and has gained considerable experience in the fields of cultural policy, cultural heritage, religions and cultural integration. Since 2002, he has been an assistant in the above mentioned department, and since 2010, a tenured associate professor. Since 2011, he has been the head of the Department of History and Theory of Culture and deputy dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, and from 2015 to the present - deputy rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

III. Assessment of the applicant's compliance with the requirements of the Law on Development of the Academic staff and the regulations of the Sofia University.

The table prepared by the applicant shows the following quantitative compliance criteria:

- group of indicators A: indicator 1 dissertation work for obtaining the scientific degree "doctor" - 50 points (minimum requirement 50 points)
- group of indicators B: monograph other than the doctorate and the habilitation for associate professor - 100 points (minimum requirement 100)
- group of indicators D: one published monograph, other than the one mentioned above and articles in refereed editions - 228.75 points (minimum requirement 200)
- indicator group D: citations – 110 points (minimum requirement 100)
- group of indicators E: supervision of doctoral students and projects - 200 points (minimum requirement 100)

The review of the presented materials confirms the information in the table. The candidate's research and academic activity corresponds to the minimum national requirements for the award of the academic position "Professor".

III. Research activity

1. Evaluation of the monographic work

The main monographic work submitted for the competition is entitled *History and its Public Uses. Political and cultural uses of the Bulgarian past from the Renaissance to the end of the First World War* and is under print in the "St. Kliment Ohridski". I must note right away that this is an ambitious and much needed project. The permanent intensity of public disputes surrounding historical events and personalities, and especially the attempts to appropriate the historical narrative by political entities, brazenly taking the designation of an important historical period as their name, impose a new, more critical attitude of professional historians. Change in this direction is limited by the enduring positivist tradition, useful but intellectually trivial, on the one hand, and by the conflicting interpretations of historians in the socialist and liberal-democratic orientations, on the other. Critical thinking certainly starts with the careful deconstruction of the "grand national narrative", and G. Valchev's monograph is a good attempt in this direction. The sheer volume of the material to be studied - from the very historical event through historical evidence, historical writing, popular history and art history and from the beginning of modernity to the present day, requires self-imposed selectiveness. I know the candidate had plans to take the analysis to the imposition of the communist regime in Bulgaria and its ideological rewriting of history, but that will be a task for the future. The present monograph begins with Paisii and reaches the end of the First World War – a logical terminus *post quem*, when the illusions and myths of the early historiography crashed into real politics. Valchev begins with the generally accepted beginning of the modern period, generally acknowledged as symbolic rather than factual: Paisii Hilendarski. In the first chapter, meaningfully titled "The past as a future", three early publicized versions of the national history are selected and analyzed: the Christian-romantic-patriotic one (Paisii), the rational-political one (Rakovski) and the emotional-figurative one (Nikolai Pavlovich). As the researcher himself notes, his goal (p.8) is «to describe precisely this state of existence of the past **beyond** [emphasis mine – R.G.] the

"official" academic historical account of it». The verb "describe" should not mislead us - a narrative approach could be no less interpretive. With all three authors, those important links - factual, symbolic, political, figurative - of the constructed chain, which most often remain unrecognized in the general public understanding, but which shaped historical thinking in the next two centuries, were brought out. The second chapter is entitled "The Renaissance as a Past" and focuses on the rearrangements ("reshuffling") in the symbolic fields, dictated by the new social and political reality. The choice of two figures, on which to build the thesis - Zahari Stoyanov and Ivan Vazov - is logical: probably the vast majority of Bulgarians nowadays will point to those two authors if asked where they learned about the history of Bulgaria during the Renaissance. What is interesting and valuable here is not so much the "who", but the "how" it was done, demonstrated through a detailed analysis of the approach of the two authors. The question "how to make the national historical narrative" through the written word is satisfactorily answered. The second part of the section presents the practices, places, objects and images of this making that have a much wider, deeper and lasting resonance. The disputes and debates that have arisen around them are also presented. This line of exploration continues in the Third Chapter, regardless of the fact that it is dedicated to the resurgence of the Medieval history. The dramas surrounding the Russian monuments in Bulgaria (including buildings) permanently (and to the present) mark the public debate. The rise of the Middle Ages as a nationally legitimizing motif is the subject of subsection 3: how new buildings and visual arts reworked the medieval motifs. The author retraces how history began to be used for non-scholarly purposes (the aesthetic pursuits of the Secession artists or the ambitions of reigning Prince Ferdinand).

The second monograph submitted for the competition is *One Hundred Years Tourist Association "Sarnena Gora". Historical developments* and was published in 2003, but was not included in the materials for the competition for Associate Professor. The research begins with what I would call tourism before tourism: the outings to the countryside during holidays. This genealogical approach is important, in my opinion, because the mass coveting and enjoyment of this exits from the territorial confinements of the everyday life was a prerequisite for the birth of tourism *sui generis*. In the course of the narrative, the history of the tourist association was reconstructed (not an easy task, as its archive was destroyed in the 1980s) in the context not only of the development of the city of Stara Zagora society, but the ideology and practice of tourism in Bulgaria. The history of the Association during the socialist period is a text-book example how the communist regime took over an independent civic entity, very often combined with the genuine enthusiasm of the participants.

2. Assessment of the contributions in the other texts

The candidate has submitted eleven studies and articles on the topic of the competition, published after or not submitted for acquiring the academic position of Associate Professor (2010). They can be broadly grouped into two areas: the creation of the national historical narrative and cultural policies, especially in the field of cultural heritage. The two topics clearly illustrate Georgi Valchev's scholarly interests: he has been interested in the "making" and uses of history since his student years and the beginning of his academic career. As noted above, the third decade of the 21st century somewhat unexpectedly brought this theme at the center of public debates, and the historical pantheon became not only a subject of heritage, but a political field. In this sense, Valchev's texts are undoubtedly quite opportune; they

deepen our understanding how the historical consciousness of Bulgarian society and contemporary political rhetoric took shape.

In the first group are the texts investigating the construction of the historical narrative in Bulgarian culture. The beginning of this line of research was already established with Valchev's MA thesis and especially with his habilitation thesis *"Zachary Stoyanov and the symbolic capital of the Bulgarian Renaissance"* (2010); the new texts evidence the development of the author's interpretations. The main objectives and qualities of his work are already visible in the article *"Zachary - the indomitable"* published in 2006. A curious but clear parallel is the article *"The Neglected Lessons of a Historical Mockingbird"* (2012), which examines the little-known *"Funny Short History of Bulgaria"* by Nikolay Genchev - an interesting attempt to overcome the Marxist-Leninist canon of Bulgarian historiography. N. Genchev's book truly "lived" before its publication in 1990, and more precisely during the years of its apocryphal circulation. In his article, G. Valchev makes an important observation about the motives of Genchev, a representative of the generation of historians who lived for a long time with the hypocrisy of the totalitarian public life and who rep[resented] not particularly effective and visible intellectual dissidence: Genchev claims that we need a new history, who could overcome the "the youth [i.e. the methodological retardation – R.G.] of the Bulgarian historical school" and the "insufficient spiritual maturity of the Bulgarian culture in general" (p.287). Valchev sees the meaning of the publication of an already anachronistic text as a warning, and the second part of his article is dedicated to the growing abuse of history as a legitimizing and compensatory mechanism. The article *"The personality and work of Vasil Levski in the context of the canonization of the new saints"* (2014) is an important step in revealing the mechanisms for turning historical events and personalities into myths: their positioning in the perspective of the Christian martyrology. Valchev analyzes the use of certain unverified and unproven character traits and situations, subsequently petrified into unshakable convictions. "The Renaissance Fantasies - Genealogies" (2019, Bulgarian title *"Renaissance Fantasies - genealogies"*) examines another mechanism of the invention of history - in this case, individual histories. Valchev dwells on the motives of people who deliberately changed their own identity by adopting an alias: Alexander Ekzarch, Zahari Knyazheski, Stanislav Dospevski and Georgi Benkovski. He argues persuasively that their altruistic motives take precedence over the presumed selfish ones, and that even when offering them access to higher social circles and benefits, the move ultimately "worked" for the national cause. Of special interest is the study *"Bulgaria: Freethought and Atheism in the Shadow of Ethnophyletism"* (2020, with Dimitar Denkov and Valentina Gueorgieva), in which Georgi Valchev is the author of the first of the three parts. I find the interpretation of the events of the mid-19th century from the perspective of the evolution of phyletism and atheism/liberalism to be helpful, especially the careful examination of the paradoxes of public discourse.

Several texts are devoted to cultural policies and the management of cultural heritage. The personal experience in the administration of culture at the regional level and the long-term leadership of the master's program *"Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage"* have endowed G. Valchev's academic pursuits with field experience and knowledge of real-life processes, which has contributed to the high scholarly value of the texts. The article *"Sanitation" of heritage or who and what makes us heirs"* (2016) is a synthesized overview of the processes involved in the management of cultural heritage

in a long and wide context. With well-chosen examples (and illustrations) the vicissitudes of cultural policy (and lack thereof) over a long period of time are presented and explained. A continuation of the analysis is the article "*Heritage "Renovation" or Who and What Makes us Heirs*" (2018), which further develops and presents for an English-speaking audience the specifics of the processes in Bulgaria. The study "*Professional development in the field of cultural heritage through formal education, carried out at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"*" (2020, with Ani Istatkova-Ivanova) is the result of both the accumulated observations in teaching students in the above-mentioned master's program and the administrative experience at the level of Sofia University. It is based on a survey of "7 undergraduate and 21 graduate programs in which cultural heritage is a research and teaching field" (p. 129). The collected data and facts are an important basis for any (possible) university strategy, but the review of the content of these programs and, above all, the identified deficits in teaching and, respectively, the demands of the practice, are especially valuable. The article "*The role of information technology and the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic to redefine the concept of museum exposition*" (2021, co-authored with Sofia Vasileva) deals with one of the areas of cultural heritage – the museums - and is a reaction both to the rapid change of available technologies and the 2000-2021 pandemic emergency, making the publication relevant and timely. The authors summarize their work within the framework of a large scientific project on the "smart city", financed by the National Fund for Scientific Research, and propose a model for the application of new technologies against the background of existing good practices in the country. This material builds on a previous publication by G. Valchev ("*The Bulgarian Museum - between hermitage and modern management*" (published in 2008, but not included in the habilitation materials), in which he summarizes his personal experience with museum policies and practices and which is particularly important in its focus on the 'human element' in museology: the problems of and around the museum workers. Finally, the article "*A Model for the Representation of Regions in Bulgaria*" (2011; with Ivan Kabakov, Neli Stoeva and Margarita Radeva) summarizes the experience and observations of a team with experience in both research and participation in national debates around culture and cultural inheritance.

In addition, I must note the considerable work of editing collections (5) and the participation in editorial boards (4): an important activity that requires considerable effort and time.

3. Quotations by other authors

Georgi Valchev has presented a list of 12 noticed citations, one of which is in a referenced and indexed edition.

4. Evaluation of the results of participation in research projects

Mr. Valchev has participated in six large-scale projects, two of which are international. I have personal impressions from his participation in a project of which I was the leader, and I can confidently give an excellent assessment (the topic and title of the project itself were suggested by Dr Valchev).

IV. Learning and teaching activity

Over the years, Prof. Valchev has developed many different courses in the fields, in which he pursues his research. In the appendix are the forms for the courses he currently leads or has led in recent years (11 forms, which include an annotation, proposed topics and literature), which give a good idea of his teaching activity. He was one of the founders and is the head of the Masters program "Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage".

V. Administrative and public activity

Participation in academic and social life has always been an important part of Georgi Valchev's personal philosophy, in Sofia University and beyond. He is regularly participates in conferences, meetings, and celebrations around the country, which is, no doubt, an important factor in his research (attached is a list of 18 conference paper titles, 13 of which after his habilitation and in parallel with his growing administrative burden).

VI. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any)

I have known George Valchev since the time of his doctoral studies; at the beginning of his academic career, he led the seminars of one of my courses; we worked in the same department for many years; we have participated together in research projects. I am writing this to acknowledge that I have witnessed his development as a researcher, teacher and administrator and have been impressed by both his effectiveness, intellectual growth and his ability to communicate with students, engage them in common projects, and work with colleagues.

VII. Recommendations and question

My question is more of a recommendation: what should be done to get his important observations to a wider audience?

VIII. Conclusion

The candidate Georgi Alexandrov Valchev: 1. has submitted a monographic work (forthcoming), which does not overlap with the ones submitted for the acquisition of the degree "doctor" and the academic position "Associate Professor"; 2. he has presented a number of original scholarly research publications and evidence of academic activities, positively evaluated above; 3. he meets the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the regulations for the development of the academic staff of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"; 4. there is no evidence of plagiarism in his texts. All this gives me the reason to give a positive assessment of the academic activity of Georgi Valchev with full confidence and to propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and to the Academic Council of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" to elect him as a full professor.