

## Opinion

on the application by Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev, PhD  
for the academic position of professor, higher education area 3.1. Sociology,  
Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture. History of  
Bulgarian Culture between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Cultural Heritage  
(public policies, management and socialisation)), in a selection procedure whose  
notice was published in the *State Gazette* No 35 of 18.4.2023  
by Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil., Sv. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia,  
Theory of Literature Department

Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev, PhD, is the only applicant in the selection procedure for the position of professor, higher education area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture. History of Bulgarian Culture between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Cultural Heritage (public policies, management and socialisation)), the relevant notice being published in the *State Gazette* No 35 of 18.4.2023. There are no deficiencies in any of the documents presented by the applicant. He meets the minimum national requirements for the position of professor and, in fact, exceeds them.

Assoc. Prof. Valchev has submitted 2 monographs and 11 articles as part of the package for the purposes of the selection procedure. The latter's topics are varied and the texts have been published in either Bulgarian or English in renowned publications, some with an impact factor. I have highlighted the variety of topics tackled by the texts because that attests to the author's wide-ranging interests but also to the vast culturological scope of his work, which spans museum work and regional policies, the uses of history and historical figures and the issue of cultural

heritage and where it intersects with educational and cultural policies and with the present, including with the matter of the pandemic. The body of work examined places focus squarely on the intermingling of the past and the present and the way in which the latter can be accounted for by means of an analytical key resting on knowledge and historical reconstruction. And, of course, the articles generally complete and enrich what we have come to call the history of Bulgarian culture.

Yet, if there is an issue that prevails in all of Assoc. Prof. Valchev's texts, different though their thematic foci may be, that issue concerns the under-discussed (as the author himself concedes) range of problems having to do with the symbolic uses of history in the development of Bulgarian culture, where these tend to cluster. The issue is under-discussed because it necessitates comprehensive familiarity [on the part of a researcher], familiarity that Georgi Valchev is clearly possessed of. This includes awareness of historicism and cultural studies, but also entails working with fiction and texts discussing art, analysing the visual art of the relevant period, the media, documents and records. In other words, a very broad interdisciplinary approach needs to be applied, and this is where the greatest strength of the work under consideration – and the overall approach of the author – lies.

As required under the selection procedure, Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev has submitted a monograph. In the remainder of this opinion, I will focus on that. The text is titled *HISTORY AND ITS PUBLIC USES. CULTURAL AND POLITICAL USES OF BULGARIAN HISTORY FROM THE BULGARIAN REVIVAL UNTIL THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR*.

Before I endeavour to offer a brief outline of the main virtues of the text, I would like to stress how timely it is. This book has emerged in a context in which a particular need for such works of enlightenment (in the best possible sense of the word) is felt.

In a context rife with attempts to stir up nationalisms of various sorts, to rewrite history, to question the matter of identity and to incite a number of conflicts, a work like the one at hand can help to correct course in a number of ways. It can serve to demonstrate the genesis of these processes in Bulgarian society and lay bare the mythologisations, appropriations and uses of the past for political purposes and in response to public attitudes. Last but not least, it can account for certain cults shared by Bulgarians, for the importance of certain topoi of collective memory and for the way in which certain explanations rooted in the psychology of the nation came to be and the extent to which these are authentic. Lastly, the text can help with the range of flexible identities that make it possible to construct a national identity.

Secondly, the monograph is particularly important because it attempts to peer into more marginal topics, what one might term 'small stories' after Foucault. It looks into how problems are identified, into the folds, gaps, analogical processes if you will. It is not interested in generally applicable grand narratives. Instead, it lays emphasis on those aspects of the past that lie beyond the official academic narrative of history. Hence, in building its stories, the monograph rests on observations relating to literature and visual art. When it deals with texts pertaining to history, it reads these in the vein of New Historicism, assuming that documents and accounts of events are similar to works of fiction and that the language in which a fact is couched is a source of no less importance than the fact itself. Put differently, this is a work that juxtaposes a variety of interpretations while being conscious of the fact that, to understand the past, it is not less important to know how this is narrated and what explanatory potential we ascribe to it.

This brings me to the third very significant contribution of Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev's work: it is modern because it is interdisciplinary, because it contemplates

history through language as it layers interpretations, because it lays emphasis on the uses of the past and its construction by means of all types of texts, not just those pertaining directly to history.

Moreover, the time period under scrutiny is also of great importance. This is because, as stated by the author, that is when ‘the two main narratives about Bulgarians’ past came to emerge – the narrative about their glorious medieval statesmanship and the narrative about the heroic times of the Bulgarian Revival – narratives that prevail in the processes underlying the formation of Bulgarian national identity to this day’.

Being a literary scholar, I should add a further contribution, namely the fact authors of seminal importance to literary history such as Paisiy of Hilendar, Georgi Rakovski, Ivan Vazov and Zahari Stoyanov are discussed in the context of their respective lives as authors of historical narratives and well-planned projects about the past. In this sense, it is not by accident that neither literature, nor history can be contemplated without taking stock of the general political processes at play during the relevant periods or of the cultural context in which these are set, if we use the achievements of the monograph in this last respect as a starting point.

Finally, the work is of great value also because it dwells on the complex relations with Russia, secondary hero-worship, the plastering of memory as regards specific issues meant to serve the relevant times, to offset imperial attitudes, etc. These are all insights that the modern day desperately needs.

All the proposed works with which Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev participated in the selection procedure are original and no plagiarism was found.

Being familiar with the unconventional ideas of Assoc. Prof. Georgi Valchev, the serious and comprehensive way in which he advocates and upholds them, his

extraordinary erudition, the authority of his texts and his entire body of work as a beloved and respected university lecturer, I stand convinced that he should be awarded the academic title of professor in higher education area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture. History of Bulgarian Culture between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Cultural Heritage (public policies, management and socialisation)).

03.08.2023

Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil.