

# REVIEW

By **Prof. Mincho Georgiev, Dr. Habil.**

IEFEM - BAN

of the scientific works presented in the competition for the academic position "Associated Professor", area of higher education 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural sciences (Bulgarian ethnology. Traditional medicine), for the needs of the Faculty of History of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" announced in the "State Gazette" №. 48/ 28. 06. 2022

For the announced competition, documents were submitted only by Assist. Prof. PhD Violeta Kotseva-Popova.

Violeta Kotseva graduated hers Master degree in 1999 in History with specialisation in Ethnology at the Faculty of History at the University "St.Kl.Ohridski". Since 2000 she has been enrolled as a full-time PHD Student at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore with Ethnographic Museum at the BAS. In the period 2002-2003, she was a scholarship holder of the "Alfred Toepfer" Foundation with a Herder scholarship for a one-year study at the University of Vienna. In 2010 she defended hers PhD Thesis on the topic "Hygiene of Bulgarians. Ethnological Aspects". Since 2010 she has been an assistant at the Faculty of History at Sofia University, Department of Ethnology and since 2011, an assistant professor.

For 20 years V. Kotseva has been leading seminars, lectures and specialized courses in Ethnology and Cultural anthropology, including Ethnology of the Balkans, Medical Anthropology, Ethnological Methods and Approaches, etc. During this period, he established himself as a competent and authoritative university lecturer. She is a member of the Publishing Council of the Faculty of History, since 2020 she became a coordinator for the Erasmus program of the same Faculty, and since the same year she has also become a director of the

"Rodopi" Center at SU. Violeta Kotseva is a member of the National Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage at UNESCO, as well as the National Commission "Living Human Treasures". She is a compiler of collections, a member of editorial boards, a participant in prestigious national and international scientific conferences and in 19 scientific projects. V. Kotseva is a co-author of various text- and scholar books. Her development as a scientist is also indicated by her serious research work, which is expressed in 2 monographs, 1 study and 34 articles, textbooks etc.

In order to participate at the competition for the academic position "associate professor", the candidate presents a scientific production that not only covers, but also exceeds the points provided by the minimum national requirements according the current Act on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

V. Kotseva is the author of over 40 scientific publications, and for her participation in the competition she provided a sample of 21 titles (2 monographs, 1 study and 18 articles) in authoritative magazines and thematic collections. The wide range of issues of Ethnography, Cultural and Medical anthropology in her publications attests to the breadth of her interests as an established university lecturer. The thematic circle of classical ethnography is represented by traditional hygiene, Ethnology in school programs and in the postgraduate qualification of teachers, the gift system, confessional interactions in settlements with a mixed population, ethno-cultural heritage and identity.

Traditional medicine in the subject field of Medical and Cultural anthropology is represented in the largest array of publications, giving her a leading place among researchers in this scientific field. The subject of her scientific interests are all elements of the medical-anthropological problem: her field research made a decisive contribution to the documentation of traditional medical practices in Bulgaria at the end of the 20th century; the interaction between academic and traditional medicine is shown as a historically necessary

phenomenon, she pioneered the introduction of medical anthropology in university ethnology programs and authored a large-scale multi-year study on traditional medicine in the country based on a large array of her own field research. The latter was attached as a decisive testimony for the habilitation of Violeta Kotseva, as a candidate for the academic position "associate professor", and therefore I will focus my attention on it in particular.

V. Kotseva chooses as main goal of her research the mechanism of coexistence of traditional and scientific medicine, which she hypothetically posits as competitive commensuration and synchronous coexistence between them. Within the framework of the objective thus set, she seeks an answer to the question whether individual and personal characteristics predetermine social processes. With this question, she departs from the conventional view of the cognitively dominated way of life of the last 2,500 years of the long-time of metaphysical thought. By reducing the personality characteristic to a mystical gift from above, she denies itself access to another type of reason in whose irrational field traditional medicine takes place. I should immediately point out that this is not a criticism of her work, but a routine prerequisite for struggles in the field of the history of mentality. And what decisively distinguishes the traditional healer from the schooled healer is the former's refusal to define himself as the bearer of knowing reason and its social paradigm as a system of exchange value for creative meaning-building art and the social system of the gift. By the way, the great Bulgarian doctor (and Sofia Universities rector) Prof. Al. Stanishev divides his patients into poor and rich and advises his young colleagues to determine the exact amount as a fee from the rich and "as much as they like" from the poor.

A number of social preconditions favored the growing interest in traditional medicine at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, and Kotseva analyzes their contribution to this: the transition from a state-planned to a market economy, growing social inequalities, difficult access to medical care, increased levels of psycho-somatic dependence and religiosity, etc.

Through the study of specific healing practices among the population from different ethnographic groups, the author achieves a general picture of traditional medical treatment. Many years of field visits, close contacts, informal communication and involved observation contribute to the completeness and credibility of the picture with the participation of all kinds of traditional medicine specialists in witchcraft, divination, herbal medicine, bio-energy therapy, bullet casting and others with emphasis on the autobiographical method, revealing their exclusivity and selectivity in their residential environment. Her special interest is in the dynamics of the image of the traditional medical healer in the postmodern reality. Life narratives of healers repeat their stereotypical image for at least the last 100 years (heredity, experienced severe life drama or clinical death, consecration in a dream or vision by a saint or previous healer, chosenness). The new features in this portrait relate to the pursuit of self-education, competitive treatment with medical graduates, guarantees against harm, advertised religiosity, mass pilgrimages to holy places and healing springs.

Why is the authority of traditional healers reviving? The author presents a wide range of opinions, among which the leading ones are two: highly specialized modern medicine is inaccessible to the majority of the population, and the postmodern person needs a personalized treatment, not as one of many the same as him. For the traditional healer this is no difficulty, because in archaic and traditional society each person is a unique constructive whole, foreign to the system of being as the tyranny of the same.

The huge empirical material available to the candidate, at the cost of many years of effort, hides exciting opportunities for historical diachronic reading, not only because Ethnology is a historical science, but because traditional medicine is archaic in origin and as such is a condition for the possibility of scientific medicine. In this sense, the prospect of new pursuits is ahead of her.

It is important to keep in mind that traditional medicine is personally engaged with its patient, not because it understands him as a value, but as a unique complete bodily unity, free from the categorical totalizations of being, God, state, etc. This body is whole and needs from healing and therefore in Bulgarian and other Indo-European languages "healing" means "making something whole" and also "healing".

In the conclusion of her work, the author points out the following more important features of Bulgarian folk medicine at the beginning of the 21st century:

1. The traditional healer is often the only interlocutor who empathizes with the drama of suffering of contemporaries excluded from the language of science.
2. This healer relies on his creative-instrumental preverbal experience.
3. The focus of this healer's attention is the general adaptation syndrome, which includes all folk diseases.
4. It offers its access to health care free from the imperatives of social necessity
5. The healer and his patient share a common preconceptual world project.
6. Traditional medical care is carried out outside the system of exchange value in that of archaic gender exchange.

### **Conclusion:**

Having in mind the fruitful many-year fieldwork to create archival wealth for Historical Ethnology and Medical anthropology in the Republic of Bulgaria,

the pedagogical experience in implementing a number of academic programs and courses and in the scientific guidance of graduates, as well as the authorship of the large-scale habilitation work on traditional medicine, I recommend to the Honorable Jury to award Violeta Kotseva the academic degree "Associated Professor".

27. 09. 2022

Sofia

Reviewer: .....  
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