

REVIEW

by Prof. Doctor of Philological Science Nikolay Georgiev Papuchiev,
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Member of a jury as per the competition, announced by Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, in S.G., issue 48/28.06.2022 for the **academic position *Professor*** in professional discipline **3. 1. Sociology, anthropology, cultural sciences** (Local traditions and cultures) with a single applicant: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova**, full-time lecturer at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

General evaluation of the candidate's profile:

According to the the autobiographical reference, enclosed to the documents, the professional realization of Mira Nikolaeva Markova is related to Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski as of year 2003, when she starts her employment at the University as full-time assistant. As of year 2011, she is full-time Associate Professor at the same University. During that period, she was conducting seminars in various university disciplines, related to ethnological knowledge, as well as a number of lecturing courses (since year 2005) in Bachelor Degree educational programs at Faculty of History and in Master Degree educational programs, taught at other faculties of Sofia University. The programs, developed by the candidate, are as per her own creation and they are innovative, and the teaching process is supported by a number of publications in the field of the subject areas, included in the courses. Among the innovative achievements of the candidate is the joint inter-university Master Degree Program “New and Contemporary Bulgarian History: problems, models, methodology“ (started in academic year 2022/23), a joint project with Veliko Tarnovo University “St. St. Cyril and Methodius“. As a scientific supervisor, 14 Master Degree theses were successfully presented and defended, and her qualities, as a mentor, with unique researching profile, are visible in her

work with three successfully defended PhD student, two with provided right for defense and four in a process of preparation of their PhD researches. Such a tendency is a clear statement for the formation of a research school with own and unique presence in science and contribution in the examination of urban spaces and local dimensions of culture by Assoc. Prof. Markova.

The scientific engagement in the field of ethnology of Assoc. Prof. Mira Markova is related to the acquisition of a Master Degree in history, with specialization in Ethnology. After the successful defense of the research thesis “The village in Central Balkan Mountains (end of XIX–XX century)” she was awarded with a scientific and educational degree of “Doctor”.

The research and scientific profile of the candidate in the competition is continuously supplemented and developed during the years of her professional development. As of year 2004 up to now, Assoc. Prof. Mira Markova has completed specializations at universities and museums in Warsaw, Budapest, St. Petersburg, Graz. She presented results of her researches to more than 40 international scientific conferences in Bulgaria and abroad, where some of the presented materials were in English and Russian language. She is a participant and a leader of 16 scientific and research projects at Scientific and research sector of Sofia University and Scientific Researches Fund at Ministry of Education and Science, and together with her scientific contribution, the massive work with students providing for the future development of science should also be pointed out. Among the extracurricular activities of the candidate, he participation in the international exchange program *Erasmus+*, and her membership in the Bulgarian Historical Society (as of year 2008), her participation in the editorial teams of 3 Bulgarian and 2 foreign periodicals with ethnological and cultural profile, and her work as an expert at the Ministry of Education of Republic of Bulgaria is also worth mentioning.

Scientific contributions

The scientific and research biography of the candidate shows serious level of activity in researches in the field of ethnology and more particularly, in the field of Bulgarian traditional and contemporary culture. The interest in this area, together with the above presented project activities and participation in scientific forums, is supported by more than 70 scientific studies and articles, the bibliographic reference of which is enclosed to the application and is verified at the publicly accessible data base web page of scientific activities of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski and NCID.

Assoc. Prof. Maria Markova participated in the competition for academic position of *Associate Professor* with one monograph, 5 studies, one chapter of joint study and 19 articles, published in authoritative scientific magazines. All enclosed publications are from the period after 2011, when the candidate took the academic position of “Associate Professor”. Her contributions to the scientific and research activities are registered in nine directions, covering wide spectrum of subjects and problems in the field of ethnology. Her permanent interest in the place of the local dimensions of tradition and cultural transformations in social realities provided a comprehensive result in the book “Local cultures and traditions. Cultural transformation of ritual systems in XXI century”, Sofia: University publishing house St. Kliment Ohridski , 2022 (ISBN 978-954-07-5518-2). The total volume of the book is 194 pages. The research is original and unique, the used and cited sources are correctly stated in the presentation, as per the standards of Republic of Bulgaria for referencing to author's works.

The research is structured in three main chapters, where the leading approach, applied to the analysis, can be determined as interdisciplinary, based on wide spectrum of observations over various geographic topos and cultural intersections. The theoretical framework of the work is constructed as a result of excellent knowledge, by the author, of the leading scientific and research tendencies in modern ethnology and the deep inside over the historical processes and trends,

related to the formation of local traditions contribute to the scientific verification of the conclusions made. The above is most prominently seen in the first chapter of the monograph, which clarifies, in the light of the comprehensive research project, the concepts of locality and of those socio-historical processes, which have formed the vision for the tradition within the layers of culture. It is important to state, in that context, that the work presents the self-reflection, which is really important for the development of science, which is presented in the search and critical reading of specific ideological projections within the scientific research. That critical view, which is extremely fruitful in the construction of new research theses and their verification through the comparison with already established theoretical statements, does not result in self-serving criticism and denial. On the contrary, it should be pointed out that the work is distinguished by significant good faith in relation to the traditions of science itself. A fact, which is noticeable in the presentation and analysis of the observations and researches of Ivan Hoich, Stepan Radich and Evdokia Peteva-Filova (demonstrated in other researches, prepared by the candidate, like “View to the Bulgarians through the prism of a textbook from the beginning of XX century - “Pictures of common geography” by Ivan Hoich” and the “Croatian geographer Ivan Hoich and his idea of Bulgarians in the end of XIX and beginning of XX century”), which are presented in the first chapter. And while, in this part of the presentation, the analysis is based on researches of archive and literature sources, gathering the best achievements in the field of imagology and historiographical researches, chapter two and three of the work are based mainly on observations, revealing the capabilities and interests of Assoc. Prof. Markova towards field studies. It should be pointed out that as professionally engaged ethnologist with wide level of preparation for the performance of historical researches in field of culture, the researcher presents results which are going far beyond the capabilities of “realistic ethnography”. The field is significant and determining for the conclusions made, but the auto-reflection towards already present scientific achievement once again significantly support

the verification and applicability of these results. The usage of that approach makes the work important not only for process of teaching and presentation to students with unknown or barely known cultural artifacts, but for established researchers as well providing a field for wide scientific and methodological discussion.

In the chapter “Cultural transformation of the rituals system in the beginning of XXI century”, the focus is on the research of the comprehensive cultural complex, related to the Nestinarstvo. The research and presentation of the structure of the ritual complex, on one hand, and the place of the custom as complementary structure in various cultural and historical realities, on the other, finds its important place among the historical paradigms. And here a problem, contributing to the researches of Assoc. Prof. Markova is outlined, which is registered in other publications made by her - the problem for functioning of relatively independent customs and ritual complexes within the light of various transformation and symbolic innovations. The comparative reading, applied in „Nestinarstvo (Anastenaria) Rite in Bulgaria and Greece: A Vivid example of Cultural Ethnological Transformation at the Beginning of the 21st century“, “The state of people’s culture in Central and East Strandzha in the beginning of 21st century”, “Nestinarstvo (Fire-dancing) or the Death of a Rite“ etc., reveal important interferences of cultural processes, characteristic for local and regionally separated settlement communities in Bulgaria and Greece. And she is doing it by the avoidance of the possible temptations for placement of accents, in the spirit of massively promoted national exoticism in the research of the symbolic character of the culture.

In this chapter of the book, one more problem, significant to modern researches, is presented with a significant level of criticism, and namely, the possible utilizations of the constructed tradition. Here, together with the problematisation of the role of ritual systems and their resilience in time as community constructive and

normatively regulated component in culture, the problem of innovative tendencies, forming the character of modern popular culture is also reflected upon. It should be pointed out that this focus is extremely interesting in the work, because it provides new reading of existing realities and reveals the layering and networking of today's sociality. Subjects, covered by Assoc. Prof. Markova in some other of her publications like "Organizational and content aspect of inter-cultural educational programs for Ethnographic and Historical museum through the viewpoint of teachers" and "Education and museum - modern interaction and perspectives".

The title of the third chapter of the monograph is "Kalvaria Patslavska - locality and religiosity in dynamics of modern time". In this part, the rituals are problematized in a specific point of view, namely, the view of religion in its institutional parameters. Here, once again, the analysis is based on numerous field-studies of the author, realized in Poland, where the researcher has worked within the framework of various scientific and research projects. Observations were performed on the local religiosity of the cult to the Mother of God – an exceptional phenomenon in the Polish traditional culture. In relation to the above, both the peculiarities of modern pilgrimage practices and the topos of religiousness, its manifestation and its utilitarian toolkit, practiced by the believers are reflected upon. The research on the place and role of the memory of the "Polish" Pope John Paul II, building on the ideas and believes in sacredness of the holy place as well as on the form of "modern hermitage", directly related to the pilgrimage of believers provide significant contributions to the work. The relation *local – universal*, viewed through the image of the Holy Father as well as the presence and role of John Paul II contributing to the change of the political doctrine in Central and Eastern Europe is also innovative and original element in the reflections, because it adds additional dimensions and layers over the idea of holiness in modern man. The obser-

vations over the specific individual experience of religion, in the context of collective pilgrimage, where the collective prayer plays the role of a link are important for the research as well. “Collective prayer is characteristic for pilgrimage procession in the world of Catholicism. In such a manner, the feeling of community is formed, and the revelation of the Lord is provided upon such a community. A feeling of old Christian communities, with joint service is established. During such type of communication, the idea of brotherhood in spirit is also present” (page 141). The “modernization” of the religious pilgrimage practices as well as the gender differentiation in the narration of the experience is also analyzed in depth.

With similar focus, but this time, from the point of view of Orthodox Christianity, the idea of locality in the light of the religious institutional and folklore rituals is presented in the articles “Urban locality and the cult to St. Mina” and “Religious and local culture”.

Among the important areas of research interests of Assoc. Prof. Mira Markova is urban modernization and the culture of the modern and contemporary Bulgarian city. The study of various sources – material from newspapers, memories, photographs, post cards and archive documents, show the mechanisms through which the modernization of Bulgaria was realized in the period up to Second World War, as well as the leading ideological concepts of the ideas for progress and civility. The above wide subject field is presented in 7 of the articles and studies, enclosed to the application for the competition.

Evaluation of the procedural documents presented:

The candidate has presented all documents, required for the completion, as per the Development of Academic Personnel in Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Rules for its implementation and the Rules of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. The biographic and bibliographic reference are presented in a correct manner and support the occupation of the academic position *Professor* by Assoc. Prof. Dr.

Mira Nikolaeva Markova. The National minimum scientific measurement points, in the field *3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences* are achieved. Even more, the check showed, that the candidate has accumulated **765** points out of the required 550. The citations and scientific contributions are fully presented (total 215 points), where the check of the author provides information for 37 citations in the period between year 2013 to the date of the competition. The meeting of the additional requirements for the position are presented in details in the relevant references. The required diplomas, documents for required time of service, certificates for participation in scientific circles and forums are enclosed. The review of the documentation provides the grounds to make an reasoned statement that the procedure of the competition has been realized according to the requirements and time-frames, provided for in the normative documentation and the candidate meets all required criteria for participation in the competition.

Conclusion:

Taking in consideration the above presented merits and contributions of the scientific researches, lecturing and administrative engagement and expert activities of Assoc. Prof. Mira Nikolaeva Markova, I do firmly support her application and I do recommend to the members of the Scientific jury also to provide their positive vote for her to take the academic position of *Professor* in professional field **3. 1. *Sociology, anthropology, cultural sciences* (Local traditions and cultures)**.

15.09.2022

Sofia

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