**SHORT REVIEW**

by Prof. Dr. Sc. Panayot Karagyozov,

Department of Slavic Literatures at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”,

on a competition for the academic position

Professor of Ethnology (Local Traditions and Cultures)

at Department of Ethnology at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”,

 with the only candidate

**Associate Professor Mira Nikolaeva Markova** **PhD**

**Formal requirements for taking up the academic position of Professor**

     The only candidate to hold the academic position of Professor of Ethnology, Assoc. Professor Mira Markova PhD, graduated from the Faculty of History of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski” in 1995 with the educational degree Master of History with specialization of Ethnology. In 2001 she defended the dissertation „The village in the Middle Balkan Mountains/ Sredna Stara Planina (late 19th–20th Century)” and acquired the educational and scientific degree Doctor. Since 2003, she has been an Assistant Professor at the Department of Ethnology of the Faculty of History of Sofia University, and in 2011 she was elected Associate Professor.

     Since her appointment, she has led seminary classes and a number of lecture courses in undergraduate and master's programs of the Faculty of History. During the period 2004-2017, Dr. Mira Markova specialized in several cultural institutes in Austria, Hungary, Russia and Poland and won competitions for the development of numerous research projects.

Between 2000 and 2022 Mira Markova published two monographs and 68 studies, articles and reviews, of which about 50 were published after her election to the academic position of Associate Professor in 2011.

Assoc. Prof. Mira Markova PhD was faculty coordinator of the Erasmus Program; from 2016 to 2019 she is an Ass. Dean and from 2019 – Dean of the Faculty of History. The latter circumstance is important because, from my personal experience, I know that the Dean's office takes a lot of the energy from the time intended to research and publications. During her seven years of administrative work, however, Mira Markova surprisingly has not reduced her scientific dynamics, for which I congratulate her.

The above data confirm that Professor PhD Mira Markova meets the formal requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Faculty in the Republic of Bulgaria (Section IV, Art. 29, 1) and the Rules of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski” for the academic position professor.

**Research**

For participation in the competition for the academic position Professor Dr. Mira Markova has presented the monograph „Local Cultures and Traditions. Cultural transformation of ritual systems in the 21st century”. Sofia, 2022, 194 ISBN 978-954-07-5518- 2; five studies and 17 articles published in peer-reviewed and referenced scientific journals and collections in Bulgarian and English.

The majority of Mira Markova's research and publicist activity is focused on the spiritual and material culture of the small Bulgarian settlements and folklore traditions and rituals as the intersectional exact of the two directions is the interest in the specifics of the local culture.

The first research strand is related to her dissertation work „The village in Sredna Stara Planina (late 19th –20th Century) “, which in recent years has been expanded with the studios „The Small Bulgarian Town: Characteristic, Specifics, Development (following the example of the town of Sredna Stara Planina). „Strelcha)“, 2019; „The life story and the dynamics of Balkan reality (in the life of the population along the Bulgarian-Serbian border)“, 2014.

This interest has evolved into research into the spaces of the big city, capital city, and industrial culture: „Local identity in the Big City (Ethnological Research),“ 2009; „The urban locality and the cult of St. Nicholas“ Mina“, 2012; „Modernization of the Bulgarian capital city until World War II through the prism of a Sofia quarter“, 2014; „Urban modernization and microhistory (as example of Sofia until the 1940s)“, 2016; „Factories and Personalities (Sofia Industry from The Liberation to the 1940s)“, 2017.

The second enduring thematic interest of  M. Markova – traditions and rituals – is publicly recreated in the studio and articles: „Nestinarstvo (Fire-dancing) or the Death of a Rite“, 2018; „The Fire-dancing at the beginning of the 21st century: some parallels in the development of the ordinance in Bulgaria and Greece“, 2019; „Transformations of folklore and religious culture in Strandzha through the prism of the custom of *Enyova bulya* and the cult of St. Modest,“ 2020; „*Nestinarstvo* (Anastenaria) Rite in Bulgaria and Greece: A Vivid example of Cultural Ethnological Transformation at the Beginning of the 21st Century“, 2021.

Common denominators of the most studies of Mira Markova are: the search for the connection between the original ritual and modernity; the transformation of traditional folk culture into a modern folklore worldview; specificity of local culture and its place in the globalising society. These thematic scientific studies of Mira Markova culminates in the monograph „Local Cultures and Traditions. Cultural transformation of ritual systems in the 21st Century“. In so far as this monograph of Mira Markova includes significant Slavic material, as a Slavist-comparatist, I will focus my reviewer's attention on it.

The monograph contains three parts examining the cultural specificity of two Balkan and one Polish regions. The first part of the work analyzes the little-known books of two Croats for our country of transition between the 19th and 20th centuries. „Paintings from the General Geography“ by Ivan Hoich and „Revived Bulgaria“ by Stepan Radic are interesting in that from the time of classical Ilirism, during which the Croats assigned Bulgarians to the general Illyrian/South Slavonic past and future, these are the first (and perhaps the only) documented Croatian studies for Bulgaria, which are undoubtedly dictated by the fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century Bulgaria was a sovereign state, while Croatia was still within Austro-Hungary. M. Markova acknowledges the favorable attitude of the two authors towards Bulgaria, their ethnographic and folklore observations and especially their high appreciation for the rapid rise of our newly liberated homeland. In this part M. Markova also resurrects the memory of the undeservedly marginalized for political reasons a dedicated ethnographer and connoisseur of the Bulgarian embroidery – Eudokia Peteva-Filova, who has been called „the virtuoso explorer of detail“.

While in the first part of the book Mira Markova presents Bulgaria (mostly) through the eyes of the foreigners, in the second and third she examines our and foreign folklore customs, rituals and religious cults from her own research point of view and most empirical data and theoretical conclusions are the result of her personal field studies. The researcher sets her goal:

'develop a theoretical and practical model of the functioning of the ritual systems in modern times, which are undergoing transformation, highlighting through the prism of the specific cases selected the specificities and characteristics of this significant cultural phenomenon'.

In particular, Dr. Markova looks at the custom of *Enyova bulya*, and *Nestinsrdtvo* in Strandzha and the Virgin Cult in Kalwaria Pacławska in Poland. What the three rituals have in common is that they combine folklore and ethnographic components, that they are localized in confined spaces and have been practiced by (mostly) locals for several centuries. This type of ritual Markova defines as „cultural and historical complexes where nature, memory, social rhythm and individual existence coexist.“ Since these rituals are „worn by always living groups of people“, according to Pierre Nora's classification, we can define them as „sites of memory“. The new thing that Mira Markova imports is that these „sites of memory“, or „cultural and historical complexes“, are as constant as they are adaptable over time. It shows how the participants in them change age and how *Nestinarstvo* changes from local custom to tourist attraction. Interesting are the contactological and typological similarities between the rituality of the Bulgarian and Greek *nestinars*, which Mira founded through direct cross-border observations of the two Nestinar’s communities. To the „unencapsulation“ of local *Nestinarstvo* and its entry into the field of tourist attractions, I would add its creation in modern literature. In particular, in the novel „The Storks and the Mountain“ (2016) by the Bulgarian-American writer Miroslav Penkov, which artistically confirms the cross-border custom and promotes it among English-speaking readers.

Interesting are the field studies of Dr. Markova on the intertwining of Christ with the Virgin Cult in Kalwaria (Calvary) Pacławska and how the personality of the Pope John Paul II strengthened and instilled political-patriotic notes in the existing cult. The selected examples with (The Bulgarian-Greek) *Nestinarstvo* and the Virgin Cult in Kalwaria Pacławska (which honors Catholics and Ukrainian units) proves the researcher's thesis that:

‘Ethnicity and confessional choice are no longer sustainable criteria for belonging to a local community. The cultural matrix of the local community is based to a much greater extent on Community reflection, shared past, sacral parameters and even a shared modern transformation of traditions.’

The intertwining of folklore and religious in the ordinance *Enyova bulya* and *Nestinarstvo* prove the man's desire to communicate with the sacral, and the entanglement of folklore and household elements in the Virgin Cult – an instinctive aspiration to land Christianity.

After all, through his research on the local customs, rituals and cults Dr. Markova proves that in our century the ritual systems function „as dynamically developing organisms “, and through their participation in the ordinance’s individuals affirm their belonging to the local collective. Last but not least, Dr. Markova demonstrates that due to its archetypal nature, local folklore ritual and religious culture is an integral part of national and global culture.

**Teaching activities**

Since the academic position of Professor in the higher schools is tied to mandatory didactic activity, I would like (as director of the Summer Seminar on Bulgarian Studies for Foreign Bulgarians and Slavists at the University of Bulgaria) to express my personal observations about the teaching skills of the candidate. In addition to those mentioned in the professional biography of Dr. Markova lecture courses at the Historical Faculty of Sofia University, since 2006 in the framework of the Specialized Seminar on Bulgarian Literature and Cultural Anthropology of Bulgarians she made numerous presentations, which were highly appreciated by foreign students and lecturers.

**Conclusion**

The review and analysis of the research and teaching activities of Assoc. Professor Mira Markova clearly shows that the candidate for the academic position Professor of Ethnology at Sofia University is an erudite lecturer and scientist who has established himself in our and the international scientific community – a scientist with in-depth research in the field of folklore, ethnography, ethnology and the specifics of local culture in general. Therefore, without any reservations I will gladly vote for the award of the academic position Professor of Ethnology (local traditions and cultures) to Associate Professor Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova.

Prof. Panayot Karagyozov,

member of a jury for the selection

of Professor of Ethnology at the Sofia University