**R E V I E W**

of the dissertation of RADINA IVO BOZHILOVA,

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“KIRILA VAZVAZOVA-KARATEODOROVA:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, ARCHIVAL

RESOURCES”

for the acquirement of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

Field of higher education: 2. Humanities

Professional area: 2.2. History and archaeology

Doctoral program: “Documentary Studies, Archive studies, Paleography” – Archive studies

**Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Evgenia Kalinova,**

**Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”**

The doctoral thesis of Radina Bozhilova falls into the field of those not so numerous studies in which certain topics and problems are presented through the history of certain persons. This scientific “genre” has its advantages, but it also confronts the researcher with many challenges. And from the very beginning I would like to express my opinion that the PhD student has successfully coped with them. Her education, of course, contributes to this. In 2015, Radina Bozhilova obtained her Bachelor’s degree in History at University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” A year later she graduated as a Master in Archival and Documentary Studies at the same university. Subsequently, she was a PhD student in the Doctoral Program “Documentary Studies, Archive Studies, Paleography” at the Department of Archive Studies and Didactic at the Faculty of History at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Her scientific supervisor is Prof. Anna Kochankova.

I would like to start with the selection of the dissertation theme. It deserves a positive recognition because, on the one hand, the personality of Kirila Vazvazova-Karateodorova undoubtedly has an important place and role in the development of Bulgarian archival studies and archaeography, and on the other hand, there is a lack of a comprehensive and complete study of this role. Therefore, both the research department and the doctoral student have rightly considered that the aim of the study is both to outline the process of the formation of the scholar Kirila Vazvazova and her professional biography, and also to trace through this prism the path of Bulgarian archival studies against the background of the historical development of the country, mainly during the years of socialism.

The dissertation is in a total length of 236 pages and consists of an introduction, a presentation structured in three chapters, a conclusion, one appendix, sources and references and a list of abbreviations used. The introduction provides an adequate argumentation of the importance and relevance of the dissertation topic, briefly indicating the significant role of Kirila Vazvazova in the development of archival management and archival studies, and provides a comprehensive review of the currently existing literature on her personality, concluding that there is a lack of a comprehensive study of her personality. This part of the introduction also reveals the author’s good orientation in the documentary heritage of K. Vazvazova and the institutions associated with her, which has made it possible to build the dissertation on a solid documentary base - archival funds - institutional and personal, located in the Central State Archives (CSA), the State Archives in Burgas, Ruse and Sofia, the NBKM-BIA, the Scientific Archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the archives of Sofia University. The PhD student has formulated in detail and clearly the aims and objectives of her research work and has explained her choice of methodology, which I find fully acceptable and appropriate to the specifics of the topic. Again in relation to the archival specificity of the work, I would define as appropriate the statement in the introduction that the scientific contributions of K. Vazvazova as a scientist studying the Bulgarian Revival will not be the subject of the dissertation (p. 9).

Radina Bozhilova followed the thematic approach in the structure of the thesis. Although she has not given any arguments for it, it seems to me that this is the most logical possible choice when it comes to the study of a particular person, where it would be more difficult to distinguish periods chronologically (of course, this could have been mentioned in the introduction). The first chapter of the dissertation aims to present “biographical data and main guidelines in the professional development of Kirila Vazvazova-Karateodorova”. Quite logically, in this chapter the reader expects to find information about the personal life of K. Vazvazova and the doctoral student has managed to extract the maximum possible in this respect from the personal archival collection of K. Vazvazova, although its documents are “dispersed between the BIA at the NBKM and the CDA” (p. 12), supplementing it with information from autobiographies written by K. Vazvazova on various occasions and with data from biographies and memoirs published about her at various times by her fellow historians (Nikolai Zhechev, Krumka Sharova, Bistra Tsvetkova, etc.). I would point out Radina Bozhilova effort not to trust the memoirs but to compare them with the available archival documents and to note scrupulously the discrepancies and inconsistencies found (e.g. in regard to the participation of K. Vazvazova in the leadership of the Bulgarian Youth Union “Otec Paisii” - p. 15-16). Unfortunately, the doctoral student has not attempted to point out the characteristics of this union on the basis of scientific research about it, and to look for some information about K. Vazvazova in its files (fond 710K) at the CDA.

Further in the paper, the PhD student again fails to adopt a historical approach to the biography of K. Vazvazova, i.e. to present the historical background that influenced the personality of K. Vazvazova and to explain through it some moments of her biography (e.g. her residence in Skopje during the Second World War). No explanation is given even about what happened on 9 September 1944 and how the “newly established Ministry of Propaganda” came into being and who was his head, who appointed K. Vazvazova “head of section”. The PhD student could have consulted f. 2 of the CDA - Ministry of Propaganda/ of Information and Arts and tried to find out which this “section” was and if there was any information about its “head”, i.e. about K. Vazvazova, whose “duties” according to the PhD student were “to monitor cultural events in the country and to be in constant contact with cultural figures” (p. 18). Vague and inaccurate is the claim that “in 1947 the Directorate [which one? - no mention of such has been made so far - E. K.] assisted in her being accepted as a member of the Club at the Chamber of Popular Culture [it is not clear what this club was, and clarification is needed about the Chamber of Popular Culture itself - E. K.] in order to be able to attend the professional meetings of the educational workers” (p. 18). It is clear from the text that K. Vazvazova worked at the Ministry until its very liquidation at the end of 1947, i.e. her stay there is not an insignificant episode in her biography, and the possible filling of this gap on the basis of the archival documents in the Ministry’s collection would have been an important contribution.

Significantly more comprehensive is the attempt of R. Bozhilova to study how in 1948 K. Vazvazova entered the Archive Department (from 1949 - BIA) at the NBKM, which would become her destiny for the next three decades, and what were the other alternatives before her. The PhD student shows skills in researching, comparing and critically reading archival and memoir evidence, but again she has missed the opportunity to outline, however briefly, the characteristics of the period, i.e. the enforcement of Stalinism in Bulgaria, and this would have helped the reader in understanding the episode with the difficulties that accompanied the election of K. Vazvazova as an assistant professor of archival studies at Sofia University and her decision to give up her academic career.

Further in the first chapter of the dissertation the main moments are traced in the professional development of K. Vazvazova, the administrative positions she held, her scientific research and international activities, the awards she received, and her main contributions to the study of the Bulgarian Revival era. A special paragraph is devoted to K. Vazvazova work at the Scientific and Directorate Councils of the NBKM from the mid-1960s onwards. The Ph. D. student outlines the views K. Vazvazova defended in these structures on the problems of the Manuscript and Documentary Sector (MDS) she headed - for example, its staff development and material resources, the publication of inventories of Slavonic manuscripts kept in the sector, the “Survey of the archival funds and collections”, the “Inventory of the photo collection in the NBCM”, etc. Radina Bozhilova has carried out a serious work on searching and systematization of data, especially from f. 1137 - National Library "Cyril and Methodius" in the CDA, and managed to present the significant personal contribution of K. Vazvazova in the organization, functioning, and promotion of the archival collections held at the NBCM and in the establishment of the RDA as a “leading archival center” (p. 48).

The third paragraph of the chapter focuses on the role of K. Vazvazova in researching documents on Bulgarian history in foreign archival repositories and in studying foreign archival experience from 1957 to 1976. The main information is extracted from the archival fond of the NBCM, located at the CDA, and the PhD student mainly uses the detailed reports of K. Vazvazova on her visits to Bucharest, Skopje, Paris, Moscow, Leningrad, Braila, Galatz, Cairo, etc. Both her activities in searching for and acquiring archival documents on certain topics of the Bulgarian Revival and her desire to acquaint herself with archival work in the respective country and to establish contacts with foreign archivists beneficial for the development of the BIA’s international cooperation are revealed. In this activity K. Vazvazova showed initiative and made suggestions for improving the methodology of retrieval of documents on Bulgarian history in foreign archival repositories (pp. 55-56) and the PhD student rightly devotes considerable attention to this part of her activity.

The next chapter of the dissertation presents the role played by Kirila Vazvazova in the development of Bulgarian archival studies and archaeography. This is the second (after the reconstruction of the main biographical moments) main task that the PhD student sets herself and which, in my opinion, is of greater weight and importance. In this part of the dissertation Radina Bojilova reveals her expertise on the most important moments in the development of archival studies and successfully searches for the contributions of K. Vazvazova. The first paragraph is about the archival discussion in the 1950s and 1960s, a period that coincides with the work beginning of K. Vazvazova in the archival system. The PhD student uses the achievements of archival researchers and compares them with the documents revealing K. Vazvazova views on such problems as for instance the fragmentation of archival documents as a result of the activities of the growing archival departments at different institutions and the possibility to overcome it by creating a state archive or by unifying the organization of work with documents in all such departments (p. 67). The creation of a unique State Archive Fund in the early 1950s questioned the very existence of the BIA. On the basis of archival documents, the PhD student presents the arguments of both sides in the dispute, as well as the activities of K. Vazvazova, aimed at defending the specificity and the tasks of the archival activity within the BIA and at finding new ways to modernize the archival work. Since the paragraph reaches even as far as 1976, I would suggest that this be reflected in its title, which in its present form indicates the 1950s and 1960s as its scope.

The second paragraph of the chapter discusses K. Vazvazova participation in the elaboration of methodological rules for scientific and technical processing and publication of documents from the Bulgarian archives. It is pointed out that the issue of adopting regulations for the organization of archival work arose at the very end of the 1940s as a result of the accelerated creation of archival collections and the need to follow the Soviet experience as part of the overall adoption of the Soviet model. The PhD student uses both scholarly research on the development of archival work and archival sources revealing the views and activities of K. Vazvazova on the development of rules for the collection, processing, preservation and use of documentary materials stored in the BIA. It shows her participation in working groups and commissions elaborating general rules for the selection and publication of documents on Bulgarian history, as well as in the first national conference on archival studies in October 1973 in Sofia, dedicated specifically to the publication of documentary sources on Bulgarian history. The evidence cited confirms Radina Bozhilova conclusion that the BIA has “extremely great contribution to the methodological provision of the activity related to the publication of archival documents” and that it was the first institution to regulate its publishing activity, and that K. Vazvazova made “a significant contribution to the elaboration of general methodological standards for the publication of written historical sources from the 18th-19th centuries” (p. 109).

In the third paragraph of chapter two, as a logical continuation of the previous paragraph, the contributions of K. Vazvazova in the preparation and realization of documentary and reference publications are presented. The PhD student aims to make a general archaeographic analysis of these publications. She uses archival materials from the BIA and CDA to reconstruct the work of various research teams with the participation of K. Vazvazova on the preparation of documentary collections on the April Uprising of 1876, on the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878, on V. Levski, etc. (according to the research of R. Bozhilova “the registered documentary collections under her direction are about 30, most of which are of scientific and the rest of scientific-popular nature" (p. 135). The principles of preparation of these collections are indicated and an assessment of their scientific significance by prominent Bulgarian historians is given. In this paragraph the real contribution of K. Vazvazova to the development of the archival studies and historical science in general are clearly visible, and the efforts made by the PhD student to find and present these published collections deserve high recognition.

The third chapter of the dissertation has a special value in the research carried out by Radina Bozhilova. In it, the PhD student systematizes the archival and bibliographic resources found on K. Vazvazova. In the first and second paragraphs, respectively, the sources related to the origin, family background and career of K. Vazvazova and those presenting her activities as an archivist, archaeographer and administrator at the NBCM. A classification is made by type of documents and their main characteristics are indicated, with special attention being paid to K. Vazvazova’s two personal collections kept in the CDA and in the NBKM-BIA. The third paragraph is of contributory character because the PhD student presents in the form of an inventory the archival documents about K. Vazvazova and especially about her work in the construction of the centralized archival system in Bulgaria and the creation of methodological rules for the publication of documents and documentary collections. R. Bojilova stresses that the documents included in this inventory cannot be found through the search fields in the Information System of State Archives (ISDA), as they are not found in the standard levels of archival description (p. 158), and this makes the inventory actually useful for future research on various topics. Special attention deserve the PhD student’s efforts to collect and systematize the memories of colleagues of K. Vazvazova from BIA, which are included in the fourth paragraph of the third chapter and constitute a specific and interesting addition to the archival documentation.

The conclusion of the dissertation briefly presents the main results of the research that are in one way or another already present in the text. The sources and references are arranged according to the generally accepted rules and illustrate the diligent work of investigation and research done by the PhD student. The abstract correctly presents the main highlights of the dissertation as well as the scholarly contributions. Radina Bozhilova has five scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation, two of them abroad, and thus she not only meets but also exceeds the minimum national requirements under Article 2b of the Law on the Development of the Academic Stuff. Last but not least, I would like to emphasize the excellent style of the presentation, which contributes to the smooth perception of the information.

My detailed acquaintance with Radina Bozhilova's dissertation allows me to express my opinion that it is an original and complete research work, to which some claims could be made (especially for the fact that in places it lacks the necessary historical context), but on the whole it meets the requirements for a dissertation and I will vote for awarding Radina Bozhilova the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in History.

6 May 2023 Prof. Evgenia Kalinova