Position

Of Associate Prof. Ilia Stoyanov Iliev, PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of History, Department of Ethnology, member of the jury for the competition for academic position of "Professor", professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, (Ethnology - Local traditions and cultures), announced in SG, no. 48 of 28.06.2022 with a single candidate, Associate Professor Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova.

1. Applicant data

Associate Prof. Dr. Mira Markova graduated in history from SU with a specialization in Ethnology. Again at the Faculty of History, she defended her doctoral dissertation in 2001. Since 2003, she has been working as a teacher in the Department of Ethnology, and in 2011 she obtained her habilitation there. Leads master's and bachelor's courses in the specialties of History, History and Foreign Language, Hebraistics and especially Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, as well as a specialized course for Erasmus+ students.

She has successfully supervised 14 master's theses and three doctoral students who completed their Phds. Outside of teaching activities and scientific advising, Assoc. Prof. Markova was coordinator for the Faculty of History of the Erasmus program, which included signing 84 contracts for the mobility of teachers and students, as well as consulting visiting students and teachers. She has given public lectures in Poland, Greece, South Korea, Latvia, Ukraine and Croatia. For the competition, she presented 25 articles and studies published in academic editions, as well as one monograph. She presented data on 37 citations.

Her scientific activity far exceeds the minimum requirements of the national law on academic staff and the Regulations of the SU. Last but not least, she was elected deputy dean (2016-2019) and dean (since 2019) of Faculty of History.

2. Monograph

In essence, the habilitation thesis presented for the competition and entitled "Local cultures and traditions. Cultural Transformation of Ritual Systems in the XXI Century" (2022), offers a complex and original approach to the concept of locality and local culture.

The first chapter is dedicated to specific researchers, namely the Croatians Ivan Hoić and Stepan Radić, as well as the Bulgarian ethnographer Evdokia Peteva-Filova. These parts also represent a kind of self-reflection – what it means for a Balkan scholar to study a local culture, how to present it to an external audience, and what an external or local audience actually means.

For Croatian scholars, the South Slavic peoples, including the Bulgarians, represent both a certain cultural community and contain serious internal differences. Narrating about them to the educated European public, Ivan Hoić and Stepan Radić also introduce themselves, insofar as the Croats, even the most educated among them, are also South Slavs.

Evdokia Peteva-Filova's work offers a similar play of proximity and distinction. She is an intellectual who promotes and researches folk culture, at the same time realizes herself as a part of the Bulgarian tradition and seeks an analytical distance from it. As a complex, this chapter with the three specific examples presents the problems of the Bulgarian and South Slavic intellectual who studies their culture and must be sufficiently distanced to apply their scientific tools, but at the same time identifies with it, tends to idealize it or at least defend it to the external reader.

The second chapter of the book is dedicated to the local culture in Strandzha and, more specifically, to the custom-ritual complexes nestinarstvo and Enyova bulya. Nestinar is one of the best-studied rituals in Bulgaria, with the first texts on it appearing even before the Liberation from Ottoman rule. Over time, it was both criticized as a superstition foreign to the rational Bulgarian spirit and exalted as emblematic of the national identity, it was interpreted as part of a common Balkan and European cultural heritage, and as an echo of unique religious beliefs and practices of ancient local tribes.

Regional cultural policies, first-class academic researchers, and even choreographers related to tourism have contributed to its modern transformations. Nestinarstvo enables Prof. Markova to analyze both the power of the influence of modern factors (including researchers) on the local culture, as well as the limitations of the influence in question. Prof. Markova shows the common elements of fireplace making in Strandzha and Northern Greece, as well as the differences related to modern processes and influences. Her analysis of the Enyova bulya custom follows the same pattern, and the rich ethnographic material will be useful to future generations of researchers.

The last third chapter, dedicated to the pilgrimage to Calvary Patslavska, closes the circle. Like the Croatian authors from the first chapter, who look for South Slavic proximity and differences with Bulgarian traditional culture, Prof. Mira Markova recognizes herself in the beliefs and pilgrimage rites in Poland, where she finds Slavic and European Christian elements, also represented in Bulgaria. And like the Croatian authors, when exploring Bulgarian culture, she finds Calvary Patslavska distanced enough to allow for analytical comparisons.

Thus, the monograph contains two plans. The former contains solid empirical material and classic ethnological analysis, which will undoubtedly not escape the reader. The second plan is more discrete and helps to understand the intellectual journey of authors who explore local cultures, the local being a matter of scale. Both individually are a contribution to today's Bulgarian ethnological science, and their combination makes the book truly valuable for future readers as well.

3. Studies and articles from other thematic fields have also been submitted for the competition. Perhaps the most important of them is urban culture, as it is related to the lecture course on the same topic led by Prof. Markova.

This includes "Urban modernization and microhistory (following the example of Sofia until the 1940s), "The modernization of the Bulgarian capital until the Second World War through the prism of a Sofia neighborhood", "Aspects of the modernization of Sofia: known and unknown players", "The path of Bulgarian modernity on the pages of Shturets (ethnological analysis through the prism of selected advertisements)", "Factories and personalities (the Sofia industry from the Liberation to the 1940s" (co-authored), "The small Bulgarian city: characteristics, specifics, development'.

A kind of bridge to the issue of local culture is represented by the studies of Sofia neighborhoods such as Reduta and Geo Milev, which form micro-communities and independent research sites, similar to the villages of Strandzha. Prof. Markova convincingly shows that the local finds its place both in the big city and in small villages like Strelcha, and the transforming influences can take different forms. And again we see this combination between a disciplined ethnological reading and self-analysis, insofar as Prof. Markova knows some of these local communities from the inside, as a direct participant.

Another thematic field is museums and the presentation of traditional culture in them. It includes the articles "Education and the museum - contemporary interaction and perspectives" (co-authored), "The Intercultural Educational Mission of Ethnographic and Historical Museum in Bulgaria", "Bulgarian traditional clothing and its presentation at the first Russian ethnographic exhibition" and "The Presentation of the Slavs in the First Russian Ethnographic Exhibition in 1867", "Organizational and content aspects of intercultural educational programs for the Ethnographic and Historical Museum - through the eyes of teachers" (co-authored). Together with the article "Stereotypes: Specificity, Characterization, Meaning (Ethnological Analysis)".

It is remarkable how throughout her academic career Assoc. Prof. Markova returns to similar topics, each time adding something new both as empirical material and as a reflexive research approach. The presentation of traditional culture is a common denominator for texts dedicated to museums, exhibitions, Croatian and Bulgarian researchers, teachers and pedagogues.

The way in which the culture in question is perceived is a leading thread in studies devoted to ethnopedagogy, stereotypes, again museums and exhibitions. The place of the researcher, as both internal to a given cultural community (regardless of its scale) and analytically distanced from it, is a third common constructive element that permeates all of Assoc. Prof. Markova's texts.

As a conclusion, I can say that the presented works show a mature scholar, who worked for years on important topics for Bulgarian ethnology. They also contain valuable empirical material that will be useful to future generations of researchers, regardless of the scientific paradigms they choose to adhere to. There are also disciplined analyzes that allow us to better understand the functioning and transformations of local and urban culture.

And last but not least, future researchers will see the dilemmas of modern Bulgarian ethnologists, who, like their predecessors, recognize themselves as part of the culture they study, make efforts to study it without excessive idealization, but also without excessive criticism, especially in front of an external audience.

Highly appreciating the overall scientific, academic and teaching activity of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova, without hesitation I propose to the respected scientific jury to award her the scientific title and academic position "professor" in PN 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Ethnology - Local traditions and cultures).

Sofia, 01/10/2022 Ilia Iliev