**OPINION**

by Assoc. Prof. Petko Hristov, Ph.D.

from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum – BAS

for a procedure for acquiring educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional area 3.1. Social Sciences, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Ethnology of the Transition Period) for the needs of the Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

for the dissertational thesis: “*‘Indian’ Organizations in Europe (Ethnographic Research on Groups of Cultural-Historical Re-enactments)*” with author Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdzhiev and advisors Prof. Veselin Tepavicharov, DSC, and Assoc. Prof. Iliya Iliev, Ph.D.

The topic of cultural-historical reconstructions, also defined as historical re-enactments, is becoming more and more relevant in the present time of political, social, and we may say, identity crisis. The enrichment of the calendar in Bulgaria with more and more events of a similar nature – from Thracian and Roman festivals to the re-enactments of the battles of the April Uprising and the Liberation War – turns cultural-historical reconstructions into an important object of ethnographic observation and anthropological analysis. That is why Lyubomir Kyumyurdzhiev’s dissertational study is both relevant and contributing, insofar as it explores a “phenomenon within the phenomenon”, according to the author himself. The research dedicated to the “Indian” organizations in various European countries, and specifically to the Bulgarian Society of Indian Studies “Eagle’s Circle”, and conducted as a case study, is a contribution in another aspect as well – it was carried out by an “insider”, i.e. by a participant directly involved in this community for years. The adroit application of the epic and emic approach in the research of the doctoral candidate is an important methodological achievement and it was successfully carried out. Moreover, aware of the difficulties of combining the two points of view, he analyses his position and as early as in the introductory part describes the difficulties he faces as a researcher, skilfully applying the anthropological approach of self-reflection, which the author himself defines as “anthropology at home” following Mariza Peirano. In his words: “*During the fieldwork, my constant priority was to combine the role of an observer, capable of an external and as objective as possible view of the researched material, with my personal commitment*”. In my opinion, Lyubomir Kyumyurdzhiev has successfully dealt with this methodological dilemma.

The doctoral candidate graduated in MA “Bulgarian Philology” at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in 1990 and since then he has been working as a journalist and translator. His long-standing interest in revealing the inner logic of the goals, motives and actions of the European Indianists led him to the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, where between 2020 and 2023 he is a full-time doctoral student. The dissertation was discussed and proposed for defence at a meeting of the same department.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a case study, a conclusion and a detailed bibliography, totalling 224 pages. In the **introductory part**, Lyubomir Kyumyurdzhiev clearly formulates the object and subject of the study, its goals and purposes, and the questions that motivate it; and something very important, he specifies the terminology used in the study. The study is based on the results of Kyumyurdzhiev’s own ethnographic research conducted over a long period of time among a large number of members of “Indian” organizations from various European countries with the classical methods of ethnography – participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews. The doctoral candidate conducted 48 interviews and a large number of informal conversations with members of “Indian” groups from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Great Britain and other European countries in the period 2010 – 2022. The respondents are of both sexes, but predominantly men, the most numerous and active part being between the 40 and 60 years of age, which, according to the author, shows the declining interest in the “Indian” topic among the youngest generation in Europe. Here, it should be emphasized the relevance of the author’s observations in the period after February 2022 regarding the hardships and collapse of part of the established pan-European “Indian” networks following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

Based on the works of Bulgarian and foreign researchers, whom the author knows well, the **first chapter** analyses the spread of the cultural-historical reconstructions and, more generally, the phenomenon of the historical re-enactments in the world as a whole, but especially in Europe. The genesis of the historical re-enactments is traced from the public spectacles in Ancient Rome, through the regular re-enactments of famous battles from the American Civil War that began in the 1960’s, to the modern manifold manifestations of this essentially cultural and social phenomenon in Europe. The origin and development of the re-enactments in Bulgaria are examined, tracing them back to the “medieval battles” at the Markeli Fortress and in the Pernik Fortress in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The emphasis is placed on the establishment of the first organizations in the country whose activity can be defined as a *re-enactment* – the Bulgarian Society of Indian Studies “Eagle’s Circle” (1990) and the National Society “Tradition” founded a year later. A classification of the historical re-enactments by categories and by times and cultures they represent has been made. The rise in the first half of the last century and the activation in the last three decades of the 20th century of various types of “Indian” organizations are examined in detail.

The **second chapter** entitled “*Freedom ... Winnetou*” examines the reasons for the rise of numerous organizations, groups and “tribes” of Indianists precisely in Europe (and especially in Germany), analysing a number of specific socio-cultural and political phenomena in European history. And despite the clash between Europe’s increased Renaissance interest in “noble savages” across the ocean supported by the authority of the French encyclopaedists, and the American policy of conquering the Wild West where “*The only good Indian is the dead Indian*” (attributed to General Ph. Sheridan), the tours of various Native American groups presented in Europe by the American traveller and painter George Catlin or by the Buffalo Bill Show accelerated the introduction of the indigenous peoples of America to the European public. This chapter also analyses in detail the impact of 19th-century belles lettres on the rise of some of the “Indian” groups in Germany, Hungary, and the Czech Republic – of the “Indian” novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, Emilio Salgari, and especially the German Karl May. If the doctoral candidate plans to continue his work on the topic and to (possibly) prepare the thesis for publication, it would be good, in my opinion, to analyse in more detail this literary impact on public opinion in Central Europe in the context of the widespread presentation of “exotic” expositions in museums in the years between the two world wars – cf. as example Demski, Dagnosław and Dominika Czarnecka. *Staged Otherness: Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe, 1850–1939*. [Central European University Press](https://www.jstor.org/publisher/ceupress), 2021.

A contribution of this chapter is also the study of the provoking and increase in interest in the “Indian” theme in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, and above all in the GDR, the USSR and Poland. The novels of Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich about the “sons of Great Bear” and of Stanisław Supłatowicz (Sat-Okh), and especially the films of the East German company DEFA not only impose interest in the history and life of the noble and freedom-loving Indians, but also turn “Indian” America into a kind of image of the “permitted West”, into “*the unforbidden America which the socialist man can approve and even imitate without becoming a dissident*” in the words of the author. This part of the dissertation is a scientific novelty with its analysis of the social reality in the decades of totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe.

The end of the second chapter traces the change and development of the interest in the Indian theme in Western Europe, and after the democratic changes also in the post-socialist countries, in the spiritual culture, beliefs and ritual practices of the various Indian tribes, stimulated by new movements such as “new wave” and the like. The new directions in European interest in the Indian mentality and its development in the first decades of the new Millennium are analysed in the **third chapter**. The author summarizes the results of his analysis with the conclusion in the spirit of Edward B. Tylor’s evolutionism that: “*The parallels between European ancestors and Native Americans are an interesting example of the idealisation of one’s own past by looking at the Indian*”. After reviewing the establishment of “Indian” organizations in Central Europe – in Germany, the Czech Republic and Hungary, Lyubomir Kyumyurdzhiev traces the foundation of “Indianist” groups in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lithuania and other Eastern European countries, which have developed particularly actively in the last two decades of the 20th century. Here, the author comments on the phases (according to Michael Terry) of the interest in Indians among white Americans – information drawn on the Kyumyurdzhiev’s personal correspondence with the American researcher of the American Indian tribes in the United States. According to Kyumyurdzhiev, this stratification can also be applied to the origin and development of the interest in the Indian traditions and history among the representatives of the various European nations. At the end of this chapter, the motivations for joining, the organization and hierarchy in the various European “Indian” groups are examined. The review of the pow wow festivals with performances of Indian songs and dances organized in Great Britain and Poland is of interest. The analysis of the international networks created by “Indian” organizations in crisis conditions after the beginning of the Russian military aggression in Ukraine is also particularly relevant; according to the author, it shows “*if not their untenability then at least their easy vulnerability*”.

The first and only Bulgarian organization for cultural-historical re-enactments in Bulgaria on the “Indianist” topic, “Eagle’s Circle”, created as an interest club in the spring of 1990, is the subject of analysis in the last part of the dissertation, presented as a case study. This part of the research is entirely new and a contribution of the dissertation.

The conclusion of the doctoral candidate’s thesis summarizes his most important observations and the conclusions drawn in the previous chapters. The most important one is that the roots of the “Indian” organizations in Europe must be sought far before their actual rise – in the enlightenment insight into the Other typical of European culture since the end of the Middle Ages. As members of such communities, these Europeans voluntarily placed themselves “beyond the frontier”, in an alternative to the European (and the American) civilised world with its laws, far from social inequality, coercion, and exploitation.

I consent to the contributions of the study formulated by the doctoral candidate. No grounds for plagiarism were found, and the existing correspondences are with texts already published by the author.

The dissertation presents Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdzhiev as an accomplished and well-prepared researcher, with a perspective for new interesting anthropological studies of the cultural-historical re-enactments. Proof of this is the author’s publications on the topic of the dissertation published in various scientific editions in the country – seven in total, one of which is in print. With this, the doctoral candidate far exceeds the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation.

The procedure corresponds to the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application, as well as the internal Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Therefore, expressing my positive opinion, I propose to the respected Academic Jury to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdzhiev for the dissertation thesis: “*‘Indian’ Organizations in Europe (Ethnographic Research on Groups of Cultural-Historical Re-enactments)*” and I will vote “yes” for that.

August 14, 2023 Petko Hristov