

## POSITION

of Prof. Dr. **Svetlana Stoycheva**, NATFIZ "Krastyo Sarafov"

on the materials provided by Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Gergana Rumenova Ruseva**, the only participant in the competition for the academic position of professor in 2.1. Philology (Sanskrit - language and culture), announced in State Gazette, issue 86 of 13.10.2023

The documents and materials provided by Assoc. Dr. Gergana Rumenova Ruseva for the current competition for the academic position of Professor in Indology, Department of Classical East at FCNF, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations.

The professional biography of Gergana Ruseva builds the image of a purposeful scientist with deep interests in the field of Sanskritology, developed in serious academic research. I will preliminarily state that the value of the scientific works with which she participated in the competition raises the prestige of both the specialty in the relevant institution and the Indological science itself. Her scientific research work since the beginning of her scientific career consists of four monographs and one teaching aid in Sanskrit, over thirty scientific articles and studies, translations from Sanskrit and Hindi, dozens of participations in scientific forums and conferences (some of them she is the organizer of), original curricula, extensive expert activity in the field, development, management and participation in scientific projects, etc.

The subject of scientific discussion in my opinion will mainly be the monographs "*Forward to the past, backward to the future. Ideas about time in Ancient India*" (2023) and "*To taste of the sweetest fruit of immortality. Ideas about death, the afterlife and sleep in Ancient India*" (2023). To a large extent, they synthesize and build on the topics that their author develops next to them, so they can be taken as representative of her scientific creativity after the acquired scientific title of "associate professor". In both books, the scientific style of Gergana Ruseva stands out: those already existing in science, as well as her own, are verified again and again through a specific textual analysis of source material, presented in one, let's call it, dynamic translation - with unceasing reflection on various possible translations and searching for key connections (for example, searching for a more adequate meaning through

the two translation variants of p. 28 of "To taste of the sweetest fruit of immortality"); but more importantly, always the linguistic efforts are aided/provoked/checked by cultural and comparative mythological readings. Since to a large extent the translation of such deeply polysemantic ancient languages as Vedic and Sanskrit is a matter not just of opening the dictionary, but of a skillful interpretation, not only would I not undertake to distinguish the candidate's contributions into "linguistic", "religious-cultural" and "translational", as she herself separates them, but I would insist on thinking in their connection: It is the creative communication between the linguist, cultural scientist and translator Gergana Ruseva, the mutual upgrading and comparison of her knowledge in the three areas that leads to her successes – as a research result and respectively as a methodology.

The monograph "To taste the sweetest fruit of immortality. Ideas of Death, the Way to the Hereafter and the Dream in Ancient India is dedicated to the most primal question that any mythology about man asks – the mystery of death. The author traces the development of the very inhomogeneous ancient Indian ideas/ideas about death and life after death, establishing the significant differences between Vedic and post-Vedic beliefs. Particularly interesting are the chapters devoted to sleep and dreaming, whose powerful power due to belief in them makes them "much more dangerous than in our culture" (p. 96). (It should be noted that the comparisons with cultures other than those of ancient India lead to the construction of a rather interesting comparative anthropological layer in both books.) The cognitive potential of this belief has also been understood since ancient times - the discovery of sleep as a "philosophical and psychological way of self-awareness " (p. 97). This plays two very important roles: for the inclusion of the unconscious archetypal reality, the "undifferentiated holy ocean of Varuna" (p.99), and for the awareness of reality in waking life as a dreamed illusory reality (the idea of maya). I find particularly pertinent the question of whether the reality revealed by dreams actually exists or is inhabited by an "occult consciousness" (p. 109).

Even the title of the monograph "Forward to the past, back to the future" indicates that the theses in it will not be easy to perceive and immediately provoke the cognitive capabilities of the recipients with a different worldview and culture than that of the ancient Indo-Aryans. From this seemingly oxymoronic metaphor to the European begins the deep penetration into the essence of ideas during Ancient India. These ideas are derived from Vedic and Sanskrit texts from the Rigveda, Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, etc., given in original and in translation (this is how the texts analyzed in the previous book are composed). Examining the abstract category of time through space in order to concretize it turns out to be a rather complex conceptualizing operation, considering time along the three

spatial axes. The analyses show both a universal use of the category, with open analogues in other worldviews and cosmviewers, and a completely specific one, relating only to ancient Indian space-time concepts. Here it is very important to add the third creative cosmogonic ferment in ancient Indian literature – sound (by the way, although described differently, but with the same functionality finds its place in the mythology of the Dogon, it is confirmed by science: registered by astrophysicists as the noise of the universe).

It is interesting that for the remarkable presentation of the past "in front" and the future "behind" in the Vedic and Sanskrit texts, the author also found Bulgarian language correspondences, but in her opinion, unsystematic and rather refuted by the opposite ideas that have prevailed (note 110, p. 39). Can we think about the development of Bulgarian ideas - from archaic ones, close to those of ancient India, to moving away from them, looking at time horizontally in the sequence usual for Europeans.

Here I will highlight the chapters "The Year and the Wheel of Time. Primacy and Pervasiveness of Time" and 'On Fate and Time in the Mahabrahma - The Wheel, the Thread and the Loom', and finally the opening of the door to mystical 'time travel'. Due to the impossibility of addressing all the original aspects of the analyses, I will propose to the author a few questions that, I hope, prove the interest that her interpretations arouse and the exceptional communicativeness of both books:

Why exactly did the word *calla* become a basic term to refer to time in ancient Indian culture?

Can the thesis be argued in a little more detail that there is a close connection between personal experiences in initiation rituals or during sleep and the genesis of the cosmogonic myth of the dismemberment of the body of the primordial being – Purusha or Prajapati; more generally, that myth and personal experiences control each other.

Can we conclude from this that the basic ideas about time (transient and eternal) in Indian culture are largely the product of experiences - meditative, ecstatic, during rituals?

How can we explain the fact that at the basis of the synthesis of religions, philosophies and cultures, to which theosophy strives, Blavatsky places models of thinking from the ancient Indo-Aryans - can her choice be objectively justified?

I would be remorse to not note the author's sense of humor, which helps in the adaptation of such serious scientific matter and such complex doctrines (for example, instead of theorizing on the performative function of the word, she jokingly "warns" the reader not to fall asleep when reading "Chant. Sleep Spell", p. 91 of the book on the ideas of death).

My general opinion: after familiarizing myself with all the materials and scientific works provided for the competition, after analyzing their significance and the scientific and scientific-applied contributions contained therein, I find it more than reasonable to give my positive assessment of the choice of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Ruseva on the academic position of Professor of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

21.01.2024 Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stoycheva

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