**REVIEW**

for a competition for the academic position "professor"

by professional direction 2.1. Philology (Sanskrit – Language and Culture),

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov, University of St. Kliment Ohridski"

For participation in the announced competition (announced in the Official Gazette, No. 86 of 13.10.2023) under: 2.1. Philology (Sanskrit - language and culture) was submitted by Assoc. Dr. Gergana Rumenova Ruseva (the only candidate in the competition), a teacher in the "Classical East" department at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The submitted materials for the competition, correctly prepared and presented in electronic form by Associate Professor Ruseva, correspond to the requirements of the rules of the SU. They cover the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of ZRASRB and meet the additional requirements in the rules of the SU for occupying the academic position "professor".

Gergana Rumenova Ruseva was born on 13.06.1974 in the city of Sofia. In 1997, she graduated with honors from the master's program "Physics", specialty "Physics of the nucleus and elementary particles" at SU. In parallel, she studied Indology (1995-2000) at the same university and graduated with full honors in 2000, with a thesis on: "Katha Upanishad - Sanskrit Translation and Commentary". Five years later, she obtained the educational and scientific degree "doctor" with a dissertation on the topic: "Indo-Aryan personal pronouns in diachrony".

Her professional experience includes teaching in the field of physics as a part-time assistant in Partial Differential Equations in the Department of Theoretical Physics at the Faculty of Physics of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the period 1997-1998 and work as a specialist physicist at the Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy (INRI) at the BS, from 2000 to 2009. I especially note these competencies and activities of the candidate in a field outside of philology disciplines and Indology because they are a good illustration of both her broad interests and her ability to quickly enter complex and demanding fields of study that require great dedication and internal discipline. Her educational qualifications include the study of a number of ancient and Eastern languages such as Sanskrit, Hindi, Classical Tibetan, Urdu, Classical Middle Egyptian, and of the modern ones: English, Russian and French.

In the period 2002 - 2009, Gergana Ruseva was a part-time teacher of Sanskrit and Hindi in the "Classical East" department at the FCMP of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", working in parallel on his dissertation. Since 2009, Gergana Ruseva has been appointed head. assistant professor of Sanskrit in the specialty of Indology in the "Classical East" department at FCMP of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", and three years later he became an associate professor of Sanskrit in the same department. She taught Sanskrit, Lexicology, Morphology and Syntax of Hindi. She also teaches courses on Hindi lexicology and syntax, academic writing, Darshana (Indian worldview teachings) in the undergraduate Indology program, and early Buddhism in texts from 2022 on. To this broad palette of courses, she also adds particularly rare disciplines such as Jyotisha: Traditional Indian Astrology in the Master's program "Buddhism (with Eastern Language)".

Her organizational work shows a serious commitment to the development of the Indology major at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" as one of the leading specialists in this field in Bulgaria. She was the head of the Indology major at the Classical East Department at FCMP from 2009 to 2019, and from 2019 up to now she is the head of the Classical East department at FCMP and a member of the Faculty Council of FCMP. She participates in 10 research projects, being the head of two of them - "Interdisciplinary Eastern Thematic Seminars", financed by NIS, (contract number: 80-10-120 dated 16.05.2022) and head of the project "Development of the Word ātmán in the Indo-Aryan Languages' of the “East-West” Indological Foundation. She is the supervisor of two defended dissertations - of Dr. Elia Alichkova and Dr. Teodora Kutsarova, as well as three master's theses. Associate Professor Dr. Gergana Ruseva participates in four editorial boards and is an editor in three refereed editions of the electronic journal "Manas". All this shows the high degree of commitment of the candidate to the academic life of the institution he represents.

The scientific production of the candidate is impressive - she is the author of four monographs, 34 scientific articles published in prestigious Bulgarian and foreign publications, 14 translations from Sanskrit and Hindi into the Bulgarian language. Her citations are over 60 in articles, studies and monographs in Bulgarian and foreign languages, and nine of them are in referenced databases. The participation in scientific conferences (23 in number) is also a testimony to the active and scientific research activity. In the announced competition, the candidate participated with two monographs and nine scientific articles, four of which were in a foreign language.

Her first monograph - "Forward to the Past, Back to the Future: Ideas of Time in Ancient India" is devoted to the complex notion of time in Ancient India. In this monograph, Gergana Ruseva was able to penetrate deeply into the essential ideas about time and world perception of the ancient inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent by selecting heterogeneous texts from different eras, starting from the ideas of time in Patanjali's Yogasutra and reaching the ideas about memory and the construction of experienced being in Buddhism. At first glance, this diversity presents a serious difficulty for the researcher, but a careful readings of the texts selected for analysis and the questions they raise create a complete and well-motivated causal composition of questions, statements and arguments that follow the complete logic of building on basic ideas about the world view of the ancient Indo-Aryans. The very formulation of such a research topic is a serious success for the researcher and a sign of its scientific significance.

​ The first chapter of the monograph is devoted to the notions of time interpreted by means of available cognitive metaphors reflected in the texts of the Katha Upanishad. The examined excerpts raise the question of the relationship between the notion of time and space and the expression of temporal categories through spatial concepts. This necessitates the expansion of the scope of the study with linguistic and cultural aspects, and Gergana Ruseva skilfully leads us through a wide range of texts to the understanding of the conceptualization of time through space. Here I should note the ease with which she includes in the arguments of her research works from various scientific fields, philosophy, cultural studies, linguistics, which she knows in depth and uses in an argumentative manner. Starting from the fundamental question of the binding of the concepts of time and space, and whether this binding is universal, she traces the problem in numerous studies of the examples of different cultures and reaches the conclusion that this supposed universality is culturally and historically conditioned. The logic of the research leads the author to the spatial arrangement of time as linear, and from there to the representation of time by means of space along a vertical axis. Here the study also covers both an in-depth philological commentary on certain passages of ancient Indian texts and numerous examples of similar linguistic phenomena in other cultures. The natural continuation of the theme is to trace the notion of time along the horizontal axis and time as movement in space forward and backward. The work enters a new thematic field as, after clarifying the fundamental space-time connections, a series of important mythological images and symbols are examined, which represent these ideas figuratively and are conditioned by the notions of time and space. Such images-symbols are the world tree, the sacrificial horse, the altars for the agnichayana ritual, as well as the images and iconography of a number of deities – Prajapati, Rudra-Shiva, Rahu-Ketu, etc. This complex metaphorical picture of the world, as the author notes: "...creates an image in which time and space merge into one living being, intertwine with each other, merge into the ordered moving living cosmos." The analyzed mythological images are presented both through the interpretation of the evidence of the texts and through their visual embodiments in the ancient Indian art, and the comparative examples and parallels drawn from other cultures enrich the exposition and make it valuable for the researchers of religious studies, cultural studies and art historians.

​ After shaping notions of time through the spatial categories of linearity (up-down and back-and-forth), a natural extension of the work is to describe calendar time and its metaphorical image of a wheel. Not only the Vedic concepts of the cyclicality of time are considered here, but also their relationship with the ideas of eternity, change, modalities and their interaction. The exposition examines successively the cosmogonic representations in the hymns of the Rigveda X.190.1-3 and the symbolism of the year. The image of Prajapati and the symbolism of the year that this image carries, as well as the Kalachakra (Wheel of Time) in Vedic texts and imagery, are analyzed in detail. The connection of these fundamental ideas with the Vedic ritual and worldview is shown. The unity of linearity and cyclicity of time is represented by the dynamism of the passage of time - "the wheels turn, the chariot moves forward".

 The basic mythological layers of the Vedic texts are built upon with an exploration of the notions of fate and time in the Mahabharata. The mythological images presented here are the loom, the thread and the fabric. These images are skillfully interpreted, presented with abundant examples in the texts and references to the same imagery in other cultures. The epic gives new dimensions to the work of Gergana Ruseva by adding more layers to the idea of time - time as an all-encompassing force, destiny, universal law.

In the next part of the monograph, the Indian calendar is examined, where Gergana Ruseva's training as a graduate physicist and her knowledge of astronomy obviously helped to present the topic in an extremely professional and comprehensible manner.

Tracing the various aspects of the notion of time, the historical development of these notions in different periods, allow the author to seek answers to the questions posed at the beginning of the work, namely, how to reach the conception of time as a transcendental reality and subsequently to its negation in Buddhism or to the attempt to get out of the wheel of time. The monograph has a number of contributions, both for Indologists and Sanskritologists, as well as for all researchers of ancient cultures - culturologists, historians of religions, etc. The style is clear and comprehensible, which is always a mark of excellent knowledge of the subject, and is a guarantee that this work will reach and be useful to specialists in a wide variety of fields of humanities.

The second presented monograph - "To taste the sweetest fruit of immortality: Ideas about death, the path to the afterlife and sleep in Ancient India" is for me a natural continuation of the first. It is dedicated to the notions of death and dying, the afterlife, as well as that connection with the afterlife that connects life and death and allows one to peer into the beyond and into life, namely sleep.

The first part of the monograph examines the Vedic ideas about the underworld and its characteristics – darkness, remoteness, and obscurity. These ideas are studied through the analysis of funeral practices, the rites of sending off the dead, mentioned in the most ancient layers of Vedic literature. The general conclusions are that the prevailing negative view of death in these earliest accounts and existence in the afterlife as a joyless existence in a world of darkness and remoteness is dominant. The second part of the first chapter examines the image of Yama and the world of Yama in the Vedas. The third part shows the development of the notions of existence after death and the concept of re-death formed at the end of the Vedic period. The victory of the second death in the heavens among the gods provides a person with personal immortality, which, however, has nothing to do with the idea of the release of the atman soul and its merging with the absolute Brahman in the later tradition. Death as the crossing of spaces or as the movement of the soul between worlds is presented in the fourth part of the first chapter of the monograph. It examines the rituals for calling upon the soul to undertake various journeys (during illness or in the process of dying). It should be noted that the idea of the reincarnation of the earth is nowhere mentioned in the older Vedic literature. It appears much later and in its beginning rather refers to the reincarnation of the father into his son.

The second part of the monograph is devoted to the concept of sleep in Ancient India and the relationship between sleep and death. The starting point of the research is the assertion that sleep and waking reality are equally significant forms of existence and awareness of reality. Life is a dream, and a dream has a reflection in life, because a person has to atone for an offense committed in a dream in his real life. This important meaning of sleep is not unique to ancient Indian culture, it is shared by all other ancient cultures, but in Indian sources this topic is developed in particular detail and especially with the description of dreaming techniques and control over dreams, which is rarely reflected in other ancient cultures, although the role of sleep in their ideas has the same important meaning. In the present monograph, the subject of sleep is considered not only from the point of view of its significance in the Indian worldview, but also as presented through the rituals for warding off bad dreams in the earliest texts, as well as through the development of lucid dreaming practices in later yogic doctrine. The interpretation of dreams and their categorization, their significance for medical conclusions and prophetic dreams complete the complex picture of the phenomenon. Finally, dreams are examined as a narrative element in ancient Indian literature and as an important motif often used in special and dramatic situations. This view of the dream, through the prism of its application to build the fabric of the narrative, further enriches the work.

Gergana Ruseva's two main monographs cover both thematically related cultural phenomena such as death, sleep, the idea of time and space, ritual and myth, but also paint an extremely colorful picture from the commentaries on a huge number of separate texts from the millennia-old Indian tradition. All this shows an extremely high level of knowledge of the material, an erudition that easily moves through the eras and problems of ancient Indian culture and languages, and the researcher's incessant desire to seek new and new answers to his questions. In search of these questions, she does not hesitate to enter the field of other disciplines such as Indo-European studies, linguistics, cognitive linguistics, philosophy, etc. thus she finds a way to bring her achievements to a much wider range of readers.

Her other studies, presented as materials for the competition, are also distinguished by this interdisciplinary nature. These articles and studies are devoted to many problems of a linguistic and cultural nature, such as the problems of time and space, the functioning and creation of the cosmos, the meaning of myth and ritual, sacrifice and dreams in the world picture of the ancient Indo-Aryans. She succeeds in showing Indian culture in development, and the themes under consideration in the dynamics and tension of opposites from the most ancient Vedic layers of Indian culture to the emergence of Buddhism, constantly seeking explanations for these dynamics and metamorphoses of ideas. At the same time, she is able to match this colorful picture of ideas with other ancient cultures and thus make her research an object of interest to other specialists outside the field of Indology, which is a distinguishing feature of any distinguished professor.

It should also be noted the significant number of translations, the work of Gergana Ruseva, of important texts for Indian culture, which give the Bulgarian reader the opportunity to touch the treasury of ancient Indian literature through the eyes of a specialist. Among these translations, I should mention the importance of the Upanishads translation project (carried out jointly with Prof. Milena Bratoeva), which is extremely important for modern Bulgarian culture.

In conclusion, the research activity of Gergana Ruseva characterizes her as a bright representative of Indological science, with lasting and indisputable contributions in the field of linguistics and literature, studies of religion and culture of Ancient India. Her research shows a breadth of knowledge, erudition and deep knowledge of the subject matter, a drive to seek answers to the questions posed and an ability to find solutions to problems, with critical thinking and the use of complex methodology. Gergana Ruseva is undoubtedly one of the most significant names in Bulgarian Indology, with an international presence and serious scientific achievements.

As an overall assessment of the submitted scientific works and materials for the competition, their indisputable scientific qualities and contributions, as well as my overall impression of the candidate's teaching, public and administrative work, her professional and personal qualities, I must state with conviction that I consider her candidacy as fully suitable for occupying the academic position according to the announced competition, therefore I recommend the Scientific Jury to propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" to elect Assoc. Dr. Gergana Rumenova Rusenova to the academic position of "Professor" in professional direction 2.1. Philology (Sanskrit - Language and Culture).

20.01. 2024 Signature: 

 Assoc. Dr. Theodor Lekov