**REPORT**

**by** Assoc. Prof. Nadya Filipova, PhD, Institute for Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

**regarding** the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree PhD in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.2. History and Archeology, History of Bulgaria

**Topic** of the dissertation: "Bulgarian-Iranian relations from the Liberation to the end of the 1950s”

**Author** of the dissertation: Angel Orbetsov

**1. Information about the applicant**

Angel Orbetsov graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) with a degree in International Relations, where he specialized in Persian, and his interest in Iran's history dates back to that time. He graduated later from a school for diplomats in Britain. He developed his career as a diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria, where he held various positions related to Iran and other important Asian countries, as well as holding positions of ambassador. In parallel with his diplomatic career, Angel Orbetsov taught Persian language, history and political system of Iran at the Burgas Free University and at the Center for Oriental Languages and Cultures at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski”, as well as history of Afghanistan at Varna Free University. His professional biography and the dissertation both reveal that Angel Orbetsov has an experience as a high-ranking career diplomat who decided to demonstrate his research and analytical skills in the field of science as well.

**2. A review of the dissertation**

Angel Orbetsov's dissertation is in the volume of the impressive 412 pages. The research is based on a wide range of different sources – among them published documents, archive documents from 80 Bulgarian collections (with the relevant inventories and archival units), as well as 70 Iranian archive documents, 24 periodicals (newspapers and magazines) from different periods, 41 collections of published documents, reference books, memoirs, etc., 138 items of scientific literature, as well as dozens of electronic sources. Original documents in Iranian, presenting the bilateral relations, are translated by the author and are incorporated in the dissertation in the appendices. Angel Orbetsov was a PhD student at the Department of Bulgarian History – History Faculty, University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski”.

The aim of the dissertation work is not clearly stated. However, the introduction itself announces that it is to present the contacts between Bulgaria and the Bulgarians, on the one hand, and Persia/ Iran, on the other, from the antiquity to the end of the 1950s. The history of Persia/ Iran is presented in the introductory part, while the actual study is concentrated on the relations between Bulgaria (after its liberation from a five-century Ottoman rule) and Iran, the successor of the Persian Empire. The study of these relations comprises the decades from 1878 till the late 1950s. I must state from the very beginning that this subject is completely new to Bulgarian historiography, which makes it a contribution by itself.

The structure of the thesis is unconventional as it is developed not in the traditional three to five chapters but in fact in ten chapters. The first two chapters are introductory and not included in the main body of the dissertation, but they are absolutely indispensable because the first one presents a panoramic view of the centuries-long development of Persia/Iran, generally unknown to the Bulgarian audience even in scholarly circles, while the second one traces the background of the interactions between the two countries before the establishment of diplomatic relations. These two chapters are highly informative, especially given that the Persian/Iranian history is presented from an Iranian rather than a Bulgarian perspective. The main eight chapters follow the chronological-thematic principle, with the first two chapters being strictly chronological, the first from the Liberation to the end of the century and the second to the Second World War. The remaining six chapters are thematic, although they too follow the chronological principle in the arrangement of the documentary material. The dissertation is supplemented by appendices showing some of the documents.

3. **Evaluation of the scientific results obtained**

I believe that the aspiration of Angel Orbetsov's dissertation to trace the development of Persia/Iran and Bulgaria in parallel has been fully realized, and not only in the time span defined in the title of the dissertation.

Although it is not usual for a dissertation to begin the historical narrative centuries before the actual beginning, it seems to me that the introductory part of the dissertation, and especially the historical overview of Iran's past, are extremely important to understand the whole specificity of the dissertation. This text, as well as the brief overview of Iranian-Bulgarian relations over the centuries, both allow us to understand the role of these two countries in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and to realize under what circumstances contacts between these two countries and their peoples were established. The various theories about the origins of the Proto-/Pra-Bulgarians, including those of Geza Feher and Bogdan Filov, which, we should not forget, are strongly influenced by geopolitics, have also found a place here.

The actual research on the topic of the dissertation in the following eight chapters impresses with the scrupulous search for the small grains of archival documents that restore the contacts between Balkan Bulgaria and Central Asian Iran, but also show how sporadic they were. It is clear that Bulgaria is not of priority importance for the Iranian foreign policy for different reasons. Angel Orbetsov shows also the capacity of finishing each chapter with brief conclusions, bringing out the most important points of what has been written.

In the structure thus chosen, the repetition of historical events in Iran, once narrated in the introductory part and then repeated in the main chapters, is inevitable. However, this is fully justified by the different context in which they are placed - in the latter case, to understand the nature of the bilateral relations. The specific cases presented also play an important role in the value of the thesis, a striking example of which are the two accounts of Persian carpet production in Bulgaria, and the accounts of the fate of individuals associated with Iran.

The overall impression of the whole dissertation is that it is written by a very experienced diplomat who is not only aware of the intricacies of the international relations, but also shows great respect for diplomats from different countries, presented with brief biographical notes. A high level of professionalism is also evident in the assessment of diplomatic missions, the understanding of their capabilities, and the limitations of diplomatic activity.

**4. Evaluation of scientific contributions**

The dissertation does not explicitly state the scientific contributions, which is quite understandable, since it has always been embarrassing for the author to evaluate himself from such a point of view. However, the reading of the dissertation makes it clear that most of what is written is a scholarly contribution to Bulgarian historiography, since no one has ever used these archival documents to present a comprehensive account of the few and difficult to reproduce bilateral ties and relations. The contribution of the dissertation is beyond any doubt.

**5. Evaluation of the dissertation publications**

Angel Orbetsov has seven publications on the topic of his dissertation, two of which are co-authored with Blagoy Prodanov. All of them are in reputable scientific journals or in proceedings of scientific conferences. The topics of the publications are related to the dissertation's issues.

**6. Evaluation of the abstract**

The abstract is in the volume of 35 pages and meets all the requirements for an abstract for a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "PhD". The abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation, briefly presents the main points and conclusions of the dissertation, as well as the author's publications on the topic of the dissertation.

**7. Critical comments and recommendations**

The problem of completing this section of the opinion on Angel Orbetsov's dissertation is that the work is written by a person obtaining the knowledge and experience of a high-ranking diplomat resulting in a well-argued scientific research. So I can hardly make any significant remarks, apart from some very minor ones. I see them in what I believe to be the misspelling of Yudenich's surname as Yudovich (p. 77); in the fact that Iraq and Palestine are more appropriately referred to as "mandated territories" of Britain rather than simply under its trusteeship, which is just a matter of style (note 303, p. 83); the first name of the German (Austrian) mountaineer who found himself forced to remain for years in Asia because of the outbreak of the Second World War is Heinrich Harrer (p. 285). I also have one or two stylistic quibbles, which are addressed to the publication of the thesis, which I strongly recommend. The name Hitlerite coalition is not wrong, but it is still preferable to use its concrete-historical name Tripartite Pact.

**8. Conclusion**

Angel Orbetsov's research on the relations between Bulgaria and Iran in the period from the restoration of the modern Bulgarian state to the late 1950s fully meets the requirements for a dissertation. The structure, the content, the realization of the scientific objectives and the undisputed scientific contribution of Angel Orbetsov's dissertation give me grounds to declare my conviction that the scientific jury should award him the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of History, for which I will also vote.

February 10, 2022 Referee: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadya Filipova