

## REVIEW

From Assoc. Prof. Violeta Kotseva, PhD,

Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski"

for obtaining the degree of PhDoctor in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies

For the dissertation titled: *Development and transformation of Bulgarian traditional clothing from the middle of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century through the prism of performing arts* with author Aneliya Sasheva Ovnarska-Milusheva and supervisors Assoc. Prof. Mirella Detcheva, PhD and Prof. Mira Markova, Phd.

Traditional folk clothing has always been an exploited and elaborated topic in the Bulgarian ethnological tradition. A number of authors since the middle of the 19th century show an attitude towards the collection, description and analysis of the traditional costume in the various ethnographic areas. The sources left by them serve as a basis for subsequent ethnographic analyzes and developments dedicated to the role and functions of the so-called traditional costume. Significant in this direction are many studies that confirm the central place of clothing as a research object. The authors pay attention to the elements of the costume, to its ethnographic and regional specifics, to the transformations in it under the influence of the modernization processes occurring in Bulgarian society from the middle of the 19th century onwards, to the symbolic codes and meaning in the structure and ornamentation, hairstyles and veils in the traditional costume. It is so, as if everything has been said, described, stated and argued.

The PhD candidate Anelia Ovnarska-Milusheva argues that clothing is a constant source of perspectives and analyzes in the field of ethnology, that it continues to live today, transformed, modified, as museum exposition, representative, scenic and "national". The work

is no doubt current. This claim is supported by the interwoven elements in the "appearance" of traditional costume today, which combine ideas of national identity with those of authenticity and antiquity, as the basis for a publicly demonstrated and claimed cultural and temporal belonging. By using wide range of data collected and analyzed by the previous generation of authors (Hr. Vakarelski, V. Naslednikova, M. Veleva, Evg. Lepavtsova, etc.), the PhD candidate Milusheva focuses hers research on the existence of clothing in its stage form and appearance, since this is its most frequent presentation in modern times.

Anelia Ovnarska-Milusheva completed a bachelor's and master's program in psychology of childhood at SU "St. Kl. Ohridski", and subsequently acquired Master's degrees in health care economics (Medical University, Sofia), as well as in Ethnology and cultural anthropology at SU "St. Kl. Ohridski", Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History. Hers contact with folk culture is also related to her long-term participation as a dancer in the "Bistrica" ensemble and as a singer in the "Bistrica Grandmothers and Their Granddaughters" group. The PhD student has many years of experience as an organizer and mediator of various events. He is also a teacher in the subject "Culture and National Identity" at 192 SU "Hristo Botev", as well as in extracurricular forms of education for children from the primary school at 145 SU "Simeon Radev".

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliographic reference with added Internet resources and an appendix (58 pages of illustrative material, mostly author's), a total of 258 pages. The text has integrated diagrams illustrating the author's theses and arguments. The thesis is well structured, clearly and consistently subordinated to the logic of the text.

In the introductory part, the doctoral student clearly formulates the goals, tasks, scope of the study, as well as the main research questions that motivate its development. The object of her research is clearly defined, namely the "stylized national dress for the stage", because

the visibility and relatively clearly defined cultural framework of the costume make it preferred and easily recognizable as a stage product. The author's interest fully corresponds to the clearly distinct trend of increased interest in folk culture in general and in particular in the so-called traditional clothing and its use for the stage representation. At the same time, her experience as a direct participant in the stage use of the costume as participant in a number of stage appearances as part of the "Bistrica" ensemble gives the important perspective of an insider and, as the doctoral student herself points out, has had many experiences over the years related to the use of the costumes of scene. In the introduction, Anelia Milusheva very clearly outlines the framework of what she understands by stage art, thus setting the safe limits of her research solely on the observation and analysis of the performances of ensembles on stage (professional and amateur) and part of the schools that teach dancers. The purpose, tasks, object and subject of the research are clearly and accurately formulated, so that the reader already knows what to expect from the proposed text. Methodologically, the doctoral student uses the methods of field ethnographic research with elements of included observation. The main field research are conducted in the period from 2018 to 2022. However, the author's long-term experience as a participant in a number of stage performances gives her the opportunity to expand her observations and the chronological scope of his research. The PhD candidate takes as a basis several ensembles for folk songs and dances, different in terms of status and concept, which puts the researched problem on a comparative basis and gives representativeness of the conclusions. In methodological terms, the benefits and deficits that accompany the researcher, being both insider and outsider in the research, are well argued. The terminological framework does not weigh down the text, but on the contrary, clarifies the author's position on exploited and therefore sometimes somewhat fluid terms such as traditional clothing, authentic costume, folklore and folk clothing, folklore group, stylized and national costume, etc.

The first chapter outlines the process of transformation of clothing from the traditional period from something, used in everyday activity in an element of the stage presentation of what, in the context of the Renaissance and Early Modern times, is chosen for a scene from the so-called folk culture. The author logically places the watershed in this process in the Renaissance period, when transformations in folk culture in general and clothing in particular became visible. The author very clearly shows the process of putting costume on stage in the context the background of the Late Renaissance debate about national identity. Against the background of the development of the Bulgarian dramaturgical tradition, it is shown how the costume becomes a tool for conveying of the character dressed in it. The PhD candidate correctly points out that stage clothing in this period declares ethnic characteristics. At the same time, it is very clearly indicated that the stage clothing, called to be presented as Bulgarian, is above all rural clothing, and the author pays attention to all the conventions related to rural and, accordingly, urban life in Bulgarian conditions.

The second chapter is dedicated to the most active period in the process of interpretation and appearance of stage clothing, namely the period of socialism in Bulgaria. Without going into details that would divert attention from the main object, the doctoral student very clearly outlines the framework of cultural and state policy during the period and her reflections on the overall vision of what the so-called folk culture should be shown and seen. It is logical to assert that folklore during this period was recognized as a valuable heritage, but not heritage in its entirety, but a selected one. In this process, of course, elements of this culture are modified, including the costume, whose purpose for the stage already requires other ornamentation and representativeness. As the doctoral student rightly points out, the process of overall ideologizing of society also leads to ideologizing of clothing (p. 60). The doctoral student also draws attention to the enormous resources that were invested in the 1970s and 1980s in the

preparation of the "1300 years of Bulgaria" celebrations in the context of the researched problem.

In the third chapter, Aneliya Milusheva examines the vision and function of folk clothing intended for stage performances. She dwells on the way it is transformed so as to present to the viewer a complete picture of music, dance and vision. This process leads to the stylization of the costume. Its transformation into a national symbol and sign, recognizable to all, is also an essential element. The doctoral student also draws attention to the gradual development and distribution of the so-called Bulgarian style in clothing. Subsequently, she dwells on the role of the tourism industry and the traditional art gatherings in imposing a specific vision of folk clothing. The theses of the doctoral student are argued with a number of examples, which gives the necessary dose of density to the text.

The fourth chapter traces the development of stage clothing in the years after 1989. The object of the study is again logically placed in the context of political events in the country, which reflect on culture in general and, in particular, on the performances of ensembles for traditional dances and songs. The author outlines the internal chronology and her reflections on the studied problem. Stepping on normative documents, Anelia Milusheva traces the new forms of appearance of stage clothing. The change of the lineups has been tracked, which also leads to a new type of solutions for stage clothing. The analysis is constructed on the specific examples of the ensembles "Chinari" and "Bulgare", the old ensembles "Filip Kutev" and the smaller "Bistritsa" and clearly shows the transformation of stage clothing in recent times.

The conclusion collects the author's thesis and summaries. The main difference between folk and stylized costume is brought out. The conclusion is clear and corresponds to the quality of the overall analysis. It represents an adequate conclusion to a comprehensive, well-constructed, readable and well-argued text.

My question is related to the methodological part of the research. How does the doctoral student determine her position as an insider in the research itself, and where does she find the pros and cons of this for her research?

The dissertation presents the PhD candidate as an accomplished and well-prepared researcher, with a perspective for new interesting ethnological studies in the field of folk culture and its transformation in the conditions of modern society. Proof of this is the author's publications on the topic of the dissertation research and beyond it - a total of 10 in number (five on the topic of the research and five on other topics, including two monographic studies). The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation. The dissertation is a contribution to the field of folk culture and its contemporary reading, and it is especially valuable that it provides a possible view of how folk culture can be read in a contemporary context.

The procedure corresponds to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application, as well as the internal Rules for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and for holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Therefore, expressing my categorical positive opinion, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Anelia Sasheva Ovnarska-Milusheva for the dissertation research on the topic "Development and transformation of Bulgarian traditional clothing from the middle of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century through the prism of performing arts" and I will vote positively for it.

Sofia

20.04.2023



Signature:

Assoc. Prof. V. Kotseva