Recension

of Prof. D.Sc. Rachko Ivanov Popov - member of the scientific jury for holding a competition for the academic position of "professor" under PN 3.1 Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Ethnology - Local traditions and cultures), announced in SG, no. 48 of 28.06.2022 for the needs of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The only candidate in the competition is Associate Professor Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova, who completed her master's degree at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" as a master's degree in history with a specialization in "Ethnology" and a second major in the Portuguese language. Her dissertation work, under the supervision of Prof. D.Sc. Ivanichka Georgieva, she defended again at her Alma Mater in 2001. Between 2003 and 2005 she was elected as a senior assistant, and from 2005 she was appointed as main assistant professor at the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of History at Kliment Ohridski University. From 2011 to the present, she holds the position of "associate professor" at the same department. From 2004 to 2017, she specialized in five institutions in Bulgaria, Europe and Russia.

From the presented documents and from my personal acquaintance with the candidate, I share my high appreciation for her great role in the development of ethnology in the Bulgarian academic environment. Since 2005, Associate Professor Dr. Mira Markova is reading 8 disciplines (lecture courses and one practical-applied seminar) for the bachelor's and master's courses not only in the specialty "Ethnology", but also for students from the specialties "Hebraistics" (together with associate professor Dr. Rumiana Marinova - Hristidi) and "History and foreign language". Especially contributing to the visibility of Bulgarian science abroad is the course "Regional Traditions and Museology", conducted in English. It is available to undergraduate and graduate Erasmus+ students, thus giving them the opportunity to get to know Bulgarian culture.

In addition, the candidate prepares and leads 6 lecture courses for several master's programs in the Faculty of History - "Museology", "Ethnology and cultural anthropology", "Cultural tourism", but also from 2022/2023 implements a joint program with VTU "St. St. Cyril and Methodius". The latter is a new proof of her dedicated work, as the maintenance of inter-academic exchange in Bulgaria guarantees the future and development of ethnology. Her educational and teaching activities extend beyond the Faculty of History through the co-leadership of the MP "Cultural Tourism" to the specialty "Tourism" in the Faculty of Geology and Geography.

In this spirit, the successful supervision of 14 graduates and 3 doctoral students, all of whom successfully defended their theses, should also be noted. Her activity continues, and at the moment she has three full-time, one part-time and two doctoral students with the right of defense.

It should be noted that the candidate was also an Erasmus coordinator between 2007 and 2018. For these 11 years, she assisted in the signing of 84 contracts for the mobility of teachers and students. Her active participation in enriching the academic life not only of the Department of Ethnology, but also of the entire faculty, should be appreciated. Her appearance as a guest lecturer at numerous universities in Poland, Croatia, Greece, Latvia and Korea and her participation and management of 14 projects in the last 8 years supports inter-academic exchange on a wider scale and helps to broaden the horizons of scientists.

From what has been said so far, it is clear that the candidate is dedicated to science and to her students, enriches the academic environment offered by the university and by the Faculty of History.

After her habilitation, Associate Prof. Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova is an active author and researcher, which is reflected in the description of her rich scientific output: 2 monographs (one from 2011 and one from 2022), 59 articles and studies in scientific journals (refereed, indexed and unreferenced), series and collections. The significance of her works is evidenced by the 37 citations found and indicated. During the period, she participated in 41 Bulgarian and international conferences with sectional and plenary reports (four) and comments and discussion.

1. The scientific research fields of Assoc. Dr. Mira Markova are diverse, and among her contributions stand out in the field of studies of the dynamics and variability of local culture in the present with a view to customary-ritual complexes (incl. the small Bulgarian town). From an ethnological point of view, I would start with the contributions in the monograph "Local cultures and traditions. Cultural transformation of ritual systems in the XXI century", published in 2022, has for the development of modern scientific knowledge.

The book has a complex structure and guides the reader along the path from the academic, through the ritual and the comparative and the human-reflexive. It seeks to build a thorough analysis of tradition as a living and dynamic structure. It is here, for me, that one of the main achievements of the text lies. The work takes a decisive step in modernizing analyzes of traditional culture - often viewed either as dying, or as static, partial, or otherwise reprehensibly transformed by modern man. Following the repeatedly quoted words of Pope John Paul II: "Tradition is not something immobile or static, but is alive and dynamic because it strengthens the intelligence of faith", the author uses analytics to trace this flexibility, but also the resilience of ritualism and faith, without giving such an assessment. Tracing the custom-ritual complexes of Nestinarism, of the Eniova Bullya, and of the model of modern pilgrimage, she successfully shows the place and necessity of ritual as a kind of "grounding" of modern man (through sustaining and binding by memory), but also the wider its ideological basis on which communal and personal relationships are based. Through them, modern man searches for his place (with the first two complexes) and himself (especially with pilgrimage). The author examines this through the prism of collectivist and individualist societies (Bulgarian, Greek and Polish).

The rich ethnographic material complements and builds on the existing literature, which is quite substantial, especially when it comes to fireplace making. The structures of the chapters help the reader, even if he does not have specialized knowledge, to find his way around easily. The applied comparative approach to tracing the "migration" of fireplace making from Strandzha to Northern Greece is essential and contributing. She indisputably proves the sustainability of the local culture of the former through the elements of the ritual model presented by the author, which preserve to a large extent common characteristics and meaning on both sides of the border. Where this proximity is absent, the absence of an original local culture is quite clearly evident. Locally, it is replaced by "copy". Such is the example of some of the settlements in Northern Greece, in which, in the absence of an ayazmo, "its intention" and its deliberate construction took place (p. 89).

However, the basic structure and purpose of the custom-ritual complexes remain unchanged regardless of the change in place (migration of fire-making), time (historical and administrative obstacles are marked, although customs are preserved), demographic challenges (observing a change in the gender and age of the ritual persons both at the Enyova bulya and at the firewalk), the profanization and the removal of certain elements (by tourism during the firewalk) and the changes in everyday life. Here I want to draw attention to the line that unites both the candidate's academic and teaching activities and her scientific work, namely the pursuit of an objective and supranational approach. The organization of the entire book is placed in a more general context by examining ritual complexes from a local perspective in three countries: Bulgaria, Greece and Poland. The complexity of researching such a diverse terrain is great, but the author manages to overcome it and achieve a broad contextual analysis, drawing lines of similarity between the three cultures in their local but also modern dimensions. Assoc. Dr. Mira Markova follows this dialogue in another way, as in the first chapter she looks at the local culture in the work of Ivan Hoich, Stepan Radich and Evdokia Peteva-Filova. Thus, she substantiates the need for research on her in modern times, tracing her role as a bridge between the national and the local in "the dawn of the formation of a modern understanding of the meaning of local traditions" (p. 10). Thus, she turns the meaning of the ethnological work from one of only national or local importance to having a definite place in the Slavic world.

The accumulated important empirical material leads the author to two interesting generalizations within the studied case of pilgrimage. Examining contemporary pilgrimage to Calvaria Patslavska, she groups the images and behavior of pilgrims (p. 159) following the male and female trajectories of the life narrative. In this way, she makes a particularly interesting analysis of the modern man who lived closer or further away from "tradition". The clash of the dynamics of pilgrimage, following an "official" ritualization but also each participant's own, and the local ritual system, which is shown to be stable but also evolving, well defends the idea of ​​the sustainability of local culture.

On the other hand, the analysis leaves room for the "mobility of its elements" in the global world. This possibility and the lack of strictly religious ritualism helps modern man in his search for himself.

The second summary concerns the image of the Virgin Mary, whose variations in image and function are widespread in many European countries, denominations and ethnic groups. The historical perspective imposed by Bulgarian manuscript monuments from the 17th - 19th centuries is important to inform the scientific community about the existing parallels in this religious image and can put new perspectives on the establishment of proximity in local cults. The critical reader would probably ask himself whether and to what extent customary-ritual complexes are the ideological basis on which survival strategies are built in modern times. Although building "primary layers" of society and the individual, do they not simply provide an additional protective function, performed almost automatically, along with the growing strong rationalization of everyday life (which the author defines as the main motivation for the performance of the rites) and its subordination to democracy , the economy, etc. In addition, the path of man back to man, or in other words, self-knowledge in the modern world follows the trajectory of Eastern beliefs and religions, not the "return to the root." These are possible discussion points to follow the scholar's labor and work.

2. I must also note the candidate's work in popularizing the work "Pictures from General Geography" by Ivan Hoich, which, in addition to following her chosen methodological paradigm in combining the historical and ethnological approach, gives academic and non-academic audiences access to the full text for the first time. Thus, she once again manages not only to place Bulgaria in a wider Balkan context through Hoich's text, but also to "open the door" to his approach in getting to know the other.

Her analysis follows the described historical development of the Bulgarians, as the local culture plays an important role. The choice of Prof. Dr. Mira Markova to work with this particular author, I believe, is also determined by her interest in the topic of stereotypes as a kind of "mechanical" reasoning that does not concern the need for evidence. The folk beliefs and customs described in the author's latest monograph are similar to the subject, insofar as she correctly considers them as not subject to rational explanations according to the modern world. On the other hand, they also form a direct connection with her research on local religious culture, whose sustainability and place in modern human life were the author's thesis back in 2014 and 2015.

3. These researches of hers are connected in the analytical approach and in the subject of research with the works of the candidate on the urban environment and culture in Sofia from the XIX and XXI centuries, which she reveals as setting trends in the development of the Bulgarian city and society. In addition to the listed six articles (in appendix 14), five of which were published after the habilitation, the author, her habilitation monograph Local Urban Cultures, presents a look at this topic based on historical and archival material, but also on biographical interviews, which undoubtedly enrich the analysis and make it sacrificial.

4. Assoc. Dr. Mira Markova's interest in museology and Slavic ethnology is manifested in her research on the First Russian Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867. As a political project centered on the Slavic peoples in the middle of the 19th century, the author examines the place of the artifacts in the exhibition, paying attention to the Bulgarian heritage in the context of the ethnographic wealth of the Slavic peoples. In three of her articles, the candidate develops the topic of educational ethnographic and historical museums from the point of view of museum pedagogy. This topic successfully combines her teaching and scientific work, as through the guidance of her doctoral student, she supports the understanding of intercultural dialogue and the educational mission of museums in modern times.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the important contribution of Assoc. Dr. Mira Markova in her research. This is her "philanthropy" at work, as Prof. D.Sc Veselin Tepavicharov would say. Her advocacy of the natural human drive for creativity, for change, but also a chosen commitment to tradition and what keeps human being "firmly on the ground" is evident in each of her works.

Evaluating completely positively the overall scientific production, academic and teaching activity of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mira Nikolaeva Markova, I will vote positively for awarding her the scientific title and academic position "professor" in PN 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Ethnology - Local traditions and cultures) at the Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". I strongly suggest the other members of the scientific jury to vote positively.

Sofia, 4.10.2022 Prof. D.Sc. Rachko Popov