

STATEMENT

from Assoc. Prof. Veselka Toncheva, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

regarding a competition, announced by Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski for the academic position of “Professor”, professional field 2.1. Philology (Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore), published in State Gazette, Issue 54/ 29.06.2021.

Details about the academic competition

Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Georgiev Papuchiev, D.Sc., is the only applicant for the competition for the academic position of “Professor”. He has submitted all documents required for participation in the competition. Considering his scientific output, expertise and academic involvement, he fully meets competition criteria.

Details about the candidate

N. Papuchiev earned his Master’s Degree in Philology, with a specialization in Ethnology, from the N. Rilski South-West University in Blagoevgrad, and in Sociology from the Lund University, Sweden. He was awarded a Doctor’s degree in 2007 and a Doctor of Science degree in 2016. Since 2013 N. Papuchiev has been Associate Professor in the Department of Bulgarian Literature, Faculty of Slavic Studies, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, and since 2019 – Head of Department. Throughout these years, he has acted as academic supervisor of many university students and successful PhD students.

The applicant has participated in different specialized academic courses and Teacher Mobility Programs in Poland (Warsaw, Lodz, Poznan, Lublin), Austria (Graz), Sweden (Lund University), etc. He has been involved in many national and international academic forums – congresses, conferences, round tables, seminars, etc. both in Bulgaria and abroad (Germany, Bosna and Herzegovina, Poland, Hungary, etc.). Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev has given public lectures and talks in Bulgaria and in different academic institutions in Poland. He has had various project commitments on different subject matters – organizational and practical, educational, scientific research ones, including projects within the framework of international scientific programs. His prolific scientific and professional biography is convincing evidence of his academic development and growth, as well as of his successful scientific and teaching career.

Description of the applicant's publications

The applicant has submitted a full list of publications featuring 4 monographs, 2 training aids, 5 scientific collections (as compiler), and dozens of articles and studies covering a wide range of topics. Amongst his most prominent writings are two of his earlier monographs discussing folklore as a resource for reconstructing national culture and providing an anthropological review of the link between identity, state narrative and ideology, and the studied object – from folk art, through the work of art and to the souvenir. N. Papuchiev has applied for the present academic competition with 2 monographs and 3 articles.

Major scientific contribution

His monograph titled “Museum – Possible and Impossible. Challenges of Mass Culture, Market Strategies and Nostalgic Memory of the Past” (2019) is a central piece of writing amongst the papers submitted for review. The study offers a comprehensive focus on contemporary museums and museology based on empirical observations and research work, with a reference to rich Bulgarian and foreign literature. The study is structured in two chapters that are relatively independent and present museums of different types and modes of existence.

The analysis in *Chapter One* covers 5 exhibitions, organized in two sections. The first one highlights three key museum exhibitions through which the author seeks to establish the impact of literature (and cinema) on mass culture, namely the Grimm World Kassel (Germany) and the folk tale perception issues; Juliet's House in Verona (Italy) through the reading of literature and of the space beyond it; and the Baba Iliytsa House Museum in Chelopek (Bulgaria) – from a literary and ethnographic point of view. These three case studies enable the analysis to position itself in the intermediate fields where high literature plots are transformed into constructs for everyday use. N. Papuchiev underlines the mechanisms that reformat the semantic cores of literary messages into an interpretative environment free from expert knowledge control.

In Section II, Chapter I of the study, the author illustrates the policies adopted by museums to address the ever-changing expectations of public audiences by giving two related examples – the world's oldest open-air ethnographic museum in Skansen (Sweden) and its Bulgarian counterpart – the architectural-ethnographic complex “Etar” in Gabrovo. The choice of these two museums is particularly smart since it offers an interesting phenomenological perspective of the overall presence of ethnographic museums in our modern times. Furthermore, as N. Papuchiev states, the great narrative of the nation's history, based on imaginary inherited cultural authenticity, no longer

suffices to attract continuously high interest among tourists. The two museums in Stockholm and Gabrovo show exhibitions that require an active attitude from their visitors. Together with other numerous museum events, exhibitions are no longer a relic unity reflecting a certain rigid plot from the past but are turned into an individual experience instead. They become an integral element of an environment that bears direct correspondence to the life experience of tourists themselves. This in turn offers tourists an opportunity to shape individual reflections of their knowledge of the past, as the author himself has established.

While Chapter I dwells on the cultural role and importance of present-day emblematic museums, the analysis in *Chapter II* is focused on the yet non-existing Museum of Socialism and the challenges of the nostalgic memory of the past. The author has studied several bigger or smaller private collections in the village of Mindya, Veliko Tarnovo, Dimitrovgrad, Pravetz, the village of Kovachevtsi, Peshtera and Sofia.

As at the time of the research, none of these sites were officially recognized as museums or public-access collections. In fact, what they do is offer their creators' personal viewpoint of the past, with individual perspective on experience being at the core of their interest and inner drive. The way these artifacts are organized, and collected and preserved, rests on the personal interpretation of social memory and national history. N. Papuchiev concludes that the absence of a proper museum has turned these exhibitions of objects from the near past into areas dedicated to memories rather than locations celebrating the memory of the historic past. As symbolic elements of the past, these exhibits reveal themselves as tools for mnemonic updates of one's own experience.

Papuchiev's research on all quoted sites and the various scientific and methodological tools applied by him throughout the process reveal a wide emotional and evaluative range of attitudes towards the recent past. His observations indicate that various scenarios fleet through one's personal memories and the collective memory, together with the effects of forgetfulness and nostalgia – nostalgia as the utopian imagining of an idealized past but also as an emotional coping mechanism to embrace the (communist) regime. The author offers yet another way of accounting for the near past, namely within the context of mass culture.

Papuchiev's study represents a solid research work of indisputable theoretical, methodological and interpretative quality. It takes a snapshot of initial attempts to present socialist times in a museum format, followed by further developments and a search for forms of existence that gravitate towards mass culture environments.

The socialist past is also present in Papuchiev's second monograph submitted for this competition, which, however, is not featured as his main habilitation thesis – "Festivals. Networks. Identities: The masquerade games in Pernik and their regional reflections" (2021). Although it is not discussed any further herein, I would still like to note that it is a high-quality research contribution. The festival in Pernik is seen as a social phenomenon through the eyes of the stakeholder theory, which is an entirely new approach to this topic.

Conclusion

The scientific papers submitted by N. Papuchiev for the competition are indisputable evidence of his comprehensive research work as a scientist focused on modernity and contemporary culture developments. Along with his top scientific performance, his application is very convincing also because of his active involvement in various research projects and initiatives, while his teaching career is one marked by dedication and academic devotion. The scientific and academic biography of the applicant gives me full confidence to propose to the esteemed academic jury to endorse Nikolay Georgiev Papuchiev as "Professor" in professional field 2.1. Philology (Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore).

Sofia

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