

## REVIEW

By Prof. DSc. Albena Georgieva

For selection of a *professor* in a professional field 2.1. Philology (Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore)

With a candidate Assoc. Prof. DSc. Nikolai Georgiev Papuchiev

Assoc. Prof. DSc. Nikolay Papuchiev graduated from SWU “Neofit Rilski” – Blagoevgrad, as a master philologist with a specialization in ethnology in 1997; in 2002 he defended his master’s degree in sociology in the International Master’s Program in Sociology: Transformation in a Comparative European Perspective, at the University of Lund, Sweden; in 2007 he was awarded the educational and scientific degree Doctor of Folklore Studies (Code 05.04.09 Folklore Studies (including Bulgarian folklore, Slavic folklore), and in 2016 he received the degree Doctor of Sciences (professional field 2.1. Philology. Anthropology of the Bulgarians, Bulgarian folklore).

He is currently Head of the Department of Bulgarian Literature at the Faculty of Slavic Philology at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In 2004 he was a researcher at the Institute of Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and an editor at the Literary Thought magazine; from 2005 to 2007 he was an assistant in Bulgarian folklore and ethnology at SWU “N. Rilski”, Blagoevgrad; from 2007 to 2009 he was an Adjunct at the Department of Slavic Linguistics at the Maria Skłodowska-Curie University, Lublin, Poland; since 2009 he has been a senior assistant, and since 2013 – an Associate Professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. He has been the research supervisor of two successfully graduated PhD students and over 20 student diploma theses. He has passed a number of specializations in Bulgaria and abroad; he has participated in over 30 national and international conferences; he has given public lectures and has been involved in a number of practical, scientific and educational projects.

Nikolay Papuchiev’s scientific production is no less impressive. He is the author of four monographs (2012, 2018, 2019 and 2021) and two textbooks (2014 and 2016), 2 studies, 40 articles and 11 co-authored articles, he is the compiler of two issues of magazines and is a member of the compilation team of 3 collections. From this

production for participation in the competition, he has presented 2 monographs and 3 articles.

The monograph “The Museum – Possible and Impossible. Challenges of mass culture, market strategies and nostalgic memory of the past” (2019) is dedicated to the current problem of the museum and its place in modern society. With his inherent sense of actuality, Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev focuses on major topics in popular culture and their projections in various museums. The Grimm World Museum in Kassel, Germany, which opened in 2015, not only presents the work of the two brothers who contributed to the development of philological knowledge in the 19th century, but also “is a kind of visualization of the first edition of the two fairy tale volumes, where the main elements of the fairy tales are presented without censorship” (pp. 30–31). According to the author, with innovative means the museum emphasizes “a heritage recognized as a construct of European cultural belonging” (p. 37). Juliet’s House in Verona, Italy, on the other hand, is analyzed as a projection of popular culture stories related to love and tragedy; it represents and popularizes Shakespeare’s tragedy, its film adaptations, created artefacts and practices and that activates the tourist flow and increases revenues.

‘Baba Iliytsa’ House-Museum in the village of Chelopek, Vratsa region, has been interpreted as an intertwining of the national narrative with literary fiction, which plays a key role in its construction. It presents ‘authentic’ ethnographic materials from the local way of life and customs and from traditional crafts and at the same time materializes ideological constructs of modern nationalism from the emblematic work of Ivan Vazov. The Skansen Open-Air Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, yet, embodies a new trend in the development of modern ethnography and becomes a standard for presenting the topical while reading the past. In comparison is considered the Bulgarian open-air museum ‘Etara’ near Gabrovo, which is recognized “as a manifestation of the ethnocentric view of a world safe in its everyday and chronological isolation” (p. 132). The first chapter of the book summarizes the attempts of museologists to ‘open’ the museum to the present and to the creativity and personal commitment of visitors. Behind the declared attempts of the creators to revitalize the past, the author identifies some disguised market strategies, which actually make the museum profitable and vibrant in our days.

In the second chapter, the attention is focused on several private collections, representative of the initial process of illustrating the socialist period through emblematic objects. The author problematizes the boundaries of individual and collective in the memory of the past and the intertwining of nostalgia and forgetfulness in recalling it. Based on personal field observations and interviews, he shows different trends in understanding the past: on the one hand is the desire of some people to give historicity and significance to their own biographical trajectories, a desire distinct in the generations whose youth passed in the era of socialism. On the other hand, nostalgic and idealized notions of this past testify to generations lacking life experience during the period. I would say it proves the mythological principle of building an idea of a ‘utopian’ and ‘assured’ past in opposition to modern strenuous life or, as the author writes, as a “temporary escape from reality” (p. 306). The influence of the market is also taken into account, as it reacts to the nostalgic attitudes of the consumers and provides goods provoking interest and ‘affection’ ‘as if’ taken from the past.

With this monograph, Nikolai Papuchiev adds his voice to the extensive contemporary dialogue about the museum and the functions it performs in society. Summarizing different phenomena, he penetrates the underlying principles and trends, outlines the complex intertwining between ‘revitalization’ of the past and the desire to engage visitors through attractive stories and events that contribute to the (self)maintenance of the museum, all the more difficult and problematic in a market economy. On the other hand, the limitations of nostalgia for the past are pointed out, nostalgia that in principle takes place in every reality, but in order to be established as a lasting phenomenon, it must be shared by a large part of the population. This, in turn, is difficult to achieve in regard to the totalitarian era of the communist rule, in which repression, restrictions and existing fears largely obscure attempts at nostalgic and cheerful recollection of one’s youth.

Nikolay Papuchiev’s unmistakable sense of actuality is also a leading principle in the other monograph presented for the competition: “Festivals. Networks. Identities. The masquerade games in Pernik and their regional reflections” (2021). Its focus is the established in 1966 Festival of Masquerade Games in Pernik and the various ways in which it projects in the tradition of individual villages. The starting point of the study

are personal observations and field recordings during student expeditions led by Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev for several years, conducted on Surva in Breznik municipality. Various aspects of the established masquerade tradition and festive events are traced and highlighted: the role of the institutions and their relations with the masked groups; the way of organizing the festival events; intertwining of inherited with innovative; combining and refraction between the adopted 'big' ideologies and local policies for building specificity and identity, etc. Already in his preliminary notes to the book, the author notes: "Surva is a field of symbolic clashes in which both companies and institutions in one form or another were involved" (p. 9). Observations and interviews register rivalries between the settlements, disputes with ethnographers about the 'authenticity' of the rituals performed, critical discussion of the jury classifications over the years, the importance of the groups for the representation of the various settlements, etc., which outlines the Surva festival and the related tradition as a center and kaleidoscope of the local cultural reality.

The first chapter focuses on the policies for the preservation of cultural heritage in the socialist era. As the author points out, after the period of extreme prohibitions "the ideological codes of modern nationalism are reactivated" (p. 12) and folklore becomes the object of study and safeguarding as part of state policies in the field of culture. Chitalishte (culture center) and local institutions for amateur art began to work for its reproduction and popularization, while it was subjected to processing and ideological control. "This is a process in which the selective reading of tradition misses some and reduces other components of cultural life for the needs of national culture" (p. 17). One of the main functions of the festivals created during this period is to turn certain practices from a cultural intimacy into a stage product of national importance. The festival in Pernik becomes part of the gradually established calendar of selectively recreated folklore traditions, including fairs and reviews of amateur art. Over time, the management of the festival shifted from local structures to the Center for Amateur Arts at the State Committee for Arts and Culture, thus establishing a centralized ideological control.

The second chapter of the book deals with the processes and phenomena that the political change of 1989 manifests or generates and which confirm the importance of

the festival in Pernik and the tradition it maintains as a crossroad of regional social interactions. Specific cases are considered, applying the theory of stakeholders and cultural policies are considered as a crossroad and interaction of different interests. The first object of observation are Gigintsi and other villages from Breznik municipality, the festival being an opportunity for them to gain visibility before the 'others', to declare their local identity, to develop the creative potential of the participants and to establish their role as an example to follow not only in masquerade games, but also in everyday social behavior. The festival strategies and local practices in the Municipality of Breznik are analyzed, where since 2003 the Masquerade Festival 'Surova Breznik' is held one week before the Pernik one and where all stakeholders make joint efforts to bring to the fore group and local identity.

The author reflects on today's equality of men and women in taking roles in the group of masked people, as well as on the involvement of new, different from the tradition plots in the community narrative about themselves. At the same time, he shows the internal processes of 'self-regulation', which are required at the expense of the almost lacking 'methodical assistance' provided by specialists from outside, obligatory in the socialist past. Not to be overlooked are the changes that occurred in the production of masks since the adoption of the Biodiversity Act of 2002, which protects certain species of animals and birds and with which the regulations of the festival are consistent. The author does not fail to look at the celebration itself and at the inevitable conflicts and tensions, the compromises and solutions found in the name of achieving the unity of the community, which in many cases is spatially divided for most of the year, but feels united and represented through its Survakar group.

In the third chapter, Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev traces the connection between the celebration and the festival event networks. He defines the festival celebration as a link between the preserved tradition, recognized as a cultural heritage, and its modern interpretation as an opportunity for creative expression. Emphasized are the importance of the inclusion of Surva in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; the involvement of the various actors in the presentation and promotion of Survakar traditions in various media and social networks; the establishment of a single cultural calendar of festive events, in which all stakeholders

participate; the importance of Surva for maintaining the settlement identity by symbolically overcoming the effects of migration and depopulation of the villages, etc. The correlation between the different village holidays in the calendar – Surva, fair (sabor) and kurban – is also considered.

Both monographs of Nikolay Papuchiev present his commitment to the study of the contemporary situation and the problems it poses to ethnologists and anthropologists. His observations are the result of extensive fieldwork and first-hand information, and his analysis is based on a wide horizon of in-depth acquaintance with the relevant Bulgarian and foreign literature. Many of the topics discussed are reviewed from different sides, possible explanations or directions for development are sought, and the opinions of foreign authors and outside observers are critically presented.

A commitment to clarify the problems of modern society is also shown by the three articles submitted for the competition: the way in which two films reflect the traumatic events of the renaming of Muslims in our country during socialism; again the festival of masquerade games in Pernik and the policies for protection of the cultural heritage by the communist government; the role that Bram Stoker's novel Dracula played in the replication of a popular image of evil in literature, film industry, mass consciousness, and tourism.

The attached reference to the citations proves that what Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Papuchiev wrote finds an echo among his colleagues and is involved in the circulation of scientific ideas and views. Along with his qualities, expressed in publications, he convincingly presents himself as a lecturer at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' with various courses, conducted study expeditions and practices and defended diploma theses under his guidance.

The stated so far gives me the reason with conviction to vote in favor and to recommend to the distinguished colleagues from the scientific jury to nominate Assoc. DSc. Nikolay Papuchiev to the academic position of *professor* in professional field 2.1. Philology (Anthropology of the Bulgarians. Bulgarian folklore).

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