

REVIEW

by

Prof. Dr. habil. Georgi Minczew, lecturer at the Department of Slavic Philology,
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on:

3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Folkloristics – Folklore
and Religion)

As part of the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor,” announced in the State Gazette, issue 98 of 19.11.2024, and on the website of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” for the needs of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, the candidate is Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova from the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.”

1. General Presentation of the Submitted Materials

Subject:

By order No. RD-22-432 of 18.02.2025, issued by the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I was appointed as a member of the academic jury for the competition for the academic position of ‘Associate Professor’ at PU in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Folkloristics – Folklore and Religion), **announced for the needs** of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

Only one candidate has submitted documents for participation in the competition: Senior Assistant Professor **Dr. Borislava Petkova**.

The materials submitted by Dr. Borislava Petkova in printed form comply with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at PU and include the following documents:

23 scientific works published after obtaining the academic degree of "Doctor": Two monographs, Three studies, 14 articles in the field of folkloristics and ethnology, Two book chapters, Two articles in the field of social anthropology and cultural studies

The submitted materials cover the academic fields of the disciplines announced in the competition.

2. Brief Biographical Data of the Candidate

Dr. Borislava Petkova's academic and teaching career is closely connected to her alma mater – Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski." Between 1993 and 1998, she completed two specializations: Journalism (1996) and Philology and Ethnology (Master's degree in 1998). In 1999, she was admitted as a full-time doctoral student in Folkloristics and has since dedicated her time, academic efforts, and organizational activities to her chosen field.

3. General Characteristics of the Candidate

Dr. B. Petkova has worked as a secretary of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, assistant professor, and senior assistant professor. I have had the opportunity to interact with her during my academic visits to Plovdiv University under the Erasmus+ program, at international summer schools, and within the Program for Promoting Foreign Bulgarian Studies.

In my opinion, the candidate successfully works with students, organizes conferences and summer schools, and efficiently handles administrative tasks related to the Erasmus+ program. Similar impressions have been shared by doctoral students and students from the Department of Slavic Philology at the University of Łódź who have studied at PU or

participated in summer schools organized by Dr. B. Petkova, such as the one held in the Rhodopes in 2023.

Dr. B. Petkova has been a frequent guest at the Department in Łódź within the Erasmus+ program. I have attended her lectures for Polish students and doctoral candidates and was pleasantly surprised by her ability to present complex scientific topics on Bulgarian traditional culture in an accessible and engaging manner. She has also assisted my students in selecting topics for their master's theses related to Bulgarian and Balkan folklore.

4. Evaluation of the Scientific and Scholarly Activity of Dr. Borislava Petkova.

Dr. B. Petkova successfully combines administrative and teaching activities with research activity in the field of folklore and social anthropology. The candidate's good scientific preparation and her ability to present her position clearly and convincingly in written text are also evident in her appearances at specialized scientific forums. Her reports are logically structured, and the folklore material is analyzed using the tools of contemporary theories in the field of ethnology, folklore, and the history of religion. I have listened to several of her public presentations at conferences. At the last one in which I participated together with Dr. B. Petkova ("The Storytelling Person and Folklore," Sofia, October 24-25, 2024), she presented a report dedicated to the reconstruction of the devil's corporeality – as it is presented in Bulgarian narrative folklore. The text is directly related to the monograph published a few months later, which will be discussed below, and was very well received by the colleagues present.

Dr. B. Petkova's research activity is also related to the candidate's participation in eight projects funded by the MES, the Ministry of Culture, Plovdiv University, and the Horizon program. Her work on the projects deserves special attention: "Construction of Religious and Cultural Identities

among Ethno-Confessional Communities in the Central Rhodopes (2015-2018, funded by Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski") and "The Christian and Cultural-Historical Heritage of Northwestern Bulgaria – Strategies for Preserving and Translating Local Identities" (2018-2022, funded by MES). These two research projects are related to the issues connected with folk Christianity – a field of humanities successfully developed in the last few decades in Bulgarian ethnology and folklore studies, a field in which the candidate can boast her own scientific contributions.

. B. Petkova's first monograph is entitled "Let Us Make Earth and People. The Story of Creation and the Fall in Bulgarian Culture," Plovdiv, 2018. Even at this early stage of the candidate's creative path, the interdisciplinary approach, characteristic of her later works as well, is evident. The biblical narrative from Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis is a foundational moment for dualistic doctrines (including Bogomilism) – the opposition of spiritual and material, of God and the demiurge, undermines the canonical biblical text and is not accidentally denounced in theological anti-heretical writings as the most dangerous view for orthodox Christianity. The monograph analyzes motifs and plots from various written and oral narrative corpora, with particular attention paid to apocryphal and folklore texts concerning cosmogony (the rivalry between the Lord and the devil in the creation of the world and the first people), the Fall, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise.

Similar are the themes and research methods in some of the candidate's articles published in the period 2013-2024, e.g.: "The Motif of the Creation of Woman in Bulgarian Folk Legends." In: "May the Descendants of the Orthodox Know the Past Fate of Their Native Land." Materials of the VIII International Forum "Zadonsk St. Tikhon Educational Readings." Lipetsk, 2013, pp. 175-177; "The Bramble in Bulgarian Folk Legends." In: "Thought, Word, Text." 14 (20), 2023, pp. 134-144; "The Devil-Monk in Bulgarian Folk Legends or on the Permeability of the Boundaries of Human Space (I-II)." In: "Slavic Dialogues," 33/224, pp. 99-121; "Thought, Word, Text." 16. (22), 2024, pp. 178-189. Dr. B. Petkova's interpretation of the etiological legend about the

origin of the bramble, reflecting the rivalry between the Lord and the devil in the act of creation, and especially her reflections on the folklore motif of the devil-monk, also reflected in apocryphal literature – in "The Word on How the Paulicians Came to Be" – are interesting.

Dr. B. Petkova also has contributing publications in the field of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. She is the author of chapters in collective monographs examining in a comparative perspective the processes of education (mainly of young people) in some EU countries: Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Bulgaria.

5. Evaluation of the Monograph "The Devil. An Attempt at Reconstruction of the Folklore Image," Plovdiv, 2025.

I am well acquainted with the text of the monograph "The Devil. An Attempt at Reconstructing the Folklore Image," presented for the academic position of Associate Professor – I had the honor of being the publishing reviewer and author of the foreword to the recently published book. It is a serious work of interdisciplinary character, a step forward in the studies of the connections between medieval literary monuments and folklore texts. The issues of dualism, Bogomilism, and the penetration of dualistic elements from high to traditional culture are especially relevant today, at a time when interest in Bogomilism is increasing, but there are still no conscientious scientific studies revealing traces of dualism in the traditional beliefs of Orthodox Christians in our lands.

B. Petkova has managed to combine the solid scientific training of an ethnologist with a careful reading of medieval written monuments with dualistic (Bogomil) content, apologetic treatises denouncing heresy, as well as contemporary philosophical and theological literature devoted to the genesis of evil and its relation to the Divine plan for salvation. The search for dualistic motifs in folklore legends is a serious challenge for Dr. B. Petkova – exactly 100 years ago, the great Bulgarian literary historian Yordan Ivanov

included similar texts in his book "Bogomil Books and Legends" (1st ed. Sofia, 1925), where he discovered remnants of Bogomil cosmogony, dogmatics, liturgical practices, etc. B. Petkova has "reversed the perspective" of the research discourse – she has made a successful attempt to seek the folklore dimensions of the image of evil/the devil and to trace to what extent they are inherent in traditional culture and to what extent the influences of canonical and apocryphal literary texts have influenced folklore narratives.

Traditional verbal culture is at the center of the study, and other texts – mythological, literary, philosophical, theological – are included in the mosaic of representations – forming the phenomenon most often called "folk Christianity" (or, in the author's preferred term, "folklore Orthodox Christianity"). The author has used as source material over 100 texts published at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in the Collection of Folklore Materials (Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniya, nauka i knizhnina - SBNU), defined generically as "folklore prose," i.e., legends and fairy tales – a difficult task for selection and contemporary classification, given the unclear genre definition of the narratives excerpted for the study, called by the older generations of folklore collectors "tales" – about evil spirits, the dead, church figures, and phenomena.

The interdisciplinary approach in the study is consistently applied, the author seeks the roots of the appearance of evil and an explanation for its presence in human life in various cultural texts: Holy Scripture, dualistic teachings (Gnosticism, Bogomilism), theological and philosophical texts, medieval apocrypha. She is not afraid to delve into complex and ambiguous theological reasoning, e.g., about theodicy: explanations for the appearance and actions of evil in the world created by God, which is good and harmonious by presumption. B. Petkova seeks the roots of the image of evil (the devil/Satan) in ancient dualism; in the Middle Eastern and European environment; traces the development of the doctrine of the two principles in European medieval culture. Dualistic teachings such as Manichaeism, Messalianism, and Paulicianism penetrated Bulgarian culture even before the emergence of Bogomilism. But it is precisely on Bogomilism, which from the

middle of the 10th century transformed these ideas and had a strong impact not only on the perceptions of the world and human religiosity in the official, church environment, but also in the sphere of traditional folklore culture, that the author's attention is focused.

Another important issue addressed by B. Petkova is related to the influence of translated and Bulgarian non-canonical literature on folklore verbal art. Unlike high theological and canonical literature, the apocrypha build a world with rich imagery, which influenced oral literature and played a significant role in the process of building the image of the devil in traditional culture.

In the folklore-ethnological part of the study, the author unfolds her scientific potential as a folklorist and anthropologist, describing and analyzing the specific dimensions of the perceptions of the devil in the folklore legends and fairy tales excerpted from the SBNU. The narratives are arranged in four thematic groups: dualistic legends about the rivalry between God and the devil; stories about the devil as a helper of man; fairy tales about the devil as a winner in the rivalry with man; texts in which a person or a biblical character outsmarts the devil. The narratives examine important perceptions of the evil force for the folklore person: the origin of the devil, his names, corporeality, his incarnations (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, phytomorphic), his "family," the habitat of the evil force. The functions of the devil are not forgotten either. The mischievous acts of evil are examined in connection with his relations with God and man. Apocryphal and folklore texts are analyzed, in which the devil is a rival of God, but also a demiurge – creator of the material world and man – motifs known from ancient Gnosticism and Christian antiquity. The author has paid particular attention to the motif of the so-called "Adam's record," very popular in apocrypha, which most likely circulated in Bogomil circles – "The Sea of Tiberias," "Word about Adam and Eve." Her observations on the function of the devil as a helper of man, but also as a deceiver and pest, sowing discord in society, are also of interest. The reader will probably agree with B. Petkova's conclusion that folklore legends and fairy tales are influenced by older ideas about Satan,

but at the same time show a folklore understanding of society and the world: the relations in the devil's company resemble the hierarchy in the patriarchal family, the underground and middle (our) worlds are identical, the boundary between them is easy to overcome – the devil settles comfortably among people, makes mischief for man, but also follows the rules of cohabitation in the community.

In the appendix, annotations of the 102 folklore legends and fairy tales analyzed in the main text of the study are published. This is an important addition, which on the one hand helps the reader to form their own idea of the image of evil, and on the other hand – allows them to better follow the author's theoretical reasoning. The legends and fairy tales are annotated and rendered in contemporary Bulgarian, and not with the dialectal peculiarities of texts published more than 100 years ago – a successfully chosen strategy, enabling their reception among a wider circle of readers.

And since an ideal scholarly text has not yet been written (at least in the field of the humanities), I would like to point out some omissions, mainly in the appendix, which in my opinion needs some clarifications and additions. As I mentioned above, Dr. B. Petkova's monograph is in a sense a continuation of the work of Y. Ivanov, "Bogomil Books and Legends," where 16 dualistic legends were published with commentary (see III ed. Sofia, 2024, pp. 309-359). In the appendix to the monograph, the candidate publishes a much larger corpus of folklore texts (102). Not all are dualistic – for the most part they either describe the devil as a trickster (mediator between our world and the underworld, i.e., his kingdom), as a cunning individual striving to deceive people; or they are a description of the appearance, functions of Satan, his dwelling place, etc. The corpus of texts well reflects both the title and the author's concept – to present a reconstructed and as complete as possible image of evil. Among these narratives, an important place is of course occupied by dualistic legends. Their place is indeed distinct, the appendix begins with them (see pp. 335-341, 16 legends as in Y. Ivanov). However, it seems to me that Dr. B. Petkova could have compared more specifically the material presented by her with the legends from Y. Ivanov's work, as well as

to include in her research texts about the rivalry of the devil with the heavenly powers and especially with Archangel Michael – a motif present in apocryphal literature and reflected in folklore narratives. Because the opposition heavenly-earthly, incorporeal-corporeal relates not only to the Lord and the demiurge/Satan, but also to the incorporeal angels and the ruler of darkness. My recommendation to the author is to prepare a publication (article or study) that would supplement the valuable observations from "The Devil. An Attempt at Reconstruction of the Folklore Image."

6. Conclusion.

The materials presented by Dr. Borislava Petkova fully meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff and its Implementing Regulations, adopted at Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski."

The candidate has presented a sufficient number of scientific works with a contributing character, published in Bulgaria and abroad. Her scientific and teaching work can unequivocally be assessed positively.

After reviewing the materials and scientific works submitted for the competition, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and to recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of¹ Philosophy and History at Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" for the election of Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova to the academic position of "Associate Professor" at Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" in: Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Folklore Studies – Folklore and Religion).

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