

OPINION

ON COMPETITION FOR ACADEMIC POSITION "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR"

in: field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Folklore - Folklore and religion), announced in State Gazette, issue 98 of 19.11.2024,

with the sole candidate Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova Senior Assistant at the Department of Ethnology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History Author of the opinion (member of the National Council):

Prof. Doctor of Historical Sciences Dimo D. Cheshmedzhiev, Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski"/Cyril-Methodievsky Scientific Center – BAS

For this competition, the only candidate, Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Borislava Petrova Petkova, has submitted two monographs, three studies, 14 articles, two chapters of collective monographs and two articles in co-authorship. One of them is in the journal Bulgarian Folklore, which is referenced in EBSCO Discovery, and is indexed in ERIH PLUS and Anthropological Index Online (AIO).

I have known the candidate for 30 years, she is my student, to whom I taught the subject "Old Bulgarian Literature". I mention this fact, since in the materials submitted for the competition she has widely used the works of this period in the development of Bulgarian literature, mainly apocryphal works.

The main monograph presented for the competition is titled: "The Devil. An Attempt to Reconstruct the Folklore Image. 2015. Plovdiv: University Publishing House "Paisiy Hilendarski". ISBN: 978-619-281-014-6 (380 pages). It represents a complex attempt to examine in detail the image of evil in Bulgarian folklore. Although this study is inherently folkloristic, its interdisciplinary nature is impressive, with the use of folklore texts from different eras, including medieval ones, which gives it depth. Unlike some folkloristic studies from the recent past, where the issue is considered separately from the entire previous tradition, the idea is to detach this issue (and this also applies to a number of other similar ones) from its Christian basis and to show that the Bulgarian folk tradition carries within itself mainly pagan elements (they are not religious after all), that it has nothing to do with the Christian tradition, even though the latter has lasted on Bulgarian soil for more than a thousand years!

The monograph uses sources for the image of the devil from different historical periods, typologically different and originating from different social environments - starting from the Old and New Testament texts, various non-canonical written monuments, translations (mainly Byzantine or those that have undergone Greek processing) and Bulgarian, dualistic and pseudo-dualistic, anti-heretical treatises, those with preserved pagan elements, etc.

The study was carried out on the basis of over a hundred folklore legends and tales published on the pages of the Collection of Folk Thoughts in the period 1889-1980. It focuses on the devil as an emanation of evil in the specific context of Bulgarian Christian folklore culture and, more specifically, in Bulgarian verbal folklore. The general idea of the devil in these legends is shown - about his body, his name, his deeds, etc. Particular attention is paid to his main functions: rival of God, helper of man, winner in rivalry with man and the outwitted devil. In the end, several conclusions are reached. In legends with a dualistic character, the relationship between devil and God comes to the fore. In the texts, the devil is either an accomplice or an opponent of God. In folklore tales, the interaction is between the devil and man. In them, the devil is sometimes a helper of man, sometimes a winner in rivalry with him. Sometimes he is a clumsy and stupid character who is easily outwitted or defeated by mortal man. And although the devil presumably retains in his image the idea of primordial evil, in Bulgarian verbal folklore he turns out to be not so much an adversary of man, but rather his mirror image.

The second monograph submitted for the competition is titled: *Let's Make Earth and People. The Story of Creation and the Fall in Bulgarian Culture*. 2017. Plovdiv: Studio 18. ISBN 978-619-7249-14-9 (286 pages). It represents the author's published dissertation, and should not be taken into account for this competition.

Three studies were also submitted for the competition. The first submitted study is dedicated to the "devil" theme, titled: *Several Notes on the Naming of the Devil in Bulgarian Verbal Folklore*. - In: *Slavic Dialogues*, 33/2024, pp. 99 - 121; ISSN: 1312-5346. As can be seen from the title, it deals with the names of the devil, studied in 31 folklore tales and legends, published in the *Collection of Folk Tales*, vol. I published in 1889, up to volume 56 of 1980. The names of the devil are examined, grouped into three groups: of biblical origin, of folklore origin, euphemistic names. They are analyzed from the point of view of their origin and their functions.

The remaining two studies are devoted to other problems. The first of them is devoted to advertising in Plovdiv in the years after the Liberation. This is a completely ethnological study,

carried out on the basis of materials from the periodical press in the city in the mentioned period. 96 advertising materials placed in the newspaper Plovdiv, from the period 1886 - 1907, were examined. Here it could be specified that this is the period after the Unification, when Plovdiv ceased to be the capital of an autonomous Ottoman province. An interesting picture of everyday life in the city and important details of urban culture from this period are revealed.

The third study is also ethnological, given the approach used, although the material is folklore: "Three images of otherness in three songs from the village of Izvor, Vidin region". It is devoted to a very modern and popular topic in today's anthropological science, which explores the image of the "other" at different levels. The research is based on folklore material published in Vasil Stoin's collection "Folk Songs from Timok to Vita" (1928). The stereotypical images of the Jew, the Turk, and the Gypsy are shown from the perspective of an Orthodox Bulgarian.

Of the 14 articles presented, four are dedicated to the "diabolical" theme in question (one in two parts). Two publications are dedicated to another popular topic in the public consciousness, especially among the "broad patriotic masses" – the martenitsa, which is surprisingly the subject of mythology in contemporary Bulgarian society. The first of them examines the contemporary "legend" of Khan Asparuh, as the creator of the martenitsa. Petkova-Kostova well shows the pseudo-folklore, authorial basis of this "legend" and its emergence as a response to the ideas of some broader layers of the Bulgarian people about patriotism. The problem with the contemporary "patriotic" functioning of the martenitsa is also examined in the second article dedicated to it, now in connection with our national holiday, which occurs at the beginning of March. The emergence of the martenitsa with tricolor, as a symbol of national identity, according to some ideas, is examined.

Of the remaining articles submitted for the competition, two are dedicated to prominent Bulgarian ethnologists, founders of the discipline of ethnology at the Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski". One is dedicated to the scientific work of the late Prof. Evgeniya Mitseva and her role in the development of ethnology at our university. Another of them - to the founder and ideologist of ethnology at the Plovdiv University himself - Prof. Dr. Todor Ivanov Zhivkov. A main place in this article is devoted to the concept of the great Bulgarian scientist for field research, something that is increasingly left in the background in ethnological and anthropological research. It is particularly impressive that the author shares her memories of practical field work together with Prof. Zhivkov, as well as her experience as a field practice leader. Here is the place to say that I also worked in the field for several years with Senior Asst.

Dr. B. Petkova-Kostova, and I can assure you that she is an excellent field player, something that is increasingly rare, and is one of the few continuers of Prof. Zhivkov's ideas in this regard.

Of the other publications, I would like to draw attention to the one dedicated to the blackberry in Bulgarian folklore legends. Strictly speaking, it is from the “diabolical” cycle of research, but I am separating it, since the blackberry is an extremely important Old Testament and Christian symbol (“the inextinguishable blackberry”), which finds a place in worship and in folklore, but in a completely different way. This provides important information about the functioning of some biblical symbols in a folklore environment.

To my own folklore publications, I would like to add this one on a Christmas blessing, published in the Collection of Folk Tales, vol. XXXV of 1923, in which the author, examining the symbols used in it (distant lands, boxwood yards, golden table, barbel fish, loaf, gold and silver), found traces of archaic mythological motifs. Two articles are devoted to the creation of woman. The first examines the reflection of the biblical story of the creation of man from the book of Genesis. In a Bulgarian folklore legend from the 19th century, recorded in Shtip, woman was created from the devil's tail. The second article examines other variants of the creation of woman, besides from the devil's tail, and for the creation of both mud and Adam's rib.

The list of presented publications also includes an interesting text dedicated to the holding of the famous Balkan Summer School on Religion and Public Life of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, of which the author is the main organizer. The results of this school are extremely interesting, as anthropologists from four continents participate and one can trace their acquaintance with public life in Bulgaria and with the role of the various traditional and modern religious systems in our country and their development.

One co-authored article is devoted to some problems of Bulgarian-Russian relations in icon painting, and mainly to the impact of Russian icon painting in modern times, especially after the Liberation, when the process of mass import of Russian icons (which began during the Renaissance) intensified in Bulgaria, as well as the emigration of Russian icon painters, especially after the so-called October Revolution. In PN 3.1, two chapters of collective monographs dedicated to educational problems are presented, as well as two more co-authored articles.

By themselves, the presented publications, which show a broad research field, with interdisciplinary research methods used, are completely sufficient for holding the claimed

scientific degree of “associate professor”. However, scientific activity also has another side – the influence of the relevant research on the development of scientific research in the relevant field. Or in other words, whether the relevant scientific research is cited or not. In this respect, B. Kostova’s research has a good fate – in the presented list of citations, she has indicated fourteen citations of eight of her publications. It should be noted that some of these citations are in research abroad.

The candidate's fieldwork has already been noted. I was unable to find any information about this in the submitted documents, but as I have already shared above, I myself have worked in the field with her when conducting field practice for students majoring in "Ethnology", as well as when organizing scientific expeditions and excursions with students majoring in "Cultural Tourism". During these practices, expeditions and excursions, the candidate has shown herself not only as an excellent fieldworker, but also as an excellent organizer. She has trained in the field, practically, more than ten generations of ethnologist students in the methods of ethnographic and ethnological research.

The high lecture workload of the candidate is also impressive. At Plovdiv University, she has taught six courses of lectures. She has always had over 450 hours, and in the last year 660, with a standard of 360 hours. This shows that the place is provided with enough hours. In addition, she has also taught a total of three courses of lectures at the branches in Smolyan and Kardzhali. She has participated in the compilation and editing of twelve scientific collections. She is the head of six international projects under Erasmus +. She has participated in eight scientific research projects and research programs.

Based on the facts presented in this way, I will vote with conviction for the position of associate professor at Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" to the only candidate, senior assistant professor Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova! I also call on the esteemed scientific jury for this!

Plovdiv 07.04. 2025

(St. Mary of Egypt)

Prof. Dimo Cheshmedzhiev,

Doctor of Historical Sciences

