

## OPINION

by PhD Valentina Georgieva Ganeva-Raicheva, Associate Professor at  
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum – the Bulgarian  
Academy of Sciences,  
on the materials submitted for participation in the competition  
for the academic position of Associate Professor  
at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv

Field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal sciences

Professional field 3.1. *Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Folklore Studies - Folklore and Religion)*

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette, no. 98 of 19.11.2024 and in the internet page of Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as a candidate participated Assist. Prof. Borislava Petkova Kostova, PhD, from the same department.

### **General presentation of the procedure and the candidate**

By Order No. RD-22-432 of 18.02.2025 of the Rector of *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in connection with the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor. Assist. Prof. Borislava Petkova Kostova, PhD, on a basic employment contract at *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Department of Ethnology, is the only candidate in the competition. The set of materials submitted by her is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv and includes all required documents.

B. Petkova Kostova graduated the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv - Master of Philology and Ethnologist (1998), contributor, reporter in mass media (1996). In the period 1999 - 2002 she was a full-time doctoral student in folklore studies at the same university. In 2010, after a successful defense of his dissertation on “Bulgarian Legends about the Fall - Folklore Interpretation and Canonical Text”, he received the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Folklore Studies (diploma from the SAC, January 11, 2011). In the period 2003 - 2010 she was Administrative Secretary of the Faculty of Philosophy and History. In 2010 she was elected to the academic position of Assistant, and in 2012 - to the academic position of Assistant Professor. She has a total work experience at the University of 23 years, of which over 13 years - teaching.

### **Evaluation of the candidate's activities and contributions**

In the period 2020 - 2025 B. Petkova is the holder of 6 disciplines at the university: *Folklore Culture, Mythology, New Holidays, Invented Traditions, Anthropology of Folklore, Cultural Studies, Ethnology of Plastic Arts*. In the branch of PU in Kardzhali he is a lecturer of 1 discipline (*Bulgarian Folklore*) and in Smolyan - of 2 disciplines (*Cultural Studies, Activities in Cultural Institutions*). In the period 2022 - 2025 he lectured at the University of Lodz, Poland, under the Erasmus+ programme. He participates in the preparation of foreign students from Turkey, Germany, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, France at Plovdiv University under the Erasmus+ program as a lecturer in the disciplines *Slavic Mythology* and *Bulgarian Folklore*.

The candidate works actively with students and is involved in the training of professionals. She is a scientific supervisor of 5 successfully defended graduates. She has been a leader of 5 international Erasmus+ projects (key activity 1, youth exchange), in which 32 students and PhD students from Plovdiv University have participated.

She declared membership in 5 professional organizations.

In the period 2015 - 2023 B. Petkova Kostova has participated in 8 research projects funded by the National Research Fund at *Paisii Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Culture, Horizon 2020 program, etc.

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the subject of the competition B. Petkova Kostova applied with 2 monographs: *The Devil. An Attempt to Reconstruct the Folklore Image* (Plovdiv: Paisiy Hilendarski University Publishing House, 2025, 378 pp.); a work based on the dissertation research - *Making Land and People. The Narrative of Creation and the Fall in Bulgarian Culture* (Plovdiv: Studio, 2017, 286 p.); 3 studies and 14 articles. One of the articles is co-authored (2.3.12). In the more general area of professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies B. Petkova Kostova presents 2 chapters from two collective monographs published in English in co-authorship and 2 articles, also in co-authorship. She presents data on participation in the compilation of 12 thematic collections.

I accept the contributions formulated in the self-assessment of Assist. Prof. B. Petkova Kostova, as well as their differentiation into several scientific fields – folklore studies, medieval studies and religious studies.

The monograph “The Devil. An Attempt to Reconstruct the Folklore Image” is an interdisciplinary study and contains contributions in all three fields. For the first time in Bulgarian folkloristics the devil as an emanation of universal evil is the subject of a thorough research. The author convincingly shows that evil is a normative and evaluative category found in different layers of human culture, and the transformations in its image can be “read as a history of the transformations of human culture”. The study is a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the processes of intersections and interactions between the spoken, written and printed word.

The image of the devil in the Bulgarian Christian folklore culture is revealed on the basis of an analysis of a voluminous material - 102 folklore legends and tales, retrieved by the SBNU, in comparison with various written sources. The mythological roots of folklore demonic characters and their place in the worldview of the people in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, fixed in the written word, are presented in detail. The context of the study is expanded with the data on the processes of origin and directions of development and spread of dualism in Antiquity and the Middle Ages with a focus on its influence on Bulgarian soil. Special attention is paid to the Bogomil doctrine and the apocryphal literature. In reconstructing the identity of the devil and his deeds in folklore, the author uses Jordan Ivanov's study “Bogomil Books and Legends” to show the correspondences and discrepancies of dualistic notions with the folkloric image. Gerasim Petrinsky's study “The Image of the Demon in Byzantine Hagiography (6th - 10th centuries)” allows B. Petkova Kostova to reveal whether and how ancient and Byzantine culture participated in the formation of folkloric notions of the devil. Parallels between Slavic and Byzantine culture are sought. Comparisons are made with canonical Christian literature.

The author conducts a kind of archaeology of sifting and layering the cultural layers in an attempt to get to the roots of the notions and bring out the primitives in order to make a summary of the religious notions of evil and the devil. It has been convincingly shown that the image of the devil in verbal folklore is the result of complex, heterogeneous cultural representations layered over centuries. To recreate it, the author skillfully draws and connects threads from ancient and Byzantine tradition, from the biblical text (Old and New Testaments), from various dualistic teachings, from apocryphal and high theological literature. The detailed analyses of the medieval notions of evil and the devil in the translated and Bulgarian apocryphal texts contribute to the research on the Old Bulgarian apocryphal literature. Knowledge of the interaction between apocryphal literature and folk legends and tales is enriched. Attention is paid to the processes of

interaction between Byzantine demonology and folkloric notions of evil and the devil assimilated into the Bulgarian cultural context, especially in the construction of the foundations of the image of the devil helper of man, laid on the notion of the demon *paredar*. Forms of influence of the biblical text and church services in the formation of folkloric imagery and plots are highlighted. Important specifics of the theodicy theme are systematized in the context of canonical texts (Book of Job), philosophical concepts, and dualistic teachings.

In order to compile the ambivalent image of the devil in Bulgarian verbal folklore, the author carries out several research procedures. The bodily characteristics and names of the devil, his incarnations (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic), his surroundings and his habitats in space, referred vertically and horizontally, are reconstructed. In order to derive the main functions of the demonic image, folk legends and tales are grouped into four main categories depending on the main motif of the text, which represent the devil: as a rival of God in the cosmogonic act; as a helper of man; as a victor in rivalry with man; as outwitted by man or by a biblical character. Based on the analysis of B. Petkova Kostova convincingly shows that “folklore is not only and solely a successor of motifs, but provides a good basis for the emergence of new plots” related to the devil's attempts “to destroy order in God's and man's world” (p. 300). He convincingly demonstrates that the devil and man in folklore are “mirror images of each other,” with “the devil himself being man with a reverse sign” (p. 305).

I appreciate as a good strategy the presentation of folklore texts in the original and in modern Bulgarian.

The monographic study provides valuable material and reflections for other future research in two directions. One relates to the possibility of expanding knowledge of folk speech. Important characteristics of folk speech are its imagery, the tendency to make maximum and full use of the potential possibilities of an individual image, the linking of heterogeneous verbal forms through the possibilities of an image. These specifics determine the movement of productive images from text to text, as the images are transformed according to the nature of the structures that include them. B. Petkova Kostova makes it possible to trace the derived characteristics of the devil in other folklore genres, e.g. phraseologisms, proverbs, nicknames, oaths, dream interpretations, other narrative folklore forms, etc.

In this spirit is also my recommendation to the text - to make full use of the Catalogue of Bulgarian Folktales (1994, authors: Lilyana Daskalova-Perkovska, Dorothea Dobрева, Yordanka Kotseva, Evgenia Mitseva), which is cited in the bibliography. The catalogue includes the tales published up to 1985, texts from the archives up to and including 1980, texts from popular publications and educational literature. Bringing the fairy tales discussed in the monograph to the typological catalogue would highlight their place in the system of the thematic and narrative stock of the Bulgarian fairy tale tradition, would show the places of distribution of the variants of this type, and last but not least would link them to the international Aarne-Thompson system. The information in the Catalogue also provides useful knowledge about the spread of the story through popular publications, about the existence of the story in other folklore forms such as proverbs and phraseologies, customs, etc.

The second perspective relates to the transition of folklore from the realm of oral culture to a fixed and classified source. The monographic study provides valuable material for future research on the changes in folklore, conditioned by its removal from the environment of its immediate existence as a living practice and its transfer to a new communication environment and a new medium, its fixation in printed texts, which inevitably leads to changes in its functioning, socialization, transmission and dissemination. It provides examples of the transition from oral to written forms of expression, and the ways in which this transition affects human consciousness.

On issues developed in the monograph “The Devil. An Attempt to Reconstruct the Folklore Image”, 8 publications have been made in peer-reviewed editions: on the naming of the Devil in Bulgarian verbal folklore (2.2.1), on the bodily visibility and invisibility of the universal evil (2.3.1, accepted for print after peer review), on the devil the tinker or on the character's ability to cross spatial boundaries (2.3.3 and 2.3.4), on the creative competition between God and the devil and the creation of the blackberry by the devil (2.3.6), on the creation of woman from a devil's tail (2.3.7, 2.3.13), on the devil the creator of the visible and invisible world (2.3.14). The publications consistently and in detail trace the influence of dualistic doctrines on folklore texts.

As a summary, related to the two monographs of the candidate and to the studies and articles mentioned above, I will note that they have their own contribution to the study of the interaction of folklore culture with Christianity and the different forms of realization of the so-called folk Christianity. B. Petkova Kostova convincingly and argumentatively demonstrates that verbal folklore “is a complex, long-formed compilation of multilayered sediments and interweavings of plots and motifs of different origins: original folklore, apocryphal, dualistic and canonical”. From folklore, the author focuses mostly on legends, but also on fairy tales. Ethiological legends are subjected to a content and structural analysis. A typology of folklore texts is also proposed. New specifics are added to the study of dualistic legends in Bulgarian folklore.

2 articles are devoted to new readings of the first of March ritual. The author traces in detail the transformation of the martenitsa into an object of contemporary myth-making, the creation of new verbal forms resembling folkloric etiological legends, which link the beginning of the custom of adorning oneself with twisted white and red strings to Khan Asparuh (2.3.2, under print after a two-stage review). B. Petkova Kostova shows how the unlikely combination of folklore, authorial creativity and historical records of the migration of the ancient Bulgarians through repeated reproduction and circulation gradually creates a new biography of the martenitsa and reimagines it as “an ancient ritual object of the Bulgarians that marked the beginning of their historical existence”. It is therefore not accidental that the martenitsa tribagrenik appeared in modern times as an expression of its new function - as a Bulgarian national symbol (2.3.8). In the article, the author shows the connection of the rituals of the traditional celebration of Baba Marta (1 March) with the national holiday of the Liberation Day of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule (3 March). The “patriotic martenitsa” is seen as “a symbolic resource in the context of the growing processes of declaring national belonging and affirming various forms of patriotism”.

In particular, I would like to mention two of the candidate's studies that demonstrate her ability to analyze cultural texts in order to reconstruct social attitudes, social and cultural phenomena of the past that have their manifestations in the present. By analysing advertisements for goods and services in the post-Revolutionary periodical press in Plovdiv, their functions are highlighted and specific features of Plovdiv's urban culture are commented upon (2.2.2). On the basis of recordings of folk songs from the Vidin region, inherited stereotypical representations of Bulgarians towards Jews, Roma and Turks are derived (2.2.3).

I also note the publication co-authored with Adriana Lyubenova on iconographic art, which outlines specifics of the interaction of Bulgarian and Russian schools of iconography through convincing examples (2.3.12).

Several articles are devoted to the specifics of the educational process and personalities related to the teaching of ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv, which are also characterized by self-reflection (2.3.5, 2.3.9, 2.3.10).

Important and topical social problems, basic values in modern times are studied in several publications co-authored with Bulgarian and foreign researchers. B. Petkova Kostova in co-authorship with two other Bulgarian authors in article 3.2.1 presents the first institutionally adopted

Plan for Equality between Women and Men in *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv with formulated areas of intervention, measures, participants, time frames, monitoring and evaluation indicators.

The applicant also presents 3 publications with results from an international project related to the participation of young people in various lifelong learning programmes managed by public and private institutions in nine European countries. Using the educational and professional trajectories of young people from Italy, Bulgaria and Germany as a case study, it explores how European and national lifelong learning policies influence young people's career choices (3.1.1). Lifelong learning policies are also the subject of research interest in another collective monograph. Starting from the position that policies shape their target groups in different ways, the authors analyse the perspectives of professionals and young people from Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Bulgaria covered by European lifelong learning policies, which they present in several in-depth interviews. Manifestations of social vulnerability leading to the limitation of the young people interviewed are highlighted, such as socio-economic exclusion, poor mental health, family violence and refugee status (3.1.2). In a co-authored article 3.2.2, based on 164 in-depth interviews with young people, the vision of young people towards lifelong learning policies is presented by highlighting: motivation for inclusion, learning experience and effect of policies (acquired skills and other achieved results). The submitted publications outside the specialized field of the competition, the fruit of teamwork of scientists from different European countries, are of important importance for introducing research results in Bulgaria into an international context and for popularizing Bulgarian ethnology and anthropology abroad.

### **Conclusion**

The research with Assist. Prof. PhD B. Petkova Kostova participated in the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” has been published in peer-reviewed and refereed international and national journals and thematic collections. The reference for the searched citations of her research (14 citations are listed) shows that she is a recognizable scientist.

The research results reflected in the candidate's publications represent her personal contribution. The formulated contributions are her personal merit. No plagiarism is found.

The publications of Assistant Professor PhD. Borislava Petkova Kostova reveal depth and analytics, application of current methods and theories in the study of cultural phenomena, development of new issues and enrichment of knowledge through interdisciplinary approaches. Her works contain original scientific contributions in the field of folklore studies, in the study of the interaction of canonical texts - medieval apocryphal literature - folklore literature, as well as more generally - in the study of intangible cultural heritage.

B. Petkova Kostova has a good teaching experience and she actively participates in the training of specialists.

The documents and materials submitted by the candidate meet all the requirements of the Law on career opportunities for academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the implementation of ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv. The achievements of B. Petkova Kostova's results in teaching and research activities fully comply with the requirements of the law and the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv for the implementation of the ZRASRB.

Based on the above, I give my positive assessment and recommend to the scientific jury to prepare a proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election of Assistant Professor Borislava Petkova Kostova, PhD, to the academic position of “Associate

Professor” at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Folklore Studies - Folklore and Religion).

14.04.2025

Opinion drawn up by:  
(Assoc. Prof. Valentina Ganeva-Raycheva, PhD)