

## A SHORT REVIEW

by **Professor Zhorzheta Cholakova, DrSc**, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for occupation of academic position of “Associate Professor” in Area of Higher Education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, Professional Field 3.1. “Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences”, Scientific specialty “Folklore Studies – Folklore and Religion” announced in State Gazette, Issue 98/19.11.2024

By Order No ПД-22-432/18.02.2025, of the Rector of Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU), I was appointed a member of a scientific jury in the competition described above. In the competition for occupation of the academic position of “Associate Professor”, announced in State Gazette, Issue 98/19.11.2024 and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University, for the needs of the Ethnology Department at the Faculty of Philosophy and History. The only candidate who participates in the competition is **Sen. Asst. Borislava Petkova Kostova, PhD** from the same Department. Within the term established by the law, she has submitted a set of documents that meet the formal requirements of Art. 36 (1) of the Plovdiv University Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff.

Dr Borislava Petkova Kostova is included in the announced competition with 2 monographs, 3 studies, 16 articles, co-author of 2 chapters of collective monographs published abroad. Three of articles have also been published in international editions. Four of the papers are co-authored. 20 scientific works, are accepted for review. Not subject to review is the PhD dissertation edited as book “Making land and people. The Narrative of Creation and Fall in Bulgarian Culture” (Plovdiv: Studio 18, 2017), as well as the two articles that are in press. With the described scientific production the candidate satisfies the quantitative parameters of the competition and the minimum state standards for occupation of the academic position of “Associate Professor”, as well as the specific requirements of the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

Dr Borislava Petkova Kostova is a Plovdiv University graduate with a BA in Bulgarian and Ethnology. In 2011 she defended her doctoral thesis in the Folklore Studies.. She has been employed by Plovdiv University since 2010 lecturing and conducting seminars in various disciplines, which are in the same scientific field, and in recent years also in Bulgarian Folklore in the Affiliate colleges of Kardzhali and Smolyan. Dr. Kostova is established as a competent and highly effective teacher who enjoys the respect of the colleagues and the students.

The presented materials show Dr. Kostova's participation in scientific seminars at home and abroad, as well as in the National Scientific Program "Development and Promotion of Bulgarian Studies Abroad", funded by the Ministry of Education (DO 1-205), to which she is the organizer and leader of the International Summer Traveling Seminar "Cultural Map of Bulgaria – the Rhodopes". She has actively participated in five editions of the Balkan Summer School in Religion and Public Life. On several occasions she has participated as an expert in the Regional Expert Commission for inclusion of an Intangible Cultural Heritage in the National Representative List. Dr. Kostova demonstrates her organizational qualities as the chairperson of the university structure of the National Branch Syndicate "Higher Education and Science" – KNSB in Plovdiv University and as the contact person of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" in the European network EURAXESS.

The habilitation thesis – *The Devil. An attempt to reconstruct the folklore image* (Plovdiv University Press, 2025) is a significant study with a distinctly contributory character. Its high scientific value is due to the long-term work of Dr. Petkova on its preparation, as evidenced by the fact that her first publication on the topic is from 2012. Some of the published articles and studies attest to the author's enduring research interests and competencies in the field of folkloric imagery and the cultural notions of human nature encoded therein. The author demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the literature in the topic and outlines the research trajectory from the first mention of the image of the devil by Racho Slaveikov to the latest specialized studies in Bulgarian folklore studies.

The figurative variations of the collective representations of the devil are traced and analyzed in a wide range of source material: both in the folktales and legends published in the Collection of Folk Wisdom, as well as in Bogomil literature and apocryphal literature, and in the Bible. The derived paradigm is based on dualistic views of theodicy, delineating the field of discussion about the origin of evil in which so-called folk Christianity sets an alternative to canonical Christianity, including through the diversification, on the one hand, of the figurative incarnations of evil and, on the other, of the role of the devil in the human world. Relying on a rich and appropriate scholarly apparatus, Dr. Kostova presents in a synthesized form the dualistic doctrines and their reflection in the Bulgarian environment, and on this basis manages to convincingly move on to their projection in the Bulgarian vernacular. The exposition follows a well-founded logic and positions the specific texts in the context of cultural and historical processes. Quite rightly, an important emphasis is placed on the historical context of Bogomilism and correspondences with other alternative teachings disseminated in the Balkans during the Middle Ages are highlighted. In this sense, the study explores the complex nature of

the phenomenon and the participation of various factors in the construction of the paradigmatic structure of the image under consideration and its existence in the folklore tradition. Therefore, in a very natural way, the applied research strategy leads to the core of the development, which is the second chapter. On the basis of the dualistic conception outlined in the first chapter, the figurative incarnations and habitats of the devil are traced and the dichotomy of his manifestations both as the rival of God and as the helper of man is derived.

In this perspective, the study acquires heuristic density and sets productive directions for the study of this problematic, including in the wider Slavic context. With this I would like to stress that such a valuable scientific work as the proposed monograph by Dr Kostova requires to be translated into other languages and to be promoted beyond the borders of Bulgarian science.

## CONCLUSION

The habilitation thesis of. Sen. Asst. Borislava Petkova Kostova, PhD contains scientific results that represent an original contribution to science and meets all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the relevant Rules of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski University. The monograph *The Devil. An Attempt to Reconstruct the Folklore Image* and the presented publications show Dr. Borislava Petkova Kostova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and research skills in the field of folklore studies. No plagiarism has been found.

In view of the above, it is with confidence that I give my positive assessment of the research, results and contributions. Having acquainted myself with the materials and scholarly publications submitted for the purposes of this position, having analyzed their significance and the contributions entailed in them with regard to their theoretical, scholarly, and pedagogical merits, I strongly recommend to the Scientific Council to prepare a report proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the selection of Sen. Asst. Borislava Petkova Kostova, PhD, for the academic position of Associate professor at Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski in the Area of Higher Education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", Professional Field 3.1. "Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences", Scientific specialty "Folklore Studies – Folklore and Religion"

15th April 2025

Reviewer:

Prof. Zhorzheta Cholakova, DrSc