

STATEMENT

By Associate Professor Meglena Ivanova Zlatkova, PhD, Department of Ethnology, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

On the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, field of higher education 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Methodology of Anthropological Research)

General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor by the order of the Rector of Plovdiv University № RD-22-433 dated 18.02.2025. This appointment pertains to the announcement in the State Gazette, no. 98/19.11.2024, in the field of Higher Education 3, Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Sciences (Methodology of Anthropological Research), to serve the needs of the Department of Ethnology. I have evaluated the documents provided by the sole candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Stoyan Hristov Antonov. The scientific metrics indicate that he not only fulfills but also exceeds the national minimum standards set by the Academic Staff Development Act and its implementing regulations for the Associate Professor role. For this competition, Dr. Antonov presented 15 scientific works: 1 monograph in Bulgarian, 13 articles, and 1 study, including 10 in Bulgarian and 4 in English.

2. General description of the applicant's activities

A) Teaching. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Stoyan Antonov teaches several bachelor's and master's courses at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski." He has served as a part-time lecturer at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, and currently at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv. Since 2005, he has held the position of Chief Assistant Professor at the Department of Ethnology at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. He participates in the development

of undergraduate programs such as Social Anthropology, Cultural Tourism, English Language and Cultural Heritage, History and Cultural Heritage, and Cultural and Social Anthropology, as well as Master's Programs including Social Mediation and Communication, Ethnology: Communities, Identities, Culture, and Ethnology and Cultural Heritage.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Stoyan Antonov has developed 21 undergraduate courses, including Field Ethnology, Methods of Field Research, Theory of Research in the Social Sciences, and Analysis of Ethnographic Materials, along with introductory courses in Ethnology and Anthropology, all of which are highly relevant to this competition. In addition to these foundational courses, he has created specialized offerings in Historical Anthropology, Ethnology of Ethnic Groups, and others. Furthermore, Dr. Antonov has developed eight courses for three graduate programs within the department. Notably, he has long served as a leading supervisor for students' summer fieldwork experiences, for which he prepares curricular research programs. He also contributes to the education of PhD students through his participation in the Department of Ethnology and the PhD University School *Academia Uventutis*.

Dr. Stoyan Antonov's courses listed in the Erasmus+ Faculty of Philosophy and History catalog have gained considerable popularity among international students. Dr. Antonov is a faculty member dedicated to providing close mentorship to these students. He has supervised 12 bachelor's theses and five master's theses, with two of his graduate students successfully defending their doctoral dissertations. In conclusion, I wish to share my perspective as an internal juror. I have collaborated with the candidate on three joint courses and overseen summer fieldwork for students. He has made significant advancements in research methodology through his research activities. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Antonov is the author of two monographs and has published over 30 articles and chapters in both Bulgarian and English. He is a reviewer for scientific publications and an editor for various collections. Furthermore, he presents his research findings at scientific conferences and congresses, both in Bulgaria and internationally. He is a recognized scholar in ethnology and anthropology, esteemed as one of the leading researchers of the Tatars in Bulgaria and a notable scholar in heraldry and vexillology. Dr. Antonov has adeptly integrated his interests as a heraldist with the methodologies of symbolic and visual anthropology, which, in my assessment, has enriched both ethnology and anthropology within our department and established a strong foundation for teaching these subjects to undergraduate students.

B) Research Activities: Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Antonov is the author of two monographs and over 30 articles and chapters in both Bulgarian and English. He is a reviewer of scientific publications

and an editor for collections. He presents the results of his research at scientific conferences and congresses in Bulgaria and internationally. He is a recognized scholar not only in the fields of ethnology and anthropology, where he is one of the foremost researchers of the Tatars in Bulgaria, but also as a significant researcher in heraldry and vexillology. Dr. Antonov has skillfully merged his interests as a heraldist with the methods of symbolic and visual anthropology, which has, in my opinion, enriched both domains.

Dr. Stoyan Antonov participated in the associate professor competition with his monographic book *Synchronisations: Transitions and Transformations in a Bulgarian Village* (2025), which includes 13 articles and a chapter.

In his monograph *Synchronisations: Transitions and Transformations in a Bulgarian Village*, the author examines various transitions in a village's collective and individual lives in northeastern Bulgaria. He approaches this topic as an insider and a detached observer, delving deeper than the surface to uncover the familiar. The author refers to this reflective position as 'research embodiments', and this book devotes significant effort to elucidating the methodological framework of this research approach.

The 'strangeness' of the familiar is possible because of the careful and precise application of ethnological and anthropological methodology, subordinated to the common research goal - to analyze the Bulgarian village at the beginning of the 21st century both as a transforming community and as the result of battles of and for memory, but also as a dynamic renegotiation of identity through the "actualization of tradition". I want to note this methodology as contributory, because Stoyan Antonov's text complements the seemingly well-researched problematics of Bulgarian villages by Bulgarian and foreign ethnologists and anthropologists. The monographic study is based on personally collected field data.

The author inscribes one particular case not only in historical and ethnological knowledge in Bulgaria, but also in the more global problematics of the reproduction of community identity, the rewriting of local histories about global changes, which helps to understand more complex social transitions such as nationalization and collectivization in the Bulgarian village after 1945 and restitution of the land and the collapse of cooperatives after 1989. This approach also determines the structure of the text, which consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and an appendix with visual data, all of which form an independent part of the main text. I have termed the approach 'strangeness' of the familiar and banal into the unfamiliar to be subjected to rigorous anthropological analysis. Such 'strangeness' occurs in three different ways in each chapter. Still, the three approaches are

methodologically synchronized throughout to explain the transitions of the village of Chereshovo both through its collective biography and as multiple individual life transitions. They are situated from the perspective of the 150-year local history of the village and the Bulgarian state.

The first chapter, "Naming," applies historical ethnology and microhistory approaches. The author analyzes with admirable ease the complex themes of inheritance both in the sense of genealogies and in the sense of personal lives, as well as the dynamics of the historical changes of the modernizing Bulgarian state. It collects the family histories in practice, using all possible archival documents and applying quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to the modes of inheritance, real and symbolic, not only of genealogies but also of the ideological and discursive modulations of the identity of subsequent generations. While tracing the lineages of a village is not easy, the author enters into discussion with the most significant researchers of naming patterns, enriching the approach of ethnology with that of sociology and social analysis. The model developed is contributory because it practically demonstrates the methodological potential of combining historical ethnology with genealogy.

After this kind of entrance to the village, which sets the social relations in the community, the actual plan of making sense of the past is introduced. The second chapter, "Memory and Histories", also fits into a rich scholarly tradition of memory studies and the construction of local histories by significant Bulgarian colleagues or foreign scholars interested in Bulgaria. What makes this chapter interesting is the strong self-reflexive stance and the author's second 'embodiment'. On the one hand, he is a local person who would have participated in writing a book of local histories of the people of Chershovo, but on the other hand, he remains an observer and analyst. What I would highlight as a contribution of this approach is that it allows one to situate the authorities who construct the village history, but also to enter into the 'becoming' of this construction as a constant synchronization not only between collective and individual memory, but also as choices and decisions about remembering and forgetting. As readers, we can learn about the makers of history and the constant negotiation with community, social control, and social censorship.

It analyzes how choices are made about what is to be told and who and how is identified through this formalized history. An interesting aspect of the synchronicities is the analysis of the constructed narrative in the text and the choice of visual data that make up the story in photographs of the village. An interpretive approach is applied to this section that captures the social positions of the authors of the stories and adds to the social portrait of the 'memory activists' identified as 'transformative individuals'. This methodological choice, on the one hand, to analyze the text and, on the other hand,

to present how the village history is narrated allows one to go in depth not only into the webs of meaning, but also into the battles of memory that take place in a village in transition and the whole country.

The celebration of Dyadovden, a traceable village festival, is an invariable part of the village history, expressing the same pattern of symbolic identity construction during the village transition, which remained without its young generations in the socialist period. The field observations in the last decades of this celebration give the author the occasion to conceptualize his observations in a third chapter called "The Tradition Updated". Here again, a methodological synchronization is applied, which I call the strangeness of a seemingly banal rural celebration, which becomes one of the most important for the community. This chapter again interprets the problem of personal and collective life transitions. It analyses the search and finding of identity as a social positioning, as well as the legitimation of the position of the 'grandfather', but through a precise and thorough analysis of the incorporation of new meanings into the invented form given the changed not only personal biographical positions of the 'grandfathers', but also the repositioning of authorities in the first decades of the 21st century.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that this monographic work contributes significantly and has the potential to serve as a framework for an extensive study of memory, identity, and inheritance, illustrated through collective and individual transitions within a relatively small rural community. Though often imperceptible, these transitions occur simultaneously and at a similar pace. By intertwining diverse methodologies and deeply exploring the significance and realization of the past, the study offers effective resolutions to otherwise contentious debates surrounding memory, history, and heritage.

I agree with the division made by the applicant of the proposed materials into three groups. The first group of three articles, referred to in the contributions as epistemological-programmatic, also represents the fields in which he has been conducting research throughout his academic career, namely, Tatars and heraldry from an anthropological perspective. It introduces conceptual models for delineating these fields and interpreting the research findings (in the list of publications, they are marked with the numbers 3, 4, and 12). The second group (1, 2, 5, 6) includes articles that explore different themes yet offer interpretative and analytical approaches to various aspects of cultural heritage and ethnic groups. I concur with the formulation of contributions made by the candidate. The third group (9, 10, 11, 13) presents potential anthropological aspects of heraldry, enriching both fields

through these interpretations and fostering an interdisciplinary approach that the author consistently promotes in his research and interpretations of heraldic data.

The article numbered 7 presents the candidate's experience as a long-time lecturer of theoretical and methodological courses in the teaching of ethnology and anthropology, whose contribution is indisputable not only for Plovdiv University. The articles numbered 7 and 14 demonstrate how historical ethnology and interpretive approaches can be applied to genealogical and folklore data and serve as a model for other analyses of similar materials.

Critical remarks and recommendations

Although I am well-acquainted with the work conducted on this book, which transpired over approximately seven years within the parameters of two collaborative research projects, I found it to be highly intriguing as a cohesive work and an exemplary instance of a holistic study, resulting from an interdisciplinary analysis of the data amassed. I had the privilege to pose my inquiries and engage in the discourse surrounding the author's concepts; consequently, I have no critical observations. However, I would like to question future interpretations of how contemporary villagers perceive their relationship with the land and/or property they have either inherited or acquired, and their experience of identity. To what degree does integration into the community manifest through the stewardship or disregard of the inherited agricultural local ecology, whose participation influences social standing and facilitates the construction of a historical narrative?

I have an inquiry regarding the potential gender implications associated with transitioning to leadership roles within our local community. This involves serving as custodians of memory and truth and also requires assuming leadership positions. Furthermore, if Dyadovden persists in illustrating 'male domination' within Pierre Bourdieu's 'economy of symbolic goods', might it be feasible to identify a similar role assumed by women that suggests a substantial social transformation?

I did not notice any plagiarism in the candidate's texts, and I have no conflict of interest with the contestant or any publications in common with him.

The contributions within the self-evaluation are appropriately articulated, and I fully endorse and align my opinion with each of them. Dr. Antonov has not only identified and advanced various scientific disciplines and topics in ethnology, anthropology, and heraldry, but has also developed his models and concepts pertaining to these fields, which subsequent authors now utilize. The compilation of citations is noteworthy and serves as a testament to scientific excellence. The

comprehensive research and teaching endeavors reflected in the documents, which I have the privilege of being acquainted with personally, demonstrate the undeniable qualities of an experienced colleague possessing expertise in multiple scientific domains and a longstanding commitment to teaching disciplines relevant to the profile of the announced competition.

CONCLUSION

After thoroughly familiarizing myself with the materials and scientific contributions presented in the competition and conducting a comprehensive analysis of their significance alongside the scientific and applied aspects contained within them, I find it appropriate to issue a positive assessment. I hereby recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal for the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History regarding the election of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Stoyan Antonov to the academic position of "Associate Professor" at Paisii Hilendarski University, within the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Sciences (Methods of Anthropological Research).

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Author of the statement:

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