

OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Nikola Ivanov Avreyski - Higher School of Security and Economics - Plovdiv
on the doctoral dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" **in:** field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, doctoral program Historical Studies

Author: Nikolay Valentinov Karamikhov

Title: Modernization through Archaization, Political Ideas in Iran in the 20th Century

Scientific Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Valentin Pavlov Petrosenko - Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral candidate:

The submitted documentation raises no doubts about procedural violations and proves that the doctoral candidate has fulfilled the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the additional university requirements of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The doctoral candidate completed secondary education with a profile in Persian language and culture and holds a master's degree in History from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." He has undertaken academic trips to the USA (2001) and Iran (2005 and 2011) and participated in UN missions in Iraq (2016–2018). He is proficient in English and Russian.

2. Relevance of the topic:

The dissertation topic is particularly significant given the world's first religious revolution in Iran, its establishment as a key state in the Islamic world and a regional power in the Middle East—a permanent hotspot of global politics—and its recent involvement in the geopolitical quadrilateral Russia-China-North Korea-Iran. At the same time, the topic is insufficiently studied in Bulgarian scholarly literature despite Bulgaria's geographical proximity to Iran. The goals and tasks outlined in the dissertation have great scientific and applied scientific significance.

3. Knowledge of the problem:

The doctoral candidate shows long-standing and sustained interest in Iranian studies and is well acquainted with the achievements of Anglo-Saxon, Russian, and Bulgarian scholarship in the field. Limitations on access to Iranian archives were compensated as much as possible by sources drawn from the works of authoritative scholars, expert analyses by international organizations, personal interviews, and photographic material of researched terrain taken by the author.

4. Research methodology:

The doctoral candidate proposes an interdisciplinary study based on achievements in historical science regarding the different stages of development of the country under study, constantly enriching the analysis using methodological tools from political science and cultural studies.

5. Description and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions:

The dissertation consecutively examines the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Persia; the 20th-century Persian nationalism; the use of archaization for political purposes by the Shah's regime attempting to modernize the state; theories explaining the unexpected success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978–1979; and the place of various smaller ideological currents in a society unfriendly towards them. The depth of the research is demonstrated by placing 20th-century Iranian modernism in the context of prevailing Western postmodernism and showing how the unexpected radical changes in Iran that do not fit postmodernism have forced Western philosophical and political thought to make serious revisions to its views. The main thesis defended by the author, that the modernization of Iran in the 20th century, contrary to expert expectations, occurred through archaization—a complex and contradictory ideological process intertwining Persia's cultural-historical heritage, everyday Shiite culture, the ancient Zoroastrianism, the 19th-century Bahá'í Faith, the new Iranian communism represented by the Tudeh Party, and the Shah's modernization ideas—is convincingly argued. It is established that practically the entire 20th century in Iran is based on the complex relationship between archaic and modern elements (p. 183). Overall, the dissertation opens a new research niche in Bulgarian historiography and constitutes the first substantial scientific contribution in this area. The work is intelligently written, a quality increasingly rare in doctoral theses.

The proposed study also has practical scientific contributions. It helps better understand the processes and phenomena in Iran during the first quarter of the 21st century and stimulates reflection on Iran's new role in the turbulent contemporary world. The approach presented could be creatively used as a model for studying how historical past and cultural heritage are instrumentalized in the political lives of other countries—not only in the Middle East but also in newly emerged countries in Central Asia and Eastern Europe at the end of the 20th century.

6. Assessment of publications and the doctoral candidate's personal contribution:

The candidate has published three studies directly related to the dissertation topic—one in a scientific journal indexed in global scientific databases ("Epochs," Institute of History, Veliko Tarnovo University), and two in collections of scientific papers published by the reputable Veliko Tarnovo publisher "Faber". Together, these three studies actually represent the core content of the dissertation, a reliable indicator of acceptance of its theses by the scientific community.

7. Abstract:

The dissertation abstract accurately reflects the object and subject, the goal and tasks, the structure, main results of the doctoral work, author's publications on the topic, as well as the author's claimed scientific-theoretical and applied scientific contributions.

8. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation's contributions and results:

With a view to the doctoral candidate's future research in Iranian studies, I offer several collegial recommendations:

The claim that "both Iran and Russia are developing dictatorships marked by inhumanity" (p. 147–148) resembles biased insinuations of a politically prejudiced actor and is an unreliable premise for objective research of countries from other civilizations. In connection with this are the twice repeated claims that the Iranian Tudeh Party is financed not only by the USSR but also by Russia (pp. 182 and 184), without any supporting evidence. This claim does not fit the established strategic cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The author devotes a whole chapter to the ideological systems of Zoroastrians, Bahá'ís, and communists—insignificant minority communities with little influence in Iranian society—but fails to provide a necessary deep characterization of the vast majority of Iranian Shiites. It is recommended to use methods of ethnopsychology to reveal the collective memory matrix of the state-forming majority of Iranians—one of the few nations that created a great and glorious empire—their psyche dominated by pride in belonging to the Ummah, their national character with its virtues and vices, and the national spirit that shapes the political will for firm defense of national interests against all external encroachments on the country's great natural resources.

It is further necessary to place the analysis within a broader geopolitical context based on the theory of civilizations. Particularly valuable would be the main work "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" by its leading representative, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, former head of the Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. Department of State, which the candidate did not deem necessary to use. In it, he would find excellently argued theses that Western conviction in the universality of Western culture suffers from three defects: it is wrong; it is immoral; it is dangerous. The course of Westernization of Eastern states is doomed, as history has provided no example of a successful transition of a nation from one civilization to another. Even if puppet regimes attempt to follow Western democracy, this will inevitably lead to strengthening anti-Western political forces outside the Western civilization and ultimately to the failure of attempts to export democracy and further weakening of Western positions.

CONCLUSION:

Summarizing my impressions of the dissertation, I can confirm that the doctoral candidate has deeply entered the labyrinth of Iran's dramatic political development in the 20th century, mastered the current level of treatment of this extremely important problem in specialized scientific literature, and used an interdisciplinary methodological toolkit that allowed him to create an independent study representing an original scientific work on a significant problem.

Viewed as a whole, the dissertation meets the requirements of ZRASRB and its implementing regulations, as well as the corresponding regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, wherefore I express my positive opinion on it and declare my intention to vote "for" the proposal by the Academic Jury to award Nikolay Valentinov Karamikhov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, doctoral program Historical Studies.

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Prepared the opinion:.....
Prof. Dr. Nikola Ivanov Avreyski