

REVIEW

by Dr. Ivo Kirilov Panov, Professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

1. General Description of the Submitted Materials

By Order No. RD-22-1638 of 14 July 2025 issued by the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski,” Prof. Rumen Mladenov, I was appointed as an external member of the academic jury for the procedure concerning the defense of a doctoral dissertation entitled “*Modernization through Archaization: Political Ideas in Iran in the 20th Century*”, submitted for the acquisition of 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*.

The author of the dissertation is Nikolay Valentinov Karamihov, an independent doctoral student at the Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.” His academic supervisor is Assoc. Prof. Valentin Pavlov Petrusenko, PhD, Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.”

The set of materials submitted by Nikolay Karamihov, both in hard copy and electronic form, complies with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at Plovdiv University and includes the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of Plovdiv University requesting the initiation of the doctoral defense procedure;
- Curriculum vitae in European format;
- Protocol of the Departmental Council regarding the readiness to initiate the defense procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- Dissertation;
- Extended abstract (author’s summary);
- List of academic publications related to the dissertation;
- Copies of the academic publications;
- Declaration of originality and authenticity of the submitted documents.

The doctoral candidate has submitted one monograph (the dissertation itself) and two publications directly related to the dissertation topic and constituting part of the broader scholarly investigation. In addition, in his biographical data, Nikolay Karamihov cites two further publications also falling within the scope of the dissertation’s subject matter.

2. Brief Biographical Data of the Doctoral Candidate

Nikolay Karamihov completed his secondary education at the 18th Secondary School “William Gladstone” with a specialization in Persian Language and Culture. He obtained his higher education at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” where he earned a Master’s degree in Contemporary History.

He is proficient in English, Persian, and Russian.

3. Relevance of the Topic and the Appropriateness of the Research Aims and Objectives

The chosen topic is highly relevant, as there are no comprehensive studies either in Bulgaria or abroad that explore in such depth the issue of Iran’s “modernization” through its “archaization.” The doctoral candidate has perceptively identified the struggle between the Shah’s institution and the Shiite clergy, manifested in the monarch’s attempts to curtail the

influence of the clergy in the country's social and economic life. This process was primarily pursued through a return to Iran's earliest religion—Zoroastrianism—with its moral norms, attributes, and symbolism. In the sphere of agrarian reform, Karamihov likewise observes a form of archaization in the fragmentation of large estates through partial state acquisition and redistribution to the rural population. These measures inevitably provoked resistance from the clergy and large landowners, some of whom were members of the religious elite. The dissertation thus makes a significant scholarly and applied contribution, offering a novel perspective on Iran's modernization. The research objectives and tasks are well considered and convincingly substantiated throughout the dissertation.

4. Familiarity with the Problem

Nikolay Karamihov demonstrates excellent knowledge of the social, political, economic, and cultural state of Iran during the 20th century. The processes taking place in the country are examined with scholarly precision and subjected to well-reasoned and therefore persuasive analysis.

5. Research Methodology

In each chapter of his dissertation, Nikolay Karamihov explains the range of methods employed, which—depending on the content of the respective chapter—prove to be well chosen and productive. The doctoral candidate's preferred methods include the historical, comparative, synthetic, analytical, and classificatory approaches, as well as the methods of oral history and self-reflexivity.

6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation

The submitted dissertation consists of an Introduction, four chapters, a Conclusion, a Bibliography, and Appendices.

In the *Introduction*, the author substantiates the relevance of the study, outlines its aims and objectives, and presents the methods and methodological framework applied.

Chapter One, "*The Complex Path of the New Ancient Nation*", serves as an introductory part of the research. It traces key moments in the historical trajectory of Persian statehood, offering concise characterizations of each turning point in the empire's existence. In the section "*The Safavid Dynasty*" (emphasis mine), however, the central historical, religious, and spiritual event of the period should be explicitly emphasized—namely, the proclamation of Shiite Islam as the state religion and the subsequent wars with the Ottoman Empire fought under the banner of religious legitimacy. Likewise, in the section "*Oil – a Key to Politics*", the doctoral candidate has overlooked the opportunity to analyze the long-standing conflict between Iranian society and the "Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," later transformed into the International Oil Consortium. The driving forces behind the nationalization of Iran's oil industry and the consequences of this act are not sufficiently addressed. The assertion that "*The policy of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 was characterized by an attempt to nationalize the oil industry*" (p. 33) is inaccurate, since such nationalization had already been enacted by the explicit decision of the *Majlis* (Iranian Parliament) on 15 March 1951. Only 43 days later, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh—the author of the law—was elected Prime Minister and proclaimed a national hero. The ensuing economic and military blockade of Iran by the Great Powers, the rampant inflation, the coup d'état, and the subsequent return of oil production to foreign control are crucial events that mirror the colonial policies of the era.

Nonetheless, the chapter demonstrates the doctoral candidate's sound orientation in the field of socio-political and constitutional transformations, the struggle for the adoption of Iran's first Constitution (30 December 1926), the clandestine maneuvers of opposing factions within the state, as well as Iran's relations with external actors. The first manifestations of archaization as a path toward modernization are also discussed.

Chapter Two, "*Persian Nationalism (A Case Study: Iran in the 20th Century)*", examines the ruling elite's efforts to construct a shared national identity in a multiethnic context. The candidate convincingly demonstrates his knowledge of the theories of nationalism developed by Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch, Maurice Halbwachs, and Benedict Anderson, applying them appropriately to the Iranian case.

Chapter Three, "*The Islamic Revolution in Iran – Future and Past*", reviews the trajectory of modern Iran leading to the Islamic Revolution. It critically examines the main theories explaining the clergy's success, including the *Conspiracy Theory*, the *Modernization Theory*, the *Economic Theory*, and the *Religious Theory*. The candidate concludes that each theory emerged at a particular historical moment, had its specific causes, and reflected actions perceived differently by various social strata. He further observes that the *Religious Theory* exhibits the greatest number of intersections with the others. Special emphasis is placed on the concepts of *modernization* and *archaization*, both of which hold emblematic significance in the dynamics of social development. The chapter further reveals the doctoral candidate's strong knowledge of international law, domestic and foreign policy, and intelligence, demonstrating both comprehensive awareness of the events and sensitivity to peripheral issues.

A particularly important aspect of Chapter Three is the discussion of the position of women from the 1950s–1960s to the present day. Here Karamihov demonstrates profound knowledge of the subject and the ability to independently analyze diverse aspects of women's roles in the political, economic, cultural, and social life of Iran.

Chapter Four, "*A Comparison of (Seemingly) Incomparable Entities*", contrasts two different religious teachings in Iran: Zoroastrianism—the first Iranian religion—and the Baha'i faith, which remains rejected in the country to this day. In this chapter, Karamihov once again demonstrates mastery of the subject. He presents the history of both religions in detail, supporting his exposition with reliable information and presenting precise, well-reasoned conclusions. Nevertheless, one of his claims raises disagreement, namely that "*Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest surviving religions in the world and is said to be the first monotheistic religion*" (p. 121). Stronger arguments exist in favor of the view that Zoroastrianism is more accurately characterized by its "monotheistic dualism."

In this chapter, the candidate also devotes substantial attention to the ideological orientation and activity of the leftist *Tudeh* Party (emphasis mine). He provides a well-grounded account of the development of socialist ideas in Iran, drawing upon the works of Iranian and foreign political scientists and examining the correspondence of key historical figures from the USSR, Iran, and Bulgaria. Particularly valuable is the archival documentation incorporated in the dissertation—resolutions, declarations, reports, correspondence, and communiqués—painstakingly collected, processed, and published by the author. This portion of the dissertation alone could serve as the basis for an independent doctoral study.

The *Conclusion* faithfully reflects the attainment of the stated research objectives. Particularly valuable is Karamihov's final conclusion that the model he proposes, "*with some adjustments in line with specific historical processes and phenomena, may serve as a working matrix for understanding the countries of the region*" (p. 7).

The *Appendices* include valuable archival documents translated by the author himself, as well as illustrations—some sourced online and others photographed by the candidate during fieldwork and preserved in his personal archive.

The *Bibliography* contains over 140 titles and more than 30 electronic sources, all of which are organically integrated into the text.

Overall, the dissertation paints a vivid picture not only of Iran's domestic political situation but also of the entangled web of interests and rivalries among the Great Powers vying for influence in the country.

The work is characterized by its polyvalence: it addresses not only historical issues but also those pertaining to political science, cultural studies, literary studies, and sociology. It engages with topics from diplomacy, ethnology, geography, archival studies, economics, and religious studies, thereby acquiring a distinctly interdisciplinary character—something rarely encountered in doctoral research.

The author's style is concise, precise, and logically argued, devoid of clichés or templates. The scholarly and conceptual framework is of a high standard. There is no evidence of improper use of others' research.

7. Contributions and Significance of the Research for Scholarship and Practice

In my view, the dissertation makes a substantial contribution to the study of Iran's socio-political situation in the 20th century. It would be of value to historians, diplomats, political scientists, students of Iranian Studies, History, and International Relations, as well as to a wider readership.

8. Evaluation of the Publications Related to the Dissertation

The publications submitted by the doctoral candidate are closely related to the dissertation topic and clearly reflect his sustained, long-term interest in the field of Iranian studies. Like the dissertation itself, they demonstrate familiarity with international research on the subject and cite relevant works accurately and appropriately.

9. Personal Contribution of the Doctoral Candidate

The dissertation reflects the effective methodological guidance of the academic supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Valentin Petrusenko, PhD. The dissertation is well structured, and the development of the topic is presented in a logical sequence. The arguments are supported by documentary evidence, some of which derives from the author's personal archive. All of this testifies to the strong personal contribution of the doctoral candidate.

10. Extended Abstract

The extended abstract (author's summary) is properly written and complies with the requirements for publication. It accurately reflects the main results achieved in the dissertation.

11. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

The dissertation contains some inaccuracies in the rendering of certain names in Cyrillic. For instance, the dynasty is referred to as *Kadjar* instead of the correct *Gadjar*, since in Persian it begins with the letter گ (*qāf*); the name Abu al-Qasem Ferdowsi-e Tusi should correctly be rendered as Abul Gasem Ferdowsi Tusi for the same reason; the province should be *Gilan* rather than *Gilyan* (a Russian transliteration); the Shiite clerical title should be spelled with a double *l* as *ayatollah*; the party *Tudeh* should appear as *Tude* without the final *h*; and the dynasty is inconsistently written as both *Safavids* and *Sefevids*.

I also cannot concur with the candidate's particularly bold conclusion that “...*the popularity of Hafez can be regarded as a unique pre-Islamic archaism that has survived to the present day*” (p. 79). It is evident that the doctoral candidate is strongest in analytical exposition but more vulnerable when making categorical declarations.

Finally, throughout the dissertation there is inconsistent use of dashes (short and long), with three different styles observed: short dashes without spacing, long dashes without spacing, and long dashes with spacing (the correct form). There are also occasional errors in the use of the definite article, punctuation mistakes, and inconsistencies in the title “*The Complex Path of the New Ancient Nation*,” which is written differently in the table of contents and in the text.

Of course, these weaknesses in no way diminish the scholarly value or the contribution of the dissertation, for which I award it a very high evaluation.

Conclusion

The dissertation contains scholarly and applied results that constitute an original contribution to research and fully meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), its Implementing Regulations, and the corresponding Regulations of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.”

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate, Nikolay Karamihov, possesses profound theoretical knowledge and professional competence in the field of History and Archaeology. He displays the qualities and skills necessary to conduct independent scholarly research.

For these reasons, I confidently give my positive evaluation of the research presented in the dissertation and extended abstract reviewed above. I recommend to the esteemed academic jury that the educational and scientific degree of *Doctor* be awarded to Nikolay Valentinov Karamihov in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities; professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology; doctoral program *Historical Studies*.

Reviewer:

(signature)

Prof. Dr. Ivo Panov

01.09.2025