

OPINION

by Dr. Sc. **Valeri Stoilov Stefanov**, Professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,

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on the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

in: field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional area 2.1. Philology
(Bulgarian Literature – Revival Literature and Folklore)

In the competition for the position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette, issue 96 of November 11, 2025, and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology, the candidate is Chief Assistant Dr. **Zdravko Trifonov Dechev** from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By Order No. RD-22-47 of January 9, 2026, issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU), I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor at PU in field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional area 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature – Revival Literature and Folklore), announced for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology.

One candidate has submitted documents for the competition: Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The set of materials submitted by Zdravko Dechev in hard copy complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at PU and includes all the required documents.

The list of scientific works submitted for the competition includes two monographs and fifteen articles. Regarding the topic of the habilitation work, one monograph and seven articles have been presented. Four publications related to the doctoral dissertation topic, outside the competition, have also been attached.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Zdravko Trifonov Dechev is a graduate of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, with a degree in Bulgarian Philology. He holds the educational and scientific degree of Doctor. Since 2013, he has been successively an Assistant and Chief Assistant (since 2015) at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. He is the author of two published monographs and numerous articles in specialized journals. He has participated in scientific projects and conferences.

3. General characteristics of the candidate's activity

For the competition, Zdravko Dechev presents a habilitation work entitled “Around the Dead Body,” published in 2026.

The issues related to the historical existence of the body and corporeality are extremely interesting and have been explored across different disciplinary fields and theoretical paradigms.

In Dechev's work, some of the “adventures” of the body and corporeality are interpreted in the context of a dramatic cultural-historical situation. For the candidate, the body is a fundamental category of human experience with the world and with oneself. It ranges from a biological phenomenon to a socio-cultural one. The body is a word, a concept, an image, a physical reality, a biological construct, an anatomical structure, a symbolic edifice.

The body is the archaic remnant within us – the field of the primal, of desires, greed, and instinct. This primal body is clothed in the garments of civilization. The body is nature, but disciplined and restrained nature. It is spatially and temporally limited. It is subject to the natural cycle – birth, growth, maturity, old age, death.

The body is not single or unified; there are different bodies marked by social and value distinctions. There are sacrificial and heroic bodies, professionally shaped bodies. Not least, the human body is “the banner of one's humanity against any power that oppresses it” (Philippe Sarasin).

All of the above is, to a greater or lesser extent, outlined and incorporated into the understanding of the body in the presented work. Literature creates conceptually structured and rhetorically intensified images of the body and corporeality. In this particular case, the discussion focuses mainly on representations of the body in works from the Bulgarian National Revival period – texts by Sofroniy of Vratsa, Nayden Gerov, Petko Slaveykov, Lyuben Karavelov, and others.

The image of the dead body makes it possible to create a specific semantic network woven from concepts such as power, violence, sacrifice, transgression, telos, flesh, etc. The body is considered across a broad range – from the trials of anatomical corporeality to the effects of symbolic construction. It is outlined as a place where horrifying excesses and tragic moral collapses are inscribed.

The human being is understood as a complex psychophysical unity that exists in constantly emerging situations of crisis. Thus, the main working concept allows conclusions about the specifics of social and political reality, as well as the functioning cultural norms and codes. The emotional world of the individual is “obediently” inscribed within these codes, yet it preserves the potential for resistance and the possibility of alternative affirmations.

The excessive existence of the body and the drive for survival lead the candidate to the concept of trauma. Trauma is a symbolically significant topos, aimed at the horizon of individual and collective overcoming. It is shown how the consequences of shocking events activate mechanisms of release, psychological transfer, distancing, and detachment. Suffering is transformed into stories, books, songs, and praises – evidence of “a difficult written mastery of the world of suffering.”

The dead body is symbolically drawn back toward life through the shirt or garment. These function as barriers against decay, concepts of wholeness, and markers of cultural existence. Thus, the transition from life to death and back – from death to symbolic living – emerges as the true plot of the presented study. Hence the moral message, which also has therapeutic effectiveness: “the value of a person is expressed not only in how they live, but also in the name of what they die.”

The second monographic work is based on the defended doctoral dissertation titled “Orality – Literacy in Revival Culture,” published in 2015. It addresses another relevant research topic in Bulgarian humanities – the relationship between voice and writing, and the

phenomenology of the voice. The topic opens broader issues: the historicity of communication, the relations between folklore and written culture, and the specific receptive attitudes shaping the Revival-era individual. The Revival period is interpreted as an impatient affirmation of the written word, through which processes of modernization unfold – new modes of communication, encounters with the wider world, changes in cultural codes, concerns for collective identity, and anxieties about memory.

For the purposes of the competition, the author also presents fifteen articles. They address various problems related both to specific periods of literary history and to the contemporary literary process. In the overview articles devoted to literary production in different years, Dechev demonstrates the ability to read works in their genre specificity and to select what is significant on the basis of sound aesthetic judgment – an important quality for critical work. Some of the listed articles are integrated into the corpus of the habilitation work, which is an entirely acceptable practice.

Overall, my evaluation of Zdravko Dechev's works is positive. They focus on interesting and relevant issues, examine them carefully and competently, and present well-grounded conclusions.

Zdravko Dechev has participated in three research projects. He has presented papers at various conferences – seven since defending his doctoral dissertation. He has also served as compiler and editor of properly cited scholarly editions.

As evidence of the candidate's scientific activity, six citations of his works are listed, as well as two reviews of the book "Orality – Literacy in Revival Culture," 2015.

The submitted report on compliance with the minimum national requirements under Article 2b of the Academic Staff Development Act shows that the required number of points for the position of Associate Professor has been achieved.

Zdravko Dechev has sufficient teaching experience and enjoys authority among students and colleagues.

4. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

The submitted works and the theses developed in them represent an indisputable personal contribution by the author, Zdravko Dechev. They are written in accordance with the standards of academic research. All borrowed ideas, opinions, and works are correctly cited.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

I would recommend that Zdravko Dechev devote greater attention to the theoretical clarification of the key concepts he works with. Around the body, for example, there exist vast research corpora in various disciplinary fields. It would be beneficial for some of these to be presented and possibly activated within the course of the work.

Citations are generally an expression of conscientiousness and scholarly correctness, but at times they predominate and weigh heavily on the exposition.

6. Personal impressions

I have no direct personal impressions of the candidate's teaching or research work beyond the materials provided to me in the field of the competition.

Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev meet all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing regulations, and the corresponding regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The candidate has presented a significant number of scholarly works published after the materials used in the defense of the doctoral degree. His works contain original scientific contributions, most of which are published in reputable scholarly editions.

The candidate's scientific and teaching qualifications are unquestionable.

The results achieved by Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev in teaching and research fully meet the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty of Philology, adopted in accordance with the university regulations.

Having examined the materials and scholarly works presented in the competition and evaluated their scientific and applied value, I give my positive assessment and recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology proposing the election of Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev to the academic position of Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional area 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature – Revival Literature and Folklore).

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