REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Nikolay Aretov Aretov,

Professional field 05.04.02. Bulgarian literature

Institute for Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

on the academic output for participation in a competition for occupying the academic position of Professor

Professional direction 2.1 Philology (Balkan literature and culture) for the needs of the section "Culture of the Balkans" (Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol")

with a single candidate Associate Professor Dr. Antoaneta Borislavova Balcheva, PhD

Associate Professor Antoaneta Borislavova Balcheva, PhD graduated in Slavic Philology, Czech Philology (second major: Slovak language) from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 1984. In 1997, as a full-time doctoral student at the Institute for Balkan Studies, BAS, she defended her doctorate with a dissertation on the topic "The Character of Romanticism in the Slavic South." Expanded and revised, the dissertation was published as a book entitled "Between Myth and Balkan Realities. Romanticism in the Slavic South" in 2000. In 2010, another book of hers, "Bridges Across the Centuries. Southeast European Dialogical Fields," was published, which continues her research in the field of Balkan Studies and Comparative Studies.

Since 1998, she has been a Research Associate II degree at the Institute for Balkan Studies, from 1999 a Research Associate I degree, from 2011 an Associate Professor, and during the period 2011 – 2017 she was the Scientific Secretary of the IBCT. She has conducted a lecture course at the Central Office of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences on the topic: "The Discourse on Europe in South Slavic Literatures (19th century)," has been the academic advisor of one doctoral student, has given single lectures to members of the Croatian Pan-European Union in Zagreb (2017), and has participated in several national and international projects. She has participated in presentations in over 45 international and national conferences, congresses, and workshops, is a member of the Academic Circle for Comparative Literature (AKSLIT), the Bulgarian Society for 18th Century Studies, the Croatian National Council for Historical Sciences/ Hrvatski nacionalni odbor za povijesne znanosti (HNOPZ), Zagreb (Croatia), the editorial team of Skyway Publications, and the management board of the "Balkan Cultures" society. Assoc. Prof. A. Balcheva is the compiler of 7 scientific collections and a member of the editorial boards of 3 others (2 of which were published in Zagreb). The reference attached to the autobiography indicates 24 citations in refereed and 12 in non-refereed scientific publications.

In the competition, Associate Professor Dr. Antoaneta Balcheva participates with the monograph "Culture of Travel. Intertwined Texts and Fates of Bulgarians and Croats from the

Late 19th to the Middle of the 20th Century." (Sofia: Institute for Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology, 2025, 274 pp.) and more than 60 articles and studies, 6 of them published abroad.

"Culture of Travel..." is an interesting and useful work, which is based on a serious methodological foundation. The book brings together various observations on texts and manifestations over a long period of about one century. The work rightly emphasizes the "hybrid nature of travel literature" (p. 11). The object of research includes various things, not only travelogues, but also more or less fictional works about imaginary journeys, differentiated into *travel writing* and *travel literature* (p. 11-12), diaries (as in the case of Prof. Iv. Shishmanov), theatrical productions (Milan Begović), encounters with representatives of the other nation (St. Chilingirov and others), and so on.

Each of the four chapters, as well as most sub-chapters, begins with a more general presentation of the cultural and political situation at the time to which the observations are focused; this is useful in most cases, as the reader is unlikely to know many of the details. The author's attitude towards the political events in Croatia is objective, delicate, and free from unnecessary criticism and patriotic passions. The same applies to conflicts in Bulgarian culture. For example, the disagreements within Bulgarian society regarding the holding of the Second Preparatory Slavic Congress in Sofia in 1910 have remained in the background. The endeavor to seek analogies of the examined works with and in other European authors, works, and genres is highlighted, though in individual places this may seem insufficiently argued (for example, regarding L. Sterne).

The emphasis in the book is naturally placed on the mutual introspection and acquaintance between Croatian and Bulgarian intellectuals, who are practically always inclined to see the positive in the other; in this respect, as the author hints several times, the Croats are more benevolent than the Serbs (including when it comes to the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885). Assoc. Prof. Balcheva connects this attitude with the idea of Slavic unity and marks its development from Illyrism through (Pan-)Slavism to "Neo-Slavism" (p. 76) and "Yugoslavism." Observations on the extent to which authors follow imposed stereotypes and to what extent they "break" them also deserve attention. Another important element in the book's examination of the mutual representations of Croats and Bulgarians is related to the perception of the modernization of society and the development of modernism in the two cultures.

The cited assessments by Croats of the modern appearance of Sofia, including in comparison with Zagreb, were a pleasant surprise for me.[1] The work does not fail to notice the publications of female intellectuals, both Croatian (Vesna Parun) and Bulgarian (Olga Chavova, Bogdana Dochova, Vera Plocheva, Anna Kamenova, and Dora Gabe), and to seek the specific female perspective in them.

Some of the book's chapters, essentially independent studies, focus on a more general attitude towards the foreign, without any connection to Bulgarian-Croatian relations. This is the

[1] "In terms of modernity and beauty, neither Belgrade nor Zagreb can compete with Sofia... the palm of the championship among the Yugoslav capitals will definitely fall into its lap" (Nikola Andrić, 1927, quoted on p. 23.) Something similar ("the Bulgarian ambience" has "more of a Western European charm") is also quoted from a text by Marijan Alković from 1910 (p. 82).

case with the chapter “The Path of Pencho Slaveykov to Italy – A Drive for a New Identity of the Bulgarian Intellectual” (the text is partially known from Balcheva's 2014 article “Spiritual Pilgrimage in the Work of P. P. Slaveykov”). I understand from the work that Pencho Slaveykov translated one of his poems into Italian. The chapter “Venice – Real and Imagined in the Creative World of Croatian Romantics” is of a similar nature. The same can be observed in the examination of the Bulgarians' attitude towards the sea (a 2020 variant in the article “The Black Sea Coast in Bulgarian Travelogues during the First Half of the 20th Century”), which to some extent problematizes the dominant perception of a relatively weaker interest in such topics in Bulgarian culture.

The work of Assoc. Prof. A. Balcheva is based on numerous theoretical and more general studies (in places it reaches over-diligence in this regard, for example, with some references to F. Braudel, M. Foucault, and others), on a solid knowledge of Croatian research on travel literature, and also on Bulgarian reception, both of contemporaries and the actually numerous later literary works. The visual illustrations in the work are appropriately selected and well-presented.

In places, the text may provoke, if not objections, then a desire for discussion. The definition of “Bloody Song” as a “messianistic utopia” seems exaggerated to me, but I do not exclude that this may be a statement by an authoritative critic, as many and different things have been written about Pencho Slaveykov's poem. It seems to me that there is a confusion in the text between Hrisan Tsankov (1890-1970) and Hristo (Hrisan) Tsankov-Derizhan (1888-1950) (p. 227, 235). In places, the language is somewhat complicated and loaded with terminology. For example: “Part of the created imagological pictures are also a metatext of her autobiographical discourse or a metaphorical image of her philosophical insights...” (p. 215).

Conclusion

The statement of original scientific contributions presented by Associate Professor Dr. Antoaneta Balcheva, as well as the List of Publications and the Academic Position Card “Associate Professor,” are correctly prepared. The list of citations (36) of her works is respectable.

The overall research and organizational activity of Associate Professor Antoaneta Balcheva, PhD, fully meets the requirements of the law, and this gives me reason to recommend with complete conviction that she be elected Professor at the Institute for Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology “Prof. Alexander Fol” - BAS.

November 15, 2025

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