БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ
Институт по балканистика с Център по тракология
„Проф. А. Фол"
Вх. № 22Нб-05-05/24.02.2023

Opinion

By Prof. Yura Konstantinova

Regarding a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor,

for the needs of the Modern Balkans Department of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, BAS

A competition was announced in the *State Gazette,* No 85 of October 2022 for the academic position of Associate Professor in higher education field 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (International relations in the Balkans in the 19th century) for the needs of the Modern Balkans Department of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, BAS (IBCT – BAS). Simeon Andonov Simeonov, the only applicant, has been admitted to participation in the competition.

Simeon Simeonov completed his MA in History at the Heidelberg University and then a second MA in International Relations at Chicago University. In 2021 he defended his PhD thesis on the topic of *Empire of Consuls: Consulship, Sovereignty, and Empire in the Revolutionary Atlantic (1778-1848)* at Brown University in the USA. He is fluent in five foreign languages: English, German, Spanish, French and Russian. He has worked as a researcher at the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, BAS and at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies and has also been a visiting lecturer at the Department of History, Brown University, USA.

Dr. Simeon Simeonov participates in this procedure with two monographs and six articles and studies published in refereed and peer-reviewed journals. The submitted works and citations exceed the minimum national requirements and along with the numerous successful personal projects make the applicant a strong candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor. Dr. Simeonov has cited as his principal habilitation work his monograph *Francisco de Miranda in the Balkans. The Origin of the Idea of Latin American Independence,* Faber, 2022, 155 p. ISBN: 978-619-7179-31-6. It is structured as an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. It includes a biographical note on Francisco de Miranda, bibliography used, as well as relevant illustrations. The monograph traces the journey of the Venezuelan revolutionary in the Balkans between April and September 1786 and his transfer to Russia, where he continued his contacts with representatives of the Balkan

elites. The study goes far beyond the description of locations, personalities, customs, and sets the region, its history and inhabitants in several different contexts: of the "Western" world, of the "peripheral" world, of the "revolutionary" world, of the personal world of the traveler, and of the research world of Dr. Simeonov.

Already the introduction claims that the book is "an emphatic argument in favour of the need for a careful local study of the revolutionary process, for interweaving different national histories and globalizing the narrative of the 'Age of Revolutions' as the cradle of the modern world" (p. 16). One of the author's goals is to revisit the Western-centric models of "center" and "periphery" and, by reconsidering Francisco de Miranda's Balkan biography, to highlight the integral role of South East Europe in his ideology and, through it, in the global ideological and political processes as well. This places the work among the studies seeking to make the Balkans an equal part of the modern world. Dr. Simeonov manages to fit his monograph perfectly into the theoretical framework required to develop such a large-scale goal and skillfully guides the reader through it. Overall, the book is notable for its lively and engaging style, interspersed with intriguing quotations from the Traveller's Diary and interesting comments by the author. The clever handling of the sources, the bold interpretations and the responsible historiographical discussions make an excellent impression. They immerse the reader in the magic of history, leading him together with Miranda through the "lethargic" Balkan landscape, whispering to him in barely audible consular voices, making him wonder together with the author why the traveller shares some impressions and withholds others, arousing his interest with questions about the role of dragomans, about what is meant by "decadent despotism", etc.

With the self-confidence of a professional, Dr. Simeonov compares the slave markets in the Orient and in America, commenting critically on Miranda's observations, problematizing concepts, and engaging in historiographical discussions. Certainly, not all of his comments can be unambiguously accepted [e.g., that of p. 114, according to which the visit to Constantinople made Miranda "the only inhabitant of the Western Hemisphere to be so dramatically influenced by the transformative processes in the Balkans in the Age of Revolutions"], while many more issues could have been addressed in his study [e.g., the subject of the Phanariots, which should have been commented upon in the account of Miranda's meetings with representatives of the Ghika, Mavrocordatos families, etc.], but this does not alter the fact that Dr. Simeonov is a scholar capable of formulating his own hypotheses based on source information and extensive knowledge of the historiography on the

main topics discussed. I find the knowledge of Balkan literature chaotic, and while I admire the author's desire to include it in his study, I recommend that he continues to systematically familiarize himself with it. Actually, this issue is more than logical, since the habilitation thesis is the first work with which Dr. Simeonov delves into Balkan problematics.

The second monograph submitted for the competition, *Builders of the Western World: How Consuls Created the Modern International Order.* Sofia, IBCT, 2022. ISBN - 978-619-7179-30-9, 312 pages, is based on Simeon Simeonov's doctoral dissertation and is an institutional history of consular institutions in the early half of the 19th century. It is indeed the topic of consulates that is constant not only in the monographs, but also in the articles and studies with which Dr. Simeonov participates in the competition. His lasting interest in this field was highly appreciated during the defense of his doctoral dissertation and the publication of his research by prestigious international publishers, and their significance has been appreciated in the citations of fellow researchers working on similar issues. I have detected no plagiarism or erroneous scholarly data in the applicant's writings.

Summarizing my impressions from the reviewed works of Dr. Simeonov, I would highlight their global (in terms of time and space) perspective, which is generally not typical for Bulgarian historiography. They do not explore Balkan history, but rather set the region in a global context and seek its place in the ideological and political processes of the 18th and 19th centuries. In this sense, Dr. Simeonov is not a Balkans scholar, but a highly accomplished historian, who skillfully and honestly handles a variety of sources, links the data yielded by them to historiographical theses, knows how to use the methods of "transversal" and "intertwined" history and to add to the basic historical methodology various other methods and approaches that make his studies truly interdisciplinary. His qualifications, his sustained interest in the consular networks in the Balkans in the 19th century, as well as the works submitted in this competition, are a serious indication of his future development in the field of Balkan studies. I believe that he should be given a chance to apply his knowledge and develop his potential in this field, and the most appropriate place for this is precisely the Modern Balkans Department of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology. All this gives me reason to recommend to the Scientific Consul of the IBCT to select Dr. Simeon Simeonov for the scholarly position of Associate Professor.

28 February 2023 Prof. DSc. Yura Konstantinova