

## RECENZIA

by Assoc. Prof. Mira Nikolaeva Markova, PhD, lecturer in the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of History of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski under a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in 3. 1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Bulgarian ethnology. Folk medicine), announced in SG, no. 48/28.06.2022

Only candidate: Ch. Assistant Prof. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova, PhD

Professional experience of the candidate

Ch. Assistant Professor Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova PhD is the only candidate in the competition announced for the needs of Faculty of History for the academic position of "Associate Professor". All the documents and materials provided comply with the RSARB and the rules for its application at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Assistant Professor Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova meets the minimum national requirements for the acquisition of the academic position of "Assoc. Professor", and her scientific publications, citations and overall activity allow her to repeatedly exceed the requirements laid down in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB ) minimum requirements. The expertise, scientific experience and educational qualifications of Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova make her a suitable candidate for the academic position of "associate professor" according to the scientific direction of the announced competition. I consider it necessary to state that in the works of Dr. Kotseva-Popova I do not find plagiarism within the meaning of the law, and the available author's scientific theses are original and contributing. I also declare that I am not a person related to the applicant in the sense of § 1, item 5 of the additional provisions of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB).

I must point out that due to the circumstances, I know the entire path in science of Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova, as over the years she has developed herself as a precise scientist, with her own research profile, inimitable style and very serious pedagogical skills.

Assistant Professor Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova graduated with a degree in History, with a specialization in Ethnology at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" in 1999. He obtained a PhD in ethnology in 2010 after being a full-time doctoral student at the Ethnographic Institute with Museum at the BAS. From 2010 to the present, he has a full-time position at Sofia

University, Faculty of History - first as an assistant, and from the following year, 2011, as a chief assistant.

### **Teaching activity**

In his work as a teacher Assistant Professor Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova leads seminars and holds lectures in the undergraduate and graduate programs in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, the undergraduate History program, the undergraduate Tourism program, at GGF. She is the author of new lecture courses that follow the latest trends in ethnology and anthropology.

I will list Problems of European Modernization, Medical Anthropology, Balkan Ethnology, Anthropology and Age Groups, Ethnology and Modernity, Ethnology, and Dynamics of Identities Across Borders. These courses present the candidate as a complex scholar and educator with an innovative flair. I will also point out the fact that assistant professor Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova is a teacher very involved with the students, being the supervisor and mentor of student internships for the students of the "Ethnology and cultural anthropology" and "History and geopolitics of the Balkans".

Her dedication is appreciated by the students, and I would say that Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova is listed as a favorite and charismatic teacher in the anonymous surveys conducted in the Faculty of History for the assessment of teachers by students. This fact complements the academic qualities of the candidate for the announced competition. Ch. assistant professor Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova has also given lectures at foreign universities in Latvia and Germany. She was a scholarship holder of the "Alfred Töpfer" Foundation with a one-year study at the University of Vienna.

Ch. assistant professor Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova is actively involved in the life of the academic community of Sofia University, since 2019 she is the coordinator of the Erasmus+ program for the Faculty of History, and since 2020 she is the director of the "Rhodope" University Center. This testifies to the authority built as a result of the work of Dr. Kotseva-Popova to confirm the leading positions of Sofia University in the field of education and science.

### **Research activity of the candidate**

The submitted works of ch. Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova is presented as a complex and innovative scientist with a focus on the problems of folk medicine, folk culture, modernization, intercultural communication.

The applicant participates in the competition with a scientific production that is original and that does not repeat the submitted publications for acquiring the academic position of "ch. assistant". It includes two monographs - one is the main habilitation thesis, and the other is the result of research for the acquisition of PhD degree, as well as 19 articles and studies, most of which are in the world's databases of refereed and indexed publications.

I will focus first on the monograph *Healers and healing practices at the beginning of the 21st century. Ethnological Aspects, 2022, ISBN:978-954-07-5520-5; ISBN 978-954-07-5521-2.pdf, Sofia: University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski"*. The book is an innovative work based on rich field material personally collected by the author from different regions of the country, and in the course of interpretation and analysis, Dr. Kotseva makes comparisons with other cultures and reaches broad generalizations.

The book consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and appendices. I find the monograph to be a contribution because it analyzes traditional medicine as a cultural and social phenomenon with a new theoretical approach and modern methodology. Through the prism of the individual characteristics of the healers, the changes in Bulgarian society in the XXI century, caused by social, economic and political transformations, become visible. It is useful to note the changes that have occurred in rituals and ritual practices, as well as the modern attitude to health problems, diseases and their treatment.

The habilitation book has its internal logic and consistency as the ritual is in the context of the ecological and social niche. The author considers healers not as individuals, but also offers a typology of healers, based on the practices they use. The leading place is occupied by the autobiographical method, which enables the individual ritual person to be seen on the one hand in the framework of his own life, but also placed in a social and historical context. Dr. Kotseva-Popova succeeds in researching and analyzing healing and the healer as phenomena of the 21st century, as they are also placed in the context of the survival strategies of modern man and regional communities as a whole. The contribution of the essay is that a transition was made from the traditional notion of health and illness to the modern understanding of these categories by combining ethnographic and anthropological knowledge. In the course of the entire composition, one feels the author's attachment to the informants and carriers of culture, but the

research maintains objectivity, as the information is verified from various sources, which makes it credible. I welcome the use of the functional and semantic approach, which shows the candidate's high theoretical training. In the development of the monograph, the information from the ethnographic field and theoretical postulates is very balanced. 80 interviews (structured and semi-structured) were conducted and I welcome the field ethics followed by the author.

The main field studies were carried out in the period 2014 - 2019, but studies were also carried out in the last three years, critically analyzing information from the media and social networks in the context of the pandemic situation, when the topics of illness, treatment and death acquired a particular social actuality. Dr. Violeta Kotseva places healers and healing practices in the position of mediators between tradition and the postmodern situation of heightened social sensitivity to personal and public health. In this context, I would like to ask a question about the reactions of the researched persons to manifested negativity and aggressive behavior, because the position of the studied phenomena is not unambiguous, as well as their public evaluation.

The perspective set as the focus of the third chapter of the essay is very interesting, namely the role of faith and religion in the images of healers. The question is raised about the dimensions of faith, about the importance of certain religious systems and about the renewal of practices resulting from new attitudes in the social environment.

Dr. Violeta Kotseva explores alternative healing as a process and as a type of communication, which is another innovative highlight of the presented monograph. The analyzed monographic work has many and indisputable merits. Introducing new ethnographic information, the work is analytical and original.

Other topics that present Ch. Assistant Professor Violeta Kotseva-Popova, Ph.D., as a researcher.

Searches in the direction of ethnopedagogy draw attention to the article *On the long road of ethnology to the school, History, 2017, ISSN (print):1314-8524, ISSN (online):0861-3710*, which examines attempts to introduce ethnology as a subject in secondary education school of the Bulgarian education system. The importance of the subject for the formation of knowledge and skills for living in an intercultural environment, as well as for building empathic behavior and constructing identities based on tolerance and understanding of otherness, is emphasized. The results of the study *POST-GRADUATE QUALIFICATION OF TEACHERS*

*IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT are in a similar direction. - STRATEGIES FOR POLICY IN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION, vol: 27, issue:1, 2019, pages:26-35, ISSN (print):ISSN 1310-0270, ISSN (online):ISSN 1314-8575, where the deficits in our educational system in terms of the preparedness of teachers to work in an intercultural educational environment. Some strategic solutions and fields for discussion are provided.*

The candidate for the announced competition also focuses on non-formal education in the field of cultural heritage. The co-authored article Electronic resources and programs for non-formal learning in the field of cultural heritage is a contribution here. Current status and prospects, Legislation and professional development in the field of cultural heritage. Historical reconstruction and current situation in the Republic of Bulgaria, Publishing house: University Press "St. Kliment. Ohridski", 2020, page: 152-162, ISBN: 978-954-07-4902-0. This research could be used as a strategy to improve non-formal education in the field of cultural heritage conservation and learning.

Ch. assistant Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova has an active project and expert activity in various fields of ethnological knowledge. This completes the profile of the candidate for the announced "Associate Professor" concurs. Before us is a scientist with great potential who is not afraid to offer solutions to pressing social and cultural issues, sharpening social sensitivity to topics such as the fate of small communities, the dimensions of tradition in modern times, communication and life in an intercultural environment, children's health, the importance of open science and the place of alternative medicine as a process in modern times.

#### Conclusion

The overall activity of Assistant Professor Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova presents her as a complex scientist with serious academic commitment, public position and pedagogical experience. This gives me reason to confidently vote in the POSITIVE assistant professor Dr. Violeta Kalinova Kotseva-Popova to take the academic position "associate professor" in professional direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Bulgarian ethnology. Folk medicine) for the needs of Faculty of History.

Sofia

October 14, 2022

Assoc. Dr. Mira Markova

