

REVIEW

by **Assoc. Prof. Anka Todorova Ignatova, PhD,**

Faculty of History of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo,

for the dissertation on the topic:

"Formation and preservation of the documentary resource of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", presented by **Ilonka Stoyanova Petrova** for the acquisition of an

educational and scientific qualification degree "doctor",

professional field: 2.2. History and Archeology,

doctoral program: "Documentary Studies, Archival Studies, Paleography"

at the Sofia University,

Scientific supervisor: **Prof. Anna Kochankova, Ph.D**

Ilonka Stoyanova Petrova graduated from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 1998 with a degree in History and a specialization in Archival Studies. The same year, she started working at the oldest higher education institution in the country as head of the newly established University Archive, and after its organizational strengthening and transformation in 2005, she was appointed to the position of "Head of the University Archive Department", which she holds to this day. Ilonka Petrova's pursuit of professional improvement led her to study part-time as a student in the Master's program "Documentary and Archival Management" at the University, which she graduated in 2011 with an excellent grade (6.00) and also an excellent grade for her defended thesis on the topic "Formation and preservation of the documentary resource of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to the creation of a University archive". In 2022, she was enrolled as a doctoral student in independent training at the Department of Archival Studies and Methodology of History Teaching at the Faculty of History of the Sofia University and during her studies she built on and expanded the topic of her diploma thesis. Her enduring scientific interest in the issues of the dissertation for over two decades has found expression in 13 publications (two of them in print). Here I would also like to note the "Almanac of Management Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2018), prepared by I. Petrova, which, according to the regulation of the procedure, does not appear in the list of the author's publications. As other colleagues have pointed out, the intellectual work invested in the production of reference publications is not considered scientific unfortunately. And the range of professional duties of the doctoral student also includes a number of activities that are directly related to the issues of the dissertation: preparing regulations and methodological tools

for work in the University Archives; accepting and storing Sofia University documents; assisting researchers and readers; preparing exhibitions, etc.

The documentation she submitted meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for application of this law.

Ilonka Petrova's dissertation is dedicated to one, as the author herself rightly points out, current and completely unexplored topic – "Formation and preservation of the documentary resource of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Its chronological scope is from 1888, when the University was established, to the present day (2022). Structurally, the work consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, appendix and bibliography. Its total volume is 330 pages.

The introduction justifies the choice of the topic, emphasizes its relevance and the absence of research interest in it by other authors so far (with one exception). The goals and the resulting tasks of the dissertation are clearly formulated. The methodology (although not entirely complete), the structure and content of the work and the sources used are presented. The gratitude expressed at the end of the introduction to all those who "provided support for the creation and development of the University Archive" makes a good impression.

The first chapter, "University Archives – Models and Practices," is an introduction to the topic. It introduces the reader to the history, mission, status, organization, and activities of several foreign university archives, with the doctoral student focusing on "the oldest, so-called "national universities" of the countries of Central and Western Europe and in particular the Balkans, as well as universities in the USA" (p. 14). Particular attention is paid to the status of University archives, especially those from the former socialist countries, which after the fall of the Berlin Wall were declared specialized historical archives (i.e. archives with a permanent composition of documents) through changes in archival legislation, which gives them the right to preserve the valuable documents of their institution in the future. This is important for the author in defending here and further in the presentation of her view of the autonomy of the Sofia University Archives. In this sense, the reasons for the more detailed presentation of the Czech archival law are acceptable. The specificity of University archives and their visibility in the public space is clearly highlighted. The role of university archivists in the conditions of new information technologies is presented, as well as their efforts to maximally satisfy the needs of researchers and students. A suitable place in this chapter is devoted to the Section for Archives of Universities and Research Institutions of the International Council on Archives, as well as to the annual conferences organized by the section. As an example of standardization of work in

University archives, the “Guidelines for Archives of Colleges and Universities”, developed and published in 1999 by the Section for Archives of Colleges and Universities of the Society of American Archivists, are cited. The text of the updated version of this document from 2021 is presented in quite detail, with the reason that it is “the only structured guide for organizing academic archives specifically” (p. 65). In view of the fact that the document can find practical application, this is somewhat justified.

The next three chapters of the dissertation are dedicated to the three main periods outlined by the doctoral student in the process of forming and preserving the documentary resources of Sofia University, whose chronological boundaries are quite logical.

The second chapter examines the organization of the administrative and archival processes at Sofia University from its inception in 1888 to 1951, when Decree No. 515 was issued to establish the State Archive Fund of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, marking the beginning of organized archival work in the country. As far as possible, based on archival documents stored in the State Archives – Sofia and in the University Archives of Sofia, the chancellery practice at the university is traced. The biographical approach applied in this part of the dissertation deserves attention – information about the individuals who worked in the University Chancellery is presented, and their contributions are highlighted. The conclusion is made that as a result of their responsible attitude to their official duties, the continuity in their work, and the internal regulatory framework regulating their activities, "the university chancellery is being built as a well-functioning mechanism similar to university chancelleries in advanced European countries" (p. 96). A separate paragraph examines the Regulation on the rights and obligations of officials in the administrative service of the Rectorate from 1941, which is the only preserved regulation of this type. It really deserves attention because it contains the most complete information about the documents created, the work with them and their archiving. Based on a comparison with the content of regulations for the registry and archival services of various other state institutions from the period under review, it is established that the University is no exception to the generally established model of working with documents in the pre-archival field in the country and some specifics arising from the subject of its activity are highlighted. Among the contributing moments in this chapter is the establishment of the actual (minimal) lack of documents, which turn out to be not as much in quantity as indicated in the historical references of f. 994K in the State Archives – Sofia.

The University's attempts to acquire documents of personal origin of lecturers, as well as of prominent figures related to Bulgarian history, are also presented. Information is given

about the personal funds of university lecturers from this period currently stored in various archives of the country.

It should be noted that the facts exposed in this part of the study represent additional touches to the history of archival work in Bulgaria until the middle of the 20th century.

The third chapter presents Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" as a source for filling the State Archival Fund established by Decree No. 515 of October 10, 1951, in the period up to the founding of the University Archive. It traces the impact of socio-political changes on the structure of Sofia University, which in turn has an impact on the composition of the documentary fund of the higher education institution, the organization of work with documents and their storage. Attention is drawn to the unlawful, according to the doctoral candidate, designation of the University as a fund-builder of the Sofia City and District State Archives (SGODA). The state of the documents, work with them and their storage at Sofia University are presented in a comparative plan with the general state of the pre-archival field in the country.

The prescriptions of the archival authority and the expert proposal of Assoc. Prof. Maria Mateeva for the formation of an institutional archive at the University, which remained without consequences for some time, are examined. The developed Regulations on the organization, tasks and activities of the institutional archive at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" are commented on, and a reasonable assumption is made about the main reason for its non-acceptance. Attention is also paid to other methodological tools – nomenclatures of cases and their application, the Instruction for the documentation activity of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and its divisions, which had not entered into force.

The stages of formation of the two archival funds of Sofia University in the SGODA have been traced, and certain violations of archival legislation have been found both by the funder and the state archives. The reasons for the actual lack of basic valuable documents of the University have been established, and also that a significant part of the documents described as missing in the historical references of the archival funds of the University in the State Archives – Sofia are actually available. Deserved attention has also been paid to rectors and lecturers who contributed to the organization of work with documents at the University in accordance with the methodological requirements of the governing archival authority of Bulgaria. Based on the extremely professional review and analysis of a wide range of sources, justified comments and conclusions have been made.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the University Archive of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" established in 1998. It is also the most voluminous – its 117 pages represent approximately 1/3 of the entire work. It presents the status, organization and

activities of this relatively new structural part of the University from its establishment to the present day, in accordance with the current regulatory framework in the country in the field of archival work.

Attention is paid to the unsuccessful attempt to gain autonomy for the University Archives, which would provide it with greater freedom of action. The archive is discussed, on the one hand, as an institutional archive, and on the other, as a historical archive (in two separate paragraphs). The specifics of organizing the records management system at the University are reflected, as well as the problems, and proposals for overcoming them. The issue of electronic documents is also touched upon, but without taking into account the Regulation on the procedure for organizing, processing, expertise, storage and use of documents in the institutional archives of state and municipal institutions, which entered into force on April 2, 2024. The detailed presentation of the internal normative and methodological basis of the University Archive, as well as its activities, is acceptable, since they can indeed serve as a model for other university archives in the country (functioning primarily as institutional) to improve the organization of work with the documentary resources of the respective higher education institution, as well as for those universities that are about to create their own archives.

The author's experience is shared in terms of completing the University Archive with historically valuable documents, their organization by complexes. The sources for completing the so-called "historical collection" are presented and the information potential of the different types of documents that make it up is revealed. A special place is devoted to the collection of personal funds of university lecturers. The goals and organization of the work on searching for funders are presented. The advantages when the documents are provided to the archive by the funders themselves, and not by their heirs are highlighted. I. Petrova's statement about the advantages of carrying out the scientific and technical processing of personal funds in the University Archive, and not in archives with a general profile – better and more timely processing of documents, and therefore faster introduction into scientific circulation – is convincingly substantiated. Good practices from the cooperation in this activity of the archive with lecturers from different scientific fields are shared. The story of the collection of personal funds is told in the first person, with an emphasis on the method of acquiring some of them and the variety of types of documents that make them up. In the cases of personal funds scattered between archives, the relevant references to other archives are given.

Also worthy of attention is the work invested by I. Petrova to trace the changes that occur during the different historical periods in terms of the type and carriers of documents in the personal funds of lecturers from Sofia University. This attempt is not an end in itself, but is

subordinate to her idea of making a forecast for the documentary composition of personal funds in the not-so-distant future, which change inevitably raises the question of the methods of their storage.

The diverse and active popularization activity of the University Archives, carried out under the leadership and with the participation of the doctoral student, is discussed in a separate paragraph, with emphasis on the long-term program "Memory for the University" launched in 2022. The activities carried out under the project in the first year are presented in detail, but not in the following ones. And they are not few, and the results are visible on the website of the University Archives.

I find the presented Concept for the Development of the University Archive, as well as the motivations for it, generally acceptable. It embodies I. Petrova's dream vision for the University Archive, which "would not only continue to function, but also be comparable to university archives around the world" (p. 282), and as Petrova notes, serve as a model for the work of archives in other Bulgarian universities.

The conclusion of the dissertation successfully summarizes the conclusions drawn based on the study of the main problems on the topic.

The appendix consists of 6 documents that supplement aspects of the content of the study. The bibliographical citation of the sources in the presentation, as well as at the end of the dissertation, does not fully comply with the generally accepted requirements. This also applies to the way in which the claim data of the documents are written. Some critical remarks can also be made regarding the spelling, but overall the text is stylistically and logically sound. It is recommended to remove the repetition of information allowed in some places in the text and to provide a list of abbreviations.

The general impression of Ilonka Petrova's dissertation work is that a great deal of work has been done to clarify the facts on the topic, meaningful observations have been made, and good suggestions for the future have been given. There is a contributing scientific study that is also of a practical and applied nature.

The author's abstract correctly summarizes the content of the dissertation and the contributions. There are 13 scientific publications by Ilonka Petrova, 5 of which are from the time of her doctoral studies.

The above gives me reason to give a positive assessment of the dissertation and to propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Ilonka Stoyanova Petrova the educational and scientific degree of "doctor" in the professional field: 2.2.

March 9, 2025

Assoc. Prof. Anka Ignatova