

REVIEW

by Jordan Angelov Baev, Professor of Contemporary International History

member of the scientific jury according to Order No. RD-38-48/27.01.2025 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

of the scientific publications presented in the competition for the full-time academic position of professor for the needs of the Department of " History of Bulgaria" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2 "History and Archaeology (Contemporary Bulgarian History – Bulgaria and the Middle East in the postwar years)"

announced in the State Gazette, issue 5 of January 17, 2025

of the candidate Romyana Dimitrova Marinova-Christidi - Associate Professor of the Department of " History of Bulgaria" at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

In the announced competition for a professorship in the Department of Bulgarian History at the Sofia University, only one candidate participated – Associate Professor Romyana Dimitrova Marinova-Christidi. For the needs of the competition, the candidate submitted one monograph and twenty two scientific studies and articles for review, twelve of which were in foreign languages.

Romyana Marinova-Christidi is a graduate of the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2004, she defended her doctoral dissertation on the topic "Education and Educational Policy in Bulgaria 1948-1959", after which she taught as a part-time assistant professor at the Faculty of History of Sofia University. Since 2009, she has been a full-time assistant professor, and since 2014, an associate professor in the Department of History of Bulgaria. The wide range of topics in the lecture courses taught is impressive - modern Bulgarian history after World War II, ideology and education, cultural diplomacy, Bulgarian-Greek relations.

Since 2018, Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi has been the head of the new bachelor's degree program "Hebraic Studies" at Sofia University, and since 2024, she has been the creator and head of the master's program "Israel: History and Geopolitics" at the Faculty of History of Sofia University. These are the only interdisciplinary study programs on such a complex and topical issue currently offered in Bulgarian academic institutions. Historically, for the first time in Bulgaria, in 1952, a scientific section "Jewish Studies" was established at the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (since 1954, named "Hebraic Studies") as the successor to the Jewish Scientific Institute, headed by Assoc.

Prof. Eli Eshkenazi and Assoc. Prof. Asher Hananel. In the early years of the 21st century, a master's program "Hebraic Studies" existed for a short time at the New Bulgarian University, headed by Assoc. Prof. Mira Meyer, but subsequently the lecture courses were partially included in a new master's program on the "Mediterranean World".

The teaching activity of Romyana Marinova-Christidi in the indicated thematic areas is impressive and fully corresponds to the requirements for holding the prestigious academic position of "full professor". With her participation in six bachelor's (one of them in a foreign language under "Erasmus") and three master's programs with a total of 16 lecture courses, she exceeds many times the requirements for classroom employment of the habilitated position she holds. Her academic expertise has deserved international recognition with invitations for honorary lectures at a number of foreign university centers in Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Thessaloniki, Milan, Rome, Urbino, Chicago, Los Angeles. Since 2011, Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi has been a national advisor on the Bologna Process in higher education. She is a member of the European Association for Jewish Studies and the Bulgarian delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (MABH).

The list of author's publications in the last quarter century includes 53 works, including three independent monographs. 15 of the publications, including two collective monographs, are in foreign languages. Submitted for review in this competition are one author's monograph "Bulgaria and Israel 1948-1990" and another 22 scientific studies and articles. More than half of them (No. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22) are on the issues of the monographic study, and some of them are included in the content of the monograph, therefore they will be reviewed together.

The latest monographic work by Romyana Marinova-Christidi consists of two parts, each of which is dedicated to topics that have not been the subject of independent studies in Bulgarian historiography. For the first time, a Bulgarian historian attempts to present a summarized history of the creation of the state of Israel and its development during the Cold War years. In this first part of the book, the chronological approach is used with a sequential examination in 21 paragraphs of the individual stages in modern Israeli history. At the end, a concise chronology of the main events from the announcement of the "Balfour Declaration" in October 1917 for the construction of a "national home for the Jewish people in Palestine" to the short-lived armistice agreement between the Netanyahu government and Hamas in January 2025 is presented (pp. 281-293). As a basis for her narrative, the author uses the "classic" work of the authoritative Oxford historian Martin Gilbert (real surname Goldberg), also published in Bulgarian (another interesting history of Israel by the French-Israeli author André Shuraki, former advisor to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and deputy mayor of Jerusalem, has also been translated into Bulgarian). The book makes extensive use of a publication by another Israeli author

who graduated in political science at Columbia University, but also a representative of the "official" Zionist historiography - Daniel Gordis. With slightly more critical views is the book by Aaron Bergman, a lecturer at the Faculty of War Studies at King's College London. Very appropriately, Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi's work uses the rich database on the historical development of Israel from the website of the independent "think tank" Israel Democratic Institute (IDI), established in 1991 in Jerusalem as a joint US-Israeli initiative.

The pioneering work for Bulgaria on the history of the state of Israel not only reveals in a suitable form for the general audience little-known pages of domestic politics and key events and processes in the long-standing Middle East conflict, but is also of great importance for the teaching of the aforementioned bachelor's and master's programs at the Faculty of History of Sofia University. The author evaluates in her introduction the first part of the book only as a "necessary introduction" to its second part. I believe that this publication on the history of Israel will inevitably be followed by her subsequent research, since the creation and development of the Israeli state represent a specific and unique phenomenon in modern world history. Therefore, I will allow myself to highlight several key issues that our colleague Marinova-Christidi could develop in the coming years as a continuation of the researched issues.

First of all, it is worth making a critical historiographical review of the main schools of modern Israeli historical scholarship, which are well known outside Israel through numerous publications in the Anglo-Saxon world. Within the "official" Zionist literature, there are clearly expressed conceptual differences, caused, among other things, by the different starting positions of the two leading political tendencies (Mapai/Labor Party and Herut/Likud). Even when comparing, for instance, the memoirs of David Ben-Gurion and Shimon Peres with those of Menachem Begin, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu, these differences are clearly highlighted. In the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, new generations of historians with prominent critical thought appeared, the so-called "New historians" and "post-Zionists" (Morris, Pappé, Segev, Cohen, Kimmerling, Migdal, etc.) are worth mentioning, as are some Israeli historians of Arab origin. To some extent, their methodological approaches are influenced by the example of Anglo-Saxon "post-revisionism".

A key "existential" moment in the creation of the State of Israel was the influence of two contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, there was the clash between Etatism and confessional views (including the controversial practice of defining "Jew" – by ethnic origin or Judaism), which led to compromise solutions and was one of the reasons why Prime Minister Ben-Gurion postponed, and subsequently abandoned, the task of adopting a national Constitution, publicly announced in the

Declaration of Independence. In this regard, it is essential to study in more depth and compare the contradictory and ambiguous legislation of the following years (the Law of Return of 1950, the Citizenship Law of 1952, the Registration Law of 1965, etc.). The other specific phenomenon is the construction of the Israeli nation from three geo-social groups with different historical, cultural, confessional and linguistic traditions – Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahim. Similarly, the Palestinian Arabs on the territory of the State of Israel (not counting the significant refugee groups remaining in neighboring Arab countries) are at least four groups – Israeli citizens of Muslim faith, Israeli citizens of Christian faith or agnostics/atheists, Druze communities in Northern Israel with a particular Islamic faith (a medieval sect from the 11th century), residents of the nominally “autonomous areas” in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, who until June 1967 were Jordanian and Egyptian citizens, respectively. It obviously makes sense to explain other concepts and factors specific to Israel – the differences between "moshav" and "kibbutz", the privileges of religious schools, the peculiarities of banking and financial institutions, the characteristic relationships with the Jewish diaspora abroad and, above all, “the Israeli lobby” in the United States.

Some representatives of Bulgarian military history science, such as former professors at the Rakovski National Defense College Yordan Milanov and Ignat Krivorov, when examining in their publications the strategic and operational aspects and military art in the Arab-Israeli wars, mention the special military-doctrinal concepts of national security and military policy of Israel. In his monograph on the military conflicts after World War II three decades ago (1995), the author of this review also listed some of the specific features that led to the formulation of the military doctrine of the Israeli state and military leadership for a "preemptive strike" - due to the small area, the country does not have strategic depth for retreat or maneuver; the Israeli army will continue to be outnumbered by the Arab armies in the future; after the start of an armed conflict, the time to achieve the set goals will be limited by the intervention of the great powers, which are interested in ensuring their influence in this neuralgic region.

Using only Israeli sources for the nature, causes, and specific actions during the Arab-Israeli wars inevitably leads to limited methodological approaches and the reproduction of some propaganda theses, as in the description of the Six-Day War of June 1967 (pp. 69-76). The serious incident of April 7, 1967, when Israeli aircraft bombed the Syrian capital Damascus, as well as the thesis that the Soviet Union “incited” its Arab allies to military action against Israel, reflect rather propaganda claims of the government in Tel Aviv. There is no mention at all of the warning messages of Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin to Levi Eshkol and Lyndon Johnson. Newly discovered Israeli documents in 2017 show that during a secret meeting of the parliamentary committee on foreign policy and defense on May 26, in response to questions from MPs Shimon Peres and Menachem Begin, the Chief of the General Staff

of the Israeli army, Gen. Yitzhak Rabin clearly stated that an operational plan for a “preemptive strike” had been activated, and Prime Minister Eshkol added that the government would make a final decision on an attack within two days, after the expected return of Foreign Minister Abba Eban from Washington. The next day, a representative of American intelligence in Israel informed his government of the Israeli decision to proceed with a “preemptive strike”. However, Secretary of State Dean Rusk informed Moscow that there was no information about such preparations. In reality, as in the next war in October 1973, the two superpowers failed to use their capabilities to “contain” their “allies” in the Middle East.

The main part of the monographic work and other publications by Rumyana Marinova-Christidi are dedicated to two interrelated topics – the Jewish community in Bulgaria and the relations between Bulgaria and Israel. The author’s work in this thematic area is distinguished by a very serious understanding of a number of discussion problems and their balanced academic presentation. It is this in-depth scientific approach that distinguishes Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi from some emotional, opposing, biased and polemical publications by other Bulgarian authors. This is probably the reason why her publications, for example on the discussion topic of “rescue” or “survival” of Bulgarian Jews during the Holocaust in World War II, are positively evaluated and proposed by the Jewish Organization “Shalom” and in some international forums (including the Vatican) as an authoritative Bulgarian presentation of this unique event for Europe. And if for the “great Aliyah” with the resettlement of Bulgarian Jews to Israel in 1948-1951 the first place belongs to Assoc. Prof. Boyka Vasileva and the Israeli historian with Bulgarian roots Dr. Shlomo Shealtiel, the topic of Bulgarian-Israeli relations in the entire Cold War era was first developed by Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi. She is the first Bulgarian historian (probably after the late Assoc. Prof. Sonya Levi) who had the opportunity to study valuable documentary evidence in the Central Zionist Archive in Jerusalem and the Yad Vashem memorial complex. The study of materials in the digital archive of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington is also very useful. However, some of the data from the Central Zionist Archive should also be compared with Bulgarian archival sources. Such is the example of the visit of Patriarch Kirill to Israel in April 1962. – the information from the Zionist archive is too fragmentary, while the reports on the patriarch's visit from the Bulgarian legation in Tel Aviv and the comments in the local Bulgarian-language newspaper "Far-Tribuna" are much more comprehensive.

The partial use and interpretation of individual documentary facts also lead to some inaccuracies. For example, in addition to Jacques Natan, the Bulgarian Zionist leader Vitaly Chaimov also did not receive an American visa in November 1944 and was unable to attend the session of the World Jewish Congress in New York (p. 152). It is for this reason that Chaimov met David Ben-Gurion in Istanbul and accompanied him on his visit to Bulgaria in the first week of December 1944. Maxim Benvenisti's

interpretation, reported in the personal interview with Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi in January 2025, about the "removal" after the Six-Day War of Bulgarian Jews who held high party and state positions (p. 235), is not justified and does not correspond to the real facts. Ruben Avramov and David Elazar were not "demoted" at all, but continued to be members of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the following years, and were joined as members of the Central Committee by David Davidov and Nisim (Niko) Yahiel. At the Tenth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in April 1971, twelve Bulgarian Jews were proposed as delegates, and Avram Melamed was rather "elevated" to the position of editor-in-chief of the theoretical journal "Novo Vreme". As for Col. Avram Molhov, he himself explains in his memoirs from 2001 the reason for his temporary demotion at the suggestion of Angel Tsanev because of his critical article, but soon after he became deputy editor-in-chief of "Narodna armiya". Incidentally, his older brother Yako Molhov held the highest army positions – head of Directorate and deputy chief of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Army with the rank of Lt.-General.

The innovative and pioneering scientific activity of Rumyana Marinova-Christidi in the field of Bulgarian-Israeli relations deserves admiration and encouragement. Given the need for further research on this topical and poorly researched issues, I will allow myself to briefly suggest several problematic topics for which there is already an accessible and previously unused documentary basis in the Bulgarian archives. First of all, the information and administrative activity of the Bulgarian representations in Alexandria, Cairo and Jaffa between the two world wars deserves attention, especially the merits of the Bulgarian Consul General in Palestine (1932-1940) Mussa Shelush. The famous Arabist Ambassador Kiryak Tsonev mistakenly claims that the diplomatic documents for the consulate in Palestine have not been preserved; however, they exist but are simply stored in various inventories of the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (f. 176K). In Bulgarian historiography, the issue of the secret operation of the clandestine organization "Mossad le Aliya Bet" composed of former fighters of the Palmach reconnaissance and sabotage group (predecessor of Mossad, Shin Bet and Aman) to organize the "illegal emigration" from Eastern Europe in 1945-1947 has not been discussed so far. Even Dr. Shealtiel spares a number of details in his extensive monograph (2008), Detailed authentic information about this operation can be found today, for example, in the public archive of the Palmach Museum in Tel Aviv. Since Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi has a separate interesting publication of her own about the youth sports organization "Maccabi", it is not superfluous to recall that during the organized "youth aliya" of 1946-1948, mainly young people from "Maccabi" and "Hashomer Hatzair" were selected. So far, the issue of the participation of Bulgarian Jews in the war of independence has not been specifically addressed, and according to electronic data on the website for the "fallen heroes of Israel", there is

biographical information about nearly a hundred young people killed in the period February-December 1948, who arrived from Bulgaria. It is also high time to refute the deliberately thrown-up thesis about the "ransom" demanded by Bulgarian Jews in order to emigrate to Israel. Bulgarian archival documents show that these are ordinary fees for issuing exit visas and passports and for transport fees (by rail and sea), which were negotiated with the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem and financially provided by the "Joint" Assistance Committee in New York (offices in Turkey and Switzerland).

At first glance, in the two decades without official diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Israel (1967-1989), one should not expect the development of bilateral contacts. From the large number of archival documents discovered a few years ago (ИЦА, fund 1Б, inventory 81Д with over 50 archival units on Israel), problematic topics that have not been explored in Bulgarian historical science so far stand out - about unofficial surveys by the Israeli side regarding the possibilities of restoring diplomatic relations as early as the mid-1970s, maintaining trade and economic ties, and developing public and cultural contacts through the so-called "public diplomacy". There are still no comprehensive studies in Bulgaria about the life of "Bulgarian Jews" in Israel, although there are a large number of personal interviews (in the publications of Daniela Koleva, Jacky Komforti, etc.), as well as testimonies in periodical media in Israel in Bulgarian (Fenia Dekalo's doctoral thesis) and other secondary sources.

Along with diplomatic archival collections, a significant source of historical information is the confidential reports and information from the Bulgarian secret services. A significant contribution to the monograph and other publications of Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi is that for the first time she introduces into scientific use valuable materials from the archival collections of Bulgarian counterintelligence services, but significantly more primary data can be found in the records of foreign and military intelligence agencies, including from the residencies in Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Beirut, Amman, Aden, Tripoli, Algeria. A significant amount of previously unused information is contained in the KGB weekly reports and bulletins within the bilateral "intelligence information exchange" between Moscow and Sofia. In the documents published over the past two decades by Prof. Christopher Andrew from the so-called "Mitrokhin Archive" (stored in University of Cambridge) yielded additional KGB data on the Bulgarian intelligence activity in Israel. Newly revealed CIA analytical reports provide additional information on the activities of Israeli secret services as well. This "sensitive" documentation once again confirms that diplomacy and intelligence are the two most important and interconnected state institutions in the field of foreign policy and international relations.

From a conceptual point of view, the key moment of a cardinal difference in the starting positions and essential interpretations between Bulgarian and Israeli historiography has not yet been paid attention to in our country. This is clearly evident from David Ben-Gurion's visit to Bulgaria in early December

1944 and his conversations with members of the Bulgarian government. While Bulgarian historical science has an extremely positive assessment of the common fate and close socio-cultural ties between Bulgarians and Jews over the centuries and especially after the creation of the third Bulgarian state, in Zionist historiography this process of interaction and common development is often assessed as a “threat” for presumable “assimilation” of the “original and unique Jewish identity”. All historical and contemporary evidence clearly shows the fallacy and unfoundedness of such concerns. Even in the conditions of "social engineering" and the construction of a "united socialist society" in post-war Bulgaria, through the efforts of the Jewish Scientific Institute (1947-1951) and the scientific section "Hebraic Studies" at the Institute of Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (1952-1966), and later through the activities and publications of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria, a significant contribution was made to the acquisition, preservation and study of the rich Jewish cultural and historical heritage in the Bulgarian lands.

In one of her latest scientific publications (No. 2), Rumyana Marinova-Christidi examines another important problem in contemporary European historiography – the presence of anti-Semitism in the Post-Cold War era. Her publication is in line with several other international studies on anti-Semitism in Europe that have appeared in the last decade. This is another problematic topic that has been mentioned very briefly in the Bulgarian scientific literature (unlike the issue of the anti-Jewish legislation of 1940-1943) and requires a special generalized study of causes, motives, socio-cultural groups and forms of manifestation. From the sporadic violent acts in Vratsa, Lom, Kyustendil and other cities and the ideological manifestos of Krum Mitakov and other publicists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, through the pseudo-historical pamphlets of Mikhail Varshavsky (Prof. Vladikin) and the imitative pogroms of pro-Nazi Legionnaires and Ratniks in 1938-1940, to the "explosion" of pro-Nazi "ultra-patriotic" pamphlets in the 1990s. It is no coincidence that in 2010/2011, at the signal of the OEB "Shalom" and the Helsinki Committee, a criminal trial was initiated against one of the active propagandists of anti-Semitic proclamations, Emil Antonov, and there was also a response during a plenary discussion in the National Assembly (on the occasion of a remark by MP Dyanko Markov). There should be no “taboo” topics in academic and expert literature, especially when it comes to humanitarian and moral-ethical issues of importance to society. Of course, it is good to apply the general definition of “anti-Semitism” of the IHRA (2016) in a more precise form, as was done in the Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism of 2021.

The attached institutional reference includes a significant number of noted citations and reviews of the author's works, of which 13 in Scopus, 10 in Web of Science, 22 in CEEOL. This clearly shows that Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi is a well-known author not only among the Bulgarian academic

circles, but also in the international historical community. Participation in 15 national and international scientific projects is also indicated, in six of which she is a team leader. Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi is a scientific supervisor of four PhD students in modern Bulgarian history. An attached reference certifies that the scientific production of Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Christidi significantly exceeds the minimum scientific requirements for holding the position of "professor" in professional field 2.2. (History and archaeology).

CONCLUSION

Considering the candidate's scientific achievements, significant teaching experience and active participation in a number of scientific projects, I would like to confirm that her achievements fully meet the legal and regulatory requirements and criteria, including those specified in Art. 115 and Art. 119 of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University, for occupying the academic position of "professor". I strongly support the candidacy of Associate Professor Dr. Romyana Dimitrova Marinova - Christidi and I call on the esteemed members of the scientific jury to vote positively for her election as "professor" in professional field 2.2. "History and Archaeology".

Member of the scientific jury:

Prof. Dr. Jordan Baev

Sofia, April 8, 2025