

REPORT

by

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Professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology

on the academic publications and activities of Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova Todorova, PhD,
participant in the competition for the academic position “Professor”
in the professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology, History of Bulgaria (Social history 15th
– 18th c.), announced in State Gazette No 111/31.12.2021
for the needs of the section “The Bulgarians, the Ottoman Empire and Europe” of the Institute
for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

The only participant in the competition Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova Todorova, PhD meets (and even considerably exceeds in two of the five indicators) the national minimum requirements for the research activities in the field of High education 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology, necessary for holding the academic position “Professor”, specified in the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

For the competition, the applicant presents a habilitation thesis – a monograph, 30 articles (two of which were published in refereed and indexed academic journals, as well as evidence of 11 reviews and 400 quotations of her scholarly publications by other authors. Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova is also the author of a notable number of other publications (reviews and review articles, popular science works, bibliographies etc), she has compiled and edited 5 collective volumes and 2 books and is member of the editorial boards of the prestigious academic journals *Bulgarian Historical Review* and *История (History)*. Between 2007 and 2019 she has taken part in 10 academic conferences of which 4 – international.

The habilitation thesis *Domestic Slavery and Slave-Holding in Ottoman Rumelia* (Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing House), 2021, 444 p. ISBN: 978-619-176-195-1, presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Olga Todorova for her participation in the competition for the academic position “Professor” focuses on an important and very interesting, but so far very poorly represented in Bulgarian historiography topic, successfully filling thus a significant gap from a historiographical and social point of view. The monograph, which is the first comprehensive study of the most widely practiced form of slavery in the region under study (as well as throughout the Islamic world in pre-modern times), is based on a wide range of sources, many

of which are for first time introduced into scientific circulation. Among them, the archival documents from the registers of the *kadı* courts of the cities of Sofia, Russe and Vidin for the period of the 16th – 18th c. hold the largest share.

Applying various research methods, the author sheds light consecutively on the most important aspects of the problems under study: from clarifying the institution of Muslim domestic slavery, through the sources and methods of recruiting slaves and their ethnic composition during the different periods of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, to tracing the individual ‘life cycle’ of the slaves, the various mechanisms of integration of the domestic slaves, male and female, in Ottoman society, as well as the opposite cases – of non-integrated slaves, the reasons for this and the manifestations of their resistance. Throughout the text, the correlation between norm and real practice does not escape the author’s attention. The specific case of the Black domestic slaves is also considered. The impressively varied social and religious profile of the slaveholders, their motivations and “economic strategies” are also outlined. Approaching the researched issues from the perspective of “History from below”, Olga Todorova provides us with an accurate analysis, but also with a fascinating historiographical narrative, in which the characters acquire flesh, bringing to life the personal stories of male and female slaves and slaveholders. The monograph succeeds in setting and proposing valuable interpretations to significant macro-historical problems and in simultaneously “populating history with people” (to quote Prof. Vera Mutafchieva). Furthermore, the reconstruction of the picture of domestic slavery and slaveholding in Ottoman Rumelia is placed in a broad spatio-temporal and problematic context – of slavery and slaveholding in the European late-medieval and early-modern world, of the decline of slavery in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of 18th – 19th centuries, as well as of the emerging national ideology and discourse on the “Turkish slavery” among the Bulgarians during this period. The in-depth study of domestic slavery and slaveholding in the central part of the Ottoman Balkans allows the author, in addition to formulating innovative research theses and convincingly defending them, to provide a solid scientific basis for overcoming some popular, even nowadays, but untenable from a scientific point of view public stereotypes. Highly appreciating the overall contribution of the monograph, I only regret that it is not provided with a detailed summary in English or another foreign language.

The other studies and articles with which Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova participates in the competition for the academic position “Professor” cover an impressively wide range of important research topics and problems in the field of social history of the Ottoman Balkans in the 15th – 18th centuries (and beyond) and make significant contributions to historiography.

Among the contributions of these publications should be noted the exploration, from new perspectives, with new approaches and through the introduction into scientific circulation of new sources, of still not sufficiently studied, especially in their specific forms of functioning in the region, Muslim institutions such as *Hajj* and *Waqf*, of domestic slavery, of various aspects and dimensions of the contact-conflict between Muslims and Christians in the Balkans during the Ottoman period, of the “image of the other” (Muslims, Jews and Black people) in the collective Bulgarian consciousness during the Ottoman era, and of the complex interrelations between history and folklore in this context. Without neglecting the contributions of Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova in the study of various aspects of everyday life, of the place of the Orthodox Church in the life of the Bulgarians in the 15th – 18th centuries, as well as of various historiographical problems, it should be specifically noted that she is the first thorough researcher in the field of the history of women in central Rumelia during the early Ottoman period, as well as of the status of children in the 15th – 18th centuries. The research interests of Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova include the exploration of different aspects of the life and activities of some interesting, “extraordinary”, personalities from the 19th century, which allows her to also contribute to the field of micro-history.

Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova’s teaching experience includes lecturing in several BA and MA courses at the Faculty of History, the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Classical and New Philology at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She has also supervised the PhD thesis of Krastio Iordanov (former PhD student at the Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and now senior assistant in the same institution) entitled “The *voynuk* institution in the Bulgarian lands 15th – 16th c.: a historical and demographic study” which was successfully defended in 2013.

The applicant Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova has participated in ten successfully accomplished research projects. With her participation in these projects, she has greatly contributed to the development of research in the fields of the ethno-religious relations in Bulgaria and the Balkans, the history of women, children, marriage and family in the early centuries of Ottoman rule, everyday life, the social structures and relationships in Ottoman Rumelia in the 15th – 18th centuries, the study of Balkan identities during the Modern times and a number of other important research topics.

Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova has been a member of the Scientific Council of the Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences since 2008, and in the period 2008-2012 she was its Deputy Chairman. Since 2012 she has been the head of the

section "The Bulgarians, the Ottoman Empire and Europe" of the Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

In conclusion, based on all the above, I state my positive assessment of the academic activities of the participant in the competition Assoc. Prof. Olga Todorova Todorova and fully support her election to the academic position "Professor", for which I will vote at the final session of the academic jury.

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Assoc. Prof. Svetla Ianeva, PhD