

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
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## OPINION

by Prof. D.Sc. Penka Ivanova Peykovska, Institute for Historical Studies – BAS,

on the materials presented for participation in the competition for the academic post of “Associate Professor” in the field of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. History and Archaeology, Scientific Speciality: “Documentary Studies, Archival Studies, Palaeography, including Historiography and Source Studies” (“Visual Historical Sources”), announced by the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for the needs of Section “Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Informatics”, as promulgated in the State Gazette, 2023, No. 97 (21.11.) by the Institute for Historical Studies at the BAS

The only candidate who has applied and has been admitted to participate in the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” in this competition is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Chavdar Venelinov Vetov. He studied at the Faculty of History at Sofia University of “St. Kliment Ohridski”, where he graduated in history – Bachelor’s degree in 2003 and Master’s degree in 2005. I have known Dr. Chavdar Vetov for ten years, in fact since the time when he joined the section of “Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Informatics” as a regular PhD student. Evaluating his overall research and teaching activities, first of all I would like to emphasize his diligence and thoroughness in research, as well as his dedication to his profession – necessary qualities for good achievements in the study of the historical past.

### **1. General description of the submitted materials:**

All the necessary documents have been provided; there have not been any administrative gaps. The candidate Ch. Asst. Prof. Dr. Chavdar Vetov has submitted a total of 24 scientific works, of which 1 independent monograph here presented as habilitation thesis, 4 studies and 20 articles, of which 3 published in journals with impact factor, and 3 co-authored. Ch. Asst. Prof. Dr. Chavdar Vetov has participated in two projects, one of which is international; he presents 17 citations.

The quantity of the abovementioned scientific production included in the list of publications for participation in the competition, and taking into account that Dr. Vetov works at the Institute on a half-time basis, it fully meets the requirements for the academic post of Associate Professor; but more important here is to emphasize the quality of the presented scientific production – essentially research with visible scientific contribution.

## **2. Coverage of the normative requirements for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor”:**

### **2.1. Acquired educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” (PhD).**

Having completed his PhD studies as a full-time PhD student at the Institute for Historical Studies in 2015 Chavdar Vetov acquired the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor of History” after a successful defense of his doctoral thesis on the topic of “Photodocuments (19<sup>th</sup> - mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) as historical sources and their preservation at the archives”, which is different from the topic of the habilitation thesis presented here for review. On this basis, it can be confirmed that the candidate has fulfilled this condition for holding the academic position of “associate professor”.

**2.2. Holding the academic position of “Assistant Professor”, “Chief Assistant Professor” for at least two academic years.** In terms of duration (9 years) and volume of scientific activity, the candidate fully meets the requirements of Act for the Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria.

### **3. Common feature of the candidate’s research activity.**

**3.1. Assessment of the habilitation thesis.** For participation in the competition Dr. Ch. Vetov has submitted a monograph entitled “The Bulgarian National Liberation Movement through the Eyes of Photography” (IHS–BAS, Sofia: 2023, 302 pp.). As the title suggests, the subject of study is is photographic images as historical sources for the Bulgarian national liberation movement. The relevance of the studied topic is predetermined by the fact that currently the visual turn in historical science is present in foreign historiography and partly in ours. The important role of visual sources in contemporary historical research and the presentation of their results is beyond doubt. The source value of photographic images, documentary film footage, realistic paintings or drawings is obvious, and the information potential of visual sources is highly appreciated. This recognition is taking place alongside the ”cult” of the written source that still exists in ”classical” historical science.

As the author himself has noted in his introduction, he aimed at searching in the Bulgarian archives the available archival materials on the issues mentioned in the title and at analysing them. Apart from the archival materials, he is also familiar with the books and albums containing published photographs on the subject. It is evident from the target thus formulated that the topic of the habilitation thesis has been approached mainly by applying the methods of practical source study.

The structure of the thesis consists of a preface, five chapters, a conclusion and references. The five chapters are respectively devoted: 1) the first one – to the photography in historical context or to the emergence of photography in the Bulgarian lands, to foreign photographers who reflected events and personalities of Bulgarian history, and to the first Bulgarian photographers; the remaining four chapters correspond rather to a thematic-chronological systematisation of the studied photographic documents, namely: 2) the second one – to photographs of revolutionaries in Chetnik uniforms; 3) the third chapter – to photographs of revolutionaries and their families and relatives in civilian clothes; 4) chapter four presents photographs reflecting the Bulgarian militia; and 5) the fifth chapter dwls with photographs reflecting the memory of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement.

The many Bulgarian archives in which Dr. Vetov has worked, namely the Central State Archives and the regional archives in Plovdiv, Ruse, Burgas, Gabrovo, Vratsa and Haskovo, the Bulgarian Historical Archives at the National Library of “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”, as well as in large institutional archives such as the scientific archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and its Institute for Historical Studies. It would be good to include such information about the places where the sources were searched with a more detailed description in the preface (rather than just knowing it from the bibliographical reference at the end of the monograph), as it reflects the very laborious scientific discovery work that was carried out. It would also be good to provide some information (yet in the preface) about the archival fonds, collections, etc. containing these photographs. What do I mean? – Some of the collections were formed by removing the photographs from other fonds – in this case it is interesting to know how this was done in practice and whether such actions influence the subsequent “handling” of the retrospective information as well as the identification of the historical persons and events photographed.

It would also have been good to make a more comprehensive disclosure of certain theoretical aspects of photographic images as specific visual historical sources, outlining their characteristics (including technical, i.e. black and white, colour, etc. photography, advantages of one or the other) – in the context of source studies as a research approach, in comparison with written sources and in parallel with other visual sources, highlighting the specifics in the analysis of their retrospective information, in their interpretation, and of course, to present (albeit briefly) the historiography of the source studies of photographic images – abroad and within our country. All of this would have been better done in a separate chapter, but could have been done more briefly in the preface.

The book includes over 500 images that form an organic part of the text and all of them come from various archives (single issues of them have been published in books, albums, and papers). It would have been useful to specify whether they represent the entire source base of the study or are only a representative sample of it and, if the latter, then what the selection criteria were.

Following the usual structure of a monograph, each chapter is expected to end with a conclusion containing the essential results of the analysis in the respective chapter. It is noteworthy, however, that in Dr. Vetov's conclusions are insufficiently thorough (p. 100, end of ch. 2; p. 282, end of ch. 5) or missing altogether (p. 156, end of ch. 3). The monograph concludes with summarizing final reflections on the issues, formulating conclusions containing the essence and meaning of the specific scientific quest and giving the concrete answer to the set goal. They are well reasoned and somewhat overcome the aforementioned shortcoming.

In his scientific text Dr. Ch. Vetov demonstrates an expert knowledge of the specialized literature on the subject.

I believe that the main contribution of the monograph of Dr. Chavdar V. Vetov consists in the retrieval and inclusion in scientific circulation of a large number of photographic images containing valuable retrospective information on the history of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement and its memory.

The monograph submitted for review is developed in accordance with the provisions of the Act for the of Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria, and its subject matter corresponds to the professional field of the competition.

**3.2. Assessment of the rest of the candidate's research work.** As can be seen from the attached list of publications, the candidate's overall activity is dominated by research work. Ch. Asst. Prof. Dr. Vetov's scientific interests are in the sphere of the competition's problems: source studies and in particular visual historical sources. And in particular the photographic documents, which are the subject of study in his doctoral dissertation and the interest in them continues as the focus narrows to the photographs reflecting the Bulgarian revolutionary movement – in the monograph and most of the articles and studies, as well as in the photographic portraits of Prince/Tsar Ferdinand and Tsar Boris III – in several articles.

In my opinion Dr. Vetov's publications are original and contributory mainly because they are based entirely on archival sources which he has found and that are new to historical science.

The general view on the presented scientific production, except the habilitation work, shows that as whole they cover the requirements of the Regulations for the implementation of the Academic Staff Development Act for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor” in the field referred to in the competition. There are scientific contributions and sufficient convincing evidence to claim that they are actually contained in the submitted scientific publications and are personal work of the author, i.e. I have not noticed the presence of plagiarism.

I wish Dr. Chavdar Vetov to continue the successful direction of his scientific development in his further work.

**4. Conclusion.** The presented materials of the only candidate in the competition clearly show that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Chavdar Venelinov Vetov fully meets the necessary requirements for the election of the academic position “Associate Professor”. In his person we have a conscientious scientist and a well-prepared specialist.

As a member of the Scientific Jury, I will definitely vote for the election of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Chavdar Venelinov Vetov for the academic position of “Associate Professor” and will support the proposal of the jury addressed to the Scientific Council of the Institute for Historical Studies at the BAS concerning his election to this position.

(Prof. D.Sc. Penka Peykovska)

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