

## OPINION

By Prof. DSc. Baian Rayhanova, Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University of St. Kliment Ohridski, a member of the Scientific Committee, appointed by the Rector's decree № RD 38 – 85/18.02.2025.

Regarding the research and teaching activities of Sr. Asst. Dr. Sirma Kostadinova, a participant in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Persian Literature and Culture), published in the State Gazette, issue 5/17.01.2025.

### I. COMPETITION DATA

The current competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Persian Literature and Culture) complies with the requirements of the Law for the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its implementation and the relevant Rules of Sofia University of St. Kliment Ohridski. The only candidate in this competition is Sr. Asst. Dr. Sirma Vesselinova Kostadinova from the Department of Classical East, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, SU of St. Kliment Ohridski. The applicant's documents, submitted electronically, comply with the regulations including the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor.

### II. CANDIDATE DATA

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Sirma Kostadinova is a graduate of Sofia University of St. Kliment Ohridski, where she obtained a bachelor's degree in Iranian Studies in 2008 and a master's degree in Indian and

Iranian Cultural Studies and Social Studies in 2011. She held the academic position of Assistant Professor in Persian Linguistics in 2017 and became Senior Assistant in 2017–2019 in the Department of Classical East after successfully defending her doctoral dissertation on the topic “Mythological Images in the Shahnameh of Abulghasem Ferdowsi” at the Faculty of Philology and Philology at Sofia University of St. Kliment Ohridski.

### III. SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

For the purposes of this competition, Dr. Sirma Kostadinova has submitted 15 academic works published in the period 2019–2025, including two monographs and thirteen articles. Four of these articles are in English and have been published in the collective collections of the Confucius Institute in Sofia and Sofia University of St. Kliment Ohridski, as well as in the electronic journal “Manas” of the Center for Scientific and Educational Research at Sofia University. One of the submitted articles is co-authored.

The main scientific work with which Dr. Kostadinova participated in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor is the monograph entitled “Travel as Reality and Metaphor in Persian Literature and Culture” and published by the “Avangard Prima” publishing house in 2025. The book is 164 pages long and represents an interdisciplinary study of the metaphor of travel, which is viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon in a linguocultural sense.

The first chapter, “Seven Days and Nights Beyond – Dream Travel and Death as a Journey,” reveals the metaphorical meaning of travel based on an analysis of the “Avesta”, the sacred books of Zoroastrianism, and other texts written in Middle Persian. A brief but comprehensive excursion into the history of Zoroastrianism is made,

tracing the main stages in its development in order to highlight the influence of this ancient religion on the language at the lexical and semantic levels.

The etymology of the Persian word “path” and its lexical-semantic development over the centuries are thoroughly investigated. The dichotomy “good path – bad path” is illustrated with a number of successful examples taken not only from the “Avesta”, but also from the Bible and the Quran. Emphasis is placed on Zoroastrian mythology, according to which “death is seen as a transition from one form of existence to another” (p. 19) or as a journey of the soul from the material world to the spiritual. According to Dr. Kostadinova, the plot of the journey to the afterlife is present in several texts in Middle Persian, among which the “Book of the Righteous Viraz” stands out. She makes a detailed analysis of the metaphorical system of this text, which tells of the hero’s journey to heaven and hell. In addition to Zoroastrian narratives, the author turns to the Quranic text and to the motif of the night ascension, making comparisons between the journeys of the righteous Viraz and the prophet Muhammad. Special attention is paid to some Arabic words adapted to Persian. They are transliterated correctly, except for one word which is written as *hejrat*. But the correct transliteration (*hijra*) is also mentioned.

In the second chapter, entitled “The Conceptual Sphere of Travel in Persian Language and Literature”, Dr. Kostadinova relies on the theory of conceptual metaphor by G. Lakoff and M. Turner, according to which metaphor is perceived as a cognitive mechanism. Persian lexemes and phraseological units, as well as Arabic loanwords with the meaning “road”, are analyzed in detail. Unlike the first chapter, here some Arabic words taken from the Quran and the dictionaries of Kh. Baranov and H.

Wehr are transliterated into Cyrillic. Their transliteration is sometimes inaccurate (for example: *sabil*, *serāt*).

The third chapter, “The Path behind the Veil of Secrets – the Quatrains of Omar Khayyam and Their Translation into Bulgarian,” focuses on the work of the Persian classic, which is also examined through the prism of the theory of conceptual metaphor. Dr. Kostadinova argues that Khayyam’s poems project “a characteristic of Persian language and thought understanding of life and death as a journey” (p. 105). The starting point of this journey is “arrival in the world,” the final point is “departure from it,” and between them is an intermediate space where the life journey takes place (p. 133). She argues her claim with a large number of quatrains, which include a variety of metaphorical expressions and words.

Dr. Kostadinova's enduring interest in the metaphorical richness of Persian literature and mythology is also evident in other publications submitted for the competition. For example, the monograph “The Persian Book of Kings - from Myth to Epic” (156 p.), printed by the “Avangard Prima” publishing house in 2024, deeply explores the mythological images and motifs in the Shahnameh of Abulghasem Ferdowsi on the basis of a defended dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. The mythological theme is analyzed in publications with numbers 3 and 4. In articles with numbers 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, various metaphorical aspects are traced, including the functioning of individual lexemes in political discourse.

#### IV. TEACHING ACTIVITY

Dr. Kostadinova's teaching activity is entirely connected with Sofia University, where she is engaged in lecture courses and practical classes in the bachelor's program for students, which is a full-time form

of education. She is the titular of the academic subjects including theoretical Persian language, Persian language – practical course, Persian civilization (pre-Islamic and Islamic), traditions and national holidays in Iran, arts and crafts of the East, monuments of Persian culture.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Dr. Kostadinova has extensive teaching experience and academic competence in various fields of Iranian Studies. Her research achievements are highlighted not only in the publications submitted for the competition, but also through participation in a number of national and international conferences.

Based on the above, I give a positive assessment of the overall scientific and teaching activity of Sr. Asst. Dr. Sirma Vesselinova Kostadinova and recommend that the Scientific Jury elect her to the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Persian Literature and Culture) for the needs of the Department of Classical East at the Faculty of Philology, Sofia University of St. Kliment Ohridski.

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