

OPINION

From Prof. Dr Anda Palieva

in connection with the competition for acquiring the academic position of professor in *Music Studies and Music Art* (Bulgarian church and secular music from the late 19th and early 20th centuries), announced in the State Gazette, Issue No. 44 / May 14, 2026, by the Institute of Art Studies at BAS for the needs of the *Music* Department, Research Group *Music Modernity*

Candidate Assoc. Prof. Stefka Venkova-Mosheva PhD

For years, I have been familiar with the substantial professional work of Assoc. Prof. Stefka Venkova-Mosheva, Ph.D., as a consistent and thorough researcher in her chosen field of musicology. Her numerous articles and studies in specialized publications, as well as her presentations at national and international musicology forums (listed in the specific reference to her publications since obtaining the academic rank of “associate professor”), are of high scholarly value and represent significant contributions to the field. This is further evidenced by the dozens of citations of her work in various studies by other authors.

I have always been deeply impressed by the broad range of her scholarly interests and knowledge, the comprehensiveness and precision of her work, and her objective approach to the phenomena she studies, as well as her refined scholarly style and engaging manner of presenting her text.

In this competition, Assoc. Prof. Stefka Venkova, Ph.D., is submitting her new third monograph, **“Building a New Musical Life in Bulgaria: The Work of Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev (1852–1938)”** (IAS-BAS, 2026). This comprehensive study is devoted to an important theme in Bulgarian musicology: the early stages of professional musical life in Bulgaria and the significant figures among its pioneers. Particularly relevant in recent decades, this topic requires, on the one hand, a reevaluation of this earlier period—which laid the foundations for Bulgarian culture—by overcoming ideological biases and limitations, and, on the other hand, shedding light on numerous “blank spots” — individuals who have been forgotten or banned, unknown creative figures, and unrecognized artifacts.

As can be seen from the book’s title itself, it focuses on the work of Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev, whom St. Venkova describes as “*one of the titanic figures in our modern history*” (p. 203), who served as an ideologue, “*the driving force and leader of new initiatives*” (p. 9), who undertook the mission of a pioneer, aware of “his historical responsibility for the emerging Bulgarian cultural identity” (p. 9). His figure has undeservedly remained in the shadows, and this is the author’s motivation for this book—to rehabilitate a remarkable personality and, at the same time, through the lens of his life and creative activity in various spheres of musical and social life in

Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century, to reveal the key moments in the overall picture of this highly dynamic period in our musical history. These two organically intertwined parallel threads in the musicological study complement and illuminate one another, and as they unfold, they shed light on other phenomena as well—on the activities of contemporaries, predecessors, or successors—thereby forming a comprehensive picture of the era when Bulgarian musical culture was first taking shape.

This has shaped the overall, large-scale, well-proportioned structure and the thematic progression of this extensive work, which comprises six chapters, a preface, an introduction, a conclusion, an extensive bibliography, and nine documentary appendices, for a total of 284 pages.

In the “Foreword,” the author clearly and precisely articulates her research goals and objectives, justifies the need for a new interpretation of Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev’s musical oeuvre, notes the difficulties in historical factual reconstruction, and provides an overview of the existing literature on him. She justifies characterizing her study as comprehensive (p. 7) by pointing to the need to apply and integrate analytical methods from various fields of research.

The individual chapters alternate with compelling logic, building upon one another step by step. The outline of Nikolay Iv. Nikolov’s life and creative journey in *Chapter One*—through a comprehensive examination of his biographical data, complete with a periodization accompanied by a presentation of his family and the musical careers of his descendants.

The examination in *Chapter Two* of Nikolay Iv. Nikolov’s particularly significant contribution to the development of Bulgarian church music from the late 19th and early 20th centuries—including his promotion of polyphonic choral singing, the introduction of the corresponding choral repertoire, and the emergence of new musical figures such as the composer and conductor, is interwoven with the role of the Bulgarian Music Union, which he led, in promoting new ideas and the overall reform of our church music. Also noted here is an interesting and important discovery by Stefka Venkova (p. 89)—the unique original song “Our Father” by Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev, published in 1926 in the magazine *Illustrated Light*.

In *Chapter Three*, the presentation of Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev continues with an outline of his role in organizing the first secular musical institutions in Bulgaria—from student and civic choirs under his direction and the First Musical Society in Sofia to the first professional organizations—the Bulgarian Musical Union and the Opera Society, and later the founding of the Music School and the State Music Academy.

Equally logical in terms of sequence is the subject matter introduced in *Chapter Five*, which is devoted to the publications by Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev in the Soviet and Bulgarian press discovered by Stefka Venkova; these are disclosed for the first time

and are included as a list in the book (p. 225). Through the lens of his journalistic activity, the book also presents an overview of the musical press in Bulgaria over a period of about three decades, with an analysis of the nature and content of the publications *Musical Newspaper* and the magazine *Musical Thought*. The author also discusses the manuscripts and personal correspondence of Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev that she discovered.

The concluding *Chapter Six*, dedicated to *Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev's role in building a musical community in Bulgaria*, reveals aspects of his individual, often complex personal relationships with his contemporaries, which provides an interesting perspective on the psychological profile of the Bulgarian music community during this formative period of our musical culture, marked by artistic exploration and aesthetic debates. A historiographical significant focus here is the new data presented by the author regarding Dobri Hristov's activities in church music, as well as his participation in the multifaceted work of the Bulgarian Music Union as an active member.

I fully endorse the *contributions* of the book on Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev as outlined in Stefka Venkova's *Conclusion*, and I would like to emphasize once again that the in-depth factual research and comprehensive presentation of the diverse musical activities of this unique creative figure, together with the disclosed and other previously unknown historical facts, in fact form the basis for a new, contemporary interpretive reading of the era in Bulgarian musical culture from the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.

I would like to note that, in addition to being an impressive musicological study that undoubtedly contributes to our contemporary music historiography, this book is also valuable to the broader contemporary cultural sphere as a book that is engaging thanks to its rich, precise, and clear narrative style and its intriguing insights into our musical past.

My excellent impressions of the candidate's overall musicological work, as well as the high quality and relevance to contemporary musicological scholarship and professional education of the book presented in this competition as a habilitation thesis, "*Building a New Musical Life in Bulgaria: The Work of Nikolay Iv. Nikolaev (1852–1938)*," allow me to confidently recommend to the esteemed jury that they award Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stefka Venkova-Mosheva the academic rank of "Professor."

October 9, 2026

Prof. Dr. Anda Palieva