

## REVIEW

By architect Prof. PhD Nikolay Lyubomirov Tuleshkov

CONCERNING: the competition for acquiring the academic position of associate professor in *Theory and History of Architecture (Digitalization of Architectural Heritage)*, professional direction 5.7 *Architecture, Construction and Geodesy* for the needs of the research group *Ancient Art* at the Fine Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS based on Ord. № 474-ПД /25.07.2024 of the Director of IAS and protocol № 7/19.07.2024 of the SC, for senior assistant Dr arch. DIMITRINA POPOVA

I am well acquainted with the candidate architect Dimitrina Popova since January 2011, when she started her PhD program at the Department of Architecture at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 2014 I was the head of the scientific jury that evaluated and approved her PhD thesis. In 2015 I participated in the jury that approved Dr. arch. Popova for the position of Senior Assistant in the structure of the Institute of Art Studies. Consecutively in 2015, 2020 and 2024 she published articles in the refereed journal “Monuments. Restoration. Museums.”, where I chaired the scientific editorial board and reviewed her work. I am also familiar with her other articles and published papers, for example, from the annual scientific conferences of University of Structural Engineering & Architecture “Lyuben Karavelov”. I believe that I have a relatively clear idea of her gradual growth in science, leading to her status as an already established scholar, with her individual characteristics and scientific contributions.

The candidate, Dr. Arch. Popova, is a scholar who is focused and dedicated to her research work. She has several quality publications in the field of architectural theory and history, as well as in the field of archival science and digitization of specialized collections. Specifically in her 2020 publication in the journal “Monuments. Restoration. Museums.” titled “Politics and Aesthetics in the Image of the Roman Villa”, she demonstrates her quality of arriving at a detailed understanding of the relationship between politics and the specific aesthetics encoded in the architectural image of the Roman villa rustica. There, and in her subsequent scholarly writings, she has developed a sustained expertise in using the latest literature in Bulgarian and English in analyses of the areas under study and formulated original conclusions. All

of this she elaborated on in several of her subsequent more recent articles, with parallel developments of her scientific experiments to make sense of the formulation of those in them from a philosophical point of view. Theoretically, she is influenced mainly by the philosophical tradition of the influential French conceptualist Jacques Derrida, but she also makes skillful use of many other writers. I find her writing style to be clear and concise, and interesting to read.

Arch. Popova has been working since 2011 in the field of higher education, as a lecturer and assistant professor at the European Polytechnic University - Pernik, in Bulgarian and English with:

-Lectures on Aesthetics for the master's Program in Architecture, in English.

-Lectures on Architectural Heritage Conservation for the master's in architecture, in Bulgarian.

-Lectures and Exercises in Architecture for the Bachelor of Civil Engineering Program, in Bulgarian and English.

She has participated individually or in teams in four research projects on the topics of Cultural Heritage, Energy Efficiency and Environmental Design.

I would also point to her excellent work with the online platforms Zoom and Meet, Google, where she conducts workshops.

On a personal level, Dimitrina is disciplined and hardworking. She is always giving more than the basic requirements in terms of quantity and quality in her academic work.

The academic publications submitted for the competition include:

224 pages of published work, mostly text; 21 articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals and collections; 4 contributions to national and international projects; 5 contributions to academic forums; list of citations in scientific publications; 8 reviews and presentations of her creative and scientific projects published in Bulgarian and foreign publications.

This scientific and creative production of the candidate meets the requirements for habilitation. These are: a habilitation thesis; a minimum of 5 publications in scientific journals other than those for the award of the PhD; at least 5 participations in scientific forums; at least 5 citations in scientific publications.

## MONOGRAPHY

A key place in the scientific production of Dr. arch. Popova occupies her habilitation thesis **“Architectural Heritage in Survey Drawings of Nineteenth-Century Houses. Analysis and Digitization of the Architecture Archive of the Institute of Art Studies”**. Institute of Art Studies, BAS, ISBN:978-619-7619-37-9, S., 2024. The book has 224 pages of text, which includes 37 illustrations - architectural survey drawings, artistic images, sketches, graphics, schemes, digital reconstructive visualizations.

The object of research in the monograph is the collection of documents inherited from the archives of the Centre for Architectural Studies, created in the period 1949 to 1962, which are now stored in the Architecture Archive of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The focus is on the results of the research and documentation of Bulgarian residential architecture of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Institute of Housing, Urban Development and Architecture and Institute of Theory and History of Urban Development and Architecture. And this is done in the process of digitization of the archival units carried out by the author.

The book is structured with an Introduction and two parts, the first of which is divided into three chapters, the initial of which is a kind of history of the architectural scientific field in the BAS system, from the moment of its institutional emergence until its liquidation. It focuses on the formation of archival units, both graphic and textual.

No small part of this chapter, and of other parts of the book, represents a successful attempt to explore an area of architectural creativity that, after these early years of the Institute's existence, has been largely untouched for decades. This is the subject of the methodology of architectural surveys, of the artistic and photographic documentation of immovable cultural heritage, of the value relation to archival units and the ways of wide-open accessibility to them. As can be seen from the author's analyses, some of these issues were the subject of research in the period of the first decades after the emergence in 1949 of an architectural scientific structure in the system of the Soviet-modelled Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which emerged after the illegal pogrom on the BANI and the repression of many of the old academicians.

The second and third chapters explore in considerable depth the archived units of the architectural survey collections and the research to them, through systematization according to nodal indicators derived by the author. By fully embracing the methodological concept of Jacques Derrida, who formulated four nodal criteria - date of entry of the document into the archive; location of the site; condominium of the

house of the capture and authorship of the capture. However, I have some doubts about the third criterion, as in my opinion it is not essential for the archetype of the house. For the Bulgarian ethnic land, a much more important indicator is the applied functional scheme - enfilade, chain, cruciform or parlor. This clarifies the regional peculiarities of the functional scheme and the mode of occupation, whereas in Bulgarian settlements one-storey and two-storey houses were always built at the same time and, as an exception, three to four-storey houses, with the lowest storey tied at grade or by several steps to the lowest ground elevation. There are also differences between the functional indicators of the houses of religious communities, especially between those of Christian and Muslim ones. Which may also be indicative of a separate indicator. Which could also be an indication of a separate indicator.

In clarifying the methodology of architectural photography, Dr. Popova goes into depth even to some details, such as the question of how many people it should be carried out with. Kozhuharov is quoted who correctly points out how, at the then level of technical provision, it was best to work in a group of three. However, archival documentation has shown that most of the survey was done by one or two people. *"In my opinion,"* the author argues, *"this was the most efficient way in the survey action, but it also indicates a discrepancy with the theoretical set-up"*. My opinion, having carried out hundreds of architectural surveys both alone and in teams of two or three, is that in practice the best, most complete and fastest survey is by three people. Dr. Popova's assumption that such large teams are possible with mainly architecture students is true.

In its entirety, however, the use for this and subsequent scientific purposes of methodologies, some of which are intrinsic at times to semiotics, is a novel approach to the scientific field. I have only one note to make here - its over-confidence in the manipulative false theses of Chavdar Marinov, who credits architectural science of the *"1950s"* with somehow *"inventing the imagery of the Bulgarian house"*. Whatever this nonsense means. In fact, this imagery, also known as *"Revival house"*, was created and spread in the period of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries throughout large parts of the Ottoman Empire, precisely by Bulgarian builders. I think I have sufficiently substantiated his tendentious scholarly attacks against the results of the research of art history and the history of Bulgarian architecture, the work of the old authors since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Who, travelling around the Bulgarian lands, got to know and document, not *"inventing"* the Marinov's imagery in question (Tuleshkov, N. On the attempt of a layman to write in the field of architectural history. – In: Monuments. Restoration. Museums, issues 1-2, 2009, pp. 51-68) The old researchers were the first to outline the architectural paradigm of the Bulgarian house, gradually getting to know it in its entirety.

Having reached the true roots of the phenomenon herself, these are the conclusions in Dr. Popova's book, so it is obviously accidental that she uses the expression in question at the end of this chapter.

The part of architectural graphics and realistic artworks studied are mainly professionally made architectural surveys of houses from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the Bulgarian ethnic land. Due attention has also been paid to the available number of archived realistic artworks - prints, etchings, watercolors, oil paintings, pencil sketches, etc., mainly by well-known artists such as Petar Morozov (22 works, submitted in 1952), Panayot Kalchev (138 color surveys), Hristo Kabakchiev (40 watercolors, most submitted in 1959), Nikola Mushanov and Zlatka Kirova, etc.

Dr. Popova rightly points out that Morozov's works *"have both artistic and documentary value"* and adds *"His work in the archive is an example, a role model for depicting buildings in drawings or perspectives according to the standards of the master artist and a starting point for the graphic design of architects' surveys."* Which can of course be said of the rest of the holdings in this archival field.

The third chapter of the study is a historical cross-section between the history of the architectural scientific unit in the process of its restructuring over time, and the changes in the political status quo of the country, the emergence of the IPK (NIPK, NINKN) and the accession of the specialized Bulgarian scientific fields to the activities of UNESCO. The formation of the units and policies for the preservation of the immovable cultural heritage are examined. It analyses the Institute of Urban Planning and Architecture in its life as, as Dr Popova points out, *"the only institution in the initial stage, until the establishment of NIPK/NINKN, which was engaged in the inventory, study and conservation of architectural heritage. Here was the laboratory for the invention, drafting and initial conception of architectural heritage policies, but with the strong intervention of the Communist Party."* Which is true, and the directors of the institute were necessarily party members, and even most of them, like Prof. Peyo Berbenliev and Prof. Todor Krastev, also collaborators/officers of the Committee for State Security.

The political control and ideological pressures exerted on the scientists of the institutes and sections of BAS, especially during the first two decades of their work, are well marked. The most active in this direction was the old communist Alexander Obretenov, who was an opponent of Modernism and professed Stalinist views on art and architecture. The influence of the philosopher Todor Pavlov is also mentioned. This part of the book is developed extensively and historically credible, but it seems to me that the issue of the task set by the two *"to give socialist content in a national form"* is rather cursorily addressed. In effect, this is a repudiation of Stalin's (indeed

Hitler's) neo-classicism and a path towards creating an architecture based on the ideas of traditional Bulgarian Renaissance imagery. And that is why, as Dr. Popova notes, the task of studying it and properly documenting it through the surveys of preserved old examples was also set. She distinguishes in the ideological speech of Todor Pavlov *"two benchmarks in relation to the creation of the collection: first, it focuses on the houses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as objects of architectural heritage and second, it draws a line in the selection process"*. Which is only natural - only the best examples should be used for the new architectural line, and so it is incomprehensible to me why, according to the author, the collection of surveys should *"create semantic tensions with the original ideological benchmarks by collecting examples from houses of material prosperity"*. While in the collection there are surveys of ordinary village houses.

In fact, the idea, which almost all the authors who wrote on this matter in the past times considered malicious, represents an attempt to create a national architecture as an aesthetic, as opposed to international copies. And as the great German architectural historian Prof. Arch. Cornelius Gurlitt said back in the 1920s. (after Torniov) to his former students in Sofia - why don't you create your own national architectonics, instead of copying foreign models, the originals are with us. Today, unfortunately, we receive many times more of the foreign and almost nothing of our own, so in the field of architecture we have almost lost our desire to fit our national spirit into the world's fashion lines. It seems that the time has passed, for example, for the Japanese, Finnish or Mexican reading of modern architectonics, which excited the world architectural college. Impersonal architectural internationalism par excellence!

Dr. Popova, however, precisely formulates what happened during this period in architectural science, from the point of view of the subject of study, to reach the logical *"general conclusion from the marked benchmarks of the ideologues that the architectural heritage (during this period) served as a source of artistic forms in the design of the new architecture, not for its preservation and restoration"*. And she is right that *"such concentration, targeting and government funding is never undertaken again"*. I do not agree, however, *"that scientific objectivity in selection of architectural heritage sites remains in the background, and in the architectural debate the awareness that architects are not the only voice in decision-making disappears."* On the contrary, precisely these questions were decided by the scientific board on a professional level, and the political and, from there, the administrative pressure was in other and mainly managerial directions. For example, in the design, where due to the application of large glass structures traditional for our old architecture, contradicting the Stalinist aesthetics (while Corbusier was inspired by them in his work), the architect could have had serious administrative problems. An

example of the professional thinking of IUA scientists in contrast to the Stalinist ideological insinuations can be found in book 9 of "IUA Bulletins", where in an address they criticize the political thesis of declaring the "*wide window*" characteristic of traditional Bulgarian architecture to be reprehensible "*Western European*" because you see it was an expression of "*decadent bourgeois architecture*". In the same style, as at that time, for example, Bogomil Raynov called the impressionists "*smears*", and Steinbeck and Hemingway - "*bourgeois scribblers*". But contrary to this party line, in 1954 the IGA decided to put the issue up for discussion, which became a fact in June 1955. And it is a turning point in the paradigm shift of Bulgarian architecture, by returning to the ideas of Modernism, which received their great development in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s.

I am surprised by the author's conclusion that Northwestern Bulgaria, as a result of political repressions in connection with collectivization, has been turned into a "*taboo topic*" for architectural studies, despite the fact that from this territory there are not only quite a number of surveys of houses - older and post-war, of Todor Zlatev, for example, but also that Georgi Kozhuharov has published a number of surveys in the collection "*The Complex Scientific Expedition in Northwestern Bulgaria in 1956. S., 1958*". So, the institute also conducted research in the Northwest.

In a systematized form, in this work of Dr. Popova, special attention is paid to the books and thematic collections published over the decades by IUA and ITIUA, which contain materials on the old residential architecture from the territory of Bulgaria. It also cites contemporary authors of articles about their scientific activities at that time. It seems mainly by those of Elena Ivanova that she was influenced to overexpose the influence of party control on the scientific thinking of the architects of the institutes. Which, in terms of some disregard for professional dignity in quite a few of them, is nonsense. I cannot imagine, for example, how Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arch. Dobrina Zheleva is influenced by "*party orders*" in opposition to her expert opinion. Dr. Popova's assessment regarding the theses of some artificial "*creation of a narrative about the Bulgarian house*" invented by Elena Ivanova and Chavdar Marinov is very accurate. No matter how you create it, it really exists, it's just that these two aren't capable, or don't want to see it clearly. That is why her reaction is very accurate: "*I do not share the statement regarding the specific regionality and fragments of the model, as this contradicts the imaginary collective archetypal image of the Bulgarian house that I have derived, which is completely different. Quite expectedly, Chavdar Marinov's theses cause debate and reciprocal responses, especially in criticism.*"

The second part of the work is also developed in three chapters dedicated to architectural memory based on archival materials. The issues of archiving and their

digitization are considered from a practical and philosophical point of view, an evaluation is made, and methodologies of use are derived, the issues of the reconstruction of the original and the socialization of the funds – on paper and virtual - are touched upon.

In the last, sixth chapter, several examples of three-dimensional visualization of five houses from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly from Northwestern Bulgaria, are presented. Materials from the first fund of the "Architecture" archive, labeled "On paper", sub-fund "Drawings and surveys", were used as a basis. The selection is based on uniform characteristics – an object that no longer exists, or is preserved, but seriously defaced; which has not been published before; whose capture is sufficiently precise. A criterion is also applied, which, according to the definition of the American architect Eiseman, must be from the so-called by him "canonical" buildings, i.e. ones that "*make the connection between buildings that came before them and after them*". Because "*there are encoded critical architectural ideas that portend change.*"

I think that for them the author has rightly introduced the new term "*monuments of the missing*", which she justifies with the fact that these realistic digitization of the disappeared objects "*possess authenticity and sacredness*".

For each of these houses there is a separate text that presents and analyzes it historically and architecturally, the literature that was presented is traced. The texts are accompanied by colorful author's digital reconstructions in which the buildings "*appear untouched by daily habitation*", according to the European method of representation from the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when architects "*depict ancient buildings in architectural projections, but not as they are in reality, but by removing the signs of the times*".

In conclusion, except for my few minor comments on the work, I can confidently assert that there is an innovative, versatile in numerous positions of scientific research, book. The author has successfully managed to unite issues from the fields of archival studies, history, philosophy, architecture, socialization of cultural heritage and some other academic directions. Thus, his work, although it must be read with great concentration, is a wonderful example of a well-composed scientifically precise exposition.

The contributions in this work are many - in the fields of archival studies, research methodology, socialization techniques, architectural values and the proof of the enormous importance of this fund for Bulgarian art, history, restoration practice and tourism. Quite novel is the testing of digital databases which led to the proposal of new research methods of architectural archival units, as well as to the derivation of



assessment criteria. The thesis that the three-dimensional reconstruction is an upgrade of the digital descriptions of the archival units is also helpful. And through this, new opportunities are discovered for the preservation and representation of the Bulgarian architectural heritage and new opportunities for collaborations with other fields of knowledge, such as ecology, ethnology, literature, geography of tourism, etc. are revealed.

## **ARTICLES AND PUBLISHED REPORTS**

21 articles and published reports from scientific conferences were presented, from which Dr. Popova selected the necessary five for the habilitation procedure. They were printed in the period 2022 - 2024, one of them being in an edition indexed by Scopus and Web of Science, and the other four being in an edition referred to by ERIH PLUS.

All five published works are thematically connected to one degree or another with the scientific subject of the habilitation work of Dr. Arch. Dimitrina Popova on three of her topics - problems of archival studies, digitization of funds and problems of digital reconstructions.

The contributions in these articles are numerous – deriving and testing models for the preservation of architectural heritage in a digital environment; structuring and ontological description of archival units; research on the technologies necessary to create a three-dimensional digital reconstruction; formation of methodologies and tools for research and archiving of the seventy-year-old scientific collection; creating systems for evaluating architectural reconstructions.

Data from reports presented at 14 academic conferences, of which 11 are international, is also presented. The topics are diverse, developed in the areas of the Bulgarian immovable cultural heritage, Bulgarian studies, the cultural heritage from the funds of the Institute of Art Studies at the BAS, energy efficiency and cultural identity in the revitalization of the inter-block spaces of modern panel complexes, etc. The contributions are in offering new perspectives in the field of digitization; in the presentation of previously unpublished data and methods of working with digital databases, etc. The original themes in the candidate's academic work, many of which are not, or are barely covered in specialized literature, naturally lead to the presence of other fragmentary contributions. It is not without importance to note that Dr. Popova possesses several key qualities for a scholar, such as an excellent style of expression, complete orientation in structuring, derivation of clearly formulated theses, a good methodological approach, depth of analyzes while respecting

priorities, etc... The serious scientific-theoretical achievements in the monograph, supported in parallel by the qualities of the other publications presented, as well as the presence of the pedagogical and creative-design skills she has acquired so far, speak unequivocally of a serious professional potential. Which if summed up gives me reasons to give the present positive opinion, based on which I propose senior assistant Dr. Arch. Dimitrina Popova to be elected to the academic position of "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR".

Sofia

10.11.2024

Prof. Dr. Arch. Nikolay Tuleshkov