



In memoriam: Ekaterina Anastasova (1962–2025)

Katya was part of the Bulgarian and international academic field from the very moment I entered it more than 20 years ago. Today, a few months after she passed away, I truly realise all that we lost with her, but also all that she left behind.

Ekaterina Evgenieva Anastasova was born on April 19, 1962, in Yalta, into a Bulgarian-Russian family. Her mother was Russian, while her father's lineage came from Macedonian lands. This is why Katya always felt at home in several countries and on two continents. She was surrounded by prominent relatives who were artists, scholars, and doctors. For her, existing beyond national boundaries was as natural as breathing regardless of political circumstances or

administrative frameworks. Her passport was Russian, her address Bulgarian, but her heart belonged to the world.

Katya was a musician, having graduated from the National Music School in Sofia. She toured numerous countries as an orchestral cellist. Later, however, she turned to her other great love, philology. In 1988, she graduated as an ethnolinguist from the Faculty of Philology at Moscow State University. Her thesis was supervised by Academician Nikita Tolstoy, whose follower she remained in the decades that followed. She turned to ethnology after her return to Bulgaria, where between 1989 and 1993 she worked as a researcher in the Department of Historical Ethnology at the Centre for Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). After a short period in the Department of Contemporary Ethnology at the Ethnographic Institute with Museum, she established her career in 1994 in the then Department of Balkan and Slavic Folklore at the Institute of Folklore, BAS.

In 1996, under the supervision of Professor Ivanichka Georgieva, Katya defended her dissertation, which was devoted to the Nekrasovtsy in Bulgaria. Her doctoral thesis was published under the title *Old Believers in Bulgaria: Myth, History, Identity* (Anastasova, Ekaterina 1998. *Staroobredtsite v Bulgariya: mit, istoriya, identichnost*. Sofia: AI “Prof. Marin Drinov”), which became a starting point for many further articles and studies on Russian-speaking ethno-confessional communities in the Balkans and Baltics. Her next monograph, *Ethnicity, Tradition, Power (Essays on the Transition)* (Anastasova, Ekaterina 2006. *Etnishnost, traditsiya, vlast. Etyudi za prehoda*. Sofia: AI “Prof. Marin Drinov”), continued her work on the models of ‘otherness’ and summarised the achievements of modern research on ethnicity in Bulgaria in the first fifteen years after the democratic changes. From today’s perspective, it seems to me that this book marked a transition in Katya’s understanding of ethnology from a discipline of ethnic and religious difference to a field of knowledge about the cultural and political meanings of affinity. This was also the result of her close collaboration around the turn of the millennium with French colleagues, especially with Professor Jean Cuisenier.

A few years later, in 2008 at the Institute of Folklore, BAS, Katya initiated the Balkan–Baltic research network with the organisation of the first conference connecting the two regions. The following year saw the publication of the first collective volume, which since 2018 has developed into *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*. Katya’s belief in the importance of close scholarly contacts

between these regions, so similar in historical destiny, political complexity and cultural diversity, continued to foster academic friendships and mutual research between leading anthropologists, ethnologists, folklorists, and ethnolinguists from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and beyond. This community was also closely connected with another research group very dear to Katya's heart, the SIEF working group on *The Ritual Year*. She was deeply interested in rituals, interpreting them through the lenses of nationalism and political culture, as well as through the tension between religiosity and secularism. This was the central discourse of one of her most significant and productive scholarly friendships, with Professor Irina Sedakova of the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences and Dr Mare Kõiva of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu.

The dynamics between nationalism, religiosity, and tradition were a major theme in Katya's research. Many issues of the journals *Bulgarian Folklore* and *Bulgarian Ethnology* edited by her, as well as several collective volumes, were dedicated to this topic (*Bulgarian Folklore*, 2008, No. 1 (*The Danube Banks: Traditions, Communities, Identities*); 2009, Nos. 3–4 (*The Balkans and the Baltic in a United Europe: Histories, Religions, Cultures*); 2016, No. 1 (*Identities, Religions, Migrations*); *Bulgarian Ethnology*, 2017, Nos. 1–2 (*The Way 1, The Way 2*) and others. See also: Anastasova, Ekaterina and Koiva, Mare (eds.) 2009. *Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: Histories, Religions and Cultures*. Sofia – Tartu: Paradigma Publishing House). Her attentiveness to emerging issues and paradigm shifts guided one of the major collective projects Katya initiated and led – research on the cultural and political meanings of the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy in Bulgaria and Europe. Innovative, interdisciplinary, and involving dozens of scholars, it remains today a point of reference in the scholarly deconstruction of Bulgarian state cults, calendars, and mythologies (Anastasova, Ekaterina; Lozanova, Galina; Stanoev, Stanoy (eds.) 2015. *Prazdnikat na Kiril i Methodiy. Prostranstva na duha*. Vols. 1–2. Sofia: Paradigma Publishing House). “In fact”, Katya wrote, “ethnology is not an intellectual game entertaining itself with archaic facts and complex methodologies. Nor is it a science of ‘everything,’ as we are sometimes tempted to claim. Ethnology has been and continues to be at the foundation and in the future of our knowledge of humankind, society, and the state.” (Anastasova, Ekaterina 2017. Preface by the Editor. *Bulgarian Ethnology*, Nos. 1, 3–5, p. 3).

For Katya, teaching and mentoring the next generations of scholars was a crucial mission. From the mid-1990s, she gave lectures and courses for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students at Sofia's St Kliment Ohridski University (Traditions and Identity; Folklore; Slavic Ethnology; Russian Folklore and Ethnology; Ethnicity, Nation, and Nationalism), at Plovdiv's Paisii Hilendarski University (Dynamics of Ethnicity), at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Balkan and Slavic Folklore), as well as at universities in Kaunas, Tallinn, Jena, Nitra, and Trnava. She supervised numerous master's theses and several doctoral dissertations. She managed to form a circle of academic collaborators in Sofia, affectionately calling us "her school", among whom I would note Svetoslava Toncheva, Grigor Har. Grigorov, Yana Gergova and myself.

Like many colleagues with significant research and teaching achievements, Katya also held a number of academic administrative positions such as head of the Departments of Balkan Ethnology and Comparative Folklore Studies; member of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, BAS; representative of the Institute at the BAS General Assembly; and scientific secretary of the Institute. In these roles, she gave meaning and direction, managing to sustain democratic principles in the governance of academia.

Working with Katya was at once easy and difficult. She always looked ahead, toward the next ideas, those that no one else had thought of yet, which came to her while reading a crime novel, visiting an exhibition or listening to a concert, ideas that were always just beyond the horizon. She thought, expressed, criticised, and encouraged with the same determination and swiftness, with generativity and pluralism. Lately she spoke of studies on the Caucasus and Asia, and I am sure that this scholarly dream would have been realised, had there been time. Ekaterina Anastasova's time with us came to an end on June 15, 2025, but her dreams remain.

Farewell, Katya!

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