REVIEW

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Reagarding

the materials submitted in a competition for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th - 17th centuries) at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' – Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev', announced in the State Gazette, issue 5 of 17.01.2025.

Competition details

In the announced competition for the position of 'Associate Professor' in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th - 17th centuries) for the needs of the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev' the only candidate is Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Simeonov Angelov. The procedure and the resulting requirements under the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of Sofia University have been complied with, as evident from the submitted documentation. As I got acquainted with its contents, I did not observe any violations, save for minor spelling mistakes. The minimum national requirements under Article 26 of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for the relevant scientific field and professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology have been met.

Candidate details

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Angelov graduated with a Master's degree in History from the Faculty of History of Sofia University in 1999. He successfully defended the thesis specific to the Faculty of History on the topic: 'The Byzantine Liturgical Model and its Influence on the Ideological Program of the Church 'St. George" in Kolusha – Kyustendil''. With his achieved level in this subject matter, Angelov permanently focuses on towards interdisciplinary work in the fields of history and art history.

In the period 2000 to 2011 he worked as an inspector at Centre 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev', from 2011 to the present day he is a chief assistant in the same scientific unit. In the meantime, he was accepted for doctoral studies from 2005 to 2008. In 2009 he defended his doctorate on the topic 'Monumental Painting in Western Bulgaria in the 16th Century (Sofia and Kyustendil) - Conservatism and Innovations' with Prof. Aksinia Dzhurova as a scientific supervisor. He has a good level of French and Russian, and basic level of English.

He has participated in two major projects under the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science, as a member of the scientific teams. The topics of the projects are related to the study of the cultural and historical heritage in Western Bulgaria. and the preparation of a digital platform for training in codicology, palaeography, archival studies and documentary studies with hermeneutical interpretation based on the manuscript and documentary heritage stored in the Centre 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev' (КП06-ОПР-05/12, 2018; КП06Н30/4, 2018). He participated in six other projects with similar topics, including 'Heritage BG'. He is also systematically involved in a number of scientific conferences, by presenting a variety of topics from his research centre.

The experience gained in scientific work in these areas and in training future personnel for work with cultural heritage. undoubtedly shapes Dr. Svetozar Angelov as a modern and well-prepared interdisciplinary researcher and teacher. At the same time, he has undertaken a number of field studies in support of his scientific research and for the preservation of cultural monuments from different eras. In the period 2007 - 2014, he has organized exhibitions in Bulgaria and in Bratislava, the main goal of which is to popularize the old church documentary heritage. Although he has not specified contact persons in his autobiography, the team of the Centre 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev' relies heavily on his good skills and scientific competencies.

Description of scientific works

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Angelov presents his main work at the habilitation competition – the monograph 'Kyustendil as a Spiritual Christian Centre through the Ages. The Metropolitan Church 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary''. Sofia, 2025. ISBN 978-619-93223-1-4 (pdf). Along with it, twenty-four other scientific works are provided. Of these, there is one more book co-authored with Yavor Mitov, two scientific publications in refereed journals, with Q2 and Q3, two studies co-authored with Kalina Mincheva and Maria Polimirova are published in the Sofia University Yearbook series and in a collection; six articles are in collections, of which two are co-authored with K. Mincheva and Aksinia Djurova in Macedonian scientific publications, another thirteen articles are published in periodicals, two of them are co-authored with Maria Polimirova. In most of the appended works, the texts in the joint publications, whose author is Dr. Angelov, are clearly distinguished.

All works testify to the author's broad scientific interests and good professional practice. Simultaneously they reflect the stages of his formation as a field researcher and scientist. In my opinion, the works indicated in the reference and submitted for review comply with the requirements of the competition and I accept them without remarks. The attached reference for the open citations of the author's works shows their relatively good recognition in scientific circles. It is evident that Dr. Angelov is a promising young researcher and lecturer, a necessary cadre for the development of the Centre 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev' at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'.

Scientific contributions

The main and most significant place among the works submitted for review is occupied by the newly published monograph by Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Angelov 'Kyustendil as a Spiritual Christian Center through the Ages. The Metropolitan Church 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary''. Sofia, 2025. The two main goals of the study are first, to make a comprehensive review of the history of the city of Kyustendil as a spiritual, Christian center and second, to trace the history of the main, metropolitan church in it – 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary'. The main tasks in connection with the realization of the goals thus set have been correctly formulated. A suitable structure has been built, consisting of a historical review of the Kyustendil past, taking into consideration the place of the town in the Christian world, a detailed study of the church and its old printed books, a conclusion and an appendix with used and cited sources.

The author uses a wide variety of sources, in terms of nature and time, some of which are known to science, but others were introduced into scientific circulation by him. Kyustendil is one of the most researched urban centers in the Bulgarian lands and the literature created in the past is significant. This did not prevent Dr. Angelov from boldly re-examining the city's history, but as part of the history of Christianity in our lands and in connection with the central Kyustendil temple 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary'. This approach requires a variety of methods, combining historical and art-historical approaches. The importance of the recent restoration work in the temple, owning to which the new findings and conclusions have become possible, is fairly and very respectfully pointed out.

The text on the role and importance of Pautalia as an episcopal center in Late Antiquity, with the influence of Western Christian monuments, is convincing. Although not easy, the presentation on the medieval history of the city is very valuable because of the list of the high clergymen in it, which was compiled using different kinds of sources. Valuable, because in Bulgarian historiography this has not been done for most of the Christian centres. The complete 'story' about the past of Kyustendil proves the importance of the city in sacred terms, but also the great changes it has undergone over the centuries. The text is constructed professionally and is both engaging and persuasive. The 'empty' periods stand out, those for which there is not enough information and more research work is needed.

The second part of the book is a contribution, examining fundamental issues from the history of the Metropolitan Church 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary'. The early history of the temple is dated to the middle of the 18th century, with the probable relocation of the metropolitan ate to Kyustendil around that time. The conclusion about the uniqueness of the interior design decisions and of the workmanship of the central iconostasis is convincing.

A detailed analysis of the icons, iconostases and other elements of the church interior follows. The earliest ones are dated from the 16th – early 17th centuries, which supports the opinion about the much earlier existence of the temple. A number of clarifications have been made regarding the authorship and time of creation of the icons and frescoes. Some unique solutions and executions not found in other temples are highlighted, such as the arched type icons of the Sovereign tier in the church, etc.

An analysis has also been made of the church library, which contains valuable and rare books, along with interesting and historically important chronicle notes. I would like their content to be linked, if possible, to the history of the city itself. The appendix with the list of all bishops and metropolitans known to date in Kyustendil is another contribution to the church history of our lands.

I think the conclusion is flawed, as it reiterates points that have already been established, appears clumsy in its presentation, and concludes with the unpersuasive statement that the temple continues to keep its mysteries hidden. There are differences in the citation of some of the sources, e.g. No. 48, in the electronic version of the book there are omitted texts – pp. 122, 144 -145.

In conclusion, it can be emphasized that the book contains a new valuable reading of the history of the temple, open to future work and additions. It undoubtedly proves the excellent professional skills and accumulated experience of the author.

In the competition for associate professor, Dr. Angelov also participated with other studies, similar to the topic of the main work. Dr. Angelov has made significant contributions through the publication of unread and unknown inscriptions and texts from the church murals from the 15th century onwards. The publication of the inscriptions around the images of the two hymnographers St. John of Damascus and St. Cosmas of Faiyum in the Church of St. George in the Kremikovtsi Monastery serves as an example. The author carries out a more accurate reading and understanding of the content of a mural inscription in the cave above the Monastery of Saint Ivan Kasinets near Vratsa, emphasizing the originality of the traditional connection between inscriptions and manuscript practice in commemorative and funerary artefacts. No less important are his readings of inscriptions in the Monastery of St. Michael the Archangel in Tran and St. Mark Church near Veles. A significant part of Dr. Angelov's work is based on the archive of our famous researcher, Prof. Assen Vasiliev. Relying on his invaluable observations and findings, Dr. Angelov achieves new clarifications, corrections and discoveries of significant value for our science /materials No. 6, 8, 9, 16 from the list of scientific works/. The article dedicated to the photo archive of Anna Roshkovska /№18/ shows not only its value, but also the great opportunities for future scientific work, which are provided not only by this archive stored in the Centre, but also by other similar archival materials in it. Many of Dr. Angelov's presented works are dedicated to problems related to church decoration of

temples. Such are the analytical texts dedicated to the ‘Church of St. Theodore’ near Boboshevo No. 10, regarding the depiction of St. Sava of Serbia during the Ottoman period in Bulgaria No. 11; he peculiarities of the ideological system of the church in the Kolusha district, Kyustendil No. 12; the churches in the villages of Goranovtsi and Vukovo No. 20, 22, 23; the churches St. Athanasius in Boboshevo and ‘Spasovitsa’ No. 23, 24. In each publication, through a detailed analysis of what has been achieved so far regarding the monument, Dr. Angelov adds his original reading, a substantiated hypothesis or a proven statement.

I really liked the article that advances the thesis about the influence of early printed books on monumental religious painting in Western Bulgaria in the first centuries of Ottoman rule. It seems to me that there is still more to be done in this direction. The article about the activities of Prof. Ivan Dujčev in Kostur during the Second World War, with facts and documents proving his patriotic work for the benefit of the Bulgarians there /№ 19/ is interesting and valuable.

In the joint book with Yavor Mitov about the church in the village of Goranovtsi ‘St. Archangel Michael’, Dr. Angelov is the writer of the second chapter. It examines the architecture and murals in the temple, with the author basing his work on the research already done by Vera Ivanova, Andrey Protich, As. Vasiliev, Velda Mardi-Babekova, Krastyo Miyatev, Magarita Koeva, Biserka Penkova and others. The contribution of Angel Angelov to the architectural study of this type of church is fairly assessed, as well as that of the authors who published the ‘Corpus of 16th century frescoes in Bulgaria’. Their analytical presentation is accompanied by an exposition of the main differences in the views regarding the time of creation and painting of the temple. The thesis for an earlier dating from the 15th – 16th centuries is also accepted on the basis that the temple has a brick iconostasis, common in that era in the Balkans and in Western Bulgaria, including in the Bilinski Monastery. Dr. Angelov assumes that through the analysis of the iconography and style of the frescoes, their dating should be made more accurate.

The analysis of all the surviving frescoes from the main architectural elements of the church follows the approach/manner established in recent decades to combine the texts about the respective holy characters, with a reading of the surviving inscriptions around them and with the history of their establishment in the Christian doctrine. This extremely useful approach gives excellent results in the overall assessment of the temple, it is also indicative of the depth of knowledge and skills applied by the author. Therefore, at the end of the second chapter, a convincing conclusion is drawn that the church of the village Goranovtsi is one of the few preserved monuments from the early 16th century in the Kyustendil Region. My overall assessment of the book is very good and, in my opinion, it is a unique example of similar work on other monuments from this period, which, to our joy, still exist in Western Bulgaria.

Conclusion

After reviewing the materials and scientific papers submitted for the competition and pointing out their scientific contributions, the candidate's accumulated field and research experience, despite some minor remarks, I find it reasonable to give my positive vote for the election of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Angelov to the academic position of ‘ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR’ in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th - 17th centuries) at Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’ for the needs of the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies ‘Prof. Ivan Dujčev’.

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Sofia Prof. Dr. Nadya Manolova-Nikolova