REVIEW

by Prof. D.Sc. Sheliyan D. Sherionov

regarding the competition for the academic position of *Associate Professor*

in Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology, and Scientific Specialty: *History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th–17th Century*, announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (State Gazette, issue 5, dated 17.01.2025)

Only one candidate has applied for the announced competition for the academic position of Associate Professor for the needs of the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Duychev" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Senior Assistant Professor, Dr. Svetozar Simeonov Angelov.

Since 2000, Dr. Svetozar Angelov's academic and professional development has been closely connected to the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Duychev" at Sofia University, with his main interests lying in the fields of art history, church history, and epigraphy. His doctoral dissertation is dedicated to conservatism and innovation in monumental painting in Western Bulgaria during the 16th century (Sofia and Kyustendil regions). Through the study of wall painting monuments from these areas, Angelov outlines the main trends in art and the repertoire of monuments from that period, revealing the specifics of their cultural and historical development.

Dr. Angelov's scientific publications, which are not repetitions of those presented for the doctoral degree, number twenty-five – including one monograph, one book chapter, and twenty-three studies and articles. The majority are single-authored (six are co-authored), with two published in journals indexed in international databases.

For the academic position of Associate Professor, Angelov has presented a principal habilitation work titled *Kyustendil as a Spiritual Christian Center Through the Centuries: The Metropolitan Church "Dormition of the Virgin"*, Sofia, 2025, 198 pages. This monograph represents a natural continuation of his previous research. Aside from a few authors who only briefly address the topic or touch upon specific aspects of it, Bulgarian historiography has not paid adequate attention to this subject. Thus, Angelov's work stands as *the first comprehensive study dedicated to Kyustendil as a spiritual Christian center and its Metropolitan Church "Dormition of the Virgin"*.

Following an established conceptual model, the author sets as the main goal of his work the revelation of Kyustendil's history as a Christian spiritual center through the centuries, along with a thorough study of the Metropolitan Church. To achieve this, Dr. Angelov:

1. Summarizes available historical and archaeological information highlighting Kyustendil's ecclesiastical significance;

2. Compiles a list of bishops of the Kyustendil Diocese from the early Christian period to the closure of the metropolitanate at the end of the 19th century;

3. Clarifies the history, development, and construction phases through n of the Church "Dormition of the Virgin" by presenting new information;

4. Examines and analyzes the features of the church interior – iconostases, icons, frescoes;

5. Presents the most valuable early printed books preserved in the church library.

Each of these activities becomes a specific task of the study.

In setting his main research goal and tasks, Angelov builds on *the achievements of the relevant scientific field.* His in-depth knowledge of both Bulgarian and international literature on the subject is impressive. The review of the research texts on this issue, systematized and presented by the author, allows the conclusion that the work under consideration is an independent work by Svetozar Angelov.

The study's source base is a synthesis of objectively interpreted and critically analyzed archaeological, epigraphic, and narrative materials, demonstrating Angelov's pursuit of comprehensive representation of the available data. The use of various types of sources, which complement and correct each other, ensures the necessary objectivity of the judgments made by the author.

The detailed understanding of the *methodology* applied in such types of research enables S. Angelov to choose the most suitable approach for implementing his ideas – the interdisciplinary approach. This approach, which creates conditions for combining heterogeneous methods, in this case, specific art history and historical methods, allows for both acquiring an external perspective on the studied processes and reaching their hidden, initially concealed internal dimensions. It should also be emphasized the author's skill in discovering and using optimal methodologies for applying the respective methods and successfully modifying those where necessary.

The selected *structure of the work* – introduction, exposition in three distinct parts, and conclusion, following a logical thematic sequence, appendices, and bibliography, with a total length of 198 pages, corresponds to the specific content of the work.

The *illustrative material* – diagrams and photographs of icons, liturgical objects, and early printed books – is particularly rich and enhances the study's comprehensibility and visual appeal.

The *scholarly apparatus* is structured according to the established literary standards, and the list of referenced literature is impressively comprehensive.

The summary of the review of the submitted habilitation work, as well as of the other publications with which Associate Professor Angelov is participating in the competition, allows the conclusion that they contain a number of **contributions** that can be grouped into the following main categories:

The first group of contributions is related to the *theoretical justification* of the issues addressed. Particularly impressive is the exceptional precision and depth of knowledge demonstrated by S. Angelov in justifying the terminology used in the work and in reviewing the manuscript and printed materials specific to the research process. Their synthesized presentation can serve as a reliable foundation for any study devoted to this type of subject matter, both on an international scale and at a regional level.

The second group of contributions has a pronounced *methodological aspect*. Existing best practices in the fields of art history, church history, and epigraphy from the international scholarly community have been synthesized and adapted to the conditions in the country. As the first comprehensive study in this specific thematic area, the work of Senior Assistant Professor Angelov lays the foundation for the development of a methodological model for this type of research in the national academic bibliography.

The third group of contributions are *research-related.* They can be differentiated into the three fundamental areas toward which the author's research activity is oriented.

The first pertains to church history. In relation to this field, through his monograph he: 1) lays the foundation for a comprehensive study of a city (in this case, Kyustendil) as a spiritual Christian center through the centuries; and 2) formulates a core set of still unexplored issues within this particular scholarly field, the detailed study of which is yet to come.

Some of the publications presented by S. Angelov to the academic community are also dedicated to issues related to this type of subject matter (Nos. 2, 5, 6, 8, 12, 117, 21–24 from the attached list of publications). These works address methodological problems related to the study of the process in question; the influence of various factors on its dynamics; the tools and methods used for its implementation; its national and international dimensions, etc. These materials have been published or accepted for publication in national and international journals.

The second thematic area in the scholarly work of Senior Assistant Professor Angelov is related to research focused in the field of art studies. A significant portion of his publications (Nos. 9–12, 14–16, 18–20 from the attached list of publications) belong to this research direction. These studies are dedicated to uncovering the characteristics of mural decoration, identifying the influence of various factors on the conceptual program of murals, and determining the role of iconographic material within the context of Bulgarian Revival culture, among others. The empirical, analytical, and methodological results achieved through these studies complement the overall understanding of another group of issues that have not been sufficiently explored in our historiography—those related to late medieval and Revival-period mural painting and iconography. This circumstance establishes Senior Assistant Professor Angelov as one of the leading specialists in this field of research.

The third thematic area in which S. Angelov focuses his efforts is epigraphy. In several works dedicated to this topic (Nos. 3, 4, 7, and 13 from the attached list of publications), the author presents to the audience studies primarily on unpublished or little-known inscriptions from the 15th to 17th centuries, both to the Bulgarian and international public. Here, Angelov reveals his views regarding their place within the monumental painting of the Balkans during that period, attempting to canonize the diverse concepts circulating in the public sphere on this matter.

Summarizing the publication activity of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Angelov, I can state that his monograph, book chapter, studies, and articles, created with erudition, fully meet the requirements of the Law on Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) for participation in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor".

This observation is also confirmed by the results he has achieved in *other types of research activity*.

After 2009, S. Angelov has participated with *papers* in six national, two national with international participation, and three international conferences. Covering the entire range of scientific fields in which his research is conducted, the presented materials contribute both to popularizing this specific type of knowledge among all our researchers and to presenting it to the international scientific community.

Senior Assistant Professor Angelov is a participant in the working teams of eight research *projects*. These projects are related to the study of the temporal and geographical parameters of Bulgarian spiritual space, its church-historical, social, and ethnocultural specifics; to source studies and the digitization of various types of historical sources; to methodology and

the outlining of methods for researching, systematizing, and presenting the cultural and historical heritage of the Balkans, etc. The successes achieved as a result of his work on these projects testify to the exceptional responsibility of S. Angelov, his expertise, and persistence in fulfilling the tasks he sets for himself.

The publications of S. Angelov have been *cited* in two articles published in peer-reviewed journals, in ten monographs and collective works, and in ten papers published in non-peer-reviewed scientific journals, which is a new confirmation of the general usefulness of his research activities.

All of this allows to state that S. Angelov is establishing himself as one of the leading experts in the scientific fields related to his direct academic pursuits.

Senior Assistant Professor S. Angelov is also actively involved in *teaching*. Over the past five years, he has been conducting lectures, seminars, and specialized courses in the Bachelor's (2 courses) and Master's (3 courses) programs at the Faculty of History and the Faculty of Geology and Geography at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." The topics of these courses cover: History of Byzantium, Byzantine Art and Monumental Painting in Bulgaria from the 4th to the 14th centuries, Text and Image in the Wall Paintings of Medieval Bulgaria, and Art History. Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Angelov actively participates in the creation of new curricula and the updating of existing ones, as well as in modernizing the facilities of the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." I can confidently state that the candidate's teaching activities fully align with the scientific field of the competition. At the same time, I would like to emphasize that Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Angelov has established himself among his colleagues and students as an experienced and authoritative teacher – one of the main requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor".

The active *exhibition work* of Senior Assistant Professor S. Angelov is also impressive. He participated in the preparation of five exhibitions (three national and two international), which were displayed not only in various cities across our country but also in Paris, Milan, Venice, Bratislava, Zagreb, and Bucharest. These exhibitions primarily showcase the preserved masterpieces of church art in our country, making them accessible to the general public both domestically and abroad. This highlights Angelov's active role in promoting our cultural heritage.

The scientific output, teaching activities, exhibition work, and professional qualities of Senior Assistant Professor Svetozar Angelov fully comply with the criteria established by the Law and recognized in the academic field for holding the academic position of "Associate

Professor." As a member of the Scientific Jury for the current procedure, I hereby state that I will confidently vote **"YES"** for granting Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Svetozar Simeonov Angelov the academic title of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, and scientific specialization History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th – 17th centuries. I recommend to the members of the Faculty Council of the History Faculty at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to also APPROVE his candidacy for the position announced in this competition.

April 22, 2025
Sofia

/Prof. D.Sc. Sheliyan D. Sherionov/