O P I N I O N

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

in the Professional field 2.2. History and Archeology (History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th–17th Centuries), announced by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
(State Gazette, issue 5 of 17.01.2025)

In the announced competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” for the needs of the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies “Prof. Ivan Dujčev” at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” as a candidate participates Assistant Professor Svetozar Simeonov Angelov, PhD.

The candidate works at the Center for Slavo-Byzantine Studies “Prof. Ivan Dujčev” Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski" since 2008 as an Inspector, Inspector of publishing programs, Assistant and Assistant Professor. His PhD thesis "*The Monumental Painting in Western Bulgaria in the 16th century" (Sofia and Kyustendil Region) - Conservatism and Innovation*" was successfully defended in 2010. Svetozar Angelov has been known for decades in academic circles for his active research, participation in scientific forums, and numerous publications in the fields of history, art history, and epigraphy. Dr. Svetozar Angelov is also very active in the *in situ* researches, which he conducts not only in Bulgaria but also in neighboring countries. This work specifically contributes to and reflects his research with a character of contribution.

The candidate has an active lecturer’s career at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, where he has been Assistant and Assistant Professor since 2011. Over the past five years, he has lectures, seminars, and specialized courses in the undergraduate (2 courses) and graduate (3 courses) programs of the History and Geological-Geographical Faculties at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In terms of subject matter, they relate to: History of Byzantium, Art of Byzantium and monumental painting in Bulgaria from the 4th to the 14th century, Text and image in the mural painting of medieval Bulgaria, and History of Art.
The candidate also participated in eight collective projects and in the preparation of five exhibitions that promoted Bulgaria's cultural heritage in Paris, Milan, Venice, Bratislava, Zagreb, and Bucharest.

The habilitation thesis "*Kyustendil as a Spiritual Christian Center through the Centuries. The Metropolitan Church of the Assumption of Holy Virgin*" (Sofia, 2025) ISBN 978-619-93223-1-4 (pdf) was submitted by the candidate.

Structurally, the habilitation thesis consists of an introduction, an exposition (in two main parts), a conclusion, an appendix, and a list of used sources and literature with a total volume of 198 pages.

The approach to the studied topic is interdisciplinary, combining methodology from the fields of history, archaeology, epigraphy, art history, and theology. The material presented covers a wide chronological period from Late Antiquity to the 20th century, covering several historical and cultural eras. The material is diverse not only in terms of chronology, but also in terms of type and characteristics. This requires the use of various research methods that meet the specifics of historical periods and the specifics of different types of empirical material: archaeology, sigillography, architecture, church painting (icons and murals) and wood carving, Cyrillic and Greek epigraphy, old printed books, marginal notes, etc. A thorough handling of archives has been demonstrated, revealing previously unknown data that shed light on historical events and figures. On the topic of the habilitation thesis, Svetozar Angelov has several scientific publications whose results are included in it.

The first part of the work is dedicated to Kyustendil through the centuries (72 pages), and it examines the historical and cultural atmosphere in the city and the region during the Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the period of Ottoman rule. An overview and summary of the history of Kyustendil and its role as a spiritual and cultural center have been made based on archaeological data, existing scientific literature, and archival data. The continuity of Christian culture has been traced through various periods in Kyustendil.

The second part of the Habilitation thesis is a monographic study of the Metropolitan church of Assumption of Holy Virgin in Kyustendil and is approximately 100 pages. In this chapter the history of the Church in the archival sources, the construction periods and architecture, the iconostases, icons, wood carvings, frescoes, old printed books and inscriptions have been studied.

Contributions

Based on the new discoveries - marginal notes in the books, mentioning the existence of the church in the second half of the 18th century, and the presence of artworks from the late 16th - early 17th century - the author revised the previous theories on the dating of the Metropolitan church, placing it not in 1816, but earlier: in the 18th century. The data from the latest editions of Ottoman documents from 15th-18th centuries, in which the names of clerics are found, have been summarized. The three construction phases

of the metropolitan church have been distinguished, and they have been thoroughly examined and analyzed. Special attention has been paid to the wood carvings in the church.

For the first time, all the icons kept in the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church in Kyustendil have been published and analyzed. They are extremely diverse, date from different periods, and are the work of various masters. The icons are located on the second floor and in the nave of the church. A small part of the icons have been only partially published so far, and some publications contain inaccuracies that have been corrected here. The study includes previously unpublished icons that are correctly and convincingly dated and attributed. They date from different times, with the earliest being from the end of the 16th century - altar doors and iconostasis fragments. Based on the epigraphic material, as well as on the iconographic and stylistic comparative analysis, Svetozar Angelov reaches a dating, attribution, and identification of the painters and patrons of the different icons, classifying them mainly into three groups by period and author. They belonged to three iconostasis and several individual works.

A particularly important contribution to art history is the comprehensive presentation of unpublished icons from 1818, work of the Epirus masters Lazaros and his nephew Lazos from the village of Ano Soudena (Ano Studena is the original name of the village, nowadays Ano Pedina) in the Ioannina region. Svetozar Angelov first published them in 2022 in an article. The icons are distinguished by their high level of craftsmanship, non-traditional iconography, and rare selection of texts. All Greek inscriptions are presented in their original spelling and with specific biblical parallels. Suggestions have been made regarding the reasons for the presence of Epirus painters and other residents from the Ioannina region in Kyustendil in the 19th century.

Special attention is given to the works of the famous Samokov icon painter Hristo Dimitrov. The entire set of royal icons (circa 1814?), which are little known and partially published, has been published, and for the first time, the Crucifixion from the top of iconostasis and the icons from the apostolic row from the St. Nicholas Chapel have been published. The icons, along with all the inscriptions, of another Samokov painter, Vasil Popradoykov, have also been published.

The icons with all inscriptions, attributed to the style of the painter Philip, are also presented in their entirety, with an emphasis on the non-traditional iconography of the icon of St. John Chrysostom.

The author analyzes the icons from the festive and apostolic rows of the main iconostasis in the church, which are almost entirely unknown and unpublished.

For the first time, the patron icon of the Church, which was recently restored, with attention to its inscriptions, is also presented for the first time.

The inscriptions on the icons, written in Greek and Cyrillic, have been meticulously deciphered and translated for the first time.

The frescoes in the dome of the church (circa 1887), by Ivan Dospevski, are being published for the first time and have not been included in scientific literature until now. An iconographic analysis was done and the inscriptions were deciphered. The painter brought iconographic themes to the Kjustendil church that are unique to Samokov, such as the interpretation of the scene *The Veil of the Virgin*. The frescoes in the apse and the prothesis niche were also examined. The image from the first painting layer from 1846 in the prothesis niche is presented for the first time. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the unconvenion iconography of the scene and its prototypes, as well as the inscriptions there that contain the names of donors and the year. The author found the same names in the church's parochial registers from 1846 and 1851.

Dr. Svetozar Angelov first identified the inscription on the tombstone of Metropolitan Hilarion of Lovech as "selected verses from the poem of Metropolitan Stefan Yavorski (1658–1722), composed on the occasion of the death of St. Dimitar Rostovsky (1651–1709)".

The author provides a comprehensive overview of the old printed books from the metropolitan church and for the first time publishes the marginal notes from the old printed editions, which are kept in the library of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church, as well as several church's parochial registers, which contain new information.

Last but not least, I would like to draw attention to the rich and well-presented illustrative material, and I would like to emphasize that it is published for the first time.

The bibliography is fully comprehensive, spanning 23 pages, including publications from the last few months in our country and abroad. The cited publications were used correctly in relation to the research material.

Other publications and scientific contributions

One of the main scientific focuses in the candidate's research is epigraphy in the mural painting in Bulgaria in the 14th-16th centuries. This is a scientific field in which very few specialists have worked and are working in Bulgaria, and not only there. His research continues the methodology and approach established by Stefan Smiadovsky and Hristo Andreev. A significant portion of these publications contribute to further research in the fields of epigraphy, art history and history. Based on the inscriptions deciphered for the first time by the author, the dating of important frescoes is changed or specified, a new identification of some scenes and images is proposed, the specific literary sources used by the painters when writing specific inscriptions are found, as well as engravings from old printed books used as

iconographic models in the creation of murals and icons. Among more than 20 publications, I will mention only a few of his publications here.
-Convincingly identified and deciphered the extensive Cyrillic text (16th century) on the rocks near the St. John Pusti (Kasinets) Monastery near Vratsa, which has "tormented" many researchers over the years.
-Identified and deciphered a very specific liturgical text from the dome of the Monastery of Archangel Michael in Trun, probably from the 15th century.
-For the first time, several hymnographic Cyrillic inscriptions from the western wall of the nave of the Kremikovtsi Monastery of St George (1493) were deciphered and published.

Most of the candidate's publications are dedicated to the monuments from the 14th to 19th centuries in Southwestern Bulgaria, but also to some monuments in North Macedonia and the territory of Northern Greece.
Some of Dr. Svetozar Angelov's publications are co-authored with prominent scholars: Member of BAS Prof. Axinia Dzurova, PhD Maria Polimirova, PhD Kalina Mincheva, and others.

Recommendations to the Candidate

I would like to recommend to the candidate to express more clearly his scientific discoveries and contributions and to distinguish it from the existing theories and statements in previous publications by other authors. In the analysis of certain icons and frescoes, more attention may be paid to the iconographic analysis and comparative analysis. I would suggest avoiding the term "Greek icons," as icons do not have an ethnic affiliation. The ethnicity of the painters from Ano Soudena near Ioannina is also unclear, whether they were Greeks, Vlachs, Albanians, or others. The original name of the settlement from which the painters originate is Ano Studena the toponym is obviously Slavic - Bulgarian. The region of Epirus is predominantly inhabited by Vlachs, and many of their settlements bear Slavic toponyms.

In conclusion, we can summarize that the presented Habilitation thesis, the remaining scientific publications and citations, as well as the long-standing lecturer’s experience of Svetozar Angelov meet all the national requirements under Article 2b of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for the appointment to the academic position of "Associate professor". Based on all the above, as a member of the Scientific Jury in the current procedure, I declare that I firmly vote "YES" for the awarding of the academic title "Associate professor" to Svetozar Simeonov Angelov in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology and the scientific specialty History and Culture of the Balkans in the 15th-17th centuries. I recommend that the members of

the Faculty Council of the History Faculty at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" must also approve his candidacy for the position announced in this competition.

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