O P I N I O N

of Prof. Rumen Zhivkov Boiadzhiev, PhD in History, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Center for Slavo-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev" (Order No.RD-38-146/11.03.2025)
on the scientific contributions of the dissertation of Chief Assistant Svetozar Simeonov Angelov, PhD, on the topic:
„*KYUSTENDIL AS A SPIRITUAL CHRISTIAN CENTER OVER THE CENTURIES. THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY"*(as well as his other related publications), in connection with a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor for the needs of the the Center for Slavo-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev" - in professional field 2.2. *History and Archeology: History and Culture of the Balkans XV - XVII centuries*
(Official Gazette, issue 5 dated 17.01.2025)

The members of the esteemed Scientific Jury were presented with both the dissertation "*Kyustendil as a spiritual Christian center over the centuries. The Metropolitan Church of the Assumption of the Virgin* Mary (ISBN 978-619-93223-1-4 pdf), as well as a selection of articles similar to the topic of the competition.

Monographic work:

In order to be evaluated, a completed work was presented to the jury, which is thematically related to tracing the history in one of the richest regions with preserved ancient/ late antique, late medieval and Renaissance monuments in the Southwestern Bulgarian lands - namely Pautalia / Velbazhd / Kyustendil. The dissertation is 198 pages in length.

The scientific text is organized in a markedly bifurcated structure, accompanied by an introduction, a conclusion, as well as a brief scientific apparatus. Making my review, I start from the end, where References are attached, as well as *sources* (pp.175 - 198). The section is structured professionally.

The literature used is abundant, clearly distinguishing between classical and modern studies relating to the period of urban flourishing in the ancient period, the challenging times of Late Antiquity; the share of the Bulgarian Middle Ages and decades of Serbian domination until the period of permanent establishment of Ottoman Rule in the region. It also covers the period characterized by the colorful and somewhat unclear picture of social upswing, population

migrations, as well as the role of the church as a factor in organizing spiritual life and intra-church confrontations.

Historical sources have been conscientiously handled (as distinguished by the indicator *of unpublished - published*), and their completeness is indicative. Late antique and Byzantine testimonies are included, starting with the Codex of Theodosius, passing through the descriptions of the grammarian Hierocles to Stephen of Byzantium and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The author has worked with archival documents, with works from the time of J. Ivanov, T. Burmov, through V. Bešhevliev and As. Vasiliev, up to the inclusion of the latest research on the topics under consideration (and such from the current year).

Under the "cover" summary "*Kyustendil - a spiritual center of Christianity*" is hidden the real historical part of the study. The main objective of the study is set out in the introduction - "*to make a synthesis of the history of the city of Kyustendil as a spiritual Christian center through the centuries and a comprehensive study of the metropolitan church "Assumption of the Virgin Mary*" (p.7). Four main tasks are clearly identified to be fulfilled in the course of the work. The chronological framework is extended to a range of time between the IV century and up to the time of the closure of the Kyustendil Metropolia at the end of the nineteenth century. The logical clarification is clearly deduced that in this period of a millennium and a half there will undoubtedly be some „blank spots" in the general political, spiritual, economic, and demographic picture of the topos under consideration. The springs for this long period are naturally also of a diverse nature.

The „*historical atmosphere*", i.e. the synthesized history of today's Kyustendil, is the subject of analysis – pp. 15 - 72. This is practically the purely historical, initial part of the work of Chief Ass. Angelov, PhD. The first separate part is "*Kyustendil during Antiquity*" (pp. 15 – 29). The picture of the foundation and early development of the *topos* is recreated here in detail, accompanied by numerous historical references. Perhaps this part of the earliest history of the city (otherwise indisputably important) could be shortened a little at some points (for example, during the city self-government) at the expense of events from later local history. A little more space could be given to the general processes that took place in the Empire during the period of Late Antiquity, when the urban territory here was also subjected to dramatic changes (on p.22; on pp. 30-31). In practice, it is precisely from the time of Constantine the Great that the Christian history

of the city begins (as it is marked in the very title of the dissertation). The author has successfully recreated the picture of the early Christian advance and the role of the local episcopate, pp. 24 - 29. Along with some parallels between local temples and some Italian models, perhaps something more could be added about the connections between Christian *Pautalia* and the nearby centers along the Bregalnica River - in the direction of the Vardar and *Stobi* rivers in the southern direction.

A proper place is given to the synthesized picture of *medieval Velbazhd* (pp. 29 – 44), where Angelov, in his capacity as a historian, has conveyed the most important moments of rise or defeat for the city and the region. In favor of the readability of the text, it would be appropriate to put some quotations from written documents (e.g. pp 30 - 31; 42) associated with the high city clergy - all in connection with the appearance of the city not only in a political, but also in a spiritual sense. There is no break in the author's story about the region for the period after 1282 - until the end of the XIV century.

The last „historical“ section (pp. 44 – 72) is dedicated to *Kyustendil and its surroundings already under Ottoman rule* as the so-called „Constantine Land“ - later Kyustendil Sanjak. Here the demographic picture of the region is developed and the map of the Christian topography is supplemented: for example, the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, the Patriarchate of Peć, and the Patriarchate of Constantinople (pp. 49 - 50). The dynamics in the transformations of the dioceses are also taken into account - for example, the development of the so-called Archbishopric of Kolasia (XV - XVIII century) and its famous metropolitans (pp. 53 - 56). Also in this chapter, the author manages to continuously follow the thread of recreating local Christian history, which is also implied in the very title of the work.

The second core part of the book refers specifically to the history of the metropolitan church "*Assumption of the Virgin Mary*" in the city (pp. 73 - 172). The tools of art history, the techniques of temple construction, the iconography and written data are used here. The author refers to various historical records for the early history of the temple in question after 1816/1817, as far as there are preserved evidence from that turbulent period (p. 74 et seq.). On the following pages, the original architectural plan of the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary after its reconstruction in 1833/1837 (p. 80 et seq.) is sequentially presented. The iconostasis partition and the style of the Royal Doors are examined in detail (pp. 88 - 90). Not verbose, but concisely and

with concise information – pp. 73 - 91, Mr. Angelov has compiled an exhaustive “passport” of this significant central Kyustendil temple.

The part dedicated to "icons, iconostasis and church furniture in the temple*" (pp. 93-172) is also located entirely in the field of art history*. An authoritative opinion on these pages will be given by art historians. The text sequentially examines the iconostasis on the second floor, as well as the icons. Here the author skillfully embarks on a description of the individual artifacts of woodcarving and iconography: in particular the Greek icon samples (pp. 98-112), as well as those made by Hristo Dimitrov (pp. 112-122). Naturally, a detailed description of the frescoes decoration of the temple (p. 140 et seq.). This second part of the dissertation, dedicated specifically to the history and structure of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary temple, highlights the Angelov's many years of experience in the expert examination of a number of cult monuments from the southwestern Bulgarian lands.

I have some recommendations for *the conclusion* of the dissertation (pp. 169-172), which could be more complete and descriptive. A derivation and even repetition of generalizations from other parts of the work would not be detrimental to the final conclusion of the text and its overall impression.

I have some remarks regarding the style of the text, but I hope they will be removed during the final editing. It is advisable to avoid some unnecessary repetitions and refine certain “heavy” structures.

As for the presented monographic work of Mr. Angelov “*Kyustendil as a spiritual Christian center over the centuries. The Metropolitan Church of the Assumption of the Virgin* Mary” (Sofia, 2025), I maintain the opinion that this is a “compact, niche” study with a certain scientific value and an obvious contributory nature. Despite the vast volume of research devoted to the cult architecture and art in our lands in the range between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the author has managed to cover the historical evidence of a specific Christian monument. With the subsequent publication, taking into account the recommendations or remarks of the Scientific Jury, the book would undoubtedly arouse interest in the scientific community in Bulgaria and abroad, and would be appreciated on its merits.

Related articles (and related topics):

What are the other scientific contributions of the candidate? Most of all, these are the studies (parts of monographs or articles) dedicated to church architecture, icon painting and inscriptions in the Southwestern Bulgaria and the nearby cross-border lands, such as: "*The Church of St. Archangel Michael" near the village of Goranovtsi, Kyustendil region*" (2023; pp. 43-106); "Unpublished inscriptions related to the scene of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary from the Kremikovtsi Monastery" (*Palaeobulgarica*, 4/2024); *"Churches and monasteries in the Southwestern Bulgaria" (XV - XVII centuries*), 2nd Edition, 2025 (co-author); "The inscription from the apse of St. Mark's Church on the Babuna River near Veles" (article, 2021); "The frescoes in the church "St. Archangel Michael" near Goranovtsi" (*Problems of Art*, 2/ 2015); "The influence of the ritual on the conceptual program of the church "St. George" in Kolusha (article - BAS, 2001); "The church "St. Athanasius" in Boboshevo - Studies and Problem" (*Proceedings of the Historical Museum of Kyustendil*, Vol. XIV, 2006), as well as other materials co-authored.

I have known my colleague Svetozar Angelov for a quarter of a century. I am a witness to his scientific growth and specialization as a historian of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, as well as to his entry, some years ago, into the difficult matter of art criticism, in which he showed apparent interest. I am also aware of his successful teaching activity in the field of Byzantine History, as well as in general courses related to the history of art.

It can definitely be concluded that the candidacy of the Chief Ass. Svetozar Angelov, PhD fully meets the profile of the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" and in my opinion, my colleague Mr. Angelov would in the future fully realize himself in a further academic career.

Prof. Rumen Boyadzhiev, PhD in History

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Place: Sofia

Date: 02 May 2025

Rumen Boiadzhiev

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