

Assoc. prof. Pavel Pavlov
Department of “Historical Theology”
Theological Faculty – Sofia University “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”
“Sveta Nedelya” Square 19
NACID Registration No:29752

R E V I E W
of the presented works
for participation in the competition for the academic position of “assoc.
professor” in 2.4 Religion and Theology
(Church archeology), for the needs of the Theological Faculty at the Sofia
University „Sv. Kliment Ohridski“,
Announced in DV 100 / 16.12.2022

Only candidate: Vencislav Georgiev Karavalchev, PhD SU "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", Theological Faculty.

This review was prepared in my capacity as a member of the scientific jury for the competition according to Order No. RD 38-49 / 27.01.2023 of the Rector of SU. At the first meeting (Prot. No. 1 / 02.03.2023) the scientific jury considered that the documents presented in the competition correspond to the legal requirements. At this meeting I was designated as a reviewer.

Contest details

The competition was announced correctly, and one candidate participated in it: Chief Asst. Vencislav Georgiev Karavalchev from the Theological Faculty of SU “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”. No violations were committed in the procedure. The candidate meets the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of ZRASRB. There is no proven plagiarism in the scientific works submitted for participation in the competition, which is why the scientific production presented by him in the above mentioned competition for the academic position of "associate professor" is allowed to be evaluated.

Applicant details

I have known the candidate since 1989, even as a student at SA “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”. I was also his supervisor during his doctoral studies at the Theological Faculty.

Chief Asst. Ventsislav Georgiev Karavalchev, PhD was born on August 8, 1967 in Burgas. In his hometown, he graduated from secondary education at the School of Construction and Architecture “Collio Ficheto” in 1986. He completed his higher education at the Theological Faculty at SU in 1992 with very good results and the qualification “specialist in theology, theological-pedagogical and pastoral-theological profile”.

For almost two decades (with interruptions) he specialized and participated in various programs in different places in Europe (Switzerland, Great Britain, Greece, etc.) mainly in the field of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. In the period 2002-2011, he worked in Georgia and Ukraine in the field of education and interfaith dialogue. This gives him good contacts, as well as the ability to communicate in several languages (English, Greek, Russian).

Since 2013, he has been a full-time doctoral student at the Theological Faculty of SU, and on September 1, 2016, he obtained the title of “Doctor” in scientific direction 2.4. Religion and theology. From February 23, 2017, he was accepted as chief asst. prof. in the Department of Historical and Systematic Theology of the Faculty, this being his first employment contract in the country. Apart from this, in the period between 2005-2012 he was an editor and author in the Orthodox web project “Dveri na Pravoslaviето” (on a voluntary basis), and from 2017 to 2020 he was the director of the “Fondacia nasledstvo na Zografskata Sveta Obitel”. Member of 6 international organizations. Married with two grown children.

Description of scientific works

To participate in the competition, the candidate, Dr. Karavalchev, presents 16 scientific works, of which 1 monograph and 15 articles. The proposed monograph based on a defended dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" has already been reviewed and is not subject to a new evaluation under the present competition.

All suggested works are studies in the broad field of Church History. The publications were made between 2006 and 2017. All but one of the articles were published in the journal *Hristianstvo i Kultura*, and one was in the journal *Bogoslovska Misal*. I did not find any particular logic in this grouping of the publications proposed for the competition, which are generally quite far from the special discipline of the announced competition (not that colleague Karavalchev does not have other publications as well). The question is not in dwelling in the

minutiae, but in the responsibility for the development of Church archaeology, which has its own special place in the Cathedra of Historical Theology. The tendency to turn every theological discipline into a “history” is an old weakness that older teachers have been gradually overcoming over the past two decades.

The main work is the monograph “Christianity in Anchialo (Pomorie) (Sofia: Simolini 94, 2023. ISBN 978-619-7672-54-1)”. The work has a total volume of 218 pages and consists of: Preface, Ancient Anchialo (instead of Introduction), three parts (Early period, Middle Ages and Ottoman period), Churches of Anchialo (as an appendix), Instead of conclusion, Abbreviations, Cited sources, References. I will briefly touch on the individual parts here. In the Preface, the author notes: “it is not possible to create a dense historical narrative of the city's ecclesiastical past. Significant periods of time are represented only through iconic figures associated with Anchialo”. This clarification is important because from the title the reader is left with an impression of a complete picture of Christianity in Pomorie. I understand and accept this clarification. In Ancient Anchialo, the author very skillfully introduces us to pre-Christian history, using the necessary sources. He also analyzes the various hypotheses about the origin of the name, making his own proposal. The Early Period section consists of three important etudes that clearly characterize the importance of Anchialo as an early Christian center. Here I do not accept the “omission” of some authors from the “home” school, however insignificant their contribution, especially when such a voluminous literature is involved, which is not necessary for a monograph. This is a principle, otherwise the omission must be justified. The Middle Ages section is clearly dominated by the study of St. James of Anchialo (2/3 of the section), which I find the most interesting and contributing in the entire study. The Ottoman period part is the most fragmented. It contains three subsections with numerous prosopographical sketches. This part contains interesting data, but the “pieces” are quite messy, which makes it inferior to the previous two, even from a purely literary point of view. The Churches of Anchialo section, which I take to be separate, although not labeled as such in the table of contents, is particularly interesting and attempts to compensate for the lack of an archaeological component in the work.

The work is the result of a huge multi-year research and systematization work on the collection and interpretation of the material, especially in the prosopographical part, which deserves admiration. The composition is

constructed chronologically and written with attitude. The narration is easy to read and engaging. The language and style are academic. It should be noted that some parts of the monograph have already been published, but these publications were correctly not proposed for the competition in order to avoid duplication.

“Not everything that flies is to be eaten” - assumptions about the Bulgarian origin of one or another metropolitan are quite superficial and very often completely groundless (e.g. the case of Patriarch Antim VII). It is high time we realized that this issue is more than geographical and ethnic. If we go beyond the popularizing character of a text, more arguments are needed for scientific research, otherwise we are pouring water into other people's mills. I say this in good faith, because I do not lack such tendencies, although I make great efforts to curb them, but under no circumstances should we allow "Macedonization of science".

In addition to the monograph, the colleague Karavalchev also offers 15 articles for participation in the competition, dedicated to various issues of a public nature. All of them are implemented in the methodology of church-historical research and bring new moments to the issues under consideration. The proposed texts are readable, written in good, both academic and understandable for a wider range of readers, Bulgarian language. This I take to be an important merit of the proposed publications. No plagiarism was found in the scientific works submitted for the competition. The attached general list of scientific publications according to 10a is not correct, as it was directly downloaded by the Authors (duplicates point 11 of the Application) and media participations, etc., are not removed from it, which does not allow the precise determination of the scientific publications.

Scientific contributions

The monograph is an original work built on solid sources and considerable literature. The work of searching for the attracted sources is valuable and time-consuming, but an even more important contribution is the effort to interpret them in a new way.

I consider the concept used here of the preponderance of prosopography in the study of a certain topos to be interesting and mandatory. In modern science, this has been done since the 19th century (e.g. in anthropogeography) and there are famous representatives in our country. This is even more true for the Christian model of research, where, after Christology, anthropology is leading. It is another matter that this does not apply to archaeology.

Due to the limited volume of the review, I will stop outlining the noted contributions and declare that I agree with the applicant's other contributions of the monograph in the proposed reference, but call for the use of softer expressions.

I especially value as a special significant contribution the translations of dozens of articles and studies by prominent theologians from various fields of theology, made and published by the colleague-candidate.

Chief asst. Karavalchev, PhD has participated in several important regional, national and international conferences with reports. This is an important contribution, I would just recommend that the definition of “plenary report” be handled a bit more carefully here.

The candidate correctly and with a complete bibliographic description indicates 12 citations of his scientific publications, all in COBISS.

Educational work

The candidate Chief asst. Vencislav Karavalchev, Phd has been a teacher for 6 years at the Theological Faculty, Department of Historical Theology and has a sufficient supply of lectures, usually exceeding the workload required for the position. He teaches the compulsory disciplines: Ecclesiastical Archaeology, Arabic Language, History of the Arabs and Islam (VII-XIV centuries), as well as the electives: Ecclesiastical-Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations, Sufism, etc. in the undergraduate program of the Faculty. In the African Studies major at FCNF, he leads the course on History of Christianity in Africa. In recent years, he has been giving lectures in his field, both in the Master's programs and in the SDC. I know and positively evaluate the teaching work of the colleague. In addition, it should be emphasized that Karavalchev has never refused a teaching load in the department, which is a very good attestation in collegial terms. At the suggestion of the founder and head of the master's program "Christian Pilgrimage" in 2018, he was appointed as the head of the program, but unfortunately in recent years it did not start due to the lack of sufficient applicants.

In the report on the indicators under Art. 112, para. 2, the specified positions do not formally correspond to the spirit of the paragraph. In this case, however, the hypothesis of this reference does not come into use, due to the lack of another candidate.

I declare that I have no joint publications or any other type of conflict of interest within the meaning of the law with the candidate under this procedure.

Conclusion

After getting acquainted in detail with the documents and scientific works submitted for the competition, and convinced of their significance and contributions, and having in mind the teaching and research work of my colleague Dr. Karavalchev, I give my positive assessment of his candidacy for the academic position “docent” in the professional direction 2.4. Religion and theology in the scientific specialty Church Archaeology. I vote FOR and recommend to the colleagues of the scientific jury that we propose to the Scientific Council of the Theological Faculty of SU “Sv. Kliment Ohridski” to elect Chief asst. Vencislav Georgiev Karavalchev, PhD to the academic position of “associate professor” in the above mentioned professional direction and scientific specialty.

Sofia, 28.03.2023

St. Boyan-Enravota Martyr

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(assoc. prof. Pavel Pavlov)