



OPINION

Relevant to an academic competition for “**Associated Professor**” position, announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies and Centre of Thracology “Prof. Alexander Fol” at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBSCT-BAS), for the needs of Department “Digital Cultural Heritage”, in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Power and regionalism in the Balkans 12th-13th centuries), promulgated in the State Gazette No. 55/ 15.07.2022., with sole applicant

Kalin Yordanov Kirilov, PhD.

Kalin Yordanov is a graduate of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, department “History of Bulgaria”, where in 2004 he defended his master's thesis, dedicated to the topic: “Sacral rituals, magical practices and miracles in the warrior tradition of medieval Bulgaria”, supervisor Prof. Dr. M. Kaymakamova. During the period 2007-2010, he was a full-time PhD-student at the Sofia University, Department of “Ancient History, Thracian Studies and Medieval History”, and in 2011, under the scientific supervision of Prof. K. Gagova, he successfully defended his dissertation on the topic: “The Crusaders: Relics and Miracles”.

Since 2020, Kalin Yordanov has been working at the Department of “Digital Cultural Heritage”, Institute of Balkan Studies and Center for Tracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Before that, he was the head of the Boyana Church Branch, at the National Historical Museum. He was a part-time lector at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and assistant professor of Medieval History at the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”.

Dr. Yordanov's scientific interests are related to the development of problems dedicated mainly to the European and Balkan medieval history. One of the main emphasis in his research work is placed on the topic of the Crusades and the fate of the Balkans. As a result of these studies, Kalin Yordanov published his first book entitled

“The Crusades: Relics and Miracles (Pilgrimage, Adventure and Relic-hunting in the Orient in the XIth to XIIIth Centuries)”, Sofia 2015, based on his PhD thesis.

At the announced competition for the academic post of “Associate Professor”, Dr. Yordanov appears with seventeen publications in various scientific editions (see the attached list of publications). Among them, two independent monographs, one chapter of a collective monographic work, six studies and eight articles. The presented habilitation work is on the topic: “The Prince of Philippopolis: the Unknown Despot Alexius Slav in the Light of New Sources and Discoveries” and is in a volume of 297 pages. The study is divided into four areas of scientific research.

The first chapter is based on the analysis of two historical documents from the official chancellery of Pope Honorius III, thus far unknown in Bulgarian historiography. It is about two letters of the Pope, addressed to the higher clergy of Latin Romania, which for the first time came into scientific circulation precisely in this study. Through a comparative analysis of the information contained in the papal correspondence, and based on the other, already known, written sources, Dr. Yordanov presents the despot Alexius Slav as the legitimate ruler of the Philippopolis and its region. Referring to the historical sources and the frequent confusion of the toponyms “*Philippi*” and “*Philippopolis*”, the author identifies “*S. princeps Philippensis*” and assumes that behind the abbreviation “*S.*” stands the personality of the despot Alexius Slav, who ruled his extensive autonomous territorial domain with the title “Prince of Philippopolis”. The author truthfully and argumentatively supports his thesis, presenting in detail the historical context in which the described events unfold.

The new information from the written sources, analyzed by Dr. Yordanov in the first chapter of the habilitation thesis, provokes an important problem, to which the second part of the study is devoted. The author dwells on the genealogy of the despot Alexius Slav, presenting in detail the existing hypotheses and at the same time offering his own interpretation on the subject. Kalin Yordanov elaborately argues his opinion that despot Slav is a successor (illegitimate son) of Ivanko-Alexius and for this reason, he also ruled the territories of his father, and in particular Philippopolis. In this part of the habilitation thesis the author examines the formation of a “*new and parallel Bulgarian state to the Tsardom of Tarnovo*”, separated within the boundaries of the

Philippopolis region, the Rhodopes and Eastern Macedonia. At the same time, Dr. Yordanov outlines the emergence of a “*new Balkan dynasty*” called the *dynasty of the Alexises*. This is an original hypothesis proposed for the first time by the author of the monograph under consideration. Analyzing the sources, Kalin Yordanov reveals the enmity and rivalry between Alexius Slav and the the Asenid dynasty in Tarnovo, which became a factor that led to the dramatic demise of the despot and his domain. I would like to emphasize that this part of the study, together with the first chapter of the habilitation thesis, constitutes the most essential and contributing part of the study.

The third part of the habilitation work is significantly shorter compared to the first two chapters. This part of the research is mainly based on the archaeological excavations in Melnik that have been carried out in recent years. As a result of them, the family tomb at the “Holy Trinity” Chapel of “Panagia Pantanassa” monastery in Melnik was identified as a mausoleum of despot Alexius Slav and his family. One of the finds – a sgraffito ceramic cup from Melnik, leaves no doubt about the heraldic character of the image displayed on the pottery. The author identified the depiction as an image of a heater-shaped shield displaying a Frankish style coat of arms. Examining the floral motifs, he concluded that stylized roses were depicted on the vessel. The author makes numerous analogies and points out parallels of similar images on heraldic sgraffito pottery from the 13th century. K. Yordanov concluded that the presence of such ceramics in Melnik is an interesting sign confirming the penetration of the Western European cultural tradition into the court of the despot Alexius Slav.

The last fourth chapter of the habilitation thesis is based on the images from the Boyana church. Kalin Yordanov expresses a hypothesis concerning the origin and identification of sebastokratorissa Desislava. The candidate assumes that the noble patroness (ktetoress) was the alleged daughter of the despot Alexius Slav from his first marriage to the Latin princess, daughter of the Latin emperor Henri de Hainault. Dr. Yordanov found a basis for this suggestion in the specificity of the mural images. In my opinion, this hypothesis could hardly find direct confirmation in historical sources. The author stated himself that his idea represents a “bold and challenging conjecture” (p. 238).

In conclusion, I have to underscore that the academic production of Kalin Yordanov is undoubtedly valuable for medieval studies. The submitted "Reference on Scientific Contributions" sufficiently reflects the contribution moments both in the habilitation monograph and in the other research topics. The scientific materials meet the approved "Minimum Requirements" for this academic position according to the current law on academic development, which can be seen from the candidate's completed forms.

All of the above gives me reason to support the election of Kalin Yordanov in the academic post of "Associate Professor", for which I will also vote at the closing session of the Scientific Board for this competition.

Sofia, November the 15th, 2022

Signature:

(Elena Kostova, PhD, Assoc. Prof. at the
Institute for Historical Studies – BAS)