

## ATTITUDE

### On the habilitation of Dr. Kalin Jordanov

Kalin Kirilov Yordanov is the only candidate for the competition for "docent" (Asc. Prof.), announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Tracology. Before applying for habilitation, he, together with his research activity, held administrative positions, among which the management of the national museum "Bojanska Church" deserves mention. This gives him the opportunity to take an additional and in-depth look at the wall paintings of this church, which are one of the most significant achievements of the Bulgarian medieval painting art.

Dr. Kalin Yordanov is a researcher mainly of the Crusades, among which the Fourth occupies a special place, all related problems (separatism in Byzantium and its adjacent areas, prosopography of the involved persons from the Orthodox and Catholic rites), unknown letters of Pope Honorius III, period painting, urban life, identification of cities and individuals, relics, etc. What is remarkable to me is the depth with which he approaches the subject. This thoroughness and punctuality is one of the hallmarks of his work. There is no doubt that Dr. Yordanov is one of the best Bulgarian and international connoisseurs of this period. Along with this, it should be noted that he did not always clearly distinguish those works of his that are relevant to his habilitation from the previous topics that are related to his dissertation.

For the announced competition, the most important is his monograph, dedicated to Alexius Slav, lord of Tsepina, the Rhodopes, the Duchy of Philippopolis, Melnik and their adjacent areas. Much can be said about this monograph, given the variety of issues that the author touches upon in it. He has chosen a classic approach: identification of the problem and its comprehensive treatment based on Western, Byzantine and local sources. It must be said that Dr. Yordanov has an excellent command of the material, at the source level, and then also at the historiographical level. Along with this, a question stands out, which to some would seem elementary: Nikitas Choniates and George Acropolitus are called "chronists" or "chroniclers" in many places, but they are not. They are historians, according to Karl Krumbacher's classic definition. Theodore Scutariot is a chronicler, and there is no doubt about it.

The main theses of the author are several and I would grade them as follows: 1. Alexii Slav is the son of Ivanko from his extramarital relationship with an unknown sister of the wife of Tsar Asen. 2. The two letters of Pope Honorius III refer to him, from which it is clear that Alexius Slavus killed the bishop of Philippi/Philippopolis. 3. Alexius Slav and his entire family (his second wife from the Petralifa family, the child from the first and the child from his second marriage) were killed around

1230, which ended his rule) 4. The founder or the female ktitor of the Boyan Church Desislava was daughter of Alexii Slav. There are many other interesting theses, but for lack of space I will refrain from commenting on them. Let's dwell on each of the points highlighted above separately.

First: Alexius Slav was the son of Ivanko and according to this thesis he must have been born around the time of the plot against Tsar Asen I or shortly after. On the other hand, if the skeleton in the Melnik Monastery of St. Virgin Pantanasa belongs to Alexius Slav, of which there can be no doubt, DNA studies show that the year of birth is around 1190. Accepting Dr. Yordanov's thesis about the genealogy of the despot Alexius Slav, which is substantiated at length, wide and in depth, I think its weak point is the chronology. If he is Ivanko's son from his illicit relationship, which led to the assassination of Tsar Asen, then the person in question has not had time to rise much at a tender age. Alexius Slav may have been the son of Ivanko, but the woman who was his mother remains unknown, and the year of his birth predates the conflict between Assen I and Ivanko. In order to create a dynasty, to be named Alexievtsi, it takes time and more representatives, not just two or three.

Second: The Assassination of the Bishop of Philippi. This city, known in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Dr. Kalin Yordanov identifies with Filipopolis (Plovdiv), pointing out that such a mistake was often made in that era. This thesis is convincing, especially since the author refers to letters of the Pope unknown in Bulgarian science. However, even here the doubt remains whether the papal office made the mistake in question with the name of the city, given that the city of Philippi was well known to the public at the time.

Third: The entire family of despot Alexius Slav was killed and buried in the monastery of St. Virgin Pantanasa. This assassination explains the rapid disappearance of the despot's principality probably after the battle of Klokotnitsa. It is logical to assume that this was done by order of the Bulgarian Tsar John Assen II. The thesis is convincing and casts some doubt on the Byzantine thesis about the "goodness" of the Bulgarian Tsar. When there are interests, there are no emotions!

Fourth: The female founder of the Boyan church, Desislava, was the daughter of Alexii Slav. For this thesis, the author refers to the research of Andre Grabar, who points out that the despotitsa's gesture and posture betrays a Western influence. Here we can draw an analogy with the knightly initiation of the despot Alexius Slav by the Latin emperor Henri d'Henault and, in general, with the penetration of Western orders into Byzantium long before the beginning of the 13th century. The thesis, in my opinion, is not very convincing. It was based on an opinion about Western influence in the painting of the Boyan church. But influences are one thing, prosopography is

another! Fashion knows no bounds, but whether it can be an argument, even in that non-communication age, is another matter!

The studies and articles that accompany the monograph are generally related to its subject matter or enrich it. This is the case with the relics of Robert de Clary, the folklore elements related to the Principality of Plovdiv, the Western motifs in the painting of the Boyan Church, etc. I was particularly impressed by the author's statement about the re-exposition of the Bulgarian military victory near Edirne in 1205. Genoveva Tsankova-Petkova hinted at such a possibility in her monograph on the Asenevtsi, but did not develop this thesis further. Dr. Yordanov does so convincingly, his analysis being accompanied by a calculation of the number of knights involved in the battle. In this way, the convincing conclusion is reached about the huge numerical superiority of the Bulgarian-Cumans in the battle near Edirne. Another issue is that the art of war includes the ability to ensure numerical superiority over the enemy. And Tsar Kaloyan knows how to do this!

The scientific contributions of Dr. Yordanov during his habilitation are indisputable. He works with great desire and enthusiasm, and this cannot but be appreciated. Another question is whether all his theses will be accepted, either because of the tenacity of tradition, or because some of his arguments, in the personal judgment of the writer of these lines, are not sufficient. As a general note, I will point out that there is too much detail in the monograph and it makes it difficult to read, although the author has a clean and clear presentation style. If the thesis is clear, it does not need verbosity.

Otherwise, I will vote in full consciousness for the habilitation of Dr. Kalin Yordanov. There are not many researchers who know the subject in depth, explore it willingly and present it in an appropriate way. New theses in our science are difficult to build, but Dr. Yordanov is not afraid to do so, taking all the risks of this endeavor. Therefore, I think that he fully deserves the scientific and scientific-teaching title "docent"(Asc.prof.).

Sofia, The 12<sup>th</sup> of Novemberq 2022

Prof habil. Christo Matanov