

REVIEW

BY DSc VIOLETA EVGENIEVA NESHEVA, PROFESSOR

(NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE WITH MUSEUM - BAS)

Member of the Scientific Jury according to Order No. 113 RD-16/01.08.2022

OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE IBS-BAS Dr. RUMYANA PRESHLENOVA, PROFESSOR

FOR THE COMPETITION

for the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of Higher education 2. Humanitarian Studies, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Power and Regionalism in the Balkans XIIth - XIIIth Century) for the needs of the section "Digital Cultural Heritage" at the IBS - BAS, announced in State Gazette No. 55/ 15.07.2022.

WITH CANDIDATE DR. KALIN YORDANOV KIRILOV

Dr. Kalin Yordanov Kirilov, known as Kalin Yordanov by his publications, historian in the section "Digital Cultural Heritage" of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is the only candidate in the competition announced by the IBS - BAS for the academic position of "Associate Professor" (SG No. 55/ 15.07.2022). According to the submitted documentation, he meets the minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor under Article 2b, paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 of the Law on Research and Development (ЗПАССРБ) and according to the Rules of its Implementation at the IBS - BAS.

Graduate of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Kalin Yordanov completed his Higher education at the Faculty of History, majoring MA in History (1996-2004). Already his master's thesis "Sacred rituals, magical practices and miracles in the warrior tradition of Medieval Bulgaria" with the scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Miljana Kaymakamova betrays an unconventional thinking, with the direction of scientific interests towards the unofficial or little-known recesses of history, which would become a specific feature and style of his further work.

In 2007-2010, K. Yordanov was a full-time PhD student at the Department of "Ancient History, Thracology and Medieval General History" at the Faculty of History of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", with the dissertation thesis "The Crusades: relics and miracles", with scientific supervisor Prof. D.I.N. Krasimira Gagova. In 2011, after a successful defense, he

received a PhD degree in 2.2. History and Archaeology (Medieval History - History of the Mediterranean).

In 2011-2022 he was a lecturer at the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" (Faculty of Law and History, Department of History) and at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and also a teacher of History and Civilization (in English) at the International High School "Prof. Dr. Vasil Zlatarski" in Sofia.

In 2018-2020 he was the Director of the Boyana Church Museum, a branch of the National History Museum. This period has played, as he himself hints, and as it can be seen from his publications, a very important role in his professional qualification. His daily contact with one of the world's most remarkable immovable cultural assets has given him opportunities to enter and specialize in the field of the study, conservation, promotion and socialization of cultural heritage, to establish useful contacts with researchers from various specialties, restorers, museologists, etc. and to build his own hypotheses, which he presents to us in some of his publications in connection with the competition. His work in Boyana actually traced his further creative path, which continues from 2020 until now, and hopefully - in the future at the IBS - BAS, in the Digital Cultural Heritage Section.

To his working career are added even more activities - freelance journalist, musician, composer and producer (bands "Irfan"; "Isihia"), even work in the foreign trade sphere. These are not subject to assessment in the context of the competition, but they do paint a positive picture of the candidate as a man of broad outlook, enterprise and creativity, with proven communication skills, who has successfully managed to combine these activities with active research work.

Kalin Yordanov's research interests, studies and publications are in the field of Medieval studies and cover mainly the Middle Byzantine period (XIth – XIIIth centuries). They are related to the Crusaders in the Balkans and their interaction with the Balkan peoples, or more generally - the East-West relations in the Middle Ages, which have left lasting traces in our cultural heritage up to the modern times. They cover a very wide range of topics, which requires, in addition to the traditional methods of research such as analysis and synthesis, an interdisciplinary approach with a broad-spectrum professionalism, which is generally rare in historical writings, but is present in the candidate's works.

Kalin Yordanov participated in the competition with three monographs - two independent and one collective (one sole-authored title), six studies and eight articles.

I would especially like to highlight here his first monograph (No. 2 in the attached List of Publications), "The Crusades: Relics and Miracles (Pilgrimage, Adventure and Shrine-Hunting in the Orient XI-XIII Centuries)", printed in 2015. This is a very valuable work, the first major and summarizing work, with undeniable contributions to Bulgarian, European and world historiography. Unfortunately, however, the work repeats the topic of the dissertation submitted for his PhD degree in History and Archeology, albeit with an added clarification in the subtitle. According to the regulations, it should be published and scored, but it is not taken into account in the discussion of the scientific production for the competition. Three of the articles (Nos. 6, 7 and 8), which were published in connection with the award of his PhD degree, are not taken into account. Nevertheless, I would like to stress that these publications highlight the author as an excellent expert on the subject, which is equally intriguing for the scientific community and in the public domain. This topic is also present in some of the candidate's later publications (articles Nos. 3, 4, 5, study No. 4) - it is inexhaustible. "The Venetian 'furta sacra' and the hunt for relics in the Latin Empire of Constantinople (1204-1261)", for example, was also developed as a section of the collective monograph "The Western Expansion of the Balkans: the Military Orders and the Italian Maritime Republics of the 12th-15th centuries", printed in 2018, with co-authors: Alexander Nikolov, Vladislav Ivanov, Nikola Dyulgerov, Simeon Hinkovsky.

The work presented by Kalin Yordanov as a habilitation opus in connection with the competition - "The Prince of Philippopolis: the unknown despotes Alexios Slav in the light of new sources and discoveries", is related to the new territorial formations in Southeastern Europe as a result of the separatism in Byzantium and Bulgaria and the Fourth Crusade, with the most prominent example - the state of despotes Alexios Slav (1208 - 1230). It is specifically pointed out by the author that this work was created "in the course of a larger study devoted to the Latin Duchy of Philippopolis, an fleeting Balkan crusader seigniory formed in Northwestern Thrace and on the Northern slopes of the Central Rhodopes as a result of the Fourth Crusade." With this, he states his future intentions to broaden the thematic scope of his scholarly work.

The research is inspired by Kalin Yordanov's lucky encounter with new historical sources containing biographical data on one of the most vivid and charismatic historical figures of the Balkans in the Middle Ages, such as despotes Slav, who, especially in the last two decades, has been permanently in the sight of Bulgarian historians, archaeologists and other specialists. Specifically, we are talking about two letters from the secret papal register in the Vatican, about donors inscriptions in the Boyana Church (a layer after Kaloyan's from 1259) near the portrait of the Sevestokratora Desislava, and about an archaeological discovery - a family crypt in the

church-mausoleum "Holy Trinity" of the monastery " Our Lady of Panthanassa", built by despotes Alexios Slav, the remains of the deceased individuals in which are identified by me as the despotes himself, his second wife Na Petralifina and two of his sons from his two marriages.

The author subjects these points of reference to an extremely penetrating analysis and synthesis with the ambitious multidirectional aim "to shed new light on the personality of despotes Alexios Slav, as well as on the processes that led to the formation of his autonomous principality and his church, on the question of the investiture that led to his legitimation as a legitimate ruler and his becoming a vassal and son-in-law of Henry of Flanders, the Latin emperor of Constantinople, on the problem of his knightly initiation, his family coat of arms and his integration into the circles of the Frankish feudal aristocracy of the Balkans.... and on the specific events and circumstances that led to his detachment from the orbit of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, his political reorientation towards the neo-Byzantine Epirus of Theodore Comnenus and his fatal clash with the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Asen II, as well as to his own downfall and the end of his principality. Issues that were hitherto unknown or not given (enough) attention by historians. Last but not least, among the tasks set by this study is the revision and illumination of the problems related to the genealogy and ancestry of this remarkable medieval independent Bulgarian ruler, as well as the question of his direct ancestors and descendants."

The monograph (324 pp.), which I would define as a collection of interconnected self-contained essays spread over four chapters, with a common introduction and conclusion, is constructed in accordance with this broad aim. I should note that this encompassing essay is preceded by preliminary publications (articles, studies).

Chapter I - "The Prince of Philippopolis: between Constantinople and Rome (The Story of a Significant Political Murder of the Early 13th Century)" is a very useful work, because on the one hand it introduces into Bulgarian historiography new source data from two letters from 1217 and 1218 of the Roman Pope Honorius III (1216 - 1227) with a sinister accusation against "S., the Prince of Philippopolis," as the despotes was known in the Vatican annals, in an assassination of the Catholic archbishop of the town of Philippi, Guillaume, instigated by his personal retinue, with a sentence that effectively outlawed Alexios Slav and made him persona non grata within the Latin Empire of Constantinople. On the other hand, in his very cogent commentary, with many analogies from the Vatican archives, and the author supports the original editors of the letters, that by the abbreviation "S." should be understood "Slav." Furthermore, drawing on all up to 2017 (the first preceding publication under a similar title),

other sources and writings focusing on the personality of despotes Alexios Slav and his state, as well as on historical events during the era, Kalin Yordanov points out, that the Latin Emperor Henry of Flanders gave as a dowry to the despotes Slav also the district of Philippopolis together with its center the city of Philippopolis, which caused him to be named in Rome "Prince of Philippopolis" after the retirement of its Latin ruler Renier of Trith, and that this has not been pointed out by researchers so far. I will remark here something on my own part. It is known that the city of Philippopolis was much destroyed by the Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan in 1205, and part of its population moved to Melnik - this is the reason why Philippopolis has not been included within the borders of Slav's fief by researchers so far. But archaeological research in Plovdiv in recent years shows continuous life in it, despite the actions of the Bulgarian tsar. Some archaeological structures unearthed on Nebet Tepe are probably associated with Alexios Slav, but let's leave it to Plovdiv archaeologists to give a definitive answer to the question. And what Honorius III has written (actually a transcript!) is a strong support for the by now established unquestioning policy of despotes Alexios Slav to preserve Orthodoxy in his lands both by historical sources and archaeological means.

Chapter II is devoted to the genealogy of despotes Alexios Slav, the genesis and demise of his principality. After a brief introduction to the importance and role of genealogy in the ruling aristocrats of the Middle Ages, to their dynastic connections both for their personal self-esteem and for their policies and aspirations for lasting rule, the author discusses at length the personality of despotes Alexios Slav and, analyzing all the old and new hypotheses of Bulgarian and foreign scholars, proposes a new vision of the Bulgarian nobleman.

Finding a similarity between Ivanko Alexios's and Alexios Slav's domains based on geographical position, borders and territorial scope, the identical pattern in which the two nobles allied themselves with Constantinople's emperors, became members of their families and dominated among the ruling elites, they received as dowry the same province - the province of Philippopolis, their established rivalry with the Assenids in Tarnovo, despite being of the same family, their generally very similar fate, despite the great difference in the period of their independent rule, Kiril Yordanov, based on their common name Alexios and other supporting facts, builds new hypotheses. The first is of a closest blood relationship between Ivanko and Slav, who was his illegitimate son by a secret relationship with the sister of Elena, the wife of the Bulgarian tsar Asen I. The second is for the formation of a new dynasty of the Alexises, related to that of the Assenids (its branch both by direct and by consanguineous line), a Bulgarian state parallel to the Bulgarian state of Tarnovo in the face of Ivanko's short-lived

independent possession of the Philippopolska region and the Rhodope Mountains, and of Slav's subsequent state, which included the lands already held by Ivanko plus northeastern Macedonia with Melnik. Furthermore, the author, relying on archaeological data from the monastery of the despotes Slav in Melnik "Our Lady of Panthanassa", in particular - the discovered ktetor's family tomb in the memorial and commemorative church "Holy Trinity" and the remains in it, probably belonging to the despotes and his second family, justifies another hypothesis concerning the simultaneous death of the family found during the excavations, defined as a violent one - for its inspiration by the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Asen II as a family vendetta.

The first hypothesis is very interesting - it does not, in my opinion, substantially change the hitherto known profile of despotes Alexios Slav. As for the second, I find it hard to accept. There may be a blood relationship, but a dynasty... Besides, there is no evidence to accept the idea of Alexios of the Stanimac inscription as the son of Alexios Slav, apart from the coincidences in names and somewhat in timing. But I applaud the colleague for his both sound, cogent, and bold, daring, but not altogether convincing - at least at the present stage of knowledge - suggestions, such as there are in this and in the other chapters of the monograph, and which henceforth any specialist who touches the subject will do well to take up. As for the extreme political assassination, I see the perpetrator in the person of the Latins as most motivated, extremely malignant towards Slav under the influence on them of the papal sentence and other circumstances, especially his alliance with their bitterest enemy, Theodore Comnenus, which is reflected in the draft treaty and the treaty with John of Brienne of 1228/1229, evidence of the despote's still continuous official dependence on the court of Constantinople. I think it was the Perugia treaty that prompted him to accelerate the construction of the monastery of "Our Lady of Panthanassa" as his refuge - a fact we have established during the excavations of the church of St. Trinity", conceived as a family mausoleum.

Chapter III - A study on the knightly initiation and the family coat of arms of Despot Alexios Slav, is based on an archaeological find from grave No. 4 of the family tomb in Melnik - a glazed pottery cup, which was also present in the other three graves and whose purpose is related to the death communion. Unfortunately, all of the cups are very damaged, on the one hand, by the live coals carried with them and piled up in the grave chambers, and on the other, by the rockslides on the cemetery site over the centuries and by contact with organic matter.

The cup is published in detail by me in "Melnik", vol. 3. It is polychrome, with a specific sgraffito decoration which, as symbolism, gives clues to the identity of the deceased, identified

hypothetically with an unknown by name 20 - 25 year old son of despotes Alexios Slav from his first marriage with the daughter of the Latin emperor Henry of Flanders. Kalin Yordanov was the first scholar to see in the decoration of the inner surface of the vessel a schematic representation of a Frankish knightly coat of arms, which was confirmed by my fellow archaeologists, experts on the subject. The publications, mine and his, for which I provided him with an illustration, were prepared simultaneously. Thus I have adopted his opinion (as one possible interpretation of its symbolism) in the interpretation of the decorative motif, and I have quoted his article, later included as chapter three in the monograph under discussion, under print. I would like to emphasize that, besides being the first to recognize the family coat of arms of despotes Alexios Slav, given to him by Henry of Flanders at his wedding to the Princess of Flanders, it is to Kalin Yordanov's credit that the first special and very useful publication for Bulgarian historiography in this country on so-called heraldic pottery, examining the cup from grave No. 4 in Melnik against the background of numerous analogues and parallels of similar armorial representations on such pottery, which appeared in the 13th century, in the era of the Crusades in the Latin dominions throughout the Near East, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans (in the lands of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch, the Kingdom of Cyprus, the Principality of Morea (Achaean), the Genoese colonies on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor and the dominions of the Hohenstaufens and Angevans in southern Italy), and became particularly popular in Western Europe in the 14th-16th centuries. He concludes that the presence of such ceramics in a contact zone like Melnik raises the problem of the influence and penetration of Western European feudal traditions, chivalric symbolism and Courtois culture in the court of the Latin vassal despotes Alexios Slav and offers new perspectives on Bulgarian-Frankish relations in the first third of the 13th century. A small caveat - the presence of heraldic pottery in Melnik does not pose, but supports with a new example the solution of the problem of Western European cultural influences in the court of Slav, which have long been on the attention of archaeologists, architects, art historians and others. The coat of arms on the chalice from grave 4 is undoubtedly related to the young son of Slav and his knightly initiation, but whether despotes Alexios Slav was "the first and probably the only Bulgarian ruler of this era to be initiated into knighthood and to acquire a personal, family and seigniorial coat of arms thanks to his investiture as vassal and son-in-law of the Latin emperor in Constantinople" is, for now at least, only a logical guess.

Chapter IV - "Portrait of a Noble Lady of Bulgarian-Frankish Origin (an Attempt to Identify the Patroness of the Boyana Church)" is written on the basis of the author's painstaking and

very persistent research work during his three-year management of the Boyana Church Museum, in an attempt to clarify the origin of the Sevastokratoritsa Desislava, about whom until then there were only guesses in the scientific literature, leading to a connection with the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty. Kalin Yordanov builds an intriguing hypothesis on the basis of donator's (ktetor's) inscriptions in the Boyana Church (a layer after Kaloyan's of 1259) with the names Ivanko and Slav, as well as on the findings so far according to a number of publications, including his own (on the miracle of St. Nicholas), of Western European influences in the Boyana Church frescoes of 1259, by interpreting Desislava as a hitherto unknown from historical sources child of the first marriage of the despotes Alexios Slav with the daughter of the Latin emperor Henry of Flanders. Unfortunately, the remains discovered during excavations in the Kaloyan church decades ago, which can by inference and according to the burial practice of the era be attributed to the ktetors Kaloyan and Desislava, are in very poor condition and cannot be subjected to comparative DNA tests with those of Slav and his family, which would resolve this issue. However, Kalin Yordanov's hypothesis is logical and more arguments can be sought on it for its possible transformation into a thesis.

It is difficult to say everything in the limited confines of one review. Therefore, as a summary, I will stress that the scientific production by K. Yordanov is valuable, profound and multilayered, conscientious and contributory, as well as thought-provoking on the topics and issues addressed. I would add his enviable bibliographical awareness, which is no doubt helped by his command of several languages, including classical ones. His colourful and sophisticated style, which I would call artistic, helps to make the otherwise very fact-laden text easier to grasp, is impressive. I recommend, however, that wherever possible he avoids linguistic extraneousness, which unnecessarily burdens what is written in Bulgarian.

I would like to point out that the scientific production is truly "authorial" - based on personal research, analysis and interpretation, and I do not find any signs of plagiarism in it.

The candidate demonstrates marked activity in terms of participation and in membership of scientific organizations, and organization of scientific forums and events. According to the submitted biographical sketch, in the period 2012 - 2022, after obtaining the educational and scientific degree "PhD" he has participated in the work of 8 prestigious international and national scientific meetings, 1- abroad, and the rest - in Bulgaria, with impressive international participation. He is the founder and chairman of the cultural and historical association "Modvs Vivendi - Medieval Society in Bulgaria". Co-founder and member of the Bulgarian medievalist

association "Medievalia: Association for Mediterranean and European Medieval Studies".
Member of the Association of Byzantinists and Medievalists in Bulgaria.

On the basis of what has been said so far, I believe that Dr. Kalin Yordanov Kirilov is a promising scholar and researcher who has emerged as one of the leading specialists in the field of the Crusaders in the Balkans. His appointment to the position of Associate Professor will be very useful for the activities of the Digital Cultural Heritage Section of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I recommend that the esteemed Scientific Competition Jury also approve his candidature and propose his appointment to the Scientific Council of the IBS - BAS.

11. 11. 2022 / SOFIA

RESPONDENT:

DSc VIOLETA NESHEVA, professor