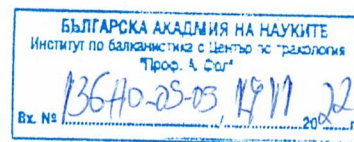


OPINION



From Prof. Dr. Georgi N. Nikolov from the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, member of the Scientific Jury according to the Order No. 113 RD - 16/01.08.2022 of the Director of IBCT–BAS Prof. Dr. Rumiana Preshlenova

On the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Power and Regionalism in the Balkans 12th – 13th centuries) for the needs of the section “Digital Cultural Heritage” of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology “Prof. Alexander Fol” at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, announced in State Gazette 55/15.07.2022 with the only candidate Dr. Kalin Yordanov Kirilov.

According to the submitted documentation, Dr. Kalin Yordanov Kirilov meets the minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor under Article 2b, paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and according to the Regulations for its implementation of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology “Prof. Alexander Fol” at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. All procedural deadlines required by the laws have been met. No elements of plagiarism are visible in the publications presented.

Dr. Kalin Yordanov participated in the competition with 16 publications (1 monograph – habilitation thesis; 8 articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes; 1 Study published in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-known databases of scientific information; 5 studies published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review or published in edited collective volumes; 1 published chapter of a collective monograph).

In the article *Bulgarian Folklore Relics from the Time of the Fourth Crusade and the Frangocracy in Northwestern Thrace* (2020), ancient legends and epic songs from the heroic folklore of the Rhodope and Sophia region, which have not been studied in detail, are examined and analyzed. In the article *A Reflection of the Fourth Crusade in the Frescoes of the Boyana Church (1258/1259)* (2019), important details of the scene of the “Miracle at Sea” from the St. John of God hagiography cycle are studied. Nicholas of Myra in the Boyana Church. In the article *Robert de Clary’s Enigmatic Collection of Constantinople Relics*

(2018), the author has retrieved and presented the collection of relics of Robert de Clary, Knight-Crusader of Picardy and chronicler of the Fourth Crusade, which he brought from Byzantium to Corby in Picardy after the capture of Constantinople in 1204. In the article *Pilgrims, Crusaders and Relic Hunters: from 'Holy Theft' and the Forgery of Relics to the Quest for the Grail* (2018), Kalin Yordanov discusses the theme of knightly wandering and the search for occult relics reflected in the novels about the Holy Grail that appeared between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the article *The Mysterious Collection of Constantinople Relics by Robert de Clary* (2016), the collection of the French chronicler, which he brought to his homeland from Byzantium after the capture of Constantinople in 1204, is presented, and in 1213 he donated 54 Constantinople relics to the Church of "St. Paul. Peter" in the Benedictine abbey of Corby in Picardy. The articles *The Constantinople Relics before 1204* (2011), *The Constantinople Relics before 1204* (2011), *Magic in the Political Practice of Byzantium and the Deaths of Some Medieval Bulgarian Rulers* (2008) and *The Merciful Harlots – Prostitution in the Latin Orient in the Age of the Crusades (12th–13th centuries)* (2009) examine interesting and little-known aspects of the Balkan Middle Ages. In the study *Portrait of a Noble Lady of Bulgarian-Frankish Origin (An Attempt to Identify the Custress of the Boyana Church)* (2022) the hypothesis is presented that the Sevastokratoritsa Desislava was the daughter of the first marriage of the despot Alexius the Slav. In the study *"Frankish" a coat of arms from the family tomb in the monastery "St. Our Lady of Pantanassa" in Melnik* (2021), a sgraffito ceramic vessel depicting a triangular knight's shield with a coat of arms was studied in the family crypt in the chapel of "Sts. Trinity" of the monastery "St. Our Lady of Pantanassa". In the study *The case "S., princeps Philippensis": two newly discovered letters of Pope Honorius III of 1217 and 1218 as a source for the relations between Alexius the Slav and the Latins* (2017), two historical documents from the office of Pope Honorius II, hitherto unknown in Bulgarian historiography, are subjected to a thorough analysis, which leads to the conclusion that between 1208 and 1218, the pope's letter to S. in 1218 Alexius the Slav was the second legitimate ruler of the Duchy of Philippopolis after Renie de Tri and before Gerard de Strom. The study *The New Holy Martyrs: the Cult of the Saints, Blesseds and Martyrs of the Crusader Movement of the 11th–13th centuries* (2013) examines the mechanism by which the Crusader movement of the 11th–13th centuries created a new mystical Christian tradition, leaving behind its holy martyrs and giving rise to new cults. In the study *A New Look at the Battle of Adrianople (The Military Resources of the Early Latin Empire and the Campaign of April 1205)* (2011), the author raises the issue of the significance, scale, results and consequences of this battle. In the study

Pilgrimage, the Cult of Relics and the Hunt for Shrines on the Eve of the First Crusade (2011), K. Yordanov shows the various ways in which the pilgrims came into possession of these pieces of sanctity, which they eventually took back to their homelands, the most popular remaining the purchase, exchange, gift, “sacred theft” and “finding” of relics. In the study *The Venetian “furta sacra” and the hunt for relics in Romagna (1204–1261)* (2018), the author concludes that, unlike other crusaders, the Venetian Doge and Venetian patricians and clerics had the advantage of knowing the sacred topography of the Byzantine capital, as well as Orthodox saints and martyrologies, and, moreover, they could decipher the Greek inscriptions on the reliquaries and reliquaries found during the sack of the city, which enabled them to select and pick out the most significant shrines from Constantinople’s treasures of relics and relics, which they systematically took to Venice.

Undoubtedly, the central place among the publications for the competition is occupied by the candidate’s latest monograph *The Prince of Philippopolis: the Unknown Despot Alexius Slav in the Light of New Sources and Discoveries* (Sofia, 2022). This voluminous work (322 pp.) is composed of four thematically linked scholarly essays (presented in four chapters), dedicated to an emblematic personality of the first three decades of the thirteenth century – the despot Alexius Slav.

The first chapter, “*The Prince of Philippopolis: between Constantinople and Rome (the story of a landmark political assassination in the early thirteenth century)*” (pp. 13–92), concerns two letters of the Roman Pope Honorius III (1216–1227) concerning the assassination of Archbishop Guillaume of Philippi. The author, argues and convincingly proves that the orderer of this murder was the despot Alexius the Slav, mentioned in the papal letters with the initial S.

The second chapter, “*Towards a Genealogy of Despot Alexius the Slav and the Genesis and Doom of His Principality*” (pp. 93–194), is divided into several paragraphs. In the first of these, Kalin Yordanov discusses the genealogy of Alexius the Slav in more detail. He firmly subscribes to the established view that the despot belonged to the numerous family of Asenevtsi. He further substantiates the thesis of the Romanian historian V. Mărculeț that Slav was the son of the Bulgarian boyar and Byzantine renegade Ivanko. In his prosopographical analysis, the author cites as evidence the name “Alexius”, borne by both Ivanko and the despot. Another element proving their kinship is the geographical position and the territorial extent of their possessions in the Rhodopes. Other interesting evidences in this direction are

given. Certain chronological discrepancies raise the possibility that Alexius the Slav was born to the sister of Tsaritsa Helena at the end of the 12th century. Very detailed and professional K. Yordanov has presented the origin, genesis and end of the rule of despot Alexius Slav.

The third chapter, *“Study on the Knightly Initiation and the Family Coat of Arms of Despot Alexius the Slav”* (pp. 195–226), is devoted to a coat of arms painted on a sgraffito-ceramic cup found in grave No.4 of the “St.Trinity” church of the Monastery of “Our Lady of Pantanassa” in Melnik. K. Yordanov convincingly proves that this was a heraldic representation of the family and seigniorial coat of arms of Alexius the Slav, found in his grave.

In the last fourth chapter of the book *“Portrait of a Noble Lady of Bulgarian-Frankish Origin”* (pp. 227–260) Kalin Yordanov presents interesting evidence and identifies the depicted querent in the Boyana Church – Desislava, as a daughter from the first marriage of Despot Alexius Slav.

In the monograph thus presented, Dr. Kalin Yordanov has used a large repertoire of methods of interdisciplinary research: historical analysis and synthesis, genealogy, prosopography, archaeology and painting, heraldry, etc. The author’s linguistic training and knowledge have enabled him to make the most of all historical sources and scientific literature on the issues under study. This publication of his shows that he is an accomplished professional and researcher of the Bulgarian media studies guild. His academic growth is fully justified and deserved.

Based on the above, I believe that **Dr. Kalin Yordanov Kirilov** fully deserves the academic position of **Associate Professor** in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Power and Regionalism in the Balkans 12th – 13th centuries) for the needs of the section “Digital Cultural Heritage” of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology “Prof. Alexander Fol” at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Sofia, 16 November 2022

Prof. Dr. Georgi N. Nikolov

(external member of the Scientific Jury)