

## REVIEW

by Prof. Vasya Nikolova Velinova, DSci

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professional field 2.1. Philology

reviewing the academic work submitted for the contest for the academic position Professor in  
professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology,

announced by New Bulgarian University, SG No. 65 of 12.08.2022 with a candidate

Assoc. Prof. Toma Ivanov Tomov, PhD

The candidate in the present competition for the academic position of Professor Toma Ivanov Tomov is a long-time lecturer in history at New Bulgarian University (since 2006). He holds a master's degree in history from Sofia University from 1994. In 2003 he defended his doctorate for obtaining the PhD degree, and since 2007 he has been an associate professor in the field of Medieval General History with his habilitation thesis "Constantinople and the Russian Colony (until 1204)".

From the attached competition documents, it can be seen that a procedure has been initiated that fully complies with the requirements in the RACRB Act and its Implementing Regulations, as well as the NBU Regulations. The only candidate in it, Assoc. T. Tomov has correctly applied complete and accurate data for meeting the minimum national requirements and the NBU criteria. The table and the publications and monographs submitted for the competition also show that the candidate not only meets the minimum requirements, but also far exceeds the minimum allowed by points.

The main thematic field of research of Assoc. T. Tomov is epigraphy with an emphasis on the epigraphic heritage (graffiti) preserved in the Church of St. Sofia in Istanbul. The monographic work with which the author participated in the competition is also dedicated to it. The title is "*The Unknown Church of St. Sophia". Sofia". Inscriptions-graffiti in Glagolitic and Cyrillic script*". In the same thematic field are also the articles proposed by the author, 12 in total - they report additional details about some of the inscriptions included in the monograph, as well as other graffiti testifying to the ethnicity of the pilgrims who left their memorial records in the Christian temple.

The monograph *The Unknown Temple "St. Sofia". Inscriptions-graffiti in Glagolitic and Cyrillic script* is a summary of the long-standing work of T. Tomov on these remarkable

epigraphic testimonies. The researcher permanently outlines the boundaries of a specific and poorly explored scientific field in Bulgaria - that of the Byzantine capital and the traces of Slavic presence preserved there. Also poorly studied due to its difficult accessibility is the specific source material with which he works - inscriptions-graffiti. Their identification, photographing, precise copying and deciphering is in itself a complex and laborious process, requiring specific knowledge in the field of photography and photometry, special equipment and a good knowledge of the graffiti tradition in a wide geographical area, which the author undoubtedly possesses. What he has achieved is respectable, as he combines a sourcing, historiographical and palaeographical approach to interpret the unique evidence.

The work is composed in two main parts. The first contains an introduction and a description of the Church of "St. Sofia", its history, reconstructions and renovations. The second part presents the graffiti according to their topography - in the western, southern and northern galleries respectively. The conclusion contains a detailed paleographic and linguistic analysis, making it an organic part of the whole study. At the end there are three appendices with diagrams and illustrations, an index of the inscriptions according to the classification worked out and defended by the author, a glossary-index and paleographic tables. The translation of major parts of the work included at the end makes it accessible to foreign scholarly audiences.

The first part, dedicated to the galleries of the Church of St. Sofia" contains detailed commentary parts on the individual architectural components, as well as some clarifications of the chronology of the mosaics in the church. An extensive bibliographical apparatus has been added to enable the reader to navigate the latest research relating to the church and its interior decoration.

The second part, the main part of the work, is again systematized topographically, which is the most appropriate criterion for ordering the material. The western gallery is considered first. Twenty-one inscriptions are identified there, some of them very revealing in terms of their content: no. 3, for example, documents the presence in Constantinople of a Bulgarian prince and temporary claimant to the throne of Tarnovo, Shishman, son of Michael III Shishman and brother of Ivan Stephen (p. 35 ); No. 5 is from the 12th century and is probably the work of Bulgarian pilgrims in the temple; No. 8 is a relatively early prayer inscription, c. early 12th century; No. 12 from the 16th century records the presence of a certain Nicholas of Tarnovo (1552); No. 15 contains names mentioned in the 14th-century copy of Borilov's Synodik. No less interesting are other inscriptions documenting the presence of pilgrims from Novgorod, Kiev and Moscow, as well as representatives of the clergy.

There are 33 inscriptions published from the south gallery. This section also gives a complete picture of the epigraphic material available. Also noteworthy is the identification of a representative of the Vlach tradition, Nenčül from No. 19, whose identification is in itself a separate short study; No. 21 reveals the personality of the Slavicised Scandinavian Igor Ulminge; No. 29 testifies to the late epigraphic tradition - the inscription is from the hand of Deacon Stoyan of Ohrid from the 18th-19th centuries. Here again the presence of Russian, Kievan and Novgorodian pilgrims is registered, and the volume and comprehensiveness of the titles in some of their inscriptions stand out, transforming them from graffiti into peculiar "stone documents" of the stay of the persons recorded in them in the temple and in the Roman capital. The author's work on the identification of individuals has been thorough; he has worked with a large volume of documents, manuscripts, archival collections, and archaeological data, making the identifications convincing. The same is true of his observations on the paleography of the inscriptions, which in itself allows us to view the work as a reference book on the history of paleography based on the inscriptions in the temple of St. Sofia.

In the north gallery 19 inscriptions have been identified and deciphered. They give insight into the Slavic diaspora in the city and can be a significant source for the anthroponymy of Bulgarians and Russians in the Middle Ages. Here are added representatives of Polish communities, as well as pilgrims with roots in the Finno-Ugric peoples. Especially interesting is inscription No. 5, which reveals unknown moments in the history of the relics related to the Passion of Christ, which were exposed for worship during Holy Week in the Byzantine capital. The Glagolitic graffiti with the name Ana (No. 15) is also presented here.

A further 21 inscriptions have been added to the niche on the east wall of the north gallery. They are mostly short autographs. The personal names they contain indicate the enduring presence of Novgorod and Kiev pilgrims over a relatively long period of time.

For the publication of all 94 inscriptions the author has adopted a uniform scheme, which facilitates the reader and at the same time allows some interesting generalizations to be made quickly. The headings are as follows: material, i.e. the ground on which the inscription/graffito was applied; dimensions, preservation, typeset text of the inscription, reconstructed text (according to dictionary entries), commentary, palaeography, orthography and dating. A scale drawing of the inscription is then given. Each description is done with as much precision and completeness as possible.

The author pays serious attention to the paleography of the inscriptions, as it has often been used successfully as a dating feature or to refine previous dating. Many parallels are drawn with inscriptions on coins, charters, seals, fabrics, etc. Serious attention is paid to the characteristic spelling of the individual letters, with a view to inferring the origin of their authors - Bulgarians or Russians. Very detailed and thorough is also the morphological analysis, the analysis of phonetic changes in the spelling of individual names, etc. This enables the author to make convincing attributions, to give reasoned readings where text is missing or where the inscription is illegible. All the inscriptions have been translated into modern Bulgarian, making the monograph accessible and useful to specialists outside the narrow circle of media historians and philologists.

The translation itself, which is necessarily interpretive, represents an independent, successfully solved scientific task, has a definite contributory character and increases the value of the publication. The analysis of the texts has brought out stable formulas attested in various groups of inscriptions - prayer, dedicatory, etc., which ranks the monograph next to the best examples of repertoires with epigraphic and documentary material known to us from established diplomatic editions of archives, diplomas, coin albums, seals, etc.

The third part, designated as the conclusion, is devoted to the most essential features of the inscriptions - their paleography and orthography. It is rather the theoretical summary of the linguistic and palaeographic analyses. The author shows a thorough knowledge of the history of Slavic languages, as well as of the paleography of inscriptions and graffiti. This is a scholarly field still poorly developed in paleoslavic studies, and any theoretical generalization is contributory and of great importance for the reconstruction of the general picture of the epigraphic traditions of the South and East Slavs. Extremely laborious and needing many hours of hard work, the process of identifying, copying and analyzing graffiti inscriptions is a serious scientific ordeal.

As a result of the work of Assoc. Prof. Tom Tomov we have before us an impressive repertoire of 94 inscriptions (against only a few notes from the hands of Slavonic scribes in Greek manuscripts of the tenth to twelfth centuries, written certainly in Constantinople, published by M. Spasova), which is an excellent source for anthroponymy, for some features of colloquial speech for which it is most difficult to find material, for prayer and ritual formulae used by Slavs who visited or resided permanently in Constantinople. It appears, on the basis of the graffiti, that literacy was more widespread among the Slavs than we might suppose on the basis of book records alone. Although of different profiles and with different levels of language

proficiency, the authors of the graffiti were clearly people with scribal skills and, generally speaking, with ecclesiastical culture, as evidenced by certain formulae and exclamations in the texts.

The monograph is provided with an extensive reference apparatus. This makes it a unique handbook on Slavic epigraphy, a handbook filling a serious gap in our knowledge of the period. We can only congratulate the author for his perseverance and dedication in dealing with this extremely difficult to access and transcribe material. In these days when we are witnessing the dramatic attack on the temple of St. Sophia and its conversion into a functioning mosque, restricting access to many important parts of the building, this monograph is the best way to preserve for future generations texts whose existence is seriously threatened, both by the vagaries of time and the changing interests of human collectives.

In the rest of the publications submitted to the competition, the author remains true to his interest - graffiti and its content. He enriches their profile both ethnically and in terms of content. He also presents drawings and some texts written by the hand of Latin-speaking authors. All publications are in specialized scholarly journals, many of them refereed and peer-reviewed. Many of them are in English, which makes the material in them accessible to a very wide readership outside our country.

The citation record also shows that the publications of Assoc. Prof. Toma Tomov have not gone unnoticed in the scientific community, on the contrary, they arouse research interest and are cited in reputable scientific journals or by established scientific teams.

The book submitted to the competition, which is not a monograph for the competition and which has not been submitted to other competitions, is *Byzantium, Known and Unknown*. It is an impressive compendium of necessary knowledge about Byzantium, presented with skill and systematized in such a way that it can also serve as a teaching tool for undergraduates, graduate students, and even doctoral students. This is not a history of the Byzantine Empire, but an attempt to present it in all its complexity as a theocratic empire, a hegemon state in the Balkans for several centuries. The author's erudition and rich factual background, presented with understanding and competent interpretation, make this book a preferred reading both as a scholarly and didactic tool.

From the reference attached for the competition, it can be seen that Assoc. Toma Tomov has participated in a number of international and national scientific projects, completed successfully and their results are highly appreciated. He has also actively participated in the administration

of academic life at NBU, holding various management positions. The evaluation given by students for his teaching activity is also high. I would add to this my excellent impressions of his work as a graduate student at the Ivan Dujchev Center after the defense of his doctoral dissertation.

Taking into account all the above, the materials submitted for the competition and the high scientific value of the candidate's monograph, as well as the contributory nature of the publications he has presented, I would like to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury of Assoc. Dr. Toma Ivanov Tomov to be awarded the academic title "Professor" in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, which he undoubtedly deserves.

Prof. Vasya Velinova DSc

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Sofia