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EXPERT OPINION

On the Candidacy of Dr Konstantin Golev in the Competition for the Academic Position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2 "History and Archaeology," Academic Speciality "Document Studies, Archival Studies, and Palaeography (including Historiography and Source Studies)," for the needs of the Section of Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Informatics at the Institute of Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, announced in the *State Gazette*, No. 55 of 16 June 2026

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The competition procedure

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2 "History and Archaeology," Scientific Specialty "Documentation, Archival Studies, Paleography (including Historiography and Source Studies)," for the Section "Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Informatics" at the Institute of Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, was announced in the *State Gazette*, No. 55 of 16 June 2026. The competition procedure has been conducted in full compliance with the applicable statutory and institutional regulations, including the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Institute of Historical Studies, the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the regulations for its implementation. Dr. Konstantin Golev is the sole candidate in the competition. He has submitted all the documents required under the applicable regulations and meets the established minimum requirements for scientific and research achievements. His application is accompanied by the relevant documentation, including a report on his individual scientometric indicators, a list of publications and citations, a statement outlining his principal scientific contributions, and copies of the publications submitted for evaluation.

Having reviewed the documentation, I find that the candidate has fulfilled the formal requirements for participation in the competition and that the procedure, as well as the submitted materials, complies with the applicable legal and administrative requirements.

Scholarly Profile and Publications

The scholarly research of Dr Konstantin Golev focuses on the interaction between nomadic societies – particularly the Cumans (Kipchaks) and the Mongols – and sedentary societies in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. A central place in Dr Golev's candidacy and scholarly output is occupied by his monograph, *Eurasian Nomads in Times of Crisis: Cumans-Kipchaks and Mongols in the Turmoil of the Thirteenth Century*, published in 2026. The work offers a substantial synthesis that challenges a number of established interpretations of the period of the Mongol invasions. Konstantin Golev advances the thesis of continuity and evolution, rejecting the notion of a complete rupture. According to his interpretation, the Mongol conquest and the rise of the Golden Horde did not destroy the existing Cuman infrastructure, but rather adapted and further developed it. The author views the thirteenth century not as an age of chaos, but as a period of reconfiguration of steppe civilization from a confederative to an imperial model, while preserving its essentially nomadic character. One of the major strengths of the monograph is its interdisciplinary methodology, which combines military history, climatology, and ecology. Golev presents the Cumans as sophisticated political actors and the Mongols as pragmatic rulers who made effective use of urban networks in consolidating their power. According to Golev, the Mongols did not create an entirely new system, but rather brought together and further developed earlier nomadic practices into a unified and effective military system. He introduces the concept of the “ecology of warfare”, explaining strategic decisions in terms of seasonal climatic changes and logistical requirements. The monograph is distinguished by an exceptionally rich source base, including Arabic, Persian, Russian, and Latin sources, and contributes to the demythologization of traditional narratives concerning the “Tatar yoke.”

Although the monograph represents a significant scholarly achievement, several critical observations may nevertheless be made. In his effort to emphasize the importance of climate, logistics, and pasture resources, the author occasionally approaches a form of economic and environmental determinism. The sociocultural and religious dimensions of transformation, including the later Islamization of the region, are addressed but at times remain secondary. Furthermore, the geographical focus is often placed on the western periphery of the Golden

Horde, while the eastern regions of the empire and Central Asia receive comparatively less attention.

Despite these reservations, Konstantin Golev's monograph is a fundamental study that rehabilitates the role of the Cumans as "builders" of the steppe imperial formation upon which the Golden Horde was subsequently established. The monograph sets new standards for Bulgarian medieval studies and constitutes essential reading both for the study of the Mongol invasions and, more broadly, for understanding the mechanisms underlying the formation and functioning of steppe empires.

In addition to the monograph, Dr Golev has submitted a body of scholarly work comprising 24 publications, which may be divided into several thematic groups. First, I would highlight the articles devoted to the *ecology of warfare* and the geography of the steppe, which develop the idea of the asymmetric seasonal activity of nomadic societies. Golev demonstrates that, unlike sedentary populations, the Cumans regarded winter as the principal "season of warfare," whereas summer was associated with a reduction in military activity because of the need to secure pasture for their herds. These studies have been cited in international scholarship on military history, climatology, and related fields, confirming their scholarly value and applicability beyond narrowly specialized academic circles. The author supports his arguments with a broad range of sources, from Byzantine and Rus' chronicles to Arabic geographical works, demonstrating how climatic factors could outweigh purely political considerations in determining the timing of military campaigns. I would particularly emphasize the convincing synthesis of military history, climatology, and nomadic economic practices in his explanation of the logistics of steppe warfare. Here, the candidate challenges the assumption that summer campaigns constituted the principal threat, demonstrating instead that winter raids were frequently the most dangerous for neighboring agricultural societies.

A second major thematic area concerns Bulgarian-Cuman relations in the thirteenth century. Here, the candidate introduces a new perspective through the prism of nomadic diplomacy. In articles such as „За българофилията на куманите“ and „*Crime and Punishment*“ he challenges the traditional notion of a "Bulgarian-Cuman brotherhood." The author presents these relations as pragmatic political arrangements based on mutual benefit rather than ethnic affinity or ideological loyalty. Particularly innovative is his interpretation of the physical elimination of a Tatar prince by the Bulgarian ruler not merely as an act of brutality, but

as the application of a steppe political ritual intended to terminate a relationship of vassalage to the Golden Horde. Golev argues that the so-called "Cuman party" in medieval Bulgaria should be understood as a political grouping rather than an ethnic faction.

Another distinct thematic group consists of publications devoted to the Golden Horde. In studies such as „Градове и номади в Златната орда“ и „*The Cities along the Syr Darya*“ Dr Golev examines the symbiotic relationship between nomadic warriors and urban networks. He interprets cities such as Jand, Sygnak, Sarai, and others not as opposites of the steppe, but as economic and diplomatic centers that provided the resources necessary for the functioning of a powerful state. He also applies his analytical framework to more specific subjects, such as the phenomenon of the nomadic city in Central Asia and the fate of the Kangly tribal confederation, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the fragmentation of the steppe world following the Mongol invasion.

A further thematic area in K. Golev's research concerns the Mongol elite and political structures. In articles such as "*Intra-Mongol Diplomacy and Witch-Hunt*" and "*Witchcraft and Politics in the Court of the Great Khan*," the candidate examines internal struggles within the Mongol elite. Through an analysis of witchcraft trials, he demonstrates how accusations of sorcery could be employed as an instrument of political purging during periods of interregnum. These arguments and publications have been cited in significant studies of legal history and comparative religious studies, illustrating the depth of Dr Golev's anthropological approach.

Scholarly Contributions

The studies outlined above establish Dr Golev as a medievalist whose work revises fundamental assumptions concerning the role of nomadic societies in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. His research transcends the boundaries of traditional political history by integrating approaches from environmental history, military anthropology, and economic geography. A particular strength of Dr Golev's scholarship is his effective use of diverse source materials, including Arabic, Persian, Russian, and Latin sources. Among the candidate's principal arguments and scholarly contributions, I would first emphasize his concept of the rationality of the nomads. Golev demythologizes the image of the Cumans and Mongols as mere "destroyers," presenting them instead as sophisticated political actors whose strategies were shaped by environmental constraints and pragmatic interests. He introduces the concept of the "ecology of

warfare” and maintains that seasonal climatic changes and the requirements of horse husbandry were often decisive factors determining the beginning or termination of military campaigns.

Another key contribution is his argument concerning continuity between the Cumans and the Golden Horde: rather than destroying the existing steppe infrastructure, the Mongol Empire appropriated, adapted, and further developed it. Golev also successfully challenges the perception of nomadic societies as isolated communities by demonstrating their deep integration into wider Mediterranean economic networks. He presents Crimea not as a peripheral region, but as a center of nomadic political activity, and reconsiders the geopolitics of the Black Sea from the perspective of steppe interests. Furthermore, the candidate challenges romanticized notions of a “Bulgarian-Cuman brotherhood” and the traditional narrative of the “Tatar yoke,” replacing them with the analytical language of *realpolitik*. Golev examines the myth of Cuman “pro-Bulgarian sentiment” and the actual nature of their alliances with the early rulers of the Asenid dynasty. He demonstrates that Cuman support was motivated not by ethnic affinity but by pragmatic interests and material benefit. Dr Golev also makes the important observation that the geography of the Balkans functioned as a natural filter that neutralized the tactical advantages of steppe warfare for a significant part of the year.

The submitted list of 87 documented citations in international and Bulgarian publications provides convincing evidence of the recognition accorded to Dr Golev's scholarship. His works have been cited in publications issued by prestigious international academic presses, including Brill, Routledge, Cambridge University Press, and Edinburgh University Press, as well as in leading peer-reviewed journals such as *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, *Acta Orientalia*, and *Golden Horde Review*. The inclusion of Golev in the *Bibliographical Dictionary of Kipchak Studies* (Kumekov and Kuzembayev, 2023) is further indicative of his recognition as an established scholar within this specialized field. I would also emphasize that Dr Golev's work has been cited in several languages, including English, Italian, Russian, and German, demonstrating the international visibility and scholarly reception of his arguments. This clearly places him within the international community of medievalists and establishes him as one of the contemporary scholars mediating between Bulgarian and global historical scholarship.

Another indicator of the international reception of the candidate's research is his record of lectures at a number of foreign academic institutions, including the University of Oxford, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Istanbul University, the

University of Vienna, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, the University of Athens, and others.

Critical Remarks and Recommendations

In some of his theses, Golev demonstrates a tendency towards ecological and economic determinism, sometimes leaving the role of the human factor, cultural, and religious identity in the background. His analysis of alliances as entirely pragmatic relationships sounds convincing but neglects possibilities for ideological, personal, and emotional loyalty. The author's style is at times dense and terminologically demanding, while the geographical focus of his research is concentrated primarily on the western periphery of the Mongol world – the Balkans, Crimea, and Rus, with the eastern regions occupying a more secondary position. The noted remarks do not diminish the high scientific value of the research but rather outline pathways for future balancing in Dr. Golev's studies.

Conclusion

The overall impression and assessment of the scholarly output submitted by the candidate is that of a productive medievalist with a clearly defined scholarly profile over the past decade. Dr Konstantin Golev demonstrates a sound command of the auxiliary historical sciences through his critical engagement with diverse sources, ranging from Rus' chronicles to numismatic evidence, and through his ability to combine these materials with approaches drawn from social and environmental history. He is among those historians who seek to transcend local and national frameworks and to situate Bulgarian history within the broader Eurasian processes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. His studies of the ecology of warfare, nomadic diplomacy, representations of „the Other” in chronicles, and the political system of the Golden Horde demonstrate sustained scholarly effort and a strong analytical approach.

In view of the high scholarly standard of his publications, the convincing international reception and citation of his work, and his innovative approach to the study and interpretation of the past, I strongly support the appointment of Dr Konstantin Golev to the academic position of Associate Professor.

14 September 2026

Veliko Tarnovo

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