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OPINION

of Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Boteva-Boyanova (Faculty of History, St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia) regarding the candidacy of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Strahil Valentinov Panayotov for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2 "History and Archaeology," Scientific Specialty "Documentary Studies, Archival Science, and Paleography (including Historiography and Source Studies)," for the needs of the "Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Informatics" Section at the Institute for Historical Studies – BAS

Only one candidate applied for the competition announced in the State Gazette (Issue No. 53 of June 9, 2026): Dr. Strahil Valentinov Panayotov, who has held a primary employment contract as a Chief Assistant Professor at the Institute for Historical Studies – BAS since February 28, 2022.

Since 2014, Strahil Panayotov has held the educational and scientific degree of PhD in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, based on a dissertation titled "*Tablets with a Handle (Amulet Tablets) from Mesopotamia*," which was published in an expanded monograph form by DioMira (Sofia) in 2016 under the title "*Tablets with a Handle (Amulet Tablets) from Mesopotamia – 2nd–1st Millennium BC*." In the competition documentation, Dr. Panayotov also included a PDF of his MA thesis, "Die Lampe am Krankenbett." Untersuchungen zu altorientalischen Gebeten an den Lichtgott Nuska, defended in 2009 at Heidelberg University and uploaded in 2016 to the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) online platform—established that same year by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Unfortunately, the link to the study's publication on the CDLI platform, as provided in the relevant PDF, does not lead to a display of the text or even its title. Google's search engine located it at a different address: <https://cdli.earth/articles/cdlp/4.0>. I assume that my failure to find it via the link in the PDF stems from my inability to navigate this specific specialized platform, whose creators have set the ambitious goal of making available through the internet the form and content of approximately 500,000 cuneiform inscriptions dating from the beginning of writing, ca. 3350 BC, until the end of the pre-Christian era. Nevertheless, when submitting application documents for a competition, a candidate ought to update the relevant publication data to ensure that mandatory reference checks yield results. In fact, this specific title arguably should not appear in the competition documentation, as the text predates the defense of the PhD dissertation in

2014—though this observation is by no means intended to downplay the significant scholarly contribution Panayotov made as early as his MA thesis.

For this competition, the candidate has submitted five studies in English; four were published between 2017 and 2020 by some of the world's most prestigious publishing houses (De Gruyter, Brill, and The Pennsylvania State University Press)—with the Brill publication being co-authored with Henry Stadhouders (Utrecht)—while the fifth, from 2025, was published by the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia (CAS). The bibliographic and substantive presentation of these five studies in the document "12. Abstracts of Peer-Reviewed Publications" is accurate; it provides a clear—albeit very concise—overview in both Bulgarian and English regarding the specific scholarly contributions and the texts analyzed. Unfortunately, regarding the co-authored study—which focuses on a cuneiform tablet at Istanbul Archaeological Museum of the "entering the palace" genre—there is no clear indication of which specific parts were authored by Panayotov (with the exception of the hand copy of the artifact), which precludes its adequate inclusion in the evaluation of the candidate. On the other hand, the four sole-authored studies possess not only significant scholarly merit and international recognition but also substantial length; collectively, they carry the weight of a compelling habilitation thesis.

Seven articles have also been submitted for review in the competition; only one is in Bulgarian and is co-authored with Desislava Kostadinova (2025). The remaining six (five in English and one in German)—like the studies mentioned earlier—have been published in some of the world's most prestigious specialized journals and miscellanea, becoming part of global scholarly historiography between 2018 and 2024. Here, I would like to specifically highlight the review article by Strahil Panayotov in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138.3 (pp. 567–573) concerning JoAnn Scurlock's "*Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine*" (Atlanta, Georgia), a volume exceeding 750 pages published in 2014. I single this out because the review vividly demonstrates the Bulgarian researcher's high level of expertise in this specific field of ancient Mesopotamian studies; furthermore, the fact that the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* provided a platform for this review speaks for itself and requires no further comment. In the list of the seven articles considered for the competition, I note an unfortunate bibliographic omission: regarding the citation of the article published in Bulgarian and co-authored with D. Kostadinova, the publication venue is nowhere to be found—neither in the list of publications nor in Document 12 (containing the summaries of the candidate's research)—with only a link to

the CEEOL (Central and East European Online Library) platform provided instead. I draw attention to this fact because the article "*Assyrian Genealogy along the Shores of Tigris*" was published in 2025 in the *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Studies* at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences—that is, in a journal of the very institution where the candidate has held a primary employment contract since January 1, 2019. Apart from this oversight, the abstracts of these seven articles included in the competition dossier present the content and contributions of each study in a highly concise yet entirely accurate manner.

The book "*Mesopotamian Eye Disease Texts: The Nineveh Treatise*" by Mark J. Geller and Strahil Panayotov—published in 2020 as Volume 10 of the series "*Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen*" (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501506550>)—has been submitted as the habilitation thesis for this competition. Although this book has already established itself as a reference work in the fields of Mesopotamian medicine and cuneiform epigraphy, I personally have reservations about reviewing it as a habilitation thesis due to the lack of a clear distinction regarding which parts are the candidate's individual work (with the exception, of course, of the first introduction, pp. 1–16, whereas the second introduction is authored by Mark Geller, pp. 17–44). Regarding the remaining 400-plus pages, the two authors explicitly state that the work is a joint effort—noting that "Neither author would have been able to produce this edition of IGI working alone" (p. xii)—and explain in detail on the preceding page (p. xi) how their contributions to the research were mutually complementary at every step and stage of the project. I wish to emphasize that my hesitation to accept this book as Panayotov's habilitation thesis should by no means be interpreted as diminishing this immense achievement by the Bulgarian researcher—an achievement that is, without exaggeration, of global significance.

The documents submitted by the candidate demonstrate his significant involvement in large-scale international projects; his professional background includes positions at some of the world's most prestigious academic institutions, such as the British Museum, the Free University of Berlin, and Heidelberg University. Achieving such high-level international recognition in a scholarly field that lacks established traditions in Bulgaria represents a truly remarkable personal and professional milestone for our colleague, Dr. Strahil Panayotov—one that deserves to be acknowledged well beyond the scope of this competition.

Not included in the formal application materials is the book "*Petar Mateev: Autobiography, Memoirs, and Activities*" (Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2017, 326 pp.). Its compilers—Aleka Strezova and Strahil Panayotov—have succeeded in rescuing from obscurity the impressive figure of Petar Mateev and the dramatic twists and turns of his life in the 19th century; his story not only marks him as the first Bulgarian researcher of ancient Mesopotamia but would also make for a compelling feature film.

The procedural requirements of the *Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria* and the *Regulations for its Implementation* have been met. Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Strahil Valentinov Panayotov meets all the requirements for the academic position for which he is a candidate. This fact, along with the aforementioned internationally recognized scientific achievements, gives me grounds to confidently recommend that the scientific jury vote in favor of appointing Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Strahil Valentinov Panayotov to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Professional Field 2.2 History and Archaeology, specializing in "Documentary Studies, Archival Science, and Paleography (including Historiography and Source Studies)"—within the "Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Informatics" Section of the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Sofia, 23.09.2026

Signature:

Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. D. Boteva-Boyanova