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Opinion

BY

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2.2. History and Archaeology

RE: THE CANDIDACY OF

DR. STRAHIL VALENTINOV PANAYOTOV, SENIOR ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

For appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field
2.2. History and Archaeology, academic specialty
“Document Studies, Archival Studies, Palaeography, including Historiography and Source
Studies,” announced by the
Section of Auxiliary Historical Disciplines and Informatics at the
Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) in
State Gazette, No. 53 of 9 June 2026

This Opinion has been prepared in connection with Order No. 64, dated 6 August 2026 of the Director of the Institute for Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Assoc. Prof. Nadya Filipova, PhD, as well as on the basis of Protocol No. 1 / 11 August 2026 of the meeting of the Academic Evaluation Committee.

Assoc. Prof. Strahil Valentinov Panayotov, PhD, is the sole candidate in the competition initiated by the Section of Auxiliary Historical Disciplines and Informatics at the Institute for Historical Studies (IHS) – BAS. The candidate has already accumulated substantial professional experience at the IHS, having served as an Assistant Professor since 1 January 2019 and as a Senior Assistant Professor since 28 February 2022. The documents and publications submitted by him, as well as the report under Article 26 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, demonstrate compliance with the minimum scientometric requirements for appointment to the academic position announced in the competition, in accordance with the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations on the Terms and Procedures

for the Acquisition of Academic Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at BAS, and the Regulations on the Terms and Procedures for the Acquisition of Academic Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at the IHS – BAS.

Dr. Panayotov is applying in the competition with 14 postdoctoral scholarly publications – 1 book (*Mesopotamian Eye Disease Texts: The Nineveh Treatise*. Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen 10. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2020, co-authored with Mark Geller), of a specifically monographic character and submitted as his habilitation work; 1 additional monograph (*Die Lampe am Krankenbett. Untersuchungen zu altorientalischen Gebeten an den Lichtgott Nuska*. Cuneiform Digital Library Preprints 4, 2016); 5 studies; and 7 articles (one of which is in fact a review). Some of the publications are indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. The materials also include the expanded and revised edition of his dissertation for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” – *Tablets with Projection (amulet-shaped tablets) from Mesopotamia – 2nd-1st Millenium BC*, Sofia: DioMira, 2016 (in Bulgarian).

The scholarly publications submitted for participation in the competition demonstrate Dr. Panayotov’s considerable research experience in the field of Assyriology, increasingly referred to in the English-language literature as Ancient Near Eastern Studies. At the same time, the candidate’s clear research focus on a specific field connected with some of the current trends in contemporary Assyriology is noteworthy, particularly his work on the history of ancient Near Eastern medicine based on in-depth source-critical study of the extensive cuneiform heritage of Ancient Mesopotamia.

The habilitation work *Mesopotamian Eye Disease Texts: The Nineveh Treatise* (Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen 10. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2020, co-authored with Mark Geller) is the result of extensive research and source-critical work. For the first time in contemporary Assyriology, it offers a comprehensive study of texts concerning eye diseases from Ancient Mesopotamia, including a complete English translation of the texts. The book is the first critical epigraphic edition of its kind, in which all known parallel texts from the second and first millennia BCE are systematically presented. Key parallels with ancient Egyptian, Aramaic, Syriac, and Greco-Roman medicine are identified, and the central role of cuneiform medicine in the ancient world is argued. This argument is skillfully developed already in the introductory sections of the

book, among which the analytical preface written by Dr. Strahil Panayotov (“Overview of Cuneiform Eye Disease Texts,” pp. 1–16) is particularly noteworthy.

Dr. Panayotov’s proposed epigraphic and paleographic analysis of prayers and incantations addressed to Nuska, the Mesopotamian god of light, constitutes an in-depth Assyriological study based on cuneiform sources from the city of Ashur preserved in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. In this study, each prayer is presented with philological precision as a critical edition, accompanied by a translation and a detailed cultural-historical commentary. In a broader Near Eastern context, of particular interest are the author’s observations on the belief that the lamp possesses magical powers is connected even with works such as “Aladdin and the Magic Lamp” from *The Thousand and One Nights* (p. iii).

The studies included among the publications submitted for the competition, in turn, demonstrate Dr. Strahil Panayotov’s ability to uncover ever new aspects of the broad field of ancient Near Eastern medicine. In one of the studies (2025), based on specific cuneiform tablets, we learn more about how bronchial diseases were understood in the Ancient Near East as early as the eighth century BCE, and about the relationship between these practices and prescriptions such as those known from the Hippocratic Corpus. Another study (2020), in turn, reconstructs for the reader the “hospital-bed scene” in Ancient Mesopotamia.

Already in Dr. Panayotov’s studies from 2018, the qualities of an Assyriologist who would subsequently establish himself successfully in international scholarly settings are clearly evident. One of the studies presents the sources attested to date belonging to the *egalkura* genre, providing a basis for further research on the “entries into the palace.” The other study from that year deals with the Assyrian Medical Catalogue, which serves as a point of departure for reconstructing the Mesopotamian therapeutic corpora. Here, the author’s interest in the relationship between magic and medicine is particularly well-demonstrated, an interest that he has continued to develop subsequently.

The articles submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Strahil Panayotov likewise demonstrate his interest in exploring this relationship. In an article from 2024, for example, he examines the comparison between demons and viruses, not in order to establish a direct connection between them, but to gain insight into their respective taxonomies, drawing interesting parallels between ancient science and modern virology. An article from the preceding year, 2023, attempts to reconsider the relationships between cuneiform medicine, magic, and witchcraft in Late Assyrian Ashur and Nineveh.

In most of his publications, Dr. Strahil Panayotov writes as a historian of the Ancient Near East with pronounced philological abilities and a particular sensitivity to a specific field that could be designated as cuneiform textual studies. His contributions to this field, and more broadly to contemporary Assyriology, are described comprehensively and convincingly in the attached Statement of Scholarly Contributions. Evidence of Dr. Panayotov's already visibility and contribution to contemporary Assyriology is provided by the numerous citations of his publications, documented in the corresponding scientometric table. Some of these citations appear in internationally recognized peer-reviewed publications in various languages.

Particular emphasis should also be placed on the fact that the candidate's emerging international scholarly profile is due to a considerable extent to the experience he has accumulated at institutions such as the British Museum, as well as to the skills he has acquired through his participation in major research projects. The numerous scholarships and grants awarded to Dr. Panayotov over the years, as well as his work at prestigious research institutions in Germany, the United Kingdom, and other countries, testify to his considerable research energy and an already well-established international network. The habilitation work submitted within the present procedure itself is a product of an ERC Advanced Grant at the Free University of Berlin, with the acronym BabMed and Mark Geller as Principal Investigator. His work on these grants and projects, as well as Dr. Panayotov's participation in the teams of internationally established leading scholars, have contributed to the further development of his academic experience and research skills.

My personal impressions of the work of Dr. Strahil Panayotov to date are also connected with his teaching in the programs of the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, where Bulgarian Assyriology also began to develop several decades ago. Courses in Assyriology relating to the Akkadian language and the history and culture of Ancient Mesopotamia have been offered here continuously. In recent years, Dr. Panayotov has been particularly active in this department as a part-time lecturer in a number of Assyriological subjects at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels. His courses attract considerable interest among students, while his teaching skills contribute to the further development of Assyriology at Sofia University.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above, I assess highly the scholarly output of Dr. Strahil Valentinov Panayotov and express my firm support for his candidacy for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2 History and Archaeology, academic specialty “Document Studies, Archival Studies, Palaeography, including Historiography and Source Studies,” within the present competition announced for the needs of the IHS – BAS. I also call upon the other members of the Scientific Evaluation Committee to vote in favor of his appointment.

23 September 2026

Professor Simeon Evstatiev