



## OPINION

by competition for the academic position associate professor in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.2 History and archaeology, for the needs of the "Kyril-Methodievski springs and traditions" section, announced in SG no. 11 of 06.02. 2024

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To participate in the current competition, the only candidate, Ch. Dr. Evgeni Dimitrov Zashev presents 12 titles. Along with the main monograph for the contest, he presents two more books dedicated to the study of the Pateric tradition - one that is a translation from Greek of 50 Pateric stories (38 of which are also present in the Vaulted Paterik), with introductory studies and a reference apparatus, including detailed bibliography; and another one with translations from Greek, by the famous preacher Pavel Monemvasiyski (10th century), but also with a study of some of the texts, with a view to their Old Bulgarian translation again in „Svoden paterik”.

Several studios are also presented for the competition. Six of them develop questions from the monograph presented for the competition: about the famous "Brief historical description of the Holy Metropolis of Veograd" by the famous Metropolitan of Berat Antim Alexudi; specifically for the Berat Reliquary; on the construction of the group of St. Septuagints in "The Earliest Verbal Image of St. Septuagints - Mechanisms of Invention"; for the memorial sites of St. Gorazd and St. Angelarius in Berat, Albania; the developing and supplementing studies on the earliest topography of the cult of St. Seven-Numbered again in present-day Southern Albania; for the authorship of the so-called Beratian (Venetian) service of St. Seven. One studio is dedicated to the poem La Bulgheria convertita, by the Italian poet Pietro Bracciolini (17th century). The next publication presented is a phototype edition of the so-called Lavrentiy collection (hand. F.I.376 of the RNB in St. Petersburg, also called Ivan-Alexandrov collection) from 1348, accompanied by an introductory study in English. It, unlike K. Kuev's edition from 1981, is complete, and some errors from the earlier one, as well as from the inventory of Bulgarian manuscripts from the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg from 2009, and also of H. Birnbaum's description. The last publication, presented by E. Zashev, with co-author Slovak Slavist Ya. Hutyanova, is dedicated to the history of Slovak Bulgarian studies, especially at the Comenius University in Bratislava, where the author was a lecturer for several years.

Here I will examine in more detail the main monographic study of E. Zashev, which summarizes some of the publications mentioned above. It is dedicated to the Berat memory of St. Seven Sevens, it was published in Sofia in 2024, by the Cyril and Methodius Scientific Center at the BAS. ISBN 978-954-9787-62-7, 264 pp., and is presented as a habilitation thesis. The monograph contains a preface (pp. 7–13), 6 chapters (pp. 19–189), an appendix (pp. 189–245) and a bibliography (pp. 245–264). In it, the author sets himself the goal of examining the development of the cult of St.

Seven-Numbered Saints in present-day southern Albania, mainly in the area of today's city of Berat (Bulgarian: Belgrade, Turkish: Arnaut Beligrad, Βελαγράδων). As he himself notes, his aim is not to establish how ancient this cult is and has its genesis since "the time of Cyril and Methodius and their direct disciples", not to examine its earliest traces with a view to their authenticity, but to traced the origin of what he called a late cult, and its role in the mentioned southern Albanian lands today. Or, to reverse the research perspective. This, of course, is only possible if one relies on the research of the scientists of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, who have largely clarified the questions surrounding the reliability of the preserved testimonies in a purely positivistic way, have established their chronology and have shown that they are late and have no connection with the Cyril-Methodian era, and in general with the time before the Ottoman conquest. This of course means that Dr. Zashev has successfully dealt with a significant scientific literature, with a long tradition. In this tradition, the prevailing opinion is that the cult of St. Seven is medieval, from the era, if not of Cyril and Methodius, then at least of their disciples. However, E. Zashev is well-versed in the numerous studies in several languages and firmly takes the correct position that it is a late cult. And sets out to study it.

In the first chapter, the author begins his research with the so-called Berat Reliquary and the relics stored in it. For him, they are the basis and generator of the newly emerging cult in the area. He rightly does not address the question of their authenticity, inasmuch as they are undeniably fake, which has already been shown in the literature. Without going further into this matter here, I will only add that there are relics of St. Gorazd in some churches in southern Poland, backed up with the relevant legends about his escape to this region, etc. The author reconstructs the history of the relics in the area, and of the reliquary itself, which is distinguished by precision and punctuality. According to him, the appearance of the memory of St. Sedmochiselnitsi is the result of the intersection of two traditions - oral and written, "...as the first exists in the form of a local tradition, and the second goes back to the liturgical works of Theophylact Ohridski, Dimitar Khomatian and Konstantin Kavasila, dedicated of St. Clement and St. Naum." The question is how it ascends to the works of these authors, who are first distant in time, and then are the offspring of another tradition related to the Ohrid archdiocese.

His conclusion that the reason for the writing of the so-called Berat service was the presence of the relics of St. Gorazd and St. Angelarius is logical and can be supported without doubt. The second chapter of the monograph is dedicated to this. First of all, quite justifiably, he pays attention to its authorship, insofar as it is anonymous. He scrupulously collected all available data about her. Very important is his conclusion, supported by indisputable evidence, that the service did not originate in the 9th century, as some authors still believe. Even less can its author be ... Prince Boris-Mikhail, which comical hypothesis also exists. The hypothesis substantiated by Dr. Zashev seems convincing - the creator of the Berat service was the bishop of Gora and Mokra Michael Ipsichiot (c. 1690–1780), and the service itself was compiled shortly before it was printed in Venice (c. 1720).

The prosopographic part dedicated to Michael Ipsichiot is of primary importance for supporting this hypothesis. Based on a review of other works by the author in question, Zashev came to the conclusion that the Berat Service is a compilation of earlier works, with the addition of an original canon for St. Gorazd and St. Angelarius. He suggests that the sponsors of the printing and the Pappas family were also involved in the writing of the service. It is especially important that attention is paid to the date of honor in this service - November 26, different from the one in the Moskopol service - July 17. The date can suggest where the influences came from in its origin, as well as the parallel use of the two dates (in this case a century and a half) gives important information about the development of the respective cult and the different traditions within it. In the third chapter, the author has analyzed the service, with the aim of establishing what in its content caused the development of a cult specifically for a "seven-member group", "marked by the linguistic sign Ἑπτάρημοι". Of course, the very existence of the service is such a factor, as the author himself points out.

Here I must definitely note the examination of historical-geographical terms in the service - Bulgaria and Bulgarians, Mysia and Mizi, Dalmatia, Dalmatians. They are also subject to further research, especially in the light of the known archaization of ethnic terms in Byzantine literature. In the fourth chapter, Zashev points out again that in the 18th-19th centuries, "and maybe even earlier", the memory of St. Gorazd and St. Angelarius was widespread in Berat. He repeats his conclusion that the memory of the two saints is post-biographical and "...has a mixed origin - folk and literary", with the relics of the saints at their core, regardless of their authenticity. Existing or rather extant artifacts (reliquaries and icons) and texts are united, according to the author, from oral accounts. This narrative was part of two macro-narratives, one about St. Gorazd and another about St. Angelarius. The first of them is closer to the folk tradition, says Zashev, and includes the names Kenos and Teodoro in the group of St. Seven-Numbered Saints, and the second is based on literary sources used by the author of the Berat Service. Traces of the second macronarrative are contained in Antim Alexudi's Brief Historical Description of the Holy Metropolis of Velegrad. He, apparently based on a confusion of similar-sounding toponyms, decided that Kliment, Naum and Angelarius arrived in southern Belgrade, not in northern Belgrade. Obviously, it was his idea and that Boris is waiting for them in Ohrid.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the whole group of Sevens. The formation of the group of saints is traced, at various stages - mention of individual names, enumeration of the saints and identification as a group. Three written monuments, eight wall paintings, four icons, one carved medallion, three reliquaries and one donation depository were examined in this direction. Based on this, the "places of memory" of this common cult in the area are also determined. The author did not give in to the temptation to define the tradition for St. Sedmochiselnitsi as a "Bulgarian national initiative", inasmuch as the tradition is Greek-speaking and developed mostly among the Wallachian population of this area, but also among Bulgarians, Greeks, and Albanians in this polyethnic region. In the sixth chapter, the famous book of Berat bishop Antim Alexudi "Brief historical description of the holy Metropolis of

Velegrad and the area under its spiritual jurisdiction" is examined in detail, in view of the topic. The author begins with a short biography of this remarkable church figure and writer, almost unknown to the Bulgarian public. The information about St. Sedmochiselnitsi is analyzed and the sources for them are sought. Emphasis is placed on the fact that Antim Alexudi, obviously in his role as metropolitan of Berat, places the diocesan seat of his diocese at the center of the veneration of the saints.

In the added Appendix at the end of the book, a new edition of the text of the Berat Service is published. There are also three more works by the alleged author, Mihail Ipsirot. Finally, a comprehensive bibliography containing 153 titles is included. Finally, I would like to express some considerations about the monograph, which are based on my own research into the cult of St. Gorazd, St. Angelarius, and in general, the Septuagint in the region, although they are aimed at establishing the authenticity of the relics of the saints in Berat and the presence of an earlier, properly medieval cult of them. First of all, I do not agree with E. Zashev's conclusion regarding the so-called Hilendar legend from the 16th century, where, in my opinion, the Saints of Seven are mentioned for the first time as a group. E. Zashev rejects this idea because: "However, it is difficult to accept that the expression  $\text{z}\check{\text{T}}$ . number corresponds to the term "Seven-numbered" ( $\text{E}\pi\tau\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\theta\mu\omicron\iota$ ), a much more adequate translation in this case is "seven in number". I don't see why the translation is inadequate, it seems to me completely accurate, E. Zashev's translation is speculative, as far as the monument is much earlier than his idea of creating the group of saints. As well as from the first, according to him, mention of this term - from the life of St. John Vladimir from 1690. The same applies to the earliest image of St. Sedmochiselnitsi, from the Church of St. Mother of God" of the Slimnicki (Slivnish) monastery near Prespa, from 1612. Whether the saints are represented here in a composition or not is not important, what is important is that they are represented together, which is obviously not accidental and speaks of an already formed group.

This, of course, changes the idea of its formation, but does not prevent E. Zashev's conclusion about the role of the Berat Service in the development of this cult. He is undisputed, but maybe the "seven-figure" notion is borrowed from somewhere else? From the Holy Mountain? Otherwise, there is no way to explain her appearance on the basis of two of the students. From somewhere, the scribes from southern Albania must have learned about the other participants in this group! Zashev has indicated from where (Theophylact of Ohrid, Dimitri Khomatian, Konstantin Kavasila), but apparently these works did not come directly from Ohrid, but most likely from Mount Athos. Which closes the logical circle! More considerations could be made about the monograph, but I must say that most of them are on debatable issues. Here I will content myself with making a few more minor remarks.

The author correctly lists the states that ruled Belgrade, incl. the Bulgarian one, but I would add more information about this period, which is quite long - from the 30s-40s of the 9th century until after the fall of Bulgaria under Byzantine rule (1018).. Several foci of resistance against the Byzantine power

in 1018. Here, the heirs of the last Bulgarian king from the so-called First Kingdom - Prussian, Aaron and Alusian - strengthened themselves and put up a long resistance to Basil II. In the nearby fortress of Proništa, the voivode Ivac also resisted for a long time. More important in this case, however, is that this area is directly associated with the activities of some of the students of Cyril and Methodius. As e.g. Kliment Ohridski, who was a bishop somewhere here, although there is still no satisfactory localization of his diocesan center. As it has already become clear, we cannot speak of a direct connection between the tradition of the 9th century and that of the 17th-19th centuries, but this probably played a role in the emergence of the later cult of St. Sedmochiselnitsi precisely in these areas. By the way, in the not-too-distant Bitola, in the church "St. Dimitar", now known as the "Greek Church", has the relics of another Septuagint - St. Sava, for which there is no information from where they were brought.

A note can also be made regarding the name of the city, namely Belgrade, in various variants. The modern name of the city, Berat, most likely does not derive directly from the Bulgarian form of the name, but rather from the name of a holy night in Islam, the Berat night, in which Muslims receive forgiveness of their sins! In conclusion, the monograph of Ch. Assoc. Dr. Evgeni Zashev provides a solution to some very important problems regarding the late cult of St. Seven-digit Saints in present-day Southern Albania. It represents a major step in the process of studying the late cult of St. Seven-Numbered Saints in present-day southern Albania. It raises many questions about this cult that are subject to further discussion. Its interdisciplinary nature must be highlighted, in which the author has shown himself to be an excellent philologist. He handles the Greek texts excellently and has included nice translations. He has also shown himself to be an excellent historian who places the investigated problems in a historical context. He has successfully protected himself from some pseudo-patriotic infatuations that could be admitted on the basis of the texts studied. Finally, he also showed good theological knowledge, having successfully dealt with the pictorial material as well. I would emphasize in this direction the study of the Berat Reliquary, which clarifies the questions surrounding its appearance and role. On the basis of all this, I will without a doubt support the occupation of the academic position of docent from ch. Dr. Evgeni Dimitrov Zashev, calling on the honorable scientific jury to do the same.

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St. Constantine and Elena  
Plovdiv

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