REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Vanev

in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Art Studies and Fine Arts (Medieval Architecture: Archives and Field Research), for the needs of the Fine Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, professional field 8.1 Theory of Arts, announced in the State Gazette (No. 44/14.05.2026, p. 240).

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Art Studies and Fine Arts (Medieval Architecture: Archives and Field Research) was announced on 14 May 2026. The sole applicant is Chief Assistant Professor Stanislav Stanchev Stanev, PhD. He has submitted a list of 24 works of which he is the author or co-author. His principal work is the monograph The Churches of Mesembria in the Research of Architect Pyotr Pokryshkin, published in 2025 (ISBN 978-619-7619-58-4 (e-book), ISBN 978-619-7619-57-7 (print)).

Stanislav Stanev graduated from the Department of Art Studies at the National Academy of Arts. In 2011 he was awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) for his dissertation Problems of Visual Art and Architecture in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: The Liturgical Planning of Baptisteries (supervisor: Prof. Dr. Arch. Stefan Boyadzhiev).

Over the years, Stanislav Stanev worked as a teacher of art history (1995–1997), as a coordinator and programme consultant at the Soros Center for the Arts Foundation (1998–2003), as a part-time assistant lecturer at the Department of History of New Bulgarian University (2006–2009), and as a programme consultant at the National Film Center (2009–2016). Since 2012 he has been a member of the Mediaeval and National Revival Art research group within the Fine Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies. Since August 2021 he has also worked at the Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute as curator of the Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis site, where his main duties concern the collections, exhibition, research and public outreach activities. Stanislav Stanev plays an important role in the study, documentation, conservation and public presentation of the Episcopal Basilica. A further contribution is his participation in the expert team that prepared the documentation for the inclusion of the site in

the UNESCO Tentative List as a serial property (together with the Small Basilica and the Late-Antique Irene Building).

Stanislav Stanev is a member of various national and international organisations relevant to his research profile, among them the Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique (AIEMA), the International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics (ICCM), the Bulgarian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS Bulgaria), and the Association of Byzantinists and Medievalists in Bulgaria. His participation in projects of ICOMOS Bulgaria is also related to his work on the monograph submitted for the present competition.

Stanislav Stanev's habilitation work focuses on the research carried out by architect Pyotr Pokryshkin in Nessebar in 1900. The choice of topic is not accidental: Dr. Stanev has had a long-standing research interest in the churches of Nessebar, already evident in his 2006 article "The Old Metropolitan Church in Nessebar in the context of liturgical planning of Constantinopolitan churches". In 2016, in connection with his participation in an ICOMOS Bulgaria project, he published the study "Church of St John Aliturgetos, Nessebar: History of its early exploration", followed in 2017 by "Mesemvria's Old Metropolitan church as explored by Karel Škorpil".

The monograph The Churches of Mesembria in the Research of Architect Pyotr Pokryshkin comprises 427 pages and consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of illustrations, a bibliography, tables, appendices, an album, and summaries in English and Russian. The text and appendices include rich and exceptionally valuable illustrative material, most of which is published here for the first time: photographs, manuscripts, field sketches, drawings, architectural surveys, watercolours, publications, archival inventories and museum records. Pokryshkin's observations and part of his documentation, held in the Research Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts, were made known to the Bulgarian scholarly community by Zhivka Vazharova as early as the 1960s. During his research in St. Petersburg, however, Stanislav Stanev came across information about photographs and draft drawings by Pokryshkin, previously unknown to Bulgarian scholars, which are kept in the Scientific Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture at the Russian Academy of Sciences; these complete the picture of the Russian architect's extensive research in Nessebar. One of the author's main aims is the full publication of this documentary heritage, the archival records of which he traced personally. In addition to being reproduced in high-quality full colour, the materials are systematised in tabular inventories, which is a further contribution by Stanislav

Stanev. The process of locating and examining the archival documentation is discussed in detail in the first chapter of the monograph, “Pyotr Pokryshkin’s Materials in the Archival and Museum Collections of St. Petersburg”.

Another important contribution of the monograph is its comprehensive biographical study of architect Pokryshkin, who is little known to Bulgarian scholars. Stanislav Stanev has traced the principal publications by Russian authors, which concentrate on Pokryshkin’s work as an architect and restorer at the Imperial Archaeological Commission, while his contribution to the study of the medieval architecture of Nessebar has remained outside their scholarly interest. The second chapter, “Pyotr Pokryshkin: Artist-Architect, Restorer and Priest”, follows his life as a student of architecture, scholarship recipient and later teacher at the Imperial Academy of Arts, as well as a participant in scientific expeditions. Stanislav Stanev pays particular attention to the two Balkan expeditions in which Pokryshkin took part. The chapter also examines his long service at the Imperial Archaeological Commission and his brief ministry as a priest in Lukoyanov. Stanislav Stanev’s meticulous research makes this chapter the most detailed and reliable biographical study of the Russian architect in the scholarly literature to date.

Chapter III, “The Churches of Mesembria”, makes the greatest contribution to the study of the ecclesiastical architecture of Nessebar. It opens with a detailed survey of early writings. A valuable complement to this survey is the publication of excerpts from the late 18th and 19th centuries, translated into Bulgarian by the author of the monograph, including texts by Wenzel von Brognard, Egor Enegolm, Charles Sayger and Auguste Desarnod, Helmuth von Moltke and others. This part presents Pyotr Pokryshkin’s study and documentation of the churches of the Holy Archangels, St. John Aliturgetos and Christ Pantocrator, which Stanislav Stanev analyses in a detailed and comprehensive manner. The three churches are presented on the basis of Pokryshkin’s documentation and observations, combined with the accounts of other researchers of the period and the author’s own field studies. The chapter logically concludes with a brief review of the known archival photographs of the churches taken during the first two decades of the 20th century. Images scattered across rare publications and archival collections are thus brought together in one place, where they can easily be compared and analysed in future research.

The scholarly contributions of the monograph are beyond doubt. Its high scholarly value has been recognised by the Nikolay Raynov Award for Art History and Criticism of the Criticism Section of the Union of Bulgarian Artists, which Dr. Stanev received in 2025, and by its

nomination for the 2025 “Image and Text” Award of the Bulgarian–European Cultural Dialogues Centre Foundation.

Regrettably, this valuable publication comes decades too late, given the extensive reconstructions of the churches carried out in the mid-20th century, which irreversibly altered their original architectural appearance. Nevertheless, Stanislav Stanev’s work should be regarded as an opportunity and a foundation for a new approach to the conservation, study and understanding of the cultural heritage of Nessebar.

In addition to the monograph discussed above, Dr. Stanev has submitted a number of publications that reflect his research pursuits and scholarly interests. The recorded citations attest to the relevance and significance of his research. His publications present him as an indispensable researcher with original ideas, capable of in-depth and comprehensive research. Some of them are devoted to the Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis and result from his participation in the study of this outstanding monument. These publications are co-authored owing to the interdisciplinary nature of the research, but his contribution and leading role are indisputable. The article “The Phiale Fountain of the Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis: On the Treatment of Spolia in Late Antiquity. Metamorphoses of the Sacred Water Concept” is devoted to the phiale in the atrium of the basilica. The authors consider the phiale an example of the transformation of an ancient monument whose elements were transferred into a new Christian context and acquired a different function and symbolic meaning.

“Two mensae from the Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis” examines two marble tabletops (mensae) found during the archaeological excavations of 2016–2018. The study offers a typological, functional and contextual analysis of the finds within the Early Christian liturgical setting of the Balkans.

A synthesis of the long history of research on the Episcopal Basilica is offered in “The Episcopal Basilica of Thracian Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria)”, presented at the 17th International Congress of Christian Archaeology. The paper proposes a new reading of the architecture of the complex, its building history, liturgical planning and urban context.

The competition also includes an earlier study examining the organisation of spaces for receiving eucharistic offerings in Early Christian and Early Byzantine churches. As a starting point, the author analyses a room uncovered during the excavations of the basilica near Sliven (Novo Selo district), which earlier researchers had identified as a baptistery. The study offers

a critical review of the archaeological evidence and proposes a new interpretation of the room as a skeuophylakion.

These publications present Stanislav Stanev as one of the few researchers in Bulgaria working on the organisation and liturgical planning of church complexes of the 4th–6th centuries. His interdisciplinary approach and his interest in the churches of Nessebar extend beyond the chronological limits of Early Christian monuments, and this, in a broader sense, establishes him as a leading specialist in the field of Byzantine architecture.

The competition documentation complies with the requirements of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and of the Regulations on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The materials submitted by Stanislav Stanev considerably exceed the required number of points, which shows that this competition is long overdue.

The demonstrated contributions and the quality of the research submitted for the competition give me grounds to recommend with conviction that the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS elect Dr. Stanislav Stanev to the academic position of Associate Professor in Art Studies and Fine Arts, professional field 8.1 Theory of Arts.

9 October 2026 Ivan Vanev