

# Opinion

by Assoc. Prof. Irena Ivanova Bokova, New Bulgarian University, sphere of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field

3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies, concerning **Dr. Nikolay Tanev Sirakov** as the only candidate for participation in the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor** in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies, promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 57/9 July 2021 for the needs of the Regional Museum of History – Sliven

## Evaluation for compliance with the minimum national requirements

It is clear from the documents submitted that all required documents connected with educational and academic degrees, a list of publications, a list of citations, author's information about the original academic contribution of the works, copies of the publications and information on the minimum national requirements under Article 2b, Paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The candidate has been conferred the educational and academic degree of PhD in the professional field of **Theory of Art** and academic degree **Art History and Visual Studies** by the New Bulgarian University (NBU), 28 November 2018, Diploma No. 353, with defended dissertation work *The Language of the Burial Rite of the Thracians along the Lower Course of the Toundja River*. He has professional qualification MA in Art History from the NBU, specialisation in Culturology (2017), MA in Archaeology and professional qualification of Archaeologist – teacher of history, and MA in Finance – professional qualification of Economist from the St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo.

For his participation in the competition Dr. Nikolay Tanev Sirakov has submitted the monograph *Ancient Articles of Adornment from the Regional Museum of History – Sliven*, Obnova Publishers, Sliven, 2021.

## Evaluation of the monograph

The monograph attracts the attention with the important topic of the articles of adornment as a system of signs revealing the hierarchy in every society, but also as a system reflecting the artistic achievements of the jewellers and goldsmiths during a concrete period. It is important to note that the author studies the traditions in jewellery art in the context of the cultural, social and political changes occurring over the centuries. The idea of the change in the images, symbols and social representations that are discerned in the material world of the articles of adornment is also associated with cultural interactions, cultural influences and preferences for certain elements, natural materials, etc. This approach makes it possible to reveal the links, the common places in the evolution of the ancient cultures, as well as to substantiate their specificity.

The author also develops the issues in a historical context and indicates key cultural area of their development. He also offers an introduction into the role and the functions of the articles of

adornment in ancient cultures, their social significance and their links to the high social status of their owners. The study places the ancient articles of adornment found during archaeological explorations on the territory of the Sliven region in a broader culturological context. Their description is framed by the ancient traditions of workmanship, both in terms of the visual images, symbols and significant characteristics of the ritual culture at that time, and with a view to the technologies in a concrete historical context. The process of accumulation of knowledge and skills for working with precious metals and precious stones, and their transformation into significant objects of ancient culture. The author convincingly demonstrates the change in the images and notions about man's surrounding world and his relations with the world of the divine, which are revealed in the course of the analysis of the articles of adornment as ornaments, symbolism and material of which they are made.

The book presents the gold wreath from Kitova Mogila tumulus in the Krushare village, the mask from Dalakova Mogila in Topolchane village, the half-mask from Yakimova Mogila in the Krushare village, as well as precious objects, hairpins, earrings and rings, necklaces and beads – part of the finds from the archaeological sites in the Sliven region. The objects are divided on the basis of their role to “mark” the head or the body. The author demonstrates a diversity of articles of adornment, which he examines both as reflecting the changes in the ideological world of the Antiquity and in comparison with other images that have been described and studied in detail. In this way, the archaeological finds of articles of adornment from the Sliven region become an important element in the narrative about the cultural evolution of the Antiquity, and they find their role as signs of the ancient culture in the region.

The study is important in the building of a cultural system in which the articles of adornment from the Antiquity were placed, which makes them comprehensible and inscribes them into a broad culturological context that exceeds the local interpretation.

### **Research (creative) activity and results**

The author has submitted four publications in co-authorship (chapters published in four collective monographs), nine published articles and eight more articles in press in reviewed or unreviewed editions with academic reviewing. The candidate meets the requirements for reviewing of the publications.

Several highlights can be identified in Dr. Nikolay Sirakov's research and publications. A lasting interest in archaeological issues can be seen, as well as analysis of finds from key sites of the ancient culture in the Sliven region (*The Thracian Heritage in the Regional Museum of History – Sliven: on the Semantic and Functions of the “Female Objects” in the Royal Burial*, published in the *Bulgarian Folklore Magazine*, 2019; *Erotic Bronze Hairpin*, published in *News of the Yambol Museum*, 2019). The topics of the articles in press, for which a document has been submitted, broaden Nikolay Sirakov's scope of research, while preserving the link with the regional cultures (*The Cultural Space in Ancient Thrace (Example from the region of the Middle Course of Tundja)*, in press in ИМЮБ, vol. 27, 2021; *Funerary Mask from the Sliven Region; Wine – Tradition Inherited from the Thracians (on the example of the Sliven Region)*, in press in

a publication of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, etc.).

A peculiar link with the submitted habilitation work can also be perceived in the study on the mythological transformations of the horse, again based on materials from the Regional Museum of History – Sliven (in co-authorship). This is also the context of autonomous papers and papers with co-authors from the 2004–2011 period, devoted to archaeological explorations conducted in tumuli from the Antiquity. Another part of the papers with archaeological topics are oriented towards discoveries on the territory of the Tuida Fortress in Sliven or in neighbouring municipalities.

Dr. Sirakov devotes special attention in his research on the studies of local cultures and their results serve as titles of chapters from collective monographs (on the villages of Kaloyanovo and Zhelyo Voyvoda. The lasting interest in the regional history is also seen in the last collective study conducted in 2021 under the guidance of N. Sirakov. A book was published on the basis of historical documents and archive materials, which presents the movement of the Goryani in the Sliven region (*Under the Banner of Freedom: the Goryani in the Sliven region*, Sliven, 2021).

The submitted publications reflect the active research activities of Dr. Nikolay Sirakov as archaeologist, historian (presentation of archaeological explorations conducted and of historical studies on the basis of documents) and participant in interdisciplinary projects, notably *Cultural Resources, Valorisation of the Heritage and Local Development* (Contract No. 20/12 with the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences as the leading organisation.

### **Citing by other authors**

The submitted documents on the citations comply with the requirements: 14 citations in publications with scientific reviewers and with references, in monographs and in collective works with scientific reviewing.

### **Personal impressions**

I know Dr. Nikolay Sirakov as a serious and thorough researcher, participant in scientific conferences and other events where he has presented well substantiated new data and interpretations of historical facts and events. His interests in the sphere of archaeology and history (Antiquity and Middle Ages) are linked to their significance for contemporary culture in the Sliven region. He is also working very seriously to attract young people and especially students of different ages to the heritage of the Sliven region, he participates in various events aimed at popularising research and at bringing the broad public of the Museum closer to research.

### **Conclusion**

The contribution and the volume of the habilitation work and of the other publications, as well as the candidate's research activities, completely warrant my positive evaluation of his entire

activities presented and my positive vote for conferring the position of **Associate Professor** to the candidate.

9 November 2021

/sg./ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irena Bokova