

## REVIEW

by

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on

the procedure of the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor** in the sphere of higher education **3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences**, in Professional Field 3.1. **Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies** for the needs of the Regional Museum of History – Sliven, promulgated in the *State Gazette* No. 57/9 July 2021. One candidate has applied to participate in the announced competition: **Dr. Nikolay Tanev Sirakov**.

### **Presentation of the candidate and professional experience**

Dr. Nikolay Sirakov has obtained three MA degrees: Archaeology at the St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo in 1999, Economy with specialisation in the sphere of Finances in 2003 and Art History with specialisation in Culturology in 2017 at the New Bulgarian University. In 2018 he defended the educational and academic degree of PhD in Art History and Visual Arts. Dr. Nikolay Sirakov's professional experience started as tutor in a school, then he was manufacturing and distribution manager of the ready production in a manufacturing enterprise. Since 2003, the candidate's career and professional experience developed in the Regional Museum of History – Sliven as curator and archaeologist. Since 2013 he has occupied the position of Director of the Regional Museum of History – Sliven.

### **Evaluation of the research publications submitted for the competition**

The publications submitted by Dr. Nikolay Sirakov for the competition generally follow his professional career as museum worker and archaeologist. The specificity is that in his capacity of culturologist and art historian he not only publishes artefacts found in the course of archaeological explorations and kept at the Museum, but he also analyses them from a culturological viewpoint, trying to integrate them in a Thracian and Indo-European cultural context.

The monograph *Ancient Articles of Adornment from the Regional Museum of History – Sliven* (2021) is submitted as habilitation work under the procedure for obtaining the academic position of **Associate Professor** at the Regional Museum of History – Sliven. In the *Introduction* and in the chapter *History of the Articles of Adornment* the author examines the polyvalent significance of these works of toreutics with which humans decorated themselves over the millennia. Dr. N. Sirakov makes a survey of mining (ways of extracting copper, gold and silver) and metalworking, with special attention being attributed everywhere to the Sliven region and also with providing extensive geological and archaeological details in the general picture outlined. The workshops, the technological processes and the tools used to make metal objects are examined. The candidate devotes attention to the changes occurring in the social organisation, the cultural and economic relations in society with the development of the means of subsistence connected with the mining and processing of metals. The author cites

salient examples of the jeweller's art from Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Aegean world (Crete, Hellas, Etruria, Rome) as a social and religious marker in the journey to the World Beyond. The paths of interactions and influences in jewellery making are outlined (see the Orientalisation in the style). Special attention is also focused on the laws passed in Greece and Rome against the excessive use of luxury goods, including works of jeweller's art.

In the chapters *Articles of Adornment for the Head and Neck* and *Articles of Adornment for the Body* the candidate starts from the particular, i.e., from the analysis of concrete objects in the Museum's depository, adducing numerous parallels, and proceeds towards generalising conclusions in a broad cultural-historical context. The examined articles of adornment for the head and neck comprise the gold wreath from the Kitova Mogila tumulus – Krushare village, a gold half-mask from Yakimova Mogila tumulus – Krushare village, the gold mask from Dalakova Mogila – Topolchane village, silver and bone hairpins from Trapoklova Mogila – Trapoklovo village, earrings, necklaces, beads, medallions, etc. The author logically associates the gold wreath, the mask and the half-mask with the faith in immortality of the Thracians and with their immortalisation rites. The analysis of the gold mask from Dalakova Mogila is interesting as it demonstrates that the Thracian craftsman was familiar with the so-called 'golden ratio' and used it. These new observations complement the established knowledge in geometry and stereometry demonstrated in the subtumular sacral constructions on which no written evidence exists. Dr. N. Sirakov examines the hairpins in detail as women's accessory during the Roman Age, and analyses specifically a bronze hairpin with the image of a phallus found on a ritual platform in the Popova Mogila tumulus (Trapoklovo village). Provoked by the archaeological context in which the hairpin was found, the author makes an extensive survey of the phallus symbolism of constructive force and its ritual meaning in the concrete situational use. The book presents the ancient collection of earrings, rings, necklaces and beads owned by the Regional Museum of History – Sliven, as well as the archaeological context of their finding, when it is known.

In the chapter *Articles of Adornment for the Body* the author has presented in catalogue form, in chronological order and according to types the numerous collection of fibulae from the Late Antiquity and Roman periods, as well as the rings, bracelets and plaques found and kept at the Museum. The book ends with a catalogue of the artefacts examined in the text. I would recommend to end with summarising the conclusions of the individual chapters with a brief cultural-historical context in which the materials analysed in the text functioned.

The monograph *The Horse and Its Mythological Transformations (Three Ancient Monuments from the Collection of the Regional Museum of History – Sliven)* is written in co-authorship with Georgi Kovachev. The monograph follows the model of three artefacts from the depository of the Regional Museum of History in the town of Sliven (two of which had been found in archaeological context and one being with unknown provenance from the region of the town of Sliven) with a view to analysing them in a broad cultural-historical and mythological Mediterranean context the introductory part familiarises the reader with the history of the domestication of the horse, its role for the Indo-Europeanisation, the dynamisation of the economy and the development of military craft. Special attention is devoted to the horse in the mythological notions of the Mediterranean world, and more specifically of the Thracians. The remaining three chapters are devoted to hybrid creatures between a horse and a bird – *hippalectryon* (a ceramic rhyton from Taneva Mogila tumulus), a horse and a sea monster – *hippocampus* (image on a bronze ring), horse and human – *centaur* (silver rhyton from Dalakova Mogila tumulus). The three artefacts are a pretext for extensive mythological and cultural-historical excursion accompanied by a comparative art-historian and ritual analysis.

Dr. Nikolay Sirakov also presents under the procedure the research on local lore *Pages from the History of the Village of Kaloyanovo, Sliven Region. Book One, Chronicle of the Zhelyu Voyvoda Village, Sliven Region*, and the study *Under the Banner of Freedom: the Goryani*, where he is co-author. These studies are essentially part of the museum work and they contribute to the studies on the Sliven region.

The candidate has submitted eleven papers, four of which in co-authorship. Most of them introduce the results of the author's archaeological results and artefacts from the Museum's depository in academic circulation. His publications on the works of jeweller's art to which Dr. N. Sirakov is particularly attracted are with a description of the object of research, which is customary for such articles, as well as data on their provenance, accompanied by art-historian and semantic analysis.

### **Professional and academic activities**

Dr. Nikolay Sirakov rose consistently in the museum hierarchy and is currently Acting Director of the Regional Museum of History in the town of Sliven. Over the years he has participated in a number of archaeological explorations on the territory of the regions of Sliven, Nova Zagora and Haskovo. The most important project in terms of significance and duration was the archaeological research of the ancient and medieval Tuida fortress.

The candidate is one of the members of the team that worked on the project for the publication of Volume 3 of the *Attempt at History of the Town of Sliven* by Dr. Simeon Tabakov and one of the editors of the edition.

### **Conclusion**

Dr. Nikolay Sirakov has considerable achievements in a difficult interdisciplinary domain – culturological positioning of the cultural heritage from the Thracian and the Roman periods of the Sliven region in the Mediterranean-Asia-Minor cultural-historical context. At the same time, he is directly involved in archaeological explorations *in situ*, which gives him an opportunity to take always into consideration the archaeological environment in which the artefacts had been found, and to reconstruct their ritual semanticism.

In view of the above, I would like to suggest to the distinguished members of the Academic Panel to confer to Dr. Nikolay Tanev Sirakov the academic position of **Associate Professor** in the sphere of **3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences**, in Professional Field 3.1. **Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies** for the needs of the Regional Museum of History in the town of Sliven.

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