

OPINION

for: a competition for the academic position of „Associate Professor” („Docent”) in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences for the needs of Regional Historical Museum-Sliven.

prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Kalin Stoev, member of Scientific Juri (SJ), based on the Order of the Director of IBCT-BAS Prof. Dr. Romyana Preshlenova for SJ, № 90 RD-16 / 22.07.2021.

At the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" announced in the Darzhaven vestnik, issue 57 of 09.07.2021 for the needs of Regional Historical Museum-Sliven, as the only candidate documents were submitted by Dr. Nikolay Tanev Sirakov. Since only one candidate appeared, my obligation as a member of the Scientific Juree to compare the required indicators with other applicants for the competition is waived.

The attached CV shows that Dr. Sirakov graduated from the University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” where he acquired a Master's degree in archeology in 1999, and then, in 2003, with a Master's degree in finance. His professional competencies in the field of scientific knowledge continue with a Master's degree at the New Bulgarian University (specialty Culturology, professional qualification Master of Arts) in 2017. He received his doctorate in 2018 at the same university as a doctor of art and visual studies with defended dissertation on “The language of the funeral rite of the Thracians in the middle reaches of the Tundzha River.” Nikolay Sirakov's professional path is developing in the Regional Historical Museum - Sliven, where he was curator between 2003 - 2013, and since 2013 he has held the position of director. His many years of experience as a museum manager and his participation in a number of projects leave no doubt in his professional qualification.

The scientific production described by Nikolay Sirakov for the coverage of the required scientometric indicators is presented by 1 habilitation thesis, a number of articles and studies, many of which are co-authored, 4 parts of collective monographs. In my opinion I will focus mainly on the habilitation monograph, also on the monograph „The Horse and its mythological transformations (Three ancient monuments from the collection of the Regional Historical Museum – Sliven)”, closely related to the topic of the competition, and I will characterize the other publications of the candidate.

The monograph submitted as a habilitation paper is entitled „Ancient jewelry from the Regional Historical Museum – Sliven” (Obnova Publishing House, Sliven, 2021, 174 p.). Although focused on objects with functional value of jewelry from the inventory of a particular museum, the book has a conceptual value for the history and development of jewelry from the Bulgarian lands, because it places their genesis in the context of the overall development of these pieces of art in the ancient world. The research has value not only as an analysis of jewelry as an archaeological artifact, but also as a mediator of cultural and mythological views at various levels in society, presenting them as a work of art with a certain cultural significance. The author's attempts to present religious ideas and mythological, respectively mythopoetic stories behind the images of the artifacts, respectively to place them in their cultural and historical context (for example, the symbolism of the *pylos* - p. 70-71 or the meaning of the image of Hermes on the ring by Taneva mogila p. 117 ff.), deserve admirations. Another author's approach, which can be described as contributing in the context of analysis of artifacts as a relic of life, culture, morals, religious beliefs of the ancient inhabitants of the Bulgarian lands and as an essential part of museum work in Bulgaria is their comparison with similar objects from the collections of other museums, such as Getty or Ashmolean (p. 101). The work has minor weaknesses - for example, an error in the bibliography („Popov, Jokenhofen 2017”, instead of 2018, p. 143-144) or in some places insufficiently detailed analysis of the relationship between the artifact and the identity of the buried at the place where it was found, what is, however, rather a secondary lack of historical and archaeological nature (p. 120-122). In general, the small remarks do not impair the overall good impression of the work.

A similar methodic is used in the book presented by the candidate, co-authored with Georgi Kovachev: „The horse and its mythological transformations (Three ancient monuments from the collection of the Regional Historical Museum – Sliven)”, Obnova, Sliven, 2020. The objectives of the work are formulated in the book in view of the methodology of transition from the private to the general. Based on the example of three artifacts with hippomorphic images, the place of the horse in the mythological notions of the Thracians is investigated, as an expression of cultural traditions, some of which lie in the Indo-European circle of beliefs (pp. 32-33). Here, too, much of the research is devoted to tracing the mythological narrative behind the artifacts. It is worth noting that the work puts into scientific circulation more mythological figures specific to our lands, such as the *hippalketryon* (the horse-cock) and the *hippocampus*. The book also contains important cultural and historical contributions related to the mythological roots of Thracian culture - for example, the hypothesis of the etymology of "Teres / Tereius" from the word *pher* - beast, which is able to explain the increased role of the centaur in Thracian art - p. 93).

As for the other collective monographs and the articles of N. Sirakov, it can be said that they on the one hand lie in the field of his monograph and treat problems of Thracian art and culture (e.g. “Erotic bronze hairpin”, “The Golden Section of the Golden Mask” – with co-authors Denis Sirakov and Marieta Sirakova) and on the other, they can also be characterized as successful attempts for socialization and communication of scientific knowledge in the field of culture, life and history of antiquity in the Sliven region. The analysis of an important type of art objects deserves attention: women's objects from Regional Historical Museum - Sliven, as an important communicator of transition rites and practices in the context of “sacred marriage” („Thracian heritage in Regional historical museum - Sliven: about the Semantics and Function of the „Female objects” in the King’s funeral”). Archaeological contributions are also important - for example, the introduction into scientific circulation of the settlement site near the village of Zornitsa, or the sites at the village of Nauchene and the village of Stripets, published in "Archaeological discoveries and excavations" for 2018 and 2019.

Also worth noting is this part of the scientific work of N. Sirakov, which draws attention to little known or insufficiently commented pages of Bulgarian history, which is important in view of the fact of socialization of knowledge concerning the Sliven region, but also in the wider meaning of the genesis of modern Bulgarian society (e.g. “Under the banner of freedom: the Goryans in the Sliven region”, Sliven, 2021 – with co-authors Maria Pavlova and Penka Dimitrova or “Pages from the history of the village of Kaloyanovo, Sliven region” – with co-authors Nedelcho Mitarkov and Minko Stefanov, “Stefan Gidikov - Sliven patriot and associate of Georgi Rakovski”).

The above said gives me the reason to express an affirmative assessment on the scientific production of the candidate and to recommend to the scientific jury Dr. Nikolay Tanev Sirakov to be elected as “Associate Professor” (“Docent”) in the competition.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kalin Stoev