

STATEMENT

done by: Kostadin Rabadjiev, Dr.Sc., Professor in Classical archaeology, member of the Scientific Jury according to the Order of the Rector of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (No. ПД 38-565/ 03.10.2023), concerning the competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology/ Archaeology/ Medieval archaeology, announced in the State Gazette (No. 65/ 28.07.2023).

1. Dr. Chavdar Yanakiev Kirilov, Assistant Professor in Archaeology, is the only candidate in the announced competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the Department of Archaeology, organized at the request of the Council of the Faculty of History (No. 11/ 26.09.2023). His documents have been approved and the reason for his participation in the competition procedure was the submitted certificate that he fulfils the minimum national requirements under Article 2b of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff. Ch. Kirilov graduated in Archaeology at the Faculty of History of Sofia University (1998), and he was a full-time PhD student in Archaeology at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, with the dissertation topic: “*Studien zu den frühmittelalterlichen Wurzeln europäischer Stadtentwicklung: Archäologische Befunde Mitteleuropas, ihre sozial- und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Deutung und der Vergleich zum Raum der östlichen Balkanhalbinsel*” (defended in 2006). Since 2006, he has been an archaeologist at the St. Kliment Ohridski University, assistant at the Department of Archeology since 2010, lecturer since 2012. In the competition he participates with a habilitation thesis published and submitted for discussion under the title: “*The Unknown known. Glass bracelets in Bulgaria from the Late Iron Age to the Ottoman Era. Sofia, St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2023*”. He also contributed 10 selected publications – studies and papers according to the attached list.

2. Chavdar Kirilov is a graduate of Sofia University and Goethe University in Frackfurt. This is an auspicious start in his professional career as an established researcher of the past, recognizable today in his dealings with Balkan archaeology in the transition from Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium to the Middle Ages. The teaching workload of Assist. Prof. Ch. Kirilov in the Bachelor's programme are the principal lecture courses of which he is the lecturer: “Archaeology of Late Antiquity”, a two-semester course (60 hrs.); and “Archaeology of the Great Migration of Peoples”, a one-semester course (45 hrs.); as well as the seminar course “Medieval Bulgarian Archaeology” in two semesters; also compulsory elective courses in the specialization in Medieval Archaeology: “Weapons and Tools of production” and “Monasticism and Monasteries”. Three are the elective courses ,which he reads in the MA program in Archaeology: “City and ‘Non-City’ in Early Medieval Europe”, “The Byzantine City”, and “Dendrochronology”. In fact, his teaching load is above the norm, almost double, which reveals him as a devoted lecturer and supervisor of undergraduate coursework and MA theses (9 on the attached list). I would also add his participation in the annual summer field practices of archaeology students in the archaeological survey of the Late Antique and Medieval fortress in Horizon district at modern Balchik, since 2009 as co-leader of the research team. Apart from this employment, Dr. Kirilov has been the head of the archaeological study of the late antique and medieval fortress “Gradishte” at Melnitsa, municipality of Elhovo, annually since 2018. Also annually since 2019 he is the leader of a non-destructive archaeological survey of a settlement from the 15th – 19th centuries in Tursko Konush near the village of Konush,

Asenovgrad region. In addition to field archaeological studies, Dr. Ch. Kirilov confirmed his presence in the college also with participations in other scientific projects, all of them professionally selected, related to his scientific pursuits and interests: such is the project on the settlement network, road infrastructure and population in Bulgaria during the Ottoman period in historical and archaeological spatial analysis; on the geographical-information system “Early Christianity in the present-day Bulgarian lands (based on historical and archaeological data)”, of which he is the head; on the historical-geographical information system of Southeast Europe: Thrace phase; FENDA (from excavation to non-destructive archaeology); for the compilation of regional dendrochronological standard chronologies in Bulgaria and their use for dating archaeological finds and sites.

A manifestation of his professional commitments is his membership in the Association of Bulgarian Archaeologists (ABA), as well as in the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), and he is also a member of the editorial boards of their editions: the *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology* and the *Studien zur Archäologie Europas*.

3. The monograph with which Ch. Kirilov participates in the competition is about the glass bracelets, and the surprise is not in the demonstrated effort to discuss the artifacts found in the Bulgarian lands, but in their placement in the very vast spatial and chronological boundaries, starting from the Celtic world in the Hellenistic era, through the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and up to the time of the Ottoman Empire. Despite all of this large-scale approach, or perhaps because of it, the structure of the study is simplified and extremely concrete. The preface (1) justifies the choice of the topic and the methods to achieve it, outlines the chronological and spatial dimensions of the analysis; this is followed by the introductory parts such as: an overview of research (2), technology (3) and systematics (4). The picture the author reveals in the historiographical overview, is not very encouraging, due to the limited information published on both the artifacts and the contexts in which they were found. And this makes it difficult to sort them out in terms of technology and workshops, shapes and sizes, colour and decoration, and hence the influences and imports, even fashion preferences, remain highly hypothetical.

The substantive analysis is in the following sections, devoted to the chronologically and culturally distinct groups of glass bracelets: the La Tène culture of Celts (5); the Roman (6); the Middle Byzantine (7) and the Ottoman (8). Despite the difficulties of interpretation outlined in advance, a generalisation is sought here, which, although hypothetical, suggests ways of clarifying the role of the artefacts – the most successful example is that of artefacts from the Middle Ages, which have been identified as a cultural marker – a fashion in the Byzantine world clearly seen in the material realm of medieval Bulgaria (p. 123), which in turn is a good justification for naming the whole group as ‘Middle Byzantine’. But it also reveals the abilities of Ch. Kirilov to look beyond the material evidence, to overcome its limitation in order to achieve the generalized view sought and to trace the long use of bracelets in today’s Bulgarian lands as a penetration of fashions and ideas from external centres.

The Register of Archaeological Sites with glass bracelets from Bulgaria, placed at the end, is arranged alphabetically, and includes 372 described and commented sites. After the bibliography there is an appendix with maps of the distribution of the artifacts in Bulgarian lands by periods (6 maps) and panels with images of bracelets – photographs and drawings, illustrations of scenes and graphic reconstructions of the monuments discussed in the work (19 plates).

Thus, behind the otherwise strange title of the work, which I would interpret as a discussion of familiar and common objects that have remained in fact profoundly unknown, due to the limited information we can learn/derive from them, there is a sense of the large-scale approach that has opened the analysis to questions that are unattainable in the limited scope of a single settlement or necropolis. Therefore, Dr. Kirilov has made a major goal of his work in the direction of an awakened interest in the problems that glass bracelets pose, towards their more precise publication, with data on their finding and the contexts in which they were present, in order to make them a reliable archaeological source (p. 155). Although this sounds too optimistic to me, given the picture of what has not been done by the archaeological college so far, which he has already sketched in the introductory sections and in the analysis, as well. But the difficulty also lies in the perceptible absence of standardization in terms of size (p. 115), perhaps in shape, decoration, colour, in the too many-faced and mixed assemblage of wares, united primarily by their function of hand decoration and by their material, which is glass....

4. Chavdar Kirilov participates in the competition with 10 scientific publications according to the attached list, 2 monographs among them – one is his PhD dissertation in Archaeology, the other is his habilitation thesis for Associate Professor. The remaining 8 are studies and articles, all of them original texts, 2 of them are published in English, 2 are in German, all of them in prestigious Bulgarian and foreign scientific journals and editions.

Settlement archaeology and the discussion of the emergence of urban centres and urbanization in the European political and cultural space in the West and in the East were the subject of Ch. Kirillov's early research interest, synthesized in his doctoral thesis (here App. 2). And the discussion has been continued in a number of studies, such as that on the Bulgarian castle (App. 4), the existence of which, according to Ch. Kirillov, is unacceptable in the eastern borders because it refers to a different economic and political model; the same theme is traced also in the discussion on the residence of the Cherven bishops in the Middle Ages (App. 7), in which the idea of its interpretation as a feudal castle is rejected. The changes in the settlement pattern as a result of alteration of strategic defence in Late antiquity are discussed in some closely associated studies: such is the one about the reduction of fortified urban space in Late Antiquity (App. 3), interpreted by him as an optimization of defence but not a decline; or on the fortified highland settlements in Late Antiquity in the Bulgarian lands (App. 5), in an effort to distinguish their protective functions for the local population from the strategic defence of the central authority; the same revealed in a study entitled "Sword or Plough?" (App. 8), in which the observed abandonment of the mountain fortresses is interpreted as the result of limited grain production, which is rationalized as the reason for the return of the population to the plains; or about the interruption of the coin circulation in the 11th century, which has been assumed as depopulation between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains as a result of raids by the Pechenegs, Uzi and Cumans (App. 6), while Dr Kirilov's analysis of demographic processes traces the causes in a change of the empire's financial policy. And his passion for the details can be detected in what he has written about the heel irons for shoes (App. 10), found in archaeological excavations, which he associates with the Ottoman period and with a change in the shoes worn in the 15th century.

The presence of Dr. Chavdar Kirilov among the scientific college is recognizable also by his participation in scientific forums and conferences with papers in the field of his interests: 7 are listed, the papers for 2 of them are co-authored, 4 are presented in

English, among them I would single out his participation in the International Conference-Workshop on New Towns in Late Antiquity organized by the Netherlands Institute in Turkey (November 2013) and a paper at the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Venice and Padua, Italy (August 2022).

I would also add something interesting that is too significant to be passed over in silence in my statement on the habilitation of our colleague Ch. Kirilov, which is the effort to maintain his web blog: “Archaeo(b)logy. Reflections on the Past and the Present” (<https://archaeoblogia.blogspot.com/>), with his writings oriented to the wide audience of the Web, in an apparent endeavour to educate, but also to cultivate the scientific principles and adherence to precision. Commendable, for the efforts, but also for the courage to face a society that is self-confident, also opinionated, and with a conviction that it is invulnerable in its anonymity.

Testimony to the contributions made are the prestigious journals in which the publications appear, as well as the citations in the scientific texts, as reflected in worldwide databases and attached in the competition documentation. The discussed texts are all written in professional language and, although with a complicated expression, the ideas are clear and readable. I have not noticed any elements of plagiarism in the texts, in fact I did not expect to find any.

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5. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the undoubted contribution of the texts proposed for deliberation in the competition, which I judge to be a significant result of undoubted scientific potential and accumulated field experience. The monograph in my opinion, is a convincing example of its author’s ability to analyse material artefacts and evidence with the methods of archaeological research, and in direct connection and synthesis with readings of historical testimony, to reconstruct ideological influences. The written texts, as well as his participation in archaeological excavations and projects, reveal him as a researcher focused in his scientific pursuits, with deep interests and knowledge of the monuments in the Bulgarian lands, the Balkans and the European world; a scholar who knows the achievements of generations of researchers in leading scientific schools and applies the possibilities of interdisciplinary analysis, who above all is precise to the facts and correct in the reconstructions proposed. He is also a talented lecturer who will enthrall future researchers, and this is the reason for my positive vote for the appointment of **Dr. Chavdar Yanakiev Kirilov** to the academic position of **Associate Professor**.

November 1st, 2023



Kostadin Rabadjiev