

REVIEW

FROM: Prof. Dr. Sergey Borisov Torbatov

REGARDING: competition for the academic position of ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Archaeology – Classical Archaeology), for the needs of the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The competition announcement was published in SG, issue 48 of 28.06.2022. After the expiration of the specified period, by Order No. RD - 38 - 461 of 26.07.2022 of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" was designated the Scientific Jury. The only candidate in the competition is Dr. Ivan Dimitrov Valchev, who since 2013 holds the academic position of "chief assistant" and is a teacher of "Thracian Archaeology" and "Classical Archeology" at the Department of "Archaeology" of the Faculty of History of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The scientific production of the candidate after the acquisition in 2011 of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" includes 2 monographs, 12 studies and articles (1 co-authored), 8 scientific communications (all co-authored) and 5 articles in press (1 co-authored). Of these, Dr. Ivan Valchev has selected 11 titles for participation in the competition – 2 monographs (Nos. 1-2), 4 studies (Nos. 3-5, 10) and 5 articles (Nos. 6-9, 11). The monograph indicated in the list under No. 2 ("*Extraurban sanctuaries in the Roman province of Thrace (I-IV centuries)*"), although it was published in 2015, repeats the topic of the dissertation work presented for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor", and according to the regulations, it is not relevant to this competition.

As a habilitation thesis, the candidate presents a monographic author's study entitled "*The Cult of Jupiter in Lower Moesia during the Roman period*" (No. 2). The expediency and promptitude of such a study are beyond any doubt, since Jupiter is associated with the most numerous group of iconographic and epigraphic monuments in Lower Moesia after the Thracian Horseman, and his cult in the said province has not yet been the subject of a thorough and comprehensive analysis neither in Bulgarian, nor in foreign historiography. The attempts made so far in this direction (mainly by Yanko Todorov, Oleg Alexandrov, Pepa Lungarova and Lucrețiu Mihailescu-Bîrliba) suffer from certain deficits, predetermined either by the then state of the empirical database, or by territorial and socio-group restrictions.

The new monographic work of Dr. Ivan Valchev is the first really comprehensive study of the cult of Jupiter in the province of Lower (and Second – in the initial period of its

existence) Moesia. It includes all the currently known and related monuments from the territory of the province within its borders in the first half of the 3rd century. Their quantity amounts to 255, some of which are published for the first time, and others (works of glyptics and ceramic lamps) have been unfairly neglected in research to date. The well-thought-out and precisely formulated structure of the work should be characterized as optimal, in view of the successful and convincing resolution of the wide range of unexplained problems related to the appearance and spread of the cult of Jupiter in Lower Moesia, which are very successfully highlighted in the introductory part. The current state of research on the origin and development of this cult from the creation of the Roman State to the time of Emperor Constantine I is presented not as a standard historiographical review, but as a critical-polemical one, with great skill, testifying to a deep knowledge of the investigated issues and all related with it world scientific literature, as well as for enviable analytical abilities on the part of the author (*Introduction; First Chapter*). The local manifestations and diverse aspects of the cult of Jupiter in Lower Moesia are discussed in detail in the following chapters of the monographic study, in which are traced – again in academically sustained critical-analytical spirit! – the prevailing notions and objective realities regarding the epithets, iconography and festivals of the god in the countryside (*Second Chapter*), the official aspect of the cult and its relationship with the emperor and the Roman army (*Third Chapter*), the worship of the cult in urban and rural environments (*Fourth Chapter*) and the ethnic and social origins of Jupiter's devotees (and worshippers!) (*Chapter Five*). In the *Conclusion*, a generalized and chronologically stratified picture of the emergence and spread of the cult of Jupiter in Lower Moesia is presented.

As I had the opportunity years ago with pleasure to state regarding his doctoral dissertation, Dr. Ivan Valchev's habilitation thesis is not only an indisputable author's achievement, but also an achievement of the modern Bulgarian science in the study of ancient religion and cult practice. Among the numerous and divergent conclusions of substantial scientific value in the work, I would like to point out at least a few that outline the specific characteristics of the cult in Lower Moesia:

- The veneration of Jupiter is above all an expression of loyalty to the Roman state and of belonging to Roman culture;
- In many of the cases in which Jupiter and Juno are represented together, we should actually see local deities worshiped under the image of the imported Zeus/Jupiter and Hera/Juno (p. 84);

- Jupiter has very few features specific to Lower Moesia and these find expression mostly in the iconography of the god and are the result of the fusion of the Greek and Roman sky thunder god, Zeus and Jupiter respectively, with a related local Thracian deity called Zbelsurd in part the cases (p. 99);

- The noted contaminations of Jupiter with Sarapis, Sabazius and Dolichen never lead to a true syncretization of their cults (pp. 213-214);

- More than half of the dedications to Jupiter are in one form or another of official nature (p. 99);

- The dedications erected for the good of the emperors are not monuments of the imperial cult, but the idea embedded in them of expressing loyalty to the ruler brings them closely in meaning to the true forms of the cult (p. 115);

- The veneration of the cult covers all layers of society, but it is not primarily the representatives of the municipal aristocracy in the province, but among the devotees the soldiers and veterans of the Roman army, as well as the village leaders, stand out clearly (p. 173);

- As early as the 40s of the 2nd century, the cult went beyond the army and enjoyed particular popularity among the civilian population (p. 207);

- During the reign of Emperor Diocletian and that of his successors in the eastern part of the Balkans, Galerius and Licinius, a special flourishing of the cult of Jupiter was observed, which has its logical explanation for political-ideological reasons (p. 215);

- Leading in the veneration and propagation of the cult of Jupiter are the persons enjoying Roman civil law, as well as those directly related to the Roman state and administration;

- The cult of Jupiter in general does not enjoy particular popularity in Thracian ethnic environment (p. 201);

- In Lower Moesia, the god has his important role as a personal and family patron. Votive reliefs are an expression of personal devotion to Jupiter and, with a few exceptions, are not directly related to the official Roman cult (pp. 209-210).

With the exception of only one work publicizing a coin hoard found during regular archaeological excavations in Kabyle (No. 8), all other publications of the candidate in the competition represent a thematically very homogeneous block, testifying to a clearly defined research priority and systematic in-depth studies on the problems of ancient religion and cult practice in the Bulgarian lands, in historical and archaeological aspect.

The studies on the festivals of Jupiter in Lower Moesia (No. 3) and on the cult of Jupiter in the Lower Danubian provinces during the Tetrarchy (No. 4) mark stages of the preparation of the habilitation thesis already discussed, and the specific research work carried out in them and the scientific results achieved naturally have found place in the monographic work. Thus, for example, the long-established thesis in the literature that the celebrations of Jupiter were combined with the Rosalia holiday has been refuted with reason, and in a number of villages with mixed population in Northern Dobrudja a periodic, possibly annual worship of the god has been established. The resuscitation and sharp rise in the practice of the cult of Jupiter at the highest provincial administrative and military level during the Tetrarchy is successfully explained by purposeful religious propaganda on the part of Diocletian, seeking legitimization of his power outside the army.

The poorly researched and not clarified in historiography problem of the fate of the city temples in Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea is the subject of a purposeful publication by Dr. Ivan Valchev (No. 5), in which a critical review of the opinions expressed so far is presented and the thesis is launched that most of them existed probably at least until the second half of the 4th century, but it is not clear whether at least some were not desacralized before their destruction, being nevertheless physically preserved as an important topos of aesthetic value in the monumental urban appearance.

In another publication, the candidate presents his original views and ideas on the issue of the destruction of pagan sanctuaries in Thrace and Dacia, which has been repeatedly commented on in the scientific literature (No. 6). He admits that the damage done by the barbarian invasions to the settlement structure in general, and specifically the interruption of life in a number of unfortified settlements, deprived some of the sanctuaries in non-urban environment of the possibility of permanent maintenance, and this inevitably led to a gradual attenuation of their functions and their possible abandonment. The author is inclined to attribute the mass intentional destruction of pagan sanctuaries to the time of Emperor Theodosius I, but explicitly notes that conclusions from a given cult site should not be generalized.

No less polemical in the scientific literature is the question of the explanation of the coins from the sanctuaries in Roman Thrace. Dr. Ivan Valchev (No. 7) skillfully joins this discussion. Without rejecting the opinions expressed so far, he proposes several new, original interpretive hypotheses. According to him, the relatively small amount of coins from the 1st - mid-3rd centuries may be due to the peculiarities of votive tradition, which implied placing them in special boxes or donating them directly for maintenance (the author could further

substantiate this idea of his with the rock inscriptions from the sanctuary in the Vodna cave near Tabachka, some of which also indicate the sums donated by the consecrators). The sharp increase in the amount of coins in the sanctuaries during the Late Roman period, on the other hand, has been suggested to be possibly related to a change in votive practices and an increased preference for coins as votive offerings, as well as to the possible emergence of a special ritual for scattering coins around the altar and in general in the temenos.

In two other publications, the candidate offers a synthetic overview of what is currently known about the sanctuaries at Kabyle during the Roman period (No. 9) and about the religious life in Nicopolis ad Nestum and its hinterland during the Roman period (No. 10). Both works are built on a thorough critical analysis of the available archaeological and epigraphic evidence and of the various opinions expressed so far in the scientific literature regarding specific monuments, locations and terrain situations. The findings on the appearance and specifics of religious life in Kabyle and the area of Nicopolis ad Nestum are placed in the context of the author's extensive observations on cultic practices in the Thracian lands during the Roman period.

The candidate's last reviewable publication presents the votive tablets of the Thracian Horseman, found during archaeological research near the village of Krepost, Dimitrovgrad region (No. 11). Although they were found reused as spolia in the construction of an early Christian church from the beginning of the 5th century, they convincingly testify to the existence in the 2nd-3rd centuries at this place of a pagan sanctuary, which was an institutionalized successor of cult activities carried out here since the middle of the 4th century BC.

In general, the scientific production of Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Ivan Valchev impresses with its thematic purposefulness, originality, marked contribution and academic balance of the proposed theses, which objectively take into account all the arguments "pro" and "con" of the ideas previously expressed by other authors on the discussed issues. The posts are entirely author's and do not show any signs of plagiarism.

The scientific activity of the candidate is versatile and, in addition to office writing, also includes field work (mainly in the NAR "Kabyle", in the capacity of deputy head and head of research in Sectors V and VIII) and very active participation in scientific forums and projects. From the presented reference it is clear that he has participated with reports (2 co-authored) or posters (2 co-authored) in 16 prestigious national and international scientific meetings and in 8 projects (in one of them in capacity of director). In addition, Dr. Ivan Valchev is the editor of a published scientific collection of studies and a member of the

editorial boards of the specialized periodicals *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology* and *Journal of Historical and Archaeological Research*.

The candidate's teaching work, continuously carried out since 2013, combines a large classroom occupation (3 courses of lectures and 3 courses of seminar classes) with scientific supervision of 6 master's theses and supervision of student summer field practice.

In view of the above said, as well as due to the fact that the candidate fully meets the state requirements for holding the academic position of "associate professor", I confidently express a positive opinion and recommend to the respected Faculty Council to elect Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Ivan Dimitrov Valchev for ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Archaeology – Classical Archaeology), for the needs of the Faculty of History of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

October 30, 2022



(Prof. Dr. Sergey Torbatov)