



REVIEW

done by: Kostadin Rabadjiev, Dr.Sc., Professor in Classical archaeology, member of the Scientific Jury according to the Order of the Rector of Sofia University (No. РД 38-461/ 26.07.2022), concerning the competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology/ Archaeology/ Classical archaeology, announced in the State Gazette (No. 48/ 28.06.2022).

1. Ivan Dimitrov Valchev, PhD, Assistant Professor in Archaeology, is the only candidate in the announced competition, organized at the request of the Council of the Faculty of History for the needs of the Department of Archaeology. His documents have been approved by a Commission appointed by the Rector, 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. Ivan Valchev graduated in Archaeology at the Faculty of History of the Sofia University (2007), he was a full-time PhD student at the Department with the dissertation topic: *Extraurban Sanctuaries in the Roman Province of Thrace, 1st–4th Century* (defended in 2011), and since 2013 he, after a competition, became an Assistant-Professor in the Department of Archaeology – a lecturer in Thracian and Classical archaeology. In the present competition he participates with a habilitation thesis published and submitted for discussion under the title: *The Cult of Jupiter in Lower Moesia in the Roman Age. Sofia, St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2022*. He also contributed 10 selected publications – studies and articles according to the attached list.

2. Ivan Valchev was among the outstanding students in Archaeology, outlined early with his interests in Classical antiquity, orientated mostly to the study of religious life in the Thracian provinces of the Roman Empire. This he realized consistently in his early writings and in his master’s thesis, it was the topic of his first doctorate, and today his habilitation thesis is dedicated to the cult of the supreme Roman god in the province of Moesia Inferior. In fact, the analysis of religious phenomenon on the basis of archaeological data and research is by no means an easy pursuit, for it predictably intersects the discussion of cultural traditions and influences with politics, yet with economics and social structure. That is why dealing with religious cults requires a long and persistent accumulation, and

Ivan Valchev's writings are a good illustration of an upward trend in mastering the available knowledge, in uncovering the connections that motivate the perceived tendencies. In doing so, he asserts his prestigious position among modern scholars of antiquity, which is perceptible in the breadth and depth of his analysis compared to those who have written before him on the same topic of the supreme Jupiter.

His interest in the religious phenomenon is also recognized in his tutorial activities with students, such as the specialized seminar in the Bachelor Archaeology programme devoted to a discussion of funerary rites and monuments/constructions in the Roman provinces of Thracia and Moesia Inferior. In fact, Ivan Valchev's teaching responsibilities are in the vast expanses of Thracian and Classical Archaeology, unusual in the Archaeology programme, but so was arranged his voluminous competition. His other lecture courses in the Ethnology and Hebrew Studies Bachelor programmes, are more general in focus. His teaching load varied over the five-year reporting period, but he always met the standard requirements, although in most years, especially in 2017/18, his workload was double or close to double. We find the same interest in the Roman archaeology of Thracian lands in the MA theses of the graduates he supervised (6 defending master's degree), including the history of religious life. These engagements are a testament to his dedication to working with students, as seen in his participation in the summer field practices of archaeology students, as part of his engagement in the archaeological research at the ancient town of Kabyle, where he participated as a student, and later in the years as a deputy leader (2014-2017) and a head of the university team (after 2018). Similar in manifestation is his participation in a significant number of scientific and educational projects (6 listed), all of them linked to the problems of Ancient Thrace, and some to his specific scientific pursuits, the result of which is the submitted habilitation thesis. In a short period of time, Ivan Valchev managed to establish himself as an authoritative member of the faculty college, which is expressed by his election to the Faculty Council. And the same can be said about the archaeological college – since 2015 he is a member of the Association of Bulgarian Archaeologists, and since 2021 he has been voted as a member of the governing board, also a member of the editorial staff of the electronic journal of the association (BeJA).

3. The monograph, with which Ivan Valchev participates in the competition (391 pages), discusses the cult of the supreme Roman god Jupiter in the Thracian province of Moesia

Inferior in its entirety within the territory of present-day Bulgaria and Romania and includes in the analysis all the monuments known today. I recognize the author's commendable effort to upgrade his creation by opposing on what has been done so far, if we compare with his previous doctorate – from an analysis of local cults to imported ideas, from popular notions in rural communities to an official cult, and the setting is no longer Thracia but Moesia Inferior. The text is structured standardly in an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion, followed by a catalogue of monuments (255 monuments), with images appended at the end, also a bibliography of the literature cited. The chapters themselves introduce gradually the problems of the religious cult, beginning with the ancient worship of the god in Rome (Chapter I), not as a narrative but as an in-depth analysis of the dimensions that would be important for what was observed in the lands of the Thracians. This is especially clearly shown in the time of the late republic and the early empire, when the cult of Jupiter was tied very closely to the veneration of the emperor, constituting the ideology of imperial power, which will also come through in the analysis of the cult in the Thracian province. Already here the author's good knowledge of the history of Rome in the writings of ancient authors, as well as in the voluminous scientific literature accumulated in more than a century of scholarly pursuits, which he knows and uses in illuminating the religious phenomenon and the events in which it has been manifested, stands out.

Chapter Two introduces the cult of Jupiter in Moesia Inferior, traced and analysed in the god's epithets, in his iconography on cultic and votive monuments, and in his festivals. The analysis is concrete and precise, general tendencies in imperial religious politics are highlighted, but local specificity is also sought, especially towards the long-suggested local deity *Zbelsurdos* in the iconography of the Greek Zeus or the Roman Jupiter. In this case I. Vulchev is maximally restrained in interpretation since the sources are not sufficient for more definite conclusions. Here I would have expected the dedicators to be discussed in ethnic and social terms, as well as the distribution of monuments within the province, but Ivan Valchev has taken a different approach, and it seems to me a more successful and no doubt more interesting one, since he has devoted the following chapters to the relationship of the cult to the ruling emperor and the army (chapter III), as well as the religious appearance in the civilian settlements of the province (chapter IV). Thus I. Vulchev has achieved the definition of the main groups of worshippers, combined with

the centres of the cult and the specifics in religious activity, he has singled out the army as the leading structure in the spread of the cult of the supreme god and the clear connection with the idea of Roman government and with the emperor as the official tendency. As for the cult in civilian centres, I have a vague sense of the sequence of the settlements listed. This was not achieved in geographical order, probably the significance of the settlements was sought, so *Colonia Ulpia Oescensium* was the first, followed by the significant municipal centres and the villages at the end. The surprising result of this survey of monuments is that it shows that the towns were not the real centres, since even the official dedications are mostly from outside the cities, and the monuments found there are mainly private dedications, and not by persons of the municipal elite, and some were not even Roman citizens. Ivan Valchev finds an explanation for this phenomenon in the activities in urban centres associated with the veneration of Jupiter and the emperor, which did not express themselves in the erection of monuments and left no material traces. But the fact that the arrangement of settlements is not according to the geographical order, it produces difficulties for the reader in creating a clearer picture. Moreover, a geographical map to guide the spread of the cult with the location of the monuments, is also absent.

The last part (Chapter V) deals with the participants in the cult, especially the dedicators as some of them, who left a material trace of their veneration. The text gives the impression that there is a repetition of many of the inscriptions discussed in the previous two chapters. But the careful reader will glimpse the intention of this chapter to clearly stratify the social rank and possible ethnicity of the dedicators, and to highlight the social processes in particular communities, beginning with the senators mentioned, more often as participants in the consecration of the dedicated monuments than dedicators by whose means religious homage to the god was paid; the representatives of the equestrians with their growing role in the third century; the limited numbers of representatives of the municipal elite; the military ranks of the army and the veterans, at the end being the magistrates of the villages, who unexpectedly were the largest group of dedicators; also groups of Roman citizens, among whom are the earliest participants in the cult. There are isolated instances of women mentioned in the dedications, only in the role of wives or daughters of dedicators, and slaves who were solely of the imperial possessions, including one *libertus*. Difficult to ascertain, the ethnic descent of the participants in the cult actions is mostly Roman citizens or Romanized participants with Latin names, and

native Thracians are rarely present in the inscribed dedications in person, except mentioned in collective dedications as ethnic groups of resident *Bessoï* and/or *Lai*, with discussion of the historical events leading to their presence.

The book summarizes the known monuments in the space of the province, revealing the cult activities for the entire period of functioning, but in it the author also draws new horizons for researchers like the relationship between politics and religion, or the new ideas and their adaptation by local communities. But above all, it is a convincing testimony to its author's ability to analyse ancient texts and images, artifacts diverse in function, and to correlate them with historical events and known facts in order to construct a logical picture of religious history, a difficult deed to achieve and a testament to knowledge and scholarly potential. Thus, the otherwise regional study of Roman religion is, in fact, part of the larger theme of the supreme Roman god, in a work that builds on the achievements of generations of researchers, evidenced by the voluminous list of literature consulted. Ivan Valchev's newly published book thus adds to the picture of the religious history of our lands in Roman times, but it is also a contribution to the great panorama of religious life in the Empire.

4. Ivan Valchev participates in the competition with 10 scientific publications, as well: studies and papers according to the attached list, all after the date of the doctoral defence (2011). Here in this review I do not include his book *Extraurban Sanctuaries in the Roman Province of Thrace, 1st – 4th Centuries* (University Press, 2015), as it is the doctoral dissertation. Two of the studies are in refereed and indexed journals, they are on the topic of the habilitation thesis also (appendices 3 and 4); all of them are in prestigious journals, mainly in Sofia University Press and in Institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The theme of extra-urban sanctuaries is continued in an article in English on the destruction of pagan sanctuaries in Thracia and Dacia based on data from the territory of present-day Bulgaria (appendix 6). It raises the significant question of the end of pagan cultic practices, traced in the analysis of artefacts found in their spaces with appreciable dates, mostly coins, and despite the diverse data and the asserted opinions about the time of Constantine the Great, it can be assumed that in many of them the end was in the time of the emp. Theodosius I at the very end of the 4th century. Another similar article is on coin finds in the sanctuaries of Roman Thrace (appendix 7), which the author suggests had a ritual role in votive practices within the boundaries of the *temene*. Another similar one is

for the sanctuaries in the Roman Kabyle (app. 9), the Thracian town in the archaeological study of which I. Valchev participates as a member of the research team. In the paper he has collected the available information and artefacts and discusses the probabilities of cultic centres in the town. But in it he marks a new beginning, I hope so, towards sacred buildings and spaces in urban environments. We see this theme continued in his article on urban temples in the two provinces of Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea in Late Roman times (appendix 5), specifically on the time of functioning of pagan urban centres, similar to what he wrote on the destruction of pagan sanctuaries in Thracia and Dacia (above). I would specially indicate his study on the religious life of Roman Nicopolis ad Nestum and its hinterland (appendix 10), which is the first attempt to summarize the religious cults in this part of Thrace and to illuminate what little has come down to us of written records, cult monuments and coins. Such is the study of the votive plaques of the Thracian Horseman from the sanctuary at the village of Krepost near Dimitrovgrad (appendix 11), in the archaeological study of which he participated. On the basis of newly discovered votive reliefs of the equestrian deity, Ivan Valchev locates and discusses a new sanctuary in Thrace, which was succeeded by a Christian church, thus highlighting its importance for the study of religious life in the province. Lastly I mention a paper on a fourth-century coin hoard from Kabyle, discovered during archaeological excavations in the ancient town (appendix 8), in which he extends his scholarly interests and preoccupations with a numismatic contribution.

A considerable part of his writing is the result of his participation in scientific projects (6 listed) or presented as papers at scientific conferences (16), some of them international and outside Bulgaria. In these he has contributed with discussion on problems of his research, but a significant part of them remain unpublished (5 submitted for printing). And to complete the picture of his scientific activity I would emphasize it with figures: 2 monographs, 17 studies and papers, 11 publications in the AOR for participation in archaeological research.

These publications outline Ivan Valchev's enduring interest in the problems of Classical archaeology. The review on his writings reveals him as a devoted researcher of religious life and cults in Roman Thracian provinces. I emphasize his purposefulness in search for the subject of his studies, which I consider a guarantee of success in his development as a researcher. And a clear testimony to the contributions made are the

prestigious editions in which his works are published, as well as the numerous citations in the scholarly literature, although the real verification will be the time, but I hope that what has been written to date and what we expect from him tomorrow will intrigue the scientific community.

The writing is in professional language, clear, readable, and concrete, which, besides its scientific merits, I would indicate as the hallmarks of his style, as well as of his character. I have not detected 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 scientific merits and undoubted contribution of the texts proposed for consideration in the competition. I appreciate them as a significant result of undoubted scientific potential and in their author I recognize a researcher with deep interests and knowledge of the Archaeology of Cult, of Classical antiquity and of the world of the Thracians within the Roman empire, a scholar who knows the material and spiritual evidence of this past, as well as the achievements of generations of researchers in leading scientific centres, but above all he is precise to the facts and correct in the proposed reconstructions. He is also a talented lecturer who will enthuse future researchers, and this all is the reason for my positive vote in favour of the award of the academic position of **Associate Professor to Dr. Ivan Dimitrov Valchev**.

October 10th, 2022



Kostadin Rabadjiev