

## REVIEW

by Dr. Valeri Grigorov, Associate Professor, Department of Medieval Archaeology at National Institute of Archeology with Museum – BAS; member of the scientific jury in the competition for the position of Associate Professor for the needs of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, announced in State Gazette No. 65 of 28.07.2023; professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology

### **Brief Biographical Data of the Candidate**

In the competition for the Associate Professor position at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, one candidate, Dr. Chavdar Yanakiev Kirilov, has submitted the required documents and meets the requirements according to the Law and the Regulations of Sofia University.

Dr. Kirilov obtained a Master's degree in Archaeology from Sofia University “Kliment Ohridski” in 1998. In 2006, he defended his PhD thesis, titled „Studien zu den frühmittelalterlichen Wurzeln europäischer Stadtentwicklung: Archäologische Befunde Mitteleuropas, ihre sozial- und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Deutung und der Vergleich zum Raum der östlichen Balkanhalbinsel”, at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt/Main, Germany.

Between 2006 and 2008, he worked as an archaeologist at the Faculty of Chemistry, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. From 2008 to 2010, he served as a senior specialist in archaeological sciences, and, between 2010 and 2012, as an assistant professor at Sofia University. From 2010 to 2012 he was a lecturer at the Faculty of History, Department of Archaeology, and since November 10, 2012 he has been a senior lecturer.

### **Presentation and Evaluation of Scientific Publications of the Candidate**

Dr. Kirilov's bibliographical reference lists 51 publications, including 2 monographs, 18 studies, 30 articles, and 1 book chapter.

I will begin the presentation of the scientific publications with his habilitation thesis *“Непознатите познати. Стъклените гривни в България от късножелязната до османската епоха. София: Университетско издателство “Св. Климент Охридски“, 2023.* [The Unknown Familiars. Glass Bracelets in Bulgaria from the Late Iron Age to the Ottoman Era.].

This is an original study, which provides a comprehensive examination of glass bracelets in Bulgaria, from the moment of their appearance in the 3rd century BC to the late 19th century. Dr. Kirilov adopts an innovative approach, focusing primarily on gathering and interpreting data on the contexts (objects) containing glass bracelets. A significant contribution of this research is the creation of a register of monuments with glass bracelets, encompassing 372 archaeological sites in Bulgaria. The register meticulously compiles essential factual information about the context of the archaeological finds. According to Dr. Kirilov, this register provides "even more significant information because it alone goes far beyond the problems of the glass bracelets themselves". The study is presented as a polemical lecture, embellished with the author's colorful and recognizable expression.

In a chapter addressing the state of the research, Dr. Kirilov focuses on the methodological errors made by Yordanka Changova in the early stages of the research. He notes that these mistakes have largely remained uncorrected and continue to be propagated by subsequent researchers. The main criticism centres on the lack of precise stratigraphic information about the finds, which has led to incorrect views on the chronology of the glass bracelets, and the uncritical use of this information, resulting in its perpetuation. Recognizing the depth of this issue, which impedes further development of the field, Dr. Kirilov endeavours to subject all the hitherto known factual evidence to scrutiny. He meticulously examines every detail, each individual context, and every piece of scarce information about the finds, trying to separate the "wheat from the chaff". His analysis ultimately leads him to a revision of the chronology of a number of sites and of the finds discovered there.

In the chapter "Systematics", Dr. Kirilov discusses various theoretical and methodological challenges in classifying archaeological material. He argues that monothetic typological schemes are of limited utility and prefers working with dynamic classifications tailored to the specifics of each study. He emphasizes the following 'basic' features for documenting and describing glass bracelets: material, shape, manufacturing technique, size, colour, degree of transparency, surface, and section.

The subsequent four chapters analyze different aspects of glass bracelets, categorized by archaeological epoch – Late Iron Age, Late Antique, Medieval and Ottoman.

In the chapter on "Latenian Glass Bracelets," Dr. Kirilov clarifies that this type of adornment is a phenomenon foreign to Thrace, coming in all likelihood from the Latenian world. He revises the thesis that local examples were produced

locally by a "creative interpretation" of Latenian objects. The discovery of finds mostly in "central locations" suggests that this type of jewellery symbolized social status.

The chapter on "Roman Glass Bracelets" defines the chronological framework, offers an explanation for the short-lived use of the jewellery and the reasons for its disappearance after 400 AD.

The chapter on "Medieval Glass Bracelets" highlights the apogee of jewelry use. After an interruption of several centuries (between the 5th and 10th centuries), glass bracelets reemerged in archaeological contexts during the so-called Middle Byzantine period. From the 11th-12th centuries up to the mid-13th century, they were among the most common ornaments. One of the contributions of this chapter is the conclusion that the use of glass bracelets in Bulgaria ceased after the mid-13th century (during the Paleologist era and early Ottoman periods), attributable to changes in clothing and sleeves styles.

The chapter on 'Ottoman Glass Bracelets' draws attention to the reappearance of glass bracelets in archaeological contexts from around the mid-17th century onwards. Dr. Kirilov associates this phenomenon with a Middle Eastern influence, noting the absence of ethnic or religious determinants in their use.

Additionally, in his application for the associate professor position, Dr. Kirilov includes another monographic study: *Die Stadt des Frühmittelalters in Ost und West. Archäologische Befunde Mitteleuropas im Vergleich zur östlichen Balkanhalbinsel. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 2006*, which is an edited and expanded text of his PhD thesis. This is the first comparative study of early medieval urban formation and urbanization processes in the Early Middle Ages in Central and Southeastern Europe. Summarizing the debate on criteria and terminology, Dr. Kirilov proposes a pragmatic model (the so-called 'bundle of criteria') for archaeologically identifying the phenomenon of the 'city'. This model encompasses: the presence of a market; a differentiated economic base; social and occupational differentiation of the population; a variety of central functions; a sizeable number of inhabitants; a unified settlement structure; and the presence of buildings of diverse functionality and architectonics. The study's summarized conclusions are, "In the West, examples of the continuation of life in ancient urban centres are more numerous and better visible than in the East. At the same time, the city of the mature Middle Ages in the West has very little in common with its Late Antique predecessor, while in the East the situation is just the opposite". This contrast is logically attributed to "the powerful cultural influence

of Byzantium, which played a significant role in preserving a number of key features of the Late Antique city in the Middle Ages”.

Another primary conclusion of his work is that “in early medieval Europe, neither in the West nor in the East, was the phenomenon of a capital (permanent ruler's residence) known”. This absence is attributed to the lack of necessary factors – a territorial state, central and provincial administration, written government – were not present. In the East, and in Bulgaria in particular, the concept of a “capital” emerged only in the 10th century, in the face of Preslav, defined by the author as “the first real Bulgarian capital, revising the traditional notion – of the first Bulgarian capital, Pliska”.

The theme of the medieval city and its fortifications remains a central focus in Dr. Kirilov’s other studies. He presents insightful reflections on the vitality of late antique cities and their fortification transformation in the publication: *The Reduction of the Fortified City Area in Late Antiquity: Some reflections on the End of the “Antique City“ in the Lands of the Eastern Roman Empire. – In: Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. 2: Byzantium, Pliska and the Balkans (Millennium-Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.). Henning, J. (ed.) Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2007, 3-24.* Here the focus is on shortening the length of the city walls and reducing the fortified urban area. These fortification changes are usually interpreted as indicators of demographic, economic and military decline of cities. However, the comprehensive analysis of archaeological data and written sources points in another direction – that the reduction of the fortified area, according to Chavdar Kirilov, “aims at a more effective defense of the cities, in which their inhabitants, and not the military garrisons, now play an active role”. The reevaluation also includes a reassessment of city demography, which together with the satellite settlements show an increase in population.

The circumstances of the emergence and nature of fortified highland settlements in Late Antiquity in Bulgaria is another topic of discussion on which Dr. Kirilov has been working. In the study: *Der rissig gewordene Limes. Höhensiedlungen im östlichen Balkan als Zeugnis für die Schwäche des oströmischen Reichs in der Spätantike. – In: International Archaeological Conference, Bulgaria-Tutrakan, 6-7.10.2005. The Lower Danube in Antiquity (VI C BC – VI C AD). Vagalinski, L. (ed.), BAS-NAIM, Sofia, 2007, 329-352,* he discusses the rise of highland settlements after the 3rd century, particularly in the 6th century, when they became the dominant settlement form. These settlements

varied in character – from temporary refuges to military fortresses and fortified civilian settlements, with the largest evolving into towns.

This topic is further explored in the study: *Меч или рало? Размисли относно края на късноантичната селищна мрежа в Тракия. – В: Тракия през средновековието и османската епоха. Характер и динамика на селищния живот (XII-XVIII в.). Сборник статии от научна конференция, проведена на 27-28 ноември 2014 г. в София. Стоянова, Д., Кирилов, Ч. (ред.), Университетско издателство "Св. Климент Охридски", София 2020, 11-26. [Sword or Plough? Reflections on the End of the Late Antique Settlement Network in Thrace]. In it Dr. Kirilov addresses the decline of the Late Antique settlement network in Bulgaria and the depopulation of the highland settlements on the border between the 6th and 7th centuries. He notes that the destabilization of the present-day Bulgarian lands due to Avaro-Slavic invasions was only one factor, but significant parts of the country's territory remained beyond their reach. The archaeological record further revealed the severe disruption of economic and commercial connections, visibly limiting grain production and food supply in the mountainous areas. As a result, the inhabitants of these highland settlements "were compelled to redirect their focus back towards the plains".*

Another topic discussed by Dr. Kirilov is the subject of the Bulgarian castle in his publication: *Българският замък – реален или въздушен? – В: Българските земи през средновековието (VII-XVIII в.). Международна конференция в чест на 70-годишнината на проф. Александър Кузев, Варна, 12-14 септември 2002 г. Йотов, В. (ред.), Абагар, Варна 2005, 179-204. [The Bulgarian Castle – Real or Aerial]. He critically analyses the hypothesis about the existence of a "feudal castle" in medieval Bulgaria, popular after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Kirilov posits that fortification structures, which appear architecturally similar, were built by central authorities in our country and in Byzantium. This feature distinguishes them from the "feudal castle" in the West, which was typically built by aristocrats on their hereditary lands, symbolising visual status dominant social positions.*

In his study: *За резиденцията на Червенските архиепископи през средновековието. – В: Stephanos Archaeologicos in Honorem Professoris Stephcae Angelova. Studia Archaeologica Universitatis Serdicensis 5. Гетов, Л., Стоянов, Т., Стоянова, Д., Пенчева, Е. Лозанов, И. (ред.), Софийски*

университет „Св. Климент Охридски“, София 2010, 713-738”. [On the Residence of the Cherven Archbishops in the Middle Ages], Dr. Kirilov extends the discussion on the ‘feudal castle’. Examining the compositional and planning scheme of the Cherven citadel, he challenges its classification as a ‘feudal castle’, suggesting instead that it functioned as the residence of the bishops, and later the archbishops of Cherven.

Additionally, Dr. Kirilov investigates the supposed mass exodus of Bulgarians from Paristrion during the 11<sup>th</sup>-century invasions of the Pechenegs, Uzis and Cumans. In his study: *Мнимото изселване на българи от Паристрион. Някои бележки по въпроса за демографските процеси между Дунав и Стара планина през XI-XII век.* – В: EURIKA. *In honorem Ludmilae Donchevae-Petkovaе.* Григоров, В., Даскалов, М., Коматарова-Балинова, Е. (ред.), НАИМ-БАН, София, 2009, 355-374. [The imaginary expulsion of Bulgarians from Paristrion. Some remarks on the demographic processes between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains in the XI-XII centuries], the author disputes the notion that the invasions of the Pechenegs, Uzis and Cumans devastated the settlement network north of the Balkan Mountains, leading to a mass migration of Bulgarians southward to Thrace. The prevailing belief in a mass exodus of Bulgarians is largely based on the sharp decrease of coin finds during this period. Chavdar Kirilov, however, points out that in this period “the coin finds went hand in hand with the army contingents stationed in the fortresses, and on the other hand served for supra-regional transactions and trade relations with the barbarians north of the Danube”. He contends that the reduction in coin circulation after the second third of the 11th century should be explained not by the supposed depopulation of the lands between the Hemus and the Danube, but rather by shifts in imperial policy regarding direct payments to the federates, as well as in the reorganization (redeployment) of military forces in the Balkans.

On the one hand Chavdar Kirilov's logic and arguments are correct insofar as they challenge a preliminary thesis built on limited archaeological factology. It seems to me however, that this topic has not yet been conclusively resolved, because we have not clarified to any great extent the state of the settlement network in the region in the period after the mid-11th and 12th centuries. For the present the settlements of this period are too few compared to the dense settlement network of the 9th – first half of the 11th century.

In his study: *Констанция (и Калоян).* В: *Laurea в чест на Димитър Янков (Марица-Изток, Археологически проучвания, 8, Карашиев, П. (ред.),*

*Марти-Дени Грун, Смолян, 2021, 304-316.* [Constance (and Kaloyan)], Dr. Kirilov analyzes the location of the medieval town of Constance, dismissing the theory of its being situated on the Asara hill, near Simeonovgrad. He argues that Tsar Kaloyan's conquest of the town in 1201 pertains to a different Constance, identified as today's Constanța on the Black Sea.

In the study: *Contribution to the study of heel irons from present-day Bulgarian lands. Contributions to the Bulgarian Archeology 11, 2021, 187-203,* Dr. Kirilov addresses the historical context of iron shoe horseshoes, known as 'nalchets'. He notes that these items are not found in secure medieval contexts but are prevalent in structures and contexts from the Ottoman era. The emergence of 'nalchets' is linked to the widespread use of iron-soled shoes, such as 'papooses' and 'chizmas', post the 15th century.

### **Teaching Activity of the Candidate**

Dr. Chavdar Kirilov's teaching activities cover the broad spectrum of his scientific research. His lecturing activity is 645 hours per year, divided into various courses: 'Archaeology of Late Antiquity'; 'Archaeology of the Great Migration of Peoples'; 'Medieval Bulgarian Archaeology'; 'Weapons and Labour Tools'; 'Monasticism and Monasteries'; 'City and 'Non-City' in Early Medieval Europe'; 'The Byzantine City'; 'Dendrochronology'. His teaching abilities are outstanding and he is highly respected by his students. Over the past decade he has mentored numerous master's and doctoral students, fostering a vibrant academic community (or archaeological school) centred around his expertise.

### **Field Work of the Candidate**

Regarding Dr. Kirilov's fieldwork, it is imperative to highlight the most significant archaeological sites he has investigated in recent years. These include the Late Antique and Medieval fortress "Gradishte" near the village of Melnitsa, Elhovo municipality; the Late Antique and Medieval fortress in Horizon, the town of Balchik; the comprehensive, non-destructive interdisciplinary study of Konush and its surrounding area.

His fieldwork is distinguished by the use of diverse interdisciplinary methods and exceptional precision in the excavation and documentation of archaeological structures. A hallmark of his approach is his commitment "not to ignore anything he can acquire from the field". He makes full use of and processes

all archaeological material, including the “most insignificant finds” that are often undeservedly overlooked. His thorough analysis and utilization of all archaeological materials have garnered the attention and admiration of the archaeological community. His recent fieldwork in Konush and its hinterland stands out, serving as an exemplary model for non-destructive micro-regional studies.

### **Summative Evaluation**

In concluding my review, I would like to highlight the most important scientific attributes of the candidate. Foremost among these is his theoretical and methodological sophistication. Each of his publications demonstrates a keen focus on archaeological methodology, rigorously critiquing any shortcomings observed in other researchers’ work. His analytical approach is characterized by meticulous examination of every detail, breaking down any ambiguous or uncertain archaeological data. He is adept at disassembling poorly substantiated or incorrect hypotheses. His language is sharp, polemical, and often adopting a sarcastic tone, which, while effective, sometimes pushes the boundaries of respectful criticism.

To summarize all the aforementioned points and taking into account his diverse scientific research and teaching contributions, I hold Dr. Chavdar Yanakiev Kirilov’s scientific competencies in high regard. Therefore, I confidently vote "FOR" his election to the academic position of "ASSISTANT PROFESSOR" in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

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Dr. Valeri Grigorov

