

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Sc. Ventzislav Nikolov Dintchev

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by COMPETITION to hold an academic position

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in the professional field “2.2. History and Archeology
(Archaeology – Museology)”,

announced by Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” (“ДВ”, No 55/ 28.06.2024),

with candidate – Assistant Professor, Dr.

ILIANA GEORGIEVA BORISOVA-KATSAROVA

At the competition for associate professor announced by the Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” for the needs of the Faculty of History, Department of Archaeology, there is one candidate – Assistant Professor Dr. Iliana Georgieva Borisova-Katsarova. She has a Master's degree in archeology from Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” since 1997. In 2002 she acquired the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” after successfully defending her dissertation on the topic “Archaeological museums and museum expositions *in situ* – achievements and perspectives in Bulgaria”. From 2002 to 2008, she worked as an expert in the Sofia State Archives (2002) and in the Central State Archives (2003 – 2008). In the meantime, she was a part-time lecturer at the New Bulgarian University, Sofia (Department “Cultural Heritage”; 2000 – 2006), at the “Nikolay Pavlovich” Academy of Fine Arts (Department “Ceramics”; 2000 – 2006) and at SU “St. Kl. Ohridski” (Department “Archival science and auxiliary historical disciplines”; 2003 – 2008). From 2008 to today, she is a full-time lecturer and assistant professor in the Department of Archeology of the Faculty of History of the SU “St. Kl. Ohridski”. From 2011 to 2013, she was director of the History Museum of Sofia University. From 2011 to today, she is the head of the master's program “Museology” at the Faculty of History of the SU “St. Kl. Ohridski”.

The results of the research and teaching activities of Dr. I. Borisova-Katsarova, presented in the competition documentation, cover the so-called minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor”, defined in the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The list of publications of Dr. I. Borisova-Katsarova, attached in connection with her participation in the competition procedure, contains 25 titles, incl. one monograph, 3 studies, 16 articles and 5 reports. The monograph and the studies

(respectively No. 1 and Nos. 22, 24, 25 according to the attached list) are the sole authorship of the candidate, in Bulgarian, with summaries in English. Two of the articles (Nos. 6 and 23) are co-authored and in English, the rest – with the sole authorship of the candidate (with the exception of Nos. 18 and 21) and in Bulgarian. One of the articles (No. 15) was published in a foreign edition. Reports (Nos. 10 – 14) are co-authored texts on archaeological fieldwork in the series “Archaeological discoveries and excavations”.

Some of the articles in the mentioned list are on the topic of the defended dissertation (for example Nos. 4 and 5) and should not be an asset for this competition. At the same time, it is striking that this list includes publications that are related in one way or another to the monograph present in it. There is no such restrictive requirement in the current legislation, and the list of publications “submitted for participation in the competition” could be supplemented with other titles from the general “list of scientific works” of the applicant, presented separately in the documentation of the competition procedure.

Along with the problems of museology, which to this day remain in the field of view of Dr. I. Borisova-Katsarova (Nos. 7, 8, 9, 18, 20), her publication production shows diverse interests in the field of ancient archeology in general – to the architecture (Nos. 15, 16, 19, 22), the funeral rites (Nos. 21, 23), the votive reliefs (No. 17), the ceramics (Nos. 2, 24), the bone and horn products (No. 25), etc. The relevant texts are of a contributing nature and are evidence of developed research skills.

The monograph „Западната порта на Сердика – археологическо проучване и социализация“ (“The Western gate of Serdica – Archaeological survey and socialisation”), published in 2024, is a rare example of a synthesis of substantial archaeological research and research on the possibilities of exposing and socializing the uncovered architectural remains. It reflects the creative amploa of Dr. I. Borisova-Katsarova and has the role of habilitation work in the current competition. It includes a short introduction (pp. 7-9), thanks to colleagues who participated in the excavations and/or assisted in the work on the book (pp. 11-12), and two main sections/parts devoted, respectively, to the archeological research of the sector of the western gate of *Serdica* in 2011 – 2016 under the guidance of the author (Part I, pp. 13-209), and of the project for conservation, restoration and socialization of the

remains discovered during the excavations (Part II, pp. 211-281). It includes a few more applications – graphics, incl. general plan, and one aerial photograph (pp. 282-287), general bibliography (pp. 289-302) and summary in English (pp. 303-328). For obvious reasons, my interest is mainly focused on the largest first part of the book.

The introduction to the first part contains the necessary information about the location and area of the site, as well as about its previous research in the period 1972 – 1980 (pp. 15-21). The following presentation is structured appropriately, according to the type of remains and structures investigated in 2011 – 2016: fortification facilities (pp. 23-70); street network (pp. 71-90); plumbing and sewage facilities (pp. 91-115); architectural remains in the protected area (pp. 117-180). The following is an attempt to interpret the results of the study in the context of the general development of Roman and Late Antique *Serdica* (pp. 181-206). The conclusion here summarizes the main findings and contributions of the field and analytical research (pp. 207-209). The text throughout is accompanied and illustrated with numerous photo and graphic applications.

I have no doubts that the commented part fulfills its main purpose well, namely – presentation of the main results of a long and not easy in methodological and logistical aspect archaeological research. However, this does not mean that I fully accept the relevant interpretations, i.e. I have critical remarks about some of them. For example, I find it unnecessary and inaccurate to try to interpret the vertical grooves immediately behind the gate pilasters as sockets for a "wooden frame of a double-winged door" (pp. 25, 33-34, 35). I am not aware of any authentic examples of antique and late antique fortress gate cases. The standard device of the latter is with rotating axes, and the vertical grooves in question are a distinctive feature of the device of the vertically descending castle gates (cataracts). The recorded situation at the western gate of *Serdica* (pp. 26, 27, 29, figs. 6, 7, 10) obviously reflects various reconstructions of the same in the course of its long-term functioning. Also redundant is the speculation about the postern in the north tower of the gate: "The presence of a postern in this place puzzled me for a while... That was until I realized that the postern was perhaps indirect evidence that the *proteichisma* was built at the same time, by which the fortress wall was thickened (p. 69)". In Late Antiquity, postern gates were often installed in curtains and in the

walls of towers, in front of which there were no *proteichismata* (see, for example, Т. Иванов. Абритуc. Т. 1. София, 1980, 30, 77-80, 90-93, 110- 113, 119, 121-122, 147, figs. 10, 84, 98, 126, 138).

More attention deserves the periodization of the remains and structures studied in the sector, incl. the fortifications, and the corresponding chronology. Thus, for the Late Roman period (the end of the 3rd – the end of the 4th century; the sixth period in the development of *Serdica*, according to the author), it is claimed that the fortification in the sector of the western gate was abandoned and was in a semi-ruined state. This statement is a prerequisite for, or rather a consequence of, the hypothesis that the new fortress of that time – the so-called *Serdica II*, completely surrounds the older fortress – the so-called *Serdica I*, incl. its western sector, and renders the maintenance of the latter pointless (pp. 78, 86, 53, 70, 135 ff., 176-177, 184-185, 187-194, 203, 205, fig. 151). As an argument for the above statement, my publication (p. 53) is also cited, in which, in view of the chronological sequence, I allow the possibility that the second main construction period of the fortress of *Serdica I* is after the construction of the fortress of *Serdica II*. However, this is a conditional assumption, and I definitely did not draw the conclusion that the two fortification constructions are separated by almost a century (В. Динчев. Северната крепост на *Serdica* (*Сердика II*). История и актуално състояние на проучванията. – ИНАИ, ХLI, 2013, 258). There is no concrete archaeological evidence for the cessation of functioning of the old, actually the main fortress of *Serdica* (*Serdica I*) during the Late Roman period. There is also no credible data to support the hypothesis of a huge area of *Serdica II*, for the complete inclusion of that of *Serdica I* in it. All reliably established remains of the fortress of *Serdica II* are completely to the north of that of *Serdica I*. Because of this, the attempt today to continue the route of the eastern fortress wall of *Serdica II* “up the slope to Georgi Benkovski Str. and Moskovska Str., thus including the *Serdica* amphitheater built in this period” (p. 191), is too frivolous. Recently, 80-85 m west of the fortress of *Serdica I* (Positano square, No. 1) a partially long negative structure was explored, assumed by the researcher to be an “excavation for a new fortress wall (of *Serdica II* – V.D.'s note), remained unfinished in this section” (М. Иванов. Нови данни за късноримската фортификация на *Сердика*. – In: *Сердика – Средец – София*, 8, 2020, 361). This interpretation is not undisputed, but even with its validity it is obvious that the

western fortress wall, incl. the gate of Serdica I could not have been abandoned and in ruins in the 4th century.

Another problem is the dating of the Early Byzantine, i.e. of the last major period of the fortress of Serdica I, when an outer curtain with an all-brick superstructure was built and new towers with a projecting edge, triangular and pentagonal in plan, were added. According to the author, this construction was carried out in the second half of the 5th century, “soon after the Hunnic invasions” of the middle of the century (p. 59), “in the third quarter or towards the end of the century, but in any case before the 6th century” (p. 196; see also pp. 70, 156, 204, 208). The concrete archaeological arguments, which are otherwise given priority (see e.g. pp. 24, 117 ff., 183), in this case are reduced to the results of archaeological trench in front of the outer face of the later western fortress wall. It was used to cut the construction trench for the latter, which was filled during its construction. The materials of its filling provide a *terminus post quem* for the construction. The information about them is: “most of the discovered... coins are dated after the middle of the 5th century” (p. 56). The corresponding photo includes a copper denomination of Emperor Anastasius, minted in 491 – 498 (p. 57, fig. 41). Recently, during the exploration of a section of the later northern fortress wall of Serdica I (Exarch Yosif Str., No. 35), materials were also found in a position to determine the *terminus post quem*, incl. a coin minted “between 517 and 527” (П. Стоянова. Участък от северната крепостна стена на антична Сердика. – In: АОР през 2020 г. Кн. II. София, 2021, 691). Other arguments that the Early Byzantine fortification of *Serdica* should be dated not before, but after the end of the 5th/ beginning of the 6th century, I presented ten years ago (В. Динчев. „Св. София“ и Сердика. София, 2014, 60-64).

Regardless of the sometimes controversial interpretations, I will repeat my opinion that the main part of the commented monograph presents well the results of an important archaeological research and is of an indisputable contribution to the archeology and history of *Serdica*. I also highly appreciate the availability of the second part of the book, devoted to the problems of conservation, display and socialization of the remains in the sector of the western gate of *Serdica*. My known examples of published conservation and/or restoration studies and projects are separate from the publications of the corresponding archaeological studies, and are

therefore not always correct in relation to their results. In view of the connection between the two types of research, the commented monograph is a pioneer in domestic specialized literature.

The publication activity is the main, but not the only, asset of Dr. I. Borisova-Katsarova in the current competition. Her intensive teaching activity at various departments of the Faculty of History of SU “St. Cl. Ohridski”, incl. the management of student theses, should also be accounted for.

The conclusion at the end of my review is that with its research achievements and publications, incl. with the monographic work (“The Western gate of Serdica – Archaeological survey and socialisation”, as well as with his teaching activity, Assistant Professor Dr. Iliana Georgieva Borisova-Katsarova is a worthy candidate for the announced competition and deserves the academic position of “Associate Professor”.

28.10.2024



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