

OPINION

of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarit Margaritov Damyanov, Department of Thracian Archaeology at the National Archaeological Institute with Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, member of the Scientific Jury, appointed by Order of the Rector of the Sofia University (No. ПД-38-407/ 14.07.2024), in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology (Archaeology – Thracian Archaeology), announced in State Gazette No. 55/ 28.06.2024.

In the competition, organized following the demand of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of History of the Sofia University for the needs of the Department of Archaeology, the sole candidate is Dr. Nikola Petrov Theodossiev, Chief Assistant Professor at the Department. The candidate fulfills the minimum national requirements under Article 2b, Paragraphs 2, 3, and 5, of the Law on the Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria, as illustrated by the submitted documentation.

Nikola Theodossiev graduated from the “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Tarnovo with a master’s degree in archaeology in 1991. Between 1992 and 1995, he pursued PhD studies at the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of History of the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and in 1998 defended his doctoral dissertation entitled “Northwestern Thrace in the 5th – 1st c. BC” (with Prof. Dr Lyudmil Getov as supervisor). In 1995, he was appointed an Assistant Professor, and in 1998 – a Chief Assistant Professor at the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of History of the Sofia University.

The candidate participates in the competition with a habilitation thesis, another monograph (his doctoral dissertation, published in English), and seven shorter and longer papers published in international publications, including peer-reviewed and indexed journals. These publications are only a small part of the comprehensive list presented by the candidate that comprises 63 more shorter or longer papers (including chapters in thematic volumes), 17 of them in co-authorship. Eleven more book reviews in peer-reviewed journals should be added, as well as a bibliographical compilation dedicated to the research of the Celtic culture in present-day Bulgarian lands (in co-authorship, listed under the heading “Books and collective monographs”). This voluminous scientific production is reflected in the numerous citations, as illustrated by the submitted references to the databases of *Google Scholar* and *Scopus*. Among them, Nikola Theodossiev participates in the competition with only a few – and it is notable that he has selected only citations of publications related to his habilitation thesis and dedicated to the tomb architecture in ancient Thrace.

The habilitation thesis of Nikola Theodossiev is entitled “The Tholos Tombs of Ancient Thrace” (Sofia, St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2024, 182 pp.) and results from his long years of research on the topic. It consists of a short introduction, three chapters and a final paragraph (separated as Conclusion), with two appendices: an analytical catalogue of selected tombs (a total of 15) and a list of 25 more, only with suggested dates and bibliography. An actual introduction to the essence of the subject is offered in Chapter I, “Origins of the Tholos

Tombs in Thrace”, where, at the very beginning, there is a short critical overview of the first theories about the emergence of these monuments that are typical of Thrace – as a continuation of the Mycenaean traditions from the Late Bronze Age or as a development of more primitive structures from the Early Iron Age. After emphasizing the chronological gap between the Mycenaean and the Thracian tombs, as well as the obvious Greek influences in the precise construction and the building techniques implemented in the Thracian tholos tombs, the author sets these hypotheses in a larger context, bringing together the construction and use of tholos tombs from all areas adjacent to Thrace, from the Bronze Age to the Late Classical Age. Particular attention is paid to Thessaly, where Mycenaean practices of construction and use of tholos tombs seem to have survived until the Late Archaic or even the Classical Period. The late (6th – 5th c. BC) tombs at Pharsalos and Kranon are pointed out as possible predecessors of the Thracian monuments, and more evidence is adduced of relations between Thessaly and Thrace. Another intriguing example is a dismantled tholos tomb at Dervenî, dated to the Early Hellenistic Period. The author stresses upon the connections between Macedonian and Thracian tomb architecture, without however supporting unequivocally the opinion that this case most probably illustrates an influence from Thrace towards Macedonia. In conclusion, N. Theodossiev writes that the emergence of the tholos tombs in Thrace was a complex process, where the leading factor was the influence of the Greek funerary architecture from the Late Bronze Age onwards. The chapter would have benefitted from illustrations to show at least some of the discussed monuments, so that they could be compared with the Thracian tombs. In the otherwise useful and informative text, the absence of comments on one recently proposed hypothesis should be noted – the one presented by Chavdar Tzochev in his detailed analysis of the tomb in Chetinyova Tumulus near Starosel (*Archäologischer Anzeiger* 2021, 2) – a publication that is included in the bibliography of the book. According to Tzochev, the tomb may actually be the earliest tholos tomb in Thrace, built by a Greek architect and combining a variety of elements, but following the specific requirements of the Thracian ruler who commissioned it. Thus, the tomb at Starosel could be also the prototype of the later fashion in the construction of such monuments. This hypothesis is backed with arguments and deserves attention.

The second chapter of the monograph discusses the typology, the chronology and the distribution of the tholos tombs in Thrace. They are divided into two main groups, single-chamber and multiple-chamber, with a number of meticulously defined subtypes. The building materials and techniques are commented upon, as well as the variations in the construction of the tholos chamber. The architectural elements of the exterior and the interior of the tombs are also discussed. In the part dedicated to the chronology, N. Theodossiev points out as the earliest possible tomb the one at Eriklice in present-day Turkey, dated to the middle or the third quarter of the 4th c. BC, immediately before the Macedonian conquest under Philip II. Again, there is no discussion of the date, proposed by Chavdar Tzochev for the tomb at Starosel (including based on pottery discovered in the tomb) – between 350 and 330 BC, more probably in the first decade, due to the political context before the campaigns of Philip II. The heyday in the construction of tholos tombs is dated to the last decades of the 4th and the first decades of the 3rd c. BC, coinciding with the end of the Macedonian rule and the emergence of new Thracian kingdoms, the one of Seuthes III being the most important among them. Isolated later

Hellenistic examples in the Rhodopes (Borovitsa and Ravnogor) and from the Roman Period in Strandzha are also intriguing. N. Theodossiev convincingly presents the regularities in the spatial distribution of the tholos tombs – mainly to the south of the Balkan Range, on the territory of the Odrysian Kingdom, and with a particularly dense concentration precisely in the vicinity of Seuthopolis. Despite the fact that this part of the monograph discusses mostly well-known monuments, it also would have benefitted from illustrating at least some of them.

The third chapter discusses the tombs in political, social, and religious context. Here, N. Theodossiev considers the tombs first as a demonstration of power and wealth on the part of the Thracian elite. Again, it is emphasized that their construction dates mainly from the time of Alexander the Great and Lysimachus and they appear predominantly in regions that had most active contacts with Greece, Macedonia, and Anatolia – that is to say that Thrace became part of a larger phenomenon within the framework of the ancient world. An overview is offered of the religious beliefs of the Thracians that may have predetermined the concept of the ruler's grave as a heroon, hence its monumentalization and turning into a sacred space. Specific monuments are commented upon, displaying evidence of long-term use and additional ritual practices that could be interpreted as indicating the heroization of the deceased.

The final paragraph once more stresses upon the uniqueness of Thrace as a region with very high concentration of tholos tombs, while in the same time they are a specific result of the contacts between Thrace and the ancient world in the dynamic times of the Late Classical and the Early Hellenistic periods.

An analytical catalogue follows of 15 tholos tombs that occupies more than half of the book. The monuments were selected based on the fact that they are less known and less commented upon in the existing literature. For each one, the history of research is presented, followed by a description of the mound and the tomb and information, if available, of the burial, with comments on the finds (if any) and the date. The accumulation of new evidence, analyzed in the book, allow for a new look at these monuments, including specifying their chronology. This part is very useful and enables including the monuments in a more adequate manner in the larger topic about the tholos tombs in Thrace. At the end of the habilitation thesis, there is a list of 25 more tombs, only with a suggested date and selected bibliography (alphabetically from Alexandrovo to Yankovo). Without any doubt, Nikola Theodossiev's book is a useful and contributing work on these most iconic Thracian monuments, clearly defining their place – from chronological, spatial, and cultural perspective – in the development of Thrace in the 4th and 3rd c. BC.

The other publications submitted by Nikola Theodossiev for the competition illustrate his much wider scholarly interests, addressing various aspects of Ancient Thrace. Among them, there is a comprehensive study of a larger region of Thrace (No. 2 – his doctoral dissertation, published in the series *British Archaeological Reports*), but also detailed analyses of specific objects (No. 5 – analysis of two vessels with Dionysiac scenes from two different periods) and discussions of a group of monuments in a broader context (Nos. 3 and 4, dedicated to the gold masks from Late Archaic necropoleis in the southern parts of the Central Balkans). Among the variegated interests of the candidate, as illustrated by the complete list of his publications, his research on the Thracian religion is clearly prominent. Among the submitted papers, there is

an analysis of the Kyolmen inscription (No. 7); despite some inaccuracies, for example regarding the date of the burial mounds at Kyolmen, discussing the inscription in the context of the Greek colonization in the Black Sea deserves attention.

Another group of papers is to be noted, dedicated to ancient Thrace as a whole. Among them, the large text *Ancient Thrace during the First Millennium BC* (No. 6) aptly overviews the information existing by that time about various aspects of the Thracian culture in the Early and Late Iron Age, accompanied with ample references. The much briefer paper *Ancient Thrace Between the East and the West* (No. 8) emphasizes the contacts between Thrace and the surrounding ancient cultures. The decades-long teaching practice of Nikola Theodossiev, while not prominent in the documentation for the competition, undoubtedly contributed to this broader perspective towards the history and archaeology of Ancient Thrace. I could not detect elements of plagiarism in any of the submitted publications.

To the scholarly activities of Nikola Theodossiev, one should add also his participation in the editorial boards of several international publications: the peer-reviewed journal *Ancient West and East* and its supplements *Colloquia Antiqua* (former *Colloquia Pontica*), as well as *Fasti Online*.

In conclusion, the variegated interests and activities of the candidate give me grounds to offer a positive vote for awarding the academic position of Associate Professor to Dr. Nikola Theodossiev.



Sofia, November 10, 2024

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarit Damyanov