

# R E V I E W

under a procedure for an open competition for the academic position of Docent in Scientific area **2. Humanities**, Professional field **2.2. History and Archaeology** (Archaeology – Thracian Archaeology), declared by the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia for the needs of the Faculty of History, published in “Darzhaven Vestnik” No 55 of June 28, 2024

Reviewer:

**Prof. Dr Peter Nedelchev Delev**, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (emeritus) member of the scientific jury by order of the Rector of the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia No ПД-38-407 of July 14, 2024

In the announced two-month period of this competition, a single candidate has submitted his documents and was admitted to participate – head assistant Nikola Petrov Theodossiev, PhD. Born in 1964, the candidate graduated from the University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” in 1991 (MA in history with a specialization in archaeology. From 1992 to 1995 he was a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Archaeology of the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. In 1998 he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, published in English in 2000 (N. Theodossiev. *North-Western Thrace from the Fifth to First Centuries BC*. British Archaeological Reports, International Series 859. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2000). Since 1995 he has been working as a full-time lecturer (1995 to 1998 as assistant, since 1998 as head assistant) at the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of History, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. Professor of Archaeology at the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski. According to the data on publications, citations, participation in scientific events and in scientific projects provided in the documentation, the candidate meets the minimum national requirements under article 26, clauses 2 and 3 of the Law for the Advancement of the Academic Personnel in the Republic of Bulgaria and article 1a, paragraph 1 and the relevant addendum (Field 2. Humanitarian sciences. Table 1) of the Rules for its application.

As a habilitation thesis the candidate has submitted in the present competition the monograph “The Tholos Tombs of Ancient Thrace”, published by the St. Kliment Ohridski University Press in 2024 (ISBN 978-954-07-5990-6). The book contains 182 pages of text and illustrations; the text part has a length of 367 499 characters (including spaces), which corresponds to 204 pages with 1800 characters per page and fully meets the requirement of § 1, item 10 of the additional regulations of the Law for the Advancement of the Academic Personnel in the

Republic of Bulgaria for a Monographic Work (minimum 100 standard pages). The contents of the book include a short introduction, three chapters (12, 7 and 16 pages respectively, or 35 pages in total), a brief conclusion, an analytical catalogue of selected tombs (101 pages with 15 catalogue numbers), a list of tombs not included in the catalogue (6 pages, 25 list numbers), a list of the literature used (24 pages with 460 titles, of which about 70% are in languages using the Latin alphabet, the rest in Cyrillic) and a short summary in English (two pages).

The title contains two formulations raising issues which have not been addressed in Theodosiev's book. The first one is "tholos tombs", as it has long been customary to call a group of representative sub-tumular stone burial structures comprising one or more chambers with a circular plan and a roof in the form of a beehive-shaped dome, built in the technique of the so-called 'false vault' ('false dome'). The term is conditional, alongside the domed chambers in question, most of these tombs (with only a few exceptions) contain also other closed or open structural parts with different plans, shapes and roofing constructions. As has become quite clear in recent decades, there are also examples of tombs in which the tholos chamber did not play the role of a main burial chamber (in the introduction Theodosiev defines these as a 'hybrid type', but in fact all tombs incorporating structural parts with different plans and roofing constructions are hybrid). I am not at all opposed to the use of the formula "tholos tombs", which has become so common (replacing it with a more precise definition, for example "stone tombs comprising round chambers covered with a false dome", would make it too verbose), but in a major study dedicated specifically to this group of monuments this conventionality of the designation deserves to be clearly noted and explained. The second part of the title defines the geographical scope of the study – 'ancient Thrace', in which the author apparently includes only the European territories inhabited in antiquity by a predominantly Thracian population. Thus, on p. 20, the tomb at Kutluca in Bithynia is seen as a parallel to the Thracian domed tombs and "excellent evidence of the cultural contacts and interactions between the ancient Thracians and Bithynians"; insofar as the Bithynians themselves were also Thracians, the tombs in Bithynia (including the tholos tomb at Kutluca) could be seen rather as a regional group of Thracian tombs in northwestern Anatolia. The author's choice in the delimitation of the territorial scope of the investigation is of course permissible, but it deserved to be specifically stipulated in the introduction or elsewhere in the text of the book.

It has become clear from the brief examination of the contents above that the habilitation thesis of Nikola Teodosiev includes two parts of unequal length: the first and shorter one could be tentatively called "synthetic" as it deals with some general problems of the monuments under consideration (their origin, typology, chronology, distribution, and the relevant political, social

and religious context), the second and more voluminous one respectively “analytical” as it presents some selected monuments of the group with a detailed analysis of their specific features. I am not convinced that this arrangement of the two parts is the best possible one; it seems to me that it would have been more logical to have the presentation of individual monuments precede the general treatment of the problems of the whole group.

The first part includes significant contributions to the problems of the monuments under consideration in comparison with the previous literature, which the author not only knows quite well but also examines in depth before presenting his own analyses, conclusions and hypotheses. The first of the three chapters into which this part is divided is devoted to the origin of the tholos tombs in Thrace (pp. 11–22). The exposition here basically repeats content from an important previous article by Theodosiev published almost 15 years ago ('The beehive tombs in Thrace and their connection with funerary monuments in Thessaly, Macedonia and other parts of the ancient world', *Ancient Macedonia* 7, 2007, 423–444). This chapter discusses in some detail the similar monuments in Thessaly and Macedonia, as well as in Caria and elsewhere in Asia Minor, which are thought to be descendants of the Mycenaean dome tombs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (pp. 14–21). On p. 22 Theodosiev also mentions the Etruscan tholos tombs of the Archaic period, but rejects the possibility of any direct connection between them and the Thracian monuments. However, in the light of the presumed Etruscan presence on the island of Lemnos during the Archaic period, this does not seem so impossible, especially considering the existence of three early (though poorly preserved) monuments from the southern coast of Thrace (in the necropolis of Mesambria/Zone) dating from the same period, which Theodosiev himself discusses in detail in his 2007 article (but for unknown reasons totally neglects in the book under review); the best preserved of the three circular structures apparently had funerary function and was dated (with finds of bronze fibulae) to the 8<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, thus possibly predating the establishment of the Greek settlement which is placed (on archaeological evidence) only in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The author does not reach in this chapter a convincing solution to the problem of the origin of the tholos tombs in Thrace, adding some of his own ideas in addition to the existing opinions on the matter, and stating in conclusion (p. 22) that it “represents a complex and multifaceted process” in which, according to him, the leading factor was “Greek tomb architecture from the Late Helladic period onwards”. The suggestion put forward (on p. 13) as a possible explanation for the emergence of the fashion for tholos burial chambers in Thrace, namely that around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC or later some Thracians “who lived or travelled in Greece, such as mercenaries, slaves, or invaders, might have seen and visited some monumental Mycenaean tholos tombs that were still known and accessible at

that time” seems unrealistic; nor is the alternative assumption (*ibid.*), that knowledge and ideas about Mycenaean domed tombs may have been passed on to local Thracians by Greeks living in Thrace, any more convincing. It seems much more likely (in my opinion) that Greek architects and builders would have been active in Thrace (as elsewhere), creating practical examples possibly followed afterwards by local craftsmen (a possibility loosely mentioned by Theodosiev on p. 21). As a matter of fact, this idea makes it much easier to explain the presence in Thracian Late Classical and Early Hellenistic tombs of a number of other architectural and decorative elements originating not in the Mycenaean or Sub-Mycenaean tradition, but in the contemporary Greek building art of that age.

The second chapter (pp. 23–30) is devoted to the problems of the typology, chronology and distribution of tholos tombs in Thrace. With its limited length (an incomplete 7 pages), this chapter merely highlights rather than analysing in depth and detail the various problems discussed, referring the reader instead to previous publications by other authors. In terms of typology, a list of two main types (single-chambered and multi-chambered tombs) with variants to each of the two is presented, mainly in accordance with the structural plan of the tombs and with references to the specific examples of each variant in the catalogue and the list of non-included monuments (pp. 23–24). Beyond this basic typology based on the plan scheme of the tombs, other construction features and techniques are briefly commented as well. As the terms used in the classification are not specifically stipulated, it remains unclear, for example, why the two compartments preceding the circular chamber of the Shushmanets tomb are defined as “an open pre-burial chamber and an anteroom” instead of “an anteroom and a dromos” as found in other publications (p. 24). The description of the tholos chamber of the Kazanlak tomb as “a combination of a beehive and a bell section” also does not sound clear and convincing (p. 25). The presence of support columns both in the domed room and in the semi-cylindrical vaulted anteroom of the Shushmanets tomb near Shipka has not been commented as a specific typological structural element, nor have the pseudo-structural decorative elements rendered on the inner walls of some tholos chambers (semi-columns, entablatures, etc.) been discussed at all. At the end of this section, the conclusion of the eclecticism of the monuments and the tendency of their architects and builders to show creativity and to work freely in combining different elements and constructions (p. 26) is naturally formulated.

The problems of the chronology of the tholos tombs in Thrace are summarily discussed on pp. 27–28, with a reference to an as yet unprinted work in which Nikola Theodosiev is a co-author. The exposition adheres to the more objective dates established of late, placing the main period of their construction in the last decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries

BC. The rare monuments of later times are also mentioned; no special comment is made however on the higher dates arbitrarily proposed for many tholos tombs in the first publications and still repeated in many places.

The problems of the distribution of the tholos tombs are also discussed in general terms (pp. 28–29); with the exception of the Kazanlak valley, the other specific areas with concentrations of such monuments or with isolated single tombs (as those at Belovo or Gagovo) are not even explicitly mentioned, with only a casual comparison of their greater number south of the Balkan Mountains compared to the lands of the Getae in the northeast. The Kutluca tomb, expanding the area of distribution of Thracian tholos tombs to the lands of the Thracians in Asia Minor, is not mentioned here at all. The author's assertion (on p. 29) that the prevalence of tholos tombs south of the Haemus is due to the greater degree of Hellenization of southern Thrace compared to the lands of the Getae and the other northern Thracian tribes, seems questionable.

The third chapter, on the political, social and religious context of the domed tombs in Thrace, is more extensive (pp. 31–46). The monumental tumular tombs in Thrace are rightly associated by the author with the high Thracian aristocracy, including (but not limited to) the kings and the members of their families. However, the definition of the Thracian aristocracy as “tribal” seems anachronistic for the period under consideration, at least with respect to the central regions of the former Odrysian kingdom. A controversial statement about the extent of Macedonian conquests in Thrace appears on p. 32; the progressive acquisition of areas in southern Thrace continued almost throughout the reign of Philip II, with 342 BC marking only the beginning of his greatest three-year-long campaign there, but neither Philip's conquests nor Alexander III's expedition to the Danube resulted in the annexation of “almost all of Thrace” to the Macedonian Kingdom, neither did Lysimachus later possess “most” of the country. The book does not discuss the possibility that the appearance of a numerically significant social stratum in Thrace with impressive financial resources, precisely in the relatively short period of the most active monumental tomb construction (the late fourth and the early third centuries BC) might have been due (at least partly) to Thracian soldiers returning home from Alexander the Great's army or to mercenaries under some of his successors who had made their fortunes through their military service abroad.

The religious context of monumental tombs in Thrace is given the most prominent place in this chapter (pp. 35–46). Written records of the funerary customs of the ancient Thracians and of their religious beliefs relating to death, the afterlife, and especially the heroization of the noble dead are traced, with iconographic evidence from the pictorial decoration of the tombs of

Sveshtari and Kazanlak. The examples of the heroization of Brasidas at Amphipolis (p. 39) and of Euphenes, son of Execestus, at Philippi (p. 43) are not particularly relevant, insofar as in both cases the heroized were not Thracians and the heroic cults were attested in Greco-Macedonian urban settings (Euphenes was a historical figure, like Brasidas, see Diod. 37.5a). The religious and political symbolism of the placement of horses and chariots in Thracian tombs (pp. 43–45), the gold funerary wreaths (p. 46), and the evidence of rituals accompanying or following the burials, such as different sacrifices, funerary feasts, or the excavation of ritual pits in the burial mounds (pp. 45–46), are also discussed. The possibility of looking for traces of Thracian heroization and the burials in mound tombs in Bulgarian folklore, and in particular in the image of the “zmey”, has however remained unnoticed.

This part of the book ends with a minimal conclusion (p. 47, 16 lines of text), which comments on the importance of the tholos tombs in Thrace, the existence of controversial and incompletely understood aspects in their study, and the expectation that future archaeological discoveries will contribute to their clarification.

The second part of the book includes an overview of the individual tombs that comprise the subject of study. The author has included 40 tombs in the study, stating (already in the introduction) that these are all the tholos tombs known on the territory of ancient Thrace. Some omissions may be noted which could increase somewhat number somewhat. The tholos tomb at Kutluca in Bithynia which has already been mentioned in this review is apparently associated with the Thracian population of this region of Asia Minor in the early Hellenistic period; it is mentioned by Theodosiev only as an external parallel, probably as a result of the limitation of the geographical scope of the name “Thrace” only to European territories inhabited by Thracians, which however is not explicitly stipulated by the author. The three circular archaic structures from the necropolis of Mesambria/Zone, which can at least suggestively be interpreted as early tholos tombs, are also missing, as already mentioned above. Four more tholos tombs from the lands of the Getae, albeit poorly preserved, could be added to the three included in the book (the two at Yankovo and the one at Gagovo): three at Cape Kaliakra and one west of Cape Chirakman near Kavarna, all four published by G. Kitov (*Terra Antiqua Balcanica* 4, 1990, 116–121); the last one, in mound No 12 between Cape Chirakman and the village of Bozhurets, was also mentioned by Theodosiev himself in an earlier publication (*Helis* 3/1, 1994, p. 111). Another missing monument is the Hellenistic-age tholos structure from Odessos, uncertainly identified as either a tomb or temple (T. Stoyanov, D. Stoyanova. *Arch. Bulg.* 1/3, 1997, pp. 22–33). And finally, another monument that could at least have been mentioned is the monumental one at Pomorie, also of a circular plan, if with a different (toroidal) architectural shape

of the roofing of the burial chamber; it can be seen as an evolution of the architectural idea represented by the tholoi with a central column exemplified in Thrace by the tomb in the Shushmanets mound near Shipka.

The Thracian tholos tombs included in the study are presented in this second part of the habilitation thesis of Nikola Teodosiev in two radically different ways: fifteen are discussed at length and in detail in the voluminous section entitled “Analytical catalogue of selected tholos tombs” (pp. 49–150), with some of them given more than ten pages of text; the remaining twenty-five appear only in the “List of Tholos Tombs Not Included in the Catalogue (pp. 151–156), where only the location (the name of the nearest modern settlement and the name or number of the tumulus), a conjectural dating, and references to existing publications are given for each of them. The principle determining the placement of tombs in one group or the other is explained in the introduction as follows: the analytical catalogue includes “tombs that are less well known ... or have not been analyzed and published in detail, or for which more complete data are lacking to date”. Of the 15 tombs presented in detail in the analytical catalogue, six were originally discovered and studied before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Nos 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 14), five were studied in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nos 1, 3, 11, 12, 13), and the remaining four – in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Nos 8, 9, 10, 15). In terms of their geographical location, two of the tombs are in the area of the Sub-Balkan Lowlands (Nos 8 and 9), three in the southern foothills of the Sredna Gora mountain ridge (Nos 6, 14 and 15), two in the Upper Thracian Plain (Nos 2 and 11), three in the Northern Rhodopes (Nos 10, 12 and 13), one in the Central Rhodopes (No 7), two in the Eastern Rhodopes (Nos 3 and 4), and two more in European Turkey (Nos 1 and 5). All of these monuments are interesting, and the author, who has personally visited most of them (and led the excavations of one of them, No 13, in the framework of an archaeological expedition directed by Georgi Kitov), has contributed much to clarifying their specific archaeological parameters. This section, however, does not include most of the most important tombs in Thrace, outstanding for their size, architecture, compositional and structural solutions, monumental painted or plastic decoration, grave finds and other essential elements; among those missed are the Kazanlak and Alexandrovo tombs, those in the Ostrusha, Golyama Kosmatka, Golyama Arsenalka, Shushmanets and Grifonite mounds near Shipka, Mal Tepe near Mezek, Chetinova mound near Starosel, Zhaba mound near Strelcha and the only tomb with two domed chambers near Gagovo, Popovsko. All of these iconic monuments are practically missing any systematical and in detailed discussion in Theodosiev’s book and are not illustrated with proper graphic illustrations or photographic material, although they

are mentioned on different occasions in its synthetic first part. Had the book been entitled “Contributions to the Study of the Tholos Tombs of Thrace” or something similar, this anomaly could have been explained with the author’s desire to emphasize on subjects presenting scientific contributions; in a work claiming (by its title) to be a comprehensive study of this category of monuments, the refusal to consider in detail the most important of them does not seem a good decision.

The attached bibliographic list covers 24 pages (157–180) and contains 460 titles, the majority of which (324, or 70%) are in the Latin alphabet, the remaining 136 in Cyrillic. A brief summary in English has been added (pp. 181–182).

Overall, the monographic treatise of Nikola Theodosiev leaves somewhat contradictory impressions. Despite the problems noted above, I can conclude that it contains undeniable scientific contributions personally achieved by the author, it is written in a good scientific style, contributes to clarifying the basic parameters of the category of archaeological monuments under consideration and has in my view sufficient positive qualities to be accepted unhesitatingly as meeting the requirements for a habilitation thesis.

Along with the monograph reviewed above and the doctoral thesis on Northeastern Thrace in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, published in 2000 in Oxford in English, Nikola Teodosiev is participating in this competition with seven more publications, enumerated in a special list and also provided in full text in the submitted documentation. Under Nos. 3 and 4 in this list stand the two parts of an important (and frequently cited) study on several necropoleis of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC in the central Balkan Peninsula featuring golden masks among other rich finds (Trebenishte, Sindos, etc.), published separately (in 1988 and 2000) in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*. Under No 5 figures another article printed in a prestigious English periodical (*The Antiquaries Journal*), dealing with two silver vessels with Dionysiac scenes from Thrace – the silver pitcher-rhyton from the Borovo treasure and a silver scyphos of the Boscoreale type from a rich burial mound near Stara Zagora. The following No 6 of the list refers to another large publication in English (some 60 pages), containing an overview of the history and culture of ancient Thrace in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. This was printed in 2011 in the first volume of the series *Colloquia Antiqua*, dedicated to prof. Jan Bouzek, and deals with issues such as territorial scope and chronology, literary and epigraphic sources, tribes and political history, social structure and religion, economic contacts and trade, cultural interactions and ethnic interrelations, settlement pattern and urbanization, sanctuaries and ritual places, mortuary practices and monumental tombs, toreutics and treasures, coinage. The next No 7 adds a shorter article, published in 1997 in the *Indogermanische Forschungen* and presenting a new



reading and dating of an important and controversial epigraphic monument – an inscription in ancient Greek lettering found near Kjolmen in northeastern Bulgaria. The remaining two publications (Nos 8 and 9) are also short texts dealing with general problems of the study of the past of ancient Thrace; the second of these was placed as an introduction in the *Companion to Ancient Thrace* published in 2015 by Wiley-Blackwell.

The listed publications are works of high quality and contain significant scientific contributions, presenting the author in a very positive light. It should also be noted that they have been selected from the considerable total number of publications of Nikola Teodosiev according to the attached full list of his scientific works; more than 50 of them have been published after the defense of his doctoral thesis in 1998. Among them there are many more impressive scientific achievements, including several publications directly related to the topic of his habilitation thesis.

In conclusion, on the basis of the above findings, I can confidently state that I support the candidacy of Head Assistant D-r Nikola Theodosiev and I give my vote for his election to the academic position of Docent.

Sofia, November 17, 2024

Reviewer:   
(prof. Peter Delev)