

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarit Margaritov Damyanov, Department of Thracian Archaeology,
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member of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order of the Director of NAIM-BAS (No. I
1696/04.09.2026), in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in
Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Specialisation: Prehistory), announced in State
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In the announced competition, organized following the demand of the Department of Prehistory of NAIM-BAS, there is one candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Kalin Lyubenov Dimitrov. The requirements of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act have been met, and the submitted documentation demonstrates that the candidate fulfils the minimum national requirements under Article 2b, paragraphs 2, 3 and 5.

Kalin Dimitrov graduated in History, with a specialisation in Archaeology, from the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in 1992. From 1996 to 2000, he was a doctoral student in the Department of Archaeology at the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In 2007, he defended his dissertation entitled *Copper Metallurgy on the Western Black Sea Coast (5th–4th Millennium BC)*, under the supervision of Corresponding Member Prof. Dr. Henrieta Todorova. Since 2010, he has held the position of Chief Assistant Professor in the Department of Prehistory of NAIM-BAS. Between 2016 and 2020, he combined this position with that of Director of the Centre for Underwater Archaeology (CUA) in Sozopol.

The candidate is participating in the competition with a habilitation thesis and 27 studies and articles, published both as a sole author and in co-authorship, predominantly in international publications, including peer-reviewed and indexed journals and volumes. The list of selected citations submitted with the documentation illustrates the substantial interest that the candidate’s research has attracted within the international scholarly community, with a particular focus on ancient metallurgy and resource extraction, but extending beyond these subjects as well.

Kalin Dimitrov’s habilitation thesis is entitled *Prehistoric Settlements and Historical Harbours. Volume 1.1, Ropotamo and Sozopol: Underwater Archaeological Investigations 2017–2024*. It has been accepted for publication as Volume LV of the Archaeological Excavations and Research series of NAIM-BAS. The monograph consists of an introduction, ten chapters, and concluding remarks. Despite its very specific title, which focuses attention on a relatively short and recent period of underwater archaeological research along the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast, the book offers a considerably broader perspective on the area across different periods of the past.

Chapter 1 is introductory in character. It presents the beginnings of underwater archaeological research in Bulgaria, sets out the aims and objectives of the study as a whole, and introduces the subject of the prehistoric settlements discovered underwater, including the earliest discoveries along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The final part of the chapter provides an overview of the investigations of the submerged prehistoric settlement at Urdoviza, Kiten. In addition to summarising the results of these investigations in a concise yet comprehensive manner, this section also offers original contributions, since, somewhat ahead of the discussion, some of the earlier results are correlated with new information from the investigations at Ropotamo and Sozopol and accordingly refined. This is, for example, the case in the final paragraph of the chapter concerning the ancient location of the settlement at Urdoviza.

Particular attention should be paid to Chapter 2, “Methodology and Organisation of Underwater Investigations by the CUA after 2017”, which presents in detail the successive stages and methods involved in conducting underwater excavations, introduced and established by the CUA over the past decade. The text has no equivalent in Bulgarian (and not only) scholarly literature and effectively constitutes a manual of good practice in underwater archaeology, covering preliminary geophysical investigations, methods for investigating underwater structures, and, above all, their precise documentation. The high-quality results achieved through these practices are abundantly illustrated in the chapters devoted to the excavations at the mouth of the Ropotamo River and in the harbour of Sozopol. It is precisely this meticulous fieldwork that enables a convincing interpretation of the stratigraphy of the sites and of specific archaeological contexts, thereby lending credibility to the proposed reconstructions of the palaeoenvironment and of the place of ancient communities within it.

The remainder of the monograph is devoted to the two sites mentioned in the title – Ropotamo (Chapters 3–5) and Sozopol (Chapters 6–10). As in the meticulous presentation of the investigations of the submerged settlement at Urdoviza in Chapter 1, particular attention is given to all previous investigations of the two sites that preceded the projects directed by the candidate (Chapter 3 for Ropotamo and Chapters 6–7 for Sozopol).

Chapter 3, devoted to the earlier investigations of the archaeological site at the mouth of the Ropotamo River, is not merely an overview but is also an original contribution, as it systematically summarises, for the first time, all information concerning these investigations available in the archives, while taking into consideration finds dating both to prehistory and to the historical periods. The synthesis is also presented in the light of the new data, which lends it additional scholarly value. Another look at the revised interpretation of the results of the early investigations is offered in Chapter 4.5.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the investigations at the mouth of the Ropotamo River between 2017 and 2020. Much of the text is highly specialised, yet exceptionally rich in information, providing comprehensive and detailed descriptions of layers and specific contexts on which the conclusions are based. The stratigraphy of the excavated trenches is discussed, the construction of the

uncovered Bronze Age structures is analysed, and the associated finds are presented. Considerable attention is devoted to the chronology of the archaeological remains, based on a large series of radiocarbon dates, which place the functioning of the Early Bronze Age settlement to the end of the 4th and the very beginning of the 3rd millennium BC. The illustrative material in the appendices complements the detailed descriptions in the most convincing manner.

The results of the investigations are presented in a more accessible form in Chapters 4.3 and 4.4. The documented transformation from a freshwater environment into a marine bay is highly convincing and demonstrates in an excellent manner the possibilities offered by modern archaeological research. At the same time, the proposed reconstruction of the settlement's development – initially established in a relatively calm environment but subsequently exposed to marine waves, necessitating the reinforcement of its structures and probably ultimately leading to their abandonment – constitutes a compelling historical narrative. Later periods have not been overlooked, when the bay in front of the mouth of the Ropotamo River provided a secure harbour. These sections also include, almost in passing, other valuable observations extending beyond the specific subject of the study, such as those concerning the later historical context of discovery of the stone anchors that for a long time have been associated in Bulgarian scholarship with the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.

The short synthesis of Chapter 5 places the prehistoric settlement within a broader context. The decision to present it as a separate chapter may perhaps not be the most appropriate, but it was probably intended to correspond to the considerably longer treatment of the prehistoric settlements in the harbour of Sozopol in Chapter 10.

The discussion of the investigations in the harbour of present-day Sozopol follows the structure already established. Chapter 6 is devoted to the initial period of archaeological interest in the city's past, with particular attention paid to the finds recovered during the dredging of the harbour in 1927. Chapter 7 examines the archaeological investigations in the harbour carried out before 2020 and provides a detailed and critical analysis of the available information, including previously unpublished archival material. Earlier hypotheses concerning the development of the palaeoenvironment in the area are also summarised.

Chapter 8 has a transitional character and is devoted to the resumption of underwater archaeological investigations in 2020, when Trench Z in the northern part of the harbour was excavated. A well-preserved "harbour accumulation" – an apt term introduced by the author – dating to the historical period was identified, demonstrating the existence of an area unaffected by dredging. The same chapter also includes a brief discussion of the historical and modern geography of the harbour of Sozopol, explaining the major changes that took place in the 1920s, when the natural entrance from the north was closed and the southern approach was deepened.

Chapter 9 is by far the largest one in the monograph and accounts for more than one quarter of the entire work, owing to the considerably greater extent of underwater investigations compared with

those at Ropotamo. Data from the various zones of the harbour selected for investigation demonstrate the extent to which they were affected by human activities – specifically, dredging – in the 20th century. Once again, the investigations in the individual trenches are presented through detailed descriptions of the stratigraphy, supported by abundant illustrative material in the appendices.

Understandably, the emphasis falls primarily on the sectors where prehistoric remains have been preserved, most notably Square X, with well-represented Early and Middle Bronze Age layers and structures, and Square O, where an Early Bronze Age layer overlies a Chalcolithic layer. Observations concerning the stratigraphy and typology of the finds are supported by a long series of radiocarbon dates, which once again contribute to a convincing reconstruction of the development of the palaeoenvironment in the bay of Sozopol.

This development is presented in Chapter 10, which summarizes for the reader all the detailed observations discussed in the preceding chapters. The chapter begins with an account of the development of the harbour of Apollonia/Sozopol during the historical periods, providing well-founded arguments against earlier interpretations in the literature that located it between the island of Sts. Cyricus and Julitta and the island of St. John. Both the analysis of the seabed relief and the accumulated new archaeological data clearly indicate that the principal harbour was located between the Skamni Peninsula and the island of Sts. Cyricus and Julitta, while a secondary zone for servicing and beaching ships probably existed to the south. Suggestions are also made concerning the presence of harbour facilities of uncertain date but predating the modern period.

The reconstructions of the ancient landscape in the context of prehistoric occupation of the area are particularly interesting, as they also reflect changes in sea level. The rise in sea level explains the observed “horizontal stratigraphy” of the prehistoric settlements, which gradually shifted from north to south. At present, the hypothesis concerning the possible existence of a Neolithic site remains unconfirmed. The observations on the subsistence and economy of the prehistoric inhabitants of the area are valuable and demonstrate their high degree of adaptation to and exploitation of this coastal environment. Evidence for dolphin hunting indicates specialised skills and boats capable of venturing into the open sea, while the evidence for early metallurgical activity points to the exploitation of the polymetallic deposits of Medni Rid.

The brief concluding remarks offer a comparison between the two sites – the settlement at the Ropotamo River and the settlements in the present-day harbour of Sozopol – in part seeking to explain the greater significance of the latter. The proposed explanation lies in the much more favourable combination of natural conditions and resources. This section also contains a very important table illustrating the rise in sea level over the last several millennia, another highly debated subject. For example, the conclusions presented by K. Dimitrov differ fundamentally from those proposed in a relatively recent study—the chapter *Étude géomorphologique des rivages d’Apollonia* in A. Hermay et al., *Apollonia du Pont (Sozopol): La nécropole de Kalfata (Ve–IIIe siècle av. J.-C.)*, Errance, Aix-en-Provence, 2010. There, for example, the authors locate the

ancient harbour in the southern area, of secondary importance according to K. Dimitrov. His observations, however, are based on actual material evidence from the archaeological investigations, which makes them considerably more convincing.

As a penultimate comment on Kalin Dimitrov's habilitation thesis, I would like to emphasise that although his focus is on the prehistoric period, the results of the investigations at Ropotamo and Sozopol are of exceptional importance for the later periods as well. In the latter case, they make it possible, for the first time, to incorporate the harbour as an effective aspect of our knowledge of Apollonia Pontica and provide a basis for developing scholarly hypotheses concerning the historical development of this oldest ancient city on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Only some of these results are highlighted in the monograph, such as the important observation concerning the functioning of two principal zones within the ancient harbour: the main zone in the northern part, between the Skamni Peninsula and the island of Sts. Cyricus and Julitta, and a secondary zone to the south. Some of the abundant material from the historical periods is illustrated in the appendices, while the author has generously entrusted its more comprehensive publication to others.

In conclusion, the monographic work submitted by Kalin Dimitrov is exceptionally valuable. It is unprecedented in Bulgarian scholarly literature and marks an entirely new stage in the development of underwater archaeology in the country. The combination of the best contemporary practices for organising and documenting fieldwork with the application of a broad range of interdisciplinary research methods greatly expands our ability to obtain a reliable understanding of the past.

The remaining publications with which the candidate participates in the competition illustrate his considerably broader scholarly interests in the field of prehistoric archaeology. Some of them are related to the subject of his doctoral dissertation, devoted to the earliest metallurgy on the Western Black Sea coast. Examples include the chapter on metal finds in second volume of the *Durankulak* series, devoted to the prehistoric necropolis (Dimitrov 2002a, 10.1 in the list submitted with the documentation), as well as his participation as co-author in the very important study of the Late Bronze Age oxhide-shaped copper ingots from the Balkans (Athanassov et al. 2020, 9.3 in the list). Indicative of Kalin Dimitrov's ability to trace connections in the past and to place even individual objects within a broader context is his article devoted to a bone spoon with zoomorphic decoration from the harbour of Sozopol (Dimitrov 2007, 9.2 in the list). The unequivocal iconographic parallels of the object lead the author to much broader observations concerning the character and chronology of the Late Chalcolithic along the Black Sea coast. Also noteworthy are the chapters authored or co-authored by him in the collective monograph *Prehistoric Mining and Metallurgy at the Southeast Bulgarian Black Sea Coast*, published in Tübingen in 2020 as the result of a major international project carried out between 2013 and 2016. Kalin Dimitrov's contributions to this very valuable volume combine his interests in prehistoric metallurgy (e.g. Dimitrov 2020 and Krauss et al. 2020a, 10.6 and 10.8 in the list) with those in underwater archaeology and ancient landscapes (Dimitrov et al. 2020, 10.7 in the list).

A number of other activities and achievements can also be added to Kalin Dimitrov's scholarly biography, which, for one reason or another, the candidate has chosen not to mention in the submitted documentation. Perhaps the most significant among these is the important role he played as co-director on the Bulgarian side of the international *Black Sea MAP* project (2015–2019), one of the most ambitious projects in the field of underwater archaeology worldwide and only one of the international projects in which Kalin Dimitrov has participated over the years. Further recognition of his professional qualities in the field of underwater archaeology is his election as a member of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

His experience as a university lecturer should also be mentioned, having taught various courses in the Department of Archaeology at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and at New Bulgarian University.

In conclusion, the candidate's diverse professional activity and demonstrated qualities provide every reason for me to vote in favour of awarding Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Kalin Lyubenov Dimitrov the academic position of Associate Professor.



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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarit Damyanov