

STATEMENT OF EVALUATION

written by Associate Professor PhD **Tanya Dzhanfezova**

‘St Cyril and St Methodius’ University of Veliko Tarnovo

on a habilitation thesis

‘Ropotamo and Sozopol.

Underwater archaeological research 2017 – 2024 г.’

by Assistant Professor PhD Kalin Lyubenov Dimitrov

under the procedure for acquisition of the scientific degree ‘**Associate Professor**’
in the Higher education and scientific field of 2. Humanities
and Professional area 2.2. **History and Archaeology**, major specialty ‘**Prehistory**’
required by the Department of Prehistory at the National Archaeological Institute with
Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Overall presentation of the procedure and the candidate

This statement has been prepared in accordance with Order No. I 1696/04.09.2025 by the Director of NAIM-BAS, as well as on the basis of a decision of the Scientific Council of NAIM-BAS (protocol No. 46/31.08.2026).

The habilitation thesis consists of two main parts. The first part is 227 pages of text, including illustrations and a bibliographic list (220 cited titles). The second part contains 175 high-quality appendices with a variety of illustrative content (maps, plans, graphically presented components of field documentation and artefacts).

The dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of ‘Doctor’ (‘PhD’) by Kalin Lyubenov Dimitrov is titled ‘Copper Metallurgy on the Western Coast of the Black Sea (mid-5th – early 4th millennium BC),’ with Professor Dr. H. Todorova as the scientific advisor. It was defended in 2007 at the Department of Archaeology at the Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski.’ In it, Dr. Dimitrov analyses the data on the development of copper metallurgy in the specified area, proposes typological classifications for various categories of copper artefacts, and identifies specific sources of copper raw material (also taking into account results from archaeometric studies of metal objects). He also traces the information on the technological aspects of copper metallurgy and on social stratification within the specified time frame. In this sense, there is no overlap between the topic of the candidate's doctoral dissertation and the content of the habilitation work.

Subsequently, the author's overall scientific work mainly focuses on topics related to archaeometallurgy, the interpretation of data from prehistoric burial contexts, issues concerning cultural heritage preservation, as well as activities related to conducting and promoting results from underwater archaeological research. It is reflected in publications and peer-reviewed journals, including international ones, some of which have a very high citation index.

Relevance of the topic

Assistant Prof. Dr. Kalin Dimitrov demonstrates in-depth knowledge on the relevant subject matter. The topic is undoubtedly significant in the long term – both because of the unique characteristics of the underwater archaeological research and the various challenges associated with this type of work on the terrain; and because of the specifics of the scientifically

objective application of the results, whose full consideration in prehistoric and historical contexts requires complex set of skills.

Characteristics of the habilitation thesis and contributions of the author

The author's monograph aims to present the underwater field research carried out according to the modern methodology developed by the Center for Underwater Archaeology, and seeks to reconstruct the processes of establishment and subsequent development of prehistoric settlements up to the mouth of the Ropotamo River and in the bay between the islands of St. Kirik and Yulita and the Skamni Peninsula (pp. 8, 11-12).

The definition of the specific tasks is tailored to the nature of the two main types of studied remains— harbor deposits and prehistoric settlements. The interconnected tracking of the information obtained from the exploration of these two types of areas aims to outline the evolution of the prehistoric settlements. It also reveals the history of the harbors and the main routes linked to them. Special attention is given to the surrounding environment of the two main sites, located in sheltered sea bays and inhabited for long periods of time, thus also tackling the question of how people interacted with their environment.

A total of ten chapters are set apart, gradually and sequentially immersing the reader in the history of research on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast (chapter 1), presenting the research methodology specifically used by the Center for Underwater Archaeology (chapter 2), outlining the initial (chapter 3) and the contemporary studies of the Ropotamo site (chapter 4), as well as representing the specific data on prehistory in the Ropotamo area (chapter 5). In this way, these five chapters form a kind of first part of the work. The actual second part consists of the following chapters, aimed at presenting information on underwater archaeological research in Sozopol: its beginning (chapter 6), development up to 2020 (chapter 7), renewed studies presented in perspective (chapter 8), as well as the results of the contemporary research carried out in recent years (chapter 9). These are accompanied by comments on the features of the landscape (chapter 10), and finally – by concluding notes (chapter 11). The habilitation work doesn't follow a standard model when it comes to the specified structure of the text, but it's clear that the organization of the different parts is entirely in line with the goals set in the thesis.

The first chapter (pp. 9-28) successfully represents the start of the underwater archaeological research in Bulgaria, focusing on the results of the investigations carried out in Kiten/Urduviza – presented in the sequence of discovery, and according to the specifics of the stratigraphy, the characteristics of the finds, and the available information about the paleoenvironment.

The second chapter (pp. 29-41) introduces the methodology and organization of the underwater research specifically at the Center for Underwater Archaeology after 2017, including some clever technical tricks for adapting modern materials and products when using equipment for underwater research purposes.

The third chapter (pp. 42-59) highlights the contributions of the participants in the early expeditions along the southern Black Sea coast, particularly in the Ropotamo area, who uncovered the "lost settlement" from the early Bronze Age, the rich ancient and medieval settlements, and the remains of the site interpreted as indicative of a "sunken harbor" (p. 59).

Chapter four (pp. 61-109) gives a detailed account of the research in the waters near the mouth of the Ropotamo River (conducted between 2017 and 2020), resumed after a three-decade hiatus. The detailed presentation of the results from the underwater archaeological campaign, the use of underwater vertical electrical sounding, the assessment of the complex stratigraphic picture in the area, the identification of the river mouth in prehistoric times, and the consideration of processes related to the permanent opening of the ancient Ropotamo

estuary all leave a decidedly positive impression. The importance of the characteristics of the geological base and paleoenvironments is highlighted, and is skillfully compared with specific contemporary observations. The results from the study of remains spanning different periods – from the Early Bronze Age to the Ottoman times are valuable; and so are the hypotheses about the presence of potential Neolithic settlements located on land in the same area.

Chapter Five (pp. 110-111) summarizes the observations made, emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary research, and raises questions about the characteristics of the population groups that inhabited the area. *Chapter Six* (pp. 112-118) provides an engaging account of the beginning of archaeological research in Sozopol, while *Chapter Seven* (pp. 119-135) presents the results and the trends in the study of the area up to 2020, outlining some important issues that are discussed in detail later in the text.

The text of the *eighth chapter* (pp. 136-144), as well as the *ninth chapter* (pp. 145-205), highlights the contributions of the author's research and the activities of the Center for Underwater Archaeology in working with archival data, in locating sites, conducting underwater surveys, and implementing GIS methods. The results of the team's underwater archaeological surveys are presented in detail, accompanied by high-quality visualizations (photogrammetric recordings, elevation models, digital terrain models, orthophoto views, and underwater photographs). The approaches to the work are impressive, involving predictive models and hypotheses that guide specific field searches within specially designated research zones on the terrain. Also valuable are the observations on the stratigraphy and the materials from the Chalcolithic and the Early, and the Middle Bronze Age, based on series of radiocarbon dates and sediment samples.

Chapter Ten (pp. 206-215) offers an attempt to trace the processes related to the changing landscape (mainly regarding changes in sea level) and their impact on the lives of people living in the area during the respective prehistoric periods. The observations are based on data about both the land and the sea floor relief obtained prior to the time of the construction of the modern port in Sozopol. The assumed location of the Apollonia port and the lighthouse tower is intriguing, as is the identification of two functional zones within the area – one for trade and one for servicing vessels. Particularly valuable are the data about the precisely located prehistoric settlements in Sozopol – dated to the 7th-6th millennium BC (a supposed settlement), to the 5th-4th millennium BC, to the 3rd millennium BC, and to the end of the 2nd/the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. The development of the horizontal stratigraphy has been traced, and important factors like the presence of freshwater sources in the past, and the usual activities carried out by the prehistoric population during the specified periods have been discussed.

The eleventh chapter (pp. 216-218) briefly presents the concluding notes on the underwater surveys and the excavations located nearby Ropotamo and Sozopol. These are accompanied by a clear comparison between the two designated areas. The author also highlights certain future tasks related to the study of other sites as well.

The goal of the habilitation thesis, according to the specific formulation in the text and the declared profile of the candidate, has been achieved. The work casts both the author's achievements and the activities of the Underwater Archaeology Center in a very positive light. It is based on experience spanning over eight years – four campaigns in Ropotamo, presented as a completed study of the site, and five campaigns in the Sozopol area, with a view to future development. These long-term efforts, involving labor-intensive and highly specialized research, logically lead to entirely new information. The latter undoubtedly enriches the scientific inquiries and the specialised discussions related to the study of the region's past.

The submitted monograph has no equivalent in the domestic scientific research, and clearly presents various aspects of the complex research process – from formulating a hypothesis to confirming it through specialized investigative studies or offering a new perspective on the issue. The text is full of concrete data and truly shows that a number of challenges have been overcome in carrying out the specific and labor-intensive campaigns of organized and based on team-work underwater research. It demonstrates the systematic application of the modern interdisciplinary methods – both in the field (under water) and in interpreting the results, which has led to undeniable contributions. Particularly valuable is the presentation of the changes in the Black Sea water level along the southern Bulgarian coast during a number of distinct prehistoric stages (otherwise spanning across several thousand years). The development of the settlements within a specific location is thus traced in accordance with the available data on the paleoenvironmental conditions associated with the area. The suggested synchronic comparison between the two main studied regions, as well as the diachronic tracking of the cultural development in each individual location, also represent valuable contributions. All this helps reveal some of the specifics associated with certain short-term episodes representing the everyday life at the studied settlements (at present located underwater). However, it should be reminded that these contexts actually belong to a continuous and rather complex processes of gradual adaptation of the population to the environmental changes – the kind that is usually difficult to clarify thoroughly.

All illustrations are of excellent quality. The final text editing and even distribution of the chapters of the thesis, synchronized with the full set of illustrations, will ensure the high quality of the future publication.

Conclusive remarks and clearly formulated final assessment

The habilitation thesis submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kalin Lyubenov Dimitrov, as well as the candidate's publications, reflect the complexity of his systematically developed analytical skills. These are demonstrated at a high professional level and are applied in a specific field, associated with a number of challenges in overcoming objective difficulties – both in the terrain work underwater and in the systematic processing of the obtained results. Due to the scientific contributions that have been made, as well as because of the research qualities demonstrated in this work, I give my positive assessment for the candidate Kalin Lyubenov Dimitrov to hold the academic position and to be awarded the degree of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology, specialty "Prehistory".

29 September 2026

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