



## Who Should Curate the Gold Mask Discovered in a Grave-Tomb Near Kazanluk?



In 2004 in a tomb-like grave at the foothills of Stara Planina Mountains in the so-called Valley of the Thracian Kings (known as Kazanluk Valley of Roses) was discovered by the team of Georgi Kitov a gold human mask which is now world famous and well known as most of the Thracian finds documented on the territory of Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>.

On 13 May 2005 together with the Director of The Karlovo Gallery Dimitur Bakartdzhiev and the journalist of Maritsa newspaper we visited the newly discovered tombs and the grave-tomb in "Valley of Thracian Kings" ending in the Museum of History in Kazanluk. There was a special hall in the Museum with exponents from the excavations of Georgi Kitov with team, but sadly instead the gold mask we were able to see a photo on the wall only.

In contrast as we can learn from the news (June 2, 2005)<sup>2</sup> Archaeological Museum in Sofia (the capital of Bulgaria) marks centennial with the most recent finds - the Gold Mask and finds from Starosel.

I have already expressed my opinion personally to Vassil Nikolov, the Director of the Archaeological Institute with Museum, that to take finds far away from their cultural context is turning back the Bulgarian museums to the 19th century when all over the world were collected finds for opening new museums (like the Archaeological Museum in Sofia). Today the visitor of any museum in the world is educated and wants to see history and culture and not antiques that can find in any antique store without even paying high entry fee. Vassil Nikolov obviously has been thinking about the numbers of visitors of his museum, but there are academic scholars who think about culture and enculturation, who think about those children and non-children that can learn much more seeing the impact Thracian treasures coming from the tombs after visiting the tomb sites (with expensive fees) or before. Sadly, the Starosel finds had been also mentioned to be curated in Sofia instead in Starosel or in Hissar.

<sup>1</sup> For one of the last catalogue see <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2005/2005-04-38.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bnr.bg/RadioBulgaria/Emission\\_English/Theme\\_History\\_And\\_Religion/Material/archmuseum.htm](http://www.bnr.bg/RadioBulgaria/Emission_English/Theme_History_And_Religion/Material/archmuseum.htm)

Asking for your opinion., by Lolita Nikolova. Comment: This is an academic opinion and a part of my anthropological research for my Habilitation Doctor Thesis “Anthropology of Everydayness”. URL: <http://www.iianthropology.org/thethraciangoldmask>

The so-called 2004 Bulgarian gold year does include another extremely important discovery – near Karlovo (in the Other Valley of Oil Roses). And again the finds directly had been taken to Sofia – this time to the National Museum of History, although there is a hope to see them back as soon as possible. But as I had witnessed on May 12, 2005, collecting finds for Sofia, Vassil Nikolov honored under his supervisor hat a non-professional in Early Bronze Age to excavate one of the most important newly discovered prehistoric cemeteries in the Balkans. The archaeologist obviously mostly has just collected finds (nobody can see them, even the Mayer of Karlovo). And since there is a real hope to see the finds back in Karlovo Museum where the pottery, stone and even one bronze axe from the earlier excavated settlement of the cemetery have been curated to the last sherd, the question is in this case was about the non-professionally documented archaeological structures. But Vassil Nikolov’s concern after my warrant e-mail was that nobody should visit the archaeological sites without the permission of the excavator. He did not worry as a supervisor about in fact destroyed by professional archaeological site but by the fact that a professional with Ph.D. received in Early Bronze Age visited obviously those excavations.

Why?

Did I see and hear something that I should not see and hear?

Why should precious finds be hidden in a private house after the working day if the Museum of Karlovo is just in about 7 km where they can be kept in safely and with an alarm system?

Do I have right to ask whether it is professional an archaeologist with a document for excavation to keep metal finds from his site in his pocket and to show the findings just after been repeatedly asked by the authorities to say what was discovered?

Is it really legal one to take the finds in a private house without entering all the information in the field notebook? If such existed why that archaeologist would say the biggest authorities of Karlovo that nothing was discovered. I can easily disprove the rumors (coming from a village Mayer) after and despite the actions of my colleague in the same village that now live in the USA not selling finds from my excavations since I am sure that every participant in my team can confirm that I am a moral and honest person and have never had kept finds in my pocket. In contrast – after the working day everything was brought in the museum! The black color cannot make the white even gray since the white is always on the other extreme of the color scale! Always big distance!

But since the Karlovo community cares about culture and obviously had cared about professional excavations, we are waiting for our earliest gold to come back as early as possible! There will be preparing a subscription of all Karlovo citizens in case it does not come back. The Karlovo children and non-children need and will see the rich past culture in its wholeness and entity in the Karlovo Museum and all other children and non-children from Bulgaria who come every year to visit the monument of Vassil Levski which is just next to the museum and soon we will see a sign: “The earliest gold of Karlovo is in 20 m from here curated in the City Museum of Karlovo”!

The question who to own the most interesting excavated finds from the so-called Province is principal. At the level at which Vassil Nikolov put it, it is just a question about the meat and the bone – the meat for Sofia and the bones for the local museums. I wish more civilized positions!

Vassil Nikolov, named by me as one of the most prominent scholars on Balkan Prehistory (I still believe that at least in past he was a scholar)<sup>3</sup>, obviously thinks as an administrator of a museum that needs finds and obviously is a supervisor with power who cares about finds but not about the quality of his excavations<sup>4</sup>. For me I can refer to the people who believe there is the One above us who sees everything and I am sure that he would confirm I am a honest and moral archaeologist who had never hidden finds from his excavations and who cares about culture.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iianthropology.org/vassilnikolov>

<sup>4</sup> I was told he is very critical about the others. By the way, it is most probably true since in past my application for excavation was returned just because was not on the letter with the logo of Karlovo Museum. We even did not have such!

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Vassil Nikolov is a Director with huge power but he is not the Bulgarian archaeology and the Bulgarian scholarmind! We will not forget what happened in Karlovo in 2004-2005 by discovering the earliest gold of this region. But I know there are wonderful personalities and do believe that these people will change the situation despite obviously wrongly used power of Vassil Nikolov!

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