

Review

BY

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RE: THE CANDIDACY OF

ASSOC. PROF. DR. TEODOR ARSOV LEKOV

For appointment to the academic position of Professor in Professional Field 2.1.
Philology (Egyptology – Language and Culture of Ancient Egypt), announced by the
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in
State Gazette, No. 52, dated 27 June 2025

The review has been prepared pursuant to Order No. RD-38-384, dated 11 July 2025, issued by the Rector of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski Prof. Dr. Georgi Valchev, concerning the appointment of the Academic Evaluation Committee for the current competition for the academic position of Professor, as well on the basis of Protocol No. 1 / 03.09.2025 from the first meeting of the Academic Evaluation Committee.

Information on the Candidate and His Participation in the Competition

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Arsov Lekov is the sole candidate in the present competition. He graduated from the Faculty of History at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in 1995, where he subsequently defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *Concepts of Human Personality in the Historical Development of Ancient Egyptian Religion*. Since 2005, he has held the position of Associate Professor at New Bulgarian University, where he presented his habilitation thesis on *The Sacred Books of Ancient Egypt: Tradition and Development*. At New Bulgarian University (NBU), he has played an active role in the advancement of Egyptology. He is a member of the Bulgarian Institute of Egyptology at NBU and serves as Director of the Bulgarian Archaeological Mission in Luxor, Arab Republic of Egypt.

At the same time, for nearly three decades (from 1996 to 2023), Assoc. Prof. Lekov has continuously contributed to the growth of Egyptology and, together with other colleagues, has supported the development of Ancient Near Eastern Studies (Assyriology) within the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology (Center for Oriental Languages and Cultures) at Sofia University. To a considerable extent, thanks to his sustained academic work, these disciplines have continued to flourish as part of the curriculum in the Arabic Studies Program where their introduction at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski dates back about four decades ago. Upon his return to Sofia University in 2023, Teodor Lekov has significantly expanded his contribution to the development of Egyptology within the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies. Beginning with the ongoing 2025/2026 academic year, the Department is launching Sofia University's first Master's Program in Egyptology named *Egyptology (Language and Culture of Ancient Egypt)* directed by Assoc. Prof. Lekov.

Evaluation of the Candidate's Scholarly Publications and Contributions

The documents and publications submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov, together with the Reference List pursuant to Article 26 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, demonstrate compliance with the minimum scientometric requirements for occupying the academic position announced in the competition, in accordance with the same Law, its Implementing Regulations, and the Internal Rules of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. He participates in the competition with 11 publications issued between 2016 and 2025, including two books (one scholarly monograph of habilitation quality and one monographic volume for a broader audience, published as a textbook with lectures on mythology and religion co-authored with Plamen Bochkov), three studies, and six articles.

A central place among the publications submitted for the competition is occupied by his habilitation work *Pyramid Texts: The Pyramid Texts and the Immortality of the Egyptian Ruler in the Old Kingdom* (Sofia: Iztok–Zapad, 2025), with a total length of 853 pages. The work consists of a Preface (pp. 9–12) and the monographic study *Pyramid Texts and the Immortality of the Egyptian Ruler in the Old Kingdom* (pp. 15–243), followed by the section *Pyramid Texts: Translation and Transliteration* (pp. 246–853). The extensive part containing the translation and transliteration marks the first complete presentation of this ancient Egyptian sacred corpus in the Bulgarian language. In this way, a fundamental source for the history and culture of the Ancient Near East—known to scholarship since 1880, when Auguste Mariette, founder of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, began clearing the entrance to the burial chamber of King Pepi I's pyramid at Saqqara—is introduced into Bulgarian academic use.

The Preface of the monograph emphasizes the significance of the *Pyramid Texts* as a conventional designation for collections of magical spells inscribed in the burial chambers of the pyramids of pharaohs and their consorts during the Old Kingdom (25th – 23rd centuries BCE). These magical formulas, which continued to be inscribed and used in the Middle and New Kingdoms, represent the earliest known corpus of religious literature not only in Ancient Egypt but in human civilization as a whole. This explains the enduring scholarly and public interest in the *Pyramid Texts* as a stable element of cultural memory transmitted throughout the centuries and millennia. Over time, this corpus evolved under various names, including the *Coffin Texts*, and some of its spells were later incorporated into the *Book of the Dead* and other ritual compilations.

Assoc. Prof. Lekov clearly articulates his methodological approach, explaining that this work represents a long-term project, the specificity of which necessitated presenting the spells as a bilingual edition. The source-critical reasoning underlying his methodology is persuasive, particularly in his decision to follow the organization of the corpus as found in the authoritative hieroglyphic edition of the leading German Egyptologist Kurt Sethe, to which later discovered spells have been added. The numbering of each spell is supplemented with bibliographical data referring to its publication in Sethe's edition.

The **monographic study** *Pyramid Texts and the Immortality of the Egyptian Ruler in the Old Kingdom* is based on a convincing and logically structured framework. The monograph comprises two main chapters, subdivided into sections and subsections, followed by a Conclusion, a list of abbreviations, and a bibliography of the sources consulted.

Chapter One, entitled *Studies on the Pyramid Texts (PT)*, consists of seven sections. In these, Assoc. Prof. Lekov insightfully elucidates the history of the discovery and publication of the PT, their dating, and their connection with royal pyramids. He discusses the funerary and mortuary ritual in the Old Kingdom, introduces the problem of reading order and textual typology in the PT, and offers his own observations regarding their systematization and function. Organizing his exposition and arguments, the author demonstrates depth and competence concerning the historical background of the texts and is convincing in presenting the discussion within the state-of-the-art. He highlights not only the methodology of Kurt Sethe but also analyzes the approaches of other prominent Egyptologists such as Gustave Jéquier, Gaston Maspero, and Jean Sainte Fare Garnot, whose work played a major role in understanding and publishing the PT.

After an in-depth analysis of the sources and the context, Teodor Lekov discusses the problems surrounding the dating of the PT. Conventionally, it is accepted that the *Pyramid Texts* were first inscribed in the pyramid of King Unis, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, and that the last royal tomb containing them belongs to King Ibi (Aba) of the Eighth Dynasty, corresponding to the period between approximately 2375 and 2160 BCE. However, Assoc. Prof. Lekov advances arguments supporting the hypothesis that there is evidence allowing us to regard the PT as considerably older than their first inscription in the pyramid of Unis. To this end, he analyzes additional criteria of antiquity, focusing also on the linguistic features and the grammatical structures of the texts (p. 33 ff.).

Lekov emphasizes the importance of the meaning and function of the royal pyramid for understanding the PT in connection with the destiny of the king. His analysis of the etymology of the word *pyramid*—used in later Egyptian history in the sense of “tomb”—is also convincing. He notes that in the Egyptian language the term might originally have signified “means of ascension,” linking it to the earlier type of tomb known as mastabah (from Arabic *mastaba*—“stone bench”), depicted in the PT as a stepped structure (p. 35). The reflections on the forms of pyramids are likewise of great interest. Lekov emphasizes that various notions of the pyramid—as the primeval hill, the rising sun, or a staircase to heaven—are not mutually exclusive but rather express multiple aspects of a complex notion (p. 39).

The *Pyramid Texts* are indicative not only of the idea of immortality within the context of the belief that the king’s name is bound to his monument, whose grandeur ensures his enduring remembrance. Lekov observes that beyond immortality through remembrance, the pyramid’s dimensions carry another meaning reflected in spells such as PT utterance 600 (p. 51), containing versions of the creation myth. Thus, the pyramid becomes the “abode of the Ka—the vital energy, the potential that dwells within things and makes them possible” (p. 52). Central to understanding the ancient Egyptian worldview is the cluster of

ideas concerning the king's immortality and the question of whether these ideas also extended to his subjects (pp. 66–67). The PT depict the deceased king as journeying toward his *Ka* in order to unite with it, thereby giving meaning to the process of death (pp. 116–117).

A crucial role here is played by the concept of *Ba*, often translated as “soul,” generally denoting the form in which the deceased continues to exist in the afterlife. While the texts of the Old Kingdom attribute the *Ba* exclusively to the ruler, in the Middle Kingdom the *Coffin Texts* mention the *Ba* in relation to ordinary individuals as well. As Lekov notes, this issue is more complex, since in the scenes from private tombs, the ritual performers of the mortuary texts (*sahu*) transform the deceased into an *Akh* (immortal spirit). The aspect of the individual that undergoes this transformation—the mode of being in the afterlife—is precisely the *Ba* (p. 67).

Chapter Two, entitled *The Concepts of the Immortality of the Egyptian King Reflected in the Pyramid Texts*, constitutes the core of Teodor Lekov's conceptual framework. This chapter is divided into four main sections, two of which (3 and 4) are further subdivided into several subsections. At the outset, the author undertakes a problematization of the idea of myth and ritual in Egyptology, viewed through their relationship to the *Pyramid Texts*. He draws on the fundamental ideas of the Egyptologist Siegfried Schott, who emphasized that the PT do not contain narrated myths but only allusions and references to their existence. The freedom with which the editors of rituals adapted divine names and other data in composing these texts, Schott argues, would not have been possible had the myths already been fixed in a clear narrative form. Thus, in the earliest period, there existed rituals devoid of a mythological foundation (p. 141). Jan Assmann, for his part, reopens the discussion on the “hiddenness” of the Egyptian myth and the polysemy of the key concepts related to it (pp. 141–145).

Based on his review of the problems of myth in ancient Egyptian culture and the distinction he introduces between myth and mythological narrative, Assoc. Prof. Lekov outlines his view of the existence of three models of worldview: magical, mythological, and logical. Each of these, in his interpretation, is characterized by specific perceptions of time and space, as well as by distinct relations between subject and object (p. 150). In this classification, the magical model rests on the awareness of the unity of the world, in which all things share a common origin. Of particular interest is the question of whether, and to what extent, the idea of the “source of creation that generated the One—the primordial principle of the world, the Creator-God” (p. 151) bears a connection to Near Eastern monotheistic religions and their conceptions of God and the cosmos.

In Lekov's typology, the mythological model represents a conceptualization of the magical, insofar as “the mythological creates order out of the chaos of the infinite transformations of the magical” (p. 152). In this way, a stable picture of the world is established. “If the magical reveals the sacred truths,” the author notes, “the mythological affirms and shares them, turning them into social norms and a cultural code” (p. 153). In the third model, that of logical awareness, “the subject is already ontologically completely separate from the objects of his cognition” (p. 154). Of particular interest are Lekov's

reflections on how this process of awareness affects conceptions of time and the past. He underscores the existence of different registers of world perception (p. 155), in which cyclicity (in the magical and mythological models) intertwines with linearity (in the logical model). From a comparative perspective, the example drawn by analogy with Christianity (pp. 157–158) is illuminating, as it further clarifies and exemplifies the applicability of the proposed typology to the understanding of world religions.

On the basis of this clear classification—which demonstrates a high level of theoretical insight into cultural and religious phenomena from the standpoint of a historian with an affinity for religion, philology, and philosophy—Lekov examines the image of the Egyptian king as an example of a mythological worldview using textual material from the PT (pp. 158–159). He reveals how ancient Egyptians understood and justified the immortality of the king, grounding his analysis in the tripartite classification he introduced—magical, mythological, and logical models of worldview.

Therefore, the **findings** formulated in the **final sections of Chapter Two** and in the **Conclusion** are convincing. Among them is the author’s summary that the long-debated scholarly thesis regarding the “hiddenness” of the Egyptian myth, the absence of myths in earlier periods, or their allegedly marginal role in ancient Egyptian culture, is largely misleading. In the original Egyptian sources, myth in the sense of a literary narrative is indeed absent, yet myth understood as the formulation of knowledge about the world derived from a mythological worldview is clearly present (p. 165). The same applies to the analysis of the king and the divine realm. Two principal deities play a central role in the king’s immortal destiny in the PT—Osiris and the Sun, the latter referred to by various names such as Atum, Re, and Khepri (p. 184). Associated with the king’s transformations are the concepts of *Ka*, *Ba*, and *Akh* (p. 206), while his ascension to the heavens constitutes a dominant theme throughout the PT (p. 211). This richness of the PT corpus allows Lekov to conclude that the material he studies represents “a spiritual legacy traceable throughout the entire subsequent Egyptian history, up to the decline of Egyptian civilization” (p. 213).

The high expertise demonstrated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov in applying a methodology that may be broadly defined as a **classical historical-philological approach** to the *Pyramid Texts* provides sufficient grounds to accept all contributions related to his monograph as listed from 1 to 6 in his Reference Report on the original scholarly contributions of his publications submitted as part of the competition documentation. These contributions, as defined by the candidate himself, are: (1) a religious-historical and cultural contribution (addressing the problem of the “hiddenness” of the Egyptian myth and the introduction of the tripartite model of world perception—magical, mythological, and logical); (2) a contribution to the discussion of the reading order of the *Pyramid Texts*; (3) a contribution arising from the analysis of the stylistic features of the PT; (4) a contribution concerning the use of the concepts *rekhyt* and *pat* as categories of people in the PT (the king leads his subjects as the limbs of a divine body and can guide them on the path to immortality); (5) the presentation of the theme of the king’s birth and the image of the Solar Eye, which has been understudied in earlier research; and (6) the analysis of the use of the concepts *Ka*, *Ba*, and *Akh* in the king’s ascension in the PT.

The monographic study by Teodor Lekov, together with his translation and transliteration of the *Pyramid Texts*, based on his specialized linguistic and analytical expertise, represents an outstanding result of thorough and original scholarly work. This habilitation work is undoubtedly part of the ongoing consolidation of Bulgarian Egyptology as a significant academic field and of its increasing recognition on the international scholarly stage.

The other publications submitted for participation in the competition vary in genre and length, yet taken together they demonstrate that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov is not only an established Egyptologist, but also a scholar with a fine sense of how the results of academic research can be communicated to a wider audience.

Among the submitted works are articles and studies in both Bulgarian and English. In these publications, Lekov contributes further original insights, accurately reflected in his self-reported Reference List. These include analyses of *Ba* as a form of existence after death, the identification of parts of the deceased's body with deities, studies of religious imagery and iconography, as well as linguistic and epigraphic interpretations of texts related to a hymn to Osiris. In his significant study "A Hymn to Osiris from the Late Period," published in the edited volume *Ancient Egypt, the World of the Mediterranean and the East* (Sofia: East-West, 2022), Assoc. Prof. Lekov includes all twelve known versions of the hymn in honor of Osiris from the Fifteenth Dynasty to the time of Emperor Tiberius.

The book *Mythology and Religion* (Sofia: New Bulgarian University, 2016), intended for a broader readership, was published as a textbook co-authored with Plamen Bochkov. In it, Teodor Lekov is the author of Part Two, *The World of Religions* (pp. 163–376), where he demonstrates his ability to synthesize a vast and diverse body of material and present it in a manner accessible to students and other readers.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov has submitted a list of thirty-five citations in Bulgarian and international scholarly publications. This satisfies the minimum scientometric requirements and indicates his growing recognition as an established Egyptologist.

Among the candidate's scholarly projects, particular distinction belongs to the significant achievements of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov as Director of the *Bulgarian mission at the tomb of Piay* (TT 263), Luxor, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. His ability and affinity to the communication of scientific results and outputs is also evident here, as shown by the acclaimed Bulgarian National Television documentary *The King and the Sun: A Journey into the History of Ancient Egypt* (2022) and numerous other appearances in national electronic media.

Assoc. Prof. Lekov also has experience in supervising **doctoral students**. One of them has successfully defended his dissertation and is now an Associate Professor, while another has been discharged with the right to defend the Ph.D. thesis at a later stage.

Evaluation of the Candidate's Teaching Experience

At Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, the teaching experience of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov in recent decades has been primarily associated with the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies. Within the Arabic Studies Program, he has developed and successfully taught a range of courses in the field of Egyptology, as well as on the history and culture of the Ancient Near East. Among these are courses, such as *Introduction to Egyptology*, *History of Egypt*, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East*, *Religion and Culture of Ancient Egypt*, and *Classical Egyptian Language – Parts I and II*.

Since his appointment as a full-time Associate Professor at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology in 2023, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov has been the principal instructor of the core compulsory course *History and Culture of the Ancient Near East*, introduced in 2024 and taught in the first year of the Arabic Studies Program. In recent years, he has also taught courses related to the Ancient Near East in other Oriental Studies programs within the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, such as Iranian Studies and Indology.

The development and launch of the new Master's Program *Egyptology (Language and Culture of Ancient Egypt)* within the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies during the current 2025–2026 academic year marks an important step in establishing Assoc. Prof. Lekov's role as a lecturer at Sofia University. Several of the compulsory and elective courses in this Master's Program are taught by him. My personal impressions of his teaching confirm that he is highly successful in engaging the attention and interest of students, enjoying their genuine respect.

To this should be added the extensive teaching and administrative experience of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov at New Bulgarian University, where he held a full-time position from 2001 to 2023—initially as Assistant and Senior Assistant Professor, and since 2005 as Associate Professor. The diverse range of courses he taught there until 2023 covered areas such as the Ancient Egyptian language, hieratic script, religion and mythology of Ancient Egypt, and the magic and sacred texts of Ancient Egypt.

Conclusion

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, I express my unequivocal and well-founded support for the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Lekov. I respectfully recommend that the esteemed Academic Evaluation Committee vote in favor of his appointment to the academic position of **Professor** in Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Egyptology – Language and Culture of Ancient Egypt), announced for the needs of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

17 October 2025

Prof. Dr. Simeon Evstatiev