

1. First let us know some details about you. Who is Iskra Todorova?

Iskra Todorova is just an ordinary woman ☺ I was born in Vidin, not a big city, but a beautiful town situated on the Danube river with ancient history. I graduated university in Tarnovo – the medieval capital of Bulgaria, also marvelous city with a unique atmosphere. There I met my husband, we have two daughters and two grand-sons. We lived in Popovo – a small town in North Bulgaria. During 2006 we transferred to Rousse, where I was incredibly lucky to start working at the Regional History Museum. I try to be a good person – I love humanity, I love my work and I believe that love and kindness can save our world.

2. Why did you choose this profession and when? Why did you choose to work in a museum?

After graduating I worked for several years as a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature. When we moved to Rousse, I had to look for a new job. I found out that there is a vacancy in the museum. As a student I was engaged in folklore studies and ethnography, then continued to work with students on these topics in extracurricular forms, and went on field research expeditions as a volunteer. With my major specialization I could work as an ethnographer in the museum. I applied and was approved. And so – since 2007 I have been working as a curator in the Ethnographic Department of the museum in Ruse.

I am extremely lucky to work what I love, and you could say that my hobby overlaps with my work. Ever since I was a child, I loved the stories that adults used to tell. I liked to read about the past, about traditions and as a student I enrolled in the folklore seminar, which was directed by one of the most incredible professors – professor Ancho Kaloyanov. It can be said that meeting him changed my point of view on the world and set the course of my life, for which I am deeply grateful to fate and to him. The knowledge about traditions accumulated over the years found its way of expression in the museum. Here I have the opportunity to interpret the themes from the field of cultural heritage both as an exhibition curator and as a scientist.

3. Dear Iskra, you are a curator since 2007. What makes the job of curator special?

What being a curator means to you?

Museum curators have many responsibilities in their work. According to the importance of work, after the director of the institution, the curator is next in rank. Curators are involved in every aspect of museum affairs – from creating museum collections, through their preservation, scientific interpretations to their presentation in exhibitions. It is of a great importance for the museum specialist to be adequate to the respective cultural and historical context, because the messages we send through our work affect our audiences. They open questions for self-reflection, educate, provoke a certain attitude towards the problems of society and to our cultural heritage.

The situation of funding the cultural institutions in Bulgaria is such so we as curators are placed in a position where along with our main duties, we have to also be guides, we take the

responsibilities of guardians of our museum collections, we are field workers, we take care of archives, we are also animators at certain events at the museum and so on...

Yet I love working with people and the only problem in this situation is the lack of enough time for realization of all of my ideas.

4. Please tell us the reasons we should visit The Regional Museum of History in Ruse?

Firstly – Rouse is a beautiful city. The Regional Museum of History in Rouse is just a part of what you could see in the city and the region of cultural and environmental importance. The RMH – Rouse is, even if it sounds immodest, one of the best working museums in Bulgaria. There are several places in Rouse which represent the cultural and environmental heritage under the care of our museum. The Historical museum displays archeology, religious and military history and many temporary exhibitions. The Eco-museum is an extremely interesting place – colorful with its many interactive dioramas and various activities for the young and elderly generations. The House of Caliopa, where I work (actually Museum of urban culture) has a remarkable atmosphere and sends our visitors back in the epoch of the Romantism in Bulgaria during the XIX century. At the house of Baba Tonka, the house of Zahary Stoyanov and the Pantheon of Bulgarian revolutionaries is represented the heroic history of Bulgarians during the Bulgarian Renaissance period. The Ivanovo rock churches are of great importance and interest – they are under the protection of UNESCO, along with their neighboring medieval fortress of Cherven. Both are situated near Rouse. I believe all these places represent the spirit of Rouse, called in the past “The small Vienna”.

5. What do you think is the most interesting object in the museum?

Honestly, I don't have a clear answer. Different people are interested in different things. Some like the charming clothes from our collection of urban wear from the end of XIX – early XX century. Others like the luxurious items from our porcelain, silver, glass collections. There are people who like traditional ornaments and so on. To me the most interesting are the stories, which every single exhibit tells.

The vase of Emile Galle, for example, tells the story about rich class of Rouse, who travelled to Western Europe and brought back expensive items, which represented their style and prestige.

But the worn-out magnifying glass of the photographer Stefan Balash (quite an inconspicuous item) tells the story of one of the most fashionable tendencies in Rouse in the early years of XX century – at every household there was a portrait on the wall made by him and shaped with the technique of sous-retouche.

I believe everyone could find in our exhibitions their own most interesting object and take home the memory of a nice and pleasant experience.