

## OPINION

For the dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the academic specialty "Art Studies and Fine Arts" 8.1. on "Reliquaries in Bulgaria from the Late Middle Ages and the Revival Period" by Darina Boykina, PhD student at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences with scientific supervisor Corr. Member, Prof. DSc Ivanka Gergova

From Assoc. Prof. Angel Nikolov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",  
Faculty of History, Department of History of Bulgaria

At the beginning of this exposition, I would like to point out that I have known Darina Boykina for several years and were able to follow closely her work in collecting and summarizing a vast amount of information about a poorly researched category of monuments whose special role and importance within Christian cult practices are obvious and do not need any special evidence. I must immediately emphasize that I have no doubts about the high professional skills of the PhD student, as proved by several of her articles, as well as the proposed thesis. In addition, I cannot spare the statement that during her fieldwork, often accompanied by serious difficulties and problems of various kinds, Darina showed dedication and determination to ultimately bring her academic endeavor to a successful conclusion.

D. Boykina's dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, three annexes, illustrations, a catalog and has a total volume of 453 pages.

In her introduction, the PhD student rightly points out that the study of relics is an integral part of the big question of the place of the cult of reliquary and relics, both in the existence of the church and in view of "reconstructing the history of Christian monuments, pilgrimage practices, popular beliefs" / p. 2 /, suggesting a more complex approach in her study. Justified is also the conclusion made by the author that in our science so far there has been no real attempt to collect and study the relics found in Bulgaria, which undoubtedly complicated D. Boykina's work on the chosen subject and necessitated the specific art analysis of the specific monuments within a broad interdisciplinary approach, both in terms of clarifying the functionality of reliquaries, as well as in the search for archival materials and literary sources concerning the reliquary on Bulgarian lands whose whereabouts today are unknown.

The geographical and chronological (p. 15-19) framework of the study are correctly marked and substantiated, the latter being imposed by the absence of older monuments in Bulgarian monasteries, churches and museums /p. 3-4 /.

The purpose of the dissertation is clearly and concisely formulated: "An attempt for independent study of the reliquaries on the Bulgarian lands from the Ottoman period, considering different aspects of their functioning - their role in the liturgical practices and personal piety of believers, the role of the semantics of decorations and the form and, as far as possible, an on-site study of each subject in the history of the monastery or church for which they are intended." / p. 11 /.

The literature review is detailed and meaningful /p.5-11 /. Pertinent and sufficiently comprehensive is the detailing as to which monuments of the studied epoch for one reason or another remained outside the scope of the study / p. 12 /, the problems surrounding the specific terminology used in the work connected with the reliquaries and relics have been clarified / p. 13-16 /.

In chapter I under the heading "The Role of Relics during the Late Middle Ages and the Revival Period" one can find a generalized expression of D. Boykina's observations on the various forms of reverence for holy relics in medieval Bulgaria; the dramatic changes that brought about the demise of Bulgarian statehood were outlined, as well as an overview of the wanderings of the relics of various older saints and martyrs during the first centuries of the Ottoman invasion, as well as of the new cults that emerged during this era related to the worship of relics. Based on various sources D. Boykina outlines the attractiveness of the most revered Christian Orthodox holy centers of the Bulgarians, that not only received pilgrims, but also often sent travelling monks loaded with holy relics, icons and prints from the Bulgarian lands - mainly the Rila Monastery, and along with it Bachkovo monastery, as well as the Svetogorsk monasteries of Zograf and Hilendar. Of interest are the collected by the PhD student examples of legends and superstitions, counterfeiting and theft of relics, as well as open manifestations of skepticism and neglect of their miraculous power / p. 29-32 /. Information on the practices during the Ottoman era and the Renaissance / in accordance with the canonical provisions / the laying of relics and reliquaries in the holy altars of the temples in their consecration are very useful - a topic that has not been practically subjected to systematic scientific research so far /pp.33-36 /.

In chapter II. "Reliquaries on the Bulgarian Lands during the Ottoman Period: Function, Form and Decoration" D. Boykina presents a specific analysis of the documented reliquaries, which are dated mainly from the National Revival period. The view that most of the reliquaries documented in the study of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were made by local goldsmiths in different Bulgarian cities on the request of travelling monks, who also defined their decorative program by providing the goldsmiths with the monastery prints / p. 38-43 / is also well defended. Also important are the doctoral student's remarks (not only here, but also further in the exposition - p. 84-89) on the functions of reliquaries, and in particular of boxes of travelling monks, not only as cult sites, but also as distinctive small portable altars / as defined by E. Genova, p. 47 /.

Examined in detail are the form and decorative program of the reliquaries and defended is the thesis that the Byzantine practice for the relics to be placed in humble fittings was followed only during the first centuries of the Ottoman rule /as is the case with the fitting of the relics of St George Novi Sofiiski from the Kremikovtzi Monastery, 1593/, but even in the 19 century /pp.53-54/. In addition, from the first half of the eighteenth century D. Boykin recorded the distribution of reliquaries of box-casket-shaped boxes with a lid, and the earliest dated such specimen is a reliquary lost today with the hand of St. Kirik from 1732, which belonged to the Bachkovo Monastery /p. 55 /. Three specific and rarer groups of reliquaries were traced - in the form of a small church building, in the form of a hand and in the form of a book / pp. 56-70 /.

The last section of chapter II is devoted to the decoration of the reliquaries, providing an overview of the images of saints, patron saints and patrons, of compositions and scenes with a liturgical meaning, and of ornamental decoration and architectural elements / pp. 71-92 /.

Chapter III is dedicated to the reliquaries as part of the goldsmith art during the Ottoman period / p. 92-120 /. In order to outline the artistic context in which the reliquaries studied by her appear, D. Boykina tries to highlight the general laws that govern goldsmith art in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule, and in particular the inseparable attachment of this practiced as a rule in the urban environment craft both with mining (as a source of raw materials) and with the church (as the largest customer and user of goldsmith articles) / p. 96-98 /. The PhD student has a solid focus on traditional and overly conservative forms of passing the craft from father to son in the family /p. 99 /, which does not prevent one from talking about a sensitive renovation of the art of goldsmithing in the 18-19 centuries by the borrowing of baroque and rococo elements "in line with the complete reformation of church art" / p. 98 /. On the basis of the collected material D. Boykina analyzes in

detail as style and art the production of the four goldsmith centers where most of the reliquaries that have reached us, at least the documented ones of the period in question, have been produced, namely: Sofia, Vratza, Vidin/Lom and Pazardzhik. The doctoral student's observations on the activities of the Pazardzhik goldsmiths and their centuries-old contacts with the Bachkovo Monastery on the basis of not only of the handiwork but also Ottoman tax documents and information of foreign travelers are very sound. /p.114-119 /.

In the Conclusion / p. 120-125 / D. Boykina summarizes well the main results of her research, noting that the reliquaries created during the National Revival Period do not lose their sacred purpose and should be regarded as works closely related to the ritual, whose "form and decoration are subordinate to the liturgical functions of the relics, but also to the belief in their advocacy role and healing power" / p. 121 /. Of key importance here is the summary that the study of reliquaries allows us to reveal the transformations in the sacral topography of the Balkans after the invasion of the Ottomans and the formation in the 18th-19th centuries of "several" nuclei "on Bulgarian lands saturated with relics of saints" / again there / namely: the monasteries around Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv and Sofia.

Following the Bibliography / p. 126-156 / useful applications are presented, the first of which / p. 157-159 / is an extremely detailed and very useful list of relics of 62 the number is somewhat provisional, having in view the pair saints of St. Cosmas and Damian and St. Cyrus and John, St. Forty Martyrs, St. Seven Maccabees Brothers, St. Martyrs, Zograf/martyr saints and 3 relics from Bulgarian land of the Ottoman period, indicating the saint's name, body part, number of arcs and their location, and in the case of relics, number of parts and location. The number of arcs with relics listed in the list is 166, some of which are known only from written information and nowadays their location is unclear. With regard to the saints, it is noteworthy that the most popular were St. Haralampius / 23 arcs and two pieces in altars /, St. Pantaleimon/ 15 arcs and 2 parts /, St. Cosmas and Damian / 13 arcs /.

Annex 2 / p. 160 / is a table with the number of goldsmiths in Pazardzhik and Plovdiv until 1614, and Annex 3 / p. 161 / - a map showing the topography of the reliquaries in Bulgaria in the 15th-19th centuries.

On pages 162-179 45 illustrations are placed that are directly related to the main text of the dissertation.

Then follows a Catalog / p. 180-453 /, detailing and documenting 95 repositories, most of which have not been published so far, with each catalog article containing dating, dimensions, material, origin and location, description, literature, archival sources and photographs .

Finally, I will allow myself to make some comments that are relevant to the layout of the text. I would recommend to D. Boykina to be more precise in the use of historical terminology, since in the established Bulgarian historiographical tradition of the last decades the technical term "Ottoman period" can hardly be used as a synonym for the broader concept "Ottoman rule in the Bulgarian lands" and even less so, our National Revival could be seen as part of the already mentioned "Ottoman period", which was accepted to mark only the first centuries of the Ottoman rule. The reason for these terminological problems does not need to be commented on here and is not a credit to the doctoral student or her supervisor, so my critical comment does not directly relate to the genuine and indisputable scientific qualities of the thesis. The rest of my remarks are purely technical in nature: it is not appropriate in the main exposition to have a passage from a historical source / letter to St. Basil the Great / to be quoted in English / p. 52 /; the same is true of the English translation of page 57, note 246, of an inscription on a Byzantine reliquary dating from the 11<sup>th</sup>

century; the title of the new paragraph on page 66 / "Book Reliquaries " / does not correspond literally to the content of the paper / "Book-shaped reliquaries" /.

Considering the impressive volume of new and in-depth information gathered by D. Boykin during field studies at monasteries, churches and museums in different parts of the country, as well as in a number of archival collections / National State Archive, the state archives in Veliko Tarnovo , Vidin, Gabrovo, Plovdiv, Ruse and Sofia, the archives of the Institute of Art Studies and the Institute for Ethnography and Folklore with Ethnographic Museum /, I believe that the proposed dissertation is a real scientific event and should be published as soon as possible as a monographic work, although I am aware of the difficulties that such an undertaking would accompany.

Based on the above, I believe that the dissertation on "Reliquaries in Bulgaria from the Late Middle Ages and the Revival Period" contains numerous scientific contributions and meets all the formal requirements for a dissertation, which gives me reason to vote for Darina Boykina to be awarded the educational and academic degree in "Art Studies and Fine Arts".

Sofia, October12,2019

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Angel Nikolov

