

REVIEW

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.Member of the Acad. of Science Prof. Elka Georgieva Bakalova, DSc

1. Darina Boykina's dissertation, with a total volume of 453 pages, is unique in our contemporary humanities, primarily because of the choice of the object of study itself. A particularly interesting but insufficiently researched material was selected which reveals significant aspects of the development of the national consciousness of the Bulgarians during the Late Middle Ages and the National Revival Period. It is hardly necessary to remind that religion, along with language, is one of the main components of ethno-cultural self-awareness according to the concept of national identity of German romanticism. In fact, religious-related issues are common to the entire Balkan region - Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians and Greeks - and currently is under intensely studied in all these countries. With this, I would like to emphasize that the topic concerning the issue of cultural and religious affiliation is proving to be extremely relevant in relation to the construction of a common European cultural area, the continuing conflicts on a religious basis and the emerging fears of a possible loss of identity in the "complex future Europe".

Thus, the **thesis** of the dissertation student poses serious challenges, but it is also extremely attractive and necessary for modern science. The repositories of the studied period reveal significant aspects of the religious life and art of the Bulgarians, and have not been the subject of systematic research up to now. The difficulties that arise in constructing such a summarizing work are great. I am pleased to find that the author has managed to avoid superficial (but perhaps more attractive at times) conclusions by examining the phenomena comprehensively and in depth and by basing her arguments on the facts.

2. The **structure** of the dissertation work fully corresponds to the set goals, and is consistent with the material found on our lands. The actual art research is covered in the second and third chapters. In the second chapter, the doctoral student offers a very appropriate classification of the studied artifacts by two basic features - form and decoration. In the third chapter, the reliquaries are simultaneously considered as cult objects and works of art in their artistic context. The phases in the design of the repository containers are monitored (in cases where transformations or replacements are observed), the semantics of the material are commented, and even links are made with the development of goldsmithing in Bulgaria during the relevant period.

The author has done a great deal of research to present a significant number of reliquaries and - as far as possible - different data both on the historical context in which these reliquaries were created and on some of the images presented on them. All this information is systematized in the catalog, which is a very important part of the thesis. It contains 95 articles, each of which presents a reliquary with details of its size, material, origin and

location. Where appropriate, Boykina also provides a description, quotes available literature, and comments on dating.

It is obvious that the dissertation student knows very well the objects of research, as well as most of the existing research on the topic. The volume of the used bibliography is impressive. However, some important works have not been taken into account in the specialized literature, such as:

- the work of the famous expert on Byzantine culture Andre Grabar on the relics of St. Dimitar¹,
- the comparatively new work of the Bulgarian researcher Elena Azmanova-Rudarska on the relics of St. Kliment².

Of particular importance is the documented visual material, which is optimally presented in the appendix with illustration. I consider as a very successful the decision of the researcher to focus only on those reliquaries which can be defined as local production or have proven to have functioned on the Bulgarian lands, without considering the objects brought from abroad after the end of the 19th century, stored in some museum or private collections in Bulgaria. The author does not examine monuments that have been studied many times, such as the ark with the relics of St. John of Rila, the icon-reliquary "St. Virgin Mary Osenovitsa" and the ark with the relics of the German Monastery.

The reliquaries included in the study are presented in collections, and in each of them the items are arranged chronologically. First, precisely dated monuments are presented, followed by those that are dated according to their stylistic features in broader chronological limits. Where appropriate, description, literature, archival sources and photographs are presented. It is worth mentioning here that part of the monuments under study were first published by the author with relevant data, illustrations and conclusions, such as the following:

Бойкина, Д. Няколко мощехранителници от софийски златари. – *Проблеми на изкуството*, 4/2016, 37-43.

Бойкина, Д. Две мощехранителници от Троянския манастир в България. – *Balkanoslavica*, vol. 47, 1, 2018, 105-118.

Бойкина, Д. *Там светеше нещо като звезда* – един непубликуван кивот за мощи. – *Маргиналия. Изкуствоведски четения 2018*. С., 2019, 321-340.

Of the appendixes I find especially valuable the first, as well as the rich illustrative material. Based on the information from the collected sources, the study of archival sources and the research of the reliquaries, Boykina has compiled a list of relics of saints and relics found on the Bulgarian lands during the Ottoman period (Appendix 1), which is a useful database for future explorations in this sphere.

3. So Darina Boykina's dissertation work is as a whole a **contribution**. Without being able to point out all the specific contributions of the study presented, I will mention only the main ones.

3.1. I would like to underline that the topic is not well studied and offers interesting research perspectives, and such research and publication will add a new aspect to the history of Bulgarian art between the Liberation and World War II, and in some cases to this day. The project has the potential to open new connections, to support with new information already known tendencies in the Bulgarian spiritual and artistic life, to present to the Bulgarian public a difficult to study and especially important for our spiritual life and history phenomenon, such as the cult of relics.

3.2. Ninety-five existing reliquaries have been documented, each photographed and described in detail, detailing the date, size, material, origin and location, as well as existing publications.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to underline the following:

The presented work deals with interesting, mostly unexplored material so far, and the problems raised are fully addressed. Scientific adviser Prof. Ivanka Gergova, one of the few Bulgarian scientists with experience in the proposed scientific field, is also a guarantee for the good results.

Darina Boykina has conducted an extremely in-depth study to collect and systematize different data about all the reliquaries she has found and, as far as possible, the historical context in which they were created. This rich information is reflected in the extremely carefully crafted catalog.

It is evident that the author knows very well the monuments presented as well as the existing literature about them. She has appropriately mastered and applied the theoretical formulations and methodology corresponding to the material under consideration. From a documentary point of view, last but not least, I would like to reiterate the importance of the provided illustration material.

I strongly recommend that **this work be published as a monograph as soon as possible**. This is also important given the worrying trend of increased theft of relics and church items from our churches.

All of this gives me reason to suggest to the honorable members of the Scientific Jury to award Darina Boykina the *Doctorate degree*, which I will vote for.

Reviewer:

From Assoc.Member of the Acad. of Science, Prof. DSc Elka Bakalova

Sofia, October 18, 2019

¹ André Grabar. Quelques reliquaires de Saint Démétrios et le martyrium du Saint à Salonique. - *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 5, 1950, pp. 1-28.

² Елена Азманова-Рударска. Св. Климент Охридски в регионалната литература и история: един съвременен „разказ“ за пренасяне на мощи. – *Български език и литература*, Volume 59, Number 2, 2017