

## **REVIEW**

For the study **REPOUSSE COVERS OF THE BOOK OF GOSPELS FROM THE BULGARIAN LANDS (16<sup>th</sup> - first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century)**

By Nona Krasteva Petkova

For awarding the educational and academic degree "Doctor"

By Prof. Dr. Elena Genova

The interest shown in the repoussé covers of gospels by researchers - Bulgarian and foreign - is lasting and consistent. The publications are not few in number, but generalizing studies are rare. Most monuments, which are not great in number, especially from early Christianity and the Middle Ages, are included in general studies of art from a given era. The individual publications of specific monuments reveal unanswered questions and problems that suggest further interest. Nona Petkova, a doctoral student, has declared this in her study. Therefore, we find that the topic is useful for a dissertation and completely timely in view of the lack of generalizable work this type of artifacts and an attempt to clarify underdeveloped topics and problems.

The presented work covers 202 pages of text, including used literature, 33 illustrations illustrating and explaining the text, a detailed scientific catalog of 24 monuments and an album presenting the objects of study, as well as many details of them / 59 it. /. The study is structured the following way – Introduction, five chapters and a conclusion.

The author has dedicated her introduction to the full presentation of the object of study - the book of gospels - the most important liturgical book in Orthodoxy and its place and functions in liturgical activity. It examines the origin and development and functioning of the ritual in the earliest centuries, the true Byzantine medieval and late medieval period. She pays considerable attention to the problem of the tradition of forging, connected not only with the rich and lush decoration of the sacred object, but also with its symbolic meaning and function. Here I would like to turn your attention to the pages devoted to the study of types of repousse, which is done so consistently for the first time. Although I have tried to do this in my publications, they are so clearly systematized only in the work of Nona Petkova. An important element in the Introduction is the argumentation of the chronological scope of the study. According to Petkova, this is the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Medieval monuments on the Bulgarian lands are missing, though she skillfully presents the prerequisites for the development of this type of church utensil, related to the scriptoriums and expensive orders of the rulers.

The authors and studies on the subject are very correctly presented, and the conclusion at the end of this text is particularly valuable, in fact, that the interest in the fittings of the gospels is significantly lower today, at the expense of the interest in other types of church utensils and metal works, such as fittings/covers of the icons.

Chapter one deals with the typology and iconography of the repousse of the gospel in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine traditions. No attempts have been made so far to systematize the repousse on this basis. The author distinguishes three main types: single, multi-component and metalwork covers-boxes, the latter type not being identified and studied at all. In the second and third types, she also distinguishes two subtypes. In order to bring about this systematization, the doctoral student draws, by way of example, an extremely large number of monuments, using a vast array of literature that impresses us with prevailing recent titles. Artifacts from the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, from major world museum collections, monasteries of the Mount Athos and Sinai, Armenian and Georgian monuments, etc. are analyzed in great detail.

The systematization of iconography begins again from the early Christian (6<sup>th</sup> century) and the true Byzantine period, as well as monuments from the post-Byzantine era in the centuries under consideration. The main iconographic models, their origin and development, as well as their symbolism and theological interpretation, the frequency of their use and the duration of their "life" are commented.

The second chapter is dedicated to the monuments of the Sofia goldsmiths from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The text begins with a detailed but precisely measured study of the context in which goldsmithing develops and functions. The city is represented in all its aspects - urban, economic, commercial, religious. Numerous publications on the subject have been researched and analyzed, archival Ottoman documents have been cited, some of which have not been published so far. For example, the problem of new martyrdom in the sixteenth century. The text about the formation, development, character and functioning of the guild is also extensive. The names of Sofia goldsmiths were searched in various types of documents and on the monuments themselves.

The next text identifies and examines in detail the stored gospel monuments / metalwork covers - five in number. As these are the most famous, published and researched fittings, repeatedly described by the authors, impressive is Nona Petkova's ability to turn the description into a careful and accurate observation and to notice even small details. One of the exact observations is the finding of the absence of ornament in the metal covers of Matthew Zlatar (Goldsmith), as well as in the other monuments in Sofia.

We are strongly impressed by the fact that the author does not touch the problem of the Sofia goldsmith's school quite deliberately, which expresses her attitude. She continues this line in other chapters of her work, concerning the Chiprovtsi, Vratsa and goldsmiths of the Bachkovo Center. There is reason behind her thoughts on this question. A contribution of the work is also the pre-dating of the Kremikovtsi Gospel with an extremely accurate analysis of the style and plastic workmanship of the two covers. Re-binding the gospel in the early eighteenth century and moving the original metalwork cover from the late sixteenth century to the back cover. The observations on the sculpturing and the style of the Dragalevtsi repousse are also very accurate.

In the third chapter dedicated to the Chiprovtsi goldsmiths, the author again makes a brilliant analysis of the context - the Chiprovtsi of the era and the two main factors - Catholicism and mining. Here she pays more attention to the problem of the school, in the context of Ivan Sotirov's most extensive and serious publications. I would say that in no case was her suspicion of the author's ambition to add to the production of the Chiprovtsi goldsmiths a huge number of monuments of church utensils, including repoussé of the gospel. She herself calls for, appeals for a careful approach to the Balkan goldsmiths of this period, which have many common features but also significant differences.

Nona Petkova is also trying to debunk many of the myths about Chiprovtsi goldsmithing as a town or village is Chiprovtsi, Srebril Mahala, Chiprovski glasses and Dubrovnik merchants, etc.

The merit of this text is that it points out the peculiarities of the Chiprovtsi works. As coming from Chiprovtsi are presented the signed and dated 10 works - crosses, metalwork covers of gospels, artophoria and a scepter, a glass. The author adds to them two more throne crosses from Vratsa region, the Decani arc of 1626, two gospel repoussé and one liturgical fan from the Krušedol Monastery in Serbia, two reliquaries from the Tismana Monastery and Snagov monastery in Romania. Two more gospel metalwork covers have been presented in the study - unsigned but dated – repoussé cover from the church of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul in Tarnovo and from the temple of the monastery St Prophet Elijah in Teteven. Quite reasonably, the author points out that these unsigned works have the characteristics of the Chiprovtsi goldsmith center. Eight main features have been derived and formulated, which include the construction of the repoussé, sophisticated iconographic programs, mastery of various jewelry techniques, the plastic execution of human figures, the structure of the visual space, the plastic and stylistic diversity, the ornamental system. It is this ornamental system and its origin that draws the author's attention in greater depth.

In this text, we should also pay attention to the PhD student's desire for completeness of the study in order to review some of the problematic issues that have been present in the publications so far.

The presentation of the monuments is chronological, since all are dated. The fittings from Tarnovo and those from Teteven were previously considered within the scope of Chiprovtsi goldsmithing. Of interest are the two ornate fittings from the Krušedol Monastery in Serbia, dated 1656.

The precise and thorough analysis of the images, inscriptions and style of the metalwork covers from the church in Tarnovo makes a strong impression. The interpretation of its connection with other works of Chiprovtsi leads to an interesting author's hypothesis about the contacts between the Metropolitanate of Tarnovo and the Chiprovtsi goldsmiths. In the text about one of the most representative Chiprovtsi metalwork covers - the one from Cherepish - we will highlight the analysis of the very rarely depicted scene of the Elevation of the Holy Cross and the arguments for its appearance on the repoussé of the gospel. The hypothesis suggested by the author about its connection to the renovation of the temple in Cherepish is very comprehensive and credible.

We can note very accurate and interesting observations on the style of execution and the plasticity of Franco Markanic's repoussé, where we can notice both the western influences as well as the influence of goldsmithing from the Wallachian lands.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the monuments of Vratsa goldsmiths from the seventeenth century. The separation of this chapter is innovative, as some authors perceive the goldsmith's center as an appendage of Chiprovtsi (Ivan Sotirov). The thesis supported by Nona Petkova is about the second most important goldsmith center in Vratsa after Chiprovtsi. The influences between the two centers are obvious, but the individuality of the Vratsa works is indisputable. Five gospel repoussé are the subject of study. They all share common characteristics that bring them together in a group representing a sustainable tradition at the Vratsa goldsmith center. All five are analyzed in great detail by the author, with attention to the smallest details, some known facts from their history of their creation are commented.

Chapter Five discusses the most numerous monuments of the period under study and the most debatable question about the existence of a goldsmith's center in the area of Plovdiv and the Bachkovo Monastery. This is the name adopted in recent studies. The main distinguishing feature is the use of the filigree enamel technique. The metalwork covers are eight in number and date from the second half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. Based on some differences between them, the author differentiates them into three groups, distinguished by their technique of execution. The latter group presents typologically metalwork covers-boxes that have not yet been studied.

The study ends with a Conclusion where the author summarizes the key problems and the ideas, presented.

An integral part of the dissertation is the extensive number of used literature in Bulgarian and English, as well as the detailed scientific catalog, which gives a detailed description of the monument, the exact transmission of the inscriptions and a bibliography. An accompanying part of the catalog is the album, illustrating in detail the works.

Once again, I will note an extremely thorough and comprehensive study with very accurate analyzes and hypotheses. I would recommend the text for publication so that a number of corrections and innovations made by the author may come into scientific circulation.

I will again emphasize the merits of the author for her excellent research and collection of material, the analytical view of the problems and the brilliant analyzes conveyed clearly and comprehensively with very good style and language.

The presented abstract correctly reflects the structure and content of the text, and the list of publications in prestigious academic publications is sufficient to defend the dissertation.

Taking into account the merits of the presented work and its academic contributions, I propose to the academic jury to award the educational and academic degree "Doctor" to Nona Krasteva Petkova.

/ Prof. Dr. Elena Genova /