

## **OPINION**

For dissertation for awarding the educational and academic degree "Doctor" in the  
**ACADEMIC SPECIALTY ART STUDIES AND FINE ARTS, 8.1 ART THEORY**

on the subject

### **REPOUSSE COVERS OF THE BOOK OF GOSPELS FROM THE BULGARIAN LANDS**

(16<sup>th</sup> - first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century)

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By Corr. Member of BAS, Prof. Ivanka Gergova DSc

Nona Petkova has successfully chosen as a topic of her dissertation a very interesting and relatively poorly studied field of Orthodox art in the Bulgarian lands - the repousse covers of the Book of Gospels: from the earliest preserved (16<sup>th</sup> century) to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a very different period began in the development of goldsmithing. She found an original approach - the works are considered in view of their affiliation with a certain goldsmith's center: Sofia, Chiprovski, Vrachanski or Plovdiv (?). Thus, no exhaustiveness was sought in the collection of the material, and the study focused on the specific features of the works of the goldsmith's centers in question, which is very convincing. The starting point for the structuring of the material and attribution is to derive a typology of the Gospel covers, which is an important part of the thesis.

The particular research perspective has allowed Nona Petkova to situate in most cases for certainty the researched monuments and to make valuable contributions in clarifying the history and characteristics of the

goldsmith centers such as Sofia, Chiprovtsi and partly Vratsa. The extensive use of archival sources has led to a lively and detailed depiction of the conditions in which Sofia goldsmiths live and work during the period under study. With regard to Chiprovtsi and partly Vratsa goldsmiths, the tone of the dissertation is controversial, with a number of controversial issues clarified in older publications, and Vratsa's works clearly distinguished from the ones from Chiprovtsi. The chosen approach for the beginning of each of the individual chapters is not followed only in the fifth chapter, dedicated to the monuments of the Bachkovo Monastery and the region where the author does not give an opinion on the controversial issue - where are the masters from. But this caution is quite justified.

The monuments included in the dissertation are examined with great care and detail. Particular emphasis is placed on the techniques used, which is rarely done in art studies. Of course, the iconographic program of the repoussé covers and iconographic features of the individual images are the focus of attention. Some of the possible models used by the masters, such as miniatures in manuscripts, engravings in old printed editions, royal doors, mural compositions, works of miniature carving, are also highlighted here. Nona Petkova pays special attention to the artistic features of each monument under consideration, and there are numerous individual contributions here as well.

Although most of the monuments studied are known from earlier publications, Nona Petkova has made a special contribution to the study and the true introduction into the scientific circulation of the repoussé covers on the Koprivshitsa and Etropole Gospels.

The catalog contains 25 monuments presented accurately and comprehensively. Its value is even greater, given that some of them have disappeared in the meantime. The album also has a great documentary and also artistic value.

Nona Petkova has been working on the theme of the repoussé covers for years and has already earned the reputation of being a very good expert on the subject. She has

repeatedly exceeded the requirements for the number of publications related to the dissertation and has set a record with 7 publications, two of which are abroad.

Given the importance of the topic and the value of the results achieved, I recommend the publication of the dissertation. For the sole purpose of assisting in the future preparation of the text for publishing I would like to make some observations and recommendations.

First, about the reading of the inscriptions. In most cases they have been transmitted correctly, but they have not always been interpreted satisfactorily. In two cases, in my opinion, there is a mistaken introduction of the name of the goldsmith master. In the Teteven repousse cover Nona Petkova finds that a master named Peshte has signed, but the inscription „ $\bar{w}$  пеще“ does not actually allow such a reading -  $\bar{w}$  in inscriptions indicates time or place. The statement in the Koprivshitsa gospel announcing the shrouding of the manuscript by Lazar Nikolov is also unconvincing - in fact he may be and is more likely the donor - similar formulas denoting donation, and not craftsmanship in other inscriptions, such as the repousse cover in the church "St. Petka ", or the one from the Vratsa districts, where after the "cover" follow female names.

The literature used is abundant but could still be updated. For example, the most complete study of the Krushedol Monastery is the two-volume monograph by Miroslav Timotijevic (2007). Maybe Petkova may not have been aware of Anna Ballian about silverwork produced in the region of Trikala in Thessaly (Silverwork Produced in Ottoman Trikala (Thessaly): Problems of Taxonomy and Interpretation) where signed repoussé covers are remarkably similar, as Ballian points out, with two of the Bachkov covers. This publication is important because it gives a new direction to the search for the origin and characteristics of Bachkovo's goldsmith monuments.

The work would benefit if more attention was paid to the Balkan situation in the field of goldsmithing, and especially to the fittings of gospels.

Nona Petkova's dissertation meets all requirements to be awarded the educational and academic degree Doctor. The topic is significant, the structure of the work is clear and adequate to the tasks set, the analyzes are conscientious, extensive and thorough, the typological peculiarities important for the studied objects are clarified.

Controversial theses of previous researchers are subject to critical consideration. The work is prepared according to the standards adopted by the Institute of Art Studies at BAS. The abstract reflects adequately the content of the dissertation. I also accept the self-assessment of the contributions contained in the abstract.

All this gives me reason to vote positively for awarding of the educational and academic degree Doctor (8.1. Theory of Arts) to Nona Krasteva Petkova.

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Sofia

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