

Assoc. Prof. Pavel Pavlov
Faculty of Theology
SU "St Kliment Ohridski"
Sveta Nedelya Sq. 19

OPINION

For the dissertation of Nona Krasteva Petkova

REPOUSSE COVERS OF THE BOOK OF GOSPELS FROM THE BULGARIAN LANDS (16th - first half of 18th century)

Dissertation for awarding the educational and academic degree "Doctor" in the Academic Specialty *Art Studies and Fine Arts*, Academic Specialty 8.1 *Art Theory*

By an Academic Jury of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS

The present opinion has been prepared on the grounds of the decision of the Academic Jury from its first meeting, where I was appointed and agreed to present my opinion on the dissertation.

Data on dissertation and abstract

The dissertation has a volume of 230 pages, an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography with 288 titles in Cyrillic and 70 titles in Latin. A 45-page catalog of monuments is also included, which is accompanied by an album. A total of 92 illustrations are attached. I was pleased to read the proposed doctoral dissertation, which has been written well and in perfect Bulgarian. It's easy to read, the story is fascinating. The plan of the dissertation is balanced and covers all the elements, the volume is consistent with the classic notion of contemporary dissertation, I would even say that it slightly exceeds it.

The title of the dissertation is quite clear and precisely worded. The period under review has not been particularly researched, especially with regard to the specific topic, but where individual elements have been studied, the author skillfully uses them and builds on her systematic research. In this sense, not only the proposed topic, but also the methodology used are original. In this sense, I fully endorse the author's claim that "iconographic and comparative analysis will be leading in the description, classification and interpretation of the monuments presented" on p. 17.

In the *Introduction*, the author very rightly emphasizes the key role of the throne Gospel in the worship services of the Church, as the image of Christ. Of course, this

part could be further developed and enriched with much greater theological content, but this goes far beyond the tasks set out here. For example: The revelation of St. John the Apostle tells us a great deal about this subject: about the four animals (4:7 "the first animal was like a lion, the second animal - like a calf, the third animal had a human face, and the fourth animal was like a flying eagle") and about the book (5:1 "And I saw in His right hand of the One that sat on the throne, a book written inward and outward, sealed with seven seals.") Also, there is a great deal of resource in the patristic literature in this direction, e.g. in the *Mystagogy* of St. Maximus the Confessor, where the theme of Christ-Word-Gospel is being discussed. In fact, it is precisely the throne Gospel, as the image of Christ, with its actions that most closely reflects this historical-eschatological περιχώρησις, which is the very essence of the Church, as the center of the connection between this world and the Kingdom of God in Heaven.

As the theologian in the venerable jury, I will allow myself the following remark. The use of one "И" in the name of Christ, although philologically permissible, usually betrays either atheistic or confessional dependence, which in this case are not present. In this sense, I would advise the author to change this so that the text remains the heir to a particular tradition of centuries old. However, here we are exploring and talking about the throne Gospels, which are used exclusively by the Orthodox Church. Moreover, while at the risk of being declared a literalist and scribe, if the throne Gospel is the image of Christ, even of the Incarnate Word itself, then the word Gospel in the study must always be capitalized, as, incidentally, this is the case in most languages. But what can we do today, when philology is the master and mocks all other sciences.

In *Chapter One* typology and iconography are quite well compared and the different types of fittings or boxes are analyzed in great detail and comprehensively. In the Basic Iconography section, more material related to the main theme of the Gospel - the narrative of the life and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ - could be drawn. But the author herself states here that "she recalls in part and in as a generalization ... without claiming exhaustiveness" on p. 36.

Chapter Two is a real gem in Nona Petkova's work. Extremely well systematized, based on solid source and interpretative reasoning, this part is fundamental to her research. Sofia is represented from different sides so that we can clearly see the significant place of the Kuyumji guild in it. Quite impressive is the storytelling fervor of the author, which shows the love for the city of Sofia. The presentation of the fittings impresses with the in-depth observation and comparison, which may have taken a long time in order to analyze everything and to capture even the smallest "scrapes" in the work of the goldsmiths.

However, the vast third chapter of the dissertation (74 pp.) is of particular interest. It is dedicated to the Chiprovtsi metalwork covers of Gospels of the seventeenth

century. Here, the author with a lot of skill and reasoning introduces many new connections and interpretations, in search of the ties between the signed and unsigned Chiprovtsi objects. The diversity of the area during this period was also emphasized, thanks to Catholic settlers who made their contribution to the development of mining and jewelry trades, as well as to the expansion of the geography of Chiprovtsi cultural influence through new trade connections. The hypothesis of the connection between the renovation of the Cherepish Monastery and the composition of the throne Gospel is very interesting.

Of interest are the *Fourth and Fifth Chapters*, which cover the Vratsa fittings of the seventeenth century and the fittings from the area of Plovdiv and the Bachkovo Monastery. The *conclusion* summarizes the tasks accomplished and highlights the achieved results.

The volume of the Opinion does not allow me to mention a number of other positive aspects of the dissertation.

The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation.

The author also has 7 publications on the topic of the dissertation.

Academic contributions

Some of the contributions have already been mentioned in the examination of the individual parts of the thesis, but in summary I believe that several areas of contribution should be emphasized.

Firstly, I take as a main contribution the placing of the topic in this methodological framework, as well as the systematic and comprehensive presentation of the individual regions and fittings during the period in question.

Secondly, the attempt to make a complex history of the various goldsmith centers, as a continuation of the medieval tradition on Bulgarian lands in the period under review.

Thirdly, the use of Ottoman-Turkish archival materials, which for the first time have been associated with goldsmith work of the period, is one of the distinctive merits of the proposed work.

Fourthly, I consider the opportunities given above for the attribution of unsigned monuments from Chiprovtsi as of particularly value.

Fifthly, I consider the applications (*Illustrations, Catalog and Album*) not only appropriate and relevant, but also a special contribution that gives a completeness and wholeness to the dissertation.

I also agree with the contributions offered by the author of the dissertation and other contributions in the Abstract.

Finally, I recommend Nona Petkova's current work, or at least significant portions of it, to be published as soon as possible, because it will enrich the studies in Bulgarian humanities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to express my conviction that the presented dissertation is a well-documented and professionally executed study that makes a significant contribution to the given topic. With its contributions in the development of the topic and with the methodology applied in the implementation, the work fully meets and even exceeds the requirements for a dissertation for the awarding of the academic and educational degree of doctor. This gives me the pleasure to support the dissertation and also to urge the distinguished members of the academic jury to award Nona Petkova the educational and academic degree "Doctor".

Repose of St. Constantine-Cyril Philosopher

February 14, 2020, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Pavel Pavlov, PhD