

REVIEW

On the dissertation for acquiring the educational and scientific degree doctor on the subject:

Personifications in Roman Art from the Territory of Bulgaria

(I-III c.)

by Elina Antonova Anastasova

from

Prof. DSc Emmanuel Moutafov, Institute of Art Studies – BAS

Elina Anastasova has an MA in Archaeology at the Faculty of Educational Studies and Arts of Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski” in 2016 with a diploma thesis on *The Cults in Serdica Based on Numismatic and Archaeological Data*. Since 2011 she has been involved mainly in rescue excavations in Sofia, Sofia region, etc. Since 01.10.2018 she has been enrolled as a full-time PhD student in the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences with academic supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Koleva. I took part in her examination and have the best impressions of her presentations. They were confirmed in the period of her studies at the Institute of Art Studies, where she was awarded the right to defend her PhD on 30.09.2021, on time and fulfilling all the necessary criteria - exams, credits, publications, etc. It is worth noting that in this period Elina Anastasova has won and realized a specialization in Roman art at the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Vienna, with a project relevant to the topic of the dissertation, namely *The Context of Personification Image - An Attempt to Reconstruct the Roman Provincial Art*. The internal defense in 2023 at the research group "Ancient Art" was attended by eminent representatives of archaeological science in the country from the University of “St. Kliment Ohridski” and Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology - BAS, and the submitted work was unanimously directed to public defense, the composition of the Scientific Jury was proposed, which was later voted by the Scientific Council of the IAS-BAS. In other words, all the legal prerequisites for the public defense were in place.

Elina Antonova Anastasova’s **dissertation** consists of a main text (300 pp.), a catalogue (227 artefacts, 267 pp.), maps (10) and a bibliography (32 pp.).

The **topic** of the dissertation, *Personifications in Roman Art from the Territory of ModBulgaria (I-III c.)*, was already defined when it was stated as a dissertation, as well as the serious competence of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Koleva to supervise such research. It corresponds as much in title as in content, which I will comment on below, with the scientific specialty *Art Studies and Fine Arts*, professional field 8.1 *Theory of Art*. To date, there is no summarizing study on personifications in the Bulgarian scientific literature, despite the existence of numerous descriptive publications on monuments of stone sculpture in round sculpture and relief.

One of the main **aims** of the dissertation is to establish the penetration and use of personification images on the territory of modern Bulgaria. Thus, the images of Nemesis, Nike-Victoria, Hygieia, Eros (with and without torch), Tyche-Fortuna, Bonus Eventus, Pudicitia, river deities, and personifications of other natural phenomena such as Helios-Sol and Selene-Moon, Eos, Aion, and Oceanus are explored. It is on these personifications that the chapters in the dissertation are shaped (VI main chapters, divided into subchapters according to the proposed typology of personifications). At this point I would like to clarify that most of the personifications become deities as their cult develops, but Hygieia is present here as an emanation of "health," since ὑγεία is primarily an abstract concept, i.e., primarily a personification of health, and then a goddess.

From the very start Elina Anastasova states that she will attempt to refine the dating of monuments that have already been the subject of analysis by previous researchers, but she also focuses on monuments whose chronological features have not been commented on before. The dating proposed by the PhD student is based on parallels similar in style, and she also looks for the earliest appearance of personifications in Bulgarian lands, as well as the duration of their use.

The examination of the various iconographic schemes, their peculiarities, and prototypes among classical and Hellenistic art, as well as their refraction through the prism of the Roman iconic universe, according to Anastasova's query, really add to the knowledge of provincial Roman art from the territory of present-day Bulgaria. In addition, the doctoral student seeks information about local production, marking the main influences and parallels with the art of the capital Rome and the eastern provinces bordering our lands. Attention is also paid to the role of military and urban culture in the adoption and dissemination of new images. A guiding feature for Anastasova is the context in which the monuments are found - public or private; in an urban or suburban setting (villas). Thus, the analysis of the different categories of stone sculpture allows us to draw conclusions about its significance and its reception by the provincial population of the Roman Empire.

To achieve the assumed, but also achieved, aims and objectives, Elina Anastasova used the following **methods** of analysis: stylistic, iconographic, comparative, and cartographic. I should clarify here that stylistic analysis is neither a discovery of art history nor its exclusive "property". It is a different matter that it is used very little by Bulgarian archaeologists. The author also applies criteria tested by her supervisor in her work on ideal sculpture.

After the presentation of the material, organized in a "German" logical and concise manner, the PhD student reaches certain **conclusions**, among which I would single out her conclusion that most of the images examined are found in the provinces of Upper and Lower Moesia, and specifically in the cities of Ratiaria and Oescus, where their greatest concentration is observed. She attributes this fact to the existence in these provinces of the many camps, castles and towns in the Limes region populated by Roman citizens and military. According to E. Anastasova also attributes to this circumstance the numerous tombstones with parallels, i.e., influences, from the

provinces to the west of Moesia. In this connection is also the generalization that monuments with images of personifications are associated with urban and military culture because they are found along the Limes and in the major urban centers in the provinces of Upper Moesia, Lower Moesia, and Thrace. It is rare to see concentrations outside these centers, as is the case with the depictions of Hygieia in extra-urban sanctuaries, although the latter also have a bearing on urban culture.

Regarding the chronology, Elina Anastasova concludes that, although there is a monument dated to the end of the 1st century, the numerous stone monuments with images of personifications belong to the phase of the flowering of Roman art in the above-mentioned provinces, which began with the Antonines and continued under the reign of the dynasty of the Severan Dynasty. In the middle and second half of the third century the use of these images continued, although they are represented by a smaller number of monuments, some being popular until the end of the century. However, all this is provisional and depends as much on the degree of excavation of individual sites as on the extent or quality of their publication.

It is also a curious observation that among the monuments found in Bulgarian lands, once part of the provinces of Upper and Lower Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia, the most popular are the personifications of states of the body (Hygieia and Eros with torch), followed by those of natural phenomena (Salt and Moon, Ion and Ocean, river god), feelings and emotions (Eros), personifications of abstract concepts, which I would define as states of mind (Nemesis, Victoria, Fortuna, Bonus Eventus) and virtues (Pudicitia).

The contribution of E. Anastasova is the proven hypothesis that stone sculpture studios, where monuments with personifications were made, existed within the large Roman cities of Ratiaria, Escus, Novae, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Durostorum, Philippopolis. Thus, in addition to the accumulation of descriptions of artifacts, it contributes to the reconstruction of artistic life in the 1st-3rd centuries, and its insertion into a general social context makes the study even more meaningful, for a study that does not contribute to the reconstruction of the whole historical picture of a particular era is an end. It is in this respect that the observation that the imported artefacts came from the lands of present-day Greece and Asia Minor is valuable. In turn, it reconstructs a picture of interactions and influences that will presuppose the further history of our lands, more connected with the East than with Central and Western Europe. And speaking of later epochs, I might mention that certain conceptual and verbal personifications of antiquity were also assimilated in Byzantium, where, for example, wedding rings with the inscription Ὁμόνοια - consent, mentioned in the dissertation on page 17 for an ancient personification of the order of Tuhe. Finally, the author also contributes to the reconstruction of everyday life in our lands, arguing that the most popular personifications are those of health and death, natural phenomena, and love, which are more akin to the worldview and beliefs of the provincial population, from the late first century to the third century.

The abstract to the dissertation reflects its content correctly and clearly. The contributions are accurately formulated, and among them I would single out the new

interpretation of the propaganda role of the images of Nike-Victoria from Augusta Trayana. The PhD student has also appended five publications on the thesis, including one article in the *Personalia* volume of Art Studies Readings 2021, of which I am the compiler and editor. The volume is indexed in the Web of Science, and Elina Anastasova's text is of high quality, standing worthy alongside the publications of already established scholars. And since two of her other publications are in junior/student collections, this text is an unequivocal statement of a scientific career.

Summing up, I must emphasize that Elina Antonova Anastasova's dissertation *Personifications in Roman Art from the Territory of Modern Bulgaria* (1st - 3rd c.) together with the abstract and the accompanying written production is a thorough work, logically structured, with mature conclusions and undeniable contributions, as well as an impressive volume. The dissertation is topical and visibly anticipated by Bulgarian scholars of antiquity, because it takes the theorization of specific cults of the Roman period in our country to a new level with its thoroughness and interdisciplinarity. The contribution of the supervisor is undoubted, as is the specialization of E. Anastasova in Vienna to the result, and it exceeds the requirements for a doctoral thesis. Therefore, I would recommend that the text be prepared as a monograph and, after the obligatory editing, be printed (the almost decorative role of commas in the text is annoying; the word *monuments* should be replaced by a more appropriate word in Bulgarian; transliterations from foreign languages should be cleaned up, such as *Hadrian* instead of *Adrian*; *ostotheca* should be spelled as *osteotheca*, etc.).

Based on the above, I confidently propose to the members of the Scientific Jury to award the scientific and educational degree of **doctor** in the scientific specialty of *Art Studies and Fine Arts*, professional field 8.1 *Theory of Arts*, to Elina Antonova Anastasova, as I will do. I do so with pleasure, believing that the development of the PhD student since 2018, synergy with the supervisor and her work is an event for the Institute of Art Studies.

Sofia, 21.08.2023.

Prof. DSc Emmanuel Moutafov,
Chairman of the Scientific Jury