



SOFIA UNIVERSITY „St. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”

FACULTY OF HISTORY

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

REVIEW

of the dissertation of Nikolay Dimitrov Dimitrov on the topic: "Religious life in Pautalia and Serdika during the Roman period (comparative analysis)" with supervisor Prof. D.Sc. Kostadin Rabadjiev, in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional direction: 2.2. History and Archaeology, scientific specialty: Archaeology in the Doctoral Program "*Archaeology*" - *Classical Archaeology: Rome*

Grounds for participating in a scientific jury and writing the review: Order RD-28-443 of 23.07.2022 of the Rector of SU "Kliment Ohridski" for the appointment of a jury.

Reviewer: Prof. D.Sc. Ilya Prokopov

The total volume of the dissertation submitted to me for review is 720 pages, which are distributed as follows: text 444 and catalogue 260 pages. The text is 79-80 characters per line and 33 lines per page.

The reference apparatus contains 236 titles in Cyrillic; 149 in Latin; as well as 7 electronic.

Structure of the work: Introduction; Chapter One: State Cults; Chapter Two: Cults to deities from the Greco-Roman pantheon; Chapter Three:

Divine Personifications; Chapter Four: Eastern Cults; Chapter Five: Local Cults and Cults of Unexplained Character; Religious Life in Pautalia and Serdica (in lieu of conclusion). Appendices: Tables 7; Cards 13; References; Catalogue.

1. Relevance and significance of the developed problem.

Until the submission of Nikolay Dimitrov's work, there is no other one of a general nature on the announced topic. The author has analyzed all known and accessible sources of information accumulated and commented on over a period of more than 100 years. He has also effectively processed ("live" and by publications) all analyzed objects and coins. The author has offered a new and very important angle to the complex and difficult-to-organize topic of religious life. The dissertation provides direct answers to questions and offers hypotheses with excellent argumentation. Taking into account the huge volume of objects, coins, analyzed sources, and publications, it can be strongly argued that the work is of defining importance in its segment. The proposed conclusions and clearly outlined scientific contributions go beyond the requirements of such a PhD work.

2. General characteristics of the dissertation.

The territorial and chronological scope of the dissertation is clearly argued and indicated. The logic for their selection is the common boundary of their areas. The two adjacent areas running from south-southwest to north-northeast are a suitable case study. The difference in their development allows us to trace the time of penetration, establishment, and decline of the studied cults. In the summaries for each separate part of the work, the author has well-defined the similarities and differences. The opinions of the previous researchers of Pautalia and Serdica are examined comprehensively and correctly. With the present work, the author has filled up the identified serious deficit regarding the detailed study of the reverse images of the coins as an important source of new information. In his work, he manages to

largely fill this hitherto unscrutinised segment with many contributing elements. To the excellent and synthesized analysis of the sources and the historical interpretation, Nikolay Dimitrov adds a magnificent numismatic analysis, which gives the work a high value. Given the fact that numismatic monuments predominate in the work, excellent knowledge of the principles and foundations of Roman provincial coinage allows the author to overcome the lack of information in the rest of the studied artifacts. Moreover, they give him the opportunity to offer his own solutions or well-grounded assumptions, or to refute others (pp. 208, 210, 234, 279, 281, 309, 311, 339, 397, etc.). It is necessary to emphasize that Nikolay Dimitrov has accumulated practical experience in working with coins, both in museum collections and at archaeological sites.

High praise should be given to the author's work with coins from auctions or those for which there is only an illustration. It is obligatory that doubt should be expressed to them as to the information they would bring. Any mistake would include incorrect information in scientific circulation.

The successful methodical approach of the author when systematizing his analyses and conclusions is impressive. The complexity of the task set in the dissertation is the difficult or almost impossible placement under one denominator of the respectable and diverse volume of provincial coins from the two cities, objects distributed in 16 groups, and 40 gods, deities, and characters. By adding in the comparative material of the city plans, plans of districts, places, and temples, a real picture of the complexity of the task and the amount of work can be obtained. You can see the very good systematization chosen by Nikolay Dimitrov. The results of the work immediately confirm this.

3. Evaluation of the scientific results and contributions of the dissertation.

3.1. Scholarly contributions.

- For the first time a historical reconstruction of elements of religious life in both Pautalia and Serdika is proposed, based on the results of the analysed artifacts;
- A comparative analysis of the registered cults in Pautalia and Serdika was conducted, emphasizing the similarities and differences in the worship of the gods;
- The chronology of the revered cults in the two cities is clarified;
- A complete picture of the iconography was built as a result of the analysis of the images of the coin reverses;
- The work discussed here can be accepted and used as a corpus for religious life in both Pautalia and Serdika.

3.2. Enrichment of existing knowledge and relevance for practice.

- A huge database is provided, and systematized for convenient use;
- Access to searched topics is offered without the need to use the entire work;
- Answers and assumptions are given, supported by arguments, to a number of debatable issues (the origin of cults, the interpretation of iconographic schemes and individual images);
- Corrections have been made and the work on a number of analyzes has been completed;

3.3. The contributions.

The contributions defined in the author's summary can be confirmed to be available. Apart from them, I would specify and indicate also:

- A huge volume of monuments has been studied and systematized;
- An excellent methodology for the study of heterogeneous monuments has been developed;
- A very appropriate structure and criteria for the study have been introduced, which can be used in similar studies by other authors;
- A thorough critical analysis of the research by other authors prior to this work was carried out;
- The author offers his arguments on all hypotheses and some theses expressed by the researchers of Pautalia and Serdika, which are still under

discussion (Y. Ivanov (p. 1, 18, 242, 343, 396), Ruzhichka (p. 181 , 194), Filov (p. 337), Gerov (p. 85, 161), Gerasimov (p. 285, 295), Gocheva (p. 161), Tacheva (p. 402), Stancheva (p. 351), Bozhkova (p. 311), Parisaki (p. 86, 161,), Yovanova (p. 370), Tachev (p. 12) and others). A clear personal position of the author is expressed towards those of them for which he has convincing evidence and expresses his own reasoned opinion (cf. p. 415).

- Great progress has been made in the study and generalization of the coinages of Pautalia and Serdica. The author derives important information from the reading of the inscriptions and the analysis of the images of emblematic coins of the two cities. Example: he discusses the representation of images supposed to be of Apollo the Healer and the possibility that this is a rare iconography of the young Asclepius (pp. 126, 181-2, 186, 399).

3.4. Notes and recommendations

The work was built using a number of research methods – observation; working with numismatic material; iconographic and stylistic analysis; synthesis, etc., – while the title only indicates the comparative analysis. It would be nice to adapt the title when publishing the dissertation.

- Following the strictly assigned topic, Nikolay Dimitrov has achieved a remarkable result in terms of thoroughness and comprehensiveness. In order to complete the topic in the future, it is desirable to consider it also from an economic, and financial point of view. Thus, the reasons for issuing various volumes (including huge ones) of provincial coins and the religious and cultic messages embedded in them will gain optimal clarity. The same applies to serious investments in the construction of expensive public facilities - complexes, buildings incl. sculptures. The period coincided with major changes in the Roman empire following the transfer of centralized mining of precious metals from the Iberian Peninsula to Thrace and the opening of business opportunities from the East following the marriage of Septimius Severus to Julia Domna.

- The cited names of researchers should be consistently either full personal names or abbreviated.
- If possible, the work should be published in its entirety.

Conclusion:

Nikolay Dimitrov's work can be assessed as very well organized in terms of topic, structure, and content. Repetition of topics and objects is purposeful to facilitate the search of specific information. The style is clean, the text is tight, and the analysed objects are excellently selected and arranged. The individual parts are balanced and appropriately worded. An excellent historical framework is laid out, fully complemented by an interpretation of each specific sub-theme and object of study. The author has used a considerable amount of sources, practically everything available.

Based on comparative analyzes and other research techniques of each group and subgroup of coins and objects, the result is a virtually new product. The synthesis proposed by Nikolay Dimitrov goes beyond the stated results ".....a detailed analysis of the venerated cults in Pautalia and Serdika, with the information from the older scientific literature being supplemented with the data from newly explored archaeological sites and newly discovered artifacts" and offers a new dynamic picture of the processes that took place in the two neighbouring cities and their urban territories. The similarities and differences in the worship of gods and cults in the context of specific time spans are clearly delineated.

It can be stated that the goals and tasks stated by the author have been successfully implemented.

The summary meets all requirements.

Nikolay Dimitrov has the required number of publications on the topic. All documents for the competition are in order.

Evaluation of the dissertation work

On the basis of everything presented above, I give my completely positive assessment of the dissertation work created by Nikolay Dimitrov on the topic "Religious life in Pautalia and Serdica during the Roman period (comparative analysis)". I am convinced that the dissertation of Nikolay Dimitrov Dimitrov has all the required qualities for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of "doctor" and I propose to the scientific jury that it be awarded to him.

I invoke in accordance with Art. 14 of ZRASB and Art. 43 of PPZRASB through the respected jury to propose to the Management of SU "Kliment Ohridski" to confirm the defence as successful.

17.09.2022

Prof. D.Sc. Ilya Prokopov

