

## S T A T E M E N T

of **Prof. Dr. Totko Stoyanov**, member of the scientific jury for the evaluation of the dissertation qualities

of **Nikolay Dimitrov Dimitrov**, PhD student at the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of History, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", on the subject of **Religious life in Pautalia and Serdica in the Roman era (comparative analysis)**, for the award of **the degree of Doctor of Education and Science** in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology

The object of study in the presented thesis of Nikolay Dimitrov has no analogue in the Bulgarian literature. The existence of numerous studies on the two major urban centres in the western borders of the province of Thrace, including archaeological and summarizing studies of the last decades, are a prerequisite for a useful innovative study. The result is there - a text that is impressive in volume, scope and content (720 pp. in total). The dissertation has a classic structure - a main text including an introductory chapter (Introduction), five chapters, a concluding chapter, two appendices (Tables 1-7 and Maps 1-9), References (458 pp. in total), and a Catalogue (262 pp.). The scrupulously broken structure of chapters I-V, containing constant paragraphs comparing cult X in Pautalia and Serdica and comparative analysis, as well as the distribution of the cults discussed by chapter, reflects careful thought in advance about the structure and content of the study.

In the introductory part of the Introduction (pp. 1-4) the reasons for the choice of the topic of the dissertation and the inclusion of the coinage of the two cities (mainly the reverse images) as an important component of the source base of the study are stated.

In the Objectives paragraph (pp. 4-6), in fact, in addition to the not very precisely formulated aim "to make a comparative analysis of the recorded cults in Pautalia and Serdica, which would draw a clearer(sic) picture, as well as outlining trends in religious politics as influences and traditions," eight tasks to achieve the aim (vaguely labeled as additional, important, specific, other) are presented in detail. In fact, these tasks outline the actual substantive scope of the thesis's goal-an analysis and interpretation of an optimal number of sources, a synthesis of data on religious life in the two cities, including manifestations of its citizens outside, in Thrace and beyond, and in the context of economic, social, and cultural their development in order to compare their common dimensions and highlight similarities and differences.

§. Methods used (pp. 7-10). Four research methods are indicated: the snarl analysis, identified as the main one in the study, the iconographic and stylistic analysis, and the cartographic method. As a basis for carrying out a comparative analysis, "the preparation of a detailed and clearly structured catalogue of the finds" "relating to the religious life of Pautalia and Serdica" (pp. 5, 7), previously identified as the first task supporting the aim of the study, is stated. The organization of the catalogue is explained, which is evidently the result of a reflection on the possibilities to extract the optimum information for the exposition.

The presentation of the catalogue units is based on the combination of two lists of criteria - the leading one is that of "gods and characters", where in group A are I. Emperor, II. Roma, and in group B 38 gods and personages (from III to XL) arranged alphabetically (from Apollo to Hyupsistos). The second criteria list is labeled as the Monuments List, containing 16 artifact types/categories, in which order the artifacts are arranged within each divine persona. Important to the manifestations of the cults are the first 8 - coins, altars, stone blocks and slabs, pedestals for statues, statues, votive tablets, statuettes. The remaining 8 are more of a general cultural and/or domestic nature. I believe it is more accurate to title this section List of Types (Categories) of Artifacts Examined.

According to the combination of the two lists, the artefacts from Pautalia are presented first (202 catalogue numbers), justified by the 'anticipatory development of Pautalia in relation to Serdica in the 2nd century' (cf. p. 3), and then those from Serdica (223 catalogue numbers). However, there is, it seems to me, an unnecessary complication in the formation of the catalogue numbers, because each serial number contains a minimum of three digits - Roman for the character number, Arabic for the artifact category number, and another Arabic for the artifact itself. When citing a catalogue item in the exposition, the characters become 4 - the first P or S stands for the city and the other three as stated. If the reader wants to trace the cited cat. no. when needed, the only facility is the indicated home page of the artifacts from the two cities. The rest of the search is rather slow (and tedious). It is clarified that "the way the catalogue is laid out allows for its continual subsequent additions, allowing it to be seamlessly transformed into a digital database" justifies this structure somewhat, but it is not workable in this text because it is not in electronic format. I believe that in publishing this work, it would be better to make a simplified numbering (which immanently contains the stated principles of catalogue organising).

The idea of putting the images of the artefacts in the catalogue together in the description is a good, practical one. Efforts to provide quality images of the coins are evident, but in the case of the sculpture monuments the sizes are small and in some cases the quality of the images is not of a good standard (for epigraphic monuments

there are not always opportunities for this). The inscription under the heading "dating" uncertain, in the case of the monuments of plastic (statues, reliefs) is unacceptable. It is true that some of the primary publications lack dates. In such a case, the author demonstrates an unwillingness to offer even an approximate date (and is in contrast to the statement that "For the monuments with images (coins, votive tablets, statuettes, etc.) a detailed iconographic and stylistic analysis has been carried out," pp. 9). In the contemporary literature, both on Thrace and on the Empire, there are already enough publications - corpora, survey and specialist studies - that allow, at least for popular cults, attempts in this direction, based on iconography, style, plastic features, context, etc. In my opinion, in the publication of the thesis, this deficiency should have been avoided.

§. Territorial and Chronological Scope (pp. 10-17) The chronological scope of the study is justified as "generally in the time from the first half of the 2nd century to the middle/second half of the 4th century" (there is an intrusion into unnecessary details in the numismatic data).

In § Historiography (pp. 17-23), a concise, informative review of the literature on the subject is made, based on several criteria, demonstrating a good knowledge of the publications of different thematic focus containing information on the topic of the study. It is pointed out that the introductory part of the texts analyzing the data on the relevant divine figures presents the history of the study of this cult.

The core of the study are chapters I -V as follows. State cults (of the Emperor and Rome, pp. 25-67); II. Cults to deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon (14, arranged not alphabetically as in the catalogue, but by degree of importance in Pautalia, as already indicated, pp. 68-250) III. Divine personifications (1. Public, 2 Natural, 251-304). IV. Eastern cults (1. Egyptian, 2. Asia Minor-Balkan, 3. Pre-Asiatic, 305-364). V. Indigenous cults and cults of unexplained character, pp. 365-390. The implementation of the same pattern of presentation of data on cults in the two cities, followed by comparative analysis and conclusions at the end of each chapter, predetermines homogeneity and balance in the voluminous text.

The primacy of numismatic data such as statistics, chronological indications, iconographic and cultural-historical data naturally leads to their use as a starting point for the study of the different cults in all the differentiated groups. The specialised training for the handling of this specific material has allowed N. Dimitrav to reach new ideas, hypotheses and theses in its interpretation. It should be stressed that a balance was sought in the use and interpretation of the other main groups of sources.

The epigraphic monuments have been examined and interpreted to the optimum extent for extracting data on cults, temples, priests and initiates - such as origin, social status, etc., conventional and local epithets.

The monuments of sculpture are also studied and interpreted as a source of data on the characteristics of the deities and personages under consideration based on iconographic analysis, specificities and parallels. The search for and commentary on iconographic types reflected, both in coinage and in the monuments of sculpture, is evident. The lack of any real analysis in some of the monuments of sculpture in the catalogue creates a sense of some imbalance.

Analysis of the archaeological context of the artefacts has been used to interpret various problems in the interpretation of individual cults. The data from the archaeological investigations in recent years of Serdica and Kyustendil and some sites within the reach of their urban areas have also been used for the purposes of analysis and interpretation.

The final chapter (pp. 391-417) is informal in structure and content. The summary of the conclusions of the five chapters is supplemented by the interpretation of the information from the seven appended tables and five maps. Tables 1 and 2 provide the number of artefacts associated with deities and personages according to the list of 16 species used in compiling the catalogue. The visualizations outline the concentration in the individual deities, respectively in Pautalia and Serdica, and support the already highlighted leading role of Asclepius, Hygeia and Telesphorus, and in Pautalia, in Serdica, based on the coins, but also the monuments (2 to 8 species) having the swarm of real evidence of cult life. The more prominent cults in both cities are also highlighted, such as those of Heracles, Zeus (and Hera), and Dionysus. Table 3 plays a similar role for the data on the main types of monuments for the temples in the two cities, as do the other tables for visualizing and interpreting the data on priests, gerusia, manifestations of religious life of a formal and more general nature (festivals, games, competitions, sacrificial offerings), epithets and initiates. Similar is the function of maps, which visualize and support generalizing interpretations about the subjects of religious life in terms of the concentration of artifacts of particular deities at specific locations in their cities and territories.

It should be pointed out that overall, the PhD student Nikolay Dimitrov has succeeded in achieving the set goals and objectives. The dissertation is written in clear and concise language, with an excellent command of professional terminology, which contributes to the overall perception of the voluminous exposition. From the text and the list of literature used, it is evident that he is very familiar with and uses the publications from the voluminous literature on the general and specific problems of

the groups of monuments studied. In his work the colleague has shown a critical eye, with a correct attitude to the various theses, and has managed to keep himself, on the whole, from overinterpretation and speculation. Throughout the study there is a skill in analyzing sources of different character, in working out his own criteria, and in synthesizing his own treatment of problems of a private and general nature. The doctoral student has achieved a thorough knowledge of the specific problems of numismatics in order to develop the coins as an important source for the religious life of the two urban centres , and more generally of Thrace. It is worth noting the willingness to analyse the artefacts studied from autopsy to the maximum extent.

In view of the qualities of the dissertation, which contains undoubted scientific contributions, I believe that the timely publication of Nikolay Dimitrov's thesis, after the necessary revision in view of the comments and recommendations, would be relevant and useful for the scientific community.

The abstract and the acknowledgement of contributions correctly reflect the content and the main achievements of the author in the thesis.

Nikolay Dimitrov is the author of three scientific publications directly related to the dissertation topic. Two of them are already out of print.

In conclusion, considering the overall merits of the dissertation work of Nikolay Dimitrov Dimitrov, I declare to the esteemed jury that the work under review possesses high scientific merit and meets the requirements in the Law on Scientific and Educational Research to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Education and Science and I will vote for it with conviction.

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