



СОФИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ „СВ. КЛИМЕНТ ОХРИДСКИ”
И С Т О Р И Ч Е С К И Ф А К У Л Т Е Т

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О P I N I O N

of Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Vassileva Boteva-Boyanova
Faculty of History, St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia,
member of the scientific jury in accordance with Rector's order РД-38-619/18.11.2022,
on the PhD study of **Vanya Mladenova Stavreva** entitled „*The anthropomorphic plastic art of the Late Eneolithic cultures Varna, KGK VI and KSB - possibilities for interpretation*” (with academic supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Petya Georgieva Georgieva), submitted for a PhD degree

The limitations of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" require me to take on the role of chairman of a scientific jury for the defense of an archaeological study, of which in chronological aspect I am not an expert, as is well known. I accepted the challenge as a researcher, who has specialized at the Centre/Arbeitsstelle for Semiotics (Berlin) of Prof. Roland Posner (at the Institute of Language and Communication of the Technical University - Berlin), since the dissertation is in fact dedicated – according to the PhD student herself – to **the possibilities for the interpretation** of anthropomorphic plastic (p. 4).

My acquaintance with the text submitted for defense allows me to say at the very beginning that it is a research, dedicated to a problematic and voluminous topic, which is undoubtedly dissertable. It requires the collection, processing and interpretation of a vast Late Eneolithic material, and – accordingly – presupposes preparation and skills for working with it. I would like to congratulate the PhD candidate Stavreva for the decision to use in her research the methodological possibilities not only of archaeology and history, but also of cultural anthropology, experiential studies, and folkloristics. This guarantees to a much greater extent the achievement of interesting observations and new interpretive possibilities. With all the

complexity of the issue, the presence of some omissions of a different nature is understandable, but they do not spoil the overall impression of the work. The same applies to the typographical and other errors (I would point out, for example, the Neolithic site in North Macedonia, which in the dissertation is given as Govrelovo – pp. 189, 209, 368, although the name is Govrlevo / Cerje-Govrlevo).

The dissertation consists of two parts – **ANALYTICAL TEXT** and **APPENDICES**. The enormous amount of work carried out during this study is clearly evident from the appendices, which include four separate components: **a catalog of sites** (total 177 + over 40 of accidental finds & non-professional excavations) related to three Late Eneolithic cultures – 1) Kojadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI, 2) Varna and 3) Krivodol-Salkutsa-Bubani (**a total of 159 settlements**, respectively from KGK VI – 56 in Bulgaria and 45 in Romania; Varna – 10 in Bulgaria; KSB – 26 in Bulgaria, 10 in Romania, 12 - in Serbia and Kosovo; **a total of 16 necropolises**, respectively from KGK VI – 11; Varna – 4; KSB – 1; **2 pit complexes**; accidental finds and non-professional excavations – from over 40 different locations); **a figurine catalog** (with an impressive 3,349 catalog numbers of whole and fragmentary artifacts); 297 **tables** (with photographs and/or drawings of the artifacts); 27 **maps** (of the distribution of the main visual images and themes in the anthropomorphic plastic of the three Late Eneolithic cultures analyzed in the dissertation). In the digital version of the dissertation, these elements are organized into five separate documents.

The analytical text is clearly structured into seven chapters, framed by an introduction (pp. 4-16) and a conclusion (pp. 344-353), the latter followed by a statement of originality (p. 354), a bibliography (pp. 355-421) and abbreviations (pp. 422-423). This structure in my opinion is logical and completely acceptable.

The introduction introduces the basic terms; the goals and tasks of the dissertation; its chronological and territorial scope; research methods; the sources; a historiographical overview of the studies, which is quite concise, since the contributions of the various authors who worked on different aspects of the subject are given in the appropriate places in the text; the structure and content of the dissertation; as well as thanks to the colleagues who supported the research.

The seven chapters of the analytical text are structured as follows:

I. Theoretical issues (with five main sub-parts), pp. 17-38;

II. Overview of the main interpretations of anthropomorphic figurines (with three main sub-parts, however the last one is wrongly numbered as II.4), pp. 39-88;

III. Principles and criteria for systematization of anthropomorphic plastic (with two sub-parts), pp. 89-102;

IV. Main visual images and themes in the anthropomorphic plastic of the KGK VI, Varna and KSB cultures (with 21 main sub-parts and a summary at the end), pp. 103-235;

V. Anthropomorphic plastic in its archaeological context (with five main sub-parts), pp. 236-275;

VI. Possibilities for functional interpretation of anthropomorphic figurines (with six main sub-parts, however there is a printing error in the number of the last one), pp. 276-313;

VII. Anthropomorphic figurines in the socio-economic context of the Late Eneolithic (with three main sub-parts), pp. 314-343.

It is immediately evident that the substantial weight, both as a volume, as a research effort, and as a contribution, is in chapter IV, dedicated to the main visual images and themes in the considered anthropomorphic plastic. The chapter in question is extremely closely related to the previous one, in which the criteria for the systematization of this plastic are presented. The careful avoidance in Chapter IV of the notion of classification in relation to the newly substantiated division of the studied artifacts into 21 visual images and themes is noticeable. I am not sure whether the avoidance here of the concept in question is a good solution. However, this is irrelevant to the actual result of the work of the PhD candidate Stavreva. I dare to assert that the systematization proposed by her meets all the basic methodological requirements of semiotics, although there are references to semiotics itself – completely correct and convincing – only in relation to gestures (pp. 98-99). On this occasion I would like to add that globally, gesture research has become particularly intensive and productive since its institutionalization in the summer of 2002 in Austin (Texas), when the ISGS (International Society for Gesture Studies) was officially founded. Already in the 1990s Prof. Roland Posner, who was president of the International Association for Semiotic Studies between 1994 and 2004, together with Massimo Leone held at the Institute of Language and Communication of the Berlin Technical University an annual one-semester seminar on the gestures; in the academic year 2002/2003 I had the pleasure of participating in it.

Of course, the systematization proposed in the dissertation can be disputed, and this would be completely understandable, because of the characteristics of the studied artifacts. Essential in this case is the fact of a methodologically correct and systematically implemented approach in


synthesizing data from empirical material that is huge in volume and diverse in features. The analysis of the possibilities for functional interpretation of the anthropomorphic plastic, as well as the overall positioning of the anthropomorphic plastic in the socio-economic context of the Late Eneolithic, should also be mentioned among the achievements of the dissertation.

The bibliography is impressive, both in terms of volume and linguistic diversity; it shows that the PhD candidate was able to familiarize herself with the achievements of a number of research schools. My random checks did not come across any publications that are included in the bibliography, but to which there are no references in the text – a fact that testifies to the correctness of the author of the dissertation.

The summary accurately reflects the content and structure of the dissertation, but the decision to put a front page in Bulgarian also for the English version is questionable. The auto-reference for the contributions is adequate to the achievements of the PhD student. Some of them have already been reported at five conferences, two of them abroad (in Turnu Severin and Vilnius) and one at an international scientific forum in Varna. A list of four publications on the subject of the dissertation is submitted, three of which are still in print (including in some long overdue volumes). Here let me say that I strongly recommend the publication of the entire dissertation.

The serious achievements in the study of a voluminous, difficult, but also very significant topic give me the reason **to vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific PhD degree to Vanya Mladenova Stavreva.**

03.02.2023

Signature: 

(Prof. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Boteva-Boyanova)