

## OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Tsvetana Cholova, medieval history of Bulgaria (2.2. History and archaeology), for the dissertation "The cultural and historical wealth of Bulgaria in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List. New data and promotion methods" for the obtaining of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in a professional direction 2.2. History and Archeology with candidate Asen Bonjev

The dissertation is dedicated to one of the important and current topics today about the objects and monuments of the cultural material, intangible and natural wealth of Bulgaria and the recognition of their importance for the world cultural heritage and the development of tourism. This theme has been the subject of research in various aspects in recent decades and contains still open discussions on some key points. It has a direct applied meaning and a reflection on modern reality.

The dissertation consists of two parts - scientific research and scientific applied. In my opinion, the fields that apply this type of research will grow in the future. Cultural heritage implies, due to its direction, in addition to fundamental historical, archaeological, art history, etc. research and projection to modern times, preservation, conservation, restoration, exposure and popularization of material monuments and non-material customs and traditions preserved from the past. The two main parts are divided into six chapters, a general conclusion, a bibliography and two appendices. An abstract, a reference to the contributions and publications on the subject is presented.

In the Introduction, definitions of important terms for the dissertation are given according to the UNESCO Conventions for the protection of the world's cultural, natural and intangible heritage, the goals and objectives are justified, and the applied methods for their implementation are described. The importance of cultural-historical heritage "not only as a powerful resource for spiritual survival, but also as an irreplaceable resource for economic development, as an instrument of international influence" is indicated. The significant place of material cultural and historical heritage in today's Bulgarian lands and the criteria for the inclusion of the most important and unique monuments and sites in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List are presented descriptively and in tables.

The historiographic review is compiled descriptively, listing the most important publications on individual topics. A general analysis, conclusions and assessment of the state of research is lacking, as this has been done to some extent in the relevant chapters and paragraphs. The critical and evaluative presentation of historiography is an important part of historical research and contributes to highlighting the scientific contributions of the work.

The author places an emphasis on the Thracian culture and monuments, which, according to him, cause the strongest international interest. This is true to some extent, especially for the 1970s and 1980s, when tracology appeared on the world stage as a new science and attracted the attention of researchers from different countries. During the same period, the interest in the Old Bulgarian culture, language and art also increased. Research on medieval Bulgarian culture highlighted Bulgaria's contribution to European history.

In the first part, "Cultural-Historical Wealth", recognized and included in the UNESCO List of material cultural-historical monuments, natural wealth and intangible traditions of Bulgaria are examined. Most of them are unique not only for Europe and the Balkans, but also for the world. The center is on cultural and historical heritage.

Particular attention is paid to the Thracian tombs, presented as a reflection of the Orphic cult of rebirth, with a focus on the Svesthari tomb and the Kazanlak tomb. Placing the topic of Orpheus and Orphism at the beginning of the study of cultural-historical heritage is correct in order to pay more attention to this extremely important phenomenon for European culture and spirituality. The subject of Orphism cannot be developed without going into the complex ideas and practices of the mystery cults, the secret teachings, and the resulting conflicting interpretations, due to the paucity and lack of information. The merit of Alexander Fall, as the author notes, is the connection of the Orphic teaching with the Thracians, and not only with the later Hellenic Orphism, which was known in the Mediterranean region and spread over the centuries. "Thracian Orphism" is a new concept in science and popularizes the Bulgarian lands as the place of origin of this tradition, woven into the basis of European philosophy and thinking. It is inherent in the mentality and spirit of the population of the Balkans, and is transferred to Christianity, culture and education in Byzantium, in medieval Bulgaria and in modern times. The topic of Orpheus and Thracian Orphism is also presented in a separate publication, and the author's translation of Orphic tables was also made, which shows a deep understanding of this complex issue.

The second emphasis in the study of the ancient cultural and historical monuments is placed on the tomb of the Sveshtari in the Sboryanovo archaeological reserve, which is also the subject of a separate publication. As the Kazanlakh tomb has been extensively studied by art historians and archaeologists, the author makes an in-depth analysis of the Sveshtari tomb, supplementing it with appendices of the recognition and World Heritage documentation. The fragments of the written information of ancient authors, the results of the work of the Bulgarian and international archaeological expeditions have been analyzed. Attention is paid to the hypotheses of archaeoastronomy. The contribution of the discoverers of the monument - Assoc. prof. Maria Chichikova and Prof. Diana Gergova for its international recognition and modern exposure - was highly appreciated. The written evidence and the results of the archaeological excavations for the Getic fortified city of Helis, the Celtic sanctuary and the medieval settlement in the "Petrova Niva" area have been collected and analyzed.

The tomb of the Sveshtari is also presented in Appendix No. 2, where for the first time all archival material on the process of discovery, restoration and presentation of this unique cultural monument, the administrative and financial problems faced by the Bulgarian state during the period of its inclusion in the List of UNESCO. Thus, the inferences in the Conclusion of the dissertation about the weaknesses in the policy of the Bulgarian state for the presentation of the unique Bulgarian cultural - historical values internationally and increasing the interest in cultural tourism in Bulgaria are supported by documents.

The analysis of the material cultural-historical heritage from the Middle Ages period includes the Bulgarian medieval monuments of world importance from the UNESCO List, in

the field of architecture, urban planning and art, in connection with the latest scientific research. For a more complete presentation of medieval Nessebar in historical and archaeological terms, it is good to add the publications from the international symposiums *Bulgaria pontica medii aevi*, which cover various directions in the study of the medieval city. The themes for the Madar horseman - a unique rock relief, with historically significant inscriptions dedicated to important peace treaties between Bulgaria and Byzantium and the frescoes of the Boyan church - have been elaborated in detail. The doctoral student points to the conclusions of the latest research related to the names of the painters in Boyana church and the discovered graffiti by Prof. Zarko Zhdrakov with the name of the painter Vasilie, analyzed in a collaborative publication with Prof. Kazimir Popkonstantinov. This tendency to search for and discover the names of so far considered anonymous painters is also characteristic of Bulgarian medieval literature. Prof. Georgi Popov discovered encoded names of Bulgarian writers in the acrostic, and this helped in the secure attribution of many works from the Middle Ages. Among the medieval sites, as some of the most attractive for tourism and the most visited, monastery complexes are presented - the stauropygial Rila monastery and the Ivanovo rock monastery complex, the center of hesychasm in the XIII-XIV centuries.

From the intangible cultural heritage, the unique recognized by the UNESCO List, preserved thousand-year-old customs and traditions in the Bulgarian lands, for the history of music, chants and Bulgarian folk art are included. New sites have also been proposed for recognition by UNESCO. They will present more fully the intangible heritage, which is just as significant as the tangible cultural monuments. The objects of the intangible heritage, recognized by UNESCO as world achievements, are only now gaining importance and will continue to increase with the unique traditions, "living history", ethnology, musical culture, etc., which Bulgaria is very rich in.

The second part of the dissertation. "Modern methods for popularizing the cultural and historical wealth of Bulgaria" is the center of the study and contains the main contributions of the dissertation work. The author has extensive theoretical and practical experience in this case in the Burgas region, one of the most significant for the development of cultural tourism in Bulgaria. He is also acquainted with world practices.

Part Two has a scientific and applied contribution with new recommendations and guidelines for the development of the Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage and cultural tourism. Bulgarian problems and practices in the field of cultural-historical heritage, its preservation, restoration, exposure and popularization are critically examined in comparison with the methods and achievements of world experience and good practices in this direction. The focus is on the presentation of the monuments, finding their rightful place in the world cultural heritage. Structurally, it would be better if the analyses, conclusions and recommendations from Appendix No. 1 "Brief overview of the administrative system of management and legal-normative framework of the cultural-historical heritage" are attached to the main text, and only the documentary material remains. Thus, the Second Part will be more complete and complete.

The topic of the dissertation is interdisciplinary, combining competences from various scientific fields and professional areas. This implies knowledge in the fields of history, architecture, art, painting, sculpture, economics, law, administrative regulation, etc. If we look from the side of narrow specialists in each of these fields, we will find gaps and incompleteness in some parts of the study, but the author has managed to find the balance and has coped well with the set goal and tasks, with the analysis and presentation of the heterogeneous and specific source material.

The dissertation reflects the current state of cultural heritage in Bulgaria, scientific research, the policy of the Bulgarian state in this direction, administrative regulations, legal acts and outlines specific guidelines for the development of cultural-historical tangible and intangible heritage and tourism. It is illustrated with numerous tables, photos and pictures that are directly related to the text. The prospects for the preservation, research, restoration, exhibition and new methods for popularizing the cultural-historical heritage and cultural tourism are indicated in comparison with the world achievements in this field.

In the Conclusion, the main inferences of the research are drawn, the contributing moments and directions of the modern development of the cultural and historical heritage of Bulgaria are outlined today. Valuable guidelines are given for the work of the Bulgarian cultural institutions to reveal and popularize the cultural and historical heritage and occupy a worthy place for Bulgaria in international research and tourism, as a country with an extremely rich cultural and historical heritage.

The author has a clear and precise presentation style, is well-versed in working with the scientific apparatus and footnotes.

The abstract and the Statement of Contributions meet the requirements in the regulations. The publications on the topic of the dissertation are in scientific journals and electronic editions.

The dissertation is a new attempt to summarize the topic of the state of the cultural-historical heritage in Bulgaria, to propose guidelines and new approaches for affirming its significance for world culture, which gives me the reason to vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific degree doctor by Asen Bondjev.

19.05. 2023

Prof. Dr. Tsvetana Cholova