

# A STATEMENT

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about the dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Stella Doncheva, PhD entitled "The production of artistic metal in early medieval Bulgaria (based on the finds data)"for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in a professional field 2. Humanitarian sciences, 2.2 History and archeology, scientific subject area Archeology (Medieval Bulgarian archeology)

## I. Information about the author of the dissertation

Stella Milcheva Doncheva, PhD was born on May 17, 1972. In 1996 she graduated in Bulgarian Language and History at the University of Shumen "Episcope Konstantin Preslavsky". In 2002 she completed a master's program in Theology at the same university. In the period she was the head of the Department of Medieval Archeology in RHM – Shumen. Since October 2011 she has been associate professor in of Medieval Archeology at the Branch of NAIM at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Shumen, and and since 2015 she has been the head of the same academic institution.

## II. Information about the procedure

According to the PRAS of the University of Shumen, Stella Doncheva's work was discussed at a meeting of the Department of History and Archeology at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Shumen. By order of the Rector of Shumen University (№ RAD-16-059 / 24.06.2020) a scientific jury was appointed. The latter held its first meeting on 6 June 2020, at which a chairman was elected and the reviewers and authors of statements in connection with the forthcoming public defense were determined. The above facts give me the reason to conclude that the procedure is in full compliance with the regulations.

## III. Information about the dissertation and the author's summary of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of introduction, two parts containing seven chapters, a conclusion, references, a list of abbreviations used and illustrative appendices - with a total volume of 548 pages of text and 365 pages of appendices. The chosen topic is dissertable and is dedicated to a problem that has not been developed so far with an interdisciplinary approach in archaeological science.

The introduction begins with a short lead-in, after which the subject, the purpose and the tasks of the dissertation are outlined. The chronological and territorial scope of the topic,

as well as the sources of information are clearly defined. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the work, the research methods used in various scientific fields - archeology, history, chemistry, physics, metallurgy, microscopic and trasological observations - are precisely indicated.

According to the suggested structure, the first part of Stella Doncheva's dissertation is dedicated to the production centers in the Preslav region. It is divided into three chapters, considering respectively the belt sets, their element composition, as well as the reconstruction of the finished products. Considering the fact that this is a dissertation for the degree of "Doctor of Science" in the scientific area of Archeology, this part of the work has the most valuable contribution.

The first chapter deals with metal plastic products and in particular belt sets. They are presented according to the classic scheme: buckles, belt ends and appliques. The materials are outlined in a generalized and at the same time precise way, consciously avoiding the endless division of kinds into types, types into subtypes, subtypes in variants, variants in varieties, etc., which as the author correctly noted can only create confusion and would not contribute to the greater clarity of the exposition.

Chapter Two (Element Analysis of Raw Materials and Items) is devoted to the data about the composition of ores and metals. Such an approach reveals a little-known aspect in the field of Old Bulgarian metal plastics and makes it possible to trace the degree of technology development in a given society in a certain chronological segment.

In Chapter Three of the dissertation hypothetical reconstructions of the different types of belt sets are offered. The advantage of the work is that they are based on rich comparative material from other centers in Bulgaria and abroad (Romania, Moldova, Southeast Europe, Eurasia), which shows the candidate's extensive knowledge.

The second part of the dissertation is entitled "Technology and practice of jewelry production in the Middle Ages" and consists of four chapters. Despite the difficult task, which requires in-depth knowledge in the field of physicochemical research, Assoc. Prof. Stella Doncheva, PhD has performed it at a high professional level, and the conclusions she has reached fully correspond to the previously set goals and objectives.

The first chapter is devoted to metallurgy and mining in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The extraction of minerals, historical information about this activity worldwide, mythological beliefs related to metallurgy, copper deposits in the Bulgarian lands and in the outstanding Burgas-Strandzha region in particular, lead and silver metallurgy and metallurgy of other metals (katay, gold) are reviewed in separate paragraphs. The fact that the chapter ends

with a concluding part, which summarizes and synthesizes the main results of the analysis, gives a good impression.

The second chapter is entitled "Metals and Alloys". It is dedicated to their structure and properties, as well as to the crystallization processes that are observed when their state changes as a result of technological processing. Emphasis here is placed on the casting properties of metals and alloys, as well as on basic metals and alloys in artistic metal.

The third chapter (Tools and devices) presents the full set of metalworking tools the medieval jeweler needed - metal tools, bone tools and production ceramics. A good impression gives the fact that a set of tools is not presented for its own sake, but is skillfully woven into the relevant production activity. At the end of this chapter, Assoc. Prof. Stella Doncheva, PhD reaches the important conclusion that the tools of the tenth century were not technically inferior to many of the tools used in the Late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and even the New Age.

Chapter Four (Technology and Practice) examines in detail a number of foundry and blacksmithing practices, as well as stamping techniques, metal coatings, artistic decoration, joining individual elements and drawing.

The conclusion of the dissertation summarizes the conclusions reached. The candidate approached to it analytically and synthesized the achieved goals and objectives. The style is readable and at the same time strictly scientific, which also makes a positive impression.

The author's summary of the dissertation is made according to the rules of this kind of research and fully reflects the content of the dissertation.

#### IV. Scientific contributions

In her self-report on scientific contributions, the candidate has singled out seven. In my opinion, they are all plausible and correctly stated. In the present statement, however, I want to HIGHLIGHT the most important contribution, namely that Stella Doncheva's dissertation is a successful attempt to study the production of artistic metal in early medieval Bulgaria according to data on products from the production centers. All finds of belt sets are presented, which are the main products of the metal-plastic studios, that functioned in the first half and the middle of the 10th century in the vicinity of the capital Preslav.

#### Remarks and recommendations

Without questioning the qualities of the proposed dissertation, some remarks can be made to it.

First, the introduction lacks a historiographical overview of the topic to show the author's awareness of previous research on the topic and to use it as a basis for further reflections in this regard.

Second, in the future printing of the dissertation, the title could be specified by clearly formulating the territorial boundaries of the study, namely regions of Northeastern Bulgaria.

Third, a certain technical inaccuracy in the final draft of the work is that the pages mentioned in the content in some cases do not correspond to the actual pages in the text of the presentation.

## VI. Conclusion

The work presented by Stella Doncheva summarizes and illustrates her many years of research on the issue. Regardless of some remarks, this work is a successfully prepared dissertation with undoubted originality and contributions, related to the clarification of the old Bulgarian metalwork and the production of artistic metal, based on data on products from the production centers themselves.

All this gives me the reason to conclude that there are the necessary circumstances (scientific and procedural) for Stella Doncheva to be awarded the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities and professional field 2.2. History and archeology, scientific area Archeology.

14.08.2020

Shumen

  
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