

A STATEMENT

By

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ABOUT DISSERTATION ON

THE PRODUCTION OF ARTISTIC METAL IN EARLY MEDIEVAL BULGARIA (BASED ON THE FINDS DATA)

By Stela Doncheva

The topic of the dissertation represents an ambitious project on complete presentation of the production of artistic metal in the region of capital centers of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. The author of the dissertation is Associate Prof. Stela Doncheva PhD.

The work consists of introduction, 2 parts, including 7 chapters in total, a conclusion, references, abbreviations, publications on the topic and a reference for contributions. The total volume is 540 pages.

The introduction contains brief words introducing the matter, the subject, the objectives of the research, the chronological scope, the information sources and the structure of the study.

Part one is entitled "Production of the production centers in the region of Preslav" and chapter one – "Metal plastic products. Belt sets". The typology of the finds is examined here as the various buckles, belt ends and appliquéés are described in detail. Belt gaskets from production centers are analyzed separately. Every paragraph is followed by the most important conclusions. The analysis is thorough and characterized with generalization.

The second chapter is entitled "Element analysis of raw materials and products". The contribution characteristic is significant. Here, too, the exposition is characterized by thoroughness and detail. In this chapter are also analyzed the ores from Burgas-Strandja basin, Malko Tarnovo and Gramatikovo deposits where the sources of metal are searched. The chapter continues with a study of finds from the three production centers. The study of the coins from the production centers is of particular importance. It concerns imitations and fake Byzantine folles, manufactured by casting in closed molds. They significantly differ in their chemical composition from those cut in Constantinople. For example, the ones manufactured in the production center in Novosel are composed of lead bronze and lead copper alloy. This chapter finishes with a comparative analysis of element composition of minerals and mineral finds. The groups of alloys, the element indicators of the raw materials, the concentration of the more important elements in the ore raw materials and finds are examined.

Chapter 3 "Reconstruction of Belt gaskets" is also separated in several subchapters. The belt as a symbol of social affiliation, belt sets from Bulgaria and abroad, and their reconstruction based on finds from the production centers, are analyzed. The chapter finishes with the more important conclusions from the analysis.

Part two is entitled "Technology and practice of jewelry production in the Middle Ages". The first chapter "Ore mining and metallurgy" presents the extraction of ores and minerals in different regions and the historical information about it, the mythology and beliefs related to metallurgical activity, the metal mining in antiquity and the Middle Ages, ore deposits and metallurgy of various metals.

The second chapter is entitled "Metals and alloys". An analysis of metals and alloys is presented, as well as the process of crystallization and the properties (physical, mechanical, chemical, technological and foundry). The fourth paragraph contains information about the

basic metals and alloys used in the complexes of artistic metal. The problem chemistry - alchemy is also given attention.

The third chapter discusses the tools and devices needed for the production of artistic metal. Various metal, bone and stone instruments and items are reviewed, as well as production ceramics. They were used in activities related to casting, casting cleaning, grinding, finery, wrought iron relief making, stamping, artistic engraving and drawing.

The title of fourth chapter is "Technology and practice". In it various foundry and forging practices are analyzed, even the defects in casting and the ways to repair them. The types of metal coatings are also presented: gold plating, silver plating, tin coating, as well as artistic decoration. The connection of the separate elements through welding and the various methods of drawing are not overlooked either.

The issue about the Byzantine influence on jewelry art inside and outside of the area of Byzantine culture is analyzed in the conclusion. Other influences and interactions are traced, more particularly with the Avars and the Hungarians. The author's opinion is that the richly decorated belt set became widespread in the Bulgarian society only after the adoption of Christianity and particularly in the tenth century. On the other hand, the presence of local production proves the existence of traditions in jewelry practice. Chemical analyses of finds from the production centers indicate that the most used element was copper, and the alloy was mainly lead-tin bronze. The items made of silver are single pieces. On the other hand, the sources of raw materials were different. The problem of the eastern influences that extended to our lands in most cases not directly, but through Byzantium, which was also influenced by them, has not been overlooked either. The conclusion also states that the set goal has been achieved and all set tasks have been fulfilled. On the other hand, it is stated that the study of the production of artistic metal is a vast topic and this research is just the beginning.

The list of references is impressive. It takes up 44 pages and includes titles in several languages. The contributions of the dissertation cover 7 points.

The author's summary of the dissertation is 111 pages long. The attached 30 publications concern various aspects of the topic. Among them are 3 monographs (one co-authored) and 27 articles in scientific journals in Bulgarian, Russian and English languages.

In conclusion, I will point out that the overall impression of the dissertation is generally very good. It leaves the impression of the author's excellent knowledge of the subject, of ambitious work. I am fully convinced that this kind of scientific research enriches science and should be highly valued. That is why I recommend the scientific jury to properly evaluate Stella Doncheva's work and give it a positive assessment.

28.07.2020
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