

REPORT

On the defense of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Maria Georgieva Pashova – a - full-time PhD student of NAIM-BAN with a PhD thesis of SGRAFFITO WARE FROM NORTHEASTERN BULGARIA XIII-XV CENTURIES

Assessor: Prof. D.Sc. Georgi Georgiev Atanasov – Regional Museum of History - Silistra, Silistra 7500, 24 Rakovski Str.

The work submitted for review by Maria Georgieva Pashova for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor includes a total volume of 215 pages, 99 tables, 45 appendices and 5 maps.

On the structure: Introduction; Chapter 1. Historiography Chapter; 2. Classification and typology; Chapter 3. Characteristics and comparative analysis of the pottery complex from the studied sites; Conclusion. The structure is appropriate, and the way in which individual chapters are "unfolded" into subtopics is also to be admired, thus introducing the reader in the best way to the issues.

The essential question is how dissertable the proposed topic is. My answer is a resounding Yes! My reasons are as follows. On first place, a similar study on sgraffito ware covering such a large region has not yet been done. Even more, it concerns a base territory of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. At first glance, the exclusion of the leading centers of Tsarigrad-Tarnov and Cherven seems justified, especially since the pottery ensembles from there as a whole has been published. For that reason it is recommended that the author specifically substantiates the geographical boundaries of Northeastern Bulgaria. Secondly. Choosing the 15th c. as an upper limit is justified and an often neglected problem by the majority of researchers on this topic, because, at least until now, fundamental differences between the sgraffito ware of the 14th and 15th c. are not differentiated. There are also historical reasons for this, because de jure the end of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom has an upper limit in the 2/4 of the 15th c. Another question is whether the upper limit should not be drawn until the late 15th c. because the serious changes in the pottery ensemble are more clearly observed in the late 15th - the early 16th c. Third. The sgraffito pottery in Northeastern Bulgaria was distributed in two

separate areas with fundamental differences - the Black Sea coast and the inland - a problem that has not been specifically studied.

The Introduction is divided into two parts: 1. Subject, goals and tasks of the research. Methodology. 2. Chronological and territorial scope. This is also a valid approach. The presented methodology is not objectionable. The chronological scope is well substantiated with cultural-historical frameworks. Further work can be done on the territorial scope, at least in the direction of where the natural-geographical and cultural-historical western border of Northeastern Bulgaria is running.

The historiography. The PhD student demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the literature concerning sgraffito ware, both in the studied region and in Bulgaria, but also in the Byzantine cultural (Palaiologian) circle, where it was spread. At first glance, too much attention is paid to foreign studies on the theme, but they introduce the subject relatively well. One might consider whether it would not be better to follow the research concerning Northeastern Bulgaria first, then the neighboring areas - for example Northern Dobrudzha, Central and Western Bulgaria, Southern Bulgaria, Wallachia, and then to move on to the Northern Black Sea region, the Caucasus, Byzantium, etc. Of course, this is a matter of personal preference and opinion, but M. Pashova demonstrates an impressive awareness, which is also evident in the following chapters. We are witnessing not at all the indication of individual studies, but also a synthesized analysis of the achievements of individual authors for individual centers. She could have been more critical about some conclusions and dates, but her sense of tact probably prevented her from critically analyzing research from the 60s-70s of the 20th c.

Classification and typology. A work well done with a thorough knowledge of the literature. I would just recommend not getting into details and particularities in search of quoting all the theses – it could be tighter. Otherwise, the erudition is obvious.

The topic of Chronological scope is very important and the author argues for the starting date in the 13th c. Even from her in-depth review, one can see that she can set the second half of the 12th c. as the *terminus post quem*. However, she has one historical repère - the Fall of Constantinople in 1204, respectively the establishment

of the Restored (Second) Bulgarian Kingdom in 1185/6. It is a matter of choice whether to emphasize archaeological or historical markers.

High professionalism is perceived in the presentation of the seven groups of sgraffito pottery - which for me is an introduction to the heart of the PhD thesis. This typology is well argued, sufficiently developed with subgroups, but here too the author is rather detailed. It may be considered whether each group should not begin with a presentation of the artefacts from the Bulgarian North-East and then from other areas, near and far regions, because in this approach the emphasis of the subject is blurred. Nevertheless, the conclusions are strongly argued, and the emphasis is already on the centers in the North-East. I have a recommendation here. In Northeastern Bulgaria in the 13th and especially in the 14th c., 3 distinct geographical, historical and political regions can be discerned - the Black Sea coast from the area of Varna to Kaliakra, the Danube area from Silistra (and Păcuiul lui Soare with Kokoni!) to Tutrakan (after the latest discoveries near Ruse), and Provadia – Shumen - Preslav region. At the same time, each of them was relatively isolated with uninhabited areas. Sgraffito pottery is a kind of insignia of material culture, and one could specifically check the common and the different in the distribution of the seven groups in the three zones. However, there are steps in this direction, because M. Pashova correctly noticed and documented the differences in the pottery ensemble along the Black Sea coast and the pottery ensemble in the fortresses and towns inland. And the reasons for this are to some extent correctly perceived.

In my opinion, the core of the dissertation work is Chapter 3 - Characteristics and comparative analysis of the pottery complexes in the studied sites. The sgraffito ware from 11 centers of Northeastern Bulgaria are presented very concisely, using all the available literature (in most cases the author had personal contact with the pottery ensemble). Regarding them, I do not perceive any significant gaps, but I have one remark. Surrounding most of the towns and fortresses represented are satellite or nearby settlements where sgraffito pottery has also been found - for example Emona to Varna, Kranevo to Kaliakra, Petrich Kale to Provadia, Vetren and Tutrakan to Silistra. They could also be included in this list thus accreting greater depth to the study, even a basis for more general cultural-historical comments. Nevertheless, the PhD student knows the pottery from these smaller settlements and fortresses well, and this can be seen well in the comments

and citations in Chapter 3 where all the more publications are listed. Attention could also be paid to the fact that in the south from the Danube to the Pre-Balkans, respectively the Provadia Gorge and in the east from the Black Sea to the Beli Lom river (almost the entire interior of Dobrudzha and Ludogorie) there is not a single settlement or fortress where sgraffito ware and pottery in general from the 12th -15th c. have been found. This fact, without going deeply into the issue, or overexposing it, should be noted, because this is 70% of the territory of Northeastern Bulgaria, which is the subject of the dissertation work.

However, these remarks are small and insignificant against the background of the very good impression that the PhD thesis leaves on the readers. The author has set a series of goals that she seems to have accomplished, especially in the concluding part.

Finally, I shall also note the high culture of documentation and presentation of information, which raises the level of the dissertation work to an even greater extent. Therefore, I recommend to the Academic Board to award M. Pashova the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

Reviewer:

Prof. D.Sc. Georgi Atanasov