

S T A T E M E N T

by Prof. Dr. Anelia Bozkova (National Archaeological Institute and Museum)
on the doctoral thesis of Denis Borisov,
regular PhD student in the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of History,
Saint Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia,
on the subject “Economic and cultural contacts of Northwestern Thrace
with the Greek world (5th – 1st c. BC)
for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PhD)
in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology

The topic of the PhD thesis of Denis Borisov has attracted the attention of the scientific community for long years, rather with the questions it raises and much less for the possibilities it offers for any generalizations. Therefore, its elaboration in a thorough and comprehensive format is fully justified and acceptable.

The PhD thesis is structured in five parts called “chapters”, a conclusion formulated as a “recapitulation”, a bibliographical list, plates, maps and tables. A valuable component of the thesis is the appended catalogue of archaeological artefacts found in the area, which form the source base of the study.

It should be made clear from the very start that the elaboration of the topic adopts a focus on “Hellenic wares and objects made under Hellenic influence”, which offers a limited and sometimes contradictory view on the complex processes of economic development in the region. However, the absence of an objectively existing basic knowledge on the economic characteristics of the region during the period under study allows the adopted approach as a possible compromise. These limitations are clearly recognized by the author himself, who devotes a short theoretical paragraph to the term “economic and cultural contacts”.

In line with the established practice, the introduction formulates the aims and objectives of the work and the methods used in the analysis of the investigated artefacts. The proviso is made that coin finds are excluded from the analysis due to the random nature of their discovery. It should be noted that this approach to the numismatic material is practically a nonsense, as most collective coin finds originate as random discoveries, with the exception of the few finds from archaeological contexts.

The territorial confines of the study and its chronological range are also proclaimed in the introduction. The brief text on historical events in the region is altogether acceptable as it introduces the background and the historical context.

The first chapter is devoted to the history of research and can be described as comprehensive in terms of the documented finds and their publications. The review of the literature includes also information on finds from Triballian territories outside the modern frontiers of Bulgaria. The section on the routes and forms of penetration of foreign products is essential in this chapter; it summarizes all existing opinions and hypotheses. The critical approach of the author of the thesis to the existing hypotheses is definitely commendable.

The following four chapters contain an analysis of the artefacts of Hellenic (foreign) origin or produced under the influence of foreign models, grouped according to the material and the functional characteristics, respectively – ceramic artefacts (chapter two), products of toreutics (chapter three), jewellery and toilet accessories (chapter four), armaments (chapter five). I am pleased to note that D. Borisov has done a very good job investigating this heterogeneous archaeological material, which has been studied to varying degrees in the existing scientific literature. He demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the artefacts, of their characteristics, function, origin, and dating, skilfully using the tools of comparative analysis. The reasons for the penetration of these products into the lands of the Triballi are discussed once more and in specifics at the end of each chapter.

In accordance with the accepted practice, the conclusion summarizes the author's main conclusions and contributions, noting severally that "Northwestern Thrace was not fully integrated with the Hellenic markets, unlike the other territories of ancient Thrace which were located nearer to the Hellenic colonies". And nearer to the main sea routes for trade, I would add. However, the hypothesis of a possible sporadic presence of Hellenic merchants of luxury goods in the lands of the Triballi is difficult to prove, as it implies larger and more regular supply, of which no objective evidence exists. In this case we have, in my opinion, a standard example of aristocratic gifts, most likely from other Thracian princes. Given what the ancient authors tell us about the Triballi, we must also assume a possible origin through war booty, at least for some of the artifacts. Regardless of the possible hypotheses, however, it should be noted that the reviewed doctoral thesis is a successful attempt to outline and enrich the existing knowledge and to seek answers in different directions to such controversial questions.

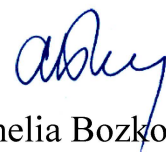
The appendices and the catalogue are professionally produced, with the necessary knowledge and critical insight into the artefacts used as evidence.

My overall impression of the dissertation presented by Denis Borisov is that of an original and personal research with undoubted contributions to the study of ancient Thracian culture.

On the basis of my overall assessment of the dissertation, I vote with conviction for the conferment of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor to Denis Borisov.

May 29, 2024

Sofia



Prof. Dr. Anelia Bozkova