

## **REVIEW**

**by Prof. Anastas Gerdjikov, PhD  
of a doctoral thesis for awarding the educational and scientific degree of  
Doctor in the Field of higher education 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.1.  
Philology – Classical languages (Medical Latin language)  
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Medicine  
PhD programme: Classical languages**

### **1. PhD candidate**

Kalina Boseva holds a MA in Classics from Sofia University. She is an assistant professor in Latin at the Faculty of Medicine of Sofia University. She is PhD candidate on an independent training course at the Department of Classics of Sofia University supervised by Ass. Professor Elia Marinova. The doctoral thesis was approved for public defence at a meeting of the Department of Classics of Sofia University. Boseva has accumulated and even exceeded the necessary ETCS credits, she has passed her doctoral examination with a grade of Excellent 6 and has completed all the tasks set in her individual plan. All the necessary documents and materials have been submitted.

In view of the above the administrative and procedural requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations on the terms and conditions for obtaining scientific degrees and employment to academic positions in Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ have been complied with.

### **2. Publications and conference participation**

The candidate has presented 13 publications related to the topic of her dissertation, two of which are articles in proceedings in periodicals, one – in academic journals and 10 conference papers and posters.

### **3. The dissertation and the abstract**

A set of materials in electronic format is presented, containing the dissertation and an abstract in Bulgarian and English.

The dissertation “*Ignis Sacer* across the Literary and Medical Traditions (1st Century BC – 11th century AD)” is dedicated to the study of the term’s semantic transformations, identification of the diseases and therapeutic methods associated with it.

It consists of 470 pages, including an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, a list of contributions, 74 pages appendices, nine tables, one figure in the main text and 214 figures in the appendices.

In the introductory first chapter of the dissertation the author presents the subject, aims and objectives of the study (analysis of the diachronic development of the term and identification of the diseases signified by it, of the therapies administered and of the medicinal ingredients used) and the current state of research on the term *ignis sacer*. A subchapter is dedicated to the corpus of sources, the criteria for its formation and methods used for the analysis of the corpus, for the identification of pathological conditions and of therapeutic ingredients.

The chapter describes the corpora it was necessary to collate. First, a corpus of sources using the phrase *ignis sacer* in connection with a disease, ranging from medical treatises and poems to sources and authors with purely literary or symbolic use of the phrase. The corpus includes 225 quoted passages in Latin and 45 in Ancient Greek from 30 Latin-language authors from the 1st century BC to the 11th century, two anonymous monastic medical collections and some Greek authors. Using the prescribed combinations of therapeutic ingredients, the original sources of these passages are traced in order to arrive at proposed identifications of the therapy's medicinal constituents, as well as the possible pathological conditions under the name *ignis sacer*. Then a second corpus of sources for the identification of therapeutic substances used against *ignis sacer* was developed. In order to process, categorise, store and statistically analyse the large volume of diverse sources it was also necessary to develop a methodological tool (a relational database).

Chapter Two presents in details the terminological and methodological foundations of the research and is divided into the subchapters. In the first of them – “Disease” and “diagnosis” as social and philosophical concepts. The multidisciplinary scientific approach to the definition of medical concepts” – Boseva compares ancient and modern conceptions of disease and methods of diagnosis and concludes that, in order to find one or more contemporary correspondences for concepts used in the past, the most appropriate method is a retrospective diagnosis. In the second subchapter – “Database development as a tool for multifactor analysis of medical, botanical and pharmaceutical terminology in the sources studied” The created relational database *Ignis Sacer Data Base* (ISDB) is described.

A third chapter is dedicated to the transformations in the development of the term *ignis sacer* in the studied sources – its semantic areas, alternative phrases and the development of the phrase *ignis sacer* in non-medical sources and in specialized medical literature.

Chapter Four concentrates on the identification of the substances and analysis of the therapy associated with *ignis sacer*. Therapeutic substances of plant, of animal and of inorganic origin are described, as well as therapeutic substances derived from tree fungi. Boseva concludes that plant substances tend to predominate and establishes the therapeutic procedures used: surgical interventions, therapy of the digestive system, physiotherapy, magical practices and topical external application of transdermal therapeutic agents.

Chapter Five is the concluding part of the dissertation and focuses on the the diseases and symptom complexes known as *ignis sacer*. The author demonstrates the complicated relations between the two traditions – the literary and the medical. Various sources use *ignis sacer* to refer to life-threatening conditions, or to conditions which have a long course or are chronic. The metaphorical use of *ignis*, on the other hand, denote multiple diseases associated with this phrase.

Boseva divides this extraordinary variety of mentions and possible identifications of the disease into two semantic circles, one deriving from the work of Scribonius Largus and the other – from the treatise of Celsus. According to her these two distinct semantic circles seem to have been mechanically united and expanded by Pliny the Elder. Boseva therefore assumes the presence of some missing link, most likely a medical text written during the 5th and the 1st centuries BC.

The candidate shows how from the very beginning of the history of *ignis sacer*, several key issues emerge: the interference between the two parallel traditions in which the phrase is attested – the literary and the medical; the preconditions for subsequent semantic transformations in the literary tradition through metaphorization and metonymization; and before all the absence of a single concept (a disease) that *ignis sacer* denotes. The dissertation traces the development of the concept and the notion in several authors and in different eras, contributing to overcoming the difficulties of specifying its lexical and conceptual essence.

The dissertation includes several appendices – Index locorum, a Glossar of identified therapeutic substances in Latin and Ancient Greek, Illustrations to Chapter 2. Terminological and methodological foundations of the research, containing 34 figures, and Illustrations to Chapter 4. Identification of the substances and analysis of the therapy associated with *ignis sacer*, containing 180 figures.

The abstract contains a summary of the work, which is too long and could present the content and the ideas of the dissertation more clearly. There are some differences between the Bulgarian and the English versions of the abstract.

#### **4. Scholarly contributions**

I agree with the list of contributions presented by Boseva in the dissertation and the abstract. The major scholarly contributions of the dissertations are the following:

1. The dissertation indeed is interdisciplinary not just within the humanities, but in the fields of philology and natural sciences. It develops an interdisciplinary approach to a topic that cannot be studied by purely philological or natural scientific methods.

2. The compiled corpus of sources in which the phrase *ignis sacer* is attested is an achievement per se and includes 225 citations from 30 Latin language authors and two anonymous monastic medical collections, and 45 citations from four Greek language authors divided into categories.

It also contains the references which include only suggested therapy, without description of symptoms of the disease and which have not been previously observed in the secondary literature.

3. Methodological models are proposed:

- for the identification of plant, mineral and animal substances;
- for the retrospective diagnosis of the pathological conditions described under the name *ignis sacer*.

4. A second corpus comprising about 350 quotes containing phytophagic passages, methods of extraction or properties of minerals, and other pertinent information has been compiled for the purpose of identifying associated remedies.

5. Boseva has developed a specialized relational database which can serve as a methodological tool for the storage, sorting and analysis of data related to the diachronic tracing of a medical term. In this database, all sources from the main corpus related to the phrase *ignis sacer* are logged, thus forming a specific Ignis Sacer Data Base (ISDB). With the help of statistical analysis of medicinal substances entered in the database, the author is able to determine:

- the preponderance of different categories of therapeutic substances: plant, inorganic, animal, etc.;
- the most commonly used therapeutic products;
- the distribution of routes of administration of therapeutic substances.

6. A revision of all the affiliations in the secondary literature is made, the taxonomic status of affiliated plant species has been updated and a 100 plant taxa in a total of 467 medicinal uses across sources are identified. Some 66 other products of diverse origin were identified, attested in a total of 265 medicinal uses and divided into 25 categories. Using the collected secondary literature pertaining to the established corpus of sources, as well as additional medical literature, more than 20 pathological conditions are identified as having at some point fallen within the semantic field of the *ignis sacer* compound. In the case of erroneous or unfounded identifications in the secondary literature new hypotheses are proposed and substantiated.

7. A glossary of 679 identified names of medicinal substances is compiled, which includes 415 Latin lexemes and 263 of their Ancient Greek counterparts.

8. For the first time, the scope of the term *ignis sacer* is outlined in authors offering only a prescription of therapy. For these sources, no in-depth attempts have been previously proposed for the identification of the disease for which the therapy is intended.

9. The dissertation is the first study, in which the two distinct traditions in the development of *ignis sacer*, up to the 11th century, are traced and analysed in detail.

## 5. Conclusion

The dissertation demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of Latin and Old Greek language, of botanical, pharmaceutical and medical terminology, as well of medical conditions associated with the *ignis sacer* complex. It is voluminous not only in terms of number of pages – the topic requires deep knowledge of numerous ancient texts and of the secondary literature.

Boseva's work focuses on authors and texts from the specialized Latin language outside the canon, which is in the contemporary research trends in classical philology. This diachronic study of a concept and its meanings identifies pathological conditions, medicinal plants (with their modern taxonomic names), and other therapeutic substances and procedures.

I would appreciate it if, during the defense, the candidate answered how she came to the conclusion that Pliny the Elder and Dioscorides did not borrow from each other, but used a common source or sources that have been lost. The arguments that most researchers are of such an opinion or that the closeness of time of the two authors is proof of such a conclusion are not sufficient.

For the reasons listed, I believe that the dissertation and the scholarly publications sufficiently demonstrate the candidate's contributions, skills and competencies and meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations on the terms and conditions for obtaining scientific degrees and employment to academic positions in Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. Kalina Boseva has accomplished the objectives set at the beginning of the study. The research analysis has been carried out consistently demonstrating scholarly contributions which are indicative of the results achieved in the dissertation.

All this gives me reason to give my positive evaluation of the dissertation and recommend to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the Field of higher education 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.1. Philology – Classical languages (Medical Latin language) to Kalina Boseva.

April 1, 2024  
Sofia

Reviewer:  
(Prof. Anastas Gerdjikov)