



## OPINION

from Assoc. Prof. Velichka Georgieva Minkova, PhD  
National Academy of Arts

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in scientific field  
3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: "INNOVATIVE DESIGN AND EXPERIMENTAL  
STRUCTURES IN THE VICTORIAN BOOK (1800–1900) - TECHNOLOGY OF RELIEF  
DESIGN BINDINGS OF OWEN JONES FOR THE PSALMS OF DAVID. PSALTER OF  
VICTORIA",

presented by Malina Gospodinova Belcheva free doctoral student in  
the Department of PRESS JOURNALISM AND BOOK PUBLISHING of the Faculty of  
Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor: Prof. Veselina Valkanova, PhD

### I. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

The dissertation is dedicated to the design of Victorian books from the period 1800-1900 and explores the technology of their implementation. It is the first comprehensive theoretical study of the complex restoration the book of *The Psalms of David* from the special collections of the Ryerson and Burnham Library at the Museum of Fine and Applied Arts in Chicago.

It should be noted that there aren't many studies on the traditional technological practices used in the creation of paper covers from this period, which undoubtedly deserves attention due to the artistic value of the rich ornamental decoration. The work clearly states it's relevance and scientific significance with in-depth research on the emblematic for the Victorian period embossed papier-mâché binding, which is rarely the subject of research in scientific works.

The doctoral student analytically describes the existence of the album *The Psalms of David* from its creation, through periods of use, restoration and preservation as a valuable artifact from a bygone era. In order to collect valuable evidence, Belcheva studies previous publications, doctoral theses on the work of Owen Jones, and references patents from public and private archives, as well as unpublished documents.

The work has significant contributions to the analysis of the technology and methods of creating the bindings and book body of *The Psalms of David*, based on a study of the materials and techniques used. The doctoral student examines comprehensively and authentically, as a restorer herself, the technology of paper, leather, decoration, the ways of



organizing and connecting the book body with the covers, as well as the restoration interventions performed in the past. This thorough review follows the internal sequence of the restoration process.

Malina Belcheva presents facts about the development of inventions in printing and improvement of production in the period from 1800 to 1900, systematized information about the materials and techniques of embossed bindings from the Victorian era, backed up by her in-depth study of theoretical sources.

To fulfill the set goals and tasks, Malina Belcheva uses a methodology which includes cultural, historical, biographical, descriptive, comparative, analytical and illustrative approach. The data obtained from the research is correctly processed and presented in the doctoral thesis. The documentation of the performed restoration process is carried out through documentation, diagrams, graphs, tables and photographs, which fully complement the theoretical substantiation of the evidentiary part.

The bibliography and the overall structure of the work is formed with precision. The individual parts of the dissertation are semantically and logically connected.

The abstract has a volume of 30 pages. They fully correspond to the dissertation and meet the requirements for abstracts.

## II. Contributions of the dissertation research

The scientific contributions of the dissertation are based on extensive and in-depth research on the Victorian style and papier-mâché technology of *The Psalms of David* created by Owen Jones. They are a novelty for science, for the theory and practice of applied art and enrich the existing theory. In this regard, the dissertation can serve as a basis for new theoretical research.

The patents studied and described associated with the design of *The Psalms of David* are a significant contribution to the work. They shed light on little-known facts in the scientific community, originating from written evidence and partially preserved sources of information in libraries, museums, private and public archives. The information presented on the main patents related to the book *The Psalms of David* is based on the documents discovered and studied by the doctoral student.

The restoration work performed by Marina Belcheva on the album, as well as the search for other copies of the first edition of *The Psalms of David*, is an essential moment for the development of the doctoral research.

## III. Notes and recommendations

The design of *The Psalms of David* is impressive with its rich ornamental decoration of the bindings and pages, each of which is a finished composition. In the third chapter, "Description, History and Study of *The Psalms of David*" Malina Belcheva makes an artistic analysis of the qualities of the book body and bindings. The skills demonstrated by the



doctoral student are a reason to recommend, as a guide for her future work, a study on the artistic principles of decorative composition practiced by Owen Jones. The subject is worthy of research due to the fact that Jones is a master of ornamental decoration and the author of the important for decorative art work *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856). As Marina Belcheva emphasizes, Owen Jones did not sign his works, and the authorship of his work is proven by the characteristic style of his design.

The recommendation does not dispute the qualities of the work in this part, but should be considered as a positive assessment of the abilities of the doctoral student.

#### IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Malina Belcheva has made three publications on the topic of the dissertation and has participated in scientific forums. This fulfills the requirements of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approbation and announcement of the results of the research according to art. 5, item 5 and the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and Art. 69, para. 3.

#### V. Conclusion

In conclusion, I strongly suggest the members of the esteemed jury award Malina Gospodinova Belcheva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of science 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

Jury member:

19.01.2021

Assoc. Prof. Velichka Minkova, PhD