

## REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Veneta Handzhiyska-Yankulova,

member of the scientific jury for the assessment of the qualities of the dissertation work of **Diana Miteva**, full-time doctoral student at the Department of Archaeology,

Faculty of History - Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Doctoral program "Archaeology - museology" on the topic:

**"Strategy for the management of the cultural and natural heritage of Pavlikeni municipality"**, presented for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

The dissertation submitted for review examines a topic that has become increasingly relevant in recent years; the perception of museums, now not only as custodians of heritage, but as active participants in community life, has become more tangible. Faced with these responsibilities, museum institutions face a number of problems that require a complex approach and competent solutions that meet modern requirements in order to remain competitive.

Diana Miteva's work is in a volume of 255 pages – 237 text pages, which include 177 images, mostly photographic material. Its structure is classic and includes an introduction, three chapters with separate paragraphs divided into parts and a conclusion. The bibliography contains scientific publications, archival documents, and Internet sources. What is impressive is the volume of 39 interviews personally taken by the doctoral student in the process of work.

Diana Miteva's personal commitment to the preservation and presentation of the historical and natural heritage of the Municipality of Pavlikeni is evident from the very first lines of the exhibition. As she herself notes, "the topic of its management has not been the subject of serious academic research, neither among historians nor local scholars."

In the introduction, the doctoral student formulates her main research goals and tasks. They include presentation and assessment of the current state of museums, public collections, historical, natural, and intangible cultural heritage in Pavlikeni Municipality, their administration and development potential. As a final goal are highlighted the proposals for modernization and optimization of the management of the cultural-historical and natural heritage, in accordance with the modern museological trends, to lay the basis of a future strategy.

Diana Miteva works with numerous and diverse sources - scientific publications, local lore literature, archival documents, including from museum funds. Her personal observations,

as well as her direct involvement with a large part of the initiatives presented in the text, are extremely impressive. In addition to the numerous interviews, this contributes to the completeness of the content and allows for objective and critical analysis. The latter shows that the topic of "the management of the cultural-historical and natural heritage hardly stands out as an independent research area. It can be discovered directly or indirectly in the context of the general studies dealing with the history of the Pavliken region".

The first and most extensive chapter - "Museums and public collections" presents in detail the historical development and current state of the museum collections that are the subject of the study - Historical Museum - Pavlikeni, with its subsidiary Ancient Ceramic Centre, Historical Museum – Byala Cherkva, Ethnographic museum exhibition - Byala Cherkva, Historical museum collection - Varbovka, Ethnographic collection - Gorna Lipnitsa, Art Residence "The Old School", Memorial museum collection "Seraphim Severnyak" - Gorna Lipnitsa, Agricultural "museum" - Gorna Lipnitsa village, General historical public collections in Vishovgrad, Duskot, Karaisen and Michaltsi. In the exposition, the author competently touches on a number of pressing topics related to the outdated and often unmaintained material base, limited financial resources, lack of qualified personnel, inconsistent management policy, etc. It is noteworthy that, although the considered institutions have a different character, structure and management model, the problems they face are similar and even identical. In the course of the exhibition, Diana Miteva expressed a number of her adequate recommendations and proposals (advertising, event halls, educational programs, etc.) regarding innovations and improvements that will create better conditions for the functioning of museum objects and make them competitive. In this case, perhaps this important part of the text would stand out better if it were set apart as a separate part of the first chapter.

I consider it necessary to point out that in a number of places in the exposition, the personal attitude, sometimes bordering on open dissatisfaction, with regard to management practices in some museums is clearly visible. In some cases, the notes are extremely detailed. In this case, it is appropriate, in view of the nature of the research, that the critical remarks be more moderated, especially when not all the objective circumstances are known. For example, the suggestion that the saved costs from the wage fund be used for repair activities is not feasible, since these are activities financed under different paragraphs. In terms of investing in construction and renovation activities, one must consider whose ownership it is and how the question of future income will be resolved. Usually in these cases it is a matter of municipal

property, and the decisions depend on the Municipal Councils and not on the management of the museums.

A specific point in the research, which appears to be a contribution, is the shared personal experience of the doctoral student and her great involvement in the legalization of the public collections in Vishovgrad, Duskot, Karaisen and Michaltsi, as well as their socialization. Here, Diana Miteva appears not only as an active participant in the preservation and presentation of the historical heritage, but also as an expert in administrative procedures, which are often not easy. She obviously knows good museum practices, she has interesting ideas that meet the specifics of museum institutions in the Pavlikeni region, she has the desire and energy for their implementation, with an extremely important element being her ability to convince the local authorities of the importance of the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of the region.

Her suggested approach can be pointed out as correct - that local museums and museum collections emphasize on what is specific to them, and in this way be distinguished from other museum centres and be more interesting and attractive to visitors.

The second chapter of the study is dedicated to the historical, natural, and intangible cultural heritage of Pavlikeni Municipality. The listed objects are certainly not exhaustive of all the existing ones, but they outline a representative "collection" that clearly demonstrates the rich heritage of the Pavlikeni region - the Roman catchment at the village of Musina and the Roman obelisk at the village of Lesicheri, the localities that witnessed the heroism of the troops of Philip Totyu, of Hadzhi Dimitar and Stefan Karadzha, of father Hariton, as well as the Christian temples, and the natural attractions. A special emphasis is on the displays of the intangible cultural heritage, expressed through the practice of the winter custom "Ivanovi Vlachugi", the St. Theodore's Day custom, the folklore festival "Humor in Folk Art" and the "Parade of Masks" in the town of Byala Church.

Here again, Diana Miteva details and meticulously reveals the historical development and current state of the sites she examines. At the same time, she provides applicable ideas regarding the inclusion of historical, natural, and intangible cultural heritage in the tourism sector in Pavlikeni Municipality. Simultaneously with the process of research, she actively participates in the implementation of activities for their preservation and popularization - organizing reenactments, scientific conferences, educational initiatives.

The third and last chapter is dedicated to the prospects for the development of the cultural and natural heritage in the Municipality of Pavlikeni. It analyses the current activity of

museums and the application of modern technologies in them, paying special attention to digitization, the state of the Internet sites and social network accounts of museum institutions. The PhD student offers a number of innovations and improvements in this direction, with the aim of attracting a diverse audience and keeping their attention engaged for a longer period of time.

Diana Miteva emphasizes the main directions in which efforts should be set when looking for new approaches and prospects with the aim of upward development of museums, public collections, cultural, historical, and natural heritage - building stock, staffing, financing, work with the public (promotion, educational programmes), conservation and restoration, introduction and use of new technologies in museums, registration and digitization. An excellent impression is made by the awareness of the significant role that museums have in the educational process, and in this case the need for coordinated actions with educational institutions is highlighted. The new trend to include and involve senior citizens, who need social contacts, in museum activities has also not been forgotten.

Diana Miteva realizes that in order for the relationship between the institutions to be effective, a strategic solution is the proposal to create a single system uniting the museums, public collections, historical and natural attractions in the Pavlikeni Municipality, whose centre will be a competent unit in the municipality. The strategy developed by her is the main contribution of the dissertation work and can form the basis of a future consistent policy in this direction by the local government. The doctoral student points out that the natural and cultural heritage of the Pavlikeni region is vulnerable to a lack of concrete strategic actions for protection and insufficient funding. Its care is a shared responsibility, but its protection depends primarily on the competence of local authorities.

The abstract and the reference for the contributions correctly reflect the content and the main achievements and contributions of Diana Miteva's dissertation. After the contributions stand out:

- An assessment of the current state and development potential of the museums, public collections, historical, natural, and intangible cultural heritage in Pavlikeni Municipality was made, by analysing the functionality of the existing institutional administrative structure, its relevance and staffing.

- Proposals have been prepared for the modernization and optimization of the management of cultural, historical, and natural heritage in accordance with museological

trends, modern methods for presenting and advertising cultural products, in consideration with the real possibilities for budgetary and external financing.

The doctoral student is the author of four scientific publications directly related to the topic of the dissertation, two of which have already been published, which fulfils the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

In conclusion, bearing in mind the positive qualities of Diana Miteva's dissertation work, I declare before a scientific jury that the reviewed work has high scientific merits, meets the requirements and I vote positively for the doctoral student to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long tail, positioned above the name of the signatory.

14 April 2024

Assoc. Dr. Veneta Handzhiyska-Yankulova