

REVIEW

done by: *Ivan Dimitrov Valchev*, PhD, Associate Professor in Classical Archaeology, member of the Scientific Jury according to the order of the Rector of the University of Sofia St. Kliment Ohridski, No. ПД 38-103/ 24.02.2023,

concerning the defense of the dissertation of **Kaloyan Ivanov Petkov** for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", with the title: *"Weapons as votive gifts in Thrace and neighboring cultures 1st millennium BC"*, with supervisor: Prof. Dr. Totko Neykov Stoyanov (Sofia University, Department of Archaeology)

The dissertation of Kaloyan Petkov is dedicated to a topic poorly developed in the Bulgarian historiography, namely votives in the Thracian sanctuaries during the 1st millennium BC and in particular of the weapons presented as gifts. Artifacts found in ritual contexts have always attracted the attention of researchers, but mostly for the purpose of clarifying the chronology of a particular archaeological site and less often as objects, involved in the communication between humans and gods. Taking this into account, I must note that the topic is important, and the wide territorial scope makes it a challenge even for established scholars.

The research is based on a wide base. First of all are the archaeological artifacts found in the included in the catalog 61 cult and ritual contexts, as well as some burial complexes. Information from literary and iconographic sources is used, which complement the picture of the ritual use of weapons. The analysis of the artefacts is made entirely on the basis of publications and, in one case, personal observations of the author as a member of an archaeological team. Unfortunately, the level of publications is very different, in not a few cases only short reports in Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations series are published, often with little or no illustrative material. Taking this into account, it would have been beneficial for the PhD student to study the artifacts in the museum collections.

The dissertation consists of an Introduction, four analytical chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, an appendix, a catalog, diagrams and maps, 411 pages in total. In the introduction (p. 1) the object of the research is presented – the votive weapons from Ancient Thrace; the purpose of the work is formulated and specific research tasks are set. The methods used are also presented.

An important part of the introduction is the clarification of the terminology (pp. 2–8). Key concepts such as votive, ritual, cult, ritual object, cult object, ritual context, ritual deposit, heroization, are discussed. Clarifying the meaning of these terms for the needs of the specific study brings the necessary clarity, since in historiography they are used by the various authors with some nuances. Both classical (such as Rouse 1902 and Renfrew 1985) and modern studies on the topic are used (Fogelin 2007, Orlin et al. 2016, Fabregat, Longo 2018, La Torre 2022). Fundamental to the entire study is the conclusion drawn already in the Introduction that the votive function of the weapons in the sanctuaries in Thrace is secondary, and those specially made for the needs of the cult, are exceptions. Their interpretation as votives is based on the archaeological context in which they were found. This predetermines the need in the analysis to be paid serious attention to the sanctuaries and the criteria for their identification. The proposed definition, that as votive weapons should be defined weapons found in a ritual context (p. 2) is clear, acceptable, and useful.

In the introductory part the inclusion of weapons from graves is also motivated (pp. 7–8). However, as the PhD student clearly points out, they cannot be unambiguously defined as votives, which is why they are not included in the catalog and in the statistical analyses. The identification of weapons as votives even in complexes where heroization of the buried one can be allowed, is highly debatable and uncertain, but on the other hand, the inclusion of such examples in the analysis is justified from the point of view of clarifying the overall ritual function of the weapons in Thrace and the neighboring regions.

The territorial scope of the study (p. 10) is clear as geographical boundaries – the Carpathians and the Dniester River in the north, the Black Sea in the east, the Aegean Sea (here the Sea of Marmara should also be included) in the south, and the Vardar and Morava valleys in the west. The extent to which all these lands were inhabited by Thracians throughout the 1st millennium BC, especially in the western and southwestern direction during the Classical and Hellenistic periods, is debatable. However, there are almost no examples from the latter territories, which does not affect the conclusions drawn by the PhD student in the analytical part of the dissertation. The inclusion of examples from Italy, Central and Western Europe in the fourth part of the study is justified here – the reason for this is the similarities in the practices and influences that Ancient Thrace experienced from these lands. The chronological scope is also clear – 1st millennium BC or the time of the Iron Age in Thrace. These chronological frames are valid mostly for Ancient Thrace itself, but not for the neighboring areas as a whole. However, the focus of the

study is Thrace, which is the reason why the practice of using weapons as votives in the neighboring lands was limited to the relevant period. Some examples from the Late Bronze Age and Roman period are also briefly examined in order to show the origin and duration of the practices witnessed in the 1st millennium BC. Chronological landmarks such as the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods are appropriately used in the text.

The second part of the dissertation is Historiography (pp. 15–31). The text is divided into two parts, with the first part devoted to the studies on Thrace, and the second to those on the neighboring regions. In the research on Ancient Thrace, mostly done by Bulgarian and Romanian scholars, there is no specific study of the weapons as votives. Weapons found in various ritual contexts are studied in the primary publications, but in most cases without analysis of their role as gifts. An exception is the cult site near Babyak in the Western Rhodope Mountains – the weapons found there were examined in the context of the gifts in the sanctuary (ТОНКОВА 2007, 2008). In this part, an overview of the history of the studies on sanctuaries in Ancient Thrace is also made.

The historiography for the regions adjacent to Thrace is presented selectively, which is due to the huge number of publications accumulated for more than 200 years of research. Archaeological sites and authors relevant to the topic have been selected. As can be seen from the bibliography of the dissertation, Kaloyan Petkov is well acquainted with modern studies on the topic of votive weapons, and in a very wide geographical scope, including almost all of Europe and large areas of the Mediterranean. The mobilities realized by the PhD student under various programs in Italy, Greece and Romania undoubtedly helped for this. The opportunity to work in the libraries of various institutions in the respective countries is essential for the development of such a topic.

The third part of the dissertation, Weapons in Ritual Context from Ancient Thrace (pp. 32–93), is the most substantial part of the study. It successively examines the data on various ritual contexts from the Thracian lands, the weapons found in them and the weapons from warrior graves from the 1st millennium BC. The main categories of cult sites in Thrace and especially the mountain and pit sanctuaries are analyzed, the opinions of the various scholars and the hypotheses expressed by them are correctly cited. Kaloyan Petkov approaches the issue cautiously and with a moderate dose of skepticism. The lack of complete primary publications is reported, which makes it difficult to deduce the characteristics of the cult sites. Ritual pits excavated in settlement contexts are justifiably established as a separate group. It is important to observe that the weapons found in

ritual pits are more than in the so-called pit sanctuaries. Unfortunately, however, it is not possible to offer an interpretation of this fact. The chapter also examines burial mounds as places for depositing gifts, including weapons. Parallels with the so-called strange complexes from the Northern Black Sea coast are cited, which show the close contacts of North-Eastern Thrace with the region of the steppes. Dacian temples were a specific form of cult places, characteristic for the lands north of the Danube in the time immediately before their conquest by the Romans. It is a curious fact that weapons were not deposited in them. Special attention is devoted to collective finds interpreted as ritual deposits. Weapons found in bodies of water were also examined. The well-attested practice in the lands inhabited by Germanic tribes shows that in Thrace too it should be interpreted as a ritual act.

The overview of the weapons found in the sanctuaries is concise and clear. With reason, the PhD student did not deviate in a detailed presentation of the characteristics of the weapons themselves, which is not necessary in view of the goals set. I would point out the conclusions that in Thrace there were no sanctuaries only for warriors or dedicated to deities with strictly defined military functions, and that the gift-dedicator connection is not as clear as in the synchronous Greek sanctuaries, for example (p. 56).

In the second part of the third chapter, warrior graves from Ancient Thrace are examined. Kaloyan Petkov's approach is selective – specific examples are selected and the text does not pretend to be exhaustive. In the summary part of this chapter, I expected to read a comparative analysis between cult/ritual complexes and burial ones in order to be outlined the similarities and differences between them. As can be seen from the next chapter, in the Greek and Celtic world, both aspects in the use of weapons have their own specifics, but a similar attempt at analysis regarding Thrace is missing.

In the fourth part of the dissertation, the ritual use of weapons in the neighboring regions of Ancient Thrace is examined (pp. 94–178). Here again, the approach is selective, but it is also the only option considering the vast territorial and chronological scope. The selected examples are not for their own sake, but with a view to illustrate the similarities and differences with the Thracian lands and the practices witnessed in them.

The final analytical part of the dissertation is devoted to rituals with weapons and specifically to trophies and ritually killed weapons (pp. 178–218). Unlike Greece, Rome and the lands inhabited by Celts, in Thrace there is no reliable information about trophies in the 1st

millennium BC. The only proposed example is from Kalново, Shumen district, which Kaloyan Petkov approaches with the necessary caution. Better attested is the practice of ritual killing of weapons, which came under influence from Central Europe rather than the Greek world, the PhD student suggests (p. 218).

The conclusion summarizes the results of the analysis. The practices attested in Thrace are compared with those in neighboring regions, and the opinion is expressed that the Thracian lands show a specific development combining various influences (p. 221).

The dissertation catalog presents 61 sites. It includes not only the weapons, but also information about the contexts and structures from which they originated, as well as other artifacts acquired during the surveys. This is necessary given the fact that the votive function of weapons is postulated precisely on the basis of their context of discovery. A uniform structure is applied despite the different characteristics of the archaeological sites.

The text is supplemented by an Appendix, which examines examples of the use of weapons in ritual contexts from Asia Minor, the island of Sardinia, the Iberian Peninsula, Britain, and the so-called North European cultural circle.

For better visualization, 10 diagrams and 15 maps are included – some of them borrowed from publications, but also author's ones specifically for Ancient Thrace. The cited literature is 44 pages and confirms the PhD student's broad view of the Mediterranean and Europe. However, there are certain gaps in it – studies cited in the text are missing from the bibliography (eg. Whittaker 1994).

The abstract and list of the contributions correctly reflect the content and main achievements of the author.

Kaloyan Petkov is author of four articles related to the topic of the dissertation. Two of them are already published.

The dissertation submitted to me for review is authored by Kaloyan Petkov, and I did not find any signs of plagiarism in the text.

In conclusion, I could safely note that the goals and objectives set in the dissertation have been fulfilled. Kaloyan Petkov's text has its undeniable scientific contributions. The first comprehensive study of votive weapons from Ancient Thrace shows the perspectives for such analyses, but at the same time points out the problems it faces, among which those that depend on us as a comprehensive publication of the results of the ongoing archaeological excavations and

field surveys. The thesis is written in a clear language, with a minimum number of unavoidable typos. The text shows good knowledge and correct use of professional terminology. The research of Kaloyan Petkov, naturally, also raises some objections, but some of them are in the field of scientific discussions and I would not consider them as mistakes. For me personally, the biggest problem remains the inclusion and significant attention given to burial complexes, because the interpretation as votives even of weapons from graves with possible heroization of the deceased, is too speculative. This is reported by Kaloyan Petkov and correctly noted in all necessary places in the text. In this regard, I would recommend correcting and refining the title when publishing the text as a monograph.

Taking into account the overall qualities of the dissertation work, I declare to the respected jury that the reviewed work has high scientific merits and meets the requirements of ZRASB and I vote "For" the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to the full-time doctoral student **Kaloyan Ivanov Petkov**.

Sofia,
06. 05. 2023



Assoc. prof. Dr. Ivan Valchev