

OPINION

on the thesis of Diana Nikolaeva Miteva
"Cultural and Natural Heritage Management Strategy of the municipality of Pavlikeni",
submitted for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD)
at the "Archaeology – Museology" Program at the Faculty of History
of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

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Diana Miteva's dissertation is 255 pages long and consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, normative documents and online sources and a list of abbreviations. The illustrations are not separated in a separate section but are integrated in appropriate, thematically linked places in the text.

The chosen theme is topical in view of the need to analyze the state and management of cultural heritage monuments in Bulgaria as a whole and to find workable solutions for their conservation, management and appropriate contemporary socialization and presentation. Focusing on the framework of the municipality of Pavlikeni creates the necessary prerequisites for the completeness of the research, and the doctoral student's obvious personal commitment to the region further contributes to this.

The introductory part presents the relevance of the topic, its scope, the aims and objectives of the work, the methodology and sources used, and the structure of the research. It begins with a comprehensive description of the history and current state of the town and municipality of Pavlikeni. Some of this information is not directly relevant to the topic and distracts the reader. If the author finds it necessary, it would be better presented elsewhere. The aims and objectives are well and realistically formulated. The various sources of information are discussed with regard to their specifics and informativeness. The author's willingness to make a multifaceted study of the cultural and natural heritage monuments under consideration makes a positive impression. It seems to me that separating the source base and historiography into a separate part would have been more appropriate and would have enabled a more focused analysis and a more comprehensive presentation of the research concerning the topic – both specifically in relation to the municipality of Pavlikeni and more theoretical developments concerning cultural heritage management. The last part of the introduction provides an overview of the structure of the dissertation by chapters, which I find redundant.

The first chapter presents the existing museums and public collections on the territory of the municipality of Pavlikeni: History Museum – Pavlikeni and Antique Ceramic Centre Pavlikeni, History Museum – Byala Cherkva and houses-museums "Tsanko Tserkovski" and "Rayko Daskalov", Ethnographic Exposition – Byala Cherkva, General Historical Public Collection – Vishovgrad, Historical Museum Collection – Varbovka, Ethnographic "household" collection -

Gorna Lipnitsa, Memorial museum collection "Seraphim Severnyak" – Gorna Lipnitsa, Agricultural "museum" – Gorna Lipnitsa, General historical public collection – Daskot, General historical public collection – Karaisen, General historical public collection – Mihaltsi. For each of them there is a detailed analysis of the history, the current state, the problems faced and the prospects for development. Obviously, the PhD student has a good insight into the museum objects under consideration, a critical attitude to the problems and ideas for improving the situation. Positive impression is also made by the purely practical side of the research: the personal involvement of the author, the contact with persons related to the management of at least some of the museums and collections concerned, the activities already carried out related to the improvement of the condition of some of them. At the same time, the structuring of the text is somewhat chaotic, in places lacking a clear logical sequence of the observations and suggestions presented. This is most evident in the presentation of the History Museum – Pavlikeni: different topics are abruptly changed, presentations of the current situation are mixed with proposals for changes. The text needs to be better structured, consistently describing the existing situation (building stock, exhibition area and showcases, thematic-exhibition plan – if there is one, temperature-humidity regime, methods of communication with the public, staff, funding, projects won, etc.), analysing the problems and then proposing solutions. It is appropriate to rely on verified facts rather than on the author's assumptions, as happens, e.g., on p. 29 and p. 30. A bad impression is made by the so-called critical analysis of staffing (pp. 33-34), which in fact concentrates only on the position of the curator of New and Recent History and gives the impression of a personal attitude.

The second chapter presents the sites of historical, natural and intangible cultural heritage: archaeological monuments at the village of Musina and the village of Lesicheri; historical sites related to the battalions of Philip Totyu, Hadzhi Dimitar and Stefan Karadzha and Pop Hariton; churches, monasteries and tombstones in Byala Cherkva, Karaisen, Visovgrad, Rositsa and Mihaltsi; natural monuments – Musinska Cave, the geocomplex "The Depressions", the geocomplex – eco-trail "Zarapovo", eco-trail "Chukata", Negovanska eco-trail; Pavlikeni Zoo; as well as the customs "Ivanovy Vlachugi" and Todorovden, the folklore festival "Humour in Folk Art" and "Parade of Masks" in Byala Cherkva. The PhD student's effort to cover as fully as possible various objects of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to seek solutions for their preservation, socialization and promotion is commendable. At the same time, this chapter also shows the need for a clearer structuring of the analysis of the current situation and prospects for development.

The third chapter is entitled "Perspectives and strategy for the development of cultural and natural heritage in the Municipality of Pavlikeni". From the very beginning, the author presents the main groups of challenges facing museums and public collections in the municipality of Pavlikeni: "registration and bringing to public awareness of the elements of cultural and historical heritage (digitization), funding, building stock, staffing, work with the public (popularization, educational programmes), conservation and restoration, introduction and use of new technologies in museums" (p. 191). The subsequent analyses, however, do not really comment on possible solutions for problems affecting building stock and staffing, as well as conservation and restoration. These topics are important, as the PhD student points out, and the lack of analysis on them in this chapter is a definite omission. There are also some weaknesses in the structure of this chapter, and of the thesis

as a whole, as some of the possible solutions to the problems registered, and therefore the prospects for the development of cultural and natural heritage, are discussed in detail in chapter one and not really addressed in this chapter.

Some of the observations proposed in Chapter Three are too general, and in some cases the relationship between the themes discussed and the specific situation at the sites under consideration is not clear. For example, in the part devoted to the need for digitization of museum collections, there is a lack of specificity as to what has been done so far, whether there are databases in place for storing the information, servers, etc., and, consequently, concrete proposals in these directions. More good examples offering working solutions from other, comparable museums in the country could be included.

In spite of the above mentioned problems, in this chapter the PhD student demonstrates the ability to critically analyze the existing problems and search for realistic, concrete, workable solutions for the preservation and development of the cultural and natural heritage in the municipality of Pavlikeni. Her personal commitment is clearly visible, which is also expressed in a number of concrete activities related to the preservation, management and promotion of the cultural and historical heritage in the region – e.g. the legalization of the General Historical Public Collection – Mihaltsi, the General Historical Public Collection – Karaisen and the General Historical Public Collection – Vishovgrad, the organization and holding of a scientific conference "Pavlikenski region in the liberation struggles of the Bulgarian people in the XIX century" in the village of Visovgrad on July 7, 2023 and the winning of the project proposal under the "Amateur Art" 2023 program of the NFP with the project "The Unknown Cultural and Historical Heritage of the Pavliken Region" in October 2023.

The conclusion presents an apt synthesis of the main results of the study. It does not need to be organized by chapters, which only creates an unnecessary sense of a "retelling" of the dissertation.

The presence of some spelling and punctuation errors, which should not be present in a scientific text, should be noted.

Diana Miteva's dissertation is an original text and I found no evidence of plagiarism in it.

The abstract has a non-traditional structure but adequately reflects the thesis.

In conclusion, I can state that the remarks made do not detract from the contributions and positive qualities of the dissertation. Based on these qualities, I vote positively for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Diana Nikolaeva Miteva.

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