

REVIEW

by

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Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”

on Dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

Professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art

Doctoral program Choreography

Author: **Martin Stoyanov Petko**, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev”

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Title: *The Wedding Ring Dance – Specific dance practices and rituals from the region of Sliven*

Academic supervisor: Prof Anton Andovov

1. General presentation of the procedure and the materials presented for review

This opinion is prepared on the grounds of Order RD-27-108/ 11.07.2024 of the Rector of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev” – Plovdiv, regarding the approval of a scientific jury and presented by the doctoral candidate: enrolment order, discharge order, dissertation, abstract, curriculum vitae, contributions and three author publications on the topic.

The dissertation is 189 pages. It consists of five chapters, including an introduction, conclusion, contributions, appendices (over 50 photographs), named list of informants (23), bibliography (96 Cyrillic sources).

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

The biographical reference of Martin Petkov indicate that his entire life path is connected with the ethnographic region of Thrace – born in the town of Sliven; graduate of AMDFA - Plovdiv; folklore ensemble "Sliven" (organizer of the concert activity); ensemble "Zagore" - town Stara Zagora (ballet master); ensemble "Zornitsa" - town Stara Zagora (choreographer), ensemble "Trakia" - Plovdiv (performer) and Bulgarian dance club "Gaitani" (leader).

The doctoral student's connection with the Sliven region is deep and the positions he holds in the mentioned creative institutions largely determine his research pursuits.

3. Relevance of the topic.

There is a concern on the part of the author regarding the relevance of his work, but it is groundless, due to the fact that the folklore culture of society develops in an environment in which it undergoes constant changes (geopolitical, economic, globalizing). These processes have an impact on the sustainability of the folklore tradition, it is this that leads to the need to trace - as, how the family

ritual functions today and to preserve it. The choice of Martin Petkov is not random and important - the wedding, as one of the most important stages in the life of a Bulgarian from the Sliven region.

4. Expediency of the research methods used to achieve the set goals

At the beginning of the dissertation, the goal and subsequent tasks (4) for its achievement are clearly formulated. The choice of a methodological toolkit, outlined in five points with qualitative characteristics, is correct and leads to the defense of the author's thesis expressed through the purpose of the research.

The scale of the studied area is impressive – 19 villages and 2 towns in the Sliven region. It is necessary to note that the set goal is difficult, given the already existing studies of the area, some of which highlight dance samples. However, the youthful energy and patriotism of the author opened before him a completely unexplored custom, part of the family ritual of a Bulgarian from Sliven.

5. Evaluation of the dissertation work.

Before starting the actual part of the research in **Chapter One**, the doctoral candidate includes an overview of scientific research, emphasizing the works of established names in the field of folklore - Radost Ivanova *The Bulgarian Folklore Wedding*; Hristo Vakarelski *Ethnography of Bulgaria*; Dimitar Marinov *Living Antiquity* magazine; Mihail Arnaudov *The Bulgarian Wedding Rites*. Ethnological and folklore studies; Stoyan Juzhev *Bulgarian Folk Choreography*; Raina Katsarova - Kukudova *On Rachenitsa and Bulgarian Dance Folklore*; Kiril Dzhenev and Kiril Haralampiev; Krasimir Petrov, Anton Andonov, Anna Ilieva.

The candidate uses the right approach of focusing on the **regional authors** - Toncho Konduzov, Simeon Tabakov, Keti Gramatikova *Samuilovo - spiritual culture and folklore*; S. A. Stoyanov *Stara Reka*; Vladimir Demirev, Radost Ivanova *The Folklore Tradition of the Sliven Region*; Minko Stefanov - *Pages from the history of the village of Kaloyanovo, Sliven region*; Ivan Tenev *Sedlarevo*; Dora Kurshumova *The woven aprons in the Sliven region*; Dimka Ilieva *The most handmade city of Sliven*; Mitko Koychev - *History of Gorno Alexandrovo*.

The overview made by Martin Petkov is distinguished by precision. The derived information "*supplements missing details in the information obtained from the field research*". This part of the work ends with a finding that can be attributed to the relevance of the topic (p. 12). A good reception on the part of the author is the characterization made and the presented cause-and-effect relationship of the performed ritual actions/ practices in the entire "Wedding" complex from the researched area in **Chapter Two. Social rules and beliefs related to the wedding**. The described habits with the exact dialect names, the specified role and its importance for the performance of the wedding, the differences in some of the rituals in the villages in the field and in the mountains, determine the development of the exposition in the following parts of the dissertation work.

Chapter Three. Pre-wedding Rituals. Martin Petkov successively describes the Matchmaking, Small Betrothal, Big Betrothal and Talks and Between the Engagement and the Wedding, precisely indicating the role with the specific name for each village of each participant and

who can perform it in the particular rite. The characteristics are derived - discretion, eloquence, gender, number of participants, time of visit, obligatory ritual actions suggesting the intentions. Focuses on conversational ability/ intention, with specific verbal examples from both parties participating in the ritual in positive and negative. The first dance practices appear in Big Betrothal and Talks (p. 31). Interesting incidents told by the doctoral student's informants are described. In general, the detailed description of the rites is impressive. Their particular function is brought out as a finding and summaries at the end of the part.

Chapter Four. Actual wedding Rituals. The author divides the chapter into two parts: (1) Preparatory ritual practices of the wedding week – "*Inviting*", "*Making the flag*", "*Preparing the wedding breads*", "*Taking the dowry*", "*Ring bread*"-"*Honey bread*" and "*Sifting*", and (2) Actual Wedding –"*Shaving the Groom*", "*Veiling*", "*Bringing Out*", "*Wedding*", "*Welcoming to the groom's home*", "*Wedding Table*", "*Unveiling*", "*Sending off the best men*", "*The First Wedding Night*", "*Sweet Brandy*". Structured in this way, this section of the work presents the wedding in its "*logical connection and sequence, characteristic of this part of Bulgaria*", as the author himself says. The ritual practices in the individual villages are presented, mentioning the differences and making a comparison with other regions of the country. An important point in the research is that the author highlights the symbolism of each detail /ritual object/ number of participants /roles/ way of arrangement /forms, from the rituals related to happiness, well-being, fertility/ children, the merging of the "masculine" and "feminine" in a whole etc. in the family. Some of the ritual songs are presented. In direct connection with the title of the work is 1.5. "*Ring bread*"-"*Honey bread*". Here the doctoral student describes five dance samples accompanying the rituals, as follows: p. 83 *Rachenitsa*; p. 84 *Buenek*; p. 85 *Buenek from Kermen*; p. 86 *Pravo Horo*; p. 88 *Boaliska*. The development of the research in 2. "Actual Wedding" is evidence and shows that the doctoral student has in-depth theoretical knowledge and a serious empirical study of the customary-ritual complex "Wedding" from the Sliven region has been carried out. Significant for the study are the summary texts on pages 95-97, related to the preparatory ritual practices and on pages 143-145, related to the actual wedding.

Chapter Five. After-Wedding Rituals. In the style of the exposition, two rites "Inviting the bride" and "Povrunki" (exchange of visits) are described in detail, with them the author closes the ritual cycle. The manner of the presented text is identical, all ritual actions are clearly detailed.

In the entire work, the stories of the informants in support of the author's findings and the correctly cited literary sources are of interest. I would say that they are the authentic source, a contribution to the researched topic.

The scientific value of the research is presented precisely in the "Conclusions of the scientific work" section.

6. Contributions and significance of the thesis and the publications on the subject of the dissertation

In order to increase the significance of the dissertation work, I believe that the contributions can be reformulated and divided into: contributions of a scientific-applied nature and contributions of an applied nature.

I have no doubt that the dissertation is the personal work of the author. Three publications are presented, which reflect parts of the topic of the dissertation work, included in publications specific to the field of "Arts".

7. Critical notes and recommendations.

It is recommended to visualize/ display the dance practices in a table (part of the rite, ritual, dance practice, time signature, form, participants), considering the title of the work, which will enrich the scientific phrasing and give a clear new knowledge about the choreographic theory.

8. Abstract.

I believe that the abstract provides information on all parts of the dissertation work.

9. Conclusion.

The folklore tradition with all its diversity speaks of the richness of the Bulgarian culture. We have witnessed an extremely thorough study related to a primordial experience for a Bulgarian – the wedding, through which the author demonstrates his knowledge of the Sliven region and readiness for a creative interpretation of the empirical material.

The work of Martin Petkov *The Wedding Ring Dance – Specific dance practices and rituals from the region of Sliven*, complements the folklore knowledge about the wedding from this region and gives it significance for the choreographic art with the emphasis on the accompanying dance practices.

Due to the above, I confidently give my **positive assessment** of the conducted research and propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the doctoral student Riolina Petkova Topalova the educational and scientific degree "doctor", professional field 8.3. Music and Dance art, doctoral program Choreography.

27.09.2024

Prof Maria Kardzhieva, PhD