

REVIEW / OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Georgi Dimov, PhD

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regarding the doctoral dissertation entitled: *"The Holy Roman Empire and the Crusade of Nicopolis (1395–1396): Participants and Sources"* for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD) to Milen Krasimirov Petrov – full-time doctoral student in Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Medieval General History)

Milen Krasimirov Petrov is a doctoral student in the "Medieval Balkans" Section at the Institute for Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBSCT–BAS). He has successfully completed his training and fulfilled all the requirements of his individual doctoral curriculum. The procedure fully complies with all legal conditions and statutory regulations. The dissertation text comprises 454 pages and is structured into an introduction, two major chapters/parts, a conclusion, biographical data, and a bibliography. Chapter One is entitled *"Sources for the Battle of Nicopolis from the Holy Roman Empire,"* while Chapter Two is titled *"Participants from the Holy Roman Empire: Knights, Squires, and Citizens."* The chapters are further subdivided into five sub-chapters each. The dissertation makes a strong impression with its coherent structure, excellent scholarly style, and rich terminology, operating fluently with the respective academic discourse.

Doctoral student Petrov's dissertation examines the medieval sources from the Holy Roman Empire pertaining to the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396, as well as the participants from the German lands who joined the crusader army against the Ottoman Turks. The chronological framework of the study encompasses two distinct periods. The lower limit is set in the first decade of the 15th century, while the upper limit extends to the works of the Bavarian chronicler Johannes Aventinus (1477–1534) from the 1520s and 1530s. The geographical scope of the research covers the "German" part of the Holy Roman Empire, primarily corresponding to present-day Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, as well as parts of modern France (Alsace). The objectives are clearly formulated: to analyze the texts in order to extract information regarding the German crusaders; to provide a profound review of the source narratives with useful comparisons between individual manuscripts; to apply the so-called "Zipf's law" to investigate the correlations between the crusading interest toward the Ottomans and the Lithuanians in order to establish a conceptual model; to attempt a cataloging of each participant from the Holy Roman Empire based on

geographical criteria; and to provide a prosopographical reference for every identified participant from the Holy Roman Empire in the crusading venture.

All of the above is highly commendable, as scholars focusing on the Balkan events of 1396 are numerous, but rarely address this specific subject matter. While the earliest studies date back to the Enlightenment in the 18th century, critical (scholarly) interpretations of the events only began to emerge during the first half of the 19th century. From that period onward, the historiography of the Nicopolis Crusade entered mainstream European scholarship. Nevertheless, a comprehensive study themes-focused on German sources and German participants in the Nicopolis Crusade remains absent to date. It should be noted that while specific issues regarding certain German sources or crusaders have been addressed in isolated publications, they have rarely been the object of standalone research. Monographic studies on the matter are entirely non-existent. Therefore, we can assert that Milen Petrov's dissertation represents a bold academic challenge for contemporary medieval and historical studies, and the topic selected by the doctoral student and his supervisor is both timely and highly significant.

The methodology applied in the dissertation is complex and incorporates the interdisciplinary approach necessary for this type of research. It combines historical analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization of data extracted from medieval sources. The methods utilized include: the comparative-historical method, drawing comparisons with the development of the crusading movement in other regions of Europe, most notably the Baltic Crusades against the Lithuanians; the prosopographical method, providing biographical profiles of the identified participants from the Holy Roman Empire (particularly those from Bavaria) in Chapter Five; and a visual analysis of miniatures and engravings related to the Battle of Nicopolis, which is of particular interest.

The contributions of the dissertation are both numerous and indisputable. First and foremost, Milen Petrov examines a total of 43 sources concerning the Battle of Nicopolis originating from the Holy Roman Empire, a large portion of which have not been previously utilized in scholarship. The dissertation also introduces 19 Bulgarian translations of sources that have remained relatively unknown until now. Special attention is dedicated to the Bavarian sources—22 in total—which constitute the largest group of German documents on the events. Furthermore, the study identifies the specific "Bavarian narrative" found in the works of Andreas of Regensburg, which gained significant popularity from the 15th to the 18th century. Two new sources for the Battle of Nicopolis have been identified, and through linguistic analysis, the etymology and origin of the

toponym *Schiltau* (Nicopolis), frequently encountered in medieval German texts, have been revealed. It is demonstrated that the so-called *Anonymous Austrian Account* is actually a Latin translation of a fragment from the memoirs of Johann Schiltberger, created around the third quarter of the 15th century. Meanwhile, the absence of certain German noble families in the chronicles of Johannes de Thurocz and Antonio Bonfini is explained by their conflicts with the Hunyadi dynasty. A conceptual model for the links between the Northern Crusades and those against the Ottomans is proposed. Moreover, the analysis of the available data indicates that it is highly unlikely that Teutonic Knights—particularly from Prussia and Livonia—joined the 1396 campaign. In total, 52 German crusaders and campaign participants have been identified.

All these contributions and scholarly achievements give me reason to confidently recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury vote in favor of awarding Milen Krasimirov Petrov the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD) in Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Medieval General History).

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Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Georgi Dimov, PhD