

Opinion

by Prof. I. Popova, Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

on the doctoral thesis by Milen Krasimirov Petrov, a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Medieval Balkans, the Institute of Balkan Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, entitled “*The Holy Roman Empire and the Nicopolis Crusade (1395–1396): Participants and Sources*” in Research Area 2.2. History and Archaeology (General Medieval History).

Firstly, I must note that the procedure followed by the doctoral candidate Milen Petrov has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation. The submitted thesis meets the minimum national requirements, and the topic under consideration is original. I have carefully reviewed the submitted text and, right from the outset, I can state with conviction that the work is of exceptional quality and makes a significant contribution.

It consists of an introduction, two main chapters comprising numerous sections, a conclusion and a bibliography, totalling 458 standard pages.

I would like to emphasise that the thesis is devoted to an important issue which continues to attract considerable interest in Bulgarian medieval studies. An exceptionally rich array of source material, as well as historiographical material, has been examined. The research is based on a wide range of predominantly German (though not exclusively) sources, which enable the author to reach in-depth conclusions.

In **the introduction**, Milen Petrov sets out his research objectives very clearly – “To analyse the sources from the Holy Roman Empire relating to the crusade of 1396, classifying the texts on a geographical basis; to examine the ways in which the authors present the events, as well as to extract information relating to participants from within the Holy Roman Empire, and to trace the accounts of the events in order to identify the presence of specific narratives; to examine sources produced outside the Holy Roman Empire relating to the participation of knights from the German lands or to the Empire’s role in the events of 1396; to present the diplomatic and military aspects of the German aristocracy’s participation in the Battle of Nicopolis”. The objectives of the study have been formulated, and the structure, chronological and territorial scope of the work have been presented and justified. The doctoral candidate has also addressed the terminology, commenting on the most frequently encountered or “problematic” terms in the study, for which I congratulate him. The research methods are also presented – comparative-historical, prosopographic, historical-structural analysis, comparison and generalisation. A review of sources and historiography has been carried out.

In the **first** chapter, devoted to *the sources on the Battle of Nicopolis from the Holy Roman Empire*, the PhD candidate provides an in-depth analysis, divided into several

subsections, of the Bavarian sources (Hans Schiltberger, Konrad Keiser, the chronicles of Andreas of Regensburg, Hans Ebran von Wildenberg, Veit Arnpek, the Brief Family Chronicles, and Johann Aventinus), the Franconian sources, sources from Alsace and Switzerland, and Austrian sources (Peter von Retz, the Brief Austrian Chronicles, The Chronicles of Thomas Ebendorfer). The following section examines Germany and the Battle of Nicopolis in texts produced outside the Holy Roman Empire, with a focus on French, Hungarian, Byzantine and Ottoman sources. I agree with the author's conclusion that the Bavarian sources undoubtedly constitute the largest group of German sources on the Battle of Nicopolis (over twenty works), spanning various genres. Compared with the other groups of sources, the Bavarian ones are comparable only to the Austrian ones, of which there are twelve, mostly from Austria itself, but also from the neighbouring ecclesiastical domains of Salzburg and Melk.

I can only congratulate the author on the depth of his analysis of the various types of sources, which is clearly evident from the text.

The **second** chapter is entitled "*Participants from the Holy Roman Empire: Princes and Knights*". In this chapter, the information gleaned from the sources regarding the participants in the Nicopolis Crusade is again examined in detail across several sub-sections. M. Petrov begins by conducting a comparative analysis between the Teutonic Order and the Nicopolis campaign, noting the greater inclination of the European aristocracy to take part in the Northern Crusades, which were geographically closer and less arduous and less bloody than the campaigns against the Ottomans. The author examines in detail the biographies of some of the prominent German participants in the Nicopolis campaign – foremost among them is King Sigismund of Luxembourg, whose role in the German chronicles is traced in detail, his role in preparing for the campaign, his policies between 1389 and 1395, and the significance of his defeat at Nicopolis in 1396. The biographies of certain other prominent aristocratic participants are also skilfully constructed, including Burgrave Johann III of Nuremberg and Count Palatine Ruprecht Pipan. Based on an analysis of all available data on participants from the Holy Roman Empire, beyond the circle of the high aristocracy and the electors, the figures of certain other participants – knights, squires and ordinary citizens – are also presented. The knights from Bavaria are examined in the form of a case study, with the PhD candidate focusing on three key aspects: the relations between the Duke and the aristocracy in Bavaria as a factor in the inclusion of certain crusaders; the divisions within Bavaria in the 14th century as a key factor in the knights' participation in the campaign; The third issue analysed is the Bavarian knight in the 14th century: his social status, armament and participation in military conflicts. This is

followed by a brief but detailed catalogue of Bavarian knights who took part in the Nicopolis campaign – Hans Schiltberger, Werner Pinzenaur, Ulrich Kühler, Stefan Schmiechen and Hans Greif von Greifenberg.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the conclusions reached, including the following: the main crusader contingents came primarily from the lands of Bavaria, the Upper Rhine (Alsace) and Switzerland; there is little or no specific data on knights from the Rhineland (the Palatinate), Austria and Franconia, though there were participants from these regions as well as Austrians. I fully agree with the author's conclusion that the available source material, and more specifically the data concerning Bavaria (and to some extent Austria), makes it possible to trace the involvement and mobilisation of the dukes' personal networks as a factor in the formation of the crusader armies from these regions. From Bavaria, representatives of some of the most prominent aristocratic families were involved; these were active in local politics and were connected in various ways to the Wittelsbachs themselves.

In his conclusion, PhD candidate Milen Petrov summarises the main conclusions reached in his thesis, both with regard to the German sources and to the German participants in the Nicopolis campaign.

I fully agree with the author's view that the sources from the Holy Roman Empire are the most numerous compared with the other groups of sources discussed in the thesis; the narrative sources from the Holy Roman Empire are a primary source for reconstructing the participants from the Empire itself, and that the texts analysed in the thesis cover the main regions from which German crusaders originated, namely Bavaria, Alsace and the Upper Rhine, Austria and Franconia. With regard to the second part of the study, M. Petrov's conclusions are correct, having been drawn on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the sources. The most data is available on the three principal princes from the Holy Roman Empire who took part in the campaign. First and foremost, this is the Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg himself, and it is very important to note that the total number of participants from the Holy Roman Empire identified by the author exceeds 50.

The sources and literature utilised in the preparation of the thesis are impressive.

The academic contributions of the thesis can be summarised as follows: a total of 43 sources relating to the Battle of Nicopolis, originating from the Holy Roman Empire, have been examined, a large proportion of which have not previously been utilised in historiography; 19 Bulgarian translations of previously untranslated sources have been introduced into academic discourse; particular attention has been paid to the Bavarian sources, numbering 22. The doctoral candidate identifies a specific 'Bavarian narrative' which is found in the works of

Andreas of Regensburg and continues to be reproduced from the 15th to the 18th century; through an analysis of the chronicle of Jacob Twinger von Königshofen and the Röteln chronicle, M. Petrov identifies numerous crusaders from the Upper Rhine region; through linguistic analysis, he reveals the etymology and origin of the place name Schiltau (Nicopolis), which is frequently encountered in German texts on the events; he demonstrates that the absence of certain German noble families (most notably the Counts of Zilli) from the chronicles of Johannes de Thurocz and Antonio Bonfini can be explained by their conflicts with the Hunyadi dynasty; using the so-called Zipf's principle, or the "principle of least resistance", the PhD candidate demonstrates that the Northern campaigns were an easier alternative for most European nobles during this period, as opposed to those against the Ottomans; Through an in-depth examination of the sources, M. Petrov concludes that it is unlikely that Teutonic Knights took part in the campaign of 1396; Based on the available data in the sources, the doctoral candidate demonstrates that Burgrave Frederick VI did not take part in the Battle of Nicopolis, but only his brother, Johann III; and last but not least, the doctoral candidate has identified a total of 52 German crusaders.

The abstract meets the requirements; the publications are on the subject of the thesis and have been published in prestigious academic journals and collections.

On the basis of everything stated so far, I would like to express my support for the award of the academic degree of "Doctor" to Milen Petrov and to wish him every success in his future endeavours.

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