

BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
INSTITUTE OF BALKAN STUDIES WITH CENTRE OF THRACOLOGY

MEDIEVAL BALKANS DEPARTMENT

REVIEW

of

the Dissertation

of

Milen Krasimirov Petrov

Title: „The Holy Roman Empire and the Crusade of Nicopolis (1395-1396): Participants and Sources“

Scientific Field: 2. Humanities

Professional Area: 2.2 : History and Archaeology

Specialty: General Medieval History

by

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Information on the doctoral studies, dissertation, abstract and publications:

The doctoral work of Milen Krasimirov Petrov has been discussed and proposed for public defense by the "Medieval Balkans" Department at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center of Thracology-BAS and approved by a decision of the Scientific Council of the IBCT of 03.06.2026, protocol No. 9. The procedure for announcing the public defense is fully in accordance with the Regulations of the Scientific Council of the IBCT-BAS on the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific titles and holding academic positions, as well as with the relevant provisions of the Law on the Promotion of Academic Positions and Academic Positions in Rep. of Bulgaria. The abstract (34 pages) fully meets the relevant requirements and provides a complete picture of the content of the dissertation. The results of the "Anti-Plagiarism" system convincingly prove the originality of the work. The text of the dissertation is presented, as required by the legal provisions and the required number of publications on the

topic. Two articles are presented, the content of which is undoubtedly related to the content of the dissertation.

Dissertation content:

The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography of the sources and studies used. It contains a total of 454 pages.

The introduction, traditionally, leads us to the object of the study, the chronological and territorial scope, the relevance of the topic, the state of research at the time of writing the dissertation, the goals and objectives of the study, the terminology and the methods used by the author.

The research is primarily of a source-based and prosopographic nature and is dedicated to the sources and participants in the Nicopolis Crusade of 1395-1396, related to the Holy Roman Empire, in particular its German-speaking areas, which generally encompass the lands of present-day Germany, Switzerland and Austria, but also some neighboring areas, such as Alsace. A review of the historiography on the topic is made, and its relevance is also emphasized, since there is no comprehensive study on the parameters set in this way. The main methods used by the doctoral student are the comparative-historical and prosopographic method, historical-structural and visual analysis, comparative textual analysis, etc.

The first chapter "Sources for the Battle of Nicopolis from the Holy Roman Empire" is dedicated to the comprehensive study and systematization of the available written sources, originating mainly from the southern German territories, but also including some sources from the Low German language area. The sources from Bavaria have the largest share, since it is from this region that the largest part of the German participants in the campaign originates. A total of 43 sources from the 15th-16th centuries have been analyzed, some of which, such as the travelogue of Hans Schiltberger, are already known in Bulgarian historiography, while others have remained almost unused until now.

Such is the account of Konrad Kyeser, also a participant in the march and an eyewitness to the main events, and also the so-called "Bavarian Narrative" by the doctoral candidate, based mainly on Andreas of Regensburg and his successors. Less well known are the texts of Hans Ebran von Wildenberg, Veit Arnpeck, Johann Aventin and some other narratives from the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age. Secondly, the doctoral student has included

sources from Franconia, mainly related to the Nuremberg region, such as the family history of the Stromer family, and also the Short Chronicle of Nuremberg and other sources from this city.

In third place are the sources from Alsace and Switzerland (Alemannia), among which the Alsatian Chronicle of Jacob Twinger von Königshofen stands out, where eyewitness accounts are most likely recreated, as well as the related Chronicle of Rötheln. As for the Swiss sources the author focused on four chronicles, originating respectively from Zurich, Bern, Spiez and the Klingenberg family, which contain previously unknown information about the campaign and the participation of fighters from Alemannia in it.

Last but not least are the sources from Austria, including the partially known in our historical poem by Peter of Retz, the chronicles of Thomas Ebendorfer, the Short Austrian Chronicles, etc. At the end of the chapter, the dissertation examines sources related to the German participation in the Nicopolis Campaign, which have French, Hungarian, Byzantine, Ottoman and South Slavic origins and which complement the picture outlined by the main corpus of texts – the subject of the study.

The second part, covering three chapters, "Participants from the Holy Roman Empire: Princes and Knights" is dedicated to the prosopographic part of the study. The third chapter, "The Teutonic Order and the Nicopolis Crusade", includes an extensive excursion into the history of the Teutonic Order, which, perhaps, was somehow linked to the Nicopolis Crusade. The author focuses on the history of the Northern Crusades, in which the Teutons played a primary role, and the possible connections of these campaigns with the Nicopolis Crusade through the potential participation of Teutonic Knights in it.

The author's conclusions from the available information, however, lead rather to the opinion that there is no evidence of direct participation of the Order in this crusade, regardless of the formal or informal connections of individual participants in it with the Northern Crusades and the Teutonic Order. In fact, the Order itself controlled lands that were not part of the Holy Roman Empire and technically fall outside the stated scope of the study, but its organic connection with the aristocracy of the Empire should not be ignored.

The fourth chapter, "The German Princes and Their Participation in the Crusade of 1396," examines the main leaders of the campaign from among the princes and kings of the Empire. A special place is given to the leader of the campaign – the Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg, who, however, was a representative of the important imperial dynasty of Luxembourg and eventually became the Roman King and Emperor later. Already during the campaign, he was also declared a lifelong vicar of the Empire, which placed him in a high

position in the imperial hierarchy, along with the crown of St. Stephen, which he had worn since 1387.

Special attention is paid to the repercussions of the Nicopolis defeat in the Holy Roman Empire, due to the extensive participation of German aristocrats in the campaign and the undermining of the positions of the Holy Roman and Bohemian King Wenceslas of Luxembourg and the dynasty as a whole. The participation and role of Burgrave Johann III von Nuremberg are separately examined, as well as the controversial issue of the participation of his brother Frederick VI Hohenzollern, who, however, apparently did not participate in the battle and is confused in historiography with another participant – the Hospitaller Frederick Hohenzollern, who was part of the knightly order.

An important contribution is the clarification of the participation of Count Palatine and Elector Ruprecht Pipan in the events – a participation that has not been studied in detail so far. The author definitely adds important points to the clarification of this issue.

Chapter Five: “Participants from the Holy Roman Empire: Knights, Squires and Citizens” is dedicated to the ordinary participants in the campaign, originating from the lands of the Holy Roman Empire. 46 such individuals have been identified, mostly from the South German lands – Bavaria, Franconia and the Upper Rhine, but also from neighboring areas such as Hesse, Austria, Swabia. Some unclear issues have also been clarified, such as the alleged participation of Tsar Ivan Sratsimir, under the name Hans Bodmann. Milen Petrov convincingly proves that this is an incorrect thesis and that Hans Bodmann was a real-life participant from the ministerial class in Swabia.

Special attention is paid to the knights from Bavaria, who are also the most numerous group of participants. Their social status, their relations with the Duke of Bavaria, the motivation for participating in the campaign and other aspects are examined. Biographical notes are presented of five Bavarian knights who are best documented in the sources, namely: Hans Schiltberger, Werner Pinzenauer, Ulrich Kühler, Stefan Schmiechen and Hans Greif von Greifenberg.

The conclusion summarizes the main conclusions of the dissertation text in a completely appropriate and convincing way. The doctoral candidate presents us with a thorough study of the sources and the most detailed reconstruction possible of the participants in the campaign, associated with the Holy Roman Empire. A summary analysis has been made of both the researched texts and the social composition, motivation, regional origin and personal fate of the identified crusaders in the best traditions of prosopography and genealogy.

The overall impression of Milen Petrov's dissertation is completely positive. This is a solid study, with an innovative character for our historiography. The style of the work is excellent, and the minor typographical and technical inaccuracies, inevitable when writing a voluminous text, could be quickly eliminated.

Scientific contributions:

I will focus on the contributions that, in my opinion, were made by the dissertation.

1. This is the first study of its kind not only in Bulgarian, but also in world medieval studies. The issues raised have been examined for the first time in this volume and in such depth, and in practice this study represents a new stage in the study of the problem of the participants
2. Numerous new, little-known sources and prosopographic reconstructions are presented, which make it possible to outline a more complete picture of the Nicopolis campaign itself, which played a key role in the fate of the Bulgarian lands in the following centuries. in the Nicopolis campaign.
3. Some controversial topics and issues have been clarified, such as the etymology of the toponym "Schiltau" or "Schiltharn", the participation of Frederick VI Hohenzollern and the Teutons in the campaign, the personality of Hans Bodmann and the myth of his identification with Tsar Ivan Sratsimir, and numerous other problems surrounding the reconstruction of the events, participants, and results of the Nicopolis Crusade.

Minor remarks may be made to the text regarding the unification of terms and names, but this unification will inevitably be made in the preparation of a possible future monograph, the publication of which I would recommend.

Conclusion:

Based on what has been said so far, I categorically recommend that the esteemed committee award the scientific and educational degree "doctor" to Milen Krasimirov Petrov. Personally, I vote with conviction "yes" and extend my congratulations for the excellent work done to the dissertation candidate and his scientific supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vladislav Ivanov.

27.07.2026 г.

The City of Sofia

Reviewer:

(Prof. Alexandar Nikolov, PhD)

