

REVIEW

By Prof. Dr. KONSTANTIN TOTEV TOTEV

ON THE DISSERTATION WORK OF ASSISTANT METHODS DIMITROV ZLATKOV,

REGULAR DOCTORAL STUDENT IN THE SECTION OF MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE WITH A MUSEUM AT THE BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ON THE TOPIC OF *SETTLEMENT SYSTEM IN MELNIK REGION IN THE 11TH – 17TH CENTURIES* - PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.2. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY, WITH SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR Prof. DR. VIOLETA NESHEVA FOR OBTAINING THE SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATIONAL DEGREE OF DOCTOR

DATA ON THE PHD STUDENT

Metodi Dimitrov Zlatkov was born on July 2, 1982 in the city of Sofia. In 2009 he received a master's degree in Archaeology at St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University. The topic of his thesis is Villages in the 11th – 14th c. on the territory of today's Central South and Southeast Bulgaria, led by Assoc. Prof. Stefka Angelova. Since 02.08 he has been a full-time doctoral student in Archaeology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, NAIM.

He has participated in nearly 50 training, rescue and regular archaeological excavations at various sites in the country.

DATA ON THE DISSERTATION AND THE ABSTRACT

The dissertation consists of two parts - text and illustrations. The text part includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a list of cited sources in a total volume of 360 pages. The PhD student has complied with some recommendations for structural changes made during the preliminary discussion of the text. The work is illustrated by an album of colour and black-and-white photographs, maps, diagrams and statistical diagrams in a volume of 117 pages.

At first glance it is clear that M. Zlatkov is convincing not only because he has long been working on the topic, but also because he builds his own theoretical statement, which subsequently begins filling with specific material, and as we see it is not only archaeological. The latter makes it possible to multifacetedly and easily supplement the picture of the sites with new and different in nature material. It is certain that this kind of work will be useful and taken advantage of in other research.

The introduction is composed of three parts. The first one presents the main parameters of the dissertation - the goals and tasks, the chronological and territorial boundaries, the methods of work and the structure. The second part reveals in more detail the main method of retrogressive

analysis used and some terminological issues, such as the clarification of the definitions of the terms of *village*, *town* and *fortress*. The third part provides a brief overview of the physical and geographical characteristics of the studied region, in order to present the geographical conditions in which the settlement system has developed.

The first chapter is devoted to a critical historiographical review of historical and archaeological studies, as well as to the presentation of archaeological data, written sources and other records on which the proposed work is grounded. It aptly presents the general historiographical framework. The comparison with the best model for historical and geographical research in Byzantine studies - *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* - makes a good impression. The author obviously seeks to follow their methodology, allowing himself to upgrade or argue it in places.

The sources base is presented in an expanded and complete manner, emphasizing the existence of a new sources base. The growth of archaeological data compared to the previous summary for the region is 54%, which is significant. The difference in the written sources is much bigger, which in M. Zlatkov's research are many times more.

The second chapter traces the changes in the political and administrative boundaries in the studied area from the 7th to the 17th century, which are directly related to the development of the settlement system. This chapter is grounded entirely on an analysis of the written sources and the works that examine them. The great depth of the analysis is impressive, as not only the opinions of individual scholars are considered everywhere, but it is based on the study of the written sources themselves. All discussion questions are set against the background of previously expressed opinions on the issue, which allows to clearly highlighting the opinion of the author. The borders of Melnik region are detailed in a way that has not been done so far, which is a definite contribution.

The third chapter summarizes the available written sources, archaeological data, topography and landscape for the nature and development of the settlement network in the investigated area. The written data from the 13th – 14th c. are analyzed very carefully rejecting a number of earlier identifications and proposing new ones.

This chapter presents the research of six separate areas in the studied area: the town of Sandanski and the villages of Ilindentsi, Sklave, Kulata, Leshnitsa and Polenitsa. In each of them the written, archaeological and toponymic data are critically examined to end up with a conclusion summarizing the spatial and demographic data for the development of the settlement life during the Middle Ages. The text for each of the six areas is a completed independent study, four of which are study-sized. The texts about Sandanski and Ilindentsi can be distinguished for considering a significant archeological material, which is skillfully combined with the written data.

The fourth chapter presents the data for the old road network in Melnik region. The topic is developed in great detail, perhaps in some places it can be more synthesized. Notwithstanding

this note, the information in it is readable and well organized. All previous studies and sources on the roads in the area, from Antiquity to the Renaissance, are critically monitored. The author offers a convincing detailed reconstruction of the routes and categorization of the roads.

The conclusion summarizes the results of the previous chapters and text appendices. Emphasis is put on the high degree of continuity in the settlement development from the 12th – 14th to the 19th century.

The cited literature covers 60 pages, divided into: sources, studies, dictionaries and encyclopedias, maps, electronic resources and registration cards in the Archaeological Map of Bulgaria. It is a testament to the author's rich bibliographic awareness.

In addition to the main text, one hundred pages of illustrations (photos, drawings and maps) are attached, which are numbered according to the respective chapters. They mainly contain photos and maps that are informative and related to the text.

From the presented text and the overall content, it becomes clear that the main goal of the dissertation has been accomplished. The study of the history of formation and functioning of the settlement system in the studied area has been done precisely. The presented text is well processed and meaningful.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In the auto-reference to the author's abstract Metodi Zlatkov notes seven scientific contributions. They reflect the serious work done in writing the here reviewed dissertation and are convincingly defended.

PUBLICATIONS AND PARTICIPATIONS IN SCIENTIFIC FORUMS

On the topic of the dissertation Metodi Zlatkov has 7 publications, 5 of which are co-authored, which meets the requirements of the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria.

CONCLUSION

I consider that the reviewed dissertation contains sufficient scientific results and original contributions, meeting the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for its implementation.

The dissertation shows that the PhD student Metodi Dimitrov Zlatkov masters in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the field of Medieval history and archaeology and can independently conduct research.

Given all that has been said so far, I confidently give my positive assessment of the reviewed dissertation and propose to the esteemed Academic Board to award the educational and scientific degree of DOCTOR to Metodi Dimitrov Zlatkov.

November 3rd 2021

Veliko Tarnovo

Reviewer Prof. Dr. Konstantin Totev Totev