

OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Krassimira Gagova

on the dissertation of Metodi Dimitrov Zlatkov

on the topic of *The Settlement System in Melnik Region in the 11th – 17th Centuries*

Metodi Zlatkov graduated with a bachelor's degree in Archeology from the Faculty of History of St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University in 2005; in 2009 he graduated with a master's degree in the same specialty after defending a thesis on *The Villages in the 11th – 14th centuries in present-day Central, Southern and Southeastern Bulgaria*, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Stefka Angelova. Since 2008 he has been a full-time PhD student at NAIM - BAS, with scholarly supervisor Prof. V. Nesheva. Since 2013 he has been working as an assistant at the Institute. He takes part in ARIADNE Project. Since 2003 he has been participating annually in field surveys, studies and rescue excavations (46 were recorded for the period 2003 - 2020), gaining experience and knowledge.

M. Zlatkov's dissertation consists of two parts - text and illustrations (maps, figures and tables). The text part is composed of four thematically divided chapters.

The first chapter is devoted mainly to the goals and objectives, terminology and methodology. The goals are precisely formulated and in accordance with them the tasks to be performed are specified. The methodology is generally interdisciplinary, but impressive is the successful employment of the retrospective research method, which allows the researcher to try to reconstruct previous periods through his knowledge of later times. I note it now as this is one of the merits of the proposed work as well as the explanations of the terms referring to the settlements, because it is extremely important not only for the researcher to be aware of the terminology, but also for the reader to be completely sure of it. The first part also substantiates the territorial and chronological scope of the study and presents the main sources on which it is based - written, archaeological and historical - geographical, and also a brief historiographical review has been made.

The second chapter deals with the history of the region within the defined chronological framework. The review of the medieval period is comprehensive, as far as the sources allow. The events that led to a change in power and the way of governing have been traced. The study of the Ottoman rule of nahiya Melnik was greatly facilitated by the nature of the administrative documentation. In both cases, grounded on sources from the respective era, M. Zlatkov makes a successful attempt to determine the boundaries of the region and its subregions. Furthermore, based on the well-known toponymy and some narrative sources from this period, he defines the character of its population as Bulgarian-Greek.

The third chapter - The settlement system in Melnik region in the 11th – 17th centuries - presents the PhD student's research on the settlements and life in them during the considered epoch. The documents from the 11th – 14th c. offer 19 toponyms that can be associated with villages from the region, but the PhD student accepts 11 as certain and locates 9 of them. The field surveys add 61 villages more, some of which overlap with what is known from the written sources. During the following period, the number of village names increased to 102. To the 72 ones localized so far, the present study adds another 33.

All settlements are strictly studied. The semantics of the name, description of the location, the preserved remains are commented, for each of them the possibilities to have been an independent one or a neighborhood to a close-by village are also discussed. The number of the population and its main occupations, the pulsation of the change in the number of inhabitants are presented. This part is a typical historical - geographical study, which is and will be very useful for anyone who would continue to explore the area.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the road system. The road tracking methodology is very successful. The information of medieval authors, travelogues from the 15th – 19th c., toponymy, maps, road remains and previous studies were employed to mark the main road arteries. Attention is paid to the type of roads and the possibility to transport different kinds of goods on them.

An extensive bibliography is attached to the text - sources and scholarly literature.

The author has very accurately assessed the contributions of his research and its usefulness, which is clearly evident in the citation of his papers on the topic - 3 independent and 5 co-authored. He also presents a list of other papers, which is an indication of his serious work.

In conclusion, I allow myself to appreciate highly his work and to suggest to the esteemed Academic Board to award him the well-deserved educational and academic degree of Doctor.

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