

## **REVIEW**

by Assoc. Prof. Iliyan Boyanov, PhD  
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of a dissertation on a topic

"City necropolises from the era of the II Bulgarian Kingdom"

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

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Scientific field: 2. Humanities

Professional direction: 2.2. History and archaeology

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The presented dissertation is an author's summary of significant known and published material, as well as personal studies of the doctoral student and presents us with an analytical independent study, which is currently missing in Bulgarian historiography. The work has a volume of 484 pages, of which the text part is 406 pages, and the illustrative appendices and statistical tables are 77 pages, which fully covers and exceeds the requirements for a dissertation work.

The work is well structured and consists of an Introduction, an exposition in four chapters, a Conclusion, a list of cited literature and a catalogue. The illustrative part consists of thirteen panels with the location of the necropolises, photographs of individual graves and parts of the grave equipment. A comparison table by catalog numbers is also presented in Appendix 5.

In the Introduction, the doctoral student presents the discussion on the concept of "city" in the Middle Ages, also pays attention to some theoretical statements regarding the topography of the necropolises and their connection with the urban space. In my opinion, the presentation of

the discussion about the medieval Bulgarian city is too extensive, and at the same time not comprehensive enough, and could only be reduced to specific problems related to the topic of the dissertation.

Traditionally, the purpose of the dissertation is formulated in this part, which is stated as "the organization and arrangement of the literature published so far". The main goal thus presented presupposes primarily a historiographical approach to the study of Philip Petrunov, as is the main methodology for achieving the set goal, namely bibliographic analysis.

The chronological and territorial scope is determined by the political history of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, with the explicit clarification that analogies will be used from both earlier and later periods. The doctoral student's focus on the Staroplanina region as the territorial core of the Medieval Bulgarian state, a priori, puts slightly aside the Danube and Black Sea centers along the southern coast, which are undoubtedly an unavoidable factor for such a study.

In Chapter One of the exposition, the traditional historiographic review with the necessary critical notes is made. To a large extent, this view of literature duplicates the discussion of the Medieval City developed in the Introduction to the dissertation. In my opinion, one of the two could be dropped in a future publication of the paper.

Chapter Two, which is also the most voluminous, is devoted to the empirical material, namely the city necropolises that can be attributed to the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom from the territory of modern Bulgaria. According to Filip Petrunov's emphasis, this chapter begins with a description of Tarnovgrad. Here again, the doctoral student largely repeats the descriptions from the introduction and the first chapter, devoting too much attention to the listing of a number of archaeological sites from the fortified cores of the city, without, however, making any references to the literature. This largely shifts the focus of the dissertation from the necropolises to their context. In fact, the necropolises themselves are mentioned in an almost telegraphic style - with only two or three sentences, from which it is not clear what conclusions the PhD student has reached. The conclusions randomly presented in places, such as "the influence of Western art on Tarnovo through direct connections between the Tarnovo royal court and the western courts" are not supported by sufficient examples or references to literature, and there is no lack of such.

Later, Filip Petrunov adopted the alphabetical arrangement of the objects, probably to facilitate work with the catalog. Personally, I would choose a different approach for arrangement,

namely the zoning of the famous necropolises, for example along the right bank of the Danube, Stara Planina and the Black Sea coast. The settlement centers included in the study belong to different cultural-historical areas, albeit within the political boundaries of the Second Kingdom, which implies specific local customs, rituals and practices in relation to their adjacent necropolises. A comparative analysis based on such zoning would, in my opinion, only contribute to the purpose of the study.

In the following pages, the imbalance between the descriptions of the settlement centers, their layout and architecture, the history of their studies, and the descriptions of the necropolises themselves is more and more clearly highlighted, and it is in favor of the former. For a layman like me, this information is undeniably useful, but I think it could be shortened at a later stage. A similar imbalance is also observed in the presentation of the necropolises in whose research Filip Petrunov took part, compared to other necropolises with sufficiently comprehensive publications. Focusing on some of the considered necropolises at the expense of others risks incorrect conclusions and omissions, both in terms of the ritual and the demographic picture.

In general, this chapter, with its huge volume compared to the others, has the character of a catalog, despite its contributing moments, and could go at the end of the exposition with the necessary references to it.

Chapter Three, which is also the first analytical chapter, is devoted to necropolises in the context of medieval cities. An attempt is made at a typology based on their location in relation to the main elements of the city - 1. Necropolises around the churches; 2. Necropolises in citadels; 3. Necropolises in the suburbs. Filip Petrunov also makes a diachronic analysis of the changes in trends between the XIII and XIV centuries, deriving the thesis that in the last century the number of necropolises inside the city increased compared to the previous century. I would be skeptical about the alleged separation of neighborhoods according to social and professional principles for the cities of the Second Bulgarian Empire. Such zoning of cities, recorded in the Roman era, is difficult to prove in my opinion until the late Middle Ages.

Chapter Four is devoted to elite funeral practices and burial facilities and is definitely the most important in Filip Petrunov's dissertation. The overall summary of the practices of royal burials and the role of Tarnovgrad in their dissemination is in itself a significant contribution to Bulgarian historiography. I find it appropriate to look for analogies with early Christian practices in Byzantium and especially with the functions of the church "St. Forty martyrs" and the palace

church on Tsarevets hill with "St. Apostles" in Constantinople. In addition to the so-called "tomb churches", as unfortunate as this term seems to me, the doctoral student distinguishes two more types of elite burial practices: in niches and in sarcophagi and masonry tombs. The emphasis in this chapter is understandably placed on Tarnovgrad and the church "St. Forty Martyrs" on the one hand, and on the other on Kaliakra, in whose studies Philip Petrunov participated directly and presents us with his observations.

The Conclusion accurately summarizes the author's observations on the characteristics of urban necropolises from the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom and their relationship with the settlement context. The main problems and perspectives for future studies are also clearly outlined. The contributions brought out at the end of the conclusion, in my opinion, should not have a place there, but in the abstract to the dissertation work.

The presentation in the Catalog of data on study, ritual, archaeological materials and scientific literature, systematized according to general parameters, of a very large range of monuments from Bulgaria gives it a contributing character. Unfortunately, the frequent lack of references to it in the text greatly complicates its use in the process of working with the dissertation work.

The abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation work and meets the requirements for the preparation of a summarized presentation of the developed topic and the main observations.

Despite the critical remarks made, which are rather of a recommendatory nature for the future publication of the dissertation work, I believe that the doctoral student has coped enviably well with the set goals and I recommend the scientific jury to award Philip Bozhilov Petrunov an educational and scientific degree "doctor" in scientific field 2. "Humanities", professional direction 2.2 "History and archaeology".

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