

## STATEMENT

according to the procedure for the defense of a PhD thesis on

### **„Urban cemeteries from the era of the Second Bulgarian Empire”**

about the acquisition of educational and scientific degree PhD

from

PhD candidate: **Philip Bozhilov Petrunov**

Scientific field 2. Humanities

Professional field: **2.2. History and Archaeology**

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The dissertation presented by Philip Petrunov "Urban cemeteries from the Era of the Second Bulgarian Empire" is a result of research on the characteristics and peculiarities of cemeteries and funeral rites from the period of the late 12th - the end of the 14th century within the context of an urban medieval environment. There is a synthesis of a considerable amount of already known and published material, as well as personal studies of the PhD student, thought out and analyzed in a general study, which until now has been missing in Bulgarian historiography. The thesis contains 484 pages and consists of a text part (406 p.), illustrative appendices and statistical tables (77 p.).

The text is structured with a structured content, a main part that includes an introduction (pp. 12-22), four chapters that, along with the analytical part, also include a history of the studies (pp. 23-165), a conclusion (pp. 166-176), bibliography cited (pp. 177-236) and catalog (pp. 237-406). The illustrative part consists of thirteen Plates with the topography of the cemeteries, photographs of selected graves and photographs or drawings of parts of the burial facilities. As Appendix 5, a comparative table by catalog numbers, location, number of Cemeteries, number of graves, gender and age ratio, grave inventory, deviations from funeral practice and burial facilities is presented. No list of illustrations is presented, and the individual images in the panel are not numbered. An alphabetical index and a geographical index are also missing.

The layout is clear, the set of computer pages is legibly presented. In-text citations are in parentheses (Oxford and Harvard system), which is one of the accepted standards in archaeological publications.

The archaeology of Bulgarian Middle Ages, and especially the one of the Second Empire, has a long history, the beginning of which dates back to the middle of the 19th century. During the separate periods, there was a systematic decline and a respective increase towards the interest in monuments from the period of the 12th-14th cc. Fieldwork and analytical research on the medieval Bulgarian city and urban cemeteries in particular have definitely marked a growing intensity in the last half century, accumulating empirical material, giving the opportunity to summarize the old and new observations of Bulgarian archaeology from the point of view of the current level of knowledge, to apply innovative research methods and theoretical concepts. Philip Petrunov's study is an attempt in this direction, which makes the choice of this topic very appropriate.

In the Introduction, the PhD student presents several theoretical propositions regarding the character of Bulgarian medieval city. The one-sided scheme for the classification of urban centers, often applied in the past, has been criticized - political importance, economic role, craft-production functions, at the expense of the geographical and transport factors. The topic about the concept of "the city" in the Middle Ages is also under discussion. Here the PhD student unfairly attributes the emphasis on the economic characteristics of the city as product of Marxist historiography. In fact, this approach was developed by historians, geographers, political economists such as M. Weber or W. Christaller, whose models are also applicable to the Balkan urban centers and have nothing to do with Marxist ideology.

In this part, Ph. Petrunov also presents some theoretical concepts about cemeteries and their function during the era of the Second Bulgarian Empire. The burial complexes are related to the organization of the urban space and especially the Christian topography of the city and the church buildings. However, the appearance of cemeteries within the urban space should hardly be considered an "inherited tradition from the early Christian culture". The cult of Saints

and their relics is not an expression of respect for the dead. The early Christian martyria, around which graves were concentrated in late antiquity, were usually located outside the city, and the cemeteries from this period also marked the boundaries of the actual urban habitable area. The location of cemeteries within cities is a new practice for the Middle Ages and it should be explained in another way.

The goal of the dissertation is defined as a general elaboration, designed to arrange the published material till 2020. For the realization of this goal, clearly formulated specific tasks, as well as methods for solving them, have not been set. Bibliographic analysis, analysis of data from available material, analogical approach in drawing conclusions about the interpretation of information from empirical material are indicated as methodology. As eventual contributions in view of the goals, "the systematization and unification of everything published so far" and "enrichment of the picture from the era of the Second Bulgarian Empire in limited and insufficiently systematized published and interpreted material" are outlined.

The chronological scope is clearly outlined in terms of historical dates, whereby Ph. Petrunov in his archaeological research makes the stipulation that analogies will be used from both earlier and later periods.

The territorial scope of the dissertation is mainly limited to the territory of modern Bulgaria, with the arrangement that in fact there, and especially in the Balkan range region, was the territorial core of the medieval Bulgarian state. This theoretical formulation is logical one in view of the dynamically changing political boundaries of the Second Empire. However, this also leads to an underestimation of the Danubian centers, having a significant meaning in the economy and regional administration of the Realm. It would also be logical to examine the question of how "Bulgarian" were the cities in the southern part of the Western Black Sea during the period of the 13-14th century. The urban complexes, inclusion in which belong to different cultural-historical areas, which raises a series of the most important problems, of which this study is about their regionalization, which reflects specific local customs, rituals and practices - something that is characteristic of the heterogeneous in every sense a vast geographical and political territory known to us under the name "Bulgaria".

Chapter I (pp. 27-31) is dedicated to the historiographic review of the studies on the discussed issues in Bulgaria, and the analytical and critical review made can be listed among the contributing aspects of the dissertation. A natural place among the indicated archaeological sources for the reconstruction and organization of the urban system and cemetery complexes have found part of the studies of Ph. Petrunov in some inclusions in these centers and their graveyards.

Chapter II (pp. 32-124) covers the urban cemeteries that date back to the Era of the Second Empire from the territory of modern Bulgaria. Logically, according to the initially stated intentions, the analysis begins with the heart of the territorial core - Tarnograd (V. Tarnovo). The context to which the cemeteries of this significant, even by medieval standards, urban agglomeration belong is presented. This part repeats to some extent the data of Chapter I. Within the limit of a certain number of pages, significant archaeological sites from the fortified complexes or neighborhoods in Tarnograd are described without specific references from the bibliography. Such appear only at the end of each of them, and where there are established cemeteries, they are presented in a compact state, which makes it difficult to work with the study. From the numerous well-known and documented cemeteries of the capital city,

the PhD student gets to know in detail the complex near the church of "St. Forty Martyrs". Despite the presence of over 800 graves, the attention in the text is shifted to the most representative of them, namely the alleged "royal graves". In search for analogies with other graves of representatives of ruling or royal dynasties, the PhD student made a factual error - the graves discovered in the sector under the Diaconicon of the former Archbishopric church of Drastar have never been identified as "the wife and daughter of Tsar George I Terter" (p. . 43), but as the wife of the future despot Ivanko Terter and his daughter, who died during the plague epidemic. This error is corrected later on p. 61 and 103 in the actual analysis of the city's cemeteries.

The following complexes are analyzed and presented in alphabetical order. The cemeteries are examined on the basis of available information with descriptions of grave goods, position of skeletons, etc. The latter also provide an opportunity for the reconstruction of social differentiation, which the PhD student often replaces with the out-of-use term "class differentiation". Where possible, data from anthropological references were also used, which shed light on the demographic picture, gender and age variability, paleopathology and racial characteristics.

A certain imbalance in this bulky part is observed in two directions:

1. The descriptions of the architecture and urban planning, the history and chronology of some of the centers supersede those of the cemeteries associated with them. The existing discussions in the scientific literature about the historical-topographical development, even the localization of some medieval cities, are not reflected, which shows that the doctoral student uncritically accepts only part of the published information. In view of the problematic presented in the work on the question "What is a city?", settlements with a controversial status in this regard are included in this category.
2. The mere representation of some Cemeteries (most often discovered in studies in which the author himself participated) is disproportionately large compared to others, whose publications can also claim to be comprehensive. This risks omissions regarding important details of the funeral rite that may shed more light on regional differences.

In Chapter II, the PhD student unreservedly uses the term "feudal center" for some of the cities, which is also controversial today, since in the Second Kingdom there was a feudal system, implying hereditary titles, possessions and autonomy from the central authority.

Chapter III presents an attempt at a typology of Cemeteries according to their location and situatedness around iconic urban topos and/or spaces. According to this indicator, three groups of Cemeteries are distinguished - 1. Cemeteries around Christian temples; 2. Cemeteries in citadels; 3. Cemeteries in the suburbs. These Cemeteries have their dynamics of change, which is well expressed from the time of the 13th to the late 14th century.

Chapter IV describes "elitist practices and burial facilities of the upper aristocracy." Ph. Petrunov begins his research with analogies from Byzantium, as the search and exposition of them was done for the first time in the dissertation. The reference is to the beginning of the early Christian period with the introduction of the practice of laying emperors in the specially built church "St. Apostles", originally located outside the fortified area of Constantinople. In historiography, the discussion about the date of construction of this temple is an old one and there is still no consensus about the question of which emperor has initiated the construction or when the remains of Emperor Constantine I have been laid within. In general, the idea about

building mausoleums for imperial persons in an urban environment is not a new one. The new point is that these burial facilities also fulfill the role of churches or were converted into churches later (Santa Constanta in Rome, the mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, the mausoleum of Galerius in Thessalonica, etc.). Porphyry, the material used to make the sarcophagi, is closely associated with imperial monuments of all kinds. Porphyry is not a marble, as repeatedly claimed in this section, but an intrusive rock composed of a fine-grained groundmass with inclusions of quartz, feldspar, and mica. Its processing is difficult, which also provides the creation of a specific clean or "austere" style, which is also transmitted to the monuments made later from another material, i.e. in Byzantium there is continuity with the late antique tradition. The data about sculptured tombstones of Bulgarian rulers from the middle of the 13th – 14th cc. could be hardly related to Byzantine influence, but rather to Central and Western European effigies.

The search for an analogy with the functions of the church "St. Forty Martyrs" and the Palace church on Tsarevets hill with "St. Apostles" is justified one. Other interesting analogies are made with earlier monuments or those outside the territorial scope of the dissertation. Three types of burial facilities have been distinguished, which could be attributed to persons from the elitist societies of the Second Empire, whose interpretation is difficult due to their ruined state. Searching for analogous monuments, whether closer or further away, is a proper approach – something the PhD student has done thoroughly.

In the "Conclusion" part, the observations about the preferred characteristics of urban necropolises in the studied chronological and territorial range are summarized once again, the connection with the settlement context is emphasized. Challenges are identified and perspectives for future research are outlined. The goals set at the beginning have been partially fulfilled, which may be explained by the fact that an attempt was made to summarize significant, but varied in its publication quality, information.

Future development of the topic needs to expand the quantitative analysis, reflected through the relevant statistical tables and graphs. Without such an analysis, the summary of the characteristics of funeral rites from the era of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom remains incomplete.

The catalog is an integral part of the dissertation. It includes in descriptive form information about the analyzed studies through excavation sites. The data are systematized according to general parameters – site, location, attribution and brief description, type of research, archaeological materials and publications. The frequent lack of references to the illustrations in the analytical part makes working with the dissertation along the line - analytical text - catalog - sample board difficult.

The Abstract reflects the correct content of dissertation and meets the requirements for the preparation of the presentation of the summary of the topic and main observations. The stated contributions of the dissertation objectively reflect its qualities.

After getting acquainted with those presented in the procedure of the dissertation work and based on the above, I recommend to the scientific commission to award to Philip Bozhilov Petrunov an educational and scientific degree "PhD" in scientific field 2. "Humanities", professional direction 2.2 "History and archaeology".

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Author of the Statement:

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