

STATEMENT

written by Prof. Dr. Ivelin Argirov Ivanov, lecturer at the Faculty of History of UVT "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" on Rangel Georgiev Mladenov's dissertation thesis "THE FALL OF THE SECOND BULGARIAN STATE UNDER OTTOMAN RULE: HISTORICAL DISCOURSE AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS", developed at the Department of History of New Bulgarian University.

Scientific field: 2. Humanities

Professional direction: 22. History and archaeology

Scientific specialty: Historical studies

Research supervisor: Prof. Momchil Metodiev.

Significance of the research problem

The issue of the fall of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom under Ottoman rule has been interpreted many times in Bulgarian and foreign historiography, but mostly from the perspective of modern secular historiography. Thus, the issue posed in this way implies a new look at the topic and an original hypothesis. At the same time, the thesis focuses on an obvious and difficult-to-resolve contradiction, since the modern historical discourse and the medieval theological interpretations are significantly different in the analysis of these dramatic events for the Balkan Christians.

Justification of the objectives and tasks in the dissertation work

This study presents a comprehensive introductory part. The author directs the analysis on the late medieval and early renaissance ideas about the reasons that led to the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans and the subsequent Ottoman rule. Also, Rangel Mladenov sets the presentation of the events and processes in question through the eyes of the chroniclers of the period XIV-XVIII centuries as the main goal of the thesis. Next, he formulates the position of contemporaries of the period in question, that the fall of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom was a result of God's wrath as the main working hypothesis. According to the doctoral candidate, all written sources expressed the attitude that the Ottoman conquest happened because of sins committed and apostasy from God's ways. The scientific hypothesis directs the research on the spiritual-religious climate in Bulgaria as a factor for the crisis of Bulgarian society, and hence

for the provoked wrath of God. This working hypothesis is emphasized several times in the course of the exposition, and the doctoral candidate emphasizes the direct connection of these attitudes in the core of the biblical context and biblical stereotypes.

An important element in Rangel Mladenov's main thesis is that the concept of "slavery" was imposed precisely by these medieval Christian authors and thus reaches the present day. According to the candidate, it is rooted in the Christian belief that the Ottoman conquest was a manifestation of God's wrath. In this regard, the main topic of the study is directed to biblical reminiscences in late medieval and early modern written sources.

In direct connection with this, the author sets one of the main tasks in his thesis – to trace the origin of the idea of retribution and to what extent it is biblically loaded. The main goal of Rangel Mladenov's doctoral thesis is to trace how the medieval biblical model becomes a secularized history in the context of the issue of the Ottoman conquest.

Correspondence between the research methodology and the goal and tasks of the dissertation work

The author clearly and in detail formulates the research methods, emphasizing the textological and text-critical analysis of the written sources used – the comparative method, the historical-analytical, the theological-critical method, the chronological method, etc. In the dissertation, there is a correspondence between the research methods stated in the introductory part and the realization of the set goals and tasks. I would underline that Rangel Mladenov emphasizes the theological-critical approach in the analysis of historical events and their interpretation by modern and late medieval authors.

Scientific contributions of the dissertation thesis

Next, in my statement on the dissertation work, I would note the main contributions of the author. According to Rangel Mladenov, the biblical model is not only convincing but also relevant to the Bulgarian historical context. It is through such a prism that medieval authors refracted historical events in their writings. For them, the world, and history in particular, seen through the prism of the biblical model, is a world of God's election, providentialism, theology, and eschatology – a world that the medieval Bulgarian writer connects with the interpretation of the past and thus creates the biblical model of written medieval history.

Among the contributions, I would also note the author's emphasis on the impact of the plague epidemic (the Black Death of the 14th century) and climate changes on Bulgarian society on the eve of and during the Ottoman conquest (p. 157). The thesis is not new, but with the current dissertation, it is once again imposed in Bulgarian historiography.

The third and fourth chapters in the dissertation is a focal point, dedicated to the Ottoman invasion through the eyes of contemporaries and the invasion in the works of early modern historiography from the 15th-18th centuries. In these two chapters, the doctoral candidate emphasizes the concept of the corporate sinfulness of a nation. The author brings it out convincingly, citing the works of several writers from the period of the conquest and the following centuries. According to Rangel Mladenov, from the era of Tsamblak to the time of Paisius, the Bulgarian people held the belief that the Ottomans conquered the Balkans because of the apostasy of Christians from God. In other words, the Balkan peoples, and the Bulgarians in particular, perceived the Ottoman invasion as the result of their spiritual retreat (p. 290-291).

The author also emphasizes that apocalyptic notions of the doomsday were based on the Byzantine calendar, according to which at the end of the "seventh century" from Creation (7000th year = 1492) Eastern Orthodox Christians expected the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. The beginning of this eschatological seventh century began in 1392 and coincided with the fall of Tarnovo a year later. It is from this perspective that late medieval authors explain what was happening in the Balkans, and in particular the fall of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom. (p. 267)

Next, I would highlight the frequent presence of a personal stance of the doctoral candidate. Analyzing late medieval Hesychasm, Rangel Mladenov states that in the face of all the teachings tolerated until then, Hesychasm saw in them a threat to its existence and that it was Hesychasm that initiated the church councils against heretics in late medieval Bulgaria (p. 143).

Also, according to the doctoral candidate, there is reason to assume that Euthymius' reforms were most likely not that beneficial for Bulgarian society (p. 229-230). A personal position is also observed in subchapter four of the first chapter. Here the author notes that if for the contemporaries of the conquest and the Ottoman rule, Bulgarians were indeed in slavery, then we must also accept this assessment since it was given by the contemporaries.

Assessment of the publications. Bibliography and notes.

There are seven scientific publications written by the author on the subject of the dissertation. This is indicative both of deep interest in the issue and publication activity of Rangel Mladenov. The bibliography of the doctoral thesis includes over 150 printed publications, monographs, and studies. 98 journal, articles, and various print and online periodicals were also used. The research is based on the interpretation of over 45 written sources. Bibliographical sources in Bulgarian, English, Spanish, Italian, German, Russian, Serbian, Turkish, and French were also used. The notes are precise and accurate. All this testifies to a real scientific approach and the research methodology of the author.

Statements, recommendations, and notes

Next, I would like to include some remarks and recommendations on the presented dissertation thesis. First, I would like to point out that, in my opinion, the Second Bulgarian Tsardom is a more appropriate name than the Second Bulgarian State. Also, I would correct a name of a monastery used by the author – *Kelifarevski* Monastery (actually *Kilifarevski* Monastery, p. 11.)

Next, I consider the description of the structure and content in the introductory part (p. 47-55) superfluous, since this task is completed in the dissertation abstract. I would also disagree with the doctoral student's criticism of Paisius's thesis about the lack of historical Bulgarian writings and chronicles lost in the destruction and fires of the Ottoman conquest (p. 60-62). It is logical to assume that Paisius, who was closer to the fateful 14th century, had more reliable information than we do but the parallels with the Catholic world indicate that medieval manuscripts survived thanks to active copying over the centuries (something that was significantly hampered in the Bulgarian lands after the Ottoman conquest).

Also, in the subchapter presenting heresies as a factor in the spiritual climate on the eve of the conquest, I consider the thesis about the role of Hesychasm as a factor that weakened the Bulgarian resistance forces to be controversial. Among the notes to the author, I would also add the criticism of worshiping the relics of saints (p. 133). I believe that the theological arguments presented by Rangel Mladenov and the reference to the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 2:5). appear logical, but outside the scope of the dissertation.

Next, I see a certain contradiction between the presentation of the historical discourse of the Ottoman invasion and the conquest of the Balkans in the second chapter and the main thesis of the dissertation. In my opinion, the presentation of the facts of the Ottoman conquest is unnecessary.

In conclusion, I believe that the presented doctoral thesis has an original and contributing character. Despite the above notes and recommendations, I think that the author has carried out an impressive scientific study and formulated significant conclusions. Based on all of the above said up to this point, I express my positive assessment and vote in favor of awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Rangel Georgiev Mladenov.

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