

STATEMENT

by Ivan Dimitrov Valchev, PhD, Associate Professor in Classical Archaeology at the Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, member of the Scientific Jury according to order No 138 ПД 16/ 02.12.2024 of the Director of the Institute of Balkan Studies with a Centre of Thracology – BAS,

concerning the defence of the dissertation of **Milen Krasimirov Markov** for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, with the title: “Arianism in Southeast Europe in the 4th century”, with supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Zlatomira Gerdzhikova, PhD (Institute of Balkan Studies with a Center of Thracology–BAS)

Milen Markov’s dissertation is devoted to a subject that has not been the focus of a thorough examination in Bulgarian historiography: the dissemination and proliferation of Arianism across the Balkan Peninsula during the 4th century. The study is situated within the broader context of the Christianization of the Balkans at the inception of Late Antiquity, a subject that has attracted significant attention in numerous international research initiatives, including some with Bulgarian involvement (<https://danubius.huma-num.fr/en/about/>; <https://haemus-network.univ-lille.fr/>).

The dissertation is structured logically, beginning with an introduction, followed by five analytical chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography, amounting to a total of 300 computer pages. The introduction delineates the objectives of the study, justifies the chronological and territorial scope, clarifies the terminology, presents the primary research methods, and offers a concise yet substantial historiographic review of both ancient sources and modern research on the topic of the doctoral thesis.

The initial two chapters of the dissertation (“Arianism – essence, main trends and periodization” and “The religious policy of the Roman emperors in the 4th century towards Arianism”) adopt a more general approach, introducing the reader to the issues and situating the events in Southeastern Europe within a broader context.

In the third chapter, entitled "The Diffusion of Arianism into Southeast Europe" (pp. 124–153), Milen Markov presents a theoretical model that explores the penetration of Arianism into the Balkans, including an examination of the potential pathways for its dissemination (pp. 124–125). This model includes information about direct or indirect connections of the Balkans with Egypt,

Syria and the Asia Minor provinces of the Roman Empire (pp. 134). It is here that archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic artefacts are most widely used. The main source of information is the data on the spread of the so-called Eastern cults and the composition of collective coin finds from the first decades of the 4th century. In support of his claims, the doctoral student also utilizes other artifacts, including lead seals (p. 146), glass *unguentaria* (p. 149), and ceramic lamps (p. 152). The author demonstrates familiarity with the scholarship on these subjects. However, it is important to acknowledge that inscriptions are not consistently referenced in accordance with the primary corpus editions of Georgi Mihailov (*Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae*. Vols I–V. Sofia, 1958–1997) and of Veselin Beshevliev (*Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien*. Berlin, 1964). Milen Markov exercises caution when handling archaeological material, recognizing the limitations of coins as evidence for direct trade contacts between the minting cities and the Balkan lands where the artifacts were discovered (p. 147). Concluding this chapter, the doctoral student acknowledges the potential role of preexisting trade, economic, and cultural connections between Southeast Europe and the eastern provinces, which are considered the epicentre of the Arian doctrine's emergence and dissemination, in facilitating the penetration of Arianism into the Balkans. The hypothesis proposed by the author appears to be both logical and tenable, as evidenced by the examples provided.

The primary section of Chapter Four, entitled “Development of Arianism in Southeastern Europe in the 4th Century” (pp. 154–212), offers a comprehensive review of the extant literature concerning the dissemination of Arianism in the urban centres of the Balkan Peninsula. The Arian bishops identified in written records are predominantly from the northern regions of the Balkans, and consequently, the focus is directed towards these regions, particularly the cities within the dioceses of Thrace and Dacia. M. Markov's primary source material is written records, although he also draws upon a number of archaeological monuments, particularly those pertaining to Philippopolis, including the mosaics from the episcopal basilica (p. 184) and data on the development of the city's necropolises (p. 185). While the utilization of these “archaeological” sources is deemed suitable for Philippopolis, in the case of a small single-nave church situated in proximity to the Roman villa in the Chataalka area, Stara Zagora region (p. 189), Markov's approach entails the employment of publications wherein the authors proffer their hypotheses within the broader historical context, eschewing detailed stratigraphic observations on the ground. The text makes mention of Christian martyrs in Thrace from the 1st century in several places — in Augusta Traiana (p. 187) and Marcianopolis (p. 190). However, the author refrains from offering

commentary on these accounts, given that both cities were not established until the reign of Emperor Trajan, or potentially even later.

Chapter Five, titled “The Goths and Arianism in Southeast Europe” (pp. 213–253), delves into the intricacies of Arianism’s diffusion among Gothic populations that settled south of the Danube River. The chapter particularly focuses on the endeavours of the Gothic bishop Wulfila. His personal history has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry for multiple decades, resulting in a substantial corpus of academic literature. However, the examination of archaeological evidence pertaining to the Gothic presence south of the Danube has only recently garnered scholarly attention. In the discussion of the places inhabited by Wulfila’s Goths, M. Markov also draws on data on the so-called Gothic episcopal complex near the village of Khan Krum in the Shumen region (p. 226). In this instance the author has restricted himself to quoting the opinion of the particular researcher, yet without even stating the arguments for this interpretation.

The conclusion (pp. 254–260) offers a synopsis and synthesis of the primary results achieved by Milen Markov in the preceding analytical chapters of his dissertation.

The abstract accurately encapsulates the content of the dissertation. The scientific contributions are presented accurately. However, with regard to the initial contribution, it should be noted that the analysis does not exclusively address the religious policy of the fourth-century emperors, but rather focuses on Christianity and, more specifically, Arianism.

Milen Markov is the author of five publications directly related to the topic of the dissertation. Notably, all of these publications are now out of print. One of them is published abroad. This clearly demonstrates that Markov has met the minimum requirements set forth in the ZRASB and the regulations to the law.

The dissertation submitted for review is the author’s work of Milen Markov, and there were no indications of plagiarism in the text.

In essence, the dissertation of Milen Markov is in full compliance with the stipulated criteria for the award of a doctoral degree, as well as the established requirements of the ZRASB. In light of these considerations, I hereby express my firm support for the conferral of the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” to doctoral student Milen Krasimirov Markov.

Sofia,

4 February 2025.

Assoc. Prof. Ivan Valchev, PhD