

REVIEW

of the dissertation for obtaining the
educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Author of the dissertation: Milen Krasimirov Markov, full-time doctoral student in the "Medieval Balkans" section at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Title: *"Arianism in Southeastern Europe during the 4th century",*

Supervisor: Associate Professor Dr. Zlatomira Gerdzhikova (Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Reviewer: Associate Professor Dr. Ivo Simeonov Topalilov (Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology "Prof. Alexander Fol" – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Milen Markov graduated with a Master's degree in Law from Burgas Free University in 1998. In 2011, he completed a parallel course of study at the Sofia Theological Seminary "St. John of Rila," and in 2020, he completed a course at the Orthodox Theological Academy "Sts. Cyril and Methodius" in Plovdiv. From January 2019 to 2022, he was a full-time doctoral student in the "Medieval Balkans" section, within the professional field *2.2 History and Archaeology*, specializing in Medieval General History at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Thracology – BAS. During his studies, in addition to specialized courses, he also completed Latin and Ancient Greek.

The reviewed dissertation consists of a total of 300 pages. The main text includes an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography of sources and literature, with a clear and logical structure.

The topic is original and has not previously been the subject of such a comprehensive study in academic literature, incorporating an interdisciplinary approach. It examines the major theological dispute in Christianity during the 4th century, which, at certain moments, challenged the unity of the Christian Church, especially after its institutionalization, with a focus on the northern Balkans. This is significant, as some of the bishops between Constantinople and Sirmium were among the most influential representatives of Arianism in the second half of the 4th century. Moreover, as the doctoral candidate clearly presents, this dispute (or disputes) cannot be viewed as purely theological but also carries a distinct political

dimension, given the Church's importance to the empire, leading to direct imperial intervention.

Undoubtedly, the research topic is highly relevant, and its territorial scope is further emphasized by the inclusion of the imperial capital—Constantinople.

In the introduction (pp. 5-30), the goals and tasks of the study are presented, along with its chronological scope (from 343 to 395 AD) and territorial coverage, which includes the dioceses of Thrace, Macedonia, Dacia, and Illyricum. The issues of terminology and the applied methodology are clearly justified. The introduction is accompanied by a brief presentation of the ancient sources and contemporary research that will be taken into account and discussed in the analytical part of the dissertation.

The first chapter (pp. 31-69) is dedicated to Arianism, its essence, main currents, and periodization. It presents and analyzes the key aspects of the development of this complex and diverse doctrine and movement, its principal currents and theological debates, as well as the participants who contributed to its formation as a doctrine—often in opposition to their adversaries and, at times, in close association with imperial involvement in these disputes.

Although the chapter has a summarizing character, the doctoral candidate's ability to conduct an academic and in-depth study of this intricate and specific subject matter is already evident. The candidate successfully navigates the complex processes of identifying different groups, their interactions, and the sequence of events while examining the main causes and consequences. Additionally, he expresses his own perspectives and opinions on a topic that remains highly debated in scholarly literature.

In order to fully reveal Arianism as both a doctrine and a movement—inasmuch as this is possible—it is necessary to examine the official religious policies of the emperors toward Christianity as a whole and Arianism in particular. This is the focus of Chapter Two (pp. 70-123). The close connection between the emperors and the theological conflict under discussion is clearly determined by the fact that nearly all emperors during this period were Christians, as well as by the role of the Christian Church in the political life of the empire and the emperors' intentions.

Like the first chapter, this one also has a broader, introductory character, guiding the reader through an analysis of the church policies of Roman emperors from Constantine I to Theodosius I, considering the emperor's authority to shape state policies in various aspects of public life, particularly in the realm of religion. In fact, some emperors—such as Constantine

I, Constantius II, and Valens—played a key role in attempts to regulate church conflicts and shape imperial policy toward Arianism at different points in the fourth century. The involvement of these three emperors in particular was influenced not only by the fact that they were Christians (as were most emperors of this period, except Julian) but also by their personal connections to the issue for various reasons. This chapter clearly outlines their specific actions and initiatives aimed at establishing a unified Christian dogma.

What the doctoral candidate does particularly well—and what demonstrates his deep understanding of the subject—is his nuanced analysis of each emperor’s policy toward the Arian controversy and the participants on both sides. He explores the underlying causes, interconnections, and consequences of their policies.

In this context, however, I would disagree with the characterization of punitive actions allegedly carried out by Julian against cities with predominantly Christian populations, such as Caesarea in Cappadocia and Antioch (pp. 104-105). In the first case, for example, it was a matter of restoring destroyed temples and imposing compensation for the use of building materials taken from pagan temples, as well as penalties related to the burning of the Temple of Apollo in Daphne. In both cases—and in others as well—his actions should be understood in the context of his role as *pontifex maximus*, a title also held by Constantius II, who had issued several edicts against the looting of pagan temples by Christians for building materials. In reality, these measures were limited in both time and scope and do not fit into the broader framework of imperial religious policy, which, as the candidate himself demonstrates, had a different overall goal. In fact, even the religious policies of his successors, such as Valentinian I, followed the same principle of the emperor acting as *pontifex maximus*.

Without underestimating what the doctoral candidate has written so far, the most significant contributions of his dissertation can be found in the next three chapters.

In the third chapter (pp. 124–153), the possible ways of the penetration and subsequent spread of Arianism in the Diocese of Thrace between 318 and 343 AD are examined. According to the doctoral candidate, these ways were both direct and indirect, linking the region to the main Arian centers—Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor (particularly Bithynia), and, not least, through the influence of key figures such as Eusebius of Nicomedia and even Arius himself, who, during his exile in Illyricum, was able to disseminate his teachings and gain new supporters.

Accordingly, the main Arian centers—though the term must be used with caution—within the Diocese of Thrace included Heraclea (ancient Perinthus), Anchialos, Hadrianopolis, Philippopolis, Augusta Traiana, Amantia, Naissus, Ratiaria, Singidunum, and Mursa. Given that Christianity already had an established presence in these centers, the spread of Arianism is traced through their connections with established Arian strongholds. Its penetration occurred through merchants, the settlement of large population groups from the eastern provinces of the Balkan Peninsula (which had already contributed to the broader spread of Christianity in the late third and early fourth centuries), as well as the military and veterans, albeit in more limited numbers.

To apply his theoretical model, Milen Markov skillfully integrates written sources with archaeological, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence. Without a doubt, only through a comprehensive analysis of all available sources and materials can the subject be thoroughly explored, yielding concrete results—not only due to the complexity of the topic but also because of the scarcity of available evidence. However, the formulation of a theoretical model for the spread of Arianism in the region seems somewhat ambitious.

Based on the analysis, it is evident that the doctoral candidate is well-versed in the primary literature on the subject, though some key publications are not utilized in certain areas. This applies, for example, to epigraphic sources, where the corpora of Georgi Mihailov (*Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae*, Vol. I–V, Sofia, 1958–1997) and Veselin Beshevliev (*Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien*, Berlin, 1964) are missing, as well as to archaeological materials. However, this omission does not affect his overall judgment.

For instance, he is entirely correct in asserting that coins cannot be considered definitive proof of direct trade relations between the cities that minted them and the regions in the Diocese of Thrace where they were discovered (p. 147). The conclusion that the spread of Arianism was facilitated by "trade, economic, cultural, and everyday factors (including the migration of population groups) from Arian centers to the Balkans" (p. 153) appears logical and well-founded.

Perhaps a brief examination of the pronounced religious syncretism among the local population would have been beneficial in understanding both the relatively swift adoption of Arianism in the region and the persistence of some of its core tenets into the first half and mid-fifth century. Notably, the origins of the migrant groups found in Thrace as early as the

second quarter of the second century AD—and possibly even earlier, in the latter half of the first century—are linked to the same regions where Arian strongholds were located, particularly Syria and, even more so, Bithynia. The connections between Bithynia and Thrace were especially strong, dating back to the pre-Roman era.

Following the logical progression of the study, the next chapter—Chapter Four—examines *The Development of Arianism in Southeastern Europe during the Fourth Century* (pp. 154–212). This section provides an analytical review of both direct and indirect evidence regarding the spread and evolution of Arianism in cities across the Balkan Peninsula. It discusses the active role of Arian leaders, the organization of councils, interactions between different Arian sees, their relations with imperial and local authorities, and the broader context in which Arianism developed.

A notable aspect of the analysis is the uneven distribution of references in the written sources, particularly the near-total absence of information on the bishops of Philippopolis. Since written sources form the primary basis of M. Markov's study, he compensates for this gap by incorporating findings from archaeological excavations. However, regarding the mosaics from the episcopal (metropolitan) basilica of Philippopolis, the candidate appears to have placed excessive trust in the hypothesis that *"the new mosaics in the episcopal basilica at the beginning of the following century were intended to erase the memory of the city's former bishop, Eutychian, who hosted the Council of Philippopolis"* (p. 184).

This interpretation is certainly intriguing and attractive, but the latest research on the mosaic floors suggests a different objective—one that was unlikely to involve the deliberate erasure of Eutychian's legacy. First, the early mosaics discovered thus far cannot be definitively linked to Arianism, despite multiple attempts to establish such a connection. Second, the location of the dedicatory inscription of the Philippopolis bishop ...*kianus* (likely Markianus or Lukianus) in the central panel of the southern nave—dating to the time of Theodosius I, when some Arian-associated monuments may have been subjected to *damnatio memoriae*—suggests that the central nave featured a motif that could not be removed or defaced. In reality, the replacement of the basilica's mosaic floors was a gradual process completed in the first half of the fifth century, following well-established trends in mosaic iconography.

In the analysis presented, there is a noticeable tendency to uncritically accept certain ecclesiastical traditions. A prime example of this is the connection between the Apostle Carpus

and Augusta Trajana during the early penetration of Christianity into Thrace (p. 130). The skepticism here arises not only from the potential confusion with the Macedonian city of Beroea/Veria, which occurs frequently, but also because the city of Augusta Trajana did not exist during Carpus's time as a disciple of the Apostles. A similar case arises with Marcianopolis (p. 190), where there is an over-reliance on the Menologion of Basil II, which, as is well-known, altered existing church traditions.

The research in this chapter is one of the central parts of Milen Markov's dissertation and reveals the possibility of a well-established network of Arian bishops in the Balkans. However, whether Constantinople (p. 259) was the center of this network remains unclear, and it seems unlikely that the establishment of the episcopate and the orthodox bishop in Constantinople, ranked second after Rome, was intended to counteract the Arian trend.

In order for the study of Arianism in the Diocese of Thrace to be comprehensive, it should also address the issue of Arianism's penetration among the Gothic groups who settled south of the Danube. This is done in *Chapter Five*, titled "*The Goths and Arianism in Southeastern Europe*" (pp. 213-253). This chapter explores the issues related to the spread of Christianity among the Goths, the creation and localization of the so-called "*Gothic Diocese*", and particularly the life and work of Bishop Ulfilas as both a secular and spiritual leader, with emphasis on his religious views, his belonging to the Homoian group, his position within the Church structure, his relationships with the emperor, and his role in shaping the Gothic Arian Christian identity. This is achieved by examining his influence over the remaining Goths who migrated into the Roman Empire during the reign of the Roman emperor Valens.

The doctoral candidate concludes that Ulfilas did not hold the episcopate in Nicopolis ad Istrum, instead being its chorepiscopus. Ulfilas is considered a full bishop, but one solely associated with the Goths (p. 230). By analyzing existing written sources and archaeological facts through the lens of the canons of the Second Ecumenical Council, the conclusion is reached that the Goths, as Arians, were excluded from the Church during the reign of Theodosius I and his sons Arcadius and Honorius. They continued to maintain connections with Arian communities in the Empire for a relatively extended period (p. 214).

In the conclusion (pp. 254-260), Milen Markov summarizes the results achieved during the research while writing the dissertation.

The abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation. The scientific contributions presented are also correctly outlined, except for the first one, which concerns

more the religious policy of the emperors of the 4th century, particularly towards Christians and especially Arians, rather than its entirety.

Milen Markov is the author of five scientific publications directly related to the dissertation's topic, which have been published. They are in both Bulgarian and foreign journals, and in this regard, Markov unquestionably meets the minimum scientometric requirements set by the ZRASB and the regulations of the law.

The submitted dissertation is the original work of Milen Markov, and no signs of plagiarism were found in it.

Considering all of this, and due to the fact that the dissertation represents a profound and academically study, in which the author demonstrates erudition, a deep understanding of this complex topic, and orientation within it, as well as the presentation and argumentation of his own observations and ideas—including the creation of certain models that could be used in similar cases and research— I recommend to the academic jury to award Milen Krasimirov Markov the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

Sofia,

08.02.2025

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