OPINION

of Prof. Petar Angelov

***On the dissertation of Ekaterina Krasimirova Angelova "The church policy of Bulgaria between the union of Tsar Kaloyan and the restoration of the Bulgarian Patriarchate" for the award of the educational and scientific degree „PhD”.***

In my opinion I will draw attention to several basic things, the evaluation of which is of particular importance when forming a certain opinion about the qualities of a dissertation work. a problem which, as can be seen from the Introduction of the dissertation, has been the object of considerable interest by our and foreign scientists. This, of course, does not at all cancel the possibility of posing the problem once again, especially when some lesser-known historical works have already been published in circulation and accordingly there are new interpretations related to the church policy of The Asen dynasty. In this specific case it can be said that a more substantial generalizing historical exposition was presented to the attention of the esteemed jury, which is based both on already known and repeatedly commented source material, and on new publications.

Another important point in the assessment of the presented dissertation is related to the qualities of its structure. In my opinion, it has a clear and logical structure that includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, two appendices and a list of sources and scientific literature used.

I want to pay special attention to the introduction. At the beginning, this part of any doctoral work is among the important indicators of whether the doctoral students are sufficiently aware of what they will research and how they will research it. Unfortunately, I have sometimes encountered examples showing that the dissertations are provided with introductions written formally and it is not clear whether the authors have understood the problem, which does not prevent them from claiming that their work represents almost the first attempt at researching a given issue. Fortunately, in this case the situation is different. Ekaterina Angelova is aware of what she has gotten herself into. She has tried to present, albeit briefly, clearly defined goals, and then, without pretending to be comprehensive, to make a brief review of the main historical sources of domestic and foreign origin in her Introduction. Here I would recommend that the list of foreign sources must be supplemented with the Acts of the Ohrid Archdiocese, which are an important source for some of the problems under consideration. In the introduction, following the classical scheme, several pages dedicated to our and foreign historiography of the problem are accordingly set aside. There is an effort to achieve comprehensiveness mainly in terms of names and publications, beginning with the Renaissance and continuing to the present day. Obviously faced with the impossibility of delving too much into the analysis of the historiographic heritage, the author has contented herself with highlighting only some of the more important problems and controversial issues that are discussed by various scholars regarding the church policy of The Asen dynasty. In fact, a large part of these problems is analyzed in more detail in the separate chapters of the exhibition. In my opinion, it would have been appropriate for the author to emphasize the most significant names from our historiographic heritage for the expense of others with a more modest, not to say controversial, contribution to the issue under consideration.

A general look at the content of the individual chapters shows that the narrative is based on a very good knowledge of the sources and shows skills for analytical interpretation. The most essential moments in the diplomacy of King Kaloyan with the Roman Church are highlighted. The complex reasons that led to the conclusion of the union and its consequences for Bulgarian society are also analyzed. Due attention has been given to various hypotheses and opinions regarding the meaning of the union. The author reflects on the problem whether this union reflects and changes the liturgical practice of the Bulgarian church or it remains only a formal act. The author definitely takes the side of those scholars who tend to see the union as something more than only a purely political union, which legalized the power of the Bulgarian ruler and brought recognition of the autocephaly of the Bulgarian archbishop Basil.

The arguments regarding the role and significance of the anti-Bogomil council convened in 1211, and what is the meaning of the definition "orthodox" found in the sources, also deserve attention. In our opinion, the author takes the more logical position that the convening of such a council was not an attempt to break the union, but rather that the term "orthodox" was probably added later in the Synodical transcripts. It is also logical to think that this council was convened by Tsar Boril largely under the pressure of that part of the Bulgarian clergy, which was reserved to the union. It is no coincidence that Archbishop Basil was not present at the council.

The style of the exposition, taking into account different points of view and built on a broad factual basis, is preserved in the third chapter of the dissertation. The events that led to the breakup of the union and the convening of the Council of Lampsak in 1235 are examined in a broad all-Balkan and European context. The skillful diplomacy of Tsar Ivan Assen II and his ability to maneuver successfully between his most important foreign policy partners such as the Latin Empire of Nicaea, Epirus, Hungary, and Serbia are appreciated. A good knowledge of the sources and the various hypotheses in our and foreign historiography about the reasons that led to the breakup of the union has been demonstrated. The author also pays attention to the place of the Ohrid Archbishopric in the complex processes of a political and religious nature that developed in the Balkans during the first half of the 13th century.

The two appendices at the end of the dissertation condense, mainly from a factual and partly from a conceptual nature, the problems analyzed in the main text. In other words, they help to highlight more clearly the place of Hungary and Serbia in the ecclesiastical politics of The Asen dynasty. However, this has inevitably led to certain unnecessary repetitions of some of the facts analyzed in the individual chapters of the dissertation.

Personally, I expected more from the conclusion, which seems somewhat formal and superficial to me. I wanted it to go beyond the simple retelling of some events and flagging problems, and to emphasize more on the main results of the research and on the original contributions of the author.

In conclusion, I believe that Ekaterina Angelova, regardless of the lack of sufficient depth in the analysis of some individual sources and the hesitation to take a more categorical side on some of the problems, has successfully coped with her tasks. The dissertation meets all the requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor", so I recommend to the esteemed jury to vote positively that this degree be awarded to Ekaterina Krasimirova Angelova.