

STATEMENT

on Doctoral (scientific and educational) degree
to Tencho Pavlov Karagyozov

for the PhD-dissertation “*Ethnic and Religious Identity in the Context of the Late Medieval Legal System – the Periphery of the Latin West (13th – 14th Centuries)*”

Professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (‘Medieval History’ – mediaeval pre-modern identities in Western and Central Europe)

PhD-student Tencho Karagyozov graduated from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (BA-degree in History, 2020). He got subsequently a master’s degree (in 2021) from the same university studying in the MA-program on Antiquity and the Middle Ages (focusing on medieval studies). In 2022, he entered the PhD-program at the Faculty of History of the same university working on a project/text that is the subject of this statement. Currently, he teaches history and civilizations at the 93rd School “Prof. Alexander Teodorov-Balan” in Sofia.

Structure:

The text provided by Mr. Karagyozov has the following *structure*: Introduction, 4 chapters (the first one is devoted to theoretical issues), Conclusion, Primary sources and Literature. The cited *Sources* number 58 titles, and the *Literature* consists of 354 titles – undoubtedly quite a serious number of primary and secondary literature for the degree of “Doctor”. The structure is very well thought out and leaves no doubt that it is the result of in-depth knowledge of the topic.

As expected, the methodology of the study relies on both the complex and interdisciplinary approaches, looking for the intersections between major theoretical discourses and specific *case studies*, namely those of multicultural and multilingual societies of Castile, Ireland and Hungary. Keeping so many *cases* brought under general criteria and in a strictly limited time interval is not an easy task, and we have to congratulate Mr. Karagyozev for the success achieved in this endeavor.

The Introduction is centered on the focus, objectives and scope of the study, with particular emphasis on the questions and concepts of ethnicity in the Middle Ages and in the context of the 13th – 14th centuries in particular. The author's goal is not to present a new *formula* of 'ethnicity', but to "give impetus to the theoretical understanding" of this concept (p. 1). Along with the ethnic, the author also tries to look at the religious context in the construction – understood here as a process, not as the identification of established "characteristics of an ethnic group" – of identity in peripheral Western European (Latin) societies and specifically on the Castilians, Irish and Hungarians (p. 2).

Chapter One discusses in detail a number of theoretical approaches to concepts such as *ethnicity* and *religious identity* (and in addition – *borderline/frontiers* and *otherness*). The author presents the views of anthropologists and sociologists on these quite heterogeneous, but also intertwined problems. He demonstrates both their strengths and limitations, especially in view of medieval studies. Due attention has also been paid to the latter and its specifics. Also, he pays attention to the achievements in early medieval studies of both 'schools' known as the Vienna School and the Toronto School. At the same time, the author has not failed to analyze the research

of scholars who seek and defend more nuanced positions, tailored specifically to the realities of the medieval past and to the then notions of *frontier*, the *Other*, *ethnicity*, etc.

Chapters Two to Four are devoted to a kind of *case studies*, as they dwell separately on three of the regions chosen by the author; at the end, he also looks at them in comparative perspective so as to outline both similarities and differences in fields such as *identity*, *assimilation*, *accommodation*, *ethnicity*.

The Second chapter of the study is dedicated to the Kingdom of Castile. Here, two sub-periods are clearly distinguished, namely between 1212-1312 and 1312-1412 respectively, in which conflicting practices regarding the attitude towards and positioning of the *Others* (e.g., Jews and Saracens) were central to Castilian society. For the second sub-period, he clearly outlined the imposition of (juridical) policies by the elite, a policy that violate the so-called “legal system” of *convivencia*, i.e. the coexistence between the different ethno-religious communities, so typical of the time before the beginning of the 14th century.

In Chapter Three, the Lordship (*sic* in the text) of Ireland is analyzed, where, again in two sub-periods, 1204-1307 and 1307-1402 respectively, the dynamically developing (legal) practices of imposing identities on the part of the English crown on both locals and immigrants coming from England are examined. As with the example of Castile, here the period after 1307 was marked by serious changes. They do clarify the painful disintegration of the different communities there; disintegration included imposing – through laws – of both social and ethnic barriers between the native Irish and the Irish-born English.

Chapter Four is dedicated to the Kingdom of Hungary. Here, too, the author follows the distinctive time-frame he has already chosen in previous chapters. Thus what one can see here are again two sub-periods, namely 1205-1301 and 1308-1395, respectively. The first is marked by the late Árpád dynasty with its more 'democratic' policy towards the foreigners, while the second demonstrates the changes in attitudes towards the *Others* in the era of the Anjou dynasty. In this second sub-period, Mr. Karagyozev correctly distinguishes between the processes of assimilation towards the Saracens (Muslims) and the Jews, which were caused by the deliberate legal policy of the Anjou, as well as the more gently policy towards the other foreigners in the kingdom, namely the Szekely, the Yass people (a community which was very close to the Alans) and the Saxons. To a large extent, he rightly defines these divergent practices as dependent on external factors. One of them was obviously the growing Ottoman power, which threatened the southeastern borders of Hungary after the 1380s.

Positive aspects of work and contributions:

Right from the very beginning I would like to highlight the well-chosen initial criteria for the separation of the objects of study, as well as the equally very well-structured Introduction and Chapter one. In a detailed form, they do present the most important theoretical approaches, methodologies and scientific schools that deal with the problems indicated in or implied by the title of the study (see, for example, p. 2). Next, in his text the author has placed an important emphasis on legal codes and legal systems in general. They outline a number of aspects of the application of legal norms for the construction of ethnicity among the Castilians, Irish, and Magyars, respectively, and for the separation of the 'internal' *Others* through legal frameworks. In addition to the above said, they are implemented in the peripheral regions of the so-called Latin

Christian world. In his work the author, in essence, deals with extremely important research fields such as those of *borderline* in history and in jurisprudence, *borderline* and ethnic construction-and-distinction (or the so-called internal and external *Others*), communication in the past, etc. With such ‘tools’ the dissertation actually enters the fields of cultural studies and historical and political anthropology, which are intertwined and analyzed here in line with law studies and historical analysis. What he calls the “integrated approach” (p. 5) makes it possible to trace the different regional variations of such a multidimensional phenomenon as that of ethnic and religious identities and their relationship to the late medieval legal system in some peripheral parts of Western Europe.

A strong point of the study is that Mr. Karagyozov also tries to introduce contextualization of the more important sources used so as to discover and outline more clearly the relationships between *text* and *context*, *analysis* and *interpretation*, *static* and *dynamics*. It is evident that he is well aware with research not only in theoretical aspects of the topic, but also on the so-called *case studies*. In addition, he introduces unknown or little-known primary sources. In my view, we can agree with his main conclusions that, firstly, the law in the three *case studies* serves both for the integration of the *foreigners* and for their marginalization within the host society; and secondly, that the discourses of exclusion and legal discrimination are particularly visible in the 14th century in all three *cases* studied.

As in any study, in Mr. Karagyozov’s text, too, one can find out some inaccuracies and omissions. Among them and in the *Literature* in particular, I shall mention that the name of David Abulafia is written David **Abufala**; in addition, he is presented as the author of a volume, and not as an editor, as he actually is.

Lack of the so-called Bulgarian contribution on all these theoretical issues researched in the beginning of the text (e.g., *frontiers, otherness, identities, ethnicity* etc.) is also easily visible. A more profound research of some Bulgarian works and achievements in such spheres, as well as in theorizing in general, would more clearly situate the dissertation in the Bulgarian scientific field. In addition, some works by authors such as David Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel and Max Weber are presented through their later English translations, rather than according to their originals in German or French. It would be logical for the author to specify that the above-mentioned authors worked at the end of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th century and to cite their books in the original; in addition, Karagyozev could specify that in his research later English translations are used. I will also address here a specific question to the author: in Chapter Three, paragraph 4.1, as well as in the Abstract (p. 21), he talks about the success of the English colonial project (*sic*) in the years between 1204 and 1307. Does this mean that he accepts as valid the thesis recently imposed by some scholars that we can talk about ‘colonialism’ even before the 15th century?

As regards the **Abstract**, it adequately reflects both the structure of the dissertation and its contributions.

I will also allow myself to make a few recommendations:

1) this work deserves to be published by the Publ. House of the Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”; 2) before that, however, and in the historiographical part in particular, the author needs to add the names and, respectively, the views of some Bulgarian authors (Ts. Todorov, Al. Kyosseva, L. Deyanova, D. Koleva, Ts. Stepanov, R. Daskalov, to mention just a few) from the last 30-35 years on a number of the problems studied by T. Karagyozev. Many of the theories and theses of foreign authors indicated in his text have become known to the scholarly community in Bulgaria precisely thanks to the research of the above-mentioned, and also other, Bulgarian

scholars; 3) perhaps it is worth for him to think about a second volume of this study, with an emphasis not so much centered on legal, but on everyday practices applied in the construction of identities and ethnicities researched by him. In this way, it will be possible to more clearly separate the tensions between the reality of life in different types of border areas and the (often variable) identities formed there, as well as the purely legal foundations that set the original written legal frameworks in which everyday practices should be realized (practices of ethnic-building and homogenizing vs. those of ethnic-differentiating and marginalizing). Such a comparative analysis would give a profound outline of at least two of the dimensions of the human condition – the ‘legal’ and the ‘anthropological’, and within a relatively long period at that. In my opinion, such a second volume could become a valuable building block against the background of the third goal of the study, indicated by the author himself (see p. 2); 4) are all these brief conclusions necessary at the end of each of the chapters? It seems to me that they could be presented in a concise form in the Conclusion, and thus unnecessary repetitions would also be avoided.

My final assessment is undoubtedly positive, because the topic developed goes beyond the usual level of a dissertation for a PhD-degree. That is why I vote ‘*Yeah*’ for awarding the scientific and educational degree of “Doctor” to Tencho Karagyozov.

Date:

20 December 2025

Signature:

(Prof. Tsvetelin Stepanov)

