

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
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## REVIEWS

of Prof. Ivan Alexandrov Biliarsky, Dr. Sci.

for the competition for the award of the scientific position ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

announced by the Institute for Historical Studies, BAS

with a single candidate

Ch. Ass. Elena Marinova Kostova, Ph.D.

Elena Marinova Kostova was born in 1975 in Sofia. During the period 1993-1998 she studied history at Sofia University "St. Clement of Ochrid", specialty "History of Byzantium and the Balkan peoples". Master of History (1998). She also holds a degree in International Relations from the Free Faculty of Sofia University (1997-1999). After specialization (2000-2001) at the Center for Slavic-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev", Elena Kostova became a PhD candidate (2002-2005). In 2006 she defended *magna cum laude* her doctoral thesis on the topic "Melnik in the XIII-XIV centuries. Problems of Political and Socio-Economic History" under the direction of Prof. Christo Matanov. Since 2008, Elena Kostova is a research associate at the Institute for Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and since 2011 she is the chief assistant in the Medieval History section of the same institute.

I can say that I have known Elena Kostova long enough - for about fifteen years - I have observations about both her research and her friendly nature and the wonderful attitude to work with a team. Undoubtedly, she is one of the best-trained scholars in the Medieval History section, which is proved at least of her languages used. She is also one of the most talented and productive researchers. This is also clear from the annexed in the documentation of the competition an array of articles and the list of books published by E. Kostova. Three author's monographs, published or printed in Bulgarian and English, as well as two volumes of co-authored publications are indicated. Elena Kostova's work includes more than thirty articles published in different languages in periodicals and collections in Bulgaria and abroad. Undoubtedly, this is an impressive number, but first of all I would like to pay attention to the quality of the research and their diverse and rich topics.

To the extent that such a competition evaluates the applicant's entire research work, I would like to propose here a review of Elena Kostova's publications before discussing her habilitation work.

First of all, I would like to draw your attention to the monograph studies on the city of Melnik (E. KOSTOVA, *Medieval Melnik From the End of the Twelfth to the End of the Fourteenth Century The Historical Vicissitudes of a Small Balkan Town*, Sofia 2013, American Research Center in Sofia ISBN 978-954-92571-3-7 и Е. КОСТОВА, *Средновековният Мелник от края на XII до края на XIV в.*, Пловдив, 2019 г., ISBN 978-954-8536-28-8). They are undoubtedly the result of the author's interest in Eastern Macedonia, as well as of her doctoral thesis. However, it should be explicitly noted that the text of the dissertation has been substantially revised and has produced a much more mature work. The book is published first in English and now we are expecting a Bulgarian edition. It is a fundamental study of one of the important political, ecclesiastical and cultural centers in this part of the Balkans. I would venture to disagree with the author, who calls Melnik a "small Balkan town". Yes, the city is like that now, but that cannot be said of the era it is considering, when apart from a significant center it is also the capital of an independent state.

The two volumes of Dubrovnik documents represent an important contribution to the history of the Balkans, which will no doubt remain noticeable in Bulgarian historiography (А. НИКОЛОВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, Е. КОСТОВА, П. ДАНОВА, С. ХИНКОВСКИ, *Дубровнишки документи за историята на България и българите през XIII – XV в.* Т. I (1230 – 1403 г.), Сборник с извори. Издание, превод и коментар, София 2017, ISBN 978-954-07-4297-7; Т. II (1407 – 1505 г.), Сборник с извори. Издание, превод и коментар, София 2018, ISBN 978-954-07-4601-2). Elena Kostova is the co-author of the publication, which, however, has a strong influence on its scientific development, since - as we shall see - the Dubrovnik theme remains essential in her studies.

Elena Kostova's articles cover a wide range of topics that could be grouped in several directions. The first of these, mostly located in the earlier period of its creative development, is related to Melnik, the Struma Valley and Eastern Macedonia during the Late Middle Ages. This is quite natural, insofar as this is the time when E. Kostova worked on completing her dissertation, and then on enriching and further developing it in a monographic study. Here we can include articles on individual monasteries in Melnik and Melnik, on the socio-economic and land relations in the region, on the Duchy of Despot John Ugleša, on the Velbazhd principality of Dragaši dynasty, on Caesar Hreljo and others. What is striking is the documentary basis of these works, some of which actually use unpublished or little-used sources, especially from the archive of the Vadopedi Monastery of Mount Athos. Emphasis is placed on the relationship between Mount Athos and Eastern Macedonia. They are mainly

economic insofar as a large part of the landholdings of the monastic republic are located there. In this way the economic and social topics are introduced, which is a significant element of Elena Kostova's research. In conclusion of my observations, I could say that the mentioned publications testify to a mature author who has already made a significant contribution to the study of Eastern Macedonia in the Late Middle Ages, at least within the framework of Bulgarian historiography.

The other major topic in Dr. Elena Kostova's research is related to Dubrovnik and its place in Balkan history, politics, economy and culture. It is particularly important for the current competition as it also includes the candidate's habilitation work. Two co-authored books with Ragusan documents were cited, as well as eleven studies and articles published or published in different languages in Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Romania. The two volumes of papers have already been discussed, and now I would like to draw attention to the articles and the studies before we go into habilitation work. Of course, their focus is on Bulgarian-Dubrovnik relations, but always presented in a Balkan context. Notable also is the fact that Elena Kostova introduces new, little-known or unused sources in her research, which is largely due to her work in the Dubrovnik State Archive. Here we can also cite the studies that point to the place of our country in the relations and ideas of the elites in the Western Balkans: a survey on the Bulgarian-Dubrovnik relations in the Middle Ages; exploring the importance of the Bulgarian state in Byzantine-Dubrovnik relations and using the name of the country in some Dubrovnik documents (Cultural-historical Contacts between Bulgaria and Ragusa in Mediaeval Times, In: International scientific conference Cultural corridor Via Adriatica – cultural tourism without boundaries, 15.10 2015 – 19.10.2015, Trogir, Croatia, 149–157; Второто Българско царство и византийско-дубровнишкият договор от 1192 г., В: *Великите Асеневици. Сборник с Доклади от конференция, посветена на 830 години от въстанието на братята Петър и Асен, началото на Второто българско царство и обявяването на Търново за столица на България, и 780 години от легитимното възобновяване на Българската патриаршия*, Велико Търново 2016, 142–147; „БЪЛГАРИЯ” според някои дубровнишки документи, издадени през 80-те и 90-те години на XIV в. (предварителни бележки), В: *Средновековните Балкани като световен кръстопът: контакти и обмен, (Доклади от Българо-сръбска конференция, София, 1-2 окт. 2015 г.)*, В: *Studia Balcanica* 32, (2017), 143–153). The topics they are devoted can be subdivided into political, economic and cultural ones, but I find it difficult to classify the articles and studies, since the relationships themselves cover all three aspects

mentioned in their complex intertwining. It is also noteworthy that the author's interest is to trace the importance and place of Bulgaria in the relations of the Republic of Dubrovnik with third countries (the Empire and Serbia in particular).

Undoubtedly, the proposed habilitation work is to crown Elena Kostova's pursuits in the field of relations between Bulgaria and Ragusa during the Middle Ages, though I hope that she will not abandon this rich topic. The book consists of an Introduction, three parts, Conclusion and seven appendices. The total volume of work is 285 pages in PDF format, but would probably be significantly more calculated in standard typing pages

The structure and content are classic. The introduction sets out the topic, and the following chapters (in the case of "parts") propose a solution. The first part is devoted to the study of the documents of the chancellery offices as a source for the Bulgarian-Dubrovnik relations. Essentially, the line for the documentary basis of historical tracing continues. The four paragraphs of this section discuss: 1) the significance of the Byzantine-Dubrovnik Treaty of 1192 and its significance for the history of the Second Empire; 2) The Bulgarian-Dubrovnik relations under the time of Tsar John II Assen (centered around the *Orizmos* of Dubrovnik of AD 1230); 3) political and economic relations between the two countries around the middle of the XIII century (text based on the treaty of 1253); and 4) the development of relations, reflected in two Serbian chrysobuls from the middle of the fourteenth century. It is obvious that the author follows the documentary sources, which, however, poses the problem of the apparently incomplete coverage of the fourteenth century. The second part deals with the trade and economic relations between the Second Empire and Dubrovnik. Particular attention has been paid to customs and the existing consular service. The latter is of interest not only in view of the exchange, but also in view of the status of foreigners on Bulgarian territory. The third part differs significantly from the previous two in that it is dedicated to two historical portraits: of the Bulgarian Tsaritsa Anna-Neda shortly before the middle of and of Nicholas the Bulgarian in the last decade of the fourteenth century. The annexes to the work are no less essential, the more so that they follow the author's manner of basing his work on documentary sources. They are seven in number and present the most important documents of the era. Here we find evidence of the Byzantine-Dubrovnik agreement of 1191, the eagle of the Dubrovnik people, the treaty of Tsar Michael II Assen with the Ragusa Republic, two oaths of the mayor of Radoslav and of Dubrovnik, and finally two Serbian chrysobuls – the Tsar Stephen Dušan and the Tsar Stephen Uroš.

In conclusion, I can say that the proposed habilitation study is a remarkable work, the result of many years of research and presenting the author's conclusions on a wide range of issues in inter-Balkan relations, and in particular between two major political and economic actors on the peninsula: Bulgaria and Dubrovnik. The study is, of course, primarily historical, but it also acquires the characteristics of interdisciplinary because of the diversity of the matter it covers. Undoubtedly, it takes the developments in the field of Bulgarian-Dubrovnik relations to a new stage and - as is usually the case with significant works - it also opens new horizons for future researchers.

Thus, I could characterize Elena Kostova as a talented, diligent, consistent and thorough researcher who knows her subject matter very well and who elaborates her texts in detail. Part of her talent lies in the choice of topics and the consistent attachment to them, resulting in the completion of a study of a particular problem or region. Another essential feature of the candidate is the work with the sources: that is, the pursuit of working with documents, the pursuit of finding few or unused ones and ultimately crowning those aspirations and efforts with success. I think that in terms of her research - both in the choice of topics and in the final result - Elena Kostova presents us as an established scholar with her place both among Bulgarian historians and internationally. In its environment, it has both a personal presence and the presence of a researcher.

The enclosed documents meet the requirements of the law. These materials, as well as my participation in the work of the jury so far, give me reason to believe that the procedure for the competition for the award of the scientific degree "Associate Professor" was carried out correctly and legally.

All that has been said / written above gives me full reason **to vote firmly for the award of the scientific position of Associate Professor to Elena Marinova Kostova** and I allow myself to call on the other members of the scientific jury to do the same.

Sofia,

December 12, 2019

Signature:

(Prof. Ivan Biliarsky, D.Sc.)