

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ		
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EXAMINER'S REPORT

on the competition for the academic post "Associate Professor" at the Medieval Department of the Institute of Historical Studies (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), in the professional field 2.2. "History and Archeology", scientific specialty „Medieval History“ („Bulgaria and Dubrovnik in the Middle Ages“)

The only applicant for the position, Dr Elena Kostova, who nowadays is a senior assistant at the Institute of Historical Studies (BAS), has long since proven herself one of the most able, accomplished and productive representatives of the younger generation of Bulgarian medievalists. Suffice it to say that her first monograph, dedicated to the medieval city of Melnik, which was based on her PhD dissertation, won well-deserved appreciation and was distinguished in 2014 with the prestigious John D. Bell Memorial Book Prize. Dr Kostova's publication activity, as her application record demonstrates, is complemented by her participation in a number of national and international scientific projects, as well as by her taking part in numerous scientific forums at home and abroad.

The list of Dr Kostova's publications, relevant to the subject matter of this contest, contains eleven articles, printed in or submitted to various Bulgarian and foreign periodicals; a collection of documents in two volumes where she is both an editor and a translator; as well as a monograph on the relations between Bulgaria and Dubrovnik/Raguza during the Middle Ages. This monograph has been accepted by Dr Kostova's colleagues at the Medieval Department of the Institute of Historical Studies as her habilitation work. In my report I will focus precisely on this book because it not only summarizes Dr Kostova's achievements in the field, but also reveals some characteristic features of her scholarship.

The study is the first attempt to examine the entire spectrum of political, diplomatic, trade and economic contacts between the Bulgarian Tzardom and Dubrovnik from the end of the 12th to the end of the 14th century – a task, which is a challenge on its own. What I want to stress, however, is that the level of compilativity, almost unavoidable in such generalizing studies, has been reduced here to a minimum. The authoress does not follow blindly her predecessors' conclusions, however authoritative they might be. Wherever possible and necessary, she proposes her own independent and critical analysis. Having said this, I would want to accentuate on the most valuable quality of Dr Kostova's research – its adherence to the primary sources. The variety of documents utilized by the author is really impressive. Along with Balkan medieval rulers' official acts which constituted the study's main base, a lot of additional sources have been exploited, such as letters, notary deeds, complaints etc., issued by or addressed to various Raguzian executive or administrative structures, as well as some texts, authored by people who worked in the Raguza Archive from the 16th c. onwards. The strong emphasis on primary sources becomes obvious by the Supplementum, containing the full texts of 7 rulers' documents, referred to and thoroughly commented by the authoress. Let me mention one more merit of Dr Kostova's habilitation work which deserves recognition. She presents her research in a wider Balkan and Mediterranean context. This approach seems to

me fully justified because taking into account the positions of all the players on the international South-Eastern European political and economical scene and drawing parallels with other Balkan states is the only way to ensure an adequate assessment of the bilateral relations between Tirnovo and Dubrovnik. I would also want to mark Dr Kostova's terminological precision. As an example I would take her elucidation of the appellation "Republic of Ragusa", a concept used in the literature until now rather indiscriminately, covering periods of the history of Ragusa when this appellation is unsuitable to describe the status of the city.

It is impossible here to dwell in detail upon the monograph's contents. I'll limit myself to saying that the book reconstructs quite convincingly Bulgarian-Raguzian relations and their evolution through the Late Middle Ages. What's more, it does not simply elaborate or partially revise the existing perceptions of these contacts but also enriches the field through mastering some under-investigated aspects, such as the status and role of Dubrovnik consulate services on the Late Medieval Balkans as a whole, and in Bulgarian lands, in particular. A pleasant counterpoint to the "dry" political, diplomatic, and economic issues, discussed in the first two chapters, is the last part of the of the monograph where the authoress traces the lives and adventures of two prominent expatriates from Bulgaria who found refuge in Dubrovnik during the 14th century: the exiled (ex) Tzarina Anna-Neda (in the 30s) and the enigmatic teacher, diplomat and healer Nikola "the Bulgarian" (in the 90s).

It goes without saying that as with other valuable research, Dr Kostova's monograph does not only give answers but also raises questions and provides directions for further scholarship. Even at this stage however, her findings and observations allow some more categorical conclusions and statements. In my view, for example, it wouldn't be an overstatement to declare the minor role of Bulgaria in its commercial relations with Dubrovnik. This becomes obvious when we consider, firstly, the insignificant presence and activity of Bulgarian merchants in Dubrovnik, on one side, compared to relatively high numbers and activities of Raguzian merchants in Bulgaria, on the other side. Secondly, the same is revealed by the essence of the exchange of goods between the two countries, raw materials or unprocessed goods being the major export from Bulgaria to Dubrovnik, in contrast to the luxury goods, pouring in the opposite direction from Dubrovnik to Bulgaria. I would be glad also to see more clearly defined and specified the characteristics of what the authoress called "The Dubrovnik pattern" after which the City of Ragusa arranged its political, diplomatic and economical relations with the rest of the Balkans in the Late Medieval and early Modern epoch.

Having in mind the entire academic performance of Dr Elena Kostova as well as her excellent research skills and her scientific contributions, I state my confidence that she is fully qualified to take the position and to carry out the duties of an associate professor at the Medieval Department of the Institute of Historical Studies. I will firmly vote for this.

14.12.2019

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