

БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ИЗСЛЕДВАНИЯ	
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## OPINION

Relevant to competition for award of the academic rank of 'associate professor' published by the Institute of Historical Studies for the needs of Section Medieval History, code 2.2. History and Archaeology, academic specialty 2.2. 'Medieval history' ('Bulgaria and Ragusa in the Middle Ages'), History and Archaeology, specialty Medieval History, promulgated in August 2019 ( SG No. 66, August 20, 2019) with sole applicant Senior Assistant PhD Elena Marinova Kostova

referee: Prof. Dr. Anissava Miltenova, Section Old Bulgarian Literature, Institute of Literature at BAS

The sole applicant for the competition announced by the Institute of Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) is Chief Assistant PhD Elena Kostova, who has been working at the Medieval History Section since 2008. Before that, she was an associate at the Ivan Dujčev Centre of Slavo-Byzantine Studies in Sofia and a regular doctoral student at the History Faculty of Sofia University under the mentorship of Prof. Hristo Matanov (2002–2005). In 2006, she successfully defended a dissertation on the subject of *Melnik in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Century. Problems of Political and Socio-economic History*. Her knowledge of Balkan history in the Middle Ages and her good linguistic background in English, Russian, French and Italian, allow Elena Kostova to be an active participant in the Section's international and national projects, her work being concentrated mainly on the field of Bulgarian-Ragusan political, social, economic and cultural relations in the Middle Ages. She also researched sources from the Dubrovnik State Archives, as well as the political, cultural, social and economic history of the medieval city. Some distinctive projects in which she participated included 'Ragusa and Bulgaria in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century' (2016–2017) and the Sofia University Alma Mater Complex funded 'Dubrovnik and Bulgaria 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> century' (2017–2018). She is an active participant in national and international conferences generally focused on Balkan studies, Bulgarian-Croatian and Bulgarian-Romanian relations, among others.

The academic product submitted for reference fully meets the requirements of the competition, a habilitation work, submitted for printing as a monograph, two participations as a compiler and author of collections (Дубровнишки документи за историята на България и българите през XIII – XV в. Т. I (1230–1403 г. [Ragusan documents about the history of

Bulgaria and Bulgarian lands in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century. Vol. II] (1407–1505), published in 2019), 11 studies and articles, eight of which published in academic periodical and miscellanies and three under press. Her research interests focus on the history and culture of the Balkans in the Middle Ages and cover the problem fields of tracking, publishing and analysis of sources relevant to the relations between Ragusa, Byzantium, Venice, the Kingdom of Naples, Hungary and others; the political and cultural relations between Byzantium, the Second Bulgarian Kingdom and Ragusa in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, data about the trade relations between the maritime republic and the other Balkan centres in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgarian-Serbian political and cultural ties, documents from the archives of Athonite monasteries about the history of Melnik and the Panagia Pantanassa (Most-Holy Queen of All) monastery, among others. For her study of medieval Melnik *Medieval Melnik from the Late Twelfth to the Late Fourteenth Centuries: Historical Vicissitudes of a Small Balkan Town* (Sofia: ARCS, 2013) she received the award of the John D. Bell Bulgarian Studies Association Prize awarded annually for the best book on Bulgarian topics in any field.

Obviously, Elena Kostova definitely has an affinity for source studies, as can be seen from her habilitation paper “България, Дубровник и Балканите: политически, икономически и дипломатически взаимоотношения (края на XII–XIV век)” [Bulgaria, Dubrovnik and the Balkans: political, economic and diplomatic relations (end-12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century)]. The monograph is based on recently studied historical sources kept at the State Archives of Dubrovnik. The author has collected and analyzed the source material within the already mentioned project “Dubrovnik and Bulgaria in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century”, which allowed a team of researchers from Sofia University and BAS to work in situ with the archival documents and make accessible little-known and unknown authentic sources about the historical, legal, diplomatic, economic, cultural and religious aspects of the contacts between the Balkan countries. The problem field is complex and requires multilateral approaches and the incorporation of the comment of sources in a broad panorama of European reality in the studied period. It is important to note that before the launch of the said project, the subject was not part of the research of Bulgarian scholars. In other words, Elena Kostova is a pioneer in her work that gives interesting results.

The research part of the habilitation paper covers 203 pages and the attached published documents in the original and in translation, as well as references, cover 55 pages. The introduction specifies the subject of research, as well as the guidelines and some essential notes relevant to terminology. The first part outlines the concept about the place and role of

Bulgarian-Ragusan diplomatic documents for Bulgarian history. It is underscored that source data need a new interpretation in compliance with contemporary approaches to sources. Contacts between Turnovo and Ragusa were particularly active during the reign of Tsar Ivan II Asen, when the processes in the European Southeast acquired a different character, so to say an open one compared to the previous period. This is evidenced by the donation charter of 1230, whose analysis (although it has been published and discussed in historiography repeatedly) shows well how diplomatic relations developed in terms of the interests of Ragusa in the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, in turn leading to a new model of relationship with its trade partners. It shows how later, under Michael II Asen, the two states came to conclude an agreement dated June 15, 1253, and underscores its outcome – the expansion and confirmation of Ragusan merchants on Bulgarian territory.

Next, the paper discusses the two Nemanjić chrysobulls of the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The author shows their restrictive character in comparison with trade with the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, as it allowed Serbian rulers to intervene in trade and limit it. This also sheds light on relations between Bulgaria and Serbia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The stress on trade relations continues in the next chapter, which analyzes the information about customs duties and provisions.

Nor can one overlook one of the contributions of the habilitation paper – presentation of the documents about the consular services and their function, which have not been discussed so far. The author has solid arguments supporting the conclusion that the appointment of consuls and judges on Bulgarian territory is a clear indication of increasing trade and monetary exchange between Bulgaria and the maritime republic. As the author has underscored, the official regulation of bilateral economic relations through the consular services in the last decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century is evidence that Bulgarian markets were widely open to trade with Ragusa.

In addition, there is a portrait description of two historical figures – Queen Anna-Neda, who was of Bulgarian descent, and the teacher and diplomat Nicholas the Bulgarian. The last extremely interesting part of the habilitation paper deserves to be developed further on its own, as it undoubtedly is a new page in Bulgarian prosopography.

It is quite obvious that the author is well informed about the structure of academic comments, with a capacity to track down the dynamics of various interpretations. The criteria for description of documents and the comparative analysis required have been met precisely. The transcription of the sources attached is professional and the translation and comments are

comprehensive. The material from the Ragusan sources has been tracked down and discussed from all angles, particularly as part of the information before the publication was subjected to additional reconstruction where it has not been preserved in entirety.

In conclusion, I have to underscore that the academic product of Elena Kostova is undoubtedly valuable for medieval studies. Her potential as a promising researcher in medieval studies cannot be questioned as she combines the profound study of historical facts and the incorporation of sources in Balkan political and cultural history. I am convinced that the academic panel should award her the academic rank of ‘associate professor’.

18.12.2019

Sofia

Prof. Dr. Habil. Anissava Miltenova