

OPINION

Concerning the competition announced in the State Gazette, No. 55, 28 June 2024, p. 23 by the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Medieval Balkan History - Economic History of the Balkans, 10th – 15th centuries) for the needs of the Faculty of History

The documents for participation in the competition were submitted by one candidate: Asst. Prof. Dr. Joanna Ilieva Bencheva. The examination committee has found that the documents submitted by her meet the legal requirements under the *Law on the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria*. All deadlines were met in the process of the competition.

According to the Report on the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 3 and 5 of the *Law on the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria*, the candidate Joanna Bencheva fully meets the standard of points.

The main habilitation work is the monograph **The Trade in Food Products in Dalmatia and Istria (13th-15th centuries)**. Sofia: St Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2024, 224 pp.

The book undertakes an in-depth scholarly study of the legal framework of the food trade, most clearly visible in the extant town statutes of Dalmatia and Istria in the 13th–15th centuries. The statutes outline the rules of the food trade. They also defined the various goods traded. Joanna Bencheva has analysed the statutes of leading centres of trade such as Dubrovnik, Kotor, Split, Zadar, as well as of smaller urban municipalities such as Buzet or Piran. Attention has been paid both to those settlements for which overland trade was also important, such as Vodnjan and Dvigrad, and to the islands that mainly used sea transport, such as Hvar and Krk. To these should be added the towns of Trogir, Sen, Vinodol, Brac, Skradin, Rab, Korcula, etc. The lower and upper limits of the study are clearly defined, in view of the adoption of the first city statutes in the 13th century and the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in the 15th century, which led to the withdrawal of Hungary as a political factor in Dalmatia. The book is structured in three chapters. The first chapter, "Towns - Natural Environment, Development, and Statutes" (pp. 13–72), reviews the natural conditions that

determined the production of certain types of food. The statutes of nine Istrian towns and 19 Dalmatian towns are examined and analysed. The rivalry between Venice and Hungary for control of the Adriatic coast and its impact on the food trade is also given major attention. The final conclusion is that unlike Venice, which succeeded in incorporating the economy of Istria and Dalmatia into its own, the Kingdom of Hungary failed to do so due to the fact that the cities of Dalmatia were distinguished by their strong autonomy and self-government. Chapter Two, "Food Trade in Urban Status" (pp. 73–161) covers the most important and substantive part of the study. It examines in detail the provisions in the city statutes that regulate food production, the working hours of producers, the import and export of foodstuffs, wholesale and retail trade, the taxes and fees collected, the rules of sale, the control of the authorities over the process of supplying the population with food, the requirements for the activities of traders, etc. Joanna Bencheva specifically addresses the following groups of food products that are subject to commercial activity: bread and cereals, meat (the raising of livestock for meat consumption). The places where food trade takes place are examined, namely the square, the harbours, shops, pubs, the home. Special attention is given to the people – the requirements of the traders and the officials who control the trade. The appearance of the goods for sale and more specifically the packaging and its significance is not overlooked. The weights and measures used are presented. In the conclusion of the book (pp. 189–192) the necessary summaries are made. The appended glossary of terms (pp. 193–195) refers mainly to weights and measures and facilitates the use made of the study. The bibliography and scholarly apparatus are accurate and in many respects exemplary of professionalism. Although her work has made use of a number of studies by Croatian scholars on the subject of food production and trade, with this monograph Joanna Bencheva makes a significant contribution to Balkan medieval studies. She presents a problem in the field of medieval mentality in its entirety.

The attached studies, articles and scientific reports of Joanna Bencheva are just another confirmation of her qualities as a brilliant researcher in the field of medieval Balkan history.

In the scientific biography of Joanna Bencheva should also be noted her numerous contributions with papers and scientific communications in national and international historical forums.

The attached reference on the lecture load in the *Department of History of Byzantium and the Balkan Peoples* shows that there are opportunities for full-time coverage of Joanna Bencheva's lecture courses.

No elements of plagiarism and incorrect attitude in citation of foreign research are found in the scientific publications of Joanna Bencheva. Moreover, the scholarly apparatus and reference to other works is done with an aspiration for completeness and collegiality.

My personal impressions of Joanna Bencheva, whom I have known since her student days, are that she is an extremely respectable, modest and erudite scholar whose scientific career should continue. Another important quality to note is her linguistic background, with knowledge of both the old languages (Latin, Old Greek, Old Bulgarian, etc.) and the modern European and, in this case, Balkan languages.

On the basis of the above, I confidently declare my affirmative vote for Joanna Ilieva Bencheva to occupy the academic position of Associate Professor in the competition thus announced.

Sofia, 29 September 2024

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "G. Nikolov". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long horizontal stroke.

Prof. Dr. Georgi N. Nikolov

(Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", internal member of the Scientific Jury)