

Review

of the monograph of dr. Joanna Bencheva for acquiring the academic title of
associate professor

Dr. Y. Bencheva is a long-time lecturer at the IF of Sofia University. As such, she independently undertook to research the eating habits of different strata of the population, food products in a vast area centered on Byzantium, etc. A natural extension of these pursuits is her latest monograph on the food trade in Dalmatia and Istria, based on the city and island statuses of these areas. Chronologically, the study mainly covers the period in which the statutes were created (13th-15th centuries). This is also a period in which the Venetian influence grew, as the republic of St. Marco manages to impose his authority over them in a special way.

In the Introduction, Dr. Bencheva traces the natural conditions in the regions in question, emphasizing the karst nature of the landscape, in most cases unsuitable for growing cereals. Exceptions are only some islands of the Elaphite group or located in the Kvarner Bay. Hence the almost frantic drive of these cities and islands to procure grain. It is no coincidence that one of the tested weapons of Venetian policy to deal with anti-Venetian sentiments was the ban on the city storing grain for more than half a year (Zadar). The vicissitudes surrounding the Venetian-Hungarian relations for supremacy in Dalmatia and Istria are traced in detail, ending with variable success, but in the end with the supremacy of Venice. In general, due to the preservation of most of the archives in the areas in question, as well as the Venetian ones, there is a lot of information about each individual event. It is a credit to Dr. Bencheva that she did not attempt to trace them in their details, but rather gives them as a result.

In the First Chapter, in addition to the natural conditions, Dr. Bencheva deals in detail with the statutes of the cities and islands in Istria and Dalmatia. It is to the author's credit that she has

collected and summarized them, which, believe me, is hard and long work, despite the extraordinary progress of computer technology. In doing so, she indicates, in addition to the latest editions, also the cities and islands where they are unavailable and she has used them second-hand. In addition to the natural conditions, the Adriatic Sea is deeper in its southern part and about 360 species of fish live here. I say this because the fish trade is beside the point in further exposition. In one place, Dr. Bencheva mentions that there are 1,200 islands along the coast of Dalmatia and Istria. My information is that there are more, at least 1,800. First Chapter is divided into two: statutes of cities in Istria, and statutes of cities and islands in Dalmatia. A few things stand out about the latter. First of all, the last area is continued with the city of Kotor, which itself does not belong to the area. After that, the author quite carefully avoids the name "Elaphite Islands" (the group of islands around Dubrovnik), known as such since Antiquity. A good impression is made by providing the text of the book at the end with maps of the cities and islands in question, from which the reader can accurately navigate the geographical situation. Basic information about the emergence and development of communities is given, and the exposition here has the character of a text from the Internet. It is extremely useful as it enables the reader to get an idea of the subject of research. In the section "Between Venice and Hungary", the author formulates several points around which the Venetian policy revolves around the sites in Istria and Dalmatia. In general, it leaves the impression that, despite the wide autonomy that the republic provides to its subordinates, it, for its part, particularly cares about the absence of leakage of food products from its territory and the extraterritorial status of its citizens.

Undoubtedly, the core of the monograph is Chapter Two, entitled "Food Trade in Urban Statutes". With her inherent accuracy, the author has divided the exhibition into groups of products, starting with bread and cereals, which are so important for the entire region of Istria and Dalmatia, passing through meat, milk, fish, honey, fruits and vegetables, olive oil and olives, salt, spices and finish with the wine. In each of these paragraphs, she brought together the information in the statutes, resulting in a true panorama of the food trade. However, it is clear here that statutes alone are not sufficient as a source. The examples are many and concern both the arrangement of the articles and their substance.

Why, for example, wine, olive oil, spices or salt are placed last? Aren't Istria and Dalmatia famous for the production of wine, salt, olive oil, etc. products? The reason is that they are less

affected in the statutes, which does not mean that they are not there. Example: the spices! It is not clear why they are almost absent from the statutes, since the Istrian and Dalmatian cities are famous for the production of herbs. They can be classified as spices, since special shops, called "pharmacies" have been opened for them since the end of the 13th century. Furthermore, Venice restricted, indeed forbade, the sailing of Dalmatian ships south of the Straits of Otranto, thus de facto denying Dalmatians access to the source of what we now call "spices". Or the honey trade, which is relatively little advocated in the statutes. The regions in question are known to produce a lot of it. The reason must be sought in other sources. Who they are and what they show should have been the candidate's task.

Chapter Three has the task of examining the role of people in the trade described. She brings the human element into this whole situation, so to speak. It starts with the place where it is traded - the square, the harbor, the shops, the pubs or the home (in rare cases). The bans that exist are pointed out, as well as a number of other circumstances - for example, not to weave or spin when it comes to milk trade. Then we move on to the people who carry out this activity (traders and officials who control them), the requirements for them, etc. Then it moves on to packaging and its meaning, but here I would like to learn more about it. After all, it is precisely such problems that give a higher degree of interest and awareness. A special place is occupied by measures and weights, since in Istrian and Dalmatian cities there is no common standard for their value and use. Despite Venice's efforts to unify them, it remains one of the most complex problems in trade. The importance of this element of exchange is shown by placing standards made of different material in the center of cities or islands. Here I would like to recommend the author to use the German scholar Schiltbach's two-volume book on Byzantine metrology, as the reference to Mancho Vekov on the metric system in Bulgaria is not enough. The Bulgarian metric system has a subordinate position compared to the Byzantine one.

The book is provided with a conclusion which, as one might expect, summarizes the conclusions drawn. In general, when it comes to food products, trade is highly protectionist, with the authorities doing everything possible to protect the interests of buyers, i.e. of the citizens of the object in question. The most detailed is the regulation regarding pubs, which has its own explanation. It should be borne in mind that wine also supplies some of the calories, and is not only a substance that leads to intoxication and the related violations of public order. In each city

or island studied in the monograph, there are officials, different in status or method of election, who monitor the proper course of trade. I would introduce the same rules now if someone would let me!

The book is provided with a rich reference apparatus: a glossary of terms with particular emphasis on metric concepts, a bibliography (it is a must for this kind of research), maps (which are rare), drawings by Konrad von Grünenberg of some of the cities and islands that are from the end of the 15th century. Particularly valuable are those drawings that precede the earthquakes of a later era, as they give an opportunity to see what the city looked like before it was built (example - Dubrovnik). Included in this section are parts of capitals that show different activities, for example the stuffing of sausages, which is not otherwise included in the exhibition or the cutting of vines. A facsimile of the status of the island of Krk in a transcript from the 16th century is also given. Finally, a summary in English is attached.

In many respects, Dr. Bencheva's monograph is exemplary in its nature. She has systematized a huge volume of material, mostly of Croatian origin. Regardless of the advancement of technology - I mean the ability to use articles and publications electronically - this is a huge work that must be appreciated on its merits. Few would delve into the depths of Croatian literature, given that much of it is provincial. Dr. Bencheva's work relieves them of this necessity, and this is one of its contributing elements.

The author has examined in detail the statutes and mainly their regulation for the trade in food products. This is undoubtedly the strength of the monograph. In Chapter Two, most of her contributions are concentrated. Her language is accurate, a little dry in places, but overall, linguistically, she has done excellently. There is no place, and I do not expect the author to show plagiarism: this is not in the style of the topic, and it is not her role.

Chapter Three seeks to bring the reader back to the mainstream of human relations, since statutes are essentially legal documents. To a large extent, the author has succeeded in this endeavor, although there are certain repetitions in the text of the chapter.

The main weakness, as I see it, is the arrangement of articles in the food trade and the use of sources other than statutes. This would condense the exposition and make it more adequate to the readers' expectations. In addition, Dr. Bencheva shows that Bulgarian Balkan studies, in

particular Balkan studies at SU, is not afraid to boldly cross national borders (this, in my opinion, is one of its main weaknesses) and deal with purely Balkan issues.

With conviction, I will vote for awarding Dr. Bencheva the academic position of "Associate Professor". The overall appearance of her monograph shows that this choice is correct. I congratulate her for her choice and for the work on the topic of the statutes of the Istrian and Dalmatian cities.

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Prof. Dr. habil. Christo Matanov