OPINION

by

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristiyan Atanasov Atanasov,
Section of Economic History, Department of Political Economy, University of National and World Economy,
member of the academic jury appointed by Order No. RD-38-114/10.03.2026, in connection with the public defense

of

the doctoral dissertation of **Yana Mihaylova Georgakieva**
entitled
"Epidemics in the Bulgarian Lands during the Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries"
submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology, Doctoral Program: History of Bulgaria – History of the Bulgarian Lands, 15th–17th Centuries

Diseases, epidemics, and the methods of their prevention and treatment constitute a fundamental issue that has occupied human consciousness since antiquity. As a rule, people strive to remain healthy and seek protection from illness, while fear of death and the search for ways to postpone the inevitable end have always accompanied humanity. In recent years, scholarly interest in this field has intensified significantly. The recent COVID-19 pandemic served as an important catalyst in this regard. In its aftermath, a considerable number of studies quickly emerged, illuminating various aspects of diseases and epidemics in the Bulgarian lands. Consequently, the topic is not only highly relevant but also particularly timely. In this sense, the dissertation research of doctoral candidate

Yana Georgakieva is entirely pertinent and fits very well within the contemporary scholarly trend of investigating pandemic situations from the past.

The dissertation is substantial in scope, comprising a total of 410 pages. Its structure follows a standard academic format: an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The bibliography is genuinely impressive. I counted 458 scholarly works, approximately 200 of which are in Bulgarian, while the remainder are primarily in English, but also in French, German, Greek, and other languages. Omissions are minimal. Doctoral candidate Georgakieva also works extensively with primary sources – archival materials, manuscripts, published travel accounts, and others. Approximately thirty unpublished documents of varying character – defters, reports, firmans, etc. – have been utilized for the purposes of the study. These are preserved either in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul or in the "Oriental Collections" Department of the National Library St. Cyril and Methodius. The dissertation further incorporates around thirty Arabic-script manuscripts.

Here I should note that the doctoral candidate ought to refine the terminology she employs. These are manuscripts that are catalogued, assigned archival signatures, and accessible to researchers, although they have not been published in full-text scholarly editions accompanied by a critical apparatus, at least to my knowledge. Therefore, the distinction between "published" and "unpublished" manuscripts should be clarified in any future publication of the dissertation text, which I strongly recommend. If it is meant that the manuscripts are uncatalogued, this would likewise be inaccurate, since nearly all of them are included in catalogues or card indexes and, at the very least, possess archival signatures.

The dissertation also contains four tables (three in the appendix and one in the main body of the text), which successfully systematize and visualize the collected information. I also counted 101 images from Arabic-script sources – archival documents and manuscripts.

The introduction is well structured and effectively introduces the topic. Some bibliographical omissions may nevertheless be noted. For instance, when

discussing the Ottoman monetary system, it would seem logical to cite Şevket Pamuk and his fundamental work on Ottoman monetary history, or Lyuben Berov. These omissions, however, do not diminish the overall positive impression created by the analytical and well-argued manner in which the reader is introduced to the subject. The dissertation's theses, conclusions, and methodology are explained precisely and meticulously. The following sections – the three chapters – are uniformly organized, each including its own bibliography, source base, and analytical narrative. In other words, a consistent methodology is maintained throughout, which serves as an excellent indicator of a high-quality scholarly product.

The first chapter is entitled "*Prophetic Medicine and Occult Practices in Healing in the Bulgarian Lands: The Religious Debate Concerning the (Im)Permissibility of Escaping Epidemic Diseases*" (pp. 39–121). In this chapter, doctoral candidate Georgakieva convincingly and systematically revises a persistent historiographical thesis – which, I must admit, had also become ingrained in my own thinking – namely, the alleged refusal of Muslims to flee epidemic centers. In reality, the situation appears far more nuanced and complex.

The second chapter, entitled "*The Dynamics of the Spread of Epidemics in the Bulgarian Lands during the Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries: Endemic Regions, Internal Migrations, and the Process of Depopulation of Urban and Rural Settlements*" (pp. 122–190), is likewise written in a highly intelligent and coherent manner.

The third chapter of the dissertation – "*Means of Treatment and Prevention of Epidemic Diseases in the Bulgarian Lands during the Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries*" (pp. 191–251) – contains the most substantial original scholarly contributions. In this section, Yana Georgakieva introduces into scholarly circulation numerous new facts, particularly concerning the preparation of medicinal compounds, dietary practices aimed at prevention and treatment, and the use of various remedies (*ilaçlar*) in combating diseases. This chapter constitutes the core of the dissertation and represents the doctoral candidate's most significant

contribution.

The entire study is skillfully synthesized and summarized in the conclusion. Overall, Yana Georgakieva's work represents an innovative and important scholarly contribution. Its interdisciplinary character positions it at the intersection of several major academic disciplines. Primarily historical in nature, the dissertation also demonstrates the methodological characteristics of a strong anthropological study, while simultaneously exhibiting elements of broader and more fundamental sociological inquiry. The dissertation clarifies and refines a number of important terms and may serve as a reliable reference work for scholars interested in working with Ottoman and Arabic-script documentation.

Among the dissertation's contributions should also be included the laboratory research conducted to identify the specific pathogen responsible for deaths during the studied period. This is a method still used rather cautiously by Bulgarian historians, although it has long been established as standard practice in international interdisciplinary research.

From a formal perspective, doctoral candidate Yana Georgakieva satisfies all requirements of the Bulgarian Academic Staff Development Act and its implementing regulations. She is indexed in the international database Scopus with her publication: **Georgakieva, Y**. "Medical Benefits of Gemstones According to Zeynelabidin bin Halil's Treatise 'Şifa el-fuad'." Global Philosophy 34, 18 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-024-09713-6. In addition, she is one of the authors of a study on medicine in the Ottoman Empire published in the 2023 volume Pearls in the Crown, issued by the National Library. Therefore, she fully satisfies the minimum publication requirements established by the regulations of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

The dissertation abstract has likewise been prepared correctly and accurately reflects the structure, content, conclusions, and principal contributions of the dissertation. The doctoral candidate has also participated in numerous conferences and other scholarly events both in Bulgaria and abroad and has already established herself as a recognizable young scholar.

All this gives me full confidence to vote unequivocally in favor of the dissertation and to recommend that the esteemed academic jury duly recognize the enormous research effort invested in this work by awarding Yana Mihaylova Georgakieva the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

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