

STATEMENT

on the scientific works of the Head Assistant Professor Dr. Joanna Ilieva Bencheva, the only participant in the competition for “Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Medieval Balkan History - Economic History of the Balkans X - XV centuries), announced in State Gazette No. 55/28.06.2024.

by Prof. Dr. Ivayla Popova, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

- **Assessment of compliance with minimum national requirements**

The procedure and the resulting requirements under the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDA) and the Regulations of the SU have been complied with, as is evident from the documentation submitted. On my perusal of its contents, I found no violations. I can stress that the minimum national requirements for the post of Associate Professor have been met.

- **Education**

Joanna Bencheva graduated in History at Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” in 1995 with specialization in the Department of “History of Byzantium and Balkan Peoples”, with a master's degree and the topic of the diploma thesis “Ownership and population in the region of Lower Struma on data from the Zografski practices c. 13 - early 14 c.”. She has a second degree in Cultural Studies and a Master's degree in Law from Sofia University. In 2018 she received her PhD with a dissertation on “Nutrition and Dietetics in the Byzantine-Balkan World X - XV Century”, which was published as a monograph in 2019 by Gutenberg Publishing House with the title “*The Meal in the Byzantine-Balkan world, 10th-15th century*”. Teaching activity of the Head Assist. Prof. Dr. J. Bencheva started in 1996 as an Assistant Professor, in the period 1999 - 2003 she was a Senior Assistant Professor, and from 2019 to the present moment Dr. Bencheva is a Head Assistant Professor at the Faculty of History of Sofia University, Department of History of Byzantium and the Balkan Peoples, where she successfully continues her teaching and research activities. Dr. Bencheva teaches a number of compulsory (Medieval Balkan History, History of Byzantium and the Medieval Balkans) and specialized courses in various specialties of the Faculty of History.

- **Research activities, results and contributions**

In the current competition for Associate professor, Joanna Bencheva contributed with the monographs “*Food Trade in Dalmatia and Istria (13th – 15th century)*”, Sofia, 2024, and “*The Meal in the Byzantine-Balkan world, 10th-15th century*”, Sofia, 2019, as well as 15 articles published in refereed journals and collections.

With the submitted habilitation thesis “*Food Trade in Dalmatia and Istria (13th – 15th century)*”, published at the Sofia University Press “St. Kl. Ohridski” I got to know it in detail and I can say that I had excellent impressions. I would like to emphasize that the work is devoted to a subject that has not been the subject of focused study in our country.

The monograph is 223 pages long and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a glossary, a bibliography, maps and illustrations.

In the **Introduction**, Dr. Bencheva formulates the aim of her research - to focus on "the legislative framework of the food trade, most clearly visible in the city statutes"; she defines the chronological framework of the study, 13th - 15th centuries; she also gives a brief historiographical overview of the topic.

The first chapter entitled **Towns - Natural Environment, Development and Statutes** in several sub-chapters discusses in detail the *Natural conditions in Istria and Dalmatia, Towns with their location, history and statutes*, and the influence of Venice and Hungary on town statutes. The first part outlines the geographical boundaries of the study, examining the natural conditions and geographical features that undoubtedly influenced human activity and therefore the food trade. The second part of chapter one is devoted to the city statutes. It has been rightly noted that *they are an expression of the city's self-government formed over decades, but they also show local customs and laws. They cover all aspects of a locality's existence* (p. 17). The monograph follows a brief overview of the towns and their history with an emphasis on their statutes, and the exposition follows the geographical layout from north to south - from Istria to Dalmatia. The last part analyses in detail the influence of Venice and Hungary on the cities along the Adriatic coast of the Balkans, and the reasons for their interest are faithfully pointed out.

The second chapter of the monograph is entitled **Food Trade in Urban Statutes**. It also has subchapters divided according to different types of food products. It analyses data in the statutes on bread and cereals, meat, milk and dairy products, fish and seafood, honey, fruits and vegetables, olive oil and olives, salt, spices, and wine. Special attention is paid to production, catching, price, marketing, weights and measures, supervision and control, taxes and fees, rules for the sale of the product concerned, smuggling, etc. The conclusion that the author rightly reaches is that the urban economy is highly protectionist towards local producers and the authorities are concerned about the sustainable development of the city.

The third chapter of the monograph is devoted to **Environment and People**. The first sub-chapter explores *Places - the square, the harbour, the shops, the pubs, the home*. Here the spatial dimensions of trade in the urban environment are presented in detail, the places where trade takes place are traced and analysed - the town square, a centre of socialising and of trade, also the harbour, the shops, etc. The second sub-chapter is entitled *People - requirements of traders and officials who control trade* and traces the requirements and norms with which traders have to comply, and for non-compliance, they are criminally and financially liable. The most detailed is the regulation of the activities of pubmasters. Wine, though an important part of the diet, leads to intoxication and can provoke riots and disorder. Of interest is the section on *Packaging and its importance*, as J. Bencheva emphasizes the importance of packaging, as it preserves the taste, facilitates the transportation of products and prolongs their shelf life. Special emphasis is placed on *Measures and weights*, including attention to their counterfeiting.

The conclusion is the last part of Joanna Bencheva's monograph in which she summarizes the conclusions drawn in the text.

The overall picture of the food trade in the region of Istria and Dalmatia in the 13th-14th centuries, created by the author on the basis of the town statutes used, is extremely valuable.

On the basis of these sources, Dr. Bencheva makes a thorough dissection of the food trade in the Balkans, taking into account the peculiarities, similarities and differences both between individual towns and between different food groups, and also faithfully considering the influence of Venice and Hungary on this trade. I have no hesitation in saying that the monograph as a whole is a contribution.

All of the above gives me reason to point out that the monograph is an undeniable success not only for Dr. Joanna Bencheva, but also for Bulgarian medieval and Balkan studies. This work can be evaluated as a solid basis for a number of future studies on the problems of the social and economic history of the Balkans, the role and importance of trade on the peninsula, including the East-West contacts in the period 13-15 cc.

I would like to say a few words about Dr. Bencheva's other publications. The articles submitted in the competition for the post of Associate Professor are characterized by a concrete and thorough study of various aspects of the food trade (the Naval Trade of the Athonite monasteries, the cheese trade in the Balkans, the catch and trade of fish, etc.) and complement the conclusions and findings presented in the habilitation thesis. Other social and economic themes of the Balkan Middle Ages - old age, travels, the use of water in the Balkans, economic development in the region of Upper Struma 12 - 14 centuries, the economy of the Zograf Monastery 13 - 14 centuries and others - are also examined and analyzed.

Conclusion

After my acquaintance with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition and the indication of their scientific contributions, I find it justified to give my **positive vote** to the Head Assist. Prof. Dr. Joanna Bencheva to be selected in competition for the academic position of "ASSOCIATED PROFESSOR" at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" at the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology. I believe that she fully deserves it.

25. 09.2024 г.

Sofia

/Prof. Dr. Ivayla Popova/