

OPINION

Relevant to **competition for appointment to the academic position of “associate professor”** in professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Medieval Balkan History - Economic History of the Balkans, 10th-15th century), as announced in the *State Gazette* No. 65 / 28. 08. 2024.

The present opinion was submitted by Academic Panel member Prof. Penka Stilianova Danova, PhD, Institute of Historical Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

A single candidate has submitted documents to participate in the competition – Assist. Prof. Joanna Ilieva Bencheva, PhD at the Department of History of Byzantium and the Balkans at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia’s Faculty of History. The publications which Joanna Bencheva, PhD has submitted to participate in the competition for the academic position of “associate professor” include two monographs and nine studies/articles, published after she was awarded the academic degree of PhD and her election as assistant professor at the above-mentioned department of Sofia University’s Faculty of History. I shall focus on her latest monograph, which I see as a habilitation paper.

The habilitation thesis of Joanna Bencheva „Търговията с хранителни продукти в Далмация и Истрия (XIII–XV в.)“, София: УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“, 2024, 223 с. (*Trade with Food Products in Dalmatia and Istria (13th-15th century)*), Sofia. Kliment Ohridski Publishing House, 2024, 223 p.) adheres to the classical structure of monographic scientific studies. It contains an introduction, three analytical chapters, a conclusion, an impressive bibliography in two sections - sources and studies, a list of abbreviations, as well as complementary parts - a glossary of terms, maps and illustrations. After highlighting the importance of the topic (trade as an important part of the medieval city's economy), the author clearly articulates the aim and object of the study, namely to trace the legislative framework of food trade, most clearly visible through an analysis of city statutes (p. 8). She underscores that it was precisely this type of official documents that defined the types of goods that were traded; the rules under which food trade was carried out, the nature of imports and exports, the places and times at which exchanges were to take place, the measures and weights certifying the quantities sold, as well as the taxes, fees, and duties that were levied on goods and that contributed to the economic rise of the towns of Istria and Dalmatia during the period in question. Some important trade-specific issues such as 'fair price' to sellers and buyers, hygiene requirements and food packaging have not been overlooked either. The designation of the officials who monitored compliance with the legal framework and the

penalties provided for any breach of it were an integral part of the regulation of this economic activity.

The introductory study to the monographic study implies a review of the sources and specialized literature devoted to the main issues it addresses. The sources (statutes of cities on the Istrian peninsula and in Dalmatia) are discussed in the first chapter, and the publications used by the author are listed in the bibliography. J. Bencheva emphasizes in the introduction that she has mainly used studies of Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian authors. Only some of the most recent studies by Croatian authors are critically reviewed here; for the others, the number of which, I emphasise, is remarkable, the author refers the reader to the bibliography at the end of the study. Her style is distinguished by clarity, systematic clarity and readability, and the issues addressed in the monograph provide ample opportunity for future contributory research. I would, therefore, venture to recommend that a broader survey of the secondary literature on the problems of food trade in Istria and Dalmatia be included in those. The bibliographic review also includes some contributions of generations of Bulgarian researchers, primarily related to the interpretation and publication of sources from the region under consideration (especially from Dubrovnik), dedicated to the economic relations of medieval Bulgaria with the Dalmatian coast.

The first chapter of the study, entitled „Градовете – природна среда, развитие и статути“ (*Cities - Natural Environment, Development and Statutes*)(13–72), sets out several essential elements of the analysis that follows. These are the natural conditions that determined the production and import of food items in the region under consideration. The geographical boundaries of the Istrian peninsula and Dalmatia are outlined in detail. The author highlights the role of the Adriatic Sea's eastern coast for cabotage, particularly of the Venetian fleet, for the development of fishing, and for the extraction of salt. The importance of the local topography and climate for the development of viticulture, olives, citrus and other fruit production and vegetable cultivation has also been emphasised. The Dinaric Alps and the karst and limestone composition of the Dalmatian islands provided good conditions for livestock farming, but also the lack of good conditions for growing cereals, which had to be imported for bread production.

An overview of the urban status of Istria and Dalmatia included in the study is given, the author already having pointed out that she will not stick to comprehensiveness, but to examining the city statutes available to her in view of the influence exerted on them by both natural factors and the political situation in the region under consideration in the 13th-15th centuries. I find this approach appropriate as it allows the outline of the specific features of individual urban statutes, largely determined by both natural conditions and the political situation. The chapter briefly discusses the statutes of eight cities on the Istrian peninsula and nineteen in Dalmatia. The author

has pointed out rightly that Budva was not part of Dalmatia, which is also evident from the maps included at the end of the study as illustrative material. The appearance, first version, manuscript history, publication, language or languages in which the text was published have been indicated for each of the statutes. This approach completes the picture of the literature used by the author. The last paragraph of the chapter, subtitled „Между Венеция и Унгарија“ (*Between Venice and Hungary*), reveals in more detail elements of the political history of the region during the period under consideration, as well as typological characteristics of the city statutes that emerged and became established primarily due to the policies of the Venetian Republic (import bans, export bans, measures and weights used, etc.).

The second chapter, on „Търговията с хранителни продукти в градските статутите“ (*Food Trade in Urban Statutes*) (73-163) carries the main weight and contributions of the monograph. The production and trade of the main food products are discussed on a comparative basis and the foodstuffs are grouped thematically as follows: *Bread and Cereals, Meat, Milk and Dairy Products, Fish and Seafood, Honey, Fruit and Vegetables, Olive Oil and Olives, Salt, Spices, Wine*. Bread occupied a special place in a city's sustenance, which is why issues concerning grain production, grain and cereal trade, and grain imports were widely covered in the city statutes. Matters such as the price of bread, weights and measures, import controls and possible exports are also discussed in a comparative perspective. Space has been devoted to the activity of millers and bakers, the hours during which it can take place (daylight hours), and control and supervision. The approach to the other products is identical, allowing the researcher to summarize in the conclusion which were the main food products (besides bread - meat, fish, wine, olives) and which are the secondary ones (honey, fruits) spices, etc.), which products were in abundance and which had to be imported. Based on the data in this chapter, generalizations have been made about the activities of millers, bakers, and innkeepers addressed in the city statutes.

The third chapter, entitled „Средата и хората“ (*Environment and People*) (163-188), contains valuable insights into the social and economic history of the region. It includes four paragraphs devoted, respectively, to the topics of - *the square, the harbour, the shops, the taverns, at home; the People - the requirements for the merchants and officials who controlled the trade; the Packaging and its significance; and the Measures and weights* related to food trade as specified in the city statutes whose standards could be used in the city squares.

The monograph by Joanna Bencheva has a contributory character. For the first time in Bulgaria, it presents in a summary way the problems related to the trade in food products in a wide geographical region such as Istria and Dalmatia. The book is written in a clear and

understandable language and will undoubtedly be of interest to a wide range of readers. The positive impression of the analysis and summaries is complemented by the glossary of terms including names of measures and weights, of coins of the period, of taxes, duties and fees, of offices, etc. The exposition is illustrated both by the two maps of the Istrian peninsula and of Dalmatia, and by illustrations showing vedutas/vedute (detailed cityscapes) of Dalmatian towns from Conrad von Grünenberg's travelogue, *Description of a pilgrimage from Konstanz to Jerusalem*; from the sculpted stone portal of the Cathedral of Lawrence in Trogir, Croatia, depicting scenes of economic life at the dawn of the Late Balkan Middle Ages; from the statutes of the city of Kotor, Montenegro.

The monograph contains no plagiarism.

I shall, therefore, declare that the habilitation thesis of Joanna Bencheva on the subject of *Trade with Food Products in Dalmatia and Istria (13th-15th century)*, as well as the documents submitted by her for participation in the competition, give me reason to vote FOR her election to the academic position of “associate professor”.

Sofia,

October 5, 2024

Signature:

Prof. Penka Danova, PhD