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OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Vladislav Ivanov Ivanov, PhD, "Medieval Balkans" Department, Institute of Balkan Studies and Centre of Thracology-BAS

Member of the Scientific Committee for conducting a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2: History and Archaeology (Research Area: Political and Economic Development of the Balkans in the 11th and 12th centuries), published in State Gazette № 7/24.01.2023, to meet the academic needs of the Medieval Balkans Department at IBCT-BAS.

Assist. Prof. Georgi N. Dimov, PhD is the only candidate in the competition announced for the needs of the Medieval Balkans Department at the Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology-BAS. The candidate has submitted the complete set of documents required by the Law on the Promotion of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB in Bulgarian). The scientometric indicators of the applicant's deposited materials show that they fully correspond to the minimal national requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor, as it can be seen from the attached "Report on the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements under Article 2b (2), (3) and (5) of ZRASRB".

In 2007 Assist. Prof. Dr. Georgi Nikolov Dimov obtained a Bachelor's degree in Archaeology (specialization "Medieval Archaeology"), and in 2010 obtained a Master's degree in Medieval History at the Faculty of History of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2014, he successfully defended his phd-thesis in Professional Field 2.2 History and Archaeology (General History of the Middle Ages) on the topic: "The Cities in Southern Italy between the East and the West in the 11th-13th centuries" at the Faculty of History of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Department of Ancient History, Thracology and Medieval History). In the same year, he was appointed as Assistant Professor in the Medieval Balkans Department at Institute of Balkan Studies and Centre of Thracology-BAS. In 2016, he won a competition, and since then he has held the academic position of "Chief Assistant Professor" in the aforementioned section. Since 2021, he has also worked as its scientific secretary. Since December 2022, he has also been appointed as Chief Assistant Professor at the University of Information Technologies and

Library Science (UniBIT in Bulgarian), where he teaches History of Byzantium, Bulgaria and the Middle Ages.

The candidate has organizational skills in the NGO sector; the managerial initiatives related to the modern humanitarian science such as round tables, conferences related to the teaching of historical disciplines in schools and universities, surveys among students; the editing of historical and humanitarian journals and scientific compendiums. Dr. G. Dimov stated in his autobiography, that he speaks fluently English, French, Russian and Italian languages.

Dr. Georgi Dimov submitted a total of ten publications for participation in the announced competition: one monograph, eight articles and two studies. The majority of the submitted articles and studies have been published in scientific journals and collective volumes, referenced in authoritative international databases such as Web of Science. According to ZRASRB's criteria, this earns the maximum number of points to the candidate's publications.

I will begin with an overview of the candidate's monograph entitled "The Balkan World in the Age of the Komnenoi (1081–1185)" (599 pages), which was published in 2023 jointly by IBCT-BAS and the University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski". The extensive scientific work is devoted to the history of the Balkan provinces of the Byzantine (or Eastern Roman) Empire under the Komnenian dynasty. The monograph consists of an introduction, three separate sections (each with several chapters), a conclusion, and a scientific apparatus (bibliography). In the introduction, the candidate summarizes the main objectives of the research: the presentation of a kind of "spatial panorama" of the Byzantine world in the Balkans during the Age of the Komnenoi and the analysis of the most important economic and political processes that took place in the aforementioned chronological and geographical frameworks. The first section, "The Geographical Factor", explores in detail the synchronous natural conditions, climate changes, borders, roads, and demography in South-Eastern Europe. The second part, which is also the most extensive, "The Material World", examines the social and economic history of villages and cities, as well as the peculiar "Komnenian economic model". As its name suggests, the third part, entitled "Political History", concentrates mainly on the foreign policy and the internal structure of the Komnenian Empire.

The chosen model of structuring the monograph aptly resembles that of the works of Fernand Braudel (1902–1985) on the Mediterranean world at the time of King Philip II of Spain and Dimitri Obolensky (1918–2001) on the Byzantine commonwealth in Eastern Europe, which have already become classics for medievalists around the world. The research has the widest possible scope, as it is based on an extremely diverse source material that includes not only written sources, such as narratives, epigraphic evidence, and diplomatic documents, but also numismatic, archaeological, and other sources. The topics covered are very intriguing, especially those related to the social and economic history of the "classical"[1] Age of the Komnenoi (1081–1185) in South-Eastern Europe, which are relatively less researched in Bulgarian historiography, although the modern territory of the Bulgarian state was an integral part of Komnenian Byzantium. I generally concur with the arguments made by G. Dimov in his monograph, such as the assertion that many previously held beliefs regarding the fall, demographic collapse, or economic stagnation of Byzantium during that period cannot withstand serious scientific criticism. I also share his conclusion that "the European possessions of the Byzantine Empire were not the periphery of the Western European medieval world, on the contrary, they were its center of attraction", as this was unquestionably the case during the time period under study. Byzantium, especially during the reign of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), played a far more significant political and, to some extent, economic role in the "European concert" than in some of the previous and most of the subsequent eras.

I have no major remarks on the text of the monograph, except for some punctuation errors. The bibliography (or scientific apparatus) is extensive and noteworthy in terms of its volume (pp. 541–599) and contains carefully picked sources and scientific publications. Unfortunately, the end of the study lacks a name index for people and places, which would have aided its readers a lot. Nevertheless, the monograph impresses with its successful attempt to

[1] I put "classical" in quotation marks here, since even after 1185, representatives of this family continued to play an important role in the history of Byzantium, the Balkans, and Asia Minor, e.g., the "Great Komnenoi" (Μεγαλοκομνηνοί), who ruled the so-called Empire of Trebizond from 1204 to 1461.

cover almost all aspects of the Byzantine-Balkan world's development in the designated period and undoubtedly possesses the necessary qualities for a habilitation thesis.

A large part of the remaining works that Dr. G. Dimov submitted for the competition are devoted to topics related to the issues discussed in the monograph and separate aspects of the relationships and contacts of the Balkan population of Byzantium with other peoples and ethnic groups. I can pick out the following scientific publications in this group as particularly noteworthy and contributing: "Cultural and political relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Kingdom of England in the 11th – 12th centuries" (published in the "History" journal, № 5 of 2012; it also has the most citations in academic works); "The problem about Latin quarters of the Balkans in the 11th – 12th centuries", (published in the collective volume "Bulgaria in the world cultural heritage. Fourth national conference "Journey to Bulgaria. Bulgaria in European culture, science, education, religion"; May 14-16, Shumen" in 2014), and "Economy, Trade and Urban Life in Langobardian and Byzantine Southern Italy in 10th – 11th Centuries", (published in the "History" journal, № 1 of 2016). Another group of the submitted scientific production, which G. Dimov properly named *Varia*, goes beyond the chronological and thematic framework of the monograph. The three articles presented in this group examine various aspects of the material culture and coinage in the realm of the so-called "Byzantine commonwealth". It should be emphasized that Dr. Dimov's scholarly work is not limited to the papers submitted for the competition, since to date he has authored 61 articles, studies, and reviews (in Bulgarian and English) on numerous issues and aspects of medieval history, culture, and art.

According to me, Dr. Georgi Nikolov Dimov has already established a solid reputation in the scientific world thanks to his academic work, teaching activities, frequent participation in various scientific forums, and the scholarships and specializations he was awarded. The documents submitted by the applicant fully correspond to the requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations of the BAS. His monograph is a scholarly work that makes a significant contribution to the study of medieval Balkan and Byzantine history. For all the aforementioned reasons, I recommend to the esteemed Scientific Committee to award Dr. Georgi Nikolov Dimov the academic rank of Associate Professor in

Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Research Area: Political and Economic Development of the Balkans in the 11th and 12th centuries).

20th of May 2023 Signature:

Sofia