

REVIEW

for the scientific works of Chief Assistant Georgi Dimov, PhD, sole participant in the competition for „Associate Professor“ in the field of Higher education 2.Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Political and economic development of the Balkans in the XI - XII centuries), announced in the State Gazette no. 7/ 24.01.2023

Reviewer: Prof. Ivayla Popova, PhD, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“

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

The procedure and the resulting requirements under the Academic Staff Development Law in the Republic of Bulgaria (ASDL) and the Regulations of BAS have been followed, as is evident from the submitted documentation. On my perusal of its contents, I found no irregularities. I can stress that the minimum national requirements for the post of **Associate Professor** have been met.

- **Education**

Georgi Dimov graduated in Archaeology at Sofia University „St. Kl. Ohridski“ in 2007 with a specialization in Medieval Archaeology, after which he obtained a Master's degree again at the Faculty of History of Sofia University, Master's Program "Medieval Societies - Politics, History, Culture". In 2014 he successfully defended her PhD thesis on „The Cities of Southern Italy between East and West XI - XII centuries“. Since 2014 until the present moment Dr. Dimov has been a full-time research fellow at the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where he successfully continues his scientific activity. Since last year G. Dimov is now also teaching at UNIBIT, but I should emphasize that his course has long been included in the MA Antiquity and Medieval Studies offered by the Faculty of History of the Sofia University.

- **Research activities, results and contributions**

In the current competition for associate professor Georgi Dimov participated with one monograph, eight articles and two studies, all published in refereed journals and collections.

I have carefully read the submitted monographic work with the title „The Balkan World in the Age of the Komnenos (1081-1185)“ and I can say that I was left with extremely good impressions. Knowing G. Dimov, in the presented monograph I was deeply surprised by an easy, Brodelian style and I can only congratulate the author for the really nice language of the book, for the easy and readable style through which a difficult subject is presented.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the work is devoted to an important historiographical problem, which has not been the subject of an independent and focused study in Bulgarian Byzantine studies and medieval studies. Its writing is the result of a lengthy and thorough research work carried out by Georgi Dimov, which enabled him to study significant and rich source material.

The study is based on a wide range of sources heterogeneous in origin, volume and content - histories of a number of Byzantine and Western authors (works of Anna Komnena, John Kinnam and Nikita Honyat, the writings of Peter Tubedius, Fulherius of Chartres, Orderic Vitalis, Baldrick, Gibert, Robert Monk, Guido, Albert of Aquen, Otto of Freising, Guillaume of Tyre, etc. ; anonymous works such as the Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolymynorum (Deeds of the Franks and other Jerusalemmites), the Gesta Francorum Iherusalem expugnatium (Deeds of the Franks who took Jerusalem), the Jerusalem History, etc.), various documents from the monastic

libraries of Mount Athos, the epistolary heritage of secular and clerical figures of the period, Muslim and Jewish sources (the Arab geographer al-Idrisi, Benjamin of Tudela), various Byzantine charters, papal bulls, Venetian and Genoese documents, as well as numerous archaeological sources, epigraphic monuments, etc. Working with this vast amount of source material allows the author to recreate a complete picture of Komnenos Byzantium and present it to the reader.

The monograph is considerable in length - over 600 pages and includes three chapters, an introduction, a conclusion, sources and literature.

The first chapter, entitled **The Geographical Factor**, in several subchapters discusses in detail the geography and climate of the Balkans and their impact on the life and lifestyle of the population. The first sub-chapter postulates the crucial problem of the *Geographical Framework* as the subject of analysis are the mountains, the plains and the sea. I fully agree with the author that it was these three components that formed the basis of the geographical environment that determined fully agriculture, partly trade and to some extent history and politics in the Byzantine-Balkan world. The author analyses the geographical features of the Balkans, traces their historical development, studies the climate and its changes, and examines the life of the local population and their livelihood in this context. The second part of chapter one is devoted to *the Road arteries of the Balkans*. The problem is developed in depth on the basis of various sources by examining both the inherited infrastructure of the Balkans from previous periods and the Balkan road system in the Comnenian era with the main and secondary roads passing through the peninsula. The author concludes correctly that overland thoroughfares in the Byzantine medieval period were rarely used for trade; and mostly short-distance, for the needs of the local market, while travel and transport of goods by water remained the far more attractive alternative. In conclusion, Dimov correctly notes that the ancient road infrastructure was maintained very successfully in the time of the Komnenos' dynasty, but it never managed to reach the scale of the Roman imperial era. Travel never stops, although at certain times it is limited by political upheaval and the destruction of the road network in places. From the second half of the 11th century and into the 12th century there is a range of evidence of increasing transport activity in the Balkans. The third part of chapter one is entitled *Demography or Human Multitudes in the Balkans*. Here the author asks the question *Who were the 'Byzantines' and were there any?* Dimov rightly concludes that Byzantine society, which never reached the idea of a nation-state or even a proto-national state in the modern sense of the term, fell far short of the idea of a unified nationality or an ethnically pure empire. On the basis of source analysis and historiographical survey, the author concludes that "a new picture emerges before us: that of the demographic rise among the Byzantine-Balkan population of the 11th-12th centuries" (p. 110). The ethno-demographic changes that occurred in the Balkans during the period under review are also the subject of analysis in this part. Dimov rightly points out that as a result of barbarian invasions and the passage of the Crusaders through the Balkans, we observe ethno-demographic ebb and flow, with the density of the settlement network south of the Balkan Mountains increasing significantly from the second half of the 11th century. The records of the Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela, which give an idea of the Jewish communities in the empire, are undoubtedly valuable for demographic statistics: in the settlements Benjamin visited there were 8841 Jews or Jewish families living. They were most numerous in Corinth, Thebes, Thessalonica, Constantinople, etc. (127 p.). I certainly agree with Dimov's conclusion that the Byzantine capital itself remained the most cosmopolitan city in the European Southeast at the time. The author of the monograph also addresses the problem of the lands along the Lower Danube: contact zone or „no man's“ land. It is undeniable that the Danube lands harbour a colourful ethnic population.

Byzantine sources describe nomadic settlements in the Sofia Fields, Niško, field of Muglen and the lands ca. Belgrade. On the basis of written and archaeological data, Dimov traces the movement of the Uzes, Cumans and Pechenegs in the Balkans. Based on archaeological evidence, the author presents the presence of nomads who switched to agriculture and a settled way of life: as the excavations in Diogentia, Kapidava, village Tsar Assen, Krivina and Noviodunum. The revival of Byzantine power in the region is traced on the basis of the coinage of the Lower Danube through the coin hoards that have come down to us.

The second chapter of the monograph is entitled **The Material World**. It is also divided into subchapters, these are *The Peasant Economy*, *The Peasant Commune*, *Byzantine Cities in the Balkans 11 - 12 c.*, *The Byzantine Economic Model of the Komnenos*. In this chapter the author traces in detail the economic situation of the village in Byzantium and in the Balkans as a whole (149 - 260 pp.), dwelling in detail on the everyday life of the rural society, examining the staple food of the population - wheat, olives and wine; discussing animal husbandry in detail; exploring the question of the rural commune; and tracing agriculture with the monastic landholding and that of the large landowners; examines in detail the social status of the various groups of the rural population - free, dependent, slaves; works with many sources, including primarily tax inventories and documents originating in the monastic archives, as well as much archaeological data.

Dwelling at length on food, Dimov rightly concludes that wheat, olive oil and wine were the dominant crops in the Byzantine economy, crops whose yield exceeded the needs of the local population many times over. To these must be added animal foods, as well as fruit and vegetable rich harvests.

The monograph under review rightly notes that agricultural development reveals a visible change in the attitude of Byzantine-Balkan society towards land in the 11th and especially the 12th centuries. Dimov accepts the theses of Assoc. Prof. Albena Milanova, who considers the monastery in the Byzantine-Balkan world not only as a religious, political or social, but also as an economic institution. Dimov, following Milanova, argues that the large provincial monasteries in southern Bulgaria, as large landowners, concentrated considerable land wealth and organized in a new way the labor of the peasants dependent on them, being one of the factors for the flourishing of agriculture in the Middle Byzantine period.

The monograph continues with a thorough analysis of the Byzantine cities in the Balkans in the 11th-12th centuries, and it is truthfully noted that after the 10th century there was a visible increase and expansion of provincial settlements in the Balkans. The researcher traces the emergence of a new urban elite, pointing to the fact that the urban population visibly increased in number and grew richer. Based on both archaeological sources and written sources, Dimov traces the urban prosperity in the 11th-12th centuries of cities such as Corinth, Athens, Sparta, Dionysopolis (Balchik), Anchialos, Mesemvria, Thebes, Thessaloniki, Adrianople, Diocletianopolis (Hisar), Serdica, Velbezh, Ohrid, Philippopolis and many others. The author also discusses the emergence of completely new settlements, the urbanization of fortified early Byzantine centers, etc. Of course, the main emphasis as a key urban centre during the period is placed on Constantinople. Dimov rightly notes that Constantinople or the "*Reigning City*" towered above all other cities in both wealth and vice. He consistently presents the inhabitants, problems and riches of the imperial city - the numerous proletariat, the increasing number of foreigners, the inhabitants with their beliefs, customs, dress, festivities, knightly tournaments, fairs, and traces the workings of various charitable institutions in Constantinople - orphanages, hospitals, orphanages, the numerous churches and monasteries, and the unique Saint Sophia. In a separate subchapter, Dimov discusses the clarification of terminology for the city - the transition from *castron* to *polis*. Special attention

is paid in the study to both the population and the city's crafts and markets, noting the crucial role of markets and fairs during this period, and not omitting the 11th-12th century appearance of foreign merchants in the so-called Latin Quarters. Based on numerous sources, Dimov also provides an in-depth analysis of the various types of urban crafts and industries. The author also traces public (primarily ecclesiastical) and residential architecture, thus adding to the diverse picture of Byzantine material life in the 11th-12th centuries. At the end of this part, G. Dimov summarizes the conclusions he reached, among which we should point out the truthful conclusion that "the 'third estate' was absent or, if it existed, it was represented mainly by Venetian merchants in the *Pax Byzantina*", as well as the fact that "the economic role of Byzantine-Balkan cities, like that of Western European civitates, grew enormously" (p. 382).

The last part of chapter two is devoted to the Byzantine economic model of the Komnenos. From the outset, Dimov points out that what "is most palpably present as a material legacy of the Komnenian era are the numerous coins and coin hoards" and correctly concludes that "they are the undisputed expression of the increased monetary relations and developed trade and economy" (p. 382). On the basis of archaeological findings, some of the most important coin hoards of the period are examined in detail, which are "impressive to say the least", and "reveal a vital Byzantine economy and intensified internal trade and commodity exchange" (p. 393).

The third major chapter of the monograph under review is devoted to **Political History**. The first subchapter examines the *Political revival under the first Komnenos*. Here Dimov traces with care the political events that played out on the peninsula, emphasizing that the 11th century was characterized by a certain political decline of Byzantium and the loss of territories in Asia Minor, the Apennines, and the Balkans. It traces the restoration under Alexius I Komnenos, who possessed the qualities of a skilful diplomat and military commander, and under his son John Komnenos. The course of events in the war with the Normans and the Pechenegs is examined, as well as the empire's relations with the Hungarians and the crusaders of the First Crusade. Dimov rightly notes the successes of imperial policy both in the West and in the East. Byzantium's relations with the Italian maritime states, above all Venice, which gradually became the hegemon in the Eastern Mediterranean, are also the subject of in-depth analysis. The second subchapter is entitled *The Byzantine West: from Rise to Fall* and explores the politics of Manuel I Komnenos. The political and diplomatic activities of this Byzantine emperor are traced, both in the East and in the West, with special emphasis on the *Italian adventure* of Manuel I Komnenos. Of interest is the section on the *Political model of the Komnenos*. In characterizing it, Dimov outlines several important elements - the complication and enrichment of the official and court hierarchical titularity (487 p.); he emphasizes that by the middle of the 12th century, the representatives of the Komnenos' family and their relatives occupied over 90% of the senior military positions (488 p.); points out that wealth in money and valuables was replaced by the possession of extensive landed estates; emphasizes the fact that attempts were being made to revive the military forces of Byzantium after the accession of Alexius Komnenos, as well as the progressive aristocratization of the army (494 p.); also emphasizes the fact that noble Latins were increasingly entering the ranks of the Byzantine aristocracy (496 p.). I fully agree with the author's assertion that even if the power of the Byzantine dynasts was considerable, it hardly approached in any degree the power of the western feudal seigniors (p. 493). I also endorse his view that "the provincial governor (duke or cathepan) concentrated civil and military power in his hands and was traditionally related to the ruling dynasty or else a member of the so-called Komnenos clan" (497 p.). The author's judgement that "the Komnenos political model took its final completed form only in the reign of Manuel I Komnenos" is correct (p. 498). The last part of chapter three deals with the *Sunset of Komnenos*

work, with G. Dimov reaches the correct conclusion that after the death of Andronicus Komnenos the political model of Komnenos was finally liquidated.

The conclusion is the last part of Georgi Dimov's monograph in which he summarizes the conclusions of the text. I fully agree with the author's conclusion that the state, cultural, and economic model of the Komnenos dynasty had a very deep and lasting influence on the Balkan medieval states and on the societies of the Byzantine oikumene in general (525 p.). The amount of sources and research on the subject used by G. Dimov, spread over 80 standard pages.

This work presents a detailed picture of Komnenos Byzantium, traces the geographical boundaries of the peninsula, how the geographical environment and climate influenced the local population and its way of life and livelihood; examines the demography of the peninsula, makes a deep cut of the economic life - of agriculture, of trade and of the city and urban economy; a significant contribution is also made by the brilliant analysis of Komnenos political model.

Extremely valuable is the overall picture of Komnenos Byzantium, sculpted by the author on the basis of rich data from archaeological material and written sources. I can say without hesitation that the monograph as a whole has a contributory character.

All of the above gives me reason to point out that the monograph is an undoubted success not only for Dr. Georgi Dimov, but also for Bulgarian medieval studies as a whole. This study can be evaluated as a solid basis for a number of future studies on the problems of history, historical geography, urban studies and the economy, the overall study of Byzantium in the Komnenos era. Some minor typographical inaccuracies and omissions can be noted (For example, the book by Dr. Joanna Bencheva, cited in the notes to Chapter 2, *The Food' Table in the Byzantine-Balkan World X-XV Century*, is missing from the bibliography), which, however, do not undermine the high quality of the presented scientific work.

The individual studies and articles submitted for the competition are characterized by a concrete and detailed study of various aspects of the history and culture of medieval society, both in the Balkans and on the Italian peninsula, which complement the conclusions presented in the monograph. They deal with issues of the economic and political history of the Balkans (11-12th centuries), the relations and contacts of the Byzantine-Balkan population with the Apennines, the nomadic, Jewish and Latin communities within the boundaries of Byzantium and its spheres of influence, as well as studies on Byzantine and Western European material culture, art and coinage.

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** for the election of the Chief Assistant Dr. Georgi Dimov to the academic position of "**Associate Professor**" at the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, BAS, in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology. I believe that he fully deserves it.

11. 05.2023 r.

Sofia

Reviewer:

/Prof. Ivayla Popova, PhD/