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REVIEW

of Prof. Dr.Sc. Liliana V. Simeonova (Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology-BAS) for Assist. Prof. Dr. Georgi N. Dimov, the only candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2: History & Archaeology (Research area: Political and economic development of the Balkans in the 11th and 12th centuries), published in State Gazette no. 7/24.01.2023, to meet the academic needs of the Medieval Balkans Department at IBCT-BAS

The candidate for the academic position of associate professor, Assist. Prof. Dr. Dimov has submitted the complete set of documents required by the Law on the Promotion of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (i.e., *ZRASRB* in Bulgarian). 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*", Dr. Dimov fully meets the requirements of the law. As regards his scholarly production for the years 2012/23, he has submitted for review a total of 10 publications, one of which is a monograph (599 pp.), and the remaining nine are articles and studies.

Dr. Dimov's long-term research has focused on the economic, political and cultural development of a vast geographical area that stretches from Italy and the Balkans to Asia Minor. His publications are set on a solid research foundation, to which his in-depth knowledge of medieval sources and good analytical skills are a major contribution.

In his monograph *The Balkan World in the Age of the Komnenoi (1081–1185)*, Dr. Dimov paints a broad panoramic picture that covers nearly all aspects of the Balkan reality. These are the routes of communication in the peninsula, its demographic landscape, the rural communities and urban life and crafts, and the turbulent events that played out in the Balkan political scene during the *Komnenoi* era. The realization of such a large-scale research project is in itself a contribution to contemporary studies of Balkan history.

The monograph consists of an introduction, three parts (each with several chapters), a conclusion, and a bibliography. The study is based on the analysis and synthesis of source material as voluminous as it is heterogeneous in its nature: written sources of various kinds, archaeological

Asia Minor and the Sicilian Normans in Southern Italy, the Byzantine military began to increasingly rely on foreign mercenaries. At the same time, the changed titular structure brought to the political scene the so-called "new people", who now occupied important positions in the governance of the state both at the central and local levels. Another major challenge to Byzantium in that period were the first two Crusades to the Holy Land, whose participants passed through imperial territory and subsequently wrested from the Muslims territories over which the Empire had a claim.

This is the broad picture that best captures life in the Byzantine Balkan regions during the Komnenian era. However, Dr. Dimov has opted for a somewhat unorthodox organization of the material: in the forefront, he deals not with political events that also had an impact on local residents' daily lives, but rather with realities that, in his words, belong to the "material world" of the Balkans. In his very broad idea of the "material world," Dimov included agriculture and the rural commune, along with the resurgence of urban life, the growth of crafts, urban public and residential architecture, and large-scale secular and monastic landholding.

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, the changes that have taken place in this material world have been explored through a comparison of written sources (including documents from the monastery archives) and available archaeological data. However, Dimov's assertion that the outcome of these changes could be described as a "Byzantine economic model under the Komnenoi" is contentious. The sources offer no evidence to substantiate his assertion that Byzantium shifted from a "command" to a "liberal" economic paradigm at this time. On the contrary, in the eleventh century, the state's continued interference in the economy caused Byzantium to lag behind the more liberally structured economies of the Italian maritime cities, and the Empire's economic disadvantage to the Italians by the twelfth century was already conspicuous.

The political climate in the Byzantine provinces of the Balkans is the subject of the monograph's third section. Both the political resurgence of the Empire under the first Komnenoi, which peaked under Manuel I Komnenos, and the decline of Byzantine authority after the end of his reign are discussed. Here, once more Dimov presents a novel term: the "Komnenian political model." It is questionable, though, whether the demise of the theme organization, the rise of the *proniarioi*, which also included the local *archons*, and the growing number of mercenaries in the Byzantine

Committee I give my positive vote in the selection of Dr. Georgi N. Dimov as Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.2. History&Archaeology (Research area: Political and economic development of the Balkans in the 11th and 12th centuries).

21 April 2023

Signature:

/Liliana Simeonova/