

OPINION

by prof. Dobrinka Parusheva, PhD, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv / Institute of Balkan Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PhD) in the Area of professional qualification 2.2. History and archaeology to Donika Nikolaeva Tsanovska-Schneeweiss

Donika Tsanovska-Schneeweiss is a PhD candidate at the Department of History of Byzantium and the Balkan Peoples, Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” since 2019. She has passed all the necessary exams and has collected the necessary credits. She has submitted all materials in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Holding of Academic Positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. For this opinion the most important of these are the text of the dissertation, the extended abstract, the related publications, and the CV of the candidate.

The dissertation with the title *The Role and activity of dragomans. The Austrian branch of the Testa family in the second half of the 18th and first half of the 19th century* consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, appendices, and a bibliography, all totalling 215 pages. The elaboration on the topic related to the dragoman stratum and their influence on diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Europe was undoubtedly facilitated by the research stay carried out by Donika Tsanovska-Schneeweiss at the Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz, Austria, as well as by her work in the Viennese archives.

The introduction presents the topic of the study, the chronological framework, the aims, and objectives of the dissertation. A brief description of the sources used and an overview of the available secondary literature related to the dragoman institution is also offered.

The first chapter is an exposé on the origins, status, and features of the dragoman institution and the range of diverse duties it encompassed in the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century onwards. The distinction of two major groups of dragoman is pointed out, depending on the institution for which translation work was provided – those in the service of the imperial high administration and others working for foreign embassies and consulates. The rise in importance of dragomans in the 18th

century is traced, as well as another major change in the 19th century, namely the gradual transfer of the dragoman positions into the hands of Muslims. The text builds on what has been achieved in the historiography. The PhD candidate correctly identifies the authors who have researched these issues, and in several places she points out what she considers to be shortcomings in the research, although it seems to me that these are limitations in scope or lacunae rather than actual shortcomings, errors, etc.

The second and third chapters are the main ones for the dissertation. The chronological scope is from the 1840s to the mid-19th century. Chapter 2 examines the origins of the Testa family and the life of Bartholomäus I Testa (1723-1809), considered the founder of the Austrian branch, as well as his professional rise from third dragoman in the Austrian embassy in Constantinople to Hofrat and chargé d'affaires twice (albeit briefly). The acquisition of the hereditary title of Baron in 1803 significantly changed the place and role of the family's representatives in Austrian and international politics. Chapter 3 traces the lives and activities of the second (Anton Testa and Caspar Testa) and third generations of the Austrian branch (Bartholomäus III von Testa and Heinrich von Testa).

The narrative is well supported with historical information drawn from archival sources in the Viennese archives, especially for the representatives of the third generation. The language and style of writing are suitable for academic work, although there are unnecessary repetitions in many places. As a remark, I may point to the rather general exposé of the Testa family's entry into the field; in fact, what we read is a rather general narrative about the Genoese people in Galata. Furthermore, the broader picture of the ramifications of the family remains unclear, as do the reasons why it is the Austrian and Dutch branches that are most influential. Insufficiently substantiated, in my opinion, seem some of the conclusions concerning the activities of Caspar Testa (e.g. on p. 116) and the reason why he is missing from the biographical lexicons. In fact, as a general remark, I would point out precisely the too frequent use of wordings like *най-вероятно, много вероятно, по всяка вероятност* in the text of the thesis.

The final fourth chapter offers us the example of the Austrian branch of the Testa family as a basis for discussion of the social networks of influence of dragomans. These networks, created primarily through kinship ties, help to protect special privileges and maintain positions within the community. While from the mid-17th to the mid-18th century there were connections with families associated primarily with Venice and France, there was a shift after that, and it was associated with the enlargement of the Austrian branch network to the Austrian aristocracy. However, as Donika Tsanovska-Schneeweiss writes, the principle of engagement remained the same, and it was aimed at securing useful contacts to help the family rise in the highest diplomatic circles of the empire (p. 187).

The text of this chapter is based mainly on general observations shared in the publications of Natalie Rothman; there are quite a lot of repetitions related to the Testa family too.

The conclusion at the end of the text is aimed at reflecting and analysing the presented information. The appendices are not commented in the text, they do serve as an illustration rather.

Some general critical remarks:

First of all, the not quite correct use of “national identity” does not make a good impression. Until the 18th century one can hardly speak of one anywhere at all (cf. p. 82). I am inclined to agree that in the second half of the 19th century it is already acceptable to speak of a commitment to a nation (p. 173), yet I would rather disagree that the members of the Testa family “committed themselves to an Austrian national identity” in the early 19th century (p. 181), still less that they “bound” themselves to an Austrian national identity (p. 192). Not only is the appropriate use of terms of particular importance, but also their weaving into a qualitative academic narrative. Related to this, secondly, terms like *diplomatic corps*, *community of dragomans*, *dragoman institution* and similar are used as synonyms without addressing this issue in advance, as one would expect. Finally, I would like to point out some purely technical omissions/flaws that are easily remedied: i) in the text we find a lot of quotations from documents that have been translated – it is appropriate to indicate that the translation is the work of the author or, if not, who the translator is; ii) when citing an article in an edited volume, the author and the title of the article should be indicated first and only then the editor and the title of the volume (cf. Schmied-Kowarzik Wolfdietrich: *Verstehen und Verständigung: Ethnologie, Xenologie, interkulturelle Philosophie* – in several places); iii) Штурмер/Шурмер: both the right and the wrong version of Stürmer are used in just two pages one after another (pp. 103-104).

I would like to clarify immediately that the critical remarks I have just shared, as well as the previously mentioned ones, do not dominate my overall impression of the dissertation presented for defence. On the contrary, the wealth of data offered by Donika Tsanovska-Schneeweiss about the representatives of the Austrian branch of the Testa dragoman family in the second half of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries and about their place in the international diplomatic networks allows me to claim that the empirical saturation of the text is sufficiently high. Material from Austrian archives, numerous biographical and other reference books, published sources and old printed editions have been used. A wealth of academic literature on the dragoman institution has also been consulted and cited where appropriate, both the major older and recent new studies on the subject. As a positive side, I would also point to the provided discussion with some of the authors when the PhD candidate felt it necessary.

The presented extended abstract (Autoreferat) correctly reflects the content and the main results achieved in the dissertation, although the author's contributions (*приноси*) are outlined very modestly. The required publications related to the dissertation topic are available too: two of them already published and another one in press.

In conclusion, the dissertation presented for defence meets the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LADRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law, and the relevant Regulations of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". It shows that the candidate possesses sufficient in-depth knowledge and demonstrates qualities and skills for independent scientific research.

Taking into account everything said so far, I give my positive assessment of the research presented in the reviewed dissertation, and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the degree of PhD to Donika Nikolaeva Tsanovska-Schneeweiss in the Area of professional qualification 2.2. History and Archaeology (Modern and Contemporary General History).

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Author of the opinion:

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