

## REVIEW

on the basis of order

No. RD-38-119 / 27.02.2024

of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

by **Assoc. Prof. PhD Gergana Yordanova Georgieva**, a member of the scientific jury, regarding the dissertation of **Donika Nikolaeva Tsanovska-Schneevais**, Department "History of Byzantium and the Balkan Peoples", Faculty of History, Sofia University on the topic: **"ROLE AND ACTIVITY OF DRAGOMANS . THE AUSTRIAN BRANCH OF THE TESTA FAMILY DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY – THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY"**

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of philosophy" (PhD) in:

Scientific field: 2. Humanities

Professional direction: 2.2 "History and Archaeology"

Scientific specialty: New and Contemporary History – New Balkan History

### **Data on the doctorate, dissertation, abstract and publications**

Donika Tsanovska holds a bachelor's degree in the specialty "Past and Present of South-Eastern Europe", obtained from SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2018 and a master's degree in "Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Balkans", acquired again at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2019. The same year, Donika Tsanovska was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department "History of Byzantium and the Balkan Peoples" of the Faculty of History, and Assoc. Prof. PhD Maria Baramova was appointed as the scientific supervisor. It would be good to include the scientific work of the doctoral student – specializations, work in foreign archives, etc. in the CV.

The dissertation consists of introduction, four chapters, conclusion, six appendices and bibliography in a total volume of 215 pages. The structure is very appropriate – the dissertation begins with an introductory chapter in which the history and main characteristics of the group of translators are outlined, after which the doctoral student moves on to the specific case of Testa family.

The **first chapter** presents the dragoman institution – its origin and development over the centuries. The emphasis of the chapter are the main characteristics of the translators' professional group in the Ottoman Empire – origin, recruit, training, legislation. The topic is based on a general historical, legal and theoretical framework outlining the foundations of the peace system in Europe, the network of legations and embassies. The principles of European and Muslim diplomacy and politics are outlined. The origin of the term "dragoman", its

application in various Arab states and its institutionalization in the Ottoman Empire is examined in detail. The place of dragomans in trade, in center-periphery contact, in military campaigns, in diplomatic missions is outlined. The predominance of Jews and Phanariot Greeks in this group is clear. Their complex status – a combination of Ottoman subjection and protection (extraterritoriality) is commented.

The **second chapter** focuses on Testa family, giving information on its origins, life in Byzantine Constantinople, their imposition as translators in the Ottoman court and the founding of the Austrian branch of the family by Bartholomeus I Testa. Based on documents from the Austrian State Archives, the biography of the founder of the Austrian branch of the Testa family – Bartholomeus Testa is outlined. The twists and turns in the fate of the family during different eras are traced.

The **third chapter** of the dissertation reveals information about the most prominent members of several generations of the family, again based on primary source material from the Austrian State Archives. The data on their life and professional activities provide an opportunity for presentation of their important place in the diplomatic circles of the Austrian Empire. The professional continuity demonstrated by several generations of the family and the high erudition and skills they develop in the field of translation and diplomacy are impressive.

The **fourth chapter** examines the social network of Testa family. They connected with representatives of the Austrian nobility and prominent diplomatic officials. The chapter is a natural conclusion of the dissertation research – raising the knowledge about the Testa family and their activities to a new level. It should give us an idea of their activity as a whole and outline the invisible threads that connect it with important representatives of the various imperial elites – Ottoman and Austrian, with local actors, with the international diplomatic elite, etc.

The dissertation is based on archival sources located in the Austrian State Archives in Vienna. The professional activity and personal life of the most prominent representatives of the Austrian branch of the Testa family have been studied.

The used scientific literature is very diverse and rich. It should be noted that some recent studies are used – such as those of Christine Filliou and Tijana Krstic, which mark the new achievements and new trends in historical studies. Christine Filliou has another article that is directly related to the topic of the dissertation – “Mischief in the Old Regime: Provincial Dragomans and Social Change at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century”, which could also to be

used in the study. Turkish historiography is well represented, with a significant number of publications on the subject. I would also recommend using Emrah Gurkan's book "Spies for the Sultan: Ottoman Intelligence in the Great Rivalry with Spain", which would help outline the international climate in Europe, the action strategies the spies who have a profile similar to the translators – cross-border people, who did not belong to a certain nation or state, as Gurkan defines them – people with multiple identities. The presentation of Bulgarian historiography could be enriched with research by Prof. Plamen Mitev on international trade, Assoc. Prof. Svetlana Ivanova – on Beratli merchants and their status, which is close to that of translators, and Assoc. Prof. Simeon Simeonov on the place of Balkan politics in a global context.

Given the large volume of sources and literature used, I would recommend a more detailed introduction to the dissertation, which would include a more in-depth and critical analysis of the historiography; overview and detailed analysis of the types of sources – what information they contain, how they can be categorized, how they are relevant and contribute to the study, etc.

The author's style is clear, the text is grammatically sound. I will only note that one last correction can be made to clean up some technical errors.

The 26-page abstract is designed according to the requirements for this type of scientific writing.

Donika Tsanovska presents three publications on the topic of the dissertation. Two of them have been published and the third is in print. Therefore, it covers the requirement of the Law and the Regulations for the acquisition of scientific degrees in SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The mentioned publications reflect some of the main topics covered in the dissertation work: a historiographic overview, the role of the Testa family as a "diplomatic bridge between the Ottomans and the Austrians", the dynamics of relations in diplomatic circles, studied on the example of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstahl.

### **Scientific contributions**

In my opinion, the main contributions of the dissertation consist of the following:

**First:** The dissertation is an attempt to present a complete history of a Dragoman family, which was part of the Ottoman, Austrian and European diplomatic elite and had its role in international decision-making during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The origin and

way of establishment of the family in Constantinople is traced – transition from merchants to dragomans, specialization in the intermediary services of translators, and etc. The fortunes of three generations of the Testa family and their skills and qualities that made them successful international players are described in detail. Special attention is paid to the fateful decision to link the future of the family to the Austrian court and the efforts to make its representatives an important part of the Austrian elite.

The introduction of new source material – documents from the Austrian archives, is definitely a contribution to the development of Bulgarian science. The case study method was also successfully chosen, which allows the author to develop a specific case as a model of a given social or professional group. The approach allows the researcher to derive the main characteristics and parameters of a phenomenon without getting lost in the ocean of sources and historiography. There is no doubt that a huge effort has been made to cover the topic comprehensively. Donika Tsanovska is well versed in the literature and historical sources on the subject. The appendices at the end of the dissertation vividly illustrate the family history and networks of the Testa family. The history of the Testa family is presented in the context of the European diplomatic history. In this sense, revealing the history of the Testa family contributes to the development of Bulgarian historiography in the field of diplomacy and international relations in the 18th – 19th centuries.

The contribution of the supervisor should also be noted here. For many years, Assoc. Prof. Maria Baramova, together with Prof. Ivan Parvev as a team, set dissertation topics related to the study of European diplomatic history, encouraging doctoral students to work with new source material from various European archives. In this way they contribute significantly to the development of Bulgarian historiography in the field of imperial politics and inter-imperial relations.

**Second:** The dissertation chooses an interesting topic, relevant and suitable for this type of research. Translators in the Ottoman Empire and Europe are considered a separate professional and social group, which is distinguished by its special status. Thanks to their study as a group, the strategies of working and survival in an international environment between the interests of the great powers are tracked. The dissertation presents how this professional group was created and developed, how it established itself in diplomatic circles and won a special status. The dissertation, thanks to the affluent scholarly literature used for its preparation, helps to shape the overall picture of European diplomacy during the period. The statement that

dragomans are a bridge between the two empires – the Ottoman and the Austrian – sounds convincing.

**Third:** An indisputable contribution of the dissertation is the fourth chapter, in which an attempt to trace the networks of contacts and collaborations built by the Testa family is made. It was used as a strategy for asserting family's place in the Austrian imperial elite. The network approach is popular in contemporary research because it elucidates the outcomes of human relationships in which invisible threads such as loyalty, friendship, kinship, professionalism, common interests, and others influence international decision-making. In fact, the networks are qualitative dimension of human activity in diplomacy, trade and governance, etc.

### **Notes and recommendations**

Although I am aware of the generalizing nature of the first chapter, which aims to present the history and development of the dragoman service, I would recommend the use of primary material that will enrich and detail the picture. I am sure there are published documents that could be used. For example, the author mentions official lists of translators in the Ottoman court (p. 31). Such lists would probably help clarify the number of translators, their origins and other specific features of their professional profile.

The espionage activity of some translators is mentioned several time in the dissertation (pp. 52, 117, 163, 191) without, however, specifying it. It is interesting aspect of international relations, which reveals the multiple levels of activities of the international agents. I will emphasize again that it is possible to use Emrah Gurkan's book on Ottoman intelligence. It could help clarify the profile and activities of these people who move freely between the European circles of power and play a double game.

The text emphasizes the rise of the Testa family as part of the Austrian imperial elite through intermarriage with representatives of the Austrian aristocracy. It has to be clarified that the network approach is much more complex than highlighting dynastic marriages in aristocratic families. Usually, thanks to a variety of sources, such as personal correspondence, researchers seek to build a more comprehensive network, including patrons and clients of the family, friends, business associates of different social levels. The purpose of this approach is also the quantitative and qualitative level of these contacts. Quantitative assessment implies a study of how often contacts are made with the given person. The qualitative assessment

analyzes what consequences and results these contacts lead to, such as commercial contracts, career advancement, and etc. A similar analysis could be made on the basis of the diagram in Appendix 6, which highlights precisely the intensity of the primary and secondary contacts of the Testa family in the sixteenth century in Pera district. This analysis is not included in the dissertation, despite the availability of ready processed information. In the fourth chapter, the potential of the constructed networks is rather hinted at, but the topic is not developed in its entirety. The method of studying personal and family networks (the so-called "network approach") is often applied in the texts of Assoc. Prof. Andreas Liberatos, Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Todorov and Assist. Prof. Petar Dobrev.

These remarks do not detract from the merits of the dissertation. They could be seen as suggestions for developing the subject in the future.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I believe that the PhD candidate has fulfilled the requirements and conditions laid down in the regulations and, based on the above, I propose to the Honorable Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy” in the Scientific field: 2. Humanities, Professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology, Science Major: New and Recent General History – New Balkan History by Donika Nikolaeva Tsanovska-Schneeweiss.

14.05.2024

Veliko Tarnovo

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/ Assoc. Prof. Gergana Georgieva/