**S T A T E M E N T**

by Assoc. Prof. Plamen Bozhinov, PhD

on the dissertation work of **DENIS BOGOMILOV IVANOV**,

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at the Faculty of History at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, with the title:

"**Ivan Drasov - the unknown and underestimated activist of the Bulgarian national liberation movement"**

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field

2.2 History and Archaeology

(History of Bulgaria - History of the Bulgarian Revival)

Following a tradition that dates back to Zahari Stoyanov and Stoyan Zaimov, the revolutionary activities of the Bulgarians during the Renaissance have been the subject of numerous, diverse and, to varying degrees, in-depth studies, the work of generations of historians, literary scholars, local historians or simply history fanciers. Today it is difficult to accept that this is an unexplored issue, and it is even more difficult to find a topic on which to write an entire dissertation. The difficulties are also determined by the limited domestic and foreign source base, which does not provide much scope for expanding the research field. However, I should stress here, in the introductory remarks, that Mr. Denis Ivanov and his supervisor, prof. Plamen Mitev have fully succeeded in their search for a free niche, focusing on the personality, life path, revolutionary activities and public appearances of the Lovchan resident Ivan Todorov Drasov, a comrade of such major figures of the Bulgarian national revolution as Vasil Levski, Panayot Hitov, Lyuben Karavelov, Hristo Botev and Stefan Stambolov. It should be noted, of course, that the work on the dissertation was greatly facilitated by the 2007 publication of the *Ivan Drasov and the Bulgarian National Revolutionary Movement* documentary collection, which was edited by experts of the era such as K. Vazvazova-Karateodorova and prof. N. Zhechev.

The chosen topic is undoubtedly dissertationable. Indeed Iv. Drasov is not an unfamiliar name for the researchers of the Bulgarian 19th century. Most of the studies, however, only barely touch on his life and work, and are mostly focused on the leaders of the revolutionary movement of the first magnitude. Thus, the prominent resident of Lovech, who at key moments played an important role in the events, stays more or less in the shadows. With his work Mr. Denis Ivanov undoubtedly fills the existing gap in our native historiography.

The reviewed dissertation contains an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and a list of abbreviations used, with a total length of 501 pages. Each of the chapters is divided thematically into separate paragraphs and sub-paragraphs, thus making the exposition much clearer and easier for the reader to use. The chosen problem-chronological approach to structuring the material is also fully acceptable, as it is predetermined by the stated aims of the study and the nature of the existing source base. Admittedly, some repetition thus proves to be a necessary evil, but in return the chosen structure allows, firstly, a fuller utilization of the data from the documents, secondly, a broadening of the research perspectives and, thirdly, a maximally critical approach to the existing theses in our historiography. In all three areas noted above, the author has made his specific scholarly contributions, which add the necessary value to his research. The chronological boundaries of the dissertation agreed in the introduction are also acceptable and permissible, especially in view of the thematic focus chosen by the dissertation student, which focuses on the life and activities of Iv. Drasov in the years before the Liberation. It is correctly emphasized that his post-liberation political activity and public appearances had their own specifics and these could be the subject of a subsequent independent research task.

The introductory part contains all the necessary elements for a dissertation – a formulation of aims and objectives of the research, a comprehensive and evaluative historiographical review, an overview of the available source base, a justification of the methods and methodology used. Necessary and obligatory stipulations in such cases are made concerning the research problem and the manner of its concrete elaboration. Some of the details of the historiographical review could have been given in a more concise form, but this is likely to be corrected in the preparation of a future publication.

The first chapter, which consists of three paragraphs, presents the family environment, the formation of Ivan Drasov as a personality and as a public activist, his first public appearances and his revolutionary activities until August 1872, when he left Lovech in order to continue his education in Bohemia. The author's scientific contributions in these pages are both in constructing a more comprehensive and fuller picture of Drasov's early years, and in clarifying a number of obscure and controversial moments of his first encounter with Vasil Levski, the building and functioning of the private revolutionary committee in Lovech and the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, and the personal contribution of the Lovech activist in helping the Apostle's activities to expand the revolutionary propaganda and the reach of the committee network.

Interest is also aroused by the revealed details about the young man's motives for leaving Lovech and Bulgaria at a time when revolutionary activity after the General Assembly in Bucharest of April 29 – May 1, 1872 was gaining speed and scope, and obviously in the near future there were important events to come that could prove decisive for the fate of the country. In these pages one can sense that the author is more spare and less critical of the actions of the personality he examines. It is also noteworthy that the third paragraph of this first chapter is relatively smaller in length and addresses fewer issues. According to the logic of the research, it might as well not be an independent paragraph, but only a concluding last point of the previous second paragraph, which is also a natural conclusion of the issues discussed in it.

The second chapter of the dissertation with a volume of 217 pages represents an essential part of the research. Mr. D. Ivanov traces the life and activity of Iv. Drasov for almost three years between September 1872 and June 1875 in it, when he lived and studied in the towns of Pisek and Prague. At the same time, the young revolutionary continued to maintain close contacts with like-minded people in Romania, Serbia and Odessa, took a keen interest in the fate of the exiles in Asia Minor, and sought to follow closely the activities of the Bulgarians in building the exarchate institution, in the cultural sphere and in the field of education. The availability of more epistolary sources for this period of his life enables the author of this dissertation to dwell in more detail on some of the more significant initiatives of the young Bulgarian, as well as on his ideas concerning the development of the revolutionary struggle, the role of the Exarchate and the school in the course of the ongoing social changes in the country. Quite naturally, the main focus in these pages is on Drasov's contacts with Panayot Hitov, Hristo Botev, Lyuben Karavelov and other revolutionary activists, through which his place and role in the events immediately following the tragic death of Vasil Levski, as well as in relation to the ideological and organizational crisis experienced by the BRCC at that time, are well highlighted.

No less important and significant is the third chapter, in which the dissertation student presents the activities of Iv. Drasov in the years of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875-1878). The chapter is divided into four paragraphs, in which successively and in chronological order the following activities are traced: the participation of Drasov in the work of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee of 1875 and in the preparation of an armed uprising in the country in the autumn of the same year; his role in the life of our emigration in Romania between the events in Stara Zagora, Rousse and Shumen and the outbreak of the April Uprising; his activity as part of the editorial staff of the *Revival* newspaper in Braila, as a scout in support of the Russian army during the Russo-Turkish War and as chairman of the Lovech City Council. With good reason, the author of the dissertation emphasizes that this was the most active period of Drasov's activity in the years immediately before the Liberation. Perhaps it should be added here that this is also the most controversial period, which has caused divergent assessments and interpretations among researchers. Based on the existing documents and recollections of participants in the events, Mr. D. Ivanov brings into focus some unexplained and controversial moments surrounding Drasov's activities, which he carefully, thoroughly and critically analyses. In most cases his conclusions are well-founded and reasoned, and in others, due to the state of the source base, he leaves the answers open for future research.

The final fourth chapter, which is also the smallest - only 35 pages, is devoted, on the one hand, to Drasov's role in shaping the dominant narrative of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement and, on the other hand, to the place he himself takes in our national memory. Despite its smaller size, this part of the dissertation is no less important with its contributions than the previous three, since it addresses crucial questions about the methods and ways in which the historical narrative was constructed by the first chroniclers such as Zahari Stoyanov, Stoyan Zaimov, Yurdan Ivanov, Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov etc., as well as about the political use of history in the turbulent years after the Liberation, when passions were still very heated and biases still very undisguised. This part of the work not only describes the image of the revolutionary, politician and enlightener Drasov, but also transfers a kind of a bridge to a future study of his activities in the years of the free Principality of Bulgaria.

In his conclusion, Mr D. Ivanov uses an approved, traditional approach to summarize the content of his research work, as well as for a general assessment of the political, literary and social activity of Ivan Drasov. In these last pages, the specific scientific contributions made in the study are also successfully highlighted.

The author's language is beautiful, controlled and precise. Certain minor omissions in the expression are in the nature of proofreading errors, which I am convinced will be corrected in the future publication of the work. Mr. Ivanov's ability to polemicize and to critically search for historical truth through a thorough analysis of the sources and literature used should also be noted.

In a text of this size and with these many topics addressed, small factual inaccuracies and omissions are quite normal. On p. 18, footnote 81, the accession of the Botev-Levski Institute to the Institute of History (now the Institute of Historical Researches) is not quite correctly presented. On p. 89, footnote 500 the author wrongly assumes that under the pseudonym "Contemporary" belongs to the author of *Tsarigradski memoirs* Stefan S. Bobchev. It is firmly established in the literature that this is a pseudonym of Peter P. Karapetrov. On p. 182 Todor Peev is incorrectly presented as the President of the Bulgarian Literary Society, since he only held the position of Secretary. It would have been good idea to add to § 1 of Chapter One a genealogical table of the Drasov family as an appendix, which would not only have illustrated the text but would have helped the reader to better orient himself in the family connections. I would like to stress that the minor remarks and suggestions made here in no way detract from or diminish the overall positive impression of the dissertation.

Mr D. Ivanov has eleven publications and one work which will be published soon. All of them are on the topic of the dissertation and contain significant parts of the research. Both in quantity and in content they far exceed what is necessary for a successful defense of the dissertation.

I found no trace of plagiarism in the publications or the dissertation.

The structure, content, main conclusions and contributions of the research are well presented in the abstract.

Everything stated in the opinion so far gives me the full grounds to evaluate positively the presented dissertation and to call upon the other members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to award Mr. Denis Bogomilov Ivanov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

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April 16, 2024 Assoc. Prof. Plamen Bozhinov, PhD