

REVIEW

of the dissertation of doctoral candidate Donika Tsanovska-Schneeweiß
"The Role and Activities of Dragomans: The Austrian Branch of the Testa Family from the
Second Half of the 18th Century to the First Half of the 19th Century"

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1. The manuscript submitted by Ms. Tsanovska-Schneeweiß comprises 215 pages, divided into an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion, followed by appendices and a bibliography. The dissertation and all accompanying documents meet the legal and normative requirements for an official defense to confer the academic degree of "Doctor". The scientometric data provided by the candidate are accurate and lawful. No attempts at plagiarism were detected.

2. At the beginning of her research, Ms. Tsanovska-Schneeweiß provides a comprehensive overview of the role and activities of dragomans within the context of diplomatic relations between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Various aspects related to the specific work of dragomans, their professional responsibilities, and aspects of their personal lives are examined. The candidate demonstrates thorough familiarity with the historiography on the subject, both international and Bulgarian, which is undoubtedly a strength.

The dissertation aims to investigate the role played by the Testa family in the history of Habsburg-Ottoman relations from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century. More precisely, it covers the decades between the Treaty of Belgrade (1739) and the Crimean War (1853-1856). The chronological focus is well-chosen, as Austrian military-political pressure towards the Balkans significantly decreased during this period, thereby increasing the importance of diplomacy in relations with the Ottoman Empire.

The PhD student had the excellent opportunity to work for nearly a year in the Vienna archives as a scholarship holder of the Austrian Academic Exchange Service allowing her to introduce new diplomatic documents into academic circulation. This circumstance attests to the seriousness of the research.

A notable highlight of the dissertation, where a significant factual and interpretive contribution is evident, is the period when Baron Ignaz von Stürmer served as Austrian ambassador in the Ottoman capital (1802-1818). Ms. Tsanovska- Schneeweiß convincingly demonstrates the undeniable connection between Austrian-Ottoman relations and the role of the dragomans from the Testa family, with their formal and informal networks of influence in Constantinople.

In my opinion, the candidate has fulfilled her research task. The manuscript presented is a work of undeniable factual and interpretive merit, meeting the legal requirement for a dissertation to be a "scientific degree" rather than merely an educational one. This is noteworthy, as unfortunately, some recent dissertations at the Faculty of History possess essentially zero scientific contribution.

3. Naturally, some remarks can be made regarding the manuscript, which otherwise leaves an undoubtedly positive impression. Given the complexity of the dissertation's research topic, it is normal for there to be aspects that a reader might want to see addressed. For example, it is not entirely clear to what extent the Testa family in its "Austrian version" created a truly strong network of influence within Habsburg society during the 18th and 19th centuries. In other words, the context of comparison with other "new noble families" in Austria pursuing diplomatic careers is missing. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore whether the ambassadorial post in the Ottoman capital was a stepping stone to a successful diplomatic or political career in the Danubian Monarchy. Moreover, at times, Ms. Tsanovska- Schneeweiß seems to overestimate the role that the dragomans, particularly the Testa family, played in the diplomatic interactions between Austria and the Ottoman Empire – they remained relatively small "cogs" in the undoubtedly complex mechanism of bilateral relations.

4. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the presented dissertation possesses undeniable academic qualities, which gives me reason to unequivocally support the conferral of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to Mrs. Donika Tsanovska-Schneeweiß.

Sofia, May 17, 2024

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