OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Snezhanka Rakova-Marinkyova, South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

regarding the dissertation titled:

ROADS AND BUILDINGS IN THE BALKANS ACCORDING TO THE ITALIAN TRAVELOGUE TRADITION (16th–17th CENTURIES)

by PhD candidate Nadezhda Yanakieva

(3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies; Doctoral Program: Theory and History of Culture)

The dissertation presented by N. Yanakieva addresses a topic of considerable importance. There is an established tradition in our field of research to examine travelogue sources categorized by their place of origin. The volumes of "Foreign Travelogues" were also published in this manner. However, Italian travelogues, in particular, have not previously been either collected or studied with a focus on the information they provide regarding a specific topic.

The dissertation follows a classic structure: an introduction, three chapters, appendices, and a bibliography. The introduction (pp. 4–20) effectively outlines the research objectives and methodology. It also provides a reasonably comprehensive review of the relevant historiography. For N. Yanakieva, the aim is "to examine and compare selected accounts regarding roads, buildings, and infrastructure facilities" in order to reveal "the road as an environment" that connects material infrastructure with travel practices (see pp. 12–13). Listed here are eleven selected Italian travel writers from the 16th and 17th centuries, alongside a description of the "typology of travelers." The subsequent analysis focuses primarily on the Diagonal Route across the Balkans, which the author prefers to call the "Middle Route", and the so-called Right Route, which follows a north-to-south path from the Danube River to Constantinople.

The introductory first chapter, "The Ottoman Empire and the Old Italian States in the 16th and 17th Centuries" (pp. 21–58), presents the historical background for the events that follow – a narrative concerning the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire. It begins with the fall of Constantinople in 1453; indeed, this is the only section that examines the relations between the new Ottoman rulers and the Italian city-states. The subsequent discussion addresses the Empire's

overall expansion during the 17th century, focusing primarily on its major conflicts with Austria-Hungary.

The core of the study is presented in the second chapter, "The Diagonal Road" (pp. 59–159). Here, the author focuses primarily on descriptions of the major cities serving as stopovers along the route taken by Italian travelers – namely Sofia, Plovdiv, and, above all, Edirne. At the same time, the study examines and discusses information regarding the important route that was followed chiefly by Venetian diplomatic missions, that led from the Dalmatian ports, through Balkan cities, to the Diagonal Road. The author has chosen to conclude this part of the narrative at Edirne, leaving the remainder of the journey to be traced in the following chapter. I believe the exposition would only benefit if this section also included brief information about the respective authors whose accounts are being analyzed. Incidentally, the reader will find biographical details regarding all the travelers at the end, in Appendix II (pp. 192–209).

Chapter Three, "The Right-Hand Route" (pp. 160–179), examines a small number of significant authors who traveled along a less frequently used route traversing the eastern part of the region before crossing the Danube. Here, N. Yanakieva makes a valuable contribution by translating and commenting on the early 17th-century accounts of Tommaso Alberti; a special appendix (Appendix I) is also dedicated to his text. The Conclusion effectively summarizes the author's work and findings regarding changes in the road network and its associated infrastructure, as documented in the contemporary accounts of Italian authors. The appendices serve as useful and important illustrations for the text. The Author's abstract effectively reflects the work of N. Yanakieva, who has also presented a sufficient number of publications.

I believe that Nadezhda Yanakieva deserves to be awarded the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" for the submitted dissertation, and I give my positive assessment.

Sofia, July 6, 2026

Signature:

/S. Rakova-Marinkyova/