

think of the fact that Psellos still had to *explain* the myth of Narcissus: John Doukas, the literary dilettante, had obviously never heard of it. Hence, while the intertwining of theoretical discourse and immediate social exigencies in Psellos' texts is evoked in the introductory chapter and again, very helpfully, in the conclusion (pp. 237–239), it is often left unexplicated in the specific readings themselves.

These observations only show the many complexities awaiting the reader of Psellos. PAPAIOANNOU's book is a huge step forward in disentangling these complexities. It is a book that will be cherished and avidly read by scholars of Psellos, students of Byzantine rhetorics, and anyone interested in Byzantine literature as a literature with its own dynamics and preoccupations.

Prof. Dr. Floris Bernard: Central European University, Nádor utca 9, 1051 Budapest, HUNGARY; bernardf@ceu.edu

Mihailo S. POPOVIĆ, Mara Branković: eine Frau zwischen dem christlichen und dem islamischen Kulturkreis im 15. Jahrhundert. *Peleus, Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns*, 45. Mainz/Ruhpolding, Rutzen 2010. 238 S. ISBN 978–3–938646–49–6.

The present monograph is based on the author's doctoral thesis defended at the University of Vienna in 2005.

Mara Branković is indeed considered one of the most interesting figures in 15th century Balkan history. As the daughter of Despot Đurađ Branković, wife of Sultan Murat II and stepmother to Mehmed II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453, she came to play a significant role in diplomatic negotiations of the Ottoman Empire. She acted as an intermediary between the Ottoman Empire, Serbia, the Kingdom of Hungary, Ragusa and Venice. She had her own palace in Ježevo, where she gathered Byzantine and Serbian nobility and artists and issued charters and letters. She was renowned for her acts of patronage and benefaction, especially in connection with the Holy Mountain monasteries of Hilandar and Saint Paul to which she bequeathed all her estate.

The book is divided into five sections. A text entitled "The development of studies about women and gender studies in Byzantine studies" dominates the introductory chapter given that the author wished to shed light on her character from the standpoint of this relatively new approach. The gender perspective is reflected both in the overview of the image of Mara, formed by her male contemporaries, and the analysis of the manner in which Mara referred to herself,

how she signed her name and the degree of autonomy she had with regard to her actions. The author discusses Mara's freedom during various periods of her life, especially in connection with her marriage. The second section, entitled "Mara Branković under the patronage of her father and husband", covers the period between the birth and death of Murat II (to whom she was married from 1436 until he died in 1451), Mara's return to Serbia, and ends in 1457, when she once again returns to the Ottoman Empire in difficult and uncertain times just prior to the fall of Smederevo. In the third section, "Mara Branković as an independent woman in the role of intermediary between ideologically and politically opposed sides", the author's attention is focused on her diplomatic mediation, both in the name of her primary Serbian family and Mehmed II. He also investigates her donations to monasteries as well as all other activities for the good of her countrymen, not excluding other Christians in the Balkans. Documents from the Venetian State Archive, related to the diplomatic activities of Mara Branković from 1469 to 1475, are published for the first time in the *Supplements*. Finally, in the "References", the author lists separately "Literature on historical issues" and "Literature on studies about women and gender studies (particularly in Byzantine studies)". This section, especially the bibliography of works written in the last twenty years in the field of Byzantine Studies, makes this book about Mara Branković a true treasure of selected literature, both on gender studies as well as various aspects of the presence of women in the Middle Ages – their place in society, life in monasteries, the iconoclastic dispute and some Byzantine empresses.

According to POPOVIĆ, Mara Branković comes out of anonymity as an eleven-year-old girl by appearing on the Esphigmenou Charter of Despot Đurađ in 1429, when the entire Branković family was presented on a portrait miniature. In addition to Đurađ and Irene, the portrait miniature includes Mara, her sister Katarina Kantakouzene as well as her brothers Grgur, Stefan and Lazar. In literature thus far, only brief references are made to the mysterious object which Mara holds between two fingers of her left hand, but the author proceeds to enlarge the miniature and discovers that the object was a small golden globe with a simple cross. He also informs us that, in the region of Serbia, globes with a cross used as rulers' insignia were first encountered on the coins of King Radoslav and that they were most likely modeled on Byzantine globes. The explanation as to why Mara holds the globe with the cross and not her father Đurađ, which sets her apart from her sister Katarina and the brothers, is that she was deliberately marked out because of her anticipated position as the future wife of a powerful ruler.

POPOVIĆ comprehensively and methodically presents the fate of Mara Branković within the Serbian Despotate and the Ottoman Empire. He analyzes

her position as female member of the Sultan's immediate family, the financial status which enabled her acts of benefaction and patronage, especially her role in diplomacy, but also all other aspects of her activities. The author substantiates every significant piece of information from Mara's life, be it her date of birth, burial place, the chronology and toponymy of events, with sources which he first analyzes and critically examines and only then gives his opinion and presents it in the light of the new findings.

This is also how he proceeds with regard to Mara's possible presence on the soil of the Holy Mountain. Literature on this subject provides various interpretations, and contrary to the opinion that this is a legend, there is mention of a chapel which was erected in memory of Mara's donation of valuable relics to the monks of the Monastery of Saint Paul. POPOVIĆ does not dismiss the possibility that this really did happen, as he indicates that these gifts, which the Three Wise Men offered to Jesus child, are still kept there today. They undoubtedly also bear witness to the fact that Mara had access to the most valuable Christian treasures which Mehmed had confiscated in Constantinople.

POPOVIĆ makes a very significant point, when he draws our attention to the parallel between the social engagement of Empress Mara and Queen Jelena of Serbia (†1314), mother of the Kings Dragutin and Milutin. That is to say, studies written thus far seem to have overlooked the segment of Mara's activities found in her charter of gifts issued in Ježevo in 1466. In this charter there is mention of "children under her protection" (most likely girls from impoverished families or orphans), including a stipulation that after her death they come under the protection of a monastery whose role would be "to protect and assist them" in order to prepare them to become nuns. This also substantiates the existence of Mara's large royal household, where the girls were able to gather and be raised. POPOVIĆ reminds the reader that Mara could have followed the example of Queen Jelena, who had a school for girls on her royal court in Brnjaci – the difference was that Queen Jelena provided them with dowries and married them off, while Mara reared them for monastic life.

Besides this pedagogical and social parallel, the author observes another similarity between Queen Jelena and Empress Mara: Queen Jelena wrote to the Ragusans (the date of the letter differs from study to study, but the year 1267/68 is cited most frequently) promising to warn them, if the Serbian king launches military action against them. Mara also warned the Ragusans of oncoming danger, but this time from the Turks – that is to say, POPOVIĆ draws attention to a letter from the Republic of Ragusa to the King of Hungary, Ladislav, from 1457, in which he is notified that two persons, one clerical and the other secular, have arrived from Edirne to Dubrovnik as envoys of Grgur and Mara to relay a written and oral warning with regard to the Sultan's intentions.

Another figure from Serbian history, also a Sultana, is mentioned in connection with Mara. Her name is Olivera Lazarević. In order to fully understand how Mara had assimilated into the system of the Ottoman court and the position she held within the harem, the author explains its structure, history and reconstructs daily life based on descriptions from different sources. In doing so, he makes quite an interesting comparison between the fates of these two women. Due to their marriages to Ottoman sultans, Olivera and Mara were held in high esteem by the writers of this period for this was conceived as a sacrifice for the salvation of their fatherland. When Constantine the Philosopher wrote about Olivera in the *Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević*, he revealed a similarity between her life and that of Esther from the Old Testament, who saved the Jewish people by marrying Xerxes. Olivera was also depicted in works of art: Nastas Stevanović, a formally trained artist, portrayed Olivera next to Princess Milica and Despotess Angelina Branković at the altar of the Cathedral in Belgrade upon the request of the Metropolitan Innocent of Belgrade (1898–1905). She is represented as a martyr. Also, when the Cathedral of Saint George in Novi Sad was restored, the image of Sultana Olivera was depicted in one section of the stained glass on the windows.

Mara Branković's presence in 15th century literature is also illustrated in the *Nadgrobna reč nad despotom Đurđem* (Speech on the Grave of Despot Đurađ) (1456) by a master of speech, the so-called "Nepoznati Smederevac" ("unknown inhabitant of Smederevo"), who refers to her tragic position by calling on Despot Đurađ to pray for his daughter: "Pray with us, oh blessed, oh purest in heart, for your weeping and most holy daughter, who spent her beauty and body for true faith in God and piety, love of father and mother and obedience".

Another writer from this period, Vladislav the Grammarian, describes and grants Mara Branković credit for moving the relics of Saint John of Rila. Upon the request of Bulgarian monks, Mara obtained permission from Ottoman authorities for their transfer. It is believed that the text itself could have been based on Mara's own account of this event because Vladislav the Grammarian lived in her vicinity. The same is believed for Dimitrije Kantakuzin whose *Life of Saint John of Rila* (1469–1479) bears testimony to the aid and support Mara gave to monasteries. Another instance of moving relics is tied to Mara, the transfer of the relics of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke to Smederevo. Researchers believe that it was Mara who enabled her father Đurađ to purchase the relics of this saint. It was believed that they would provide supernatural protection to the threatened city. It is important to note that POPOVIĆ also trails the reflection of Mara's image in contemporary literature by citing works dedicated to her, like the novel by Stojan NOVAKOVIĆ *Kaluđer i hajduk* (The Monk and the Hajduk) or *Mara, hrišćanska sultanija* (Mara – the Christian Sultana) by Giorgos LEONARDOS.

As to gender research, in his book POPOVIĆ follows the course of Mara's fate from daughter of an Ottoman vassal to widow of an Ottoman Sultan. In other words, from an anonymous girl who did not have the right to an opinion and was expected to be obedient, to an individual who had become an active factor in South Eastern Europe. He marks the year 1457 as her "existential milestone". An important aspect of her self-awareness is demonstrated by the manner in which she refers to herself in her letters, as "Lady Empress Mara", and in the use of the stamp of Despot Đurađ. This in fact reveals her role of heiress to Serbian rulers and head of the family Branković. Similarly, her self-will had become apparent when she refused to remarry, first to Constantine XI Dragases Palaiologos, the last reigning Byzantine Emperor, and then John Giskra, a Czech military commander. By disregarding the wishes of her parents, Mara chose the path of independence as opposed to abiding by the usual custom whereby dynastic widows either remarried or joined a monastic community. We should bear in mind that the sacrifice Mara made for the survival of the Despotate, in other words, her willingness to spend the best years of her life in a harem, was recognized and appreciated. Therefore, this too should be taken into account when analyzing the fact that her wishes were respected. As POPOVIĆ points out, Mara could have modeled her actions after Olivera Lazarević.

The author follows and comments the diplomatic role of Mara Branković based on various documents – letters, chronicles and reports in Latin, Greek and Slavonic-Serbian. By strictly adhering to the principle that if there are no documents there is no history, POPOVIĆ focuses his attention mainly on the sources, which he then comments and uses to reconstruct the image of Mara Branković. He sheds light on Mara's position during the period of Murat II and concludes that she, as his wife, obviously took part in a much broader range of activities than previously thought. Murat II was clearly aware of Mara's potential role of mediator in the forthcoming battles with the Serbian Despotate and the imminent Crusade of the Christian forces. When in 1444 he entered into peace negotiations with the Kingdom of Hungary, Mara served as his contact with Đurađ and consequently with the Hungarian royal court. The description of Mara's mediation during the period of Mehmed II, when she played a considerable role in diplomacy, is just as important. In the case of Mehmed and Mara, the author also reconstructs the private side of their relationship, revealing an important emotional aspect demonstrated in Mehmed's great respect for Mara. POPOVIĆ calls attention not only to her role of mediator in diplomatic negotiations, but also her obvious influence in Church politics, which is reflected in the fact that her candidate, Dionysius, was appointed Patriarch of Constantinople. Her authority was again revealed in 1465, when she secured Mehmed's support and forced Ragusa to enter into negotiations over the payment of the Ston

tribute. Special attention is given to the analysis of Mara's five letters to the Ragusans written in Serbian. In a brief digression we find out that Serbian was the diplomatic language in the Ottoman Empire of the 15th and 16th centuries.

In addition to presenting Mara's life and activities, this book provides a broader picture of the Branković family, whose members played an important role in Serbian history over a time-span of two hundred years, from the first half of the 14th century to the first half of the 16th century. In the context of the times, the fate of the Branković family resembled the fate of refugees, which numerous Byzantine families experienced after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. Educated and wealthy people found refuge in various places – from the Holy Mountain and Italy to Dalmatia, the Kingdom of Hungary and Walachia. Mara's father, Despot Đurađ Branković, traveled through the greater part of Europe and Asia, fighting the Turks or trying to organize resistance against them. He tried to extend the life of his threatened Despotate through diplomatic marriages, consequently giving one daughter, Katarina Kantakouzene, to the West, to Ulrich of Celje, and the other, Mara, to Murat II.

Based on observations made by Momčilo Spremić, it could be said that the children of Despot Đurađ were each more miserable than the other. His sons Stefan and Grgur were blinded by the Turks on the very day of Easter in 1441. Stefan lived in Smederevo shortly before the Turks conquered the city in 1459; he was forced to leave the country. After crossing Buda, Croatia and Ragusa he arrived in Albania, where he married Angelina, the daughter of an Albanian lord, George Arianiti. To escape the threat of the Turks, Stefan and Angelina went to Italy and settled in the Friuli region, in a city called Belgrade, located southeast of Udine, where Stefan died in 1476. Ten years later, Angelina came to Srem with her sons, Đorđe (later Bishop Maxim) and Jovan, where the Branković family revived the monastic and spiritual life with numerous acts of patronage. After 1457, Stefan's blinded brother Grgur lived in Turkey. He took monastic vows and died on the Holy Mountain as monk German; he was buried in Hilandar.

Momčilo Spremić brought attention to the fact that, unlike members of some other ruling families – Castriota, Crnojević, Vukčević –, not one member of the Branković family had turned to Islam and had become Muslim as well as the increasing number of Serbs on the Holy Mountain as the Ottoman Empire continued to conquer Serbia. Consequently, the remains of the Branković family members, beginning with Vuk, his brother Radonja-Gerasim and all the way through to his son Grgur-Gerasim, lined up on the Holy Mountain.

The ideological principle guiding the Branković family was its attachment to tradition, which was clearly their way of confirming their identity as well as a guarantee of survival. Regardless of the different countries, political conditions or personal circumstances, it remained their only spiritual beacon. Mara con-

tinued with this tradition, which is obvious by her acts of benefaction and patronage, a long tradition started by monk Roman-Gerasim Branković, her grandfather's brother. He restored the Saint Paul Monastery on the Holy Mountain, which the Branković family considered their family monastery.

With his book, POPOVIĆ actually summarizes all previous knowledge about her. This book represents the first collection of written sources from the 15th century (some even a bit later) in which Mara is mentioned. In addition to the new information about Mara Branković, the author offers a broader picture of her family as well as the political and cultural history of South Eastern Europe in a transparent and well-documented manner.

Prof. Dr. Svetlana Tomin: Faculty of Philosophy, Dr Zorana Djindjića 2, 21000 Novi Sad, SERBIA; arsenije@ptt.rs

Juan SIGNES CODOÑER, *The emperor Theophilos and the East, 829–842. Court and frontier in Byzantium during the last phase of Iconoclasm. Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies*, 13. Farnham / Burlington, Ashgate Variorum 2014, p. xii, 518. ISBN 978–0–7546–6489–5.

Juan SIGNES CODOÑER's book is the fruit of long and laborious research that began in 2006. His main purpose is to challenge the view of Theophilos – an unlucky emperor, because of his “military failures against the Muslims” (p. 1) – proposed by J. ROSSER,⁶⁷ which influenced modern research, by reassessing Theophilos' military policy. He also examines the relations of the Byzantine Empire under Theophilos with its eastern neighbours. His survey is based on an in-depth and critical analysis of the evidence of Byzantine and eastern primary sources, taking advantage of the progress of recent research.

The book is organized in seven thematic sections and twenty four chapters, and concludes with an Epilogue and a Chronology of Theophilos' reign. In the first section *Prolegomena to a reign: internal conflict in the empire under Leo V and Michael II*, the author examines firstly the restoration of Iconoclasm in

⁶⁷ J. ROSSER, *Theophilos “the unlucky” (829 to 842). A study of the tragic and brilliant reign of Byzantium's last iconoclastic emperor*. New Brunswick, New Jersey 1972, 301. A revised portion of Rosser's doctoral dissertation which is more easily accessible is included in the 3rd volume of *Byzantiaka* (1983) 37–56 [online at [http://histsociety.web.auth.gr/Βυζαντιακά_3_\(1983\).pdf](http://histsociety.web.auth.gr/Βυζαντιακά_3_(1983).pdf)].