

A NEW OUTSTANDING WORK ON “WOMEN’S HISTORY”¹

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The emergence of a new trend in historical science – the history of women – contributed to a qualitative change in research on the status of women, women’s everyday life, the problems of women’s self-organization, their participation in the political and public life of different states, performance of various social roles by women and mechanisms of their adaptation to social cataclysms, ethnology of family, gender and sexuality. Despite the fact that the women’s history has attracted the attention of researchers of different specialties from different countries, as well as artists, writers and publicists for many years, and a number of significant works have already been created in this field, the book of the holder of an Advanced Doctorate in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor, Leading Researcher at the National Museum of History of Moldova Lilia Zabolotnaia, *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics and Love* has already taken its special place in the scientific historical literature.

Several conditions contributed to this fact.

Firstly, it is the author of the publication. Doctor of historical sciences Lilia Zabolotnaia is known in the scientific community as a serious researcher, author of original works, publisher of archival materials shedding new light on the history of Moldova and its characters. The main topic of her research is women, first of all those women who are connected with the history of Moldova by their fate. This is the subject of L. Zabolotnaia’s works during recent decades². An

¹ Lilia Zabolotnaia, *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love*, Târgoviște, Editura “Cetatea de Scaun”, 2018, 295 p.

² In particular, we are talking about monographic studies on women’s issues, published by L. P. Zabolotnaia in recent years: L. P. Zabolotnaia, *История жизни Марии Кантемир в письмах и документах* [History of Maria Cantemir’s life in letters and documents], Chișinău, Lexon Prim Publ., 2018, 271 p. (Series Women’s History).

important characteristic of the researcher is the desire to fundamentally study the problem, relying on a wide range of representative sources. That is why, exploring the 18th century, L. Zabolotnaia uses not only published documents – artefacts of the historical past of Moldova, but also relies on materials that have been kept in archives so far. Knowledge of several foreign languages allowed L. Zabolotnaia to introduce into scientific circulation documents from the archives of Poland (located in Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan), Belarus (in Minsk), Russia (in Moscow, St. Petersburg), Lithuania (in Vilnius). Special attention should be paid to the testing of the research results of L. Zabolotnaia, who made reports and published her works in the UK (Oxford), USA (Boston), Romania (Bucharest, Jassy, Suceava), Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tver, Ryazan, Yaroslavl, Smolensk, Stary Oskol), Poland (Poznan, Krakow, Warsaw, Lublin), Belarus (Minsk, Nesvizh), Ukraine (Kiev, Odessa, Pereyaslavl-Khmelnytsky), Lithuania (Vilnius), Armenia (Yerevan), Kazakhstan (Almaty). The approval of the scientific community, obtained by L. Zabolotnaia, testifies to the interest in the problems raised and in the coverage of problematic issues and historical plots by the researcher.

Secondly, it is the originality of the book. *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love* is a collection of works by L. Zabolotnaia. The articles that formed its basis were written at different times and were previously published in different languages, in various specialized and popular publications in different countries. But the interest of the scientific community to these works turned out to be so great that the question arose of publishing them in English in order to satisfy the intellectual hunger of those interested in both the history of Moldova and women's history. In order to make a single book from the

Book Review published in “Codrul Cosminului”, XXIV, 2018, No. 1, p. 257-261; *Dreptul la proprietate și la moștenire al femeilor din Moldova și țările vecine (secolele XIV-XVII). Studii și documente* [The women's right to property and inheritance in Moldova and neighboring countries (14th-17th centuries). Studies and documents], Series “Women's History”, Chișinău, Cardidact Publ., 2015, 316 p.; *Femeia în relațiile de familie din Țara Moldovei în contextul european până la începutul sec. al XVIII-lea (Căsătorie, logodnă, divorț)* [Women in the family relations in Moldova in the European context until the beginning of the 18th century (Marriage, Engagement, Divorce)]. Series “Women's History”, Chișinău, Pontos Publ., 2011, 350 p.; *Raporturile dinastice și rolul „diplomației de mariaj” în relațiile moldo-polone în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIV-lea – mijlocul secolului al XVII-lea* [Dynastic relations and the role of the “marriage diplomacy” in the Moldavian-Polish relationships in the 2nd half of the 14th century - the middle of the 17th century], Chișinău, 2004, 192 p.

scattered works L. Zabolotnaia and her Lithuanian colleagues Gabija Surdokaitė-Vitienė and Adomas Vitas edited all the articles and unified the design of the scientific apparatus, made up vocabularies of conceptions, of names, and geographical places. Having a general idea uniting all structural elements and a single logical structure, the book has been published and has already found its reader.

Thirdly, it is the support of prominent scientists – the founders of a new direction in historical science, the history of women. The first readers of the book were L. P. Repina and N. L. Pushkareva. Advanced Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Lorina Petrovna Repina is a renowned expert in the field of history methodology, historiography and intellectual history of Europe, author of studies on historical urbanism, organizer and president of the Russian Society for Intellectual History, member of the International Society for Intellectual History, the International Commission for the History of Towns (ICHT) at the International Congress for Historical Sciences, the All-Russian Association of Medievalists and Historians of the Early Modern Period, and the British Studies Association. Advanced Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor N. L. Pushkareva is the founder of historical feminology and gender history in Soviet and Russian science, president of the Russian Association for Research in Women's History, member of the executive committee of the International Federation for Research in Women's History and head of its Russian National Committee, founder of the theory and methodology of gender studies; she identified the main directions of scientific research in the field of ethnology of the Russian family, gender, sexuality, expanded the understanding of the history of the women's movement in Russia, the history of Russian traditional and everyday life. It was these prominent scientists who wrote the preface to the book. L. P. Repina and N. L. Pushkareva noted that, despite the large amount of scientific literature on women's and gender history, published annually in the countries of Western Europe and the USA, many subject matter related to the gender aspects of the European past, especially in the regions of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, remain little developed or generally unexplored, while the relevance of this kind of plots for covering the history of these regions is obvious. Therefore, the edition of *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love* is a timely and expected event. The variety of topics covered in the collection largely reflects the differentiation of the subject field of women's and gender history, which is due to the development of the latest trends in the socio-humanitarian knowledge of the third millennium.

The book *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love* contains five sections, combining 19 articles on various aspects of the women's history of Moldova.

The first chapter, ***The Institution of Marriage***, includes 5 articles (*The impact of the Ottoman factor on the status of women in the South-eastern European countries in the Middle Ages through historiography perspectives; Women, marriage and canon law in the medieval Moldova; Considerations regarding the divorce of Alexander the Good and Rynghalla-Anna; Unveiling the private life of the 18th century. A divorce act of 1795; Terms of marriage between individuals of non-orthodox faith in the Russian Empire (on the basis of the letters of Nicholas I "law on marriage alliance")*) on the issues relating to the institution of family and its evolution in the Middle Ages and the Modern period. The author describes the structure of family and the status of its members, focusing on the social and legal status of women. The empirical material for the study was the state of society and historical events in Moldova and the Balkan countries (in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Wallachia) during the Ottoman period. Particular attention is paid to the legal aspects of creating a family: the conditions of marriage, the rights and duties of family members, the reasons for the dissolution of marriage, the consequences of the termination and dissolution of marriage. L. Zabolotnaia pays attention to the existence of the estate organization of society and the specifics of the regulation of marriage and family relations in different classes. Of particular interest to the researcher were the family and marriage relations of high society – rulers and boyars, analysed through the involvement of a wide range of documentary sources.

The second chapter, ***Women and Power***, contains 4 articles (*Women and power in the history of the Asan dynasty; Women's power in Moldova (14th – 17th centuries). Gender studies; Elena Voloshanka in Russian history. Dynastic, genetic and political aspects; Between politics and destiny. Ruxandra, the daughter of Vasile Lupu, from history's secular point of view*), which reflect the participation of women in government and the exercise of power by them. A woman in power is a plot, which every year more and more acquires the interest of society, and an assessment of the role of a woman in management activities is becoming increasingly relevant.

Describing the process of the formation of dominant dynasties in medieval Bulgaria and Moldova, L. Zabolotnaia concluded that women played a key role in preserving the right of the dynasty to the throne. In Bulgaria, Serbia, and Moldova, the right to inherit the throne could be transferred both through the male

and female lines. Even in cases where women did not have a direct right to the succession to the throne, they served as a “saving link”, a “saving tool” in gaining power by men. Kinship with a representative of the dominant royal dynasty was the main means of realizing political ambitions in the conditions of the realities of the Middle Ages and the Modern period.

The author gives examples of the determining the ruling dynasties in the female line. The Asen dynasty in Bulgaria as well as the Bogdan-Muşat and the Movilă dynasties in medieval Moldova received power in this way. Women took an active part in the political struggle of their husbands, sons, and brothers; mothers often provided power to their sons through the transfer of power through the regency.

As examples of the active life position of women and their important role in the political life of the country, L. Zabolotnaia cites the destinies of the heroines of the history of Moldova – Elena Voloshanka (1465/1466 - 1505), the daughter of Prince Stephen the Great (1457-1504), and Ruxandra (1629/1631 - (?)), the daughter of Prince Vasile Lupu (1634-1653). These women are outstanding persons who played an important role in the political life of their countries of their time. Elena Voloshanka entered the history of Russia as a woman who desperately fought for the power of her son, Dmitry Ivanovich. As a result, the grandson of Stephen the Great and Ivan III was officially declared heir and became Grand Prince crowned in the Assumption Cathedral of the Kremlin. However, in the confrontation with another woman, Sophia Palaiologina, Elena and her son lost not only power, but also their lives. Ruxandra, the wife of Tymish Khmel'nitsky, the son of Bogdan Khmel'nitsky, is characterized by L. Zabolotnaia as a highly educated woman who spoke four foreign languages and patronized Orthodox monasteries. Throughout her life, Ruxandra sought to help the realization of political ambitions, first to her father, and then to husband. Early widowed, Ruxandra used her full potential to assist her stepbrother Ștefăniță in gaining power.

The third chapter, *Feminine Personalities*, includes three articles (*The Mohylankas and the descendants. Unknown pages. Some contributions to the genealogy of Ieremia Movila’s descendants; The story of the courtship of Catherine “the Circassian”, the second wife of the Prince Vasile Lupu; Anna Tumarkin – the first female doctor of philosophy in Europe: the unknown pages of her life*), which give the reader the opportunity to experience the colouring of the daily life of women who have left their mark on the history of Moldova of the Middle Ages and the Modern period. Portraits of historical characters, created by

L. Zabolotnaia based on a wide range of sources make it possible to characterize both the peculiarities of the stories of these women and the typicality in their behaviour and destinies.

The heroines of the essay by L. Zabolotnaia are the four daughters of Prince Ieremia Movilă (1595-1600; 1600-1606). They were all married to representatives of the magnate Polish families. The eldest daughter of Ieremia Movilă, Raina Wiśniowiecka, was the mother of the famous Jeremi Korybut Wiśniowiecki, whose life was reflected in the famous novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz *With Fire and Sword*. She also became the grandmother of Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki, the first elected king of Poland. The second Movilă's daughter, Maria Potocka, raised her seven children and a niece. According to her lineage, the Movilă dynasty intermarried with the ruling dynasties of Europe: the blood of Movilă flowed in the veins of King of Poland Stanisław I Leszczyński and his daughter, the Queen of France Maria Leszczyńska; the descendants of Maria Movilă intermarried with the families of Radziwiłł, Brandenburg, Hohenzollern, Habsburg, and Hessen-Homburg.

Another character who attracted the attention of the researcher was the Moldovan Prince Vasily Lupu's spouse, who entered the history of Moldova as Catherine the Circassian (1620-1666 (?)). She played an important role not only in the personal life of the Moldavian ruler, but also in the fate of his daughters from his first marriage, Maria Radziwiłł and Ruxandra Khmel'nitsky. Catherine the Circassian showed herself as a generous patron of the arts, patron of churches and monasteries of Moldova, and during the crisis periods of the rule of her spouse and son she showed herself as a far-sighted politician with strategic thinking.

The attention of L. Zabolotnaia was also attracted by the fate of Anna Tumarkin (1875-1951), a graduate from the women's gymnasia in Chişinău, who entered the history of world science as the first woman to become a professor of philosophy. Anna Tumarkin graduated from the University of Bern. At the age of 22 she received the degree of Doctor of Science, and by the age of thirty she received the academic title of professor. Along with male scientists, Anna Tumarkin was engaged in scientific research, conducted training courses, examined doctoral candidates, and reviewed dissertations. Anna Tumarkin's attention was directed, among other issues, to problems concerning the position of women in society and the formation of the feminist movement. In the women's newspaper of Bern she published her articles about gender inequality, about the impossibility of self-realization for women, about the exploitation of women in

the workplace. She actively fought against the National Socialists. One of the streets in Bern today bears the name of Anna Tumarkin. L. Zabolotnaia notes with regret that in Chişinău there is not even a plaque on the house in which she and her family lived for many years.

The fourth chapter, **Testaments**, contains four articles (*Some considerations on the testament of Maria Cneajna, the daughter of Stephen the Great; The riddles, myths and facts concerning Maria (Lupu) Radziwiłł's last will and testament; New contributions to the biography of Maria Cantemir. The first testament of Maria Cantemir, from 1725; Funeral elements in Eastern Europe in the 16th–17th centuries. Comparative study of funeral elements in Russia and Moldova*) on the important side of life in the Middle Ages and the Modern period, namely, the making of wills, the mechanisms for the realization of the testamentary will of women, as well as the funeral customs and traditions.

Studying documents and materials from various archives in various countries, L. Zabolotnaia collected an interesting collection of testaments and testamentary letters. Analyzing them and introducing previously unpublished documents to the academic community, using various methods of complex research, L. Zabolotnaia identified and characterized the specifics of testamentary materials, funerary traditions, customs and rituals related to Moldavian women in the period under study. Based on the biographical method and an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the wills of Maria Cneajna, daughter of Stephen the Great, Maria Radziwiłł (1627 (?) – 1660), daughter of Vasile Lupu, and Maria Cantemir (1700-1757), daughter of Dmitry Cantemir (1673-1723), author revealed not only the traditional features of the drafting and implementation of testamentary documents, but also restored the motives for writing testaments, determined their semantic content. Based on the analysis of wills and testamentary letters of women, the author reconstructed the family climate, determined the individual characteristics of the testators, attempted to determine the lifestyle of women who left these testamentary documents, taking into account the mentality of the time and the moral and spiritual foundations of society. As a matter of fact, L. Zabolotnaia, using testamentary historical sources, created portraits of her heroines in the context of their historical epoch.

The fifth chapter, **The Woman and/in the Arts**, contains three articles (*The history of private life of Maria (Lupu) Radziwiłł reflected in the images of the epoch; Maria (Lupu) Radziwiłł's portrait in the historical heritage of the Polish artist Korneli Szlegiel; The strength and weakness of Alexandra Osipovna*

Smirnova-Rosset (On the history of the origins of one of the women of the Pushkin era)). It is dedicated to women whose images are reflected in works of art.

Until now, the issue of the image of a Moldavian woman of the Middle Ages and the Modern period in painting has not been studied. In the national museums of Moldova and Romania there are no attributed female portraits (neither in the original nor in replicas) from the time under study. L. Zabolotnaia, having identified numerous portraits and engravings depicting Moldavian women in foreign archives, museums, and libraries, explores them both as works of fine art and as a fact of fixing a particular person on a painting canvas. A female portrait serves for L. Zabolotnaia as a reason to describe the character depicted, her historical epoch, and the features of the status of women during that period.

Basically, we can add some wishes to the work of L. Zabolotnaia. While entitling the book *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love*, its author announced her research interest in the destinies of the women of Moldova. But the content of the book is wider than the stated scope of the study: characterizing the heroines, L. Zabolotnaia carried out a comparative analysis of the statuses of women from different countries, in fact devoting her research not only to Moldavian, but to European women of the Middle Ages and the Modern period.

Showing the diverse aspects of the life of a European woman, the author rightly links them with the socio-economic characteristics of the era and the individual status of the person, but she did not allot in the book a special chapter on the economic situation of women, although her writings in this area are known to the scientific community.

The book about women, of course, should be published with illustrations. In the work by L. Zabolotnaia there are illustrations, but not colour, but black-and-white, therefore they do not convey the whole diversity of women's everyday life and give an idea of it in "black and white" colours.

In the new age of digital technology, it would be desirable to prepare a publication that included a CD containing an electronic version of the book. The demand for such material, including for popularizing the results of L. Zabolotnaia's research, can be predicted in advance.

Not all questions posed by L. Zabolotnaia received answers in her book *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love*. The range of problems requiring scientific understanding is defined. So, we are waiting for new meetings with new works by L. Zabolotnaia.

All the same, the book *Moldavian Women in History. Destinies, Politics, and Love* demonstrates the use by the author of various research techniques to identify the specific social situation of Moldavian women in the Middle Ages and Modern period. One of the most effective was the comparative analysis, which made it possible to compare the family, legal, and social status of women in Moldova and women in neighbouring countries: Romania, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Poland, Transylvania, Russia, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Since the world of women in the period under study was primarily a family space, L. Zabolotnaia’s particular attention to the issues of marriage and family law and the specifics of the regulation of property and inheritance relations is explicable. The researcher considers the following as features of the legal status of women in Moldova: equal rights to property with men; the right to acquire for their own money, exchange and mortgage property, as well as use it at their own discretion; the right to manage her dowry in the form of movable and immovable property without the spouse; the right to inherit movable and immovable property; the right to initiate legal proceedings, independently represent their interests in court (act as a witness, testify), challenge property claims in court with relatives and family members; the right of women to divorce and remarry after divorce; the right to use property and child custody after a divorce or death of a spouse; the right to bequeath property at their discretion to children, spouse, relatives and the right to deprive them of property.

L. Zabolotnaia believes that until the middle of the 20th century the history of mankind has been described as male history, the history of the actions and decisions of men. Only in recent decades, questions were raised about the role of gender in the distribution of powers, about the importance of women in the world political history. Ideas about political history have expanded; views on the possibility of women, deprived of access to the institutions of political power, to influence management decisions and ideas about the mechanisms of this influence have changed. In the context of new approaches, L. Zabolotnaia made an attempt to determine how women of South-Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages and Modern period could influence political processes and realize themselves in the sphere of public authority.

The theoretical constructions presented by L. Zabolotnaia received in each section arguments and rich illustrations obtained as a result of studying a wide range of sources of various kinds. The absolute advantage of the author and her work is the use of archival documents and materials and their introduction into scientific use.

The texts are written in a scientific, but figurative language, understandable for readers of any category. The book is supplied with an apparatus criticus that may be of interest to specialists in the field of historical anthropology, ethnology, history of law, medieval studies, social history, demography, as well as anyone interested in the history of Moldova and the history of women in Europe in the Middle Ages and Modern period.