

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Zhorzheta Nazarska,
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of Yura Toteva Konstantinova's thesis
"The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars"

In accordance of Order № 733PД-16/ 21.10.2019 of the Director of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, I am a member of the jury that is to discuss the thesis of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, PhD. The thesis was discussed at a wider meeting of the Modern Balkans Section of the said Institute on 08.10.2019 and judged ready for defense by the Scientific Council. Having checked the relevant documents, I opine that the procedure has been followed as requisite by the Law for development of academic cadres, the Regulation for its application and the Rule of the above-mentioned Institute.

1. Relevance and importance of the problem dealt with in the thesis

In the first pages of her study, Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova points out that Salonica is a city-become-symbol that has engendered strong emotional reactions and centuries-long political *fixations* in the Balkans. The author establishes the fact that so far the Bulgarian community in Salonica in Modern times has never been studied comprehensively, and that most publications are placing it in specific discourses (e.g. as birthplace of SS Cyril and Methodius, as unattained foreign policy target of the Bulgarian kings, as center of new Bulgarian education and national emancipation effort), and that relevant processes have been looked at from the *outside*. The doctoral candidate has accepted the challenge to deal with a matter that is (still) considered a *hot spot* in national Balkan historiography and collective memory.

It is hard to research *Bulgarian* Salonica also because of the *ocean* of documents, which could demotivate even the experienced professional. It comprises memoirs of eyewitnesses and descendants, publications of documents varying in provenance and type, research by nonprofessionals and established specialists. However, they have a bearing chiefly on political relations, diplomatic activity, the functioning of Exarchic and other clerical institutions, on national liberation struggles and military action. It is only seldom that the fabric of the Bulgarian community in the city would transpire through such narratives, with its structures, social networks and mobility, grouping, leadership, *co-living with the other* (Jews, Greeks, Turks, Serbs). Studies so far have missed the rhythm of everyday life with its workdays and holidays, private and public spaces, of *Lebenswelt* places. Yura Konstantinova addresses just that problematique, opting for a perspective from the inside and a horizontal dissection of society.

2. Analytical characterization of the thesis

The thesis submitted is 494 pages long and is divided on a thematic-chronological basis into an Introduction, three Chapters, Conclusion and a List of sources. In Chapter one the formation and functioning of the Bulgarian community in Salonica is narrated, with an accent on migrations, social stratification, the establishment of the Congregation and its substructures. Chapter two deals with the education of the Salonica Bulgarians in schools of their own, as well as in schools belonging to other nations and religious denominations. The two pearls in the crown of Exarchic education, i.e. the Boys' and Girls' high schools are rightly given special attention. The last chapter deals with the city space, seen as a field for public and political activities, and with Salonica as a place of memory. Various functional places of memory are researched, such as plays, novels, newspaper pieces and films.

The thesis is based on an interdisciplinary approach.

Foremost, it uses the perspective of the science of history, combining so-called traditional history (i.e. institutional, political and cultural history) with the rich opportunities offered by social history, understood as the history of social groups, movements and processes. In the doctorate the notion of "Bulgarian" is deliberately used to mean young and old; men and women; educated and uneducated; Orthodox, Catholic, Uniate, Protestant and Muslim; persons of Bulgarian self-identification despite a non-Bulgarian ethnicity; persons of different political persuasions, etc. The social history context allows the following of events during a long period, i.e. the so-called late Ottoman period, connected to the Tanzimat reforms and the difficulties of modernization, co-temporal with the rise of Balkan nationalisms, the dynamization of international relations and the belle époque culture. That social history is central to the study is revealed by the wide usage of memoirs as source, which (exactly because they are subjective) gives to the historic reconstruction detail, imagery, color, life and, in the last resort, much more authenticity than would be attainable by a narrative, based solely on official documents. Following the social history approach, the author naturally draws from genealogy and prosopography as auxiliary historic studies. Though seldom invoked in the last half-century, these studies allow Konstantinova to give flesh to her historic narrative at micro level and thus buttress her contentions.

The submitted text is exemplary insofar that it demonstrates the wide range of resources at the disposal of a historic study. The text is founded on a huge source basis: unpublished documents from 12 domestic and foreign archives, 79 memoirs, 4 films, 8 fiction texts, and 204 research pieces in Bulgarian, Greek, English, Russian and French.

Special commendation is due to the successful effort of the author to seek out, transcribe and include documents from Greek and North Macedonian archives, as well as private archives in the possession of descendants of the Salonican families Alexiev, Andonov, Biolchev, Oshavkov, Shavkulov, Tapkov etc., often ignored by traditional historiography. The sources have been pedantically collected and meticulously

mastered, and after being processed through analysis, text critique, synthesis and comparison, lead to successful retrospection and convincing reconstruction.

Secondly, the viewpoints of the cultural sciences (culturology, cultural heritage studies, memory studies, imagology) and social anthropology are also reflected in the thesis. It could hardly have been otherwise, for Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova, besides the goals of a traditional historic study, sets herself another goal too: to investigate the place of Salonica in the collective memory of Bulgarians and the Bulgarian *places of memory* (P. Nora) during the nearly century-long presence of Bulgarians during the Modern epoch in that city. To do that she combines the analysis of artefacts (from literature and art) with fieldwork methods such as observation and interview.

3. Evaluation of the contributions and participation of the author in the findings in the thesis and the publications related to it

Although the thesis touches upon aspects of local, urban, and national history, the study pertains to regional history, centered on a particular social group: that of the Bulgarian national community in cosmopolitan Salonica. In doing that, the thesis dialogizes with contemporary studies of other ethno-religious communities in that city and sets a point of departure for comparative research in cooperation with humanitarians from abroad.

Konstantinova also counts on micro-history, placing the Bulgarian community in the center of several circles of cultural exchange: the other communities in the city, the Ottoman authorities, the diplomatic representatives, and institutions from abroad (i.e. Bulgaria, Russia, Rumania, Greece and Serbia). The inside-to-outside perspective allows for a colorful depiction of everyday life - in the city or in an educational institution: celebrations and games, competitions, awards and punishments, etc. The inside-to-outside perspective is rendered possible also due to the method of social topography, clarifying the characteristics of the leading groups in Bulgarian elites, i.e. the merchants, teachers and doctors.

There is a big potential, relevant also for future studies, in the successful attempt of Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova to trace the set principle through which the social and cultural institutions of Salonica Bulgarians function. Sets are analyzed consistently, e.g. in terms of family and business ties, but the careful reader may also follow the author through other numerous sets (territorial-neighborly, confessional, professional, shared interest) which connect the local community with then national body in the mother country. Of special interest is the productive social exchange with other Bulgarian colonies beyond the borders of the national state: in Constantinople (still numerous in the period, and not limited to the Exarchate and the diplomatic agency, as is the usual view); in Rumania; in Besarabia; and in the Zograf monastery.

Doubtless one of the achievements of the study is the research on the demographic processes in the city and its surroundings, i.e. the content and results of long-circulating matrimonial, labor, educational and political migrations. It is these migrations that form in the second half of the 19th c. the Bulgarian community in Salonica, set the pattern for its cultural institutions and signal its end with the end of the Balkan wars (1913). The author is adroit in using demographic methods to reveal the social composition of the Bulgarian colony and its economic characteristics via the social roots of the pupils in the Bulgarian schools.

A special contribution of the thesis is the pioneering comprehensive research of the Salonica Girls' Gymnasium, hitherto not in the scope of educational historiography, as well as some of the secondary schools, including girls' schools, which still await their researchers. This is the place to pay tribute to the serious gender aspect of the thesis. The women of the community come out of anonymity, their presence in charities and sports organizations is sketched, and a full picture is given of their contribution to education. In doing that Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova shows the uneven pace of modernization processes in Bulgarian society and gives an example how categories such as nation and gender can be researched jointly.

The unearthing and usage of private archives as sources has been mentioned already. One shouldn't omit, however, that they are used not only classically, viz. as archivist documentation that supplements the historian's information, but also for the prosopography of members of several families, leaders in the process of national consolidation. It is prosopography that enables the generational tracing of changes in national identity, based on the influence of the multicultural urban milieu and specific cultural exchanges, often leading to acculturation or assimilation. A case in point is the Grekization of the Darzhilov family, traced for about a century.

Last, but not least in importance is the successful attempt to map the Bulgarian institutions in Salonica, which is an endeavor both effort-consuming and untypical for traditionally schooled historians; it has taken a decade of sifting through official documentation and checking against memoir writings, and finally has been visualized *in situ* by the author. The fact is shown that the Bulgarian material heritage (neighborhoods, church and school buildings, cemeteries) hasn't been successfully preserved in that Aegean city.

4. Critical evaluation, points and recommendations

The critical points that I made during the internal discussion have been taken into account by the author in the last version of the text.

That is why I would like to emphasize here the internal potential of this study, which for a future publication may be enriched by an Appendix, which might include several family trees and photographs to visualize some of the actors, places, institutions, etc.

In the future, the author may further develop, including from a comparativistic angle, the themes of the imagined Salonica community, whose members after 1913 would live in emigration, but exist simultaneously in Bulgaria and Salonica, and the political aspect of the Salonica myth in historiography as well as in collective memory.

5. Abstract and publications on the thesis' topic, fulfillment of the minimal requirements for obtaining the degree Doctor of Science in Professional Line 2.2.

The Abstract (24 pp) synthesizes with precision and veracity the main content and conclusions of the study. It includes the five contributions of the thesis according to the author, together with ten publications on the subject.

The publications (in Appendix 1) comprise seven articles, printed in Bulgarian, English and French in scientifically referenced publications; in two reviewed scientific collections; and in one non-reviewed scientific collection. Together they amount to 165 pp. , and deal with important themes of the thesis, such as formation of the Bulgarian Salonica community, its everyday life, existing merchant social networks, adopted ideologies, interaction with diplomats in the city, places of memory. According to the national minimal requirements for obtaining a doctoral degree in Professional Line 2.2., together with the Rule of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the said publications bring the author 260 points (7 x 30 + 2 x 20 + 1 x 10), the minimum being 100 pts.

To them should be added the results from citations from the candidate's publications. There are a total of 20 citations of her fundamental monographs and studies by scientists of authority in Bulgaria, Greece, Russia, and North Macedonia. Citations, including four reviews, are found in: professional publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes (6); monographs and collective volumes with scientific review (11)] non-referenced journals with scientific content (2). According to the national minimal requirements for obtaining a doctoral degree in Professional Line 2.2., together with the Rule of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the said citations (section D) bring the author 210 points (6 x 15 + 11 x 10 + 2 x 5), the minimum being 100 pts.

Bearing in mind that Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, PhD, has defended a dissertation for an educational and scientific doctorate in 2006 (found in the database of the National Information and Documentation Center and giving 50 pts.), in this procedure she not only amasses the minimum of 350 pts., but surpasses it almost doubly, garnering 620 pts. (by section: A – 50 pts., B – 100; G – 260; D – 210).

Conclusion

After acquainting myself carefully with the thesis “The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars” of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, PhD., I find it to be produced independently by the author, defensible as to its themes and problematique, containing theoretical generalizations re an important historical problem and being an original contribution to fundamental historic science.

The procedure and the documents meet the requirements of the Law for development of academic cadres and the Regulation for its application.

Declaring my positive evaluation of the thesis under discussion, I submit to the esteemed jury a recommendation to vote that Yura Toteva Konstantinova be awarded the degree *Doctor of Science, Professional Line 2.2. History and Archaeology*.

Sofia, 05.01.2020

/Signed/

Zh. Nazarska