

OPINION

of Associate Member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Prof. Alexander Kostov, DSc

on the thesis of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova

“The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars”

Professional line 2.2. History and Archaeology

The effort of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova to study a topic that is important and merits a DSc in History is laudable. The submitted thesis is a logical continuation of her research on this problematique in the last ten years, including as project leader with the support of the Scientific Research Fund. Without doubt, this is an original piece of work.

The author endeavors for the first time to place Bulgarians in Ottoman Salonica in the focus of research, and, what is more, to follow them for a chronological period of about half a century. As a whole, she has met with success. Especially commendable is the fact that her work is founded on numerous sources from Bulgarian and foreign archives, including newly discovered documents, supplemented by rich information of various kinds from personal collections, fiction books and films. This enables the author, via the case of Bulgarians in the largest city of European Turkey (not counting Constantinople, as it spreads on two continents), to introduce *memory* for the first time in our historiography as an object of serious research. The candidate successfully upholds her contention that, for the larger part of the period in question, Salonica is not only an important economic and cultural hub, but also the center of the Bulgarian national idea in the Ottoman Empire, which differentiates Salonica from the cities in Asia Minor. Chief characteristics of that city at that time are the strong influence of the national Balkan states, its prevailing Jewish population and its Bulgarian hinterland. These characteristics are the source of its specificity and in the last resort predetermined its future fate.

I evaluate fully positively the structure and contents of the study and its manner of narration, organized around several problems treated chronologically. It makes sense, bearing in view the fundamental goal of the study, to show in Chapter one the demographic aspects of the process of formation and development of the Bulgarian community in Salonica, along with the political and economic factors that led to the intensification of migration, resulting in a significant increase of the number of Bulgarians in that city during the period in question. Also very well depicted is the organizational and public life of the Bulgarian community, the difficulties in the functioning of the Congregation, as well as its achievements that materialized in the erection or acquisition of four church buildings, two cemetery plots, a Metropolitan seat and eight school facilities.

Of special interest and importance in my view is the theme of the education of Bulgarians in Salonica, researched and presented in Chapter two of the thesis. Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova communicates the results of her research of primary schools and gymnasiums, especially the prominent SS Cyril and Methodius Boys' Gymnasium and the Holy Evangel Girls' Gymnasium. Based on the evidence to do with the problems and achievements of these schools, the author is prompted to view Salonica as a center of education and enlightenment for the whole region. That accomplished analysis is supplemented by evidence re the schooling of Bulgarians in other educational institutions in the city.

Chapter three should also be evaluated most positively. Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova researches there the participation of Bulgarians in the public and political life of Salonica in the context of the activities of other religious and national communities. She is quite right to designate as the apex of these processes the period following the Young Turks coup of 1908, when the Bulgarian public initiatives proliferated. The author demonstrates that the national liberation idea is the strongest stimulus for the Bulgarian urban population in its emancipatory struggles through the activities of IMARO and the newly created parties: the *Union of Bulgarian constitutional clubs* and the *Peoples' federative party*. Also considered is the participation of Bulgarians in anarchistic and socialist groups, with the characteristic frequent intertwining of ideas, motives and acts.

The Conclusions sums up the findings.

Konstantinova's narrative style makes her thesis a pleasure to read, and adds to the effect of the doubtless competence of the author. She offers conclusions on serious problems, abreast with the science of history today.

I have no criticism of consequence on the text in terms of content or presentation.

The submitted thesis does not repeat the content of works by the author, used to earn the educational and scientific degree of PhD, or to obtain the academic qualification of "Associate Professor".

The Abstract presents the main points of the thesis quite adequately. As should be clear from what I have written so far, I accept the Contributions as claimed. The Publications of the candidate should be enough to convince the public that Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova has worked on that problematique, and has published the results of her work.

In conclusion, based on the above, I submit with full conviction my opinion that the thesis "The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars" fulfills the written and unwritten requirements, which gives

me reason to vote that its author Yura Toteva Konstantinova be awarded the degree “Doctor of Science” in Professional line 2.2. History and Archaeology.

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