

OPINION

of Assoc. Prof. Rossitsa Ivanova Stoyanova, PhD,

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re the thesis "The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars"

of Assoc. Prof. Yura Toteva Konstantinova, PhD

Professional line 2.2. History and Archaeology

The submitted thesis is a comprehensive, complex, multidisciplinary research work. The importance of the topic is beyond doubt: Salonica is significant with its position and role as administrative, economic, communications and military center in the Ottoman Empire, being one of the few megapolises in the Balkans during the researched period; however, it is also connected with the development of the Bulgarian population in that part of the Empire, and occupies a special place in Bulgarian history and memory. Hitherto the topic not only has not been researched so exhaustively, during that chronological scope and with the goals proposed, but has remained, as the author puts it, "totally absent from the official narrative of the history of Bulgaria and Bulgarians". This in its turn gives not a few opportunities for falsifications and abuse of historic facts, breeds discouragement among the descendants of people that had amalgamated their fate with the city's history and supplies Konstantinova with extra arguments and research stimuli.

In the title, the chronological frame is set from the 1860s, when the first durable Bulgarian institutions were formed, to the Balkan wars that led to the destruction of everything created by the effort and energy of generations of our compatriots. In the thesis, however, the author goes beyond these time limits, same as she reaches beyond the goals and tasks, formulated in the Introduction, viz. "to present and analyze the existing evidence re the Bulgarian community in Salonica during the late Ottoman period". In many places in the text, and especially in §3 of the last chapter, Konstantinova focuses her attention on the memory of "the Bulgarian Salonica"; she has researched archive documents of varying character and provenance, memoirs, fiction and films, interviews (published, or the result of her personally interviewing descendants of Bulgarian families, once notable in Salonica). It is these parts predominantly that give the thesis its interdisciplinary character and once again demonstrate the accomplished professionalism and sense of responsibility, with which Konstantinova analyzes and evaluates events and their traces in national memory.

The thesis comprises an Introduction, three chapters, Conclusion and a list of the literature used. It contains 494 pp. According to habitual usages, the Introduction presents the researcher's intentions, goals and tasks, methods of research, analysis and interpretation. The historiographic analysis is comprehensive,

critical and demonstrates excellent knowledge of the relevant historic literature on the city and its ethnoses. The author has structured her study thematically, and then endeavored, and largely succeeded, to treat developments within each theme chronologically. The result is a well-balanced text, both in terms of quantity and content, while repetitions (usual for this kind of structure) are reduced to a minimum.

In the first chapter, subdivided into four parts and entitled “Formation and strengthening of the Bulgarian community”, the author deals with the demographic data relevant to the Bulgarian community in Salonica (characterizing also the other ethnoses inhabiting it then), and also to the Bulgarian population of the surrounding vilayets. The Bulgarian colony is analyzed in terms of professions and social status, the establishment of the Bulgarian Congregation is narrated, as well as its difficulties in the course of time; the real estate of the Congregation is also accounted for, as well as its fate today.

The second chapter, also subdivided into four, deals with the educational establishments. On the basis of rich and varied source material, Konstantinova describes the development of the different levels of education, beginning with the kindergartens, characteristic for Bulgarians in Macedonia, and ending with the Boys’ and Girls’ gymnasiums. Based on abundant factology, the author fleshes out the achievements and problems of Bulgarian schooling, compares it with schooling provided by other nationalities, shows the influence of educational tendencies, characteristic of Bulgarian state education (until 1885 the influences of Eastern Rumelia are also considered), analyzes the social status of students, and offers individual and collective characterization of the staff.

The last chapter comprises three parts and deals with the participation of Bulgarians in the public and political life of the megapolis.

In the Conclusion Konstantinova synthesizes her position and findings.

The merits and contributions of the thesis are numerous and multivarious. I would emphasize the ones that in my opinion characterize best Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova as researcher. Firstly, the massive information basis. It’s really impressive: the author has uncovered and used documents and other material from more than a hundred archive collections – of state and civic institutions, personal and family documents, dispersed in archive depositories in Bulgaria, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia; has sifted through the issues of 35 periodicals; examined dozens of published documents, memoirs, travelogues, fiction, plays and films. Thus, massive new documentary material, varied in its provenance and character and rich in relevant content has been put into academic circulation. Erudition and professional ethics transpire even from the list of academic and reference literature, with its multitude of authors and titles. All this has given Konstantinova the opportunity to write a text firmly based in fact and

complete in its complex form. It would be hard to find an aspect in the life of the community that the author has not dealt with, fully or cursorily. The author does not hide her personal attitude, yet observes the obligatory distance to her subject matter. The text reads well, giving a vivid and colorful picture of the development of the Bulgarian Salonica Community: demographics, influential individuals and families, institutions. Achievements, but also setbacks are depicted. Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova has used a comparative approach, as she has done in her previous work. Her knowledge of the life of the other communities in multi-ethnic Salonica enables her, through comparing achievements, to place with precision the Bulgarian community among them economically, socially and politically. In this way she is enabled to answer the question why, in the final count, that community disintegrated.

Among the contributions of more concrete nature I'd mention the excellent personal portraits found throughout the text; the family history of the most influential Bulgarian families and their role for the strengthening of the national consciousness of the community; the brilliant narrative of the activity of Atanas Shopov, the Bulgarian commercial representative, to become Consul General after 1908; the detailed story of the charity organizations, etc.

The Abstract fulfils the legal requirements, and gives an accurate summary of the structure, methodology, content and the main research results. There is a list of ten relevant publications, plus others outside the scope of the thesis. All of them have been printed in professional collections of quality; their impact is demonstrated by the numerous citations by Bulgarian and foreign authors.

To conclude: the thesis on the topic "The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars" is a finished piece of contributive historic research. It brings conceptual innovations to professional issues and opens new research fields.

I hereby evaluate positively the successful work presented by the thesis, the Abstract, and the Contributions and propose to the honorable Jury to award to Assoc. Prof. Yura Toteva Konstantinova, PhD the degree "Doctor of Science", Professional Line 2.2.

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