

## REVIEW

by Prof. Nadya Hristova Danova, DSc  
of the thesis of Assoc. Prof. Yura Toteva Konstantinova, PhD  
“The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars”

Professional line 2.2. History and Archaeology

In 2006 Yura Konstantinova successfully earned her PhD degree by defending the dissertation “The Balkan politics of Greece in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.”, which reached the wider professional community thanks to its publication as a monograph in 2008. In 2014, she published the monographic study entitled “Bulgarians and Turks battling over the Ottoman heritage”, on the basis of which she earned her Associate Professorship. I am mentioning these stages in the career development of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, PhD, for they also mark stages on her way to mastering a complicated and multi-layered problematique that demands high professionalism, based on theoretical training, linguistic prowess, and last but not least, a drive to discover and evaluate new sources. It is after covering this ground that Yura Konstantinova arrived at the conviction that she should concentrate her attention on the theme of the Bulgarians in Salonica. Having followed the professional output of Yura Konstantinova, and following the publications of Bulgarian, Greek and other researchers on Balkan history, I have no doubt that the fate of the Bulgarian community in Salonica is an important historiographic problem that needs research both comprehensive and in depth. The theme is doubly significant: because Salonica is a city, important for its economic, communication, military, administrative, political and cultural functions, connected in one way or another with Bulgarian history; and also because of the fact that the Bulgarian Salonica community has remained “invisible” to contemporary historians owing to political and diplomatic considerations. The necessity to know fully the fate of the Bulgarian community in a city that was second in importance in the Ottoman Empire is evident also due to the fact that in the story of that community are reflected problems and processes, significant for Balkan and Bulgarian history. One cannot shed light on these problems and processes without shedding light on the story of the Bulgarian community in Salonica. Practically, so far we haven’t had any comprehensive research on the Bulgarian participation in the economic, social and political life of Ottoman Salonica, and I am convinced that an author with the professional qualities of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, PhD is best suited to filling in this white spot in historiography.

Owing to the excellent linguistic training of Yura Konstantinova, her research work is based on full familiarity with the existing Bulgarian and foreign (in particular Greek) professional literature, relevant to the economic, political and cultural development of Salonica and the Bulgarian community there. I for one did not find any gaps in the bibliographical knowledge of Konstantinova, and I want to make a point in mentioning her correct attitude to the authors quoted, regardless of her numerous disagreements with

many of them. An extremely rich source material has been used, including hitherto unknown sources, written in several languages, discovered by the author in Bulgarian, Greek and British archives. Just the correct *reading* of these documents on many occasions is a serious challenge to the researcher. A huge number of published Bulgarian and Greek sources, periodicals and memoirs are used; also documents from personal archives, works of fiction, films. I contend that the detailed critical review of the sources, given in the Introduction, not only demonstrates the painstaking work of the author, but might also be used as a manual by scholars with similar research tasks.

For me the author's argumentation for choosing the chronological limits of her thesis is convincing. The beginning is set in the 1860s, the decade in which the first Bulgarian institutions appeared in Salonica, and the end comes with the destruction of the Bulgarian community, brought by the Balkan wars. However, the author is right in contending that the story of the Bulgarian community in Salonica does not finish in 1913, for it continues on the pages of the refugee files, in diplomatic correspondence and in collective memory. The structure of the thesis is adequately chosen for treating such a complex and comprehensive problematique: the text is subdivided thematically, then the separate themes are treated chronologically. That choice has enabled Konstantinova to cope with the historic material, huge in quantity and varied in content.

The main problems, around which the text of Yura Konstantinova is organized, have been chosen very sensibly: they allow the author to go in depth and reveal all the important aspects. The first main problem is the formation and strengthening of the Bulgarian community in Salonica. Evidence of settlement is summarized and analyzed, beginning with Ottoman registers, monasterial *kondiki*, documentation of the trades corporations (*esnaf*), and ending with travelogues of passing foreigners. I make a special note of the fact that Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova has not missed any potential source of relevant information on this delicate matter. At the same time, she has subjected the sources to criticism, and has not let herself be swayed by national mythology, e.g. the rumors around the burning down of the printing press of Teodosiy Sinaitski. Scrutinizing sources, Konstantinova concludes that during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Bulgarians were a noticeable group in Salonica, of varying numbers, with the majority of its members belonging to the middle and lower urban strata. I fully accept the contention that the Bulgarian community remained for a long time distanced from the Bulgarian religious and national movement, without any contribution to education and culture until the first manifestations of Bulgarian national consciousness in the 1860s. Based on a huge and varied documentary and periodical material, Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova tells the story of the functioning of the Bulgarian community, a difficult and often interrupted story. Then, from disparate evidence coming from varied sources, she pieces together a picture of the community's educational activities, without underrating the contribution of the Zograf monastery, the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Bulgarian charities in Istanbul. She follows closely the vagaries of Bulgarian schooling, displaying

uncommon ingenuity and correctness in unearthing new information. The exploratory passion of the author is especially manifest in her effort to clarify the fate of the vilayet newspaper *Selanic*, which appeared in four versions: Ottoman Turkish, Greek, Ladino and Bulgarian.

A most serious matter, which Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova is right to treat with particular attention, is the Grekization of Bulgarians in Salonica, akin to the Grekization in other places with Greek communities having strong economic, social and cultural institutions. The author makes the point that the Grekization tendency remains strong until late in the research period. She is also right to investigate a relevant phenomenon, specific for Salonica, viz. the double identity of certain members of the Bulgarian Congregation's Board. By following the genealogy of families such as Hadjilaru, Darzhilovich, Dinkov and Paounchev, Konstantinova describes and analyzes the vacillation between Bulgarian and Greek national identity, largely due to the economic factor. Shown are the negative effects of the proclamation of the schism between the Ecumenical Patriarchal Church in Istanbul and the Bulgarian Exarchial Church (it resulted in a division in the Bulgarian community). Also depicted is the atmosphere in Salonica during the war of 1877-1878, when Bulgarians started to separate into "manifestly external" Bulgarians", i.e. a group in which Greek influence was small, and "hidden inner" Bulgarians, who preferred not to affirm their ethnic origin.

Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova advisedly investigates the demographic situation of the Bulgarians in Salonica, and attempts to clarify their social structure and estimate their number. Based on sources discovered by her, she shows the economic and political causes of the immigration waves throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> c. She makes a convincing narrative of the economic progress of the Bulgarian merchants coming from inner Macedonia, who open office in the city and thanks to local ties manage to create their own commercial networks. Konstantinova shows how the leaders of Bulgarian initiatives in Salonica developed new self-esteem and rose from the merchant ranks. Simultaneously, she points out that from the same ranks also came people who opted for Greek nationality and remained in Salonica after it was enclosed in the Greek state. I hereby commend the apt manner in which Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova depicts the social structure of the community, revealing the link between the social position of some of the members and their attitude to manifestations of nationality.

While dealing with the number of the Bulgarians, the author's professionalism is illustrated by her comments, which produce a vivid picture of the hardships faced by Bulgarians when it comes to national self-determination. Impressive is her finding, richly documented, that after the Inter-allies war not a few Bulgarians remain in the city, adapting themselves to the new conditions there, i.e. stopping to declare themselves as Bulgarian. I commend the author's observation, founded on newly found archive materials, that in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. the Bulgarian merchants had secured an independent and serious presence on the Salonican market. Based on new sources (again), she considers in turn some merchant

families, such as the Vessovs, Matovs, Hadjimishevs, Shavkulovs etc., revealing the ties among them and the real span of their business. She is quite correct to stress on the importance of ties based on origin and family relations among the commercial firms, which help them to stabilize their position. The input of these families in the national movement is assessed, as well as the fact that some of the Bulgarian merchants opt for joining the Greek community.

Thanks to her array of sources, Konstantinova manages to flesh out the image of representatives of other professions too: doctors, teachers, clerics, artisans, bankers, who all play a role in the life of the city and the Bulgarian community.

The author uses rich documentary material to narrate the activities of the Congregation, restored in 1880, characterizing the chief movers and the obstacles to its functioning. She uncovers aptly the internal contradictions and the complexity of the Congregation's position, due to which these movers have to maneuver among influential parties such as the Exarchate and the Bulgarian government, plus pressures from the Ottoman authorities, the Greek community, the diplomatic representatives, plus the dastardly tricks of some community members. Special attention is paid to the financing of the Congregation, with an emphasis on the role of the Exarchate. Based on archive materials exclusively, the author acquaints us with persons such as the bookshop keeper Kone Samardjiev and the tailor Naste Stoyanov, whose fates are crossed by all factors of importance in the life of the community.

Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova then considers a problem that hasn't been researched so far: the real estate acquired by the Congregation. A careful study of the sources allows her to evoke a reality very far from the view which until recently dominated Greek historiography, viz. that the Bulgarians of Salonica lived "in dugouts and semi-dugouts". By piecing together the evidence, Konstantinova has shown that despite the numerous obstacles, the Congregation owned four churches, two cemetery lots, a Metropolitan facility and eight school buildings; she has also found that one third of that real estate was bought with money from collections. The evidence elucidates the stories of the building of the Bulgarian Consulate in Salonica, as well as some opulent mansions in the villa district of the city. That part of the study is full of succinct information and is of singular interest, because, as the author points out, today there is no material trace of all these houses, excepting a memory plate put 2014 in the place where the Bulgarian Boys' gymnasium used to stand.

The next big theme of the thesis is the Bulgarian education in the city. Here again we can see the professional diligence of the author, who adds to what was known hitherto on Bulgarian primary schools and gymnasiums, and the education of Bulgarian students in foreign schools. It is a marked step forward in historic research, revealing the problems stemming from the differentiation of educational levels and the foreign schools in the city, as well as the specific problems of primary and high schools. All that is set in the context of contemporary educational tendencies in Salonica and the Bulgarian state. The author observes

(always based on documents) that despite the financial problems faced by the organizers of primary schools, the number of pupils was constantly on the rise, as a function of the rising number of Bulgarian immigrants. It is shown that the opening of schools in all Bulgarian neighborhoods enhanced literacy and culture among the adults too. The author explores also the opening of kindergartens, an innovation that the Salonica Bulgarians adopted before their neighbors in the Bulgarian state. She is right to note that kindergartens in Macedonia were the result of national confrontation and the fight for the consciousness of the children in the region. A parallel is made to the city of Plovdiv, where a kindergarten was also started with the express wish to dissociate Bulgarian children from Greek influences.

The author depicts in detail the organization and functioning of the Bulgarian Boys' Gymnasium "SS Cyril and Methodius", which at the time of its establishment was the sole Bulgarian institution in the Ottoman state to offer such schooling, of the highest quality at the time.

The author shows how that institution helped modernization. At the gymnasium there were pedagogical and commercial courses, which in 1908 grew into a Commercial gymnasium. The gymnasium's budget came from the Bulgarian state, and was governed by the Exarchate. The staff of the gymnasium is depicted in detail. Initially it consisted of teachers educated in Russia, then in the West, and finally in Bulgaria. The curriculum and the composition of the library are analyzed. Schooling conditions and living conditions in the boarding house are looked into, clarifying the causes for student unrest. The author points out that most of the teachers were fascinating persons with presence in the public and political life of the city. To an extent, this should explain why the Boys' gymnasium became a revolutionary center, and a birthplace of the Internal Macedono-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (IMARO), which never lost its link with the gymnasium. The fact that Salonica is the Imperial city in which European influence was strongest and the Ottoman authorities the most liberal is, according to the author, probably also part of the explanation. Interesting reading make the pages dedicated to the opposition between Bulgarians and Serbs in the field of education, the financial enticement of Bulgarian young men by Belgrade and the role of Russian diplomacy in support of the Serbian national project.

A multitude of contributions is to be found in the part dealing with the "Holy Evangel" Girls' Gymnasium. It was the only full-course girls' high school in the whole Ottoman Empire. Hitherto it has not been a specific object of research, albeit girls from all Macedonia used to flock to it, to be trained as pedagogical cadres, public actors, and mothers. Assoc. Prof Yura Konstantinova has personally found in the Greek national Library most of the documentary materials, on which she bases her narrative. She describes schooling conditions, programs, the composition of the library, the facilities, the living conditions in the girls' boarding house, the students' health status and the financial, social and political problems that challenged this high school's organizers. Konstantinova stresses the fact that the money coming from the Exarchate was not enough and had to be complemented by charity collections. Also of importance is the information

that children of Bulgarian ethnicity attended Greek and Serbian schools, and also the Catholic school. Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova is quite right to observe that the multinational and commercial character of the city created conditions for competition and inter-influencing among the various schools and educational approaches, which doubtless had a positive effect on the quality of education in the city. The rich information presented by the author allows her to conclude that the Bulgarian educational institutions in Salonica were quite competitive in terms of the number of students and the qualification of teachers, the array of schools and the quality of education offered.

The last big theme to be addressed by Yura Konstantinova is the participation of Bulgarians in the public and political life of Salonica. Once again enormous source material is mobilized, allowing her to extend our knowledge significantly. Archive materials, periodicals and memoirs are analyzed, prompting the author to recognize several stages of Bulgarian involvement in city affairs. She makes it clear that Bulgarians became publicly visible quite some time after they had started dwelling in the city. Moreover, the Bulgarians lived encapsulated to other urban communities for a long period, resulting in a lack of evidence for Bulgarian participation in the modernization processes in Salonica. Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova emphasizes the conservatism and timidity of the Congregation regarding any initiative for fear that it might cause the displeasure of the Ottoman authorities or the Exarchate. Especially telling is the fact that in the 1880s the only words in Bulgarian to be seen in Salonica were on the sign of the printing press of Kone Samardjiev, written in letters some 25 cm high. Konstantinova mentions the poverty and lack of culture of a large part of the Bulgarian community, which until 1908 did neither have a newspaper, nor a library and reading house. Well presented are the innovations after the Young Turks' coup of 1908, prompting numerous public events, a boom in belles-lettres, book printing, proliferation of Bulgarian bookshops and appearance of Bulgarian periodicals. Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova states that the movers of change were the teachers, but yields to the temptation to quote the opinion of the British Consul General Henry Lamb, that "in Macedonia the line between teacher and *komitadji* [Turkish for anti-Ottoman rebel] is never very clearly defined, and a *daskalos* [Greek for teacher] without a job is ready to become a *voyvoda* [Bulgarian for paramilitary chief]". It is the teachers that started the professional organizations and their conferences, and infected the students with the latest ideologies of the period, such as nationalism, anarchism and socialism. It was quite natural that the national liberation struggle focused the attention of the majority of the active citizens, so IMARO and its creations, the two legal parties, became the most influential political organizations in Salonica. The author does not overlook the activities of socialists and anarchists, and gives special attention to the *Gemidjii*, who made the terrorist attacks in Salonica in 1903; also, to the personality of Avram Benaroya from Vidin, prominent in Salonica's socialist movement. The trade unionism of the tobacco workers and printers is also considered; also, the activity of the local gymnastics societies.

The careful reading of the source material prompts Yura Konstantinova to address yet another serious issue, rarely treated as a result of the tendency of authors to consider primarily the heroics of that epoch: the everyday life of the Salonica Bulgarians, also their cultural life, health care etc. The impact on Salonican life of the IMARO “affairs”, Greek nationalistic activities and Serbian politics is shown. Konstantinova is justified in allocating plenty of space to the activities of Atanas Shopov, Bulgarian commercial agent and subsequently Bulgarian Consul General (previously he was also Secretary of the Exarchate). Konstantinova paints the image of an energetic and flexible politician, doubtless a factor in Salonica, whose informal diplomacy yielded brilliant results. Yura Konstantinova notes the unquestionable signs of change in 20<sup>th</sup> c. Salonica, but once again points to the fact that there was no communication between the different urban communities.

True to her professional ethics, Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, does not pass in silence over the conflicts between the urban ethnic groups. However, her narrative of these bloody clashes is calm and not one to foment animosities. We read detailed documented accounts of the murders of prominent Salonica Bulgarians, perpetrated by Greeks and Serbs in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. for reasons of terror. The struggle for supremacy in the city permeated all public spheres and culminated in the dramatic events of June 17 and the night proceeding June 18, 1913. At that point the Bulgarian community in Salonica was dealt a heavy blow. The community was not to recover from it. The 300 to 350 families that remained in the city no longer dared to declare a Bulgarian identity.

Konstantinova knows well the huge memoir literature linked to Salonica, together with other materials that have saved memories of life in the city. That is why she has the basis to end her thesis with a section, dedicated to the Bulgarian idea of Salonica. There the reader would find his or her answer regarding what was there in Salonica that used to ignite Bulgarian imagination and why it had become the object of so much fruitless effort.

The contentions and findings are summed up in the Conclusion; they fully correspond to the logic and content of the thesis.

I have dwelt repeatedly on the contributions of Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova, but I would synthesize them once more here.

The first contribution is simply the choice of topic. It has been made considerately, with full understanding of the complexity, responsibility and all risks pertaining to that task.

A fundamental contribution is the source material, enormous in quantity and variety, newly found by the author. It has allowed her to offer a first comprehensive and solidly documented multi-faceted research of the life of the Bulgarian community of Salonica during a fifty-year span.

Thanks to her enviable familiarity with the existing literature and archive troves, Assoc. Prof. Yura Konstantinova has managed to reach out beyond the mainstream, and speaks of the functioning of Bulgarian communities in a milieu, foreign to them linguistically and religiously. Thus, she has presented us with an excellent basis for comparisons to other Imperial centers.

Konstantinova, based on new sources, has depicted the educational activities of the Salonica Bulgarians, analyzing Bulgarian education in comparison to other educational approaches from Salonica and Bulgaria. There is a first-time comprehensive research of the Bulgarian Girls' gymnasium of Salonica.

The work of Assoc. Prof. Konstantinova offers rich material on the varied political activities of Bulgarians in Salonica, their organizational activity and contributions to Salonican ideology and politics. It helps to comprehend why Salonica became the focal point of the activity of IMARO.

The thesis of Yura Konstantinova can also function as an excellent archive for the microhistorian. Such a researcher would be able to find prodigious information, regarding everyday life, individual characteristics, personal fates and ties between individuals, the mentality of the "little wo/man" with his/her struggles, negotiations and compromises.

Thanks to her findings, the author is in position to correct much of the professional thinking, hitherto accepted as fact.

I made my comments and recommendations during the preliminary discussion of this study, and they have been taken into account, here I'll limit myself to wishing that this valuable piece of work gets published, and if possible, in English too.

The Abstract renders the content of the thesis quite correctly. So far, the author has published ten relevant papers, presenting central problems of the thesis, in prestigious professional media.

Based on all that, I submit that the thesis of Assoc. Prof. Yura Toteva Konstantinova, PhD, entitled "The Bulgarians in Salonica from the 1860s to the Balkan wars" has all the qualities that enable its author to earn the degree "Doctor of Science", Professional line 2.2. History and Archaeology

Sofia, 11.12.2019

Reviewer:  
Prof. Nadya Hristova Danova, DSc