

ATTITUDE

to the contributions of PhD Milena Petkova – Encheva in connection to her participation in the competition for Associate Professor

In the last years Mrs. Milena Petkova, PhD, is one of the young and perspective researchers of the Ottoman past of the Bulgarian lands. Her interests are directed towards the classical period i.e. 15-17 C. with a region between the Phodops, Sredna gora and Strandza or with other words parts of Thrace. In some rare cases Mrs. Milena Petkova goes out of this area and chronological scope. As transpires from the publication submitted these exceptions are connected with the participation of Bulgaria in the WW I as well as the examples about plagues in the Ottoman Empire and the competition on Vidin and the region. As far as I can guess the documents on the competition are prepared correctly so I can direct myself on the publications, 15 in number.

Leading position among them are the two monographs published by Gutenberg editorial house in 2020 and 2021, that is quite recently. Their titles are "Between Anatolia and Rumelia" etc. for the period 15-16 C. It is dedicated to the settlement of the area of Thrace by the so called "yuruks". The second monograph is entitled "Central Balkans and the Ottomans" etc. and is dedicated to the demographic and agrarian features of Thrace in the 16th C. The rest of the publication (13 in number) in Bulgarian, English and Turkish with three exceptions as far as is estimated by me are dedicated or are additional work out of themes in the monographs. In my opinion this is quite normal.

In the publications under review the candidate introduces herself as a scholar of knowledge and experience in the field of classical Ottoman studies in Bulgaria. She makes use of the tax registers for the regions in question and in certain cases also sigils and hudjets of the kadi institution. Mrs. Petkova has no problems with the language of the sources and is representative of the generation of Bulgarian scholars who firmly believe that without the language of the source the research is both short-lived and useless. The candidate deals with sources which in my firm opinion are the first evaluation of Bulgarian history en masse and hide the code of Bulgarian development in the course of centuries.

In the first monograph and in some of the articles the attention of the author is directed towards the yuruks. They are semi-nomadic population who practice seasonal breeding – let it be clear that there are no clear nomads. Her main attention is directed towards its transition from Karaman or Central Anatolia in Thrace and its role in revitalization of the local agrarian economy at the cost of almost total debulgarizatin of the region. By the way as the author points out citing the monograph of Krasimira

Gagova and others Thrace is almost wholly depopulated as result of the civil wars and early incursions of Ottoman and Aydin Turks. As Nicephoros Grigoras puts it down " the towns emerged like lonely ear of wheat in an devastated by storms cornfield". It should not be forgotten however that the the seasonal movement has a long tradition in the Bulgarian lands and its practice is not something new for Thrace and other Bulgarian regions.

The second monograph is dedicated to the period of upsurge in the 16th C. The candidate has calculated the density of population and obtained the maximum of 4,5 , 4,7 hane per km 2. If her calculation are correct this means that this is the most populated area in this period if we accept the coefficient 5 per hane or even 7 as accepted by Elena Grozdanova . It is obvious if we compare it with the depopulated Central Dobrudja or the sandjak of Nicopol or Vidin (5-6 people), Sofia (8) . It should be worked out if this is not a local peculiarity of the sanjaks of Chirmen and Pasha which are regions in Thrace.) One should have in mind that the most populated areas on the Balkans are those in Preveza (Greece) and the valley of Morava in present day Serbia. In both cases the numbers are little over 30. Mrs. Petkova has published in Bulgarian translation Ottoman documents on delimitation of villages' land (the so called sinirname, inscription in mosques in Stara Zagora, abstracts of Ottoman chronicles on the plague etc. All these and many others which for the lack of place I cannot reveal here are contributions to the history of Thrace. I have an additional encouragement for the author. As she reveals at many places the Ottoman Empire emerges in the 15th C and is not existing in the past. The latter is revealed in Bulgarian Ottoman studies by calling the early Ottoman rulers "sultans" and by describing it in classical terms.

And now the critical remarks which I make with the awareness that there is no perfect human creation whatsoever. Secondly I could add that everybody sees the problems under his personal angle. Critical remarks of course could be accepted in many cases.

The first group of critical remarks are directed to the geographical terms which are repeated for example in the titles of the monographs and less in the articles. The region of Thrace is certainly not Central Balkans. It has been established for sure that the geographic nucleus of the Balkans is the field of Sofia. Accordingly if we speak on the Central Balkans these are the field proper and the surrounding regions like Ihtiman or Samokov. I recommend to the candidate to use more exact terms like the region of Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Haskovo and others which are Southeastern Thrace. This is done in some of the texts.

Christo Matanov

If somebody remains with the impression that I am very critical I am impatient to declare that I cordially support the efforts of Mrs. Petkova to become Associate Professor. She is a real researcher who in the course of research cannot have in mind everything. The same holds true about all scholars in Bulgaria and abroad. I support the acquisition of the title of Associate Professor by Mrs. Petkova which means a habilitation as well. I wish to her a prosperous scientific future.

The third group of remarks is connected with the knowledge on the pre-Ottoman period. I am aware of the fact that Mrs. Petkova is influenced by the Turkish literature for which such factors are non-existent. They are almost entirely from the Seljuk period. In fact there are others and very strong at that! Not everything is a matter of transition of models. I'll demonstrate it by two examples. The so called surnames are well known in the Byzantine and generally in the pre-Ottoman period. There is a documentation on this practice. The seasonal breeding also if there are people to perform it. The Vlachs and Bulgarians practice it also in Thrace. If a researcher is not aware on the early Ottoman incursion (in the case there is no way from the cited literature) he or she could easily be made to believe that the boundary between Tarnovo Bulgaria and the Ottomans goes along the different settlement system in the plain and the north of Stara Zagora. Boundary lines are non-existent in that period and especially after the raid of Ali pasha.

The second group of remarks is directed towards the scientific literature cited. It is not about the Ottoman period proper with which the author is OK. It is true that one and same names and titles are repeated constantly but this could be left without attention. My remarks have in mind the literature of the previous period. It is not normal in my opinion to cite without remarks Petar Nikov or Dimitar Angelov, whose first articles are from the 50ies of the 20th C. and are very much out of date. Others have very popular character. At the same time without attention are left the publication of N. Kondov and Chr. Matanov (I hate to mention myself but it is inevitable in the case). At that the scientific critic on these publication are accepted by everybody in the scientific environment with gratitude. Instead of these publication for example the very old monograph of Angelov on the agrarian conditions in Macedonia is cited! I belong to other generation and I have been instructed that when cited the male proper names are abbreviated and the female are given in extenso. At that the name of the river Marica even in English translation is not "Merich" in the same way as Plovdiv is not Philippopolis. The discussion on the year of the capture of Odrin exists only in the last publication of Hall Inalçik. It is established (1369) by Beldiceanu-Steinherr.