**Review**

by Prof. Stoyanka Todorova KENDEROVA, PhD

for the dissertation of Angel Mitkov ORBETSOV on the topic

**Bulgarian-Iranian Relations from the Liberation**

**till the end of the 1950s**

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy"

Professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology,

Doctoral Program "History of Bulgaria" – Modern Bulgarian History

(Code of the scientific speciality: 05.03.06)

The proposed for defence doctorate thesis includes **Introduction**, **Initiate Part, Eight Chapters, Conclusion and Bibliography.** It covers 403 pages, complemented by 29 pages of **Applications.**

The **Introduction** briefly presents the content of the individual chapters, the existing main researches on the history of Bulgarian diplomacy, the methodology adopted, and the sources and literature used.

**The Initiate part** consists of two components. The first of them presents the history of Iran from antiquity to the middle of thetwentieth century. The second component traces the historical links between Bulgaria and Iran over the centuries. This part is written with great competence and wideness of knowledge, both in linguistic and cultural and historical terms, but as a content it is quite far from the specific topic and the announced chronological scope of the doctorate thesis.

CHAPTERONE **"Diplomatic and consular relations between the Principality of Bulgaria and Iran until the beginning of the 20th century"** reflects the initial period in the implementation of bilateral relations. Leading is the role of Iran, interested not only in the situation of Iranian subjects, who mainly reside in Northeastern Bulgaria, but also by a desire to be present in the Balkans. The problems related to the acquisition of Iranian citizen, has been followed up; the Bulgarian government's aspiration to overcome the consequences of the Berlin Treaty has been analyzed, subjecting itself to its own assessment of the need to open consulates and the selection of candidates. The relations between the two countries through the missions in Tsarigrad (Istanbul), the official correspondence between the monarchs and the presence of Iranian consuls in the Principality are the reason for Angel Orbetsov to express doubts as to the accepted date of establishment of the diplomatic relations – **15 November 1897.**

To the next period in relations was dedicated CHAPTER TWO **"Iranian representatives in Bulgaria and political relations from the beginning of the 20th century until The Second World War"**. The main motive for Iran's activity is again the concern for Iranian subjects (about 100 people). Besides the legation in Sofia, the honorary consulates in Ruse and Plovdiv are also active. There are the same problems: refusals to recognize consuls, military service recruitment summonses, settlement of inheritances, acts of civil status, etc. Iran diplomacy is also interested in the most important political events in Bulgaria and in the Balkans.

Eight paragraphs in CHAPTER THREE **"Bulgarian diplomatic activity towards Iran from the end of the 19th century to the eve of The Second World War"** present the inner political events in Iran and the way in which Bulgarian diplomatic representations: our missions in Turkey and Russia/USSR and our legations in London and Bern, and the Consulate in Alexandria, inform about them. The Turkish-Iranian relations are of paramount importance. Bulgarian diplomacy is improving, gradually emerging from the secondary role held so far.

In addition to the political events, Bulgarian diplomacy is active in other areas to which CHAPTER FOUR is providing inside knowledge of "**Bulgarian-Iranian Trade and Economic Relations. Cultural and scientific contacts from the beginning of the 20th century to The Second World War"**. The attempts to conclude a Bulgarian Iranian agreement were affected, given the export of Bulgarian silkworm grain in the 1920s. Our legation in Tehran also contributes to the export of chemical preparations, railway wagons, tobacco, cement and others. Bulgarian legation opportunities also for imports of goods from Iran. Translations into Bulgarian language are carried out of the works of the most representatives of Persian classical literature.

Of exceptional interestis CHAPTER FIVE **"Bulgarian Labor Emigration to Iran and the Activities of the First Bulgarian Mission in Tehran"**. As a result of the construction of roads and the Trans-Iranian railway, hundreds of Bulgarians forced to seek a more dignified livelihood are heading to Iran.There they apply their professional skills as masons, builders, general workers, painters, carpenters, and others. Due to the problems related to their residence, **in April 1939 the first Bulgarian legation was opened in Tehran.** Its comprehensive work is detailed on the basis of newly-found documents preserved in the Bulgarian State archives. The complex international situation and the invasion of Soviet and English troops in Iran were crucial to the break-up of our diplomatic relations in September 1941.

The further fate of the Bulgarian emigrants is analyzed in CHAPTERSIX **"The Bulgarian community in Iran and the Iranian community in Bulgaria under the protection of Swedish legations in both countries"**. Acts of repatriation have been taken for Bulgarian subjects, many of whom are interned in British camps and in the city of Soltanabad under difficult living conditions. The activity of the Swedish legation in Tehran on their protection and the difficulties of repatriating them are shown in this part. The main problems of the Iranian community in Bulgaria are caused by the coercive measures against persons of Jewish origin, whose cause is defended by the Swedish legation.

The last two chapters **reflect the bilateral ties between Bulgaria and Iran from the end of The Second World War to the end of the 1950s**, specifically CHAPTER SEVEN is **dedicated to the political and consular relations**. The complicated political situation in Iran and its orientation toward the Western block is reflected. During this period, Bulgaria's interests were protected by Yugoslaviya and later by Czechoslovakiya, while the Iranian interests – by the Belgian Legation in Sofia. Although the two countries are in opposing political camps, contacts are made between parties with close ideologies. Links are also established between the youth organizations. Documents from the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bulgaria disclose the relationships between the Bulgarian Communist Party and Iran’s “Tude” People's Party.

CHAPTER EIGHT **focuses on the economic, cultural, sporting, and social links** betweenthe two countries. During this period Bulgaria "opened up" to countries of the "third world". Prerequisites are created for strengthening bilateral contacts and the first deals for Bulgarian exports to Iran of flat glass and sodium bicarbonate are realized. Success in economic terms is the production of Persian type carpets in Bulgaria, mainly in Panagyurishte and Plovdiv.

There is also a place allocated to the acquisitions in the "St. St. Cyril and Methodius” Bulgarian National Library of manuscript books in Persian, which testifie to the presence of the Persian language and culture among the Muslim population in the Bulgarian lands.

Although quite weak, **the cultural and economic relations during the considered period are a preparation for a new stage of cooperation. They prove that the mutual interest of the two countries in each other continue.**

**The Bibliography** is compiled according to the most recent requirements. First, the used archival documents are presented, followed by source publications, reference editions, periodic printing and scientific literature in Bulgarian, Russian, English and Persian. However, the documents in Ottoman Turkish language are from the fund of the Oriental Collections Department.

**Conclusion**. The doctorate thesis proposed for defence examines the history of relations between Iran and the Bulgarian country from several aspects – political, economic, cultural, and social. These questions has not been a subject of a specific academic study that determines its contribution in full. The new found documentary sources (over 350 archival unities established in the Central State Archives in Sofia and about 70 documents preserved in Iran) contribute to this. The information reflected in them is examined and analyzed in the context of the internal and external political events that took place in both countries during a certain period. The objective view of the author and the high praise given to the activity of Bulgarian diplomacy are evident.

The dissertation is written in nice and clear language. I recommend that the work be published in English. This will enrich modern historiography and will contribute to the further development of relations between the two countries.

In view of the foregoing, I express my opinion and invite the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to confer on Angel Mitkov Orbetsov the educational and scientific Doctor’s degree.

Sofia, 8 February 2022 Prof . Stoyanka Kenderova