БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ
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REVIEW

from

Assoc. Prof. Gergana Yordanova Georgieva, PhD

member of the Scientific Jury in a competition for an Associate Professor

in the field of higher education 2. Humanities,

professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology

(International Relations in the Balkans in the Nineteenth Century)

for the needs of the "Modern Balkans" Section,

announced in Darzhaven Vestnik, no. 85/ 25.10.2022

The competition was announced on the basis of a decision of the Scientific Council of IBSCT-BAS (December 13, 2022, Minutes No. 15, Item 4). The scientific jury was confirmed by Order No. 178 RD-16/14.12.2022 of the Director of the IBSCT-BAS. All procedural actions are in accordance with the Regulations for the implementation of the Zakon za razvitie na akademichniya sastav in the BAS. One candidate participated in the competition – Dr. Simeon Andonov Simeonov, who meets the national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of the Law.

Dr. Simeon Simeonov obtained his BA in History from the University of Heidelberg in 2010; he has two master's degrees: in History from the University of Heidelberg (2012) and in Social Sciences from the University of Chicago (2015). Simeon Simeonov defended his doctorate at Brown University, USA (2021).

Dr. S. Simeonov's professional experience is related to research work at the Center for Early American Studies – Philadelphia, USA and the Institute of Balkan Studies and the Center for Tracology, Sofia. Dr. Simeonov also has teaching experience as a guest lecturer at Brown University in the academic year 2021-2022.

Dr. Simeonov is a member of three scientific organizations: the Society of Historians of Early American History; Organization of American Historians and Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations.

He has numerous research fellowships and travel grants related to his dissertation at Brown University. He is currently involved in two projects, one as a team member and the other as a supervisor: "Epochs of History – Integrating Genetic Methods in Historical Research" and

"Empire of the Consuls: Consulship, Sovereignty and Empire in the Long Nineteenth Century" – Scientific "Peter Beron and WE 2021" program. He presented papers at prestigious international conferences in Belgrade, London, Moscow, Philadelphia, Aarhus, New Orleans, Arlington, Providence, Granada and Sofia.

In the current competition, Dr. Simeon Simeonov presents nine publications: two monographs, four studies and three articles.

His monograph entitled "Francisco de Miranda in the Balkans. The Birth of the Idea of Latin American Independence" is of undeniable contribution. In it, he gives a new look at the activities and ideas of this revolutionary and diplomat and the interweaving of his life with the Balkans.

In six consecutive chapters, the author traces his political and ideological development – through Catholic education and his participation in the American Revolution; his visit to the Republic of Dubrovnik; his travels to Zakynthos, Patras, Corinth, and Athens; his observations of the sailors of the island of Hydra and the multi-ethnic society of Smyrna; his reflections on slavery, despotism, interracial and interreligious relations in the Ottoman capital, as well as his notes on diplomatic society in Istanbul and its political manoeuvres; his experiences in Kherson and Crimea, where he commented on ethnic discrimination and restrictions on freedom of movement.

Its conclusion is a precise summary of the details accumulated in the analysis. Observations are presented on the globalization of the world, on the connections between individual regions, on the dominant Eurocentric point of view. He highlights again the Idea of the Other – how we perceive each other and how we perceive ourselves in the encounter with a culture different from ours. The question is raised – whether we can overcome our stereotypes and build new ideas based on the empirical knowledge we receive or remain within the frameworks of our education.

Dr. S. Simeonov affirms the thesis of intertwined histories, looks for the connection and mutual influences between different peripheries – Latin America and the Balkans. The opportunity that Dr. Simeonov gives us to follow the changes in F. de Miranda's thinking in process and to observe how his political ideas take shape is exciting. The encounter with a

completely different environment, which does not cover his knowledge and expectations, causes serious "cognitive dissonance", as the author says, and transformation – from following the others' opinion to constructing new ideas about the foreign culture.

Observations on racism and its inconsistency with Enlightenment's ideas contribute a new detail in building the image of the Western European and Atlantic elites. Other important themes on which F. de Miranda's views collide or develop are slavery and the "decadent despotism" in the Ottoman Empire. It was the idea of the despotic essence of empires that crystallized in Miranda's views during his encounter with the Ottoman rule and was laid down as fundamental in his further revolutionary activity.

The conclusions about the European diplomatic system in the capital of the Ottoman Empire are importnat. The study draws attention to the isolation of European diplomats. Their voluntary seclusion in the Pera neighborhood is a prerequisite for building an inaccurate picture of the Ottoman reality. As far as I know, this detail of their life in Istanbul is not taken into account in most studies. Usually the emphasis is placed on their good awareness and dense networks of connections and contacts. This circumstance could lead to filtering and serious distortion of the information that European diplomats receive and to dependence on the people who mediate the process of diplomatic relations. The paper also draws attention to women in diplomatic missions, whose role is sometimes "crucial to the conduct of regular international relations".

The psychological approach to understanding F. de Miranda's behavior is very interesting. I will quote two excerpts that are telling: "clear traces of voyeurism, so inherent in the eccentric Western ideas about the Orient. The pursuit of Circassian beauty gives a clear indication that he was familiar with popular Western notions of the intimate space of the harem, which was inextricably linked to the markets for sex slaves in the empire" (p. 106) or "The reversal of the racial logic of dominance creates its own a kind of cognitive dissonance in him, testing his understandings of a just and rational social order" (p. 102).

Some of the commented observations of F. de Miranda, in my opinion, do not have equal importance in drawing up the portrait of the Ottoman society, since they are rather born from the observation of incidental examples, which are not necessarily representative of the whole. Similar, in my opinion, is the case with the voluntary conversion of young Greeks to Islam.

In conclusion, I will say that Dr. Simeon Simeonov's analysis of the role of the Balkans in the career and ideological growth of the Latin American revolutionary is a real contribution to the historical scientific field. According to him, the Balkans are not a "transitional" region in his revolutionary career, but have a key role in the formation of his revolutionary ideology.

The second book listed is "Builders of the Western World: How Consuls Created the Modern International Order". Dr. S. Simeonov aims to examin the major historical changes occurring in the 18th and 19th centuries through the key role of the consuls as active participants in these events. Their "free will" and their opportunities to influence and intervene in events is emphasized.

Placed between empires and revolutionaries, between metropolises and colonies, consuls operate unconventionally. In practice, they are both in and out of the system. Their ability, thanks to their institutional positions, extensive business and diplomatic networks, to provide the three essential ingredients of food, credit and weapons for revolutions makes them key players.

However, the versatility of their actions is also reported. Outside the material context of the occurrence of the revolutions, consular activity has been examined on an ideological level. They develop large-scale public activity to legitimize certain revolutionary or counter-revolutionary views. The big management debates are also touched – the consuls participate in the negotiation of important topics such as state sovereignty, citizenship and universal human rights.

Their role in the changing world in the 19th century is assessed. The redefinition of the old regime turns the world into a "global system composed of many freely trading and internally integrating nation-states". In this new system, the consulate is absolutely necessary for the functioning of global diplomatic and economic relations. Thus, Dr. S. Simeonov defends the thesis that consuls participate in the birth of the modern world as active participants.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research is noted. It intertwines various scientific fields – international relations, global history, etc. The archival material used to reconstruct the picture of the changing global world in the 19th century is impressive: diplomatic archives from France, Spain, Cuba, the United States.

The emerging main thematic fields in his articles and studies are interconnected given the emphasis of his interests on diplomatic history, but also mark a number of highly important themes in Balkan and global history. First of all, Dr. S. Simeonov is interested in the place and role of consuls in the great diplomatic game and in global politics. He brings them to the fore by presenting a number of testimonies of widespread consular autonomy in making important geostrategic, geopolitical and diplomatic decisions. It looks for the interrelationship between empires and nationsq arguing that one begets the other rather than oppose it. Dr. Simeon Simeonov calls the Russian consulates in the Balkans "real imperial laboratories" and "incubators of national independence". In the second place, Dr. S. Simeonov examines the consular institutions in structural and functional terms, following the process of empowering them with diplomatic functions. Thirdly, Dr. S. Simeonov goes beyond the framework of Balkan history, providing a broader view. He (1.) seeks the connection of the Balkan events with other large-scale world processes and phenomena and considers the Balkan liberation movements as global phenomena in the Age of Revolutions; (2.) emphasizes the role of the consular services of the United States of America as an important geopolitical actor on the Balkan diplomatic scene in the 19th century.

In my opinion, Dr. Simeon Simeonov's research definitely contributes to the development of Bulgarian historiography with a larger-scale examination of history and the establishment of interrelationships between processes and phenomena in global history and politics. In this way, Balkan history in the 19th century received a new meaning and a new place in world events, in the "Age of Revolutions". It is extremely important that approaches, theoretical models are enriched and the thematic framework in which the Balkans are thought of is diversified. Thirdly, credit must be given to the attraction of an unknown, rarely used in Bulgarian historiography archival material, which enriches our view of Balkan history. His research is distinguished by good awareness, rich historiographic knowledge, knowledge of theoretical models and a broad view of the happening events. Therefore, Dr. S. Simeonov managed to cover different regions and build the interrelationships between them. Logically, the key word in many of his studies is "rethinking". The above-mentioned skills and knowledge give him the opportunity to enrich and further develop the conclusions and observations on Balkan history, to discover new interconnections.

CONCLUSION

I declare that I do not find any plagiarism in the works of Dr. Simeon Andonov Simeonov and there is no unreliability of the scientific data presented by him. After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition and analyzing their significance and the scientific contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and to recommend to the respected Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies and Center for Thracology at the BAS for the election of Dr. Simeon Andonov Simeonov to the academic position of "Associate Professor", in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.2. History and Archeology (International Relations in the Balkans in the Nineteenth Century).

08.03.2023

Veliko Tarnovo

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/ Prof. Dr. Gergana Georgieva /