



REVIEW

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Member of the Scientific Jury for conducting a competition for the academic position “Associate professor” in the sphere of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and Archeology (International Relations in the Balkans in the 19th century) for the needs of the “Modern Balkans” section, IBCT-BAS,

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The only participant in the competition, Dr. Simeon Andonov Simeonov, submitted to the attention of the Scientific Jury two monographs, one of which (*Builders of the Western World: How Consuls Created the Modern International Order*. Sofia, IBCT–BAS, 2022) is based on his PhD thesis, and six studies and articles, five of them published in refereed and indexed editions. The presented publications in general reflect the reorientation of the author, whose research interests at the beginning of his academic career were in the field of modern American history, towards Balkan studies.

A product of this thematic transition, Dr. Simeonov's habilitation thesis *Francisco de Miranda in the Balkans: the Birth of the Idea of Latin American Independence* (Sofia, IBCT–BAS, 2022) indisputably represents an unconventional and innovative approach to the history of the Balkans/Ottoman Empire at the end of the 18th century, placed and interpreted in a specific global context. With the skillful genre combination of biographical, travelogue and historical narrative and integrating the methods of classical historical research, social anthropology and even political science, the author has managed to highlight and intertwine different conceptual lines in a comprehensive, comparative and analytical study.

The monograph is dedicated to a historiographically underestimated but important episode of the varied political, diplomatic and revolutionary biography of the Venezuelan cosmopolitan Francisco de Miranda - his six-month trip to the Ottoman Empire in 1786 and the influence of his so-called in the study “Balkan Odyssey” on the formation of his revolutionary ideology. At the

same time, Miranda's impressions and reflections on the occasion of his first contacts with Southeast Europe present various aspects of the Balkan political, social and cultural realities, refracted through the eyes of the Latin American traveler, unbiased by stereotypical Western European notions about the region. In this sense, the author not only explored Miranda's diaries as a historical source in the context of travel literature on the Balkans, but he found in it a wide field for a comparative "historical and diachronic" analysis beyond regional and in geopolitical frameworks of the global revolutionary process in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The aims and objectives of the study are convincingly argued in the Preface with the need for a comparative analysis of the similarities in the processes of imperial disintegration in Southern Europe during this period (the Spanish and Ottoman Empires), whose local specificities are essential for the construction of the modern world. With his critical approach to the dominant in historiography understanding of these processes only as regional manifestations of Western European ideological and political models, the author aims to outline the parallel cultural and socio-economic developments in the periphery of the industrializing Western world, as well as the direct interactions between spatially distant peripheries. In this context, the question of the role of modern diplomacy is highlighted in the text as a particular emphasis and thematic line. To achieve these tasks, Dr. Simeonov "refracted" the biographical research through the prism of transnational and "entangled" history with the tools of interdisciplinary methods and an advanced terminological-conceptual apparatus.

Structured chronologically, the monograph traces the life path of Francisco de Miranda, whose fate in exile made him a witness and even a direct participant in the epochal revolutionary events and socio-political transformations in America and Europe during the last decades of the 18th century. The first two chapters, dedicated to his stay in North America and Western Europe, are in a certain sense introductory to the central theme of Miranda's journey in the European Southeast, whose specifics and similarities with his native Latin American reality completed his "Creole" identity and revolutionary-political credo.

Examining the micro- and macro-environment that shaped the mentality and worldview of the Venezuelan, the author made a comparison with the Balkan realities - ethno-cultural diversity of society, discrimination on an ethno-religious basis, a clash of the already permeating ideas of European Enlightenment with the old oppressive regimes of government, including along the lines

of metropolis-colony relations. It is noteworthy that, analyzing the archival sources, Dr. Simeonov reasonably re-evaluated some facts and conceptions established in historiography related to Miranda's activities and views from the time of his "American" exile, which gave the author reason to search precisely in the later "Balkan" period the final clarification of his revolutionary ideology. Chronologically and spatially following Miranda's path from Western to Southeastern Europe, the study outlines the ongoing evolution in his ideas and attitudes - affirmation of Enlightenment ideas and rejection of "decadent despotism", rethinking of the Eurocentric vision of the world, ambiguous assessment of republican regimes.

The first stage of Miranda's "Balkan Odyssey" in the border regions between the Venetian and Ottoman dominions, Peloponnese and Athens, the subject of the third section, outlines the main thematic emphases of his Balkan narrative - political situation, administrative rule, trade, lifestyle and traditional culture, attitude to the ancient heritage. Dr. Simeonov remarked the differences of these perceptions from the familiar Western European ideas about the Ottoman Empire, as well as the references to the distinctive culture of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, but analyzing them in the light of the interactions and "unexpected interweaving" between the peripheries, he emphasized the different historical, social and cultural context. Along with the theme of the oriental specifics of despotism, already a central problem in Miranda's diaries, the study highlights the role of the consular institution and the participation of European diplomatic representatives in the life of the local population.

While following the deviation from the Balkans on the traveler's route to the Ottoman capital via the Aegean Sea and the Asia Minor coast, the fourth chapter presents a comparative picture of trade, urban environment and life in the imperial regions, which highlights the economic and cultural decline of the Balkan cities in the late eighteenth century. Miranda's observations of the European community in Smyrna and his many contacts with consuls and merchants are a colorful illustration of the interweaving and clashing of the various political and economic interests of the Great Powers in the Ottoman Empire. The author commented and analyzed the excerpts devoted to slavery and the slave trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, not only in view of the observer's comparisons with these practices in America and Western Europe, but also in the context of the dividing lines in Ottoman society based on religion and socio-political status as opposed to race and class opposition in the Euro-Atlantic Western world.

Dedicated to the Venezuelan's stay in the Ottoman capital, the next section of the monograph, entitled "In the body of real despotism", examines this part of his diaries, which, for obvious reasons, constitutes the essence of his Balkan narrative. The colorful palette of socio-political, ethnic, everyday life, cultural-civilization and mentality specifics of a society on the border between East and West, reflected in the appearance and life of the imperial center, amazed even a cosmopolitan like Miranda with its contradictory diversity. The interwoven various storylines in his narrative are explored in the general context of imperial decline and "oriental despotism" and their manifestation in the contrasts of urban life and inter-communal ethno-religious relations. The theme of the European diplomatic presence is continued here already at the highest level in his hierarchy, which has allowed the author to analyze Miranda's personal assessments, characteristics and specific information in the light of both individual problems and the general geopolitical situation in Southeast Europe at the end of the 18th century. The vividly depicted picture of the slave market in the imperial capital is examined in the context of the two main problem circles of the study - the specifics of social oppositions in Ottoman society and the influence of the social phenomena observed by Miranda on the further shaping of his ideological positions and future revolutionary biography.

The last chapter of the monograph is devoted to the border regions between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, which the traveler visited on his way to Kiev and Moscow. His stay in the former Ottoman provinces newly annexed to Russia represents a kind of epilogue to his "Balkan Odyssey", which summarizes the accumulated impressions and reflections. The numerous contacts with the local elites not only enriched his ideas about the northeastern Ottoman domains, but also clarified his convictions about the similar ideological and geopolitical framework of the revolutionary processes in the peripheries of the Western world. Miranda's meetings and conversations with representatives of famous Phanariot and Greek revolutionary families, commercial circles and European consulates are a source of diverse information about the impact of military conflicts on personal destiny, economic development and demographic changes in these areas. Particular attention is paid to the colonization of the new Russian territories with "loyal subjects", including through the forced settlement of the Orthodox population; of the sense of inter-ethnic tension and oppressive rule; of the interference of "outside" interests and ambitions.

The study highlights Miranda's open-minded approach in his assessments and characterizations of the warm attitude of local Muslims in contrast to the hostility he encountered in the Ottoman capital. A special emphasis in this section is placed on the wavering of atheism and secularism in Miranda's ideological positions under the influence of his impressions of the ambiguous role of religion in Ottoman society as an instrument of despotic power, but also of personal and social values and, above all, of the participation of the Orthodox Church in the formation of new national identities and the struggle for political emancipation. Dr. Simeonov continued the topic of diplomacy here, highlighting the similar practices in the two Empires and the efforts to win the support of the local elites through the integration of their representatives in the consular services.

The conclusion summarizes the main factual and conceptual contributions of the monograph in the context of globalization accompanying the modern world from its inception in the 18th century to the contemporary dimensions, manifestations and perceptions of these processes. The author pointed out the permanent tendency of "marginalization" of the peripheries (following the example of South-Eastern Europe and Latin America) in the historiographical and political thought of the North Atlantic center and defined the topic of his research as "an appropriate occasion" for rethinking the stereotypical ideas about these regions. In this sense, he has raised questions whose ambiguous answers fit into the open larger discussion about the coincidence or divergence between the understandings of Europeanization and modernization of these historically and culturally specific societies.

Dr. Simeonov's monographic research is based on published documents, periodicals, memoirs and archival sources from Spanish and American archives, which have allowed the author to fill a significant gap in the biography of Francisco de Miranda, as well as to correct and clarify some facts from the available scientific literature. The information obtained from the historical sources is contextualized in the general political and socio-economic processes during the studied period thanks to the extremely extensive and varied bibliography. The factual and thesis contributions of the monograph are undoubtedly the result of the critical reading and in-depth analysis of the archival sources and scientific works used.

The presented studies are devoted to various problems in the field of international relations and diplomacy from the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century, with an emphasis on the

specific nature and role of consular services as a largely autonomous and "trans-institutional system". The author has drawn attention to lesser-known processes in the context of the clash between Empires, the formation of the so-called European concert and transformations in the global international order. In this sense, the study of piracy and the slave trade as transnational phenomena related to various state bodies and which left an imprint on the creation of new regulatory regimes on a regional and global scale is of indisputable interest.

The Balkan aspects of this issue are highlighted in different directions. On the basis of the archival sources used, Dr. Simeonov brought new facts about the international relations of the participants in the Greek Revolution in the 1820s and argued the thesis of the Balkan national liberation movements as part of the global revolutionary processes during this period. By analyzing the diplomatic practices and "quasi-diplomatic" functions of consulates, including in the Ottoman Empire, he directed attention to the role of these institutions in the modernization accompanying the emergence of the new nation-states in Southeast Europe and the Atlantic region since the beginning of the 19th century. The author interpreted the integration of representatives of the local elites into the consular services as an expression of the tactics of combining their national aspirations with imperial geopolitics and, in the light of new historiographical tendencies, he supported the concept of the mediated relationship between Empires and modern nation-states. It should be especially emphasized Dr. Simeonov's thesis about the key role of the USA in the creation of the modern international system, in particular the consular institutions, which implies a reassessment of the American influence in the Balkans in the 19th century, as well as about the place of the region in the "transatlantic debates on the regulation of the international order".

The scholarly works of Dr. Simeon Simeonov undoubtedly have an original and contributing character. They display in-depth knowledge in the field of the issues he researches, the result of his many years of work with numerous and diverse historical sources - documents from European and American archives, published documents, periodicals and memoirs, extensive scientific literature. Along with a high educational qualification, impressive foreign languages training and research experience, the candidate demonstrates skills of critical analysis, bold conceptual thought and an academic writing style. The fact that his scientific interests so far have been centered around themes of modern world history and American history in particular, I see as

an advantage in looking for a different focus to the Balkan history and interpreting it in the context of global processes in the 19th century, as it is visible from the presented publications.

In conclusion, I believe that the scholarly works and the personal professional capacity of Dr. Simeon Simeonov meet the accepted scientometrics criteria and the established professional requirements for the academic position of "Associate professor", as well as that his nomination will contribute to the human resources and research advances of the "Modern Balkans" section of IBCT. In this sense, I propose to the Scientific Jury to approve the candidacy of Dr. Simeon Simeonov for holding the academic position of "Associate professor".

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