

REVIEW

for the candidacy of

Assoc. Prof. PhD Olga Todorova Todorova

in the competition for a professor at the Institute for Historical Studies,

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

for the needs of the section "Bulgarians, the Ottoman Empire and Europe"

by

Prof. Ivan Alexandrov Biliarsky, Dr. Sci.

Olga Todorova has her master's diploma of higher historical education in 1981 at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "Saint Clement of Ochrid". During the period 1983-1986 she was a full-time doctoral student at the Institute of History (now the Institute for Historical Studies, BAS). Thus, it can be said that her entire scientific, creative, and professional career is connected with our institute. She prepared her doctoral thesis on a topic that covers and thus connects the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Ottoman era, as traditionally Bulgarian history is usually periodized. In general, the topic can be defined as the history of the Orthodox Church during these transitional times. I believe that this marks the beginning of a rich historical work, characterized by interdisciplinarity in the subject matter and in the methodology of scientific research, richness of plots and obvious anthropological approach, combined with the best traditions of historical research.

Olga Todorova defended her thesis and she has been a "candidate of historical sciences" (now a "doctor of history") since 1987. She was immediately appointed a researcher and then a research fellow at the Institute. She became a Senior Research Fellow II degree (now "Associate Professor") in 1999.

Olga Todorova has worked with the most prominent representatives of Bulgarian historical science for the period in which she is interested. This undoubtedly gives her a good

foundation for building research and teaching experience. And during her work with the Institute for Historical Research, she continued to deepen her linguistic knowledge, especially with regard to the Ottoman Turkish language, as well as others necessary for her research. Building a specialist is actually a lifelong task and Olga Todorova is a clear example of this with her specializations in prestigious centers general and Ottoman studies. Here we can list: the specialization in Moscow, Institute of Slavonic and Balkan Studies (1989-1990); in Cambridge, Great Britain, Center for Ottoman Studies (1995) and in 1999 - Istanbul, Turkey, Governmental Archives, with a scholarship under the program of the Open Society Foundation (1999).

This professional training of Olga Todorova predetermines the wide range of her scientific interests, which are generally in the domain of Bulgarian, Balkan and Ottoman history. Here we can include in particular the topics of social structure in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the XV-XVIII centuries, the relations between different denominations - both with the dominant Islam and between the representatives of other religions, everyday life, women, marriage, the family, the children, the Orthodox Church during the Ottoman era. These topics can be traced in the scientific work of Olga Todorova.

We should probably start with the topic of the Orthodox Church, as it precedes the others in the formation of the candidate as a researcher. It is chronologically the first in the work of Olga Todorova. Here, of course, we should first mention her book *The Orthodox Church and the Bulgarians XV-XVIII centuries*, Sofia, 1997, 298 pages (in Bulgarian). She presents the history of the Orthodox Church in the Bulgarian lands from the earliest era after the Ottoman conquest and in the context of its consequences. Although it appeared a quarter of a century ago, it has not lost its relevance so far, moreover, the author does not abandon the topic and returns to it many times in her research. In this sense, we can cite her article from the collection *The Bulgarian Church through the Centuries* (2003), which examines the positions of the Church in the early years of Ottoman rule, as well as a special article on Orthodox legitimacy, focused on the work of Presbyter Synadinos and published in the volume in honour of Prof. R. Radkova. In this group, we can also include the candidate's research on other religions and denominations in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule. For obvious reasons, Muslims and their culture are particularly well represented. Without in any way ranking the individual studies, I would like to mention the history of Muslim pilgrimage from the lands we now call "Bulgarian", as well as several studies related to the Islamization or change of religious social structure in individual

areas. Sometimes these pursuits are combined with those about gender relations, which we will focus on separately. Olga Todorova's article on Jews and the image of the Jew with the ideas of the Bulgarians from the 19th century, published in the magazine *Literaturna misal* (2000), should also be mentioned.

Thus, the passage through the various denominations, which are decisive for the structuring of the Ottoman society, the work of O. Todorova gives the author the opportunity for approaches to different social groups. Here, too, there are groups of studies that are not so separated from each other, but on the contrary, build a comprehensive complex that gives an idea of the Ottoman society of the era.

It is especially worth emphasizing the importance of the study of gender relations in the so-called "gender" topic - a name that has recently been strongly and much abused. In this sense, the book by Olga Todorova about women in the Ottoman era should be mentioned in the first place: O. TODOROVA, *Women from the Central Balkans during the Ottoman era (XV-XVII centuries)*. Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing House, 2004, 515 pages (in Bulgarian). In a sense, it summarizes the author's efforts and gives a comprehensive picture of relations during that distant era. However, this book is the result of a long creative journey and also gives additional results, as the author does not abandon the mentioned issues after her book. Here we can point to articles and studies such as "Servants and Concubines", "Men's Times", "Gender Aspects of Islamization", "Sexualization of a Religion", etc. I would also like to mention the study of prostitution in the Bulgarian lands during the early Ottoman era. The topic of the child before the Ottoman period deserves special attention, which covers a part of this group of works. Here we can cite the large and extremely interesting study "The Child in the World of Adults in the XV-XVIII centuries (based on materials from the Bulgarian lands)", *Contrasts and conflicts "behind the scenes" in Bulgarian society during XV-XVIII century* (2003). This topic further enriches the already wide range of research interests of Olga Todorova and provides additional arguments in the evaluation of her work in this competition.

The next group of researches is the most important for me, as far as it is the most recent in time and as far as Olga Todorova's last book belongs to it, which is also her habilitation professorial work. It is a study of slavery in the Bulgarian lands. Prior to the publication of the monograph, the author published several studies that indicate her research path and that prepare us for the result. First of all, I would like to point out an article that deals with a seemingly side

issue, which, however, leads to some strong, unnecessary and essentially harmful emotions related to the term "slavery". It is about the article "*The Untold History of Slavery: Towards the Preconditions for a Public WAR IN TERMS*", *Historical Review*, 2019. Olga Todorova is preparing several studies on domestic slavery in recent years. Here we can include the already cited article on concubines, captive slaves, the decline of slavery in the Ottoman Empire and others. All of them find more or less echo in the monograph, which I will focus on a little more.

The main work, with which Olga Todorova appears in the competition is entitled *Domestic slavery and slavery in Ottoman Rumelia* (Sofia, 2021, in Bulgarian). The monograph consists of an introduction, six chapters and an epilogue and is structured to cover the phenomenon and study it from all sides. In this sense, it seems to me that in fact the limitations of the study are mainly placed in the choice of the specific material and not the topic. It seems comprehensive with regard to the study of slavery in the Islamic world and in the post-medieval era, if we use the generally accepted periodization.

The *Introduction* is of particular importance insofar as it is the basis for further research. Its very title contains the main characteristics of the text: "Slavery in the Islamic world in the pre-Ottoman era and the formation of the Sharia slave paradigm." The *First chapter* deals with the methods of obtaining slaves, the ethnic composition of slaves, as well as differences in the status of some members of the dependent population. The *Second chapter* presents the individual process of integrating slaves into Ottoman society, presenting different points of view and examining the different aspects of the liberation and transition from the world of slaves to the world of the free. This process is not presented unilaterally, but with a hint of the very different results that such an act can lead to. The *Third chapter* deals with a somewhat opposite plot: non-integrated slaves. This includes a variety of cases, some of which undoubtedly attract attention. Such is the case with the escape of slaves, their organization and consequences. At the same time, I would like to point out that the wording of one of the sub-chapters as "slaves' crime" could raise objections, insofar as slave status itself calls into question legal personality and the possibility of a slave being a perpetrator. The *Fourth chapter* presents a special case: that of the "black Arab" we know from folklore. This chapter, devoted to the place, meaning, origin, status and image of blacks in the Ottoman Empire, seen through the eyes of the Bulgarian *raya*, undoubtedly gives additional richness to the study. The *Fifth chapter* is devoted to the figure of the slave owner in Rumelia in the XVI-XVIII centuries. The chapter is of interest because it

clearly defines a situation - namely, that slaves are not subject to "ruthless exploitation" but rather a matter of luxury - and characterizes slaveholders as wealthy people, but not necessarily belonging to the ruling Muslim elite. This, as well as interesting statistics, form a significant contribution to the study of social structures. The sixth chapter continues this topic with a comparative study and follow-up of non-Muslim slavery, as well as in other European countries. The epilogue presents the decline of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, the views of the Bulgarians about it, as well as the various (mis)uses of the term "slavery".

I think we can confidently say that Olga Todorova's book is an undoubted contribution to the Ottoman studies in our country and in a sense has a pioneering character, at least as far as Bulgarian historiography is concerned. In addition, it undoubtedly continues the lasting line of the author, who has chosen a certain topic with anthropological and sociological orientation and with a strong emphasis on cultural history. For this she can only be congratulated.

Thus, in conclusion, I can say that the review of the entire work of Olga Todorova gives me every reason to say that she has a stable, bright and high place in Bulgarian Ottoman studies and Bulgarian historiography in general. The selected topics are not conventional, as well as the way the author develops them. In essence, I believe that she should have held the academic position of 'professor' a long time ago.

Based on my observations and conclusions about the quality of Olga Todorova's scientific work, as well as on the attached documentation on the competition and the procedure correctly following the requirements of the Law on Growth of Academic Staff, I strongly vote for awarding Olga Todorova position of "professor" and I invite the other members of the scientific jury to support her candidacy as well.

Sofia, March 28, 2022 г.

SIGNATURE:

/Ivan Biliarsky /