

R E P O R T

by Prof. D.Sc. Tzvetana Georgieva

on the scientific production of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Olga Todorova,

the sole applicant in the competition for the academic position “professor” in professional field 2.2. History and Archeology, scientific specialty “History of Bulgaria” (Social History, 15th – 18th centuries), for the needs of “The Bulgarians, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe” Department of the Institute for Historical Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

I have been following and I know Dr. Olga Todorova’s scientific production for decades. It’s long since I consider her as a researcher of forgotten and neglected topics in which she finds significant and important aspects in the history of generations of Bulgarians who once lived as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. That is why I start my report with the categorical assertion that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Olga Todorova’s scientific production as well as her public activities and her teaching fully meet the requirements for obtaining the *professorial* academic position.

The validity of my personal opinion about her work has been confirmed on several occasions by the published reviews on her monographs “The Orthodox Church and the Bulgarians, 15th- 18th Centuries” and “Women on the Central Balkans in the Ottoman Epoch, 15th -17th Centuries”, as well as by dozens of citations of these monographs. Her third monograph “Domestic Slavery and Slaveholding in Ottoman Rumeli” will be presented in more detail by the esteemed reviewers, members of the jury in this competition. That’s why in my report I venture to point out a number of aspects in Assoc. Prof. Dr. Olga Todorova’s studies which I consider typical for her research methodology and indicative of her historiographical professionalism.

The titles and the contents of her monographs present her as a researcher of wide areas during prolonged historical periods. However, the main focus of her studies emerges through the selection of sources and data analysis, and it always falls on the details, tendencies, opportunities or restrictions defining the life of Bulgarian people. It is precisely this Bulgaristic approach that gives Olga Todorova the grounds

to aspire to and be approved as a *Bulgarian History professor*. This assertion of mine becomes quite obvious in her last monograph, in which various stages of the Bulgarians' adaptation to the Ottoman rule are displayed, one after the other, before our eyes. The first chapter introduces the reader to the devastating spoiling raids carried out by the Ottoman Turks, then acquainting him with the gradual transformation of the local population into Ottoman subjects, who were granted *zimmi* status. In carefully elaborated tables, Dr. Todorova clearly marks the substantial differences between the status of the subjects, on one hand, and the status of the domestic slaves, on the other hand, in their capacity of being both human beings and objects. In the study on domestic slavery documentary information has been drawn from diverse sources, which reveal the adaptation of the Bulgarians to the Ottoman reality. The presence of Bulgarians in *kadi* courts suggests that they became aware of the subtleties of the Ottoman justice system. Moreover, by the middle of the 16th c. they had already managed to make the *Shariat* a weapon of their own self-defense. During the next century, as the Ottoman historian Silâhdar mentions, Non-Muslim *reaya* from Sofia, Skopje and Filibe complained to the Divan that although they were paying their poll-tax (*ciziye*), they saw their properties being plundered and their people enslaved. The authority's response came in the form of a *fetva* recommending that the enslaved be returned to their settlements and their *zimmi* status be restored. This and similar examples demonstrate Dr. Todorova's objectivity by avoiding in her texts both the traditional emphasis on Bulgarian sufferings and martyrdom and its antipode – the alleged "privilege" to be a Christian subject of the Ottoman sultan. In the same chapter various "criminal" and "state" activities as means of turning the free *zimmis* into slaves are shown, suggesting how "soft" authority pressure transmuted into violence. But soft adaptation by the Bulgarians was also implied. It was precisely this kind of adaptation that fostered the notions of Bulgarians' "well-being" under the auspices of the padishah during *Tanzimat* times. Though without explicitly saying it, Dr. Todorova alludes to the cost of the compromise experienced and wielded – the suppressed will and the lost expertise for independent political activity. Actually, the same conclusion applies to all Balkan communities who spent centuries as Ottoman *zimmis*. Although to a different degree and differently oriented, they continue to need a protector to guarantee their restricted rights and to bolster their self-confidence in their abilities and strengths.

In the monograph on domestic slavery in Ottoman Rumeli I also find another line which touches some significant aspects of our contemporary historical knowledge. This is History of Everyday Life, and Dr. Todorova is one of the few scholars who pioneered the promotion of this discipline in our country. The entire text is an amalgam of facts, processes, notions, opportunities, and even illusions, which have been tagged, explained and analyzed. Within the “slaves versus slaveholders” relationship, a wide range of options was revealed which „dissolve“ the essence and contents of the personal lives of both categories. They formed the societal atmosphere for more than twenty generations inhabiting Rumeli and Anatolia in the Ottoman Empire’s “classical age”. Collected by the authoress in her “databank”, the information helps to reconstruct life in the past as a vivid reality but also as a pattern according to which, after assimilating themselves in the Ottoman “melting pot”, the majority of slaves became Muslims. The only prospect before their successors was the Turkish ethnos. I dwell on this research line because it (perhaps) marks one of the factors for a long-presumed demographic process through which, as Tzvetan Todorov suggested, numerous groups of people moved from the West to the East before the colonial era. Domestic slavery and slaveholding in Rumeli (perhaps, once again) led to a demographic surge in the Ottoman domains. That’s why I am taking the liberty of suggesting that Dr. Todorova *train some young and promising researchers in Everyday Life history*. It’s obvious that various surprises and new knowledge are awaiting us in this field.

Lastly, I chose to dwell on a conception launched and well-substantiated by Dr. Todorova about the convergence of real slavery and slavery as a metaphor, which almost periodically “erupts” to the surface of modern Bulgarian society. I am aware of more than a few sociological and culturological attempts to explain this “phenomenon”. Many of them leave either unanswered questions or give unfounded answers. Historian Olga Todorova uncovers the reasons and causes underlying these eruptions by a professionally conducted analysis of our recent past, an analysis which I accept and salute.

At the finale of my report I would point out the active presence of Dr. Todorova in our professional and public life. Of the total of her 15 participations in various collective

projects, 10 were realized under the auspices of the Institute for Historical Studies of BAS, which bears witness to her scientific responsibility as a historian. Her civic attitudes, demonstrated in public through various formats, are expressed softly but her message is always clear and resolute.

There is much positive to be added but I think that what has been written so far about the work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Olga Todorova is enough to justify **my determination to vote “yes” for her election as a professor of Bulgarian history, appealing at the same time to the distinguished members of the jury to follow my example.**