



Nikolay Aretov. *Ivan Naydenov: za pravo i napredak. Memoari, pisma.* Queen Mab Publishing House, 2019. 363. ISBN 978-954-533-178-7.

Nikolay Aretov's most recent book is not likely to attract the attention of a large number of readers or provoke a multitude of debates in specialized circles. Unlike some of his previous work, it does not provide new interpretations or suggest novel approaches to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bulgarian history. Nor does it attempt a generalization or systematization of significant processes or phenomena in Bulgarian cultural and literary history. *Ivan Naydenov: za pravo i napredak. Memoari, pisma* (*Ivan Naydenov: For Rights and Progress. Memoirs. Letters*) does not focus on the kind of widely known public figure from the Bulgarian National Revival period that has come to be appreciated by “lay” readers and experts alike. Significantly, it exemplifies the unpopular genre of the “first” biography of a relatively little-known Bulgarian author, and also comprises what is left of his literary legacy. The book is thus part of an important area in Aretov's research: the recovery of otherwise forgotten writers and public figures from the past. Earlier examples include his books on Vasil Popovich and Assen Hristoforov.

Rather than being merely the *object* of Aretov's analysis, Ivan Naydenov (1834 – 1910) may be described as his *co-author* insofar as his *oeuvre* accounts for two thirds of the whole volume. Prior to this publication, only three articles and a few entries in Bulgarian encyclopaedias were devoted to Naydenov's life and work, and predictably, one of the articles was authored by Aretov himself. Although Naydenov's name was repeatedly mentioned in studies of Bulgarian journalism in the late Ottoman Empire, the National Church struggle, and the life of the Bulgarian community in the Ottoman capital, he received comparatively little attention in his own right. Regrettably, his public image was to a large extent shaped by his political opponent Lyuben Karavelov, who represented some of the more radical tendencies in the Bulgarian national movement. Karavelov portrayed Naydenov as the timid, conservative and boring editor of “the venerable *Pravo* (Right) newspaper.” Changing Naydenov's received image and producing a less biased view of this forgotten, but nonetheless significant, figure of the Bulgarian national movement is among Aretov's main tasks in the book under consideration. It should be pointed out that he has carried it out exceptionally well.

The volume opens with an overview of Naydenov's life (5 – 114) in which all of its turns and twists have been properly contextualized. Aretov dwells on his main character's early years and his arrival in the Ottoman capital, before moving on to his work as a journalist and focusing specifically on the newspapers that he published. He analyses Naydenov's relations with important representatives of the Bulgarian national movement, such as Petko R. Slaveykov, Svetoslav Milarov, and Karavelov, and, generally speaking, the Bulgarian revolutionaries, who had left the Ottoman Empire and fled across the Danube to present-day Romania. Naydenov's memoirs are approached in terms of their genre characteristics. Due attention is also paid to his translations. Overall, Aretov presents Naydenov as a figure split between modernity and tradition but tactfully refrains from imposing labels upon him or assigning him a fixed place within the ideologically diverse terrain of nineteenth-century Bulgaria. His restraint in constructing hypotheses about the past and use of self-effacing strategies in the text are commendable insofar as he thus leaves room for future interpretations – both his own and those of other scholars.

The volume's second part (115– 196) contains Naydenov's memoirs, which Aretov has assembled from scattered extracts. As he himself observes, it is impossible to say if this is the complete text, or a portion of it, as more extracts might be recovered in the future. The memoirs depict the life of a man, who grew up in the provincial town of Kazanlak, spent his most productive years in the Ottoman capital,

and eventually came to occupy high administrative posts in the Ottoman-controlled province of Eastern Rumelia and the autonomous Bulgarian Principality.

The book's third part (197– 51) includes what is left of Naydenov's correspondence, with his letters to Milarov forming the most essential part of it. Those letters were never completely neglected by researchers, but in the past, they were mostly approached as sources of information about other, more "prominent" public figures or about the "great" events of the National Church struggle; no special interest in their author was evinced prior to the publication of Aretov's book. Apart from shedding new light on Naydenov's biography and contributing to our knowledge of his ideological development, which was sometimes marked by uncertainty and vacillation, the letters illuminate the more "intimate" aspects of the Bulgarian Church question: lots of details are provided about the conduct of members of the Bulgarian Orthodox clergy and some of the secular leaders of the movement, who were swayed by different political factors. We thus get an insider's view of the purely "human" dimensions of the National Church struggle, which are usually absent from "grand" historical narratives about the movement. This clearly indicates that even when a historical event has been continually studied and interpreted, some of its significant aspects may have been overlooked.

Naydenov's correspondence is also of considerable value as a source of first-hand knowledge about the day-to-day activities of Bulgarian journalists in Istanbul in the second half of the nineteenth century. Letters between the editor of the newspapers *Pravo* (Right), *Napredak* (Progress), and *Shutosh* (Jester) and his closest associate Milarov were exchanged on a weekly basis over a period of two years. These letters make us aware of the multitude of problems that people in Naydenov's position faced, such as trouble with the Ottoman censorship and unreliable contributors, printing difficulties, subscribers' failure to pay their subscription fees, professional jealousy and intrigues from fellow journalists, uncertainty about what stance to adopt on ticklish issues, and perennial impecuniosity. Furthermore, they provide information about problems encountered by other journalists, including those belonging to other ethnic groups, who were similarly based in the Ottoman capital at that time, and shed light on the mechanisms that the Ottoman authorities employed to control the press, the role of the Bulgarian censors Hristo Arnaudov and Nikola Mihaylovski, who served in the Ottoman Administration of Press Affairs, ways and means of obtaining funding for journalistic ventures, and the extent to which individual authors contributed to certain publications. Despite the fact that Milarov's replies to Naydenov's letters have not been preserved, the correspondence is also a source of detailed information about his writing career: we learn about his contributions to Naydenov's newspapers and how his *Church History* and the play *The Fall of Constantinople* came to be produced. The letters likewise enable us to trace the process of the two correspondents' gradual transformation into radical nationalists. Further information about Naydenov's earlier and later life can be obtained from letters addressed to an impressive number of other correspondents: Ivan Momchilov, Stancho Bradinski, Georgi Gruev, Georgi Zhivkov, Ivan Geshov, and Ivan Grozev.

Aretov's book skilfully portrays a quiet but persistent man of letters, who played a wide variety of social roles throughout his life: Naydenov was a teacher, a textbook author, and a journalist, as well as a mediator between the Ottoman authorities and the Bulgarian community in Istanbul, a representative of the Bulgarian Exarchate, and eventually a state official in autonomous Bulgaria. Underlying his numerous activities was his vision of progress as a lengthy process of step-by-step improvement carried out unobtrusively by people with a preference for modesty rather than self-promotion. Aretov's most recent book has brought back from undeserved obscurity a little-known representative of nineteenth-century Bulgarian culture and has thus prepared the way for further reappraisal of that period of the country's history.

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