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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MENTALITY IMAGE OF THE BULGARIANS DURING 15th–17th CENTURIES IN BULGARIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY¹

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Abstract: *The study is an overview and analysis of the opinions of Bulgarian historians about the Bulgarian mentality during the first three centuries of the Ottoman rule. The topic is very debatable and only four authors stand out with contributions, but these are some of the most famous representatives of our national historiography in the twentieth century – Peter Mutafchiev, Hristo Gandev, Dimitar Angelov, Nikolay Genchev. Their research and opinions are presented along with other issues related to the topic of the study. The studies of the so-called “People’s Psychology” for the period are untenable. The main approach in such research should be focused on cultural processes.*

Keywords: *Mentality, People’s Psychology, Bulgarian folk psychology, 15th–17th century.*

It is unanimously accepted in the Bulgarian public opinion that during the all time of the Ottoman rule the Bulgarian people had been suffering of state, religious, national and economic discrimination undertaken by the Muslims and especially by the Turks. The common belief is that the tortures had been strongest over the first three centuries – 15th, 16th and 17th, but they never had been ceasing until the Liberation in 1878, however, only within the free territories which hardly included about a third of the entire Bulgarian population and ethnic space².

In fact, the Bulgarian professional historians who have written similar extreme assessments for the first three centuries of the Ottoman rule never have been majority both among the leaders and among all representatives of the historical sciences in Bulgaria [Запрянова, А., Вечева, Е. 1994, с. 62–63, 73, 103, 157 and others.]. Nowhere on the Balkans the Turkish historiography opinions for blessed and easy government over the conquered Christian lands have accepted without reserves [See Снегаров, И. 1958, с. 3, 19³; Barkan, Ö. L. 1949, S. 524–529; Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 88; Inalcik, Н.

¹ The bigger part of this study was written more than 10 years ago as a part of preparation of my PhD work defended in 2009. It was set aside because of language and terminological difficulties, mainly for the English translation of Bulgarian words as *dushevnost* and other key concepts of the dissertation. Consequently, the file had been forgotten and hardly recently it was found. Now the paper with the corresponding revisions is presented to the readers.

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² An author who most consecutively examines this phenomenon is Tsvetana Georgieva [Георгиева, Ц. 1993, с. 7, 13; 1999, с. 183]. About the reflection of these conceptions among the scholars who were authors of History schoolbooks see: [Исов, М. 2005]; Closest to the public comprehensions are the so called people psychological researches. See: [Семов, М. 2001 с. 190, 197, 208–209, 243; Минкова, С., Трифонов, Т. 2003 с. 138–180].

³ On the page 19 see note № 1.

1997, p. 6–7, 10–11; **Кил, М.** 2003, с. 27–28], but it is essential to be underlined that the attempts the Ottoman invasion to be concerned as a biological collapse or a demographic disaster have not found many followers amid Bulgarian scholars. Probably the best evidence is the zealous discussion in 1970-s between some Bulgarian researchers after the publishing of the book of Hristo Gandev *The Bulgarian nationality in 15th century* [Гандев, Х. 1972; Мутафчиева, В. 1973 pass.; Димитров, С. 1973 pass.; Генчев, Н. 1973 pass.; Гандев, Х. 1973 pass.; Гандев, Х. 1975 pass.; Григоров, А. 1980, с. 85–95]. Although this study obviously was ordered by highest place, there and then the author and his methods were heavily criticized [Дечев, С. 2019 pass.].⁴

The issues published with propaganda purposes, from the times of the height of the Cold war or the forced change of the personal names of the Bulgarian Muslims (so-called *vazroditelen protses*), usually demonstrated deliberately negative attitude as of its titles [Тодоров, Н. 1953; Снегаров, И. 1958; the documental collections composed by Петров, П. 1962; 1972; 1987–1988; Дечев, С. 2019]. It is interesting, however, that even there in different places on their pages could be seen examples of objective attitude to the problems.

The collective issues of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences expressing the official Government position confirm this observation [История на България 1954, с. 245–293; История на България, 1983]. It is naturally at conditions of totalitarian regime the historical science to feel oppression but because of many circumstances the Bulgarian historians have few opportunities to influence over the public opinion. People still accept willingly each issue confirming their comprehensions, and reject all that proves the contrary [Стоянов, Л., Методиев, В. 2002, с. 19, 20–21⁵; Запрянова, А., Вечева, Е. 1994, с. 166–167, 173].

There is a very good example about that how sensible Bulgarians regard the Ottoman rule and how they trust to their own convictions but not to historians, who are implicitly considered as servants of politics, when they write unpopular things. After the democratic changes on November 10, 1989 a rumor appeared that the phrase “Turkish slavery” in the textbooks was replaced with another – “Ottoman presence” [Георгиева, Ц. 1993, с. 8–11]. In vain prof. Tsvetana Georgieva, an internationally recognized and prominent scholar in Ottoman studies, was trying to prove that there was not a Bulgarian textbook or a scientific research where this formulation was used [Георгиева, Ц. 2006, с. 100]. The most of the

Bulgarians not only reject the scientifically correct and internationally established terms – “Ottoman domination” or “Ottoman rule” but persist in calling this period “Turkish slavery”. The last modification of this rumor was in 2016 when the alleged term was “Ottoman coexistence” also groundless but effective enough to cost the Minister resignation [Дечев, С. 2019].

In Bulgaria after the Liberation in 1878 for a long time the accents of historical researches were the Middle Ages and the Bulgarian Revival. The first three centuries of the Ottoman rule were set aside because of different reasons, but the most significant one was the small number of prepared professionals. The increase of scholar interests after the Second World War and furthermore in recent decades lead to the appearance of skillful experts and the circle of knowledge was considerably widened. However, for the non-specialist majority the centuries before the Bulgarian Revival have always been dark ages, time of oppression and national humiliation. On the other side, the researches demonstrated that such opinions were exaggerated in most of the cases. Therefore, a large abyss has been opened between academic issues, on one hand, and textbooks, national commemorations, museum expositions and popular literature, on the other hand.

It is indisputable that the Bulgarian historiography has suffered by censorship and political restrictions [Мутафчиева, В. и др. 1995, с. 8–11]. But after 1956 the obstacles gradually began to reduce. By the end of the 1980s Bulgarian scientists had to conform with the authorities but not by

⁴ For all main controversial points of view and the development through the years after Second World War of the topic about the Ottoman conquest, demographic losses as well the newest detailed research and conclusion see the study of Grigor Boykov [Boikov, G. 2016].

⁵ Page 19 words of Vera Mutafchieva, p. 20–21 an interview with Tsvetana Georgieva.

all means yet [Исусов, М. 1991, с. 3–12; Запрянова, А и др. 2005, 14–15; Todorova, M. 1992, 1105–1117]. In the scientific issues it was possible to express and defend opinions different from the official ones, but they became known only to professionals. The historians who did not agree to serve the political conjuncture chose to work in fields where they felt themselves secure and disposed with enough documents to support their thesis [Запрянова, А., Вечева, Е. 1994, с. 79–80, 103, 130, 164–165; Исусов, М. 1991; Todorova, M. 1992]. As a result the Bulgarian historical school remained close to the positivistic forms of research [Запрянова, А. и др. 2005, р. 31; Koleva, D, Elenkov, A. 2004, 113–120; Todorova, M. 1992; Даскалов, Р. 2002, 30–31], although it criticized the positivism from a methodical viewpoint of the Marxist philosophy [for instance Георгиев, К. 1981, с. 249–262]. For this and many others objective reasons, as the international isolation and obligatory use of the principles of dialectic materialism, the

Bulgarian historian's works were slightly related to the postwar ideas and researches of the New History and Historical anthropology [Запрянова, А. и др. 2005, р. 34; Тодорова, М. 1988, с. 6; Даскалов, Р. 2002, р. 311 (note 33)].

The problems of the Bulgarian mentality image during the long lasted Bulgarian history was left as marginal and only small part of the historians had paid attention on it. This theme remained priority for patriotic disposed intellectuals, who shared to great extent the mass opinions of the tragic and heroic Bulgarian historical past [Георгиева, Ц. 2006, с. 100–101⁶]. In these works, in spite of some interesting contributions; there is nothing affirmative for the development of the historical knowledge in Bulgaria concerning the period 15th–17th century. In this paper could be mentioned only the most representable for the purposes of the research monograph issues because the number of articles, essays and brochures is quite imposing [Костурков, С. 1949; Семов, М. 2001; 1987; Страшимиров, А. 1993; Панов, Т. 1992; Хаджийски, И. 1974; Зарев, П. 1983; Минкова, С. Трифонов, Т. 1981; 1990; 2003⁷; Данчев, Н. 2002; Свинтила, В. 2007]. At the same time the small number of professional historians who have written about these problems includes some of the leading representatives of the Bulgarian historiography, a fact giving stable base and favorable opportunities for future growth of the works and the interest.

The first Bulgarian historian who put under analysis the historical processes concerning Bulgaria was prof. Petar Mutafchiev. He was an expert in Byzantine and Medieval Bulgarian studies and it was no wonder that he concentrated his efforts mostly upon this period. The Mutafchiev's plans for philosophical attitude to the Bulgarian history included the Ottoman domination as well, but he passed away before commencing that part of the work. Actually, P. Mutafchiev planned to review a large circle of questions and the Bulgarian mentality image (both in general and during the Ottoman rule) should have been only an element in the entire research [Мутафчиев, П. 1987, с. 5–21; Ангелов, Д. 1983, с. 5–11; Гюзелев, В. 1983].

Which were the features of the Mentality image of the Bulgarians from the Ottoman conquest to the beginning of the Bulgarian national Revival? Only three Bulgarian historians have examined this question – professor Hristo Gandev, academician Dimitar Angelov and professor Nikolay Genchev.

Prof. Hristo Gandev is known as a historian of the Bulgarian Revival. In the beginning of 40s of the 20th century he published a work, where he criticized the idea of the Dark Ages and proved that during 17th and 18th centuries in Bulgarian lands functioned a lot of monasteries and cell schools that maintained the connection between the culture and memory about the Bulgarian medieval state; therefore the Bulgarians had not lost their national consciousness and identity, in spite of the long-lasting foreign domination [Гандев, Х. 1943, с. 6–7, 179–185]. Even stranger on this background in 1972 Hristo Gandev published his research in that he described the 15th century as utter disaster for the

⁶ She points out that in Bulgaria there are several “speakers of the historians” who create similar image of the Bulgarian past, but these opinions are shared mostly of non historians.

⁷ These two authors appoint here mentioned books as three editions of the one research, but except the different titles, they are possessing quite different contents, especially between the first and the third.

Bulgarian people [Гандев, Х. 1972].⁸ The First chapter of the Second part of this work is entitled “A Reflection of the Ottoman Conquest over the People’s Mentality”. The author points out in it that the Bulgarian nationality suffered monstrous demographic and psychic losses during the second half of the 14th and the whole 15th centuries due to massacres, enslavements, janissary takings, flights in abroad etc. According to him the Bulgarian people’s mentality was marked by feeling of frustration and irreversibility owing to the slayings and the devastations during the whole researched period [Гандев, Х. 1972, с. 171–179].

It appeared that the Bulgarian mentality got a hard blow in the 15th century, but nevertheless, according other of Gandev’s studies, one century later the Bulgarian society succeeded to restore its vital forces. A strong confirmation of this conclusion is the fact that four years after imprinting the book for Bulgarian nationality in the 15th century, in 1976 the earlier Gandev’s monograph was re-issued [Гандев, Х. 1976]. Gandev did not develop the problem with the Bulgarian mentality image through the Ottoman rule and one general conclusion based on his contradictory attitudes in different works concerning the different centuries and written in different times is insecure. The book from 1972, however stayed more popular at the present both amidst the society and in non-specialized scientific circles.

The detailed apocalyptic description made this work the most representative for what the Duth researcher Machiel Kiel named the *catastrophic theory* for the time of Ottoman conquest [Кил, М. 2002, с. 25–27]. The Gandev’s book still gives reasons both of supporters and opponents of this theory.

It has been already mentioned about the discussions derived in the Bulgarian

Historiography around the Gandev’s thesis for a biological collapse. They were strong enough to make the author to revise and published again his research with conclusions about the demographical loses almost reduced in half [Гандев, Х. 1989]. Amid the majority of the Bulgarians, however, impressions from the first issue remained. For instance, Marko Semov, one of the prominent authors and to the great extent founder of pretending to be science Bulgarian people psychology (*narodopsihologia*), in his fundamental monography as well University textbook, used the data from the first edition and at this point started to made analyses and conclusions about the Bulgarian national character and mentality [Семов, М. 2001, с. 243].

The problem with the historical study on the Bulgarian mentality is complicated both for the scarcity of sources and for the above mentioned negative attitude of the Bulgarians as a whole to the Ottoman rule. These two reasons give additional explanation to the fact that not many historians have dealt with such researches.

Academician Dimitar Angelov, is among the exclusions. He was a leading scientist in Byzantine and Medieval studies after the Second World War. In the first of his monograph studies, dedicated to the mental image of the Bulgarians, he examined the earlier period – from the Christianization of the Bulgarian state in the middle of the 9th to the end of the 14th century when it was subdued by the Ottomans [Ангелов, Д. 1985]. Still in this book D. Angelov touched in many cases questions from the next epoch, and later, in the last years of his life, he directed many efforts to the Bulgarian history during the Ottoman yoke. On the basis of his comprehensive knowledge of the miscellaneous sources he convincingly exposed the viewpoint that despite all the victims, devastations and oppressions the Bulgarian people did not lose its sense of self identity and the memory about the former Bulgarian state [Ангелов, Д. 1994, с. 66–67, and especially 89]. In another of his books concerning the period 15th–19th centuries D. Angelov researched the Bulgarian mentality but as a whole he paid little attention to typically psychological topics [Ангелов, Д. 2002]. He preferred to deal with problems mostly connected with the field where he had worked for many years – the historical development of the Bulgarian nationality. D. Angelov defended the position that the folklore records, although mostly collected in late times, were an important source for the Bulgarian mentality study [Ангелов, Д. 2002, с. 15].

⁸ In many places within the whole First part, between pages 17–170.

With his elaborate works and professional attitude academician D. Angelov gave a good example how the Bulgarian mentality image as well as problems close to it from the past centuries should be studied. Naturally, some disadvantages could be found in his works but they are easily explainable with the fact that similar problems were new for the Bulgarian historiography and the readers, professional or not, frequently anticipated to read something which meet their own images – a hard to achieve task for such abstract matter. D. Angelov put many problems to research for the period of the first centuries of Ottoman rule. Most of them left unfinished but it is considerable merit that with his sight of great scholar he realized these kind of problems did not have to be neglected by the historical science. It is impossible to be conducted whatever serious study about the Bulgarian mental image during the centuries before the Bulgarian Revival and Angelov's works to be missed.

Nikolay Genchev is among the most respected Bulgarian historians, famous far outside the academic circles. He put to reassessment some events and processes, first of all of the Bulgarian cultural and revival history, though he has many contributions and in other areas too. As a number and especially in contents his works on the Bulgarian mental image in 15th – 17th ages were not many [Генчев, Н. 1985; Генчев, Н. 1987]⁹ but N. Genchev much more purposefully treated this question and compared with Hr. Gandev and D. Angelov he worked it out theoretically to greater extent.

Regarding the period 15th–17th century N. Genchev shared close to Hr. Gandev's opinion for the devastating character of the Ottoman conquest and his negative consequences over the Bulgarian mentality and history as whole. He stressed on the bloodsheds as one of the main factors for the consciousness and behavior of the Bulgarians in the late Middle Ages [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 27–28, 42; Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 101–102]. According to him, the destruction of the Bulgarian state for some centuries on reduced strongly the economic, cultural and demographic potential of the Bulgarian nationality [Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 94–96]. The author was convinced that the continuity in the mental images of the Bulgarians from the times of the free medieval Bulgarian state and these during the centuries of Ottoman domination had been utterly broken [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 32–33, 42, 44].

Genchev described the medieval Bulgarian from the times preceding the Ottoman conquest as a rough and remorseless warrior and on this position he created contrast with the

Bulgarian population from later times recorded in many stranger's travel notes as timid and peaceful [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 23, 24]. Actually, there are not any serious proofs about mass war-mongering amid the ordinary people in Bulgaria during the time of the Second Bulgarian realm; on a contrary, the data reveals less and less participation of the male population in the campaigns during 13th and 14th centuries. With the exception of the rule of the first three Assens and the Ivaylo's uprising the Bulgarian army was not numerous – it rarely surpassed ten thousand people and included great percent foreign mercenaries [Ангелов, Д., Чолпанов, Б. 1989, с. 213].

Genchev's positions depended in the first place on his comparative methods. He juxtaposed culturally and demographically the Bulgarian society with other societies of Christian Europe having left free from Ottoman invasion [Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 94–96]. From this point of view the Bulgarian people looked too backward but Genchev did not compose a despairing picture [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 25]. According to him the Bulgarian cultural development should be studied realistically without nihilism and megalomania that he underlined as main features of Bulgarian character and that have often appeared even in the scientific researches [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 37–39; Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 15–17].

The cultural studies were most important for N. Genchev and though he declared his interest to the Bulgarian mentality and psychic his works over these problems remained unfinished and they possessing relative comprehensiveness namely in connection with the cultural studies [Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 8]. In any other aspect they stand somehow isolated mainly because after the end of 1980s the author stopped to deal with them [Даскалов, Р. 2006, с. 207, 219]. N. Genchev, however, gave a lot of recommendations of great use regarding eventual future researches over the Bulgarian mentality [Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 8]. The obviously cultural backwardness of the Bulgarians in the dawn of the

⁹ Many questions connected with these topics are encountered as well in other his work [Генчев, Н. 1988].

Modern times undoubtedly was owed to the Ottoman domination but all assertions in sense that the mentality of the Bulgarians was deeply changed as a consequence of the Ottoman conquest lay only over suppositions and could not find support in the sources. The different approaches to the Bulgarian mental image have always depended on the national identity feeling of the authors. This explains why even in works of conscientious scholars are able to be seen conclusions close to the respective current nationalist conceptions but it is need to be pointed out that they neither always have served to them nor in most of the cases have originated from them.

The short overview made here is enough to mark whence the last three commented authors commenced their researches over the Bulgarian mentality in 15th–17th c. There are several starting points: Hr. Gandev went from his demographical studies and their results normally reflected a tragic picture. This picture however immediately was put under suspicion. It has been rejected as a sequence of many researches in Bulgaria and abroad from the last decades [for example: **Ковачев, Р.** 1997, с. 100; **Радусев, Е.** с. 69–70; **Войков, Г.** 2016]. Gandev searched support for his thesis in folklore sources and at this point he paid most serious attention to the Bulgarian mentality [Гандев, Х. 1972, с. 171–179] but it is impossible to be proved that these songs reproduced entire and reliable picture of the time of the Ottoman conquest and the entire 15th century, because a great number of different sources and researches prove the opposite. Any searching of historical information in the folklore works as a rule is contradictory. Their subjects are very old and often common for different people [Славейков, П. П. 1994, с. 55–60].

The other Gandev's approach to the epoch – a cultural one, did not suggest a similar look. According to it in the centuries after the 15th the Bulgarians after all demonstrated enough visible continuity with the ages before the conquest and although the author did not write very much about the mentality of Bulgarians in that times, a similar result is quite possible. He appoints the view of life of the average Bulgarian in the beginning of 17th century as church-religious with pagan shades – a characterization too close to every medieval European [Гандев, Х. 1943, с. 181].

D. Angelov started from the topic about the self identity of the Bulgarian nationality. He researched problems as the territorial unity and manifestations of patriotism. He also traced the spiritual basis on the Bulgarian traditional culture in the free middle Ages, the Ottoman period and the first decades after the Liberation. The results reveal the idea for considerable continuity in the cultural and psychical levels of the Bulgarian society, naturally in its structures spared by the conquest [Ангелов, Д. 1994, с. 288–289; Ангелов, Д. 2002, с. 15–16, 35–36, 92–116, 188, 203–222 and others].

The cultural historical approach of N. Genchev showed a great number of problems in the Bulgarian development during the centuries of the Ottoman rule. According to him the destructions of the conquest, the new order and life conditions had derived serious transformations in the range of Bulgarian culture [Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 102–104]¹⁰. He was confident that the Bulgarian psychic was changed. The main reason was the new political, socio-economical and denominational situation brought by the conquerors and the abuses and terrors of evil intended Muslims over the defenceless infidels [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 23–24, 32–33; Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 101–102]. Basically a period of several centuries is enough for such changes but to what extent the new conditions had influenced to it, that is impossible to say; the continuity established in areas like settlement life, cultural traditions and the economy in the villages, where the greater percent of population lived give evidence for the contrary [Георгиева, Ц. 1999, с. 137–139, 179, 188–189] N. Genchev appointed the philosophy of the Bulgarians as “terrific” [Генчев, Н. 1985, с. 34] but it hardly exists any suspicion that the Bulgarians had been strongly connected to the soil and agriculture long time before the Ottoman conquest. Revealing the cultural processes and features of the Bulgarian medieval state and juxtaposing it, by this way, with these from the next centuries N. Genchev described more continuity than ruin. Naturally, the cultural life from the 14th century couldn't compare with the 15th but as a number the

¹⁰ This view is shared as well by the other leading specialist on the Bulgarian cultural history during the period of Ottoman rule [Георгиева, Ц. 2006, с. 103].

intellectuals during the last century were more than they were in the 13th century. During the further age the numbers of the intellectuals had increased and reach in 16th century the value before the conquest [Генчев, Н. 1988, с. 62, 106]. It is easy to accept that the quality of preparation and education during the free Medieval times were on higher level, although this is controversial too, according to Machiel Kiel [Кил, М. 2002, с. 158–218]. Independently of the disputable heritage of the Second Bulgarian state nothing is able to change the fact that the Bulgarian people, without aristocracy and high clergymen, succeeded to maintain its own variant of the old higher cultural tradition.

Such the mentality image of the Bulgarians in 15th–17th century is quite contradictory. Hitherto researches were not consecutive and may be this is the main reason for divergence of the opinions. The Bulgarian character, however, has always been full with opposites.

It is undoubtedly that the study of the Bulgarian mental image depends to a great extent of the cultural studies. The culture as totality of the all human actions leaves the base evidences for the mentality from the past times. The researches over the borderline at 14th and 15th century should be continued in direction to be settled the exact parameters of the changes and their reasons after the Ottoman conquest. The image of the Bulgarian from the ages before the Revival is not mystery. Many elements of it could be seen through the works of the here commented authors but it has to be additionally cleared up. This will not lead to a completed notion but at least will help to be removed old prejudices.

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