**SOFIA UNIVERSITY “ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”**

**FACULTY OF HISTORY**

**REVIEW**

by Prof. Dsc. Orlin Stamenov Sabev

on the dissertation **“Health Education in Bulgarian Society 1856 – 1878”** by **Vladimir Krasimir Terziev** with supervisor Prof. Dr. Plamen Mitev for achieving the educational and scientific degree of “doctor” in the professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology

(History of the Bulgarian Revival)

The dissertation submitted for review and public defence by Vladimir Terziev (who obtained his master’s degree in 2019 and was a full-time PhD student at Sofia University between 2020 and 2023) is on a topic that has gained particular relevance due to the recent pandemic of Covid-19. The latter revealed painful deficits in the health education and culture of modern humanity, in particular in Bulgarian society. The work is therefore useful in order to clarify the level of health education among our predecessors at a time when they were struck by a series of serious cholera epidemics and pandemics.

The dissertation, consisting of 348 pages, contains an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. In the introduction, the author inevitably stresses the significance of the topic in the light of the last pandemic and explains the motives for choosing one specific aspect: he does not study the pandemics, epidemics, diseases and healing practices in the second half of the 19th century in the Bulgarian lands, but the level of health education among the population, which is of particular importance for the manner and efficiency with which it overcomes such life-threatening challenges. Terziev stresses that this topic in itself has not been the subject of individual, comprehensive and in-depth scientific research in Bulgarian historiography, in particular by specialists in the history of medicine. On the other hand, the author points out that the topic of health education has been studied in the context of the aims, content, deficits and achievements of the overall educational process in the period usually defined in historiography as the Bulgarian Revival. Among other things, the development of health culture was an element of the modernization processes in the Bulgarian society of the time.

Given the topic, the author has limited the chronological scope of his study to the period 1856 – 1878. According to him, the problem of improving the health culture of the population was addressed most clearly and purposefully in the curriculum of Bulgarian schools, as well as in the works of the educators, including doctors with medical education acquired outside the Bulgarian borders, and in the Bulgarian press of the time. If the upper boundary is self-evident, insofar as it is associated with the end of the period known in Bulgarian history as the Revival, Terziev does not provide sufficient argumentation for taking 1856 as the lower boundary of the study. In this respect, we find further references and arguments in the following chapters of the dissertation (pp. 81-82, 86, 92, 95, 102, 170).

The objectives of the study are clearly and adequately formulated and the methodology applied is appropriate for such an interdisciplinary study. All available primary sources of the most varied nature (archives, textbooks, periodicals, published memoirs and travelogues), as well as all major studies related to the subject matter are used. In the historiographical survey (pp. 8 – 19), Terziev traces extensively the chronological development and deepening of research interest in the history of medicine, including congresses and museum work as well as scientific periodicals. This endeavour is useful, but could rather be separated into a stand-alone publication and is to some extent superfluous to the present work. Here the author could have highlighted more clearly the extent to which previous research has explored the topic of health education and culture in Bulgarian society during the period under review.

In the first chapter Terziev examines the level of health knowledge among the Bulgarians, paying attention on the one hand to the so-called folk medicine and on the other to the emergence of modern health knowledge. It examines the activities and the level of “professional” training of folk healers, the not always unambiguous interrelationship between healing practices and Christian dogmatics, the collections of medicine recipes with prescriptions for various diseases. The author clearly highlights the difference between traditional folk medicine, which does not search for the roots of diseases but focuses on their treatment, on the one hand, and modern health knowledge, which seeks to investigate the causes and factors of diseases and accordingly proposes effective healing methods.

The second chapter is devoted to the factors that provide the impetus for the development and dissemination of health education and the formation of health culture among the population: the frequency of epidemics and pandemics, the need for a new modern education, including to a certain extent health culture. The training of Bulgarians in medical educational institutions is studied. The role of the Ottoman authorities in preserving the life and health of the subjects, and of the missionaries in this respect, is not overlooked, nor is the development of the pharmacy.

The third chapter traces the place and institutionalization of health education in the Bulgarian educational network. Attention is drawn to the numerous publications by Bulgarian educators and intellectuals in the then periodicals and newspapers, stressing the need for health education. The author identifies these publications as part of a conditional “debate” which culminated in the 1870s and which concerned the problem of educational content in general. In fact, in the case of health education, it is difficult to speak of a “debate” insofar as these publications are not in response to other publications expressing opposing positions. Rather, we can speak here of a gradually intensifying public campaign for health literacy in two directions: by highlighting the need for such literacy and by actually educating the population. And, after all, the advocates of traditional education with a markedly religious character do not deny health education, even if they do not give it the importance that the advocates of the study of natural sciences give it. In this chapter Terziev also discusses the presence of medical knowledge, in particular hygiene, in the curricula of Bulgarian schools either as part of educational literature with more general content or as specially prepared manuals. In the conclusion of this chapter, the author rightly notes that, after all, modern health knowledge reached only a relatively limited segment of the literate stratum of Bulgarian society at the time.

In the fourth rather lengthy chapter (almost 100 pages) Terziev presents the health education literature in detail, offering a classification of the types of texts by subject matter, degree of originality (authorial, translated or compiled/adapted works), aims and readership, analyses the emerging conceptual apparatus of the time, and presents a content analysis of the texts themselves, incl. “the first Bulgarian medical treatise of the Bulgarian Revival”: the 1842 “Roots of Drunkenness”, whose authorship is attributed to Zahari Knyazheski.

In the conclusion of his dissertation, Terziev summarizes the analytical observations in the chapters, highlighting the coexistence of folk medicine (which remains dominant) with modern medical knowledge during the period under review.

In the dissertation “Health Education in Bulgarian Society 1856 – 1878”, submitted for public defence, its author Vladimir Krasimir Terziev shows the necessary skill to conduct a thorough, well-argued and contributory scientific research and to present its results in adequate academic text. The research is an original work without any visible elements of borrowing or plagiarism.

Along with the undoubted merits of the work, it should be noted, as I have pointed out several times in this review, that the lower chronological limit of the study, 1856, is not convincingly argued by the author. In his thorough and exhaustive exposition, he himself feels the need to “lower” this limit even to the 1820s, when Peter Beron’s Primer was published and modern medical education on the Western model was introduced in the then Ottoman capital, which subsequently benefited many Bulgarian youths. This fact rather convinces the reader that in the future publication of the dissertation in the form of a monograph, the lower limit in the title should be corrected to correspond more adequately to the content of the work itself.

The abstract adequately reflects the content and contributions of the work. Terziev is also the author of six articles published in the period 2020 – 2023, as well as three other articles submitted and approved for publication, which are on the topic of the dissertation.

In conclusion, I would like to express with full conviction my positive opinion on the qualities and merits of the dissertation work of Vladimir Krasimir Terziev “Health Education in Bulgarian Society 1856 – 1878” and I believe that it fully meets the requirements of the Bulgarian law on the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of “doctor”.

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