

R E V I E W

by Assoc. Prof. Krasimir S. Krastev, PhD,
Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,
Department of Archive Studies and History Didactic,
of the dissertation by Hava Bekir Junin
entitled: “School Education in the Nevrokop Region from 1912 to 2020”
Field of Higher Education: 2. Humanities
Professional Field: 2.2. History and Archaeology
Doctoral Program: “History of Bulgaria – History of Bulgarian Education”.
Scientific Supervisor: Prof. Todor Mishev, PhD

Hava Bekir Junin graduated with a degree in “History and Philosophy” in 2015 and obtained a Master’s degree in “Preschool Pedagogy” two years later. At the beginning of her professional career, she briefly worked as a teacher of Philosophy and History and Civilizations. Since 2019, she has been teaching in a preparatory group for preschool children. In 2020, Hava Junin was enrolled as a doctoral student at the Department of Archive Studies and History Didactic, and she was formally discharged with the right to defend her dissertation on February 1, 2024.

The doctoral candidate has submitted a list of four publications on the topic – two of which are in press – that meet the minimum national requirements. The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation. No plagiarism has been identified in her work. The submitted materials comply with the Regulations on the Acquisition of Academic Degrees at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Structurally, the dissertation proposed for defense consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, appendices, and a list of sources used, with a total volume of 258 pages. The main goal set by the doctoral candidate is to examine and evaluate the processes in school education in the Nevrokop region during the period 1912 – 2020, by tracing the content of instruction, teaching methods, and the effect of the educational process on students. Her aim is to show how educational activity contributes to the formation of identity, while also analyzing the impact of political and social changes on teaching practices throughout the period in question.

Before turning to the analysis of the individual chapters, it should be noted that, during the preliminary discussion stage and thereafter, recommendations were made for a comprehensive language editing – regarding style, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Unfortunately, these remarks were not addressed, leaving an unpleasant impression of insufficient attention to the formal aspects of academic writing.

The first chapter of the dissertation, titled “Nevrokop Before the Liberation of the Town” (pp. 7 – 73), does not correspond to the declared chronological scope of the study. According to the candidate, it serves as an introduction to the “historical landscape of the Nevrokop region” and “sets the thematic framework of the research, highlighting the significance of the region in national history” (p. 14). If the connection between this chapter and the main body of the dissertation is as substantial as claimed, then the chronological scope of the study should have been more precisely defined from the outset.

This chapter is structured in two main parts: “Nevrokop During the National Revival”, which also includes the history of several surrounding villages, and “New Trends in Economic Development and Ecclesiastical-National Struggles in the Nevrokop Region Before the Liberation of the Town”. The principle behind this thematic division is not explicitly justified. Moreover, despite the declared focus on the Bulgarian National Revival period, a

considerable portion of the data refers to the Late Middle Ages (15th – 17th century), with some references even extending beyond 1912. The overall impression is that this chapter is excessively voluminous and has a compilatory character, without making a significant contribution to the main research goal of the dissertation.

The second chapter, titled “School Education in Nevrokop After the Liberation to the Present Day” (pp. 74–139), is more important to the dissertation and is based on archival sources. In it, the candidate presents the Nevrokop Natural Sciences and Mathematics High School “Yane Sandanski” as an institution of key importance for the education, cultural formation, and patriotic upbringing of the local population. The school is depicted as a symbol of enlightenment, modernization, and spiritual growth, providing a solid intellectual and professional foundation for thousands of young people. The chapter also traces the history of the Nevrokop Mixed High School “Knyaz Simeon Tarnovski” from 1922 to 1943, with special attention paid to the role of teachers, school life structure, disciplinary practices, and pedagogical views of the time. Based again on archival sources, the chapter thoroughly follows the development of schools in the villages of Breznitsa and Dabnitsa, which played a key role not only in the education of local students but also as centers of social integration and cultural convergence. In this context, Hava Junin outlines the key factors for the success of schools operating in multiethnic regions of Bulgaria, emphasizing the need for active cooperation between teachers, parents, and institutions.

Some factual errors are present in this part of the dissertation. For example, on p. 77 it is stated that on October 5, 1912, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro simultaneously declared war on Turkey, which does not correspond to the actual events. Furthermore, in order to improve clarity and structural coherence, it would be appropriate for the text presented by Hava Junin to be organized into shorter and thematically distinct blocks, a solution that would likely enhance its readability and analytical depth.

The third chapter – “Schools from Within: The Teachers” (pp. 140–176), is built on published memoirs, archival documents, and data collected using the oral history method. In direct connection with this part of the study are 24 appendices, containing descriptions of interviews conducted with respondents—residents of the town of Gotse Delchev and the villages of Banichan, Dabnitsa, and Breznitsa. Although the interviews lack high precision in their implementation, they were conducted in an informal setting and provide valuable insights into school life in the region under study.

At the end of her study, Hava Junin emphasizes that education in the Nevrokop region is not merely a product of state policy but also a cultural and social phenomenon with a local identity and independent tradition.

Numerous technical errors are found in the formatting of the dissertation. The table of contents does not match the actual pagination of the text, which makes orientation difficult. There is inconsistent formatting – unnecessary spacing between lines or paragraphs. Especially noteworthy are the deficiencies in the scholarly apparatus – the same titles are cited multiple times in full in the footnotes without the use of abbreviations or references such as *ibid.*, which contradicts established academic practice. References to articles in periodicals (including newspapers) also do not meet academic standards – some lack complete bibliographic information or present it inconsistently.

In conclusion, Hava Bekir Junin’s dissertation represents an attempt to trace and analyze the development of school education in the Nevrokop region over a span of more than a century. The candidate uses a variety of sources – archival documents, periodicals, and interviews with participants in the educational process – which provides the study with an empirical foundation and diversity of perspectives. However, I must express serious reservations regarding the overall construction of the dissertation – imprecise structure, frequent repetitions, insufficient analytical depth, and the predominance of a descriptive approach.

These weaknesses limit the scholarly potential of the study, compounded by errors in spelling and technical formatting.

Despite the noted shortcomings, I believe that the efforts invested in the search for and interpretation of archival documents, as well as the work undertaken in collecting oral testimonies, demonstrate research initiative and a strong engagement with the topic. This provides grounds for me to express a positive assessment of Hava Junin's dissertation. At the same time, I would recommend that the doctoral candidate exercise greater attention to detail in her future work. Based on the above, I propose that the esteemed academic committee award her the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 2.2.

Sofia, May 20, 2025

Author of the review: 
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