THOMAS A. MEININGER (Downsview, Ont., Canada)

The Social Stratification of the Bulgarian Town
in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century

In studying the social stratification of the nineteenth-century Bulgarian town, the historian is immediately perplexed by the many difficulties that arise in trying to analyze Balkan societies on the basis of the methods and terminology drawn from Western models. Terminology and methods are related of course, and it is really the question of methods which can frustrate an understanding of the social physiognomy of the peoples in question.

A good case in point concerns the concept of class. For the Western student of Ottoman history, a study of class composition is almost invariably affected by the image he has of the traditional classes of Western Europe. These classes, however, took shape in a specific historical setting and in the context of specific local patterns of interaction with other groups and classes that did not hold true for the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman history, to cite one very sweeping example, failed to see the development of that partial affinity of interests that in the West came to characterize relations between the crown and the rising middle classes. One of the eventual results of this collaboration in the West was the ability of part of the middle class or bourgeoisie to be in a position to exploit ever larger numbers of hired workers; and if any single thing subsequently came to act as the defining criterion of the bourgeoisie as a whole, it was the simultaneous presence of a working class subservient to and dependent on that bourgeoisie. In the Ottoman Empire, however, at least where production and industry were concerned, there was no alliance between the sultans and the emerging capitalist classes, and, unlike in the West, the former did not take the steps that would have aided this element by indirectly or directly fostering the appearance of a working class. Rather, the reverse was true, for Ottoman rulers hindered capitalist development both by acts of omission (e.g., their failure to use tariffs to nurture domestic industry) and of commission (e.g., the 1773 firman of Sultan Mustafa III which reiterated state support for the restrictive and equalizing powers of the guilds). Accordingly, capitalist development in the Ottoman Empire was significantly curtailed. In this situation, and especially in the absence of any true proletari-

2. Ibid., p. 214; see also P. Tishkov, Istoria na nasheto zanaiatchiistvo do Osvobozdenieto ni (Sofia: Sotuz na Zanaiatchishte i profesionalni zdrazhennia v Bulgaria, 1922), pp. 12-18.
at, the use of the term "bourgeoisie" in the context of nineteenth-century
Balkan history, however appropriate it sometimes seems to be, can at other
times be misleading.3

Other methods of analyzing social composition—e.g., the study of role dif-
ferentiation, structural-functional analysis, occupational breakdown—can also-
be less than perfect tools for the examination of nineteenth-century Balkan
society, and not only because these methods likewise tend to follow Western
models. As paradigms developed in the abstract, such approaches sometimes
assume a level of differentiation too sophisticated for application to relatively
less advanced societies. But the greater problem here is that these meth-
ods, if they are obsessively concerned with descriptive distinctions, thwart the
historian’s ability to develop a holistic or integral understanding of society
and the dynamics of social development. Insight of this sort requires not sim-
ply a listing of categories or groups which can be easily "pigeon-holed," but
also the appreciation of consciousness, attitudes and patterns of social and
political behavior.4

The point of the foregoing discussion is to offer a partial explanation for
the decision here to examine Bulgarian urban society in the third quarter of
the nineteenth century through the use of an ad hoc method combining a
simplified structural-functional approach with class analysis in conjunction
with a concern for the roles that emerged from membership in a certain occu-
pational group or class. This decision hinges on a belief that while the histori-
ography has seen significant achievements, it has not yet devised a fully accep-
table theoretical model of Balkan social development as seen from the inside.5

More positively, the mixed approach suggested here offers the practical ad-
vantage of permitting a broader and less restrictive discussion of the evidence.

Thus, one can cast a larger net in seeking to pull in the information that
would be helpful for ascertaining social stratification. On the basis of the
state of the literature devoted to the history of the Bulgarian town in the last
phase of the Bulgarian national Revival,6 four areas of attention and concern
come to mind as being relevant for a study of social composition: occupation
and function; level of economic activity particularly in terms of relationships

3. For a recent statement of generally the same point in relation to the study of nine-
teenth-century Serbian history, see the Slavic Review, 36, No. 4 (Dec. 1977), 708-09
(review).
4. Cf. the discussion in the preface of E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English
5. Useful efforts in this direction are implicitly or explicitly a part of such recent
works as Todorov’s Balkanskiat grad and Kemal Karpat’s An Inquiry into the Social
Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State: From Social Estates to Classes, from
Millets to Nations (“Research Monographs, No. 39”; Princeton Univ. Center of Interna-
tional Studies, 1973).
6. Called in Bulgarian the Vůrazhdane, the period of the modern national Revival is
dated from the 1762 appearance of the Paisii Khilendarski’s Istoria slavionobulgarska.
The Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878 marks the end of the Vůrazhdane.