

Part 3 – Before Ilinden

A theological school was opened in Prilep in 1884 and transferred to Ochrid in the following year, whence it was moved to Constantinople, where it developed into a *seminary*. Many of its graduates became teachers. The Bulgarian "class school" in Ochrid had four classes by 1885. This same school was transformed into a *pedagogical gymnasium* in 1896 and given the name of "Dr. Peter Beron".

Thanks to the efforts of the Exarchate and personally of Exarch Yossif, with the cooperation of the local population, the Bulgarian educational work in Macedonia and Thrace made astonishing progress. Soon a very dense network of schools well organized was established in Salonica, Enidje Vardar, Voden, Doiran, Stroumitza, Kavadarzi, Koukoush, Seres, Petrich, Gorna Djumaya, Melnik, Bansko, Mehomiya (now Razlog), Nevrokop (Gotze Delchev), Bitolya, Skopje, Prilep, Kostour, Ochrid, Koumanovo, Kratovo, Kochani, Tetovo, Shtip, Veles, Odrin (Adrianople), Lozengrad, Oustovo, Raikovo, Dede Agach and at hundreds of smaller towns and villages. On the eve of the Balkan War (1912) there were 1,373 schools in Macedonia and Thrace, under the jurisdiction of the Exarchate in Constantinople. Out of these schools 13 were secondary schools (gymnasiums) and 87 had the statute of "class schools." There were 2,266 teachers there to teach 78,854 students. All schools were opened on the demand of the local Bulgarian population in these two provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

Observing strictly the orders and decrees of the Ottoman authorities, the Exarchate did not open up schools, nor did it appoint teachers in the towns or villages without the expressed desire and official petition of the local population.

To provide for the educational work in the two "vilayets" the Exarchate received subsidies from the Bulgarian government, but they were quite insufficient. In many localities part of the church revenues were used for the upkeep of the schools. The richer church and school communal councils (Ochrid, Prilep, Shtip, Veles, etc.) provided for the entire upkeep of their schools.

Due to the lack of enough funds, the Exarchate was not in a position to answer the demands of many settlements for the opening of schools. At certain places it was even obliged to cut all subsidies to already opened schools. The local population was much alarmed by such measures on the part of the Exarchate. In these cases the Bulgarian communities turned for help and assistance to the Ministry of Public Education or the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Sofia. Such assistance was demanded by the Ressen community, the brotherhood of the Saint Ioan Bigor Monastery in Debar and many other communities. All these petitions testify convincingly that the Exarchate had not imposed its educational policy, nor carried out any kind of "denationalization" activity, as certain ill-disposed towards Bulgaria circles have maintained.

The educational and cultural work at all Exarchate schools was carried out with great mastery. The "School trusteeship council" was responsible to a great extent for this excellent activity of these schools. At a much later date, the "trusteeship council" with the Exarchate was given a new name — "Educational or School Department," headed by such distinguished pedagogues as Dr. Dragiya Delidelvov, a graduate of a renowned pedagogical university in Belgium, Dimo V. Hranov, St. Stanimirov and others. A School Inspectorate was attached to this department and only teachers of long standing and good experience were appointed as inspectors. The distinguished historian of Bulgarian education, Louka Dorosiev, held for several years the post of Inspector General of the Exarchate schools. Dame Grouev, Pere Toshev, well-known Bulgarian revolutionaries, also were school inspectors.

Some of the first teachers of the Exarchate schools were the prominent Bulgarian educators Grigor Parlichev, Kouzman Shapkarev, Traiko Kitanchev, Konstantin Velichkov (in Salonica), Vela Zhivkova-Blagoeva (in Bitolya and Ochrid), Vassil Kunchev, Blagoi Dimitrov, Paraskev Tsvetkov (a graduate of the Dresden Conservatoire), Ivan Karadjov (a graduate of the Imperial *Singing* School in Petersburg), Ivan Kyoulev, A. P. Stoilov, A. Naoumov and many others.

There was no established and strictly unified school program during the first several years in the Exarchate schools. It was the teachers who introduced the school plans and programs from the schools they themselves had studied in. Thus, Stefan Minchov, Vassil Karayovov and Martin Todorov (all three graduates from Robert College in Constantinople), after being appointed in 1881 as teachers in the main school at Prilep, transformed it into a preparatory school and introduced subjects, which they had studied in the respective classes at Robert College.

Beginning with 1886-1887, unified school plans and programs were introduced at all primary schools in Macedonia and Thrace. These programs were worked out by the High Educational Council, sitting in Constantinople. Members of the latter were the teachers from the gymnasium in Salonica, the head masters of the four class schools, as well as persons versed in the problems of education.

In 1895, the Educational Department elaborated a unified school plan and program for the "class schools" and sent it for consideration to the teachers' councils. Such programs were also worked out for the pedagogical schools. The subjects of pedagogy, history of pedagogy, didactics, logic and psychology were included in these programs.

The programs of the primary, class and secondary schools (gymnasiums) were similar to these of the respective schools in Bulgaria. The difference was that the first included the Turkish language as an additional subject.

The Exarchate schools usually used text books published in Bulgaria. The text books used in the primary schools were also for the most part the same as the ones used in Bulgaria, but others — mainly ABC readers, elementary arithmetic books and the like — were compiled by teachers of the Exarchate schools and printed in Salonica.

The Bulgarian schools both in Macedonia and Thrace had the reputation of educational establishments well organized, giving solid training. The Salonica Gymnasium, for example, was considered as one of the best secondary schools in the Empire. It had a large library with over 15,000 books, well equipped laboratories in chemistry, physics and the natural sciences. A meteorological station, with all the necessary equipment, was also set up in the gymnasium. According to Professor Kassner, this station was the very first scientific establishment in this particular branch of science on the Balkan Peninsula.

Almost all town schools had their own libraries. Thus, in 1912, the school library in the town of Prilep had 6,300 books, the Skopje school library had 5,000 volumes, the one at the town of Gatch, 2,000 books, Kroushovo, 1,300, Kichevo, 1,200 books, etc.

The Education Department with the Exarchate took care to appoint physicians in all boarding schools. The same department showed great concern to preserve the health of all students of the Exarchate schools. It was also concerned with their patriotic, moral and aesthetic education. It sent out instructions and model plans for the construction of new and hygienic school buildings, etc. Certain communities, like the one in Veles, demanded plans for the construction of a new school from the Ministry of Public Education in Sofia. On the initiative of the Educational Department, courses were organized for improving the qualifications of the teachers. Pedagogical conferences were convened, at which the teachers read papers and lectured on various themes. Sunday courses and Sunday schools were organized in which both young and old obtained additional training, etc.

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