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A Centre in the Periphery: Merchants during the Ottoman Period in Modern Bulgarian Historiography¹ (1890s - 1990s)

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In the last 100 years Bulgarian history has endured many political changes, some of them very abrupt, which inevitably influenced the dominant ideological and methodological paradigms of Bulgarian historical writings. Being for five centuries (XVth - XIXth) under Ottoman rule, after the Berlin Congress (1878), the Bulgarian state was restored. Passing through the agitated period of the Balkan Wars (1912 - 1913) and World War I, Bulgarian history of the interwar period continued to witness much political and social tension. World War II brought about another radical change, namely the establishment of a totalitarian political regime. After 45 years, in 1989, the multiparty democratic system was restored. As one can guess, all these political upheavels, influenced by some ideas of European philosophy, shaped to a great extent modern Bulgarian historiography.

An attempt will be made in the present paper to assess some trends and concepts in Bulgarian historiography by examining as a case study research on merchants during the Ottoman period.² It will be organised

* I wish to thank especially Eyal Ginio and Kate Fleet for their useful suggestions and support.

¹ The titles of the Bulgarian publications have been translated into English by the author.

² There are a few historiographical articles on Bulgarian history during the Ottoman domination (XVth-XIXth centuries) but most of them do not address this issue. See for example B. Cvetkova, 'Sources et Travaux de l'orientalisme bulgare', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisation*, 3 (1963), 1158-1182; *idem.*, 'Bulgarian Historiography on Bulgarian History during the XV-XVIIth centuries', *First Congress of the Bulgarian Historical Association*, vol. II, (Sofia, 1972), pp. 557-564 (in Bulgarian); V. Mutafchieva, 'Oriental Studies in Bulgaria during the last five years', *Peoples in Asia and Africa*, 3 (1963), pp. 239-241 (in Russian); K. Kosev, 'Research on the Genesis of Capitalism in the Urban

on a chronological as well as thematical order. From the chronological point of view the paper will cover a period of about one hundred years and will be divided into three parts: 1878 to 1944; the totalitarian period, and from 1989 up to the present. It will examine the types of studies and main discussion issues. The analysis will continue on a more concrete level with exploring the sources, ethnic background of the merchants, their geographical localisation, and those areas which need further research. The paper will question as to why the topic of merchants is both an attractive yet unpopolar subject, what the inherent factors are and the external influences on the development of this issue and how and why some concepts were transmitted, preserved, or reshaped.

1. The Pre-World War II Historiography (1878 - 1944)

Modern Bulgarian historiography was shaped by the ideas of romanticism and positivism. On the other hand, it is well known that nineteenth-century historical writings were also influenced to a great extent by the dominant nationalism. In the case of the Balkans this general

Economy', in *Bulgarian Historiography after World War II. Some Problems*, (Sofia, 1973), pp. 282-285 (in Bulgarian); N. Todorov, 'Research on the economic and social aspects of the Bulgarian Revival and the Genesis of Capitalism', in *Bulgarian Historiography after World War II. Some Problems*, (Sofia, 1973), pp. 265-282 (in Bulgarian); E. Grozdanova, 'Contemporary Bulgarian Historiography (1971-1980) on the Impact of the Ottoman Rule on the Development of Bulgarian People during the period from the XVth through the XVIIIth Century', *Revue Bulgare d'Histoire*, 4 (1981), pp. 68-85; K. Sharova, E. Vecheva, E. Grozdanova, G. Neshev, S. Stanimirov (eds.), *Bulgaria during the XV-XVIIIth centuries. Historiographical Research 'Bulgaria XV-XIXth centuries'*, vol. 1, Sofia, 1987; S. Panova, 'Bulgarian Historiography on social and economic Development in the XVIIIth century up to the World War II', *Istoričeski Pregled (Historical Review)*, 9 (1990), pp. 60-77 (in Bulgarian); M. Todorova, 'Bulgarian Historical Writing on the Ottoman Empire', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 12 (Spring 1995), pp. 97-119; E. Grozdanova, 'European Provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the XVI - XVII centuries in the latest Hungarian and Bulgarian Research (1985 - 1995) (A Comparative Analysis)', *Historical Review*, 3 (1997), pp. 76-97 (in Bulgarian); S. Grăncarov, 'Thoughts on Bulgarian Economic Concepts (1878 - 1915) *Historical Review*, 3-4 (1998), pp. 140-167 (in Bulgarian). At a conference in 1996 I read a paper on XIXth Century Commercial Companies and its broader version, with a table of all the publications divided according to decades, was published later. See E. Davidova, 'Bulgarian Commercial Houses during the Revival Period (Some Historiographic Aspects)', *Historical Review*, 5 - 6 (1997), pp. 95-119 (in Bulgarian).

trend took on much sharper contours and historiographies had to fulfil a peculiar mixture of political, social, and scholarly functions. For instance, the traumatic perception of the preceding period of foreign political domination was so strong that many Bulgarian authors called the XVth - XVIIth centuries 'Dark Ages' in Bulgarian history and the whole period became known as the 'Turkish Yoke' and 'Turkish Slavery'.⁴ The idea that the Dark Ages is a period not worth studying because it does not support national self-confidence prevailed. This attitude also presupposes a marginal interest in economic history. Indeed, most of the scholars were interested in political and cultural history.⁵ Not surprisingly this gloomy interpretation also has a brighter aspect, with opposing interpretations for the whole Ottoman period: the XVIIIth - XIXth centuries were regarded as a period of economic and cultural prosperity when a revival of national identity began, called *Bulgarian Revival* or *Bălgarsko Văzrazhdane* (in Bulgarian).

Another issue, closely related to this internal periodisation of the Ottoman period in Bulgarian history is the concept of backwardness. The discussion on Balkan backwardness has many aspects. For instance, most of the Balkan researchers (probably except the Turkish ones) blame Ottoman rule for driving the region away from the path and pace of European economic and cultural development and modernisation.⁶ In the case of Bulgarian scholarship criticism started in 1875 with the first publication of the *History of the Bulgarians* by Constantin Irecek.⁶ It was during this period of Bulgarian revival that the Bulgarians gained access

⁴ The term is formally incorrect because slavery existed in the Ottoman Empire.

⁵ One should bear in mind that this trend was not alien to European historiography at the time. It was also valid for Ottoman historiography up to the World War II which deals exclusively with military and political history. See H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (London, 1973), p. 2.

⁶ D. Chirot, 'Causes and Consequences of Backwardness', in Daniel Chirot (ed.), *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe. Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*, (London, 1989), pp. 1-15; J. Lampe, 'Imperial Borderlands or Capitalist Periphery? Redefining Balkan Backwardness, 1520-1914', in Daniel Chirot (ed.), *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe. Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*, (London, 1989), pp. 177-210.

⁶ C. Irecek, *History of the Bulgarians*, (Sofia, 1978), pp. 419-458, 478-622 / (in Bulgarian)/. The book was published firstly in Czech in 1875 and translated into Bulgarian in 1876.

to European culture and civilisation. Some of the bearers of new ideas and European influences were merchants. That is the positive perspective from which the topic of the merchant was introduced into historical writings.

Most representatives of the first generation of Bulgarian historians touched the issue of merchants mainly from the social point of view. For instance, tradesmen in the urban socio-economic context were introduced by Nikola Milev⁷, elaborated by Ivan Shishmanov (1930), later on developed by Khristo Gandev (1939, 1943), and Jacques Nathan.⁸ These authors distinguished a variety of unstudied topics (without doing special research on them) on economic and social changes and stressed the establishment of an urban social stratum in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries with its main representatives: guilds and merchants.⁹ However, they were more concerned with urban stratification than the mediator's role between the city and the system of markets carried out by the traders. Many studies are focused also on merchants as patrons. This issue is related to a long debate started in Bulgarian newspapers during the period of Ottoman domination. Often in the XIXth-century journals one can read many accusations of merchants' failure to offer sufficient funding for the national movement. For example, in some cases tradesmen were called derogatively 'Jewish *bazergân*'.¹⁰ On the contrary, during the period after

⁷ Two years before him, a literary critic Bojan Penev focused attention on Bulgarian merchants as cultural mediators and their patronage role as one of the crucial factors in the development of national identity. B. Penev, *The Beginning of the National Revival*, (Sofia, 1918), p. 26, 37 (in Bulgarian).

⁸ N. Milev, 'Factors in the National Revival', in *Anthology in Honour of Professor Ivan Shishmanov*, (Sofia, 1920), pp. 129-58 (in Bulgarian); I. Shishmanov, 'Introduction to the National Revival', in *Selected Works. Bulgarian Revival*, vol. 1, (Sofia, 1965), pp. 43-45 (in Bulgarian); Kh. Gandev, *Factors in Bulgarian Revival*, in *Bulgarian Revival. Some Problems*, (Sofia, 1976), pp. 23-154 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *Early National Revival, 1700-1860*, in *Bulgarian Revival. Some Problems*, (Sofia, 1976), pp. 154-271 (in Bulgarian); J. Nathan, *Bulgarian Revival. A Historical and Sociological Account*, (Sofia, 1939) (in Bulgarian); p. 15 *et seq.*

⁹ Again Bojan Penev had previously formulated it as the 'Bulgarian urban stratum of craftsmen and merchants'. B. Penev, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁰ *Nezavistomost (Independence)*, IV, 44, (Bucharest, 17 August 1874), p. 358 (in Bulgarian). At a conference on the 300-year anniversary of the birth of Voltaire, held in Sofia, 15 - 17 December 1994, Prof. Rolan Desné mentioned the interesting fact that in XVIIIth century France the expression 'Jew-usurers' was used as an insult for all who were dealing with usury whatever their ethnic origin.

1878, assessments of the merchants were freed from their negative tones and many of them became very supportive.¹¹ It is suggested in these studies that the national movement was generously supported by the wealthy tradesmen. This trend continued in many works devoted to Bulgarian ecclesiastical and educational history during the national revival¹².

The longevity of the thesis that bearers of merchant capital and new forms of entrepreneurship in the Ottoman Empire became mainly representatives of a non-Muslim bourgeoisie is not only due to a lack of research based on non-Bulgarian primary sources. For instance, according to Ivan Sakâzov, Bulgarian economic prosperity did not start in the XVIIIth century with the massive Bulgarian migration to the towns as was commonly supposed. The Dubrovnik sources revealed that Bulgarians have never lost their urban economic positions. This concept fits very well with the inferior role that the author predicated for the Turkish urban population.¹³ By contrast, Khristo Gandev emphasised the process of 'Bulgarisation' of the towns that began in the XVIIIth century and the gradual demographic change that occurred in favour of Bulgarians at the

¹¹ For instance, Ivan Shishmanov wrote after the death of the merchant Nikola Tâpchileshtov: 'Without the moral and material support of him and his friends - the educated merchants of Istanbul - our bitter struggle with Phanar would not have been resolved so successfully.'

I. Shishmanov, 'Nikola Tâpchileshtov', *Bulgarian Review*, 7 (May 1895), pp. 158-159 (in Bulgarian).

¹² See S. Velez, *Golden Book of the Donors to Bulgarian Education*, vol. 1, (Sofia, 1907) (in Bulgarian); G. Pashev, *Golden Book of the Donors to Bulgarian Education*, vol. 2, (Sofia, 1923) (in Bulgarian); Z. Markova, *Bulgarian Movement for a National Church before the Crimean War* (Sofia, 1976) (in Bulgarian).

¹³ I. Sakâzov, "Development of Bulgarian Urban life and Guilds in the XVIII and XIX centuries", in *1000 years of Bulgaria 927-1927*, vol. 1, (Sofia, 1930), pp. 686-687 (in Bulgarian); I. Pastukhov, *Bulgarian History. Second Bulgarian Kingdom. Ottoman Rule. National Revival*, vol. 2, (Sofia, 1943), pp. 338-339, 626. This thesis is quite popular in the earlier regional studies; it was shared by Nikolai Todorov who wrote that during the XIXth century the dominant ethnic group stayed apart from the capitalistic mode of production; the bearers of merchant capital and of the new forms of production were bourgeoisie of the subjected peoples. See N. Todorov, 'On the Labour Force in Bulgarian Lands in the middle of the XIXth Century', *Historical Review*, 2 (1959), p. 1 (in Bulgarian); V. Paskaleva, "Development of Urban Economy and the Genesis of the Bulgarian Bourgeoisie in XVIIIth Century" in *Paisii Khilendarski and his Epoch (1762-1962)*, (Sofia, 1962), p. 75 (in Bulgarian).

expense of the Turkish and Jewish population¹⁴. However, in both theses Bulgarian dominance in the urban economic landscape is overemphasised.

Some valuable insights into the merchant's role is offered in works exploring bilateral Bulgarian-foreign commercial relations. This theme was introduced by Ivan Sakāzov but elaborated by Khristo Gandev (1944) who examined the integration of Bulgarian lands into European trade in the XVIIIth century and the enrichment of Bulgarian merchants as a result of this exchange.¹⁵ He also paid special attention to the positive balance of XVIIIth century Bulgarian commerce. His contributions are interesting from two points of view: firstly, the isolation of the Bulgarian economy from the other Ottoman markets, and secondly, the assumption that the positive balance of trade is by definition a favourable characteristic. Both ideas are firmly embedded in the historical writings of the totalitarian period.

There is another group of studies dealing with mercantile issues that consists of regional research.

Most of the authors studied the economic conjuncture of the region as a whole and commercial activity is placed in the context of the local dominant craft or industry. Some books from the 1930s provide the best examples of this trend, such as histories of the town of Gabrovo by Petār Tsonchev, of Pleven by Yurdan Trifonov, of Sliven by Simeon Tabakov, and of Veliko Tārnovo by Mosko Moskov¹⁶. Interesting characteristics in other regional works, written in 1920s and 1930s, may be mentioned:

¹⁴ Kh. Gandev, *Factors*, pp. 23 - 154, *ibid.*, *Partly*, pp. 154-271, *idem.*, 'Bulgarian Penetration in Vidin and its Surroundings during the Russo-Turkish War 1768 - 1774', in *Bulgarian Revival. Some Problems*, (Sofia, 1976), pp. 516-539 (in Bulgarian).

¹⁵ I. Sakāzov, 'Trade between Bulgaria and Ancona in XVIIIth and XVIIIth centuries according to new sources', *Bulletin of the Historical Association*, 6 (1929), pp. 20-24 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *Economic Relations between Dubrovnik and Bulgarian lands in XVIIIth and XVIIIth centuries* (Sofia, 1930) (in Bulgarian); Kh. Gandev, 'Trade Exchange between Europe and the Bulgarian Lands in XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth centuries', in *Bulgarian Revival. Some Problems*, (Sofia, 1976), pp. 395-425 (in Bulgarian).

¹⁶ M. Moskov, *Tārnovo's Past and Future from the Economic Perspective* (Veliko Tārnovo, 1910) (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *The Beginning of Industry in Tārnovo (Veliko Tārnovo, 1925)* (in Bulgarian); S. Tabakov, *An Attempted History of the Town of Sliven*, vols. 1 - 3, (Sofia, 1911 - 1929) (in Bulgarian); P. Tsonchev, *From Gabrovo's Economic Past* (Sofia, 1929) (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *From Gabrovo's social and cultural Past* (Sofia, 1934) (in Bulgarian); Yu. Trifonov, *History of the Town of Pleven before the Liberation* (Sofia, 1933) (in Bulgarian). Some new sources are published in the above-mentioned four books, for example the XVIIIth century ledgers of Hadzhi Rachko from Gabrovo by P. Tsonchev.

the theme of merchants is expressed in the form of biographies of some local traders. It is typical of this kind of 'hagiographic' writing that authors are very interested in the social (predominantly the patron's) activity of the merchants on a local or wider basis. Exemplary of this approach is the book by Nikola Nachov for the village of Kalofer which comprises biographies of about 30 families, most of them dealing with trade. Another similar type of research is provided by Stephan Ganchev for Svishtov¹⁷.

There is another subgroup of books devoted to Bulgarian diasporas. Most of them were written in the 1920s, after the loss of some territorial possessions attained during the First Balkan War and World War I, and focused on continuous cultural relations with the Bulgarian population living outside Bulgarian boundaries.¹⁸

The geographical localisation of the merchants who are the subject of this research, is distinctively delineated. It is widely accepted that the first external contacts of the Bulgarian traders were established with the Central Europe. Especially active were Bulgarian merchants from Macedonia.¹⁹ Other regions that attracted scholarly attention, were mainly small mountain towns with developed craft industries that had predominantly Bulgarian populations. Cities along the Danube river such as Vidin, Svishtov, and Ruschuk (now Russe) are the third area of interest.

Regarding the issue which is at the centre of this paper, it is worth noting that it was Khristo Ganchev who published a short communication on the Georgievi Brothers in 1940.²⁰ He placed their economic activity within the context of the whole process of social and political development

¹⁷ N. Nachov, *Kalofer in the Past. 1807 - 1877* (Sofia, 1927), pp. 356-514 (in Bulgarian); S. Ganchev, *Svishtov (Tribute to its History)*, (Svishtov, 1929), pp. 379-403 (in Bulgarian).

¹⁸ M. Balabanov, 'A Bulgarian Colony on an Island', *Periodical Review*, LXXI, 1-2 (1910), pp. 313-372 (in Bulgarian); L. Dorostev, 'Bulgarian Colonies in Asia Minor', *Journal of the Bulgarian Literary Association*, XXIV, 13 (1922), pp. 32-193 (in Bulgarian); N. Nachov, 'Istanbul as a Bulgarian Cultural Centre up to 1877', *Journal of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*, XIX (1925), pp. 1-206 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, 'The Bulgarian Colony in Odessa', *School Review*, XXVIII, 5 (1929), pp. 601-628 (in Bulgarian).

¹⁹ As we mentioned above political reasons influenced to a considerable degree the emphasis on Macedonian history after the WW I. N. Milev, 'Macedonia's Trade at the end of the XVIIIth century', *Macedonian Review*, 1 (1922), pp. 25-34 (in Bulgarian).

²⁰ Kh. Ganchev, 'One Trading Company of the Period before the Liberation', *Professional Thought*, 2 (1940), pp. 40-46 (in Bulgarian).

and proposed some general tasks for Bulgarian historical writing on trade during the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, namely new sources to be published, the study of individual merchants and commercial companies, in order to reconstruct the hierarchy of commercial networks. With this paper the author produced a model for analysing a commercial company that was followed later on by many other researchers.

The question of a merchant's ethnic affiliation is closely related to the problem of sources. Most of the scholars worked with Bulgarian sources such as memoirs, Bulgarian newspapers, commercial correspondence, ledgers. One of the most frequent-used type of foreign sources are consular reports and traveller's accounts. The least-used ones are the Ottoman sources and Greek materials.²¹ Where there are translations of Ottoman documents these are mainly in state materials. The lack of diverse sources presupposes that the main area interest is focused on external aspects of trade, the activity of merchants as patrons and, to a small extent, on their role as money-lenders. These studies created the pattern of a comparative approach based on Western European models, followed strictly by researchers in the subsequent decades.

2. The Marxist Period (1944 - 1989)

The dominance of Marxist's concepts after World War II, when historical materialism was considered the only valid approach for interpretation, also shaped historical writings on merchants. It is often stated that Marxism places an emphasis on research into the social and economic structures and institutions of the Ottoman Empire and it is in this field that significant contributions have been made.²² This assertion is quite true but at the time of Marxist dogmatism, especially in the late

²¹ See for example P. Dorev, 'Documents from the Turkish State Archives (1564-1872)', part 1 (1564-1872), *Documents for Bulgarian History*, vol. 3, (Sofia, 1940). On Greek sources see M. Apostolidis, A. Peev, 'Book of Plovdiv's *abaci* guild', *Annual Book of Plovdiv's National Library and Museum*, (Plovdiv, 1931), pp. 65-170.

²² K. Kosev, *Research*, pp. 282-285. This shift of emphasis from political to economic and social history is common to Ottoman as well as to European historiography in general after 1945. On this topic see H. Inalcik, 'Introduction', in H. Inalcik and D. Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300 - 1914*, (Cambridge, 1994), p. 2.

1940s and 1950s, a limited spectrum of topics, combined with a nationalist colouring, dominated and as a result does not attract many scholars. Bulgarian scholarship did not only reflect Stalinist concepts on history but also international isolationism and the limitation of academic contacts which was valid for other historiographies as well.⁴⁴ In the mid-1960s the isolation was partly overcome by placing historical research in its natural regional context, in particular with the foundation of the Institute of Balkan Studies in Sofia (1967).⁴⁵ It is actually from the 1960s onward that most of the contributions on commerce have been made.⁴⁶

An important trend in economic history became the publication of new sources in specialised periodicals.⁴⁶ However, one should bear in mind that the palaeographical difficulty with the sources, most of them being manuscripts with different handwritings and in various languages, limits many scholars in their choice. It is not a secret also that publishing documents is a long-term project and many researchers avoid it. This fact is even more true in the case of merchants' archives. If one tries to list these publications they would total only a few works.⁴⁷ With the exception of the pioneering work of N. Michoff, most of them resulted from collective efforts.

⁴⁴ S. Faruqi, 'Introduction', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18, 3 and 4 (1991), p. 4; W. Vuchinich, 'Post-war Yugoslav Historiography', *The Journal of Modern History*, XXVIII (1951), pp. 41-58.

⁴⁵ N. Todorov, *Development, Achievements and Tasks of Balkan Studies in Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1977), pp. 1-36 (in Bulgarian).

⁴⁶ However, one should bear in mind that the increase in Bulgarian publications in the 1960s had some ideological motives, in exposing falsifications of Ottoman history such as Halil Inalcik's concept on social justice in the Ottoman state. On this issue see Ts. Georgieva, 'Development and Tendencies in Research on the History of the Bulgarian People in XVth-XVIIth Centuries', in K. Sharova, E. Vecheva, E. Grozdanova, G. Neshchev, S. Stanimirov (eds.), *Bulgaria during XV-XVIIIth centuries. Historiographical Research 'Bulgaria in the XV-XIXth centuries'*, vol. 1, Sofia, 1987, p. 33.

⁴⁶ Such as *Godishnik na Muzeite ot Severna Bulgaria* (Annual Book of the Museums of North Bulgaria), *Izvestia na Muzeite ot Severozapadna Bulgaria* (Bulletin of the Museums in the Northwest Bulgaria), and *Izvestia na Muzeite ot Yuzhna Bulgaria* (Bulletin of the Museums of South Bulgaria), *Izvestia na Dărgavnite Arkhivi* (Bulletin of the State Archives).

⁴⁷ N. Michoff, *Contribution à l'histoire du commerce bulgare. Documents officiels et rapports consulaires*, vols. 1 - 6: (Sofia, 1940 - 1971); P. Dinekov, 'Nineteenth-century Letters from Sofia's Merchants to Istanbul', *Serdika*, 3-4 (1942), pp. 80-87; 7-8 (1942), pp. 105-111 (in Bulgarian); E. Eskenazi, A. Hananel, *Jewish Sources for the Social and Economic Development of the Balkans*, vol. 1 (Sofia, 1958); vol. 2 (Sofia, 1960); G. Galabov,

One can distinguish three main categories of studies dealing with commerce: firstly, research on macroeconomic and socio-demographic history; secondly, special studies on merchants; thirdly, regional histories.

The first group consists mainly of surveys of Bulgarian economic history. Most of these histories summarise previous scholarly achievements but a few of them are based on special research and new sources. However, some important subjects emerged in their agenda such as the gradual incorporation of Bulgarian commerce within the framework of the European economic network; the development of new commercial itineraries; regional specialisation and commercialisation of agricultural produce; fairs as mediators among the local markets.²⁸ Valuable contributions on concrete aspects of trade and exchange are included in the only anthology on the history of trade in Bulgarian lands from the XVth to the XIXth century.²⁹ Within this general context Bulgarian traders are perceived as the main mediators of exchange (except the Dubrovnik merchants in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries). However, it seems that the system of Ottoman markets: local, regional, interregional and international

B. Cvetkova, *Turkish Sources for the History of Bulgarian Law*, vol. 1, (Sofia, 1961), vol. 2, (Sofia, 1971); N. Todorov, M. Kalizin, *Wills and commercial transactions from Sofia's kadi sicils in the XVIII-XIX centuries*, (Sofia, 1977); K. Vâzvazova-Karateodorova, Z. Markova, E. Pavlova - Harbova, V. Kharizanov (eds.), *Hadzhitoshev's Family Archive (1751 - 1827)*, vol. 1, (Sofia, 1984) (in Bulgarian); M.-T. Stefanova, 'Documents on the Economic Activity of the Gabrovo's company 'Stancho Arnaudov & Son' (1860 - 1861)', *Bulletin of the State Archives*, 55 (1988), pp. 239-283 (in Bulgarian); St. Maslev, *Trade between the Bulgarian Lands and Transylvania in the XVI - XVII centuries*, (Sofia, 1991) (in Bulgarian); A. Velkov, P. Gruevski, S. Ivanova, M. Mikhailova-Mrâvkarova, N. Robev, E. Silianova, *Inventory of the Ottoman Turkish Documents on Trade and Crafts (XVI - XIX centuries) preserved at the Oriental Department at the National Library 'St. st. Cyril and Methodius'*, (Sofia, 1993) (in Bulgarian). There are two series of documents which also contain materials on the subject under study, namely *Turski izvori za bulgarskata istoria* (Turkish Sources on Bulgarian History) and *Chuzhdi pâtepisi za Balkanite* (Travellers Accounts on the Balkans).

²⁸ J. Nathan, V. Khadzhinikolov, L. Berov (eds.), *Economic History of Bulgaria until the Socialist Revolution*, 1st edition, (Sofia, 1969), pp. 208-295; L. Berov (ed.), *Economic History of Bulgaria until the Socialist Revolution*, 2nd edition (Sofia, 1981), pp. 241-260 (in Bulgarian); J. Nathan, *Economic History of Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1938), (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *Bulgarian Revival, History of Bulgaria*, vol. 5, (Sofia, 1985); vol. 6, (Sofia, 1987) (in Bulgarian). Chapters on trade are written by Virginia Paskaleva, Konstantin Kosev, and Nikolai Todorov.

²⁹ V. Paskaleva, S. Panova, L. Berov, B. Cvetkova (eds.), *On the History of Trade of the Bulgarian Lands in the XV - XIX centuries* (Sofia, 1978) (in Bulgarian).

does not provide a broad context for these studies and as a consequence the mediating role of the merchants among all these market zones is not fully estimated. The majority of the generalisations are based on only a few case-studies of less than ten rich merchants' families. In most of these general surveys the Marxist approach examines tradesmen mainly with respect to the genesis of capitalism and the initial accumulation of capital.

A noticeable trend is to place Bulgarian economic development within its Balkan context. Along these lines it is necessary to note some general studies on the Balkans.³⁰ One should start with Nikolai Todorov's socio-economic and demographic analysis of the Balkan city. The social stratification of the urban population, the genesis of entrepreneurial elements within the guilds and the creation of hybrid organisations incorporating the 'putting-out' merchants and the guilds (particularly in the textile crafts), are valuable contributions to revealing investment patterns in the Balkan economy. Another book of general character, dealing with the history of prices in the Balkans from the XVIth to the XIXth centuries, is by Lyuben Berov.³¹ These two studies are exceptional in terms of the scope of their generalisations. In principle, most of the Bulgarian economic researchers avoid general studies covering all the Balkans and limit their research to some areas, such as Dobrudja, Thrace, Macedonia, and the Black Sea region.³² One possible explanation might

³⁰ N. Todorov, *The Balkan City. XV-XIX centuries* (Sofia, 1972) (in Bulgarian); L. Berov, *Prices in the Balkans in the XV-XIX centuries and the European Price Revolution* (Sofia, 1976) (in Bulgarian).

³¹ However, one should bear in mind that some of the Bulgarian sources on which Lyuben Berov's research is based are not always reliable for such general conclusions. The subject of currency and money circulation is studied in a few works. A recent PhD by Nikola Robev was devoted to this issue in 1997. On this topic compare S. Panova, 'Money in the Trade between Vienna and Istanbul in XVIIIth century', *Historical Review*, 2 (1993) pp. 98-120 (in Bulgarian). With respect to the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire see also S. Pamuk, 'Money in the Ottoman Empire, 1326 - 1914', in Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History*, pp. 947-981; S. Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, (Cambridge, 2000).

³² V. Tonev, *Dobrudzha during the National Revival* (Sofia, 1974), PhD (in Bulgarian); V. Paskaleva, 'The Bulgarian Black Sea and its Region during the Period of Ottoman Rule', in *Black Sea*, (Varna, 1978), pp. 486-508, (in Bulgarian); S. Dimitrov, N. Zhechev, V. Tonev, *History of Dobrudzha*, vol. 1, (Sofia, 1988) (in Bulgarian); I. Todev, *The Bulgarian National Movement in Thrace 1800 - 1878* (Sofia, 1994), pp. 29-66 (in Bulgarian); V. Tonev, *The Bulgarian Black Sea during the National Revival* (Sofia, 1995), pp. 131-139 (in Bulgarian).

be that these are the regions perceived traditionally as 'Bulgarian lands' of the medieval Bulgarian kingdoms. The other more practical reason is probably the easy access to primary sources kept in contemporary Bulgaria.

The second group of studies, specifically on merchants, deserves special attention. From the late 1950s on research interest in commerce increased and it was visible especially in the 1960s and 1970s with the work of the first generation of economic historians like Virginia Paskaleva, Konstantin Kosev, David Cohen, Snezhka Panova, Ioana Spisarevska, Marta Bur-Markovska, Khristo Glushkov. In the early 1980s one can name some new researchers such as Mikhail Grâncharov, Plamen Mitev, Maria-Toska Stefanova, Ivo Zheinov.

If one makes a rough estimate of the number of merchants who have been the subject of special research, the total is only around 30.⁴⁴ Immediately one can distinguish the names of the two brothers Evlogi and Khristo Georgievi, who have also been studied in the previous period.⁴⁵ However, there are other traders who attracted researchers' attention too.⁴⁶ In some studies (as in a book by Konstantin Kosev) one can find an abridged history of more than 12 merchants and trading companies. There is an article on a similar theme by his father Dimitâr Kosev, Vladimir Diculescu, and Virginia Paskaleva on the economic activity of Bulgarian emigrants in Wallachia.⁴⁶

Some other authors such as Marta Bur-Markovska, Snezhka Panova,

⁴⁴ Of course, that number is only an approximation.

⁴⁵ This company is studied by Khristo Gandev, Virginia Paskaleva, Khristo Glushkov, David Cohen. Evguenia Davidova analysed the Georgievi Brothers' business through the eyes of their contemporary Khristo Tâpchileshtov, a rich merchant in Istanbul.

⁴⁶ For example, the Khadzhitoshevi family, Chalâkovi family, Robeivi brothers, Tâpchileshtovi brothers, Pavel Nenovich, Tsviatko Sakhatchioghlu, Stancho Bradinov and Komsievi brothers, Khadzhi Khristo Rachkov, Ivan Kalpazanov, Stephan Karagiozov, Khadzhi Slavcho Selveli, Rali Khadzhi Mavridi, Papazoglu brothers, the Aries family, Stancho Arnaudov and Son, Atanas T. Kânchev and Cie, Mikhail Gyumyushgerdan, Masâr Company, Maniovi brothers, Khristaki Ganevi brothers, etc.

⁴⁷ K. Kosev, *On Bulgarian Capitalist Development in the 1860s and 1870s* (Sofia, 1968), pp. 59-60 (in Bulgarian); D. Kosev, Vl. Diculescu, V. Paskaleva, 'On the Economic Activity of the Bulgarian Emigrants in Wallachia in XIXth Century (until the Russo-Turkish War 1877 - 1878)', in *Bulgarian-Rumanian Relations across the Centuries. Research I (XII-XIX centuries)*, (Sofia, 1965), pp. 285 - 373 (in Bulgarian).

and Stoian Maslev studied Balkan merchants and found a Bulgarian presence in the so-called 'Greek Companies' (a collective term for Orthodox merchants from the Ottoman Empire in Austria) in the XVIIth and XVIIIth century Habsburg Empire. Their commercial and social activity in the same areas in the course of the next centuries were examined by the Rumanian scholar Constantin Veliki, Karol Telbizov, and Virginia Paskaleva. The tiny group of merchants in Chiprovtsi (a small town in Western Bulgaria) were traced by Karol Telbizov, Snezhka Panova, and Marta Bur-Markovska. The Bulgarian 'Nezhin's Greeks' (in Russia) and the Bulgarian merchant's diaspora in Odessa were also explored.³⁷ Foreign merchants who traded in Bulgarian lands, such as the Dubrovnik network of traders and their local agents, were also studied by Ivan Sakâzov, Ivan Pastukhov, Ioana Spisarevska, and Ekaterina Vecheva.³⁸ All these works are based on unpublished materials from foreign archives and cover different aspects on multi-ethnic partnerships and cooperation among the Balkan merchants outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

A survey of the geographical destinations of Bulgarian merchants in chronological terms shows their itineraries to Transylvania, Austria, Moldavia and Wallachia, Russia, Asia Minor and Anatolia, and Egypt. If one divides the studies according to the countries of research one can see that interest is quite uneven: some countries such as Austria/Austro-Hungary (Virginia Paskaleva; Marta Bur-Markovska; Snezhka Panova),

³⁷ S. Panova, *XVIIIth century Bulgarian Merchants* (Sofia, 1980) (in Bulgarian); *idem*, 'The Chiprovtsi Merchants', in *300 Years of the Insurrection in Chiprovtsi. A Tribute to the History of the Bulgarians in the XVIIIth Century*, (Sofia, 1988), pp. 46-60 (in Bulgarian); M. Bur-Markovska, *The Balkans and Hungarian Market in the XVIIIth century* (Sofia, 1977) (in Bulgarian); P. Mitev, *Bulgarian Trade in the XVIIIth century*, (Sofia, 1989), PhD thesis (in Bulgarian); C. Veliki, 'On the Trade between the Bulgarian Cities and Austria at the end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth centuries', *Historical Review*, 6 (1959), pp. 61-77 (in Bulgarian); K. Telbizov, 'Some Sources on the Economic Position and Trade of the Chiprovtsi Merchants in Sedmigradsko in the XVIIIth century. A Contribution to the History of Bulgarian Trade', *Publications of the Varna Institute for Economy*, 1 (1964), pp. 1-52 (in Bulgarian).

³⁸ I. Sakâzov, *Economic Relations*, I. Pastukhov, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 362-367 (in Bulgarian); I. Spisarevska, 'On the legal status of Dubrovnik's Colonies in the Bulgarian Lands under Ottoman Rule (XV - XVIIth centuries)', *Historical Review*, 2 (1973), pp. 76-93 (in Bulgarian); E. Vecheva, *Dubrovnik's Trade in the Bulgarian lands in the XVth - XVIIIth centuries*, (Sofia, 1982) (in Bulgarian).

France (Khristo Gandev and Virginia Paskaleva), Rumania (co-authorship of Dimitâr Kosev, Vladimir Diculescu, Virginia Paskaleva; and David Cohen), and Russia (Veselin Hadzhinikolov, Virginia Paskaleva and Maria Todorova) have attracted much more research than others such as England (Khristo Glushkov)³⁹. However, as in the previous period, the external aspects of commerce predominated.

Within the Ottoman Empire Bulgarian merchants from Macedonia continued to be studied⁴⁰. The settlements along the Danube river were examined in detail as well as some towns in the Balkan mountains, such as Vratsa, Gabrovo, Sliven, Târnovo, Kazanlâk. It is not by chance that these regions have more prosperous merchant strata. If one compares the above-mentioned geographical areas with the studies on the crafts and guilds in most cases both maps would coincide.

Although there is sometimes a problem with merchants' names in how to distinguish their ethnic affiliation, research shows that from the ethnic point of view mainly Bulgarian tradesmen have been studied. However, the multi-ethnic character of the Ottoman Empire presupposes

³⁹ Virginia Paskaleva is among the most productive scholars in this field. The subject of Central Europe, which the author treats in many publications, is very well elaborated in her monograph, where the economic relationships between the Balkan and Central European regions are placed on a large comparative basis by introducing massive, unpublished material from the Austrian archives. V. Paskaleva, 'Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) Economic Penetration in Bulgarian Lands after the Crimean War until the Liberation', *Bulletin of the Institute of History*, 7 (1957), pp. 113-163 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, 'On French-Bulgarian Commercial Relations from the beginning of the XIXth century until the Liberation', *Historical Review*, 5 (1960), pp. 53-85 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, 'Russian-Bulgarian Commercial Relations in the 1850s and 1870s', in *Bulgarian Revival and Russia*, (Sofia, 1981), pp. 392-415 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *Central Europe and the Lands of the Lower Danube, XVIII - XIX centuries (Social and Economic Aspects)* (Sofia, 1986) (in Bulgarian). See also M. Bur-Markovska, *Balkans*, S. Panova, *XVIII century*; *idem.*, *XVIIIth century Bulgarian Trading Companies in the Austrian Market* (Sofia, 1996) (in Bulgarian); Kh. Glushkov, 'Britain's Trade Relations with Bulgarian Lands during the Period after the Crimean War until Bulgaria's Liberation from Ottoman Rule (1856 - 1877)', *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 4 (1976), pp. 26-51; V. Khadzhinikolov, 'Bulgarian-Russian Economic Relations until the Liberation from the Turkish Yoke'; *Bulletin of the Institute of Economic Studies 'Karl Marx'*, 1 (1957), pp. 19-123 (in Bulgarian); M. Todorova, 'Trade Relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire during the second quarter of the XIXth century', *Centuries*, 3 (1977), pp. 31-41 (in Bulgarian).

⁴⁰ V. Paskaleva, 'On the History of Macedonia's Trade Relations with Central Europe in the XIXth century', *Bulletin of the Institute for History*, 11 (1962), pp. 51-83 (in Bulgarian).

partnerships in the field of trade. Research on Turkish, Greek, Jewish, and Armenian merchants is insufficient and inadequate in relation to the available sources. Among them we can mention only a few works on the Arie family from Samokov, and Mesrobovich from Plovdiv.⁴¹

However, while most of the above-mentioned studies cover a wide range of problems; their structure shows a certain pattern. Usually they commence with a short biography of a merchant's career.⁴² Often the successful merchant began as *abaci* especially in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries when the *abacilik* (production and trade in rough woollen cloths) was a predominant activity in many mountainous villages; later on he (it is always he!) continued as a peddler or commission agent; sometimes he became a merchant, usurer or banker, or a mixture of all three. There are some models of behaviour common for a bigger area. The sources consulted reveal that Bulgarian merchants followed a well-known pattern of trading within the framework of the nuclear family. The profession and the capital of the head of the family were transmitted to his sons. Most of the trading firms in Europe, which had a leading role in XVth and XVIth century economic life, were family concerns.⁴³ This scheme is described in many other studies; its Balkan variant is well portrayed by Traian Stoianovich.⁴⁴ Bulgarian examples are provided by

⁴¹ An interesting instance is provided by the Arie family archive. The archive is kept in Samokov. There is an abridged history of the family in 4 volumes translated into Bulgarian. However, this very rich archive has not been used except by Eli Eskenazi. E. Eskenazi, 'On the Collection of some Taxes in Western Bulgaria in the XIXth century until the Liberation'; *Bulletin of the Institute of History*, 16-17 (1966), pp. 333-345 (in Bulgarian); S. Zaprianova, 'Mesrobovich's Archive - A Source for the Nineteenth Century Plovdiv's Economy', *Bulletin of the Museums in Southern Bulgaria*, 10 (1984), pp. 137-145 (in Bulgarian). S. Panova also works with Jewish sources in her PhD and other publications. See for example S. Panova, 'On the Application of Commercial Law by the Jewish Merchants in the Ottoman Empire (South-Eastern Europe) in the XV-XVIIIth centuries', *Annual Book of the Jewish Cultural and Educational Organisation*, 21 (1986), pp. 61-75 (in Bulgarian).

⁴² The career 'stage' approach is also used by Traian Stoianovich. See T. Stoianovich, 'The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant', *Journal of Economic History*, XX, 2 (1960), p. 312.

⁴³ F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XV^e - XVIII^e siècles*, vol. 2, *Les jeux de l'échange*. (Paris, 1979), pp. 384-386; A. Gurevich, 'The Merchant', in *The Medieval World*, (London, 1990), p. 276.

⁴⁴ Tr. Stoianovich, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

the Tâpchileshtov family, Stancho Arnaudov and Son, etc. In this respect Mikhail Madzharov's memoirs of the 1860s and 1870s come to mind: 'My father's ideal was to make me a merchant following contemporary convention and he did not give up until the Liberation (1878) when many new perspectives were opened for Bulgarian youth. Trade, he said, is an honourable and pleasant thing. One can go across the seas to see foreign countries. Trade is an independent occupation. It even offers good possibilities to exercise control over the Turks.'⁴⁵ In this quotation one can see that the merchant's profession was perceived in terms of family succession and was appreciated for its decent character, wealth, some independence, social prestige, international contacts.

Usually, after a short biographical introduction a certain aspect of the economic activity of the tradesmen is presented either as a survey of the company's business for a limited period of time (some papers of Maria - Toska Stefanova), or the participation of the merchant in the export trade (as the article on the Georgievi brothers' trade in England by Khristo Glushkov). Some works trace only one branch (Eli Eskenazi's research on tax-farming of Aric). Lists of export and import goods, itineraries, types of transport are presented in almost every study. Special attention is often paid to technical innovations such as telegraph and railroads. A few authors follow the economic strategy and commercial techniques of some trading companies, analyse their overall economic activities, and investigate the reasons for transition from one branch of activity to another (Georgi Pletnirov's paper on Stephan Karagiozov).

One can find a lot of material on merchants in regional studies. More recent histories have been written either with co-authors, like the books on Tolbukhin, Vratsa, and Gabrovo⁴⁶, or are results of a long-term project by researchers such as Simeon Damianov for the region of Lom, and Mikhail Grancharov for Pleven, where special chapters on trade are included.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ M. Madzharov, *Memoirs*, (Sofia, 1968), p. 124 (in Bulgarian).

⁴⁶ E. Buzhashki (ed.), *History of the Town of Tolbukhin* (Sofia, 1968) (in Bulgarian); *History of the Town of Vratsa since Antiquity until the Liberation* (Sofia, 1976) (in Bulgarian); *History of the Town of Gabrovo* (Sofia, 1980) (in Bulgarian).

⁴⁷ S. Damianov, *The Region of Lom during the National Revival. Economic Life and Political Struggles* (Sofia, 1967) (in Bulgarian); M. Grancharov, *The Town of Pleven and its Region during the National Revival* (Sofia, 1989) (in Bulgarian).

With respect to the subject of the present paper, one could distinguish four major topics, discussed on a macroeconomic or microeconomic level in the above-mentioned studies such as incorporation into the world economy; the backwardness of the Ottoman economy and the lack of Ottoman protectionism; the Marxist concept of the genesis of capitalism and related to it the problem of the initial accumulation of capital; and the concept of class structure and the economic power of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie.

Most Bulgarian scholars did not take part in Wallerstein's debate but it can be suggested that they are mainly supporters of Wallerstein's concept of 'penetration-absorption' of the Ottoman economy in terms of its passivity. The majority of the researchers assumed the penetration of European capitalism in the Ottoman economy and stress its negative effects on local industry. For instance, authors who worked immediately after World War II in the decade of the most rigid Marxism declared that the Ottoman Empire became a 'semi-colony' of the West without distinguishing any regions within the Empire.⁴⁸ At the same time some researchers suggested that incorporation into the world economy had some positive effects on the development of trade. Traian Stoianovich also noted that the balance, which existed between trade and industry in the XVth century, was destroyed in favour of the former. However, Balkan merchants profited from this change more than their European counterparts and enjoyed great prosperity.⁴⁹ Often the example of the Greek bourgeoisie, the earliest in the Balkans, that appeared and prospered on the basis of trade is used as an argument. Bulgarian researchers Krăstio Manchev and Strashimir Dimitrov also pointed out that all the changes that occurred in Bulgarian lands during the XIXth century had a 'commercial' basis because all social and economic processes during that time corresponded more to the growth of trade with Europe than to local industrial and agricultural development.⁵⁰ On the other hand,

⁴⁸ See for example D. Kosev, *Modern Bulgarian History. An Outline* (Sofia, 1951), p. 133 (in Bulgarian).

⁴⁹ Although the trade sector of the Balkan economy became bigger, the economy as a whole declined. Tr. Stoianovich, *op. cit.*, pp. 199, 203.

⁵⁰ S. Dimitrov, Kr. Manchev, *History of the Balkan peoples in the XV-XIXth centuries* (Sofia, 1971), pp. 136-137 (in Bulgarian); Kr. Manchev, *History of the Balkan peoples* (Veliko Tărnovo, 1979), pp. 44-45 (in Bulgarian).

recent research makes it appear that European imports did not affect all the local industries as had been previously assumed. For instance, many Bulgarian crafts, such as the textile industries, attained their great prosperity during the second and third quarter of the XIXth century because production continued to be sold on the Balkan and Asian markets.⁵¹ Even more, some authors claim that during the same period merchant-usury capital (accumulated through trade with Europe) played a stimulating role by participating in the organisation of small-scale local manufactures and factories and thus contributed to Bulgarian capitalist development.⁵² Many of the above-mentioned authors stress the lack of protectionist policy and the obstacles which tradesmen faced.⁵³

The subject of merchants is closely related to the problem of the genesis of capitalism and the initial accumulation of capital which is treated within the Marxist paradigm. Some authors, like Jacques Nathan, approached this question as the replacement of one mode of production by another and identified the period of the Bulgarian Revival as a transition from the old system of barter exchange to new market relations, as a process of decline of Turkish feudalism and a genesis of capitalism.⁵⁴

⁵¹ N. Todorov, *The Balkan City*, p. 209. Vasilis Panayotopoulos also supported the thesis that European competition did not cause a total decline in local crafts because the majority of the population lived in a condition of autarchy without using European products. V. Panayotopoulos, 'Artisanat: Organisation du travail et marché aux Balkans XVe - XIX siècles', in *Actes du IIe Colloque International d'histoire (Athens 18 - 25 Sept. 1983). Economies méditerranéennes, équilibres et intercommunications XIII - XIX siècles*, (Athens, 1986), p. 257. S. Faroghi, 'The Fieldglass and the Magnifying Lens: Studies of Ottoman Crafts and Craftsmen', *The Journal of European Economic Studies*, 20, 1 (1991), p. 55; S. Ianeva, *L'artisanat et les corporations de métier dans la partie centrale des Balkans pendant la première moitié du XIX siècle*. Thèse de doctorat, soutenue à l'Institut Universitaire Européen, Florence, 1997; M. Palaret, *The Balkan Economies c. 1800-1914*, (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 50-85.

⁵² K. Kosev, *On Bulgarian Capitalist Development in the 1860s and 1870s* (Sofia, 1968), pp. 59-60 (in Bulgarian).

⁵³ On the contrary, with the first contemporary Bulgarian periodical *Iyubostovje* published in Izmir (1842-1844) there began the trend of supporting the principles of free trade and *laissez faire*. Most of the authors in the XIXth century were supporters of this tendency. However, it seems that they merely reflected foreign theories. See B. Mintses, 'Political and Socio-Economic Concepts in Bulgarian Literature before the Liberation', *Anthology for Folk Works and Writings*, XVI and XVII (1900), p. 5, 41 *et seq.* (in Bulgarian); J. Nathan, 'Bulgarian Economic Thought during the National Revival Period', *Historical Review*, 3 (1951), pp. 292 - 393 (in Bulgarian).

It is not surprising that merchants were perceived as bearers of the new, 'progressive' forms of production.

The class concept has not occupied a crucial position in most Bulgarian writings apart from one discussion at the end of the 1940s in the periodical *Istoricheski Pregled* (Historical Review). One possible explanation might be that the local feudal class/elite did not survive, thus, there was unanimous accord that merchants were part of the new bourgeois class which was ill-defined. Moreover, in most Bulgarian studies merchants are not distinguished from the rest of the population except for a few rich traders and placed mainly in their urban environment. For instance, Nikolai Todorov reveals the genesis of the entrepreneur-capitalist from the master within the guild of *abaci* producers who preserved his membership within the guild⁵⁵.

Again in the pages of the periodical *Istoricheski Pregled* (Historical Review) in 1977 a discussion was held on the financial potential of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, concerning mainly merchants. In the fifth volume of the *History of Bulgaria* some assertions about the lack of capital are not quite correct.⁵⁶ Many sources as well as some new research reveal the existence of substantial capital owned by Bulgarian merchants.

One may note that after the 1970s there was not much discussion regarding subjects of a more general character. Most of the authors assume the existence of bourgeois structures and the integration of Bulgarian lands (not as a part of the Ottoman market but mainly in terms of a political entity in decay) within the capitalist economy.

3. The Post-Totalitarian Period

Although one can immediately notice a lack of Marxist clichés, most of the concepts of the previous period are still in circulation. There has been no reassessment of the Ottoman period in Bulgarian

⁵⁵ J. Nathan, 'Research on the Bulgarian Economic Past', in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, (1977, Sofia), p. 43, 187, 214, 277 (in Bulgarian).

⁵⁶ N. Todorov, 'Some Thoughts on Economic Development and the Genesis of Capitalism in the Bulgarian lands under Turkish Rule', *Historical Review*, 6 (1961) 87-106 (in Bulgarian); *idem.*, *Balkan City*, pp. 230-267.

⁵⁷ *History of Bulgaria*, vol. 5, p. 265.

history as a whole.⁵⁷ In the field of commerce, in particular, the preoccupation with Bulgarian merchants and an unwillingness to place research within the overall Ottoman economic context continues.

Nevertheless the political changes brought about the opening of many new archives and a shift of historical research towards recent and contemporary history means one can observe that, in the 1990s, interest in commercial issues is still alive. Most of the scholars already mentioned above continue their research. One even witnesses the appearance of a new generation of historians who work more in a regional context and less to a general plan. Probably this 'local' tendency and lack of funding explain why most of the publications are short papers, articles, and a few monographs.⁵⁸

A relatively new topic has become popular in the last decade, namely the forms of commercial partnerships, developed by Snezhka Panova, Plamen Mitev, Marta Bur-Markovska for the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, and by Ivan Rusev, Nadja Manolova, and Evguenia Davidova for the XIXth century. Some interest in the merchants' participation in the system of tax farming can also be distinguished.⁵⁹

Although a variety of subjects is discussed in the studies on merchants, there are still a lot of blank spaces. Some interesting topics which need to be clarified are: traders and the Crimean War; the study of merchants' balances in a comparative context; the wives of merchants; inter-ethnic professional contacts and ethnic solidarity, etc. Legal aspects of business activities still wait to be elucidated.⁶⁰ There are no studies on the relations

⁵⁷ See M. Todorova, *Bulgarian Historical Writing*, pp. 114-115.

⁵⁸ See the table prepared by E. Davidova, *Bulgarian Commercial Houses*, pp. 95-119.

⁵⁹ P. Mitev, 'State Regulation in the XVIIIth century Urban Economy in Bulgarian Lands', in *The Establishment and Development of Modern Institutions in Bulgarian Society during the National Revival*, (Sofia, 1996), pp. 75-80 (in Bulgarian); See also S. Panova, *On the Application of Commercial Law*, pp. 61 - 75; N. Manolova, 'The Bulgarian Merchant during the National Revival - Examples of Economic and Social Behaviour', *Past*, 3 (1995), p. 47 (in Bulgarian); I. Rusev, *Firms and Manufactures in the region of Sliven and Kotel during the National Revival*, (Burgas, 1996) (in Bulgarian).

⁶⁰ V. Ganev, 'History of Commercial Law', *Annual Book of Sofia University - Faculty of Law*, XII, (1921); p. 60, 70 (in Bulgarian); K. Katarov, *Systematic Course on Bulgarian Commercial Law*, 4th edition, (Sofia, 1990), pp. 9 - 10 (in Bulgarian); R. Gradeva, 'On the kadı's Court Law Prerogatives in the XVIIIth century', *Historical Review*, 2 (1993), pp. 98-120 (in Bulgarian); S. Panova, *On the Application of Commercial Law*, pp. 61-75; I. Spisarevska, *On the legal status of Dubrovnik's Colonies*, pp. 76-93.

between Bulgarian and other Balkan markets especially in the western part of the peninsula as well as contacts in the Asian part of the Ottoman Empire. The problem of heredity within the merchant's profession is also a very stimulating subject, especially in terms of Muslim and Christian comparisons⁶¹. There is another important question, namely the status of traders in the Ottoman Empire. It is known that some merchants became foreign subjects, like Shishmanoglu, the Georgievi brothers, Khristo Arnaudov, etc. Others, like Khristo Tâpchilestov and his brother Nikola, became *Avrupa tuccarlari* (European merchants), a privileged status introduced by Selim III in order to replace the Christian merchants, protected by the Great Powers.⁶² As one might expect, there was competition among these groups, within them, and with their European counterparts, which has not been a subject of special research in the Bulgarian historical agenda.

It is worth noting that most of the research done in the last decade is based on new sources of diverse origins. It reveals different points of view from private merchant archives, official institutions as well as a foreign perspective on commerce in general.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, one has an impression that a Bulgaro-centric approach dominated issues concerning the history of trade (as it did in most other fields). As Maria Todorova pointed out, the provincialism of Bulgarian historiography, however, is not alien to other Balkan historiographies.⁶³ There are only a few attempts to overcome parochial boundaries, mainly by placing some merchants in a wider European context. Most of the

⁶¹It would be interesting to trace some merchant families after the restoration of the Bulgarian state. Usually, it is accepted *a priori* that the sons of the rich families preferred to join the administrative apparatus than to continue in their profession but there are some other factors which contribute to the decline of these families. See on this topic, E. Davidova, 'Dossier commercial de la famille Tâpchilestov - les trois fils Nikola, Stoyan et Petko (1851 - 1895)', *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 3-4 (1996), pp. 130 - 148

⁶²H. Inalcik and D. Quataert (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 838 - 839; B. Masters., 'The Sultan's Entrepreneurs: The *Avrupa Tuccaris* and the *Hayriye Tuccaris* in Syria', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24 (1992), pp. 579 - 597.

⁶³M. Todorova, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

authors assumed the existence of the Bulgarian market *per se* and not as a part of the overall Ottoman economy. Where comparisons are made they are mainly oriented to Western and Central European models. Actually, contrary to what Surayia Faroqhi noted as a lack of Ottoman - European comparisons in Turkish historiography, one would say that in our case there is a lack of Bulgarian - Ottoman, or Ottoman - Ottoman comparisons.⁶⁴

One can assume that there is continuity in the main concepts and a smooth integration of new topics. It seems that this process is too smooth and that there is a lack of polemical dialogue among the researchers. Most of the concepts introduced by C. Irecek and the first generation historians from the pre-World War II period, are still in circulation in the scholarly community. The longevity of some theses, such as the focus on Bulgarian economy outside the Ottoman context, the division of the whole Ottoman period of two sub-periods, the positive assessment of non-Muslim merchants as bearers of new forms of production, etc. might be explained to some extent by their anti-state and nationalist assumptions.

This survey of research points out that there is progress in enriching the themes and in archival material. The paucity of various type of sources for the earlier period up to the XVIIth century shaped the study of merchants mainly as a group (except for the trading companies from Dubrovnik). It is only after the mid-XVIIth century that one can observe research on individual merchants and companies. It should be noted that a shift in interest from the rich merchants to the middlemen and small-scale tradesmen has gradually occurred in the last three decades and thus enriched scholarly knowledge about the functioning of commercial networks.

Although the topic of merchants is not at the centre of Bulgarian writings covering the Ottoman period, one can trace its firm presence within a period of a century. Almost all Bulgarian economic historians have made some contributions on this subject. One should bear in mind

⁶⁴ S. Faroqhi, *Introduction*, pp. 13-14; *idem.*, 'In Search of Ottoman History', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18, 3 - 4 (1991), p. 212.

that pre-World War II research had a much more theoretical aspect; on the other hand, the following two periods put the accent on new problems and made much more empirical contributions. Some concepts have been transmitted from one period to another personally by the same researchers; others through the use of the same type of sources; still others through the mediation of general histories and text books.

Some of the cited 'blank spaces' reveal that there are still many stimulating topics about the merchant's world waiting for future researchers.