

A STATEMENT ON A SCHOLARY PAPER SUBMITTED FOR THE ACQUISITION OF THE SCIENTIFIC DEGREE ‘DOCTOR OF SCIENCES’

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regarding the acquisition of the scientific degree ‘doctor of sciences’ under Professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and sciences of the culture – with candidate PhD Stefan Ivanov Dechev

1. Scientific and scientific-application significance of the research topic

Associate professor PhD Stefan Dechev has applied to the current procedure with a dissertation on the topic ‘From the rice of Asia to the peppers of America – an intertwined story of food and cuisine in Ottoman Bulgaria and the neighboring lands (late 14th – early 19th century)’. The paper contains 546 typewritten pages. The topic is of great significance since the problem of the food of the Bulgarian population in the Ottoman empire has not been an object of a dissertational research – in that sense, it possesses a great potential and the expectations towards it are big - to define the problems, linked to the topic of food of the Bulgarians during the Ottoman period; to clarify them by presenting them in a diachronic and synchronic aspects and, as much as possible, to relate them to Bulgarian communities of the time and their inner social structures.

The dissertation is the first complete research in Bulgaria of ‘the food and the cuisine in Ottoman Bulgaria and the neighboring lands’. The paper tracks some diffusions in the food and the diet in the Balkans during the existence of the Ottoman and the Habsburg empire, Vlashko, Moldova, Transylvania etc., systematizes various issues, linked to the ‘history of the foods, the cuisine, the diet and the dishes’, it marks a strive for placing the foundation of the research of the later process of the establishment of national cuisines. A new and unknown to this moment definition appears for the first time, moreover in the title of the paper – ‘Ottoman Bulgaria’, without being precisely defined. I find this definition to be a problematic one, because it is related to a period when the Bulgarian state did not exist, but it combines two mixed notions – the first one is connected to the institutionalized power over a certain territory and its inhabitants, and the second is connected to characteristics of the culture, perceived as a non-

Bulgarian one. Based on the above, I find it necessary for the author to define the notion of ‘Ottoman Bulgaria’.

2. Justification of the goals and the tasks in the dissertation paper

Associate professor PhD Stefan Dechev has set himself the goal to show the action of the food ‘as a key and a means’, ‘to research the foods, the cuisine and the dishes in the marked chronological period in the broadest’ context, linked to the ‘development of the agriculture, the crafts, the proto-industry, the social structure, the development of a social class which has an excess of free time and money to spend, various psychological preconditions and aesthetic values’. He broadly lists tens of questions on the topic, which are supposed to get an answer. It would be a good thing, even more so if the paper is to be published, for the goals of the research to be specified and more detailed and for the tasks – to be systemized and summarized.

In the course of the vast and critical review of the impressive amount of foreign and Bulgarian literature, the author states that he sides with the thesis of E. N. Andersson regarding ‘the global culinary regions’ and the theory of Im. Valerstein regarding ‘the worldwide systems’ as a common web of separate ‘politei’.

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology and method of research with the goal and the tasks of the dissertation paper

The author states that he is using a ‘flexible’ and an ‘open’ scientific approach by mainly relying on historical and anthropological methods, as well as on the instrumentation of anthropology, history of culture, industrial history, the research of nationalisms, history of the cities, history of the national culture, ‘the intellectual’ and literary history. He especially puts an emphasis on the fact that he will overcome ‘the Bulgarian national perspective’ by constantly paying attention to ‘the transnational developments and entanglements’ of food with the Ottoman empire, Vlashko and Moldova, Serbia and the Habsburg empire (especially Voyvodina, Banat and Transylvania) while bearing in mind ‘the multiple challenges to the national history which lies in every national culture in Southeastern Europe’. I stand by the opinion that methods, used by the author, need a precise formulation. This will contribute to the clarification of the goals and tasks of the paper and, furthermore, will ease the research efforts. I have also noticed the presence of other problems.

The object of the research is not clear. The primary expectation that the central place will be taken by the food of the Bulgarians is not always met. From the first to the fifth chapter the things that are mainly commented are: the food of the Turkish – mainly of a part of the elite, the enichari, the sales-people etc. and of those who reside in the larger Balkan cities; the food of the aristocracy in Vlashko, Moldova, Transylvania, Hungary, Italy; the food which is sold and thus became known to foreign travelers who had passed through the lands, populated by the Bulgarians. It is mentioned a couple of times that at least until the 18th century the food that was sold and consumed in the cities was most likely very little known to the vast rural population, including the Bulgarian one – these people continued to rely upon their traditional practices; furthermore, it is hypothesized that they tried to imitate the luxurious and posh dishes with their available resources (boza, baklava, yufka, coffee, burek, halva, sherbet, pastarma, fruit, spices). In chapter six, the 18th century is viewed as the beginning of the big changes in the food in the Ottoman empire and their reflection on the Bulgarians. I really hope that the object of the research will be defined in the beginning of the paper and I think that this will influence the organization of the subsections, the material and the used literature.

As a whole, the analysis is scarce. In every one of the six chapters associate professor PhD Dechev states a variety of assumptions which are backed up by insufficient evidence. In reality, every one of the six chapters ends with a brief conclusion – six texts, declared by the author as a scientific contribution. I do not accept the validity of his statements since in every one of the texts are collected and repeated parts of the particular chapter – because of that, I can define them, at the most, as summaries, but not as analytical contribution or conclusions.

*4. Scientific and scientific-application contributions of the dissertation paper
(description and evaluation), including the presence of original contribution to the
science¹*

The candidate declares to have a series of theoretical contributions. I accept two of them as valid – the first one is the clarification of a part of the influences (‘the diffusions’) on the food of the Bulgarians – the majority of the spices, yellow cheese, sesame, sugar and by the end of the researched period – beans, peppers, corn, tomatoes, eggplants, carrots, green beans (I think that by this time the rice, the turkey, the kebab, the kyufte, the stew, the starch, the rose water, the sherbet, the halva, the sweets and the dates most probably had significance only to a

¹ This is related to the scientific degree ‘Doctor of sciences’.

few of the Bulgarians). In the second place, I accept the contribution of the dating and the sequence of the entry of the new foods in the Balkans during the researched period.

5. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation paper: number, nature of the editions in which they are published

Associate professor PhD Dechev attaches a list of ten publications on the topic of the research paper. Three of them (two studies and one article) are published in prestigious internationally reviewed editions, which are indexed in Scopus; three studies – in a redacted collective volume (two of them); a magazine, which is not referenced, with a scientific review (one of them); the other four papers – in a magazine, which is not referenced, with a scientific review (one of them) and in reviewed collective volumes (three of them). It is unknown to me if they have been used in such a similar procedure, which is the requirement by law regarding the scientometrics. I think that associate professor PhD Dechev is well-known to the international scientific community with his publications on the topic of his dissertation.

6. Citations by other authors, reviews in the scientific papers etc.

The candidate presents thirty citations, seven of which in referenced and indexed papers, eight of them – in scientifically reviewed monographies and collective volumes, and fifteen of them – in unreferenced magazines with scientific reviewing. The citations of his papers meet and even exceed the requirements of the law.

7. Opinions, recommendations and notes

I would like to express a part of my critical notes and thoughts about some of the statements of associate professor PhD Dechev in his dissertation paper.

I accept the opinion of the weaknesses of the older Bulgarian ethnographic research, linked with the bad dating of the processes and events – in the case of the foods and their origin; these weaknesses have been known for a while. This statement is also supported by associate professor PhD Dechev - the papers cited by him are published no later than the 90s of the 20th century. I think that a part of the the reasons for these facts has to do with the nature of the terrain work and its sources; another part has to do mainly with the opportunistic character, especially the ideologemes, axiomatic postulates and Slavophilism are shortcomings of the

historical science of the communist period in general. At the same time, I do not accept the repeated accusations in the text of the dissertation against ethnographers of concealment and distortion of processes, in a tendentious effort to attribute longevity to "many 'late' food practices" (incl. to deliberately 'distort' the place of the pork and the fish in the Bulgarian's diet), to knowingly conceal 'the participation of minority ethnic and religious groups in the cuisine' in order to omit 'the role of the Ottoman conquest in a number of innovations in food, especially in the city'. I fully support the opinion of associate professor PhD Dechev about the harm of too much trust in field materials, as I generally apply it to all types of sources, including written ones such as official documents, memoirs, travelogues, which should be critically examined. I think his reflections on the problem of the non-historicity of ethnographic science relate to an understanding of tradition as unchanging, that modern ethnology has long since ceased to suppose. I welcome the author's willingness to distinguish between historicising and contextualising, to apply multi-disciplinary approaches, to 'reformulate' categories where necessary, in order to present work of broad scope to the scholarly community. At the same time, I find his claims insufficiently proven, that a number of foods (sourdough bread, noodles, yoghurt and other dairy foods), techniques (lack of salt in dough, preserving vegetables by fermentation, baking bread in an oven) and even tastes (the surge of the spicy taste in the 18th century, as hot peppers were then introduced among the Bulgarians) appeared in the Balkans after the arrival of the Ottomans. Their attribution to the pre-Ottoman period rests on archaeological, written and field data cited by many researchers. I will briefly discuss only some of what has been found and published about bread and yogurt.

The text says that by the end of the 18th century "the common rural Christian population" did not know the bread leaven. The main arguments are the facts that travellers do not mention it and that the potion for its preparation contains "crushed old beans, corn flour and hot peppers". I believe that the expectation every detail to be recorded in a written historical source, and by foreign travellers at that, is difficult, especially when it comes to the customary practices of a rural population whose inhabited lands are under foreign rule, and who themselves lead a distinctly isolated and static life, subject to an archaic worldview and norms. There are a number of archaisms in the traditions of such communities, the occurrence of which is rarely recorded in writing. I believe that among the archaisms in the food culture of the Bulgarians, which in the 14th -18th, and partly in the 19th century belonged to the mentioned type, is the bread leaven. It is different from bread yeast. Here I will refer to information contained in my own works, including my dissertation "Food and nutrition: between nature and culture", published as a

monography (Sofia, 2011). The preservation of the bread leaven in the food culture of the Bulgarians has to do primarily with the nature of their farming, not with their ethnic identification. It is significant that sourdough bread is a priority element in the diet of settled farmers over a wide area, including Europe (in some of these communities fresh dough plays an episodic role), that in the agricultural and farming population, of which the Bulgarians and most pre-Asian communities are a part, sourdough is predominant (although fresh dough is common and quite widely used), that the nomads and semi-nomads of Front and Middle Asia hardly use bread leaven, and that it is completely absent in the diet of the nomads of Mongolia (Mongols and Turks) - thin fresh bread is traditional for nomads in Asia.

The second indicator that points to the old presence of the bread leaven among the Bulgarians is that certainly by the middle of the twentieth century, they universally called 'bread' only the product containing leaven, regardless of the composition of the flour, and they knew and used old leaven (a piece of raw dough kneaded from flour, salt and water) for their bread, and that many times they knead the leaven with a decoction or brew of various ingredients, which include herbs, flowers of plants, grains of cereals or legumes, onions or their peelings, garlic, hops, and also chillies, corn, beans; vinegar, wine, brandy, yoghurt, pears, bread are also added to the resulting liquid. For the Bulgarians, 'catching' new bread leaven is also a ritual action (similar to the renewal of the leaven for yogurt), and scholars agree that ritualization is a sign that the associated material elements (objects, foods) have a persistent presence in the respective culture.

I consider the assumption that yogurt is a product brought to the Balkans by the Ottomans (Turks, Yuruts) as problematic. I believe that associate professor PhD Dechev ignores the emergence of mobile pastoralism (transhumance and nomadism) in the Balkans in the late Neolithic (confirmed by archaeological findings and chemical analyses) and its development until the mid-twentieth century. There are abundant sources on this topic, such as monastery charters, tax documents, Jelepkeshan registers, etc., including direct references to Bulgarians in them. It has also long been studied, and not only by contemporary Bulgarian ethnographers (Rakshieva, S. "The problem of the typology of mobile farming in Bulgarian lands", *Bulgarian Ethnology*, 1995, book 4, 3-20; Rakshieva, S. In: *Ethnic and Cultural Spaces of the Balkans. Part 2. Modernity - ethnological discourses*. Collection in honour of Prof. Tsvetana Georgieva. University publishing 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. Sofia, 2008, 175-220), but also by E. Grozdanova, St. Andreev, F. Brodel, whose works have many references in the dissertation. The Yuruks themselves (who gained priority in the use of pastures due to the patronage of the

central authority), as well as the Turks at the time of their arrival in the Balkans, were nomads who did not engage in transhumance. Transhumance is practiced in settled societies with complex economies, while nomadism is practiced in unsettled and highly mobile societies where it is also the main sphere of the economy that determines the survival of the community. A number of studies, including comparative-historical ones, indicate that nomads are not the bearers of a more developed and 'sophisticated' culture or tradition, and that in settling they generally adopt elements of the culture of the conquered settled societies, rather than the other way around (e.g., the above-mentioned studies of S. Rakshieva, the work of A. Kalyonski, who also comments on the difference between the Yuruks, Karakachans and Vlachs, noted by associate professor PhD Dechev, the international collection 'Viehwirtschaft und Hirtenkultur. Ethnographische Studien. Budapest, Academia Kiado, 1969' with a glossary of terms, etc.).

Especially in the Balkans, transhumance has a deep tradition. In its terminology are mixed Greek, Vlach and Turkish borrowings – the latter were imposed during the Ottoman rule as the official legislation consolidated them for all subjects in the empire. In addition to herding, the traditions of this livelihood are also linked to the processing of milk and dairy products, which are an important part of local people's diet. It is indicative of the long-standing presence of yoghurt in the diet of the Bulgarians that there is knowledge that milk curd can be 'caught' not only by yoghurt, ayran or stir-fry, but also by dozens of other means: bread, vinegar, dzhanki (sour plums), butter, precious metals, various plants ('sour thistle', 'parichka', 'podkvas', 'chelia/'karachelia', 'black thistles', 'green wheat', 'red onion', 'butter herb', 'butterwort'/'sour grass', 'scripalets', 'mlechek'), St. George's day dew. I also do not think that the name 'yoghurt' was particularly accepted by the Bulgarians until the 18th century - according to ethnographic materials, even in the 20th century they mostly called the particular product 'sour milk' (with an emphasis on the technology), and in places they also used 'sour' or 'hot milk' (because of its taste).

8. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of the dissertation paper

According to article 12, paragraph 1 and 2 of the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science should 'contain a published original theory, theoretical or empirical generalization, solution of a major scientific or applied problem at the level of modern science'. Despite my deep conviction that science evolves through debate, I believe that the dissertation presented in 'From

the rice of Asia to the peppers of America – an intertwined story of the food and the cuisine in Ottoman Bulgaria and the neighboring lands (late 14th – early 19th century)’ authored by associate professor PhD Stefan Ivanov Dechev, the deficits outweigh the stated contributions. This does not give me grounds to endorse it as a work that contains the qualities, listed in the law, necessary for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science.

In conclusion, my evaluation of it is negative and I will vote against it at the meeting of the scientific jury.

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Sofia

(associate professor PhD M. Markova)