

## Nikolai T. Todorov, 1921–2003

Nikolai Todorov Todorov, emeritus professor at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, eminent Balkan scholar, esteemed teacher, accomplished administrator, and distinguished diplomat, died in Sofia on 27 August 2003 at the age of eighty-two. In diverse ways, Nikolai contributed significantly to our understanding of both modern Bulgarian and Balkan social, economic, and urban history and the interdependence among the national liberation movements in southeastern Europe. In addition, he was a distinguished institution-builder and promoter of tolerance and understanding among the peoples of southeastern Europe.

Born on 21 June 1921 in the port city of Varna, Nikolai lived there until he completed his secondary education. His love of learning led him to study medicine at the University of Sofia (1941–47), but the war and his political opposition to fascism interrupted his studies. After Nikolai received his M.D. degree in 1947, he chose not to practice medicine and instead enrolled again at the University of Sofia, studied history this time, and graduated in 1950. During the 1950s and early 1960s he worked as a researcher at the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow, where he studied with A. F. Miller, the well-known scholar of the Ottoman period. His dissertation based on archival research, “Zarozhdenie kapitalisticheskikh otoshenii v tekstil’nom proizvodstve Bolgarii v pervoi polovine XIX v.,” earned him the degree of *kandidat istoricheskikh nauk* in 1957.

At the University of Sofia in 1957, Nikolai presented the first course on the modern and contemporary history of the Balkan peoples, a course that was instrumental in moving Bulgarian historiography from a narrow national focus toward a broader Balkan and European framework. In 1964 Todorov was primarily responsible for establishing the Institute of Balkan Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and he served as its director for twenty-five years. Together with his colleagues and staff, Nikolai helped make the institute a vibrant center for the study of Balkan history and culture from antiquity to the present. He was also the moving force behind the interdisciplinary publications, *Etudes balkaniques* and *Studia Balcanica*, and a number of serial studies such as *Balkanistika* and *Balkani*. All these publications contributed greatly to the dissemination of Bulgarian and Balkan historiography and the evolution of a dialogue between Bulgarian and foreign scholars.

At the same time Nikolai worked tirelessly to promote Balkan studies in Europe. A founding member of the UNESCO-sponsored International Association for Southeast European Studies, he served as president of the association from 1974 to 1979 and remained honorary president to the end of his life. Thanks to his efforts and leadership, the First International Congress for Southeast European Studies was held in Sofia in 1966. Nikolai’s international scholarly and diplomatic activity extended beyond the Balkans through his membership in the Executive Committee (1972–76) and as president (1985–86) of the General Conference of UNESCO. Through his initiative, the International Information Center on the Sources of Balkan and Mediterranean History (CIBAL) was created in 1977 in Sofia. The center has since established a unique library by collecting and preserving documents, books, publications, and electronic data dealing with the history and cultures of southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean area for use by researchers and institutions.

Nikolai remained an active scholar despite his wide-ranging administrative duties. He was the author or editor of more than four hundred books, essays, and review articles published in various languages in Bulgaria and abroad. At the beginning of his career he focused on the social, economic, and demographic developments in the Ottoman empire from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Two major collections of his numerous writings in this field were published by Variorum as *La Ville balkanique sous les Ottomans (XV–XIXe s)* (1977) and *Society, the City and Industry in the Balkans, Fifteenth–Nineteenth Centuries* (1998). In 1971 he received the degree of doctor of historical sciences for “Balkanskii

gorod XV–XIX w. v sostave Osmanskoi imperii.” Through this pioneering study, the first work to explore the socioeconomic development of various Balkan cities, Nikolai made his greatest contribution to the study of urban life in southeastern Europe. Translated into many languages, it appeared in Bulgarian as *Balkanskiiat grad XV–XIX vek* (1972) and in English as *The Balkan City, 1400–1900* (1983). Together with Asparuh Velkov, Todorov published *Situation démographique de la Péninsule balkanique (fin du XVè s.–début du XVIè s.)* (1988). Nikolai strongly believed in the importance of publishing and using primary sources for teaching and writing Balkan history. In collaboration with other scholars, he guided the work and edited ten volumes of documents on Bulgarian and Balkan history, including not only Bulgarian and Ottoman sources but also materials found in archives near and far.

Nikolai’s interest in finding the common tendencies in the nation-building processes of the Balkan states led him to study the national liberation movements and the collaborative efforts of the Balkan peoples in these struggles. Bulgarian-Greek relations were the focus of his *Filiki Eteriia i Bulgarite* (1965), and, together with Veselin Traikov, he edited *Bulgari-uchastniitsi v borbite za osvobozhdenie na Curtsiia, 1821–1828* (1971). This substantial work drew on Greek archival materials and demonstrated the Bulgarians’ collaboration and active participation in the struggle for Greek independence.

During the 1990s, Nikolai was active as a diplomat and public figure. From September 1990 to June 1991, he chaired the Bulgarian Grand National Assembly. A number of Bulgarian political observers and scholars have noted the positive role he played in the assembly during the writing of the new democratic constitution. His work *Vii Veliko Narodno subranie: Zad kadur* (1993) discusses these activities. His last work, *The Ambassador as Historian: An Eyewitness Account of Bulgarian-Greek Relations in the 1980s* (1999) describes his ambassadorial experiences.

For his teaching, scholarly, and administrative accomplishments, as well as his organizational activity, Nikolai was elected corresponding (1974) and then full (1979) member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. From 1982 to 1988, he also served as vice president of the academy. In addition, he held membership in a number of foreign societies and academies and was the recipient of many Bulgarian and foreign awards.

One of the most prominent Bulgarian historians of the twentieth century, Nikolai was well known and respected abroad. In all of his activities he helped Bulgarian scholars overcome their isolation and made it possible for many of them to keep in touch with scholarly developments throughout the world. When I went to Sofia in the summer of 1972 to invite Bulgarian scholars to participate in a joint American-Bulgarian Conference on Bulgarian Studies, Nikolai played a crucial role in persuading his colleagues at the Academy of Sciences and the University of Sofia to accept the invitation. During the last thirty years, seven such scholarly meetings have been held in Bulgaria and the United States.

Nikolai’s writings and activities influenced and encouraged many historians. Nikolai, who spoke French, English, Russian, Greek, Serbo-Croatian, and Turkish, personally knew most Balkan and many American scholars of his time. He visited the United States a number of times, gave lectures, and presented papers at conferences. He admired American vitality, efficiency, and openness. Notwithstanding the many political and social constraints that existed in his country, Nikolai was able to accomplish a great deal for Bulgarian scholars and the promotion of scholarship. And he provided generous assistance to American graduate students and scholars doing research in Bulgaria.

Nikolai is survived by two daughters and one son, their spouses, and five grandchildren. One of his daughters, Maria N. Todorova, professor of modern Balkan history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, is well known to American scholars through her work *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) and many other publications. Nikolai’s death is a profound loss to the historical profession and his family, friends, and colleagues. *Vechna mu pamet.*

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