ИСТОРИЯ НА МЕДИЦИНАТА
HISTOPY OF MEDICINE

Doctors and the national liberation movement

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Лекарите и националноосвободителната идея

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Abstract: The Bulgarian National Revival was a period marked by the formation of the modern Bulgarian nation and state. Doctors played a significant role in this process — not only as practitioners of a new profession, having received their education at universities in Western Europe and the Russian Empire, but also as intellectuals. In this role, they took on the responsibility for the cultural development and unification of the entire nation. They participated in various stages of the formation of the national idea, such as: establishing the school system and education, textbook production, reforming of the Bulgarian literary language, printing and book publishing, the struggle for ecclesiastical independence, the activities of societies and organizations, the revolutionary movement, diplomacy and foreign cultural influences, as well as public health and hygiene.

Key words: National Revival, national liberation ideology, doctors

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Резюме: Българското възраждане е период на създаването на модерна българска нация и държава. В този процес важно участие имат лекарите. Не само като носители на една нова професия, придобили своето образование в университетите в Европа и Русия, но и като интелектуалци. В тази своя роля те поемат отговорността за културното израстване и обединение на цялата нация. Те участват в отделни сфери на създаването на националната идея като училищна мрежа и образование, учебникарство, реформиране на българския книжовен език, печатници и книгоиздаване, борба за църковна независимост, дейност на дружества и организации, революционно движение, дипломация и чужди културни влияния, здравна култура и хигиена на населението.

Ключови думи: Възраждане, националноосвободителна идея, лекари

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Introduction

The history of the Bulgarian National Revival is a topic of considerable interest to historians and researchers. This article examines this historical period — centered on the idea of national liberation — not through its major events, but through the biographies of the individuals who played a role in them. Bulgarian doctors played a key role in the unification of the nation and the emergence of a modern-style state. Their individual experiences led to collective action. Their conduct inspired and captivated others. They

are part of a historical "game of scales." The term was introduced by the French historian Jacques Revel to describe the approach of examining global events through the lens of individual strategies and lived family histories [1]. They participate in the "grand history" by adding depth to it. The doctors of the National Revival period were individuals with many accomplishments beyond their profession. They were teachers, scholars, school principals, printers, scientists, naturalists, poets, playwrights, historians, diplomats, reformers, and revolutionaries. All these activities were interwoven with the establishment of the Bulgarian nation.

What is a nation?

Doctors were deeply involved in the early efforts to emancipate the Bulgarian population from foreign cultural influences within the crumbling Ottoman Empire. In their role as leaders, they asserted, on behalf of the Bulgarian people, their rights for the attainment of national sovereignty. Dr. Ivan Bogorov clearly stated that "we must first create Bulgarians and then Bulgaria" [2]. These individuals, who read, traveled, and familiarized themselves with the political and social order in the Enlightenment centers of Europe, worked to realize the national idea by every means possible. Therefore, they researched, wrote, and spoke about the historical roots of the Bulgarians, the need for a reformed educational system, the modernization of the language, Bulgarian book publishing and printing, Bulgarian Orthodox Church independence, a new approach to preventive healthcare and public health, and revolutionary-political activity. This synthesis of different areas of life shaped the cultural model of modern Bulgarian society. Once realized, their ideas and values gave legitimacy to a new, unified system of social order. Max Weber referred to such systems as "worldviews" or "ethics" [3].

What is the historical context in which the modern Bulgarian nation began to take shape? For nearly 600 years, the Ottoman Empire was one of the most powerful empires in the world. Territories spanning three continents – Europe, Asia, and Africa – were united within its borders. By the end of the 19th century, the processes of progressive decline that had begun on several levels — social, political, and military – inevitably led to its transformation into "the sick man of Europe." This expression is still used today in political discourse to describe a state in instability and collapse. Under pressure from Western powers, especially after the Crimean War, its cultural and political reform became imperative. France became the main catalyst for changes in the Empire's educational system, and a large portion of Bulgarian doctors were products of precisely this progressive model. In this complex historical puzzle of what Botev called "the now toothless Turkey," the empire was forced to reorganize the political, social, and cultural order in its Balkan territories [4]. These internal changes had external repercussions in the western part of political Europe. Turkey was "involved in the circulation of European capitalist trade" [5]. This was a historically opportune moment for the Bulgarians — as well as the Romanians, Greeks, and Serbs — to begin organizing their independence, to think in national terms about their liberation, and to pursue their social and cultural cohesion.

In his book "Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity", Professor of Humanities Stephen Toulmin devotes a separate chapter to examining the modern worldview that leads to the formation of a Europe of nations with new social structures and forms of solidarity [6]. At that time, Bulgarians lived within a territory conquered by the Ottoman Empire alongside 11 other ethnic groups. Nikolay Genchev pointed out the obstacles these peoples faced in achieving a more rapid national self-awareness and separation, which, however, led to an earlier, distinct "cohesion among the Balkan peoples" and "multinational unity" [7]:

Due to the peculiarities of the Turkish despotic state system – which relied not only on centralization and state control over land, not only on an autocratic dictatorship, but also on religious Muslim fanaticism – relations between the Turks and the subjugated peoples were characterized by domination and oppression.

It was only after the processes of the Ottoman Empire's disintegration intensified that the various ethnic groups inhabiting it began to conceive of the modern nation-state as their political right. Communities such as that of the Bulgarians, even while still under occupation, began to embrace the national idea, loyalty, and attachment to the collective with which they shared common roots and customs. That is why, in the Balkans, nations were formed before they won their freedom and established their own states. The British-American political scientist Benedict Anderson referred to nations as "imagined political communities," made possible by changes in the way the world was perceived [1]. Every individual who is part of such a community, due to the impossibility of maintaining daily contact with the entire community, is symbolically mediated and connects with others through cultural elements. The intellectual elite takes on the task of evaluating this communication through moral reflection concerning its own responsibility toward society. Intellectuals are the first to recognize their right to

"national egoism" and, on behalf of others as well, declare that "at last — we, too, are a nation" [8].

In his memoirs, "My Life as Described by Me", Dr. Ivan Bogorov leaves no doubt, from the very first sentences, about his spiritual and patriotic quests, about his mission to find the "philosopher's stone." Regarding the school in Kurucheshme, he tells of a Bulgarian [2]:

… whoever it was — even the famous Rakovski – during our evening walks by the sparkling sea at Metarevma, to the strains of violins from the Sultan's stable, we yearned for the slumbering Bulgarian nation, which at that time was barely awakening.

The awakening of the nation is a role of serious political significance, to which Bogorov and the other National Revival doctors committed themselves without hesitation. As the cultural elite, they became the bearers of the national idea in a traditional society that did not think in broad national categories and had a different, patriarchal and conservative way of interacting. This traditional society was defined as "the cultural era in which even the cities closely resemble the villages" [9]. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, changes began to take place, and a more intense migration of the population toward the cities was observed due to the raids by the Kardzhali and Daali tribes. The outward appearance of the urban environment changed. It began to modernize. Commercial and market relations expanded. Changes occurred in festivals, behavior, clothing, and cultural standards. During the National Revival, the first national holiday was established — May 11, commemorating Bulgarian education and the First Apostles Saints Cyril and Methodius. Dr. Ivan Seliminski played an active role in organizing its first celebration. At that time, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Ivan Bogorov, the ancient coat of arms of Bulgaria, featuring the face of Tsar Ivan Shishman, was also printed.

Foreign Influence – Benefits and Downsides

At first, Bulgarian doctors were influenced by the Greek movement for political liberation. This was followed by a period of "disillusionment" with that movement during the Enlightenment and even before the struggle for ecclesiastical independence began. The focus on foreign examples – not only those of Greece, but also of European bourgeois civilization and other Slavic peoples – in a society that had remained for centuries under the pressure of the cultural backwardness of the Orient marked the beginning of a constructive process. It was only now beginning to develop its own bourgeois class and intelligentsia. The lack of an educated elite capable of connecting with the small but significant pre-existing medieval intelligentsia was beginning to be overcome. Bulgarian Enlightenment-era physicians understood that in order to achieve political independence for the Bulgarian population – numbering about 4.5 million in the mid-19th century – it was necessary to study and unite around its shared past [10]. Past historical experience, which had shaped existing cultural traditions, served as the foundation around which a nation-state could be unified. We find a number of efforts by Renaissance-era physicians dedicated to such studies. They worked actively to preserve historical memory. Dr. Ivan Bogorov, whom we often refer to as "the first," published the first collection of Bulgarian folklore. Dr. Vasil Beron published "Archaeological and Historical Studies", a compilation of his in-depth research on the Veliko Tarnovo region [11]. He collected and published Bulgarian folk songs in the journals "Bulgarian Scholars" and "Bulgarian Bee". Dr. Hristo Daskalov discovered the Tarnovo Inscription of Tsar Ivan Asen II. Dr. Hristo Stambolski published "A Few Pages from Old Bulgarian History: On the Relations of the Bulgarians to the Byzantine Roman Empire" in 1899, and his extensive "Autobiography, Diaries, Memoirs" is a rich source of information not only on the life of the Bulgarians at the time, but also on Turkish society in Constantinople, where he studied and worked as a physician.

Familiarizing the people with their historical past is a tool for cultural self-determination through patriotism. During the European Renaissance, national self-esteem was of great importance because it was a time when nations were taking shape. This occurred through the unification of people around a shared love for the idea of the homeland. At that time, the widespread emotional invocation of the patriotic ideal – drawn from sources of pride in the past – carried a positive connotation. It shaped the future of the struggle for liberation. Old and new national symbols interacted with one another. Benedict Anderson sees, in certain historical circumstances, the meaning of "antiquity" as an inevitable consequence of the nation's "youth" [12]. An important tool was the abundance of heroism from the past. It falls to the intellectual elite to bring about this transition and to consolidate values in light of new historical events, thereby creating the conditions for a shift in national consciousness. At first, by learning from others.

Among the medical professionals, efforts to connect with the cultural elites of other nations – whom they aspired to emulate – were readily recognizable in the choice of educational institutions, in the establishment of societies and organizations, in the emergence of periodicals and publishing activities, in the choice of locations for medical practice, and in the

creation of a literary legacy. Doctors chose to study and live abroad because they were driven by specific aspirations – in science, in their profession, and in terms of social and political influence – which empowered them in their role as intermediaries. They were meant to bring cultural benefits to society as a whole. They became emigrants, yet they facilitated cultural interactions and efforts to break free from the isolation of a social environment that, until recently, had been cut off from the processes of the bourgeois revolutionary upheaval and liberalism in Europe. It is certain that these doctors, who were educated in Greek schools under the influence of the Greek Renaissance figures, were intimately familiar with their efforts to reform the Greek language and the debates surrounding its revival. Dr. Stoyan Chomakov, who studied at the school of the distinguished Greek educator Theophilos Kairis on the island of Andros (which existed for only three years, from 1836 to 1839), strongly advocated for the use of the Bulgarian language in schools, the national idea, and the right to autonomous education. What Dr. Chomakov came to understand from his time there is that the Greeks' fervent patriotism served as a good example, but also embodied the political ambitions of a people seeking to impose their cultural dominance over the other Balkan nations – and especially the Bulgarians, who had repeatedly demonstrated their supremacy throughout their medieval history. In "Dr. Stoyan Chomakov (1819-1893) or How the Bulgarians Became a Nation," Ilia Todev mentions an incident in which Kairis, during a general history lesson, "slandered the Slavs with such malice that saliva flew from his mouth" [13].

An entire generation of Bulgarian doctors was influenced by the Greek Renaissance figures. They were inevitably drawn in by their drive for recognition and their shared political goals. That is why quite a few Bulgarians took part in the Greek people's struggles for liberation. The Greek journalist Konstantinos Levidis wrote in the newspaper "Elpis" in 1860 [14]:

Bulgarian commanders, leading Bulgarian volunteers, fought alongside Kolokotronis, Botsaris, Karaisakis, and other Greek heroes in the sacred struggle for the fatherland and freedom. Abundant Bulgarian blood was shed along with Greek blood on the battlefields, until Turkey – a colossus hitherto considered invincible – received a fatal blow.

Dr. Ivan Seliminski reports that he made contact with the leaders of the uprising and participated in it as an officer. He was awarded a silver medal for his dedication [15]. Dr. Nikola Piccolo, inspired by the heroic deeds of the Greeks in the defense of Missolonghi – where Lord Byron also perished – wrote the play "Nikiratos," whose manuscript has been lost. Unfortunately, there are only a few written accounts attesting to its existence. Together with Dr. Atanas Bogoridi, they signed an appeal to the American scholar Edward Evert, a professor at Harvard University, urging him to call on American citizens to come to Greece's aid. Piccolo served as an envoy for the Greek "Filiki Eteria" movement in London in 1821. A few years later, Piccolo drew on his experience to support the Bulgarian cause during the Paris Peace Conference.

There were also those who expressed a different opinion. Dr. Stoyan Chomakov, together with Ilarion Makariopolski, took a negative stance toward the Cretan Uprising and submitted a petition to the Sultan in which they described it as "the senseless and utterly ungrateful movement of the Cretans" [16]. Was this a diplomatic maneuver, or did Chomakov wish to give a well-deserved response to the Greeks' arrogant attitude toward the Bulgarian people? The Bulgarian educator Pandeli Kisimov, quoted by Toncho Zhechev in "Bulgarian Easter, or Bulgarian Passions", wrote on this occasion [16]: *The Cretan uprising, supported by Greece, gave the Bulgarians an opportunity to repay them in kind.*

This refers to the events in Tarnovo in 1862, when the Greeks pledged their support to the Sublime Porte against the Bulgarians. A lesson that will be learned by the National Revivalists who worked for the national cause, such as Dr. Vasil Beron, who in his "Archaeological and Historical Studies" recounts the course of the uprising, the courage of the Bulgarian legionnaires, as well as the political interests of the Serbs in establishing a "Slavic Confederative State" [17]. The doctor went on to write about the undying spirit of liberation among the Bulgarians and how it was kindled and revived in others.

The National Revival-era doctors characterized the political situation of the Bulgarian and neighboring peoples as a tyrannical yoke. They observed and participated in the processes of others and used the same tools as their original mentors and teachers from the Greek Enlightenment. Dr. Seliminski listed the most important ones [18]: …*only education, science, and wisdom can teach us the surest, most reasonable, and quickest means of freeing the people from the tyrannical yoke.*

Seliminski was intimately familiar with Korais's work. Both Korais and Theophilos Kairis served as his role models and teachers. The latter was his teacher at the high school in Kidonia, which also followed the French model of education. Later, however, when Seliminski left to study medicine in Athens – where, at that time, there was a sizeable Bulgarian

student community – his relationship with the Greek Enlighteners underwent a drastic change. Here, as on the island of Andros, their attempts to undermine the Bulgarian students began to be felt. In a letter to Vasil Aprilov from 1841, Seliminski mentions an insult that Kairis himself used against the Bulgarians, calling them "sclavi" (from the Latin sclavi, meaning slaves, instead of Slavs) [19]. The Bulgarian historian, writer, and diplomat Simeon Radev offered a similar account when speaking of the school on the island of Andros [20]: *The young Bulgarians from the Andros School were, in spirit, half-Hellenized. When discussing general ideas, they spoke to one another only in Greek. The Greek language gradually and imperceptibly became the language of their private conversations as well. Hellenic culture was what they aspired to. None of this, however, prevented them from remembering their origins. They felt Bulgarian and could not forget it. Seeing their people constantly ridiculed and made a laughingstock, indignation began to boil in their souls, growing stronger and stronger. Even those among them who had initially been captivated by Kairis's innovative genius were not slow to rebel against the arrogant manifestations of his Hellenic proselytism, hidden behind a religious mask. This instinctive reaction, fueled by daily exposure to Greek insolence, was to gradually transform the Bulgarian students' sense of their origins into a vibrant national consciousness.*

It is not surprising that Dr. Stoyan Chomakov also described the Greeks' behavior as arrogant and offensive. He repeatedly mentioned the benefit he had gained from them: that one must love their homeland.

The Ottoman conquest of Bulgaria at the end of the 14th century physically and morally annihilated the Bulgarian medieval aristocracy, and nearly all the medieval intellectuals mentioned in historical documents were either slaughtered, exiled to foreign lands or "disappeared without a trace in the tumultuous course of events, heralding the decline of the Bulgarian state" [21]. Bulgarian National Revival intellectuals placed two important strategies at the core of the national idea: recalling the glorious elements of the past and drawing on the example of the Enlightenment thinkers from other nations who had organized themselves earlier. By publishing newspapers and books of historical research, and by organizing societies whose initiatives would draw on the values of previous generations, they sought to restore cultural ties with the past. While at first the doctors were receptive to cultural influences from other Balkan peoples – Greeks, Romanians, and Serbs – a point came when they began to discern more aggressive intentions to dominate the emerging cultural sphere, particularly on part of the Greeks. Voices began to be heard ever more clearly, asserting the right of this nascent nation to reconnect with its roots under what Karavelov called the "life-giving sun." In his "Notes on Bulgaria and the Bulgarians," in a chapter devoted to the schools in Plovdiv, he described the tendency of Greek teachers to belittle all things Bulgarian at a time when "the Bulgarian people have a past, their future is bright and enviable, and everyone is obligated to defend their national rights" [22]. In these cultural and political struggles for independence and self-affirmation, various skills and approaches were required. A new form of political art, essential for the Bulgarian National Revivalists, emerged on the historical stage: diplomacy. We associate several exceptionally erudite physicians with the mastery of this art — Dr. Georgi Valkovich, Dr. Stoyan Chomakov, and Dr. Georgi Mirkovich. They would distinguish themselves not only in the struggle for the liberation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, but also by holding leadership positions in hospitals and universities, wielding influence within the ruling circles of the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

The medical community of the first Bulgarians to receive medical degrees, used culture – education, language, printing, science, symbols (national holiday, coat of arms), and institutions – to shape a new Bulgarian society, influenced primarily by the European Enlightenment. To convey its messages, they became intermediaries whose success depended on their authority as a cultural elite. They were the champions of nationally recognizable values necessary for the spiritual and political awakening of the Bulgarians. They exhibited a certain type of behavior shaped by their places of origin, family backgrounds, time spent in exile, and the education they received. They realized that they must be the bearers of a moral code for sustainable development. Their public profile as intellectuals obliged them to act correctly in the name of the national rights of others and to demonstrate the profound meaning of a free existence.

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