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**The Codex of the Church of the Virgin in Haskovo as a Source  
for Greek Cultural Influence and Bulgarian-Greek Relations  
during Nineteenth Century**

The unpublished<sup>1</sup> codex of the Sveta Bogorodica Church is a large manuscript book measuring 38×24 cm with a time-worn leather cover. It concerns the period from 1831 to 1876 and contains 92 folios. The fifth, sixth, and seventh pages are missing and the last pages have been removed for unknown reasons. The following is written in Greek on the cover: “Codex of the newly built church of the town of Haskiöy to record expenditure and income, as also the gifts made to the church”. Most of the documents in the codex are standard records of bare figures relating to the budget for a specific period. Exceptions are the first pages, which constitute three documents of 1844 and 1855, which are different from the rest and do not follow the otherwise strict chronological order. They are a decision to honour the departed founders and donors and two wills drawn up for the poor and for the building of a girls’ school.

The codex is an important source which sheds light on the structure

1. Various excerpts from the codex have been used or published in the following studies: N. Dimov, *Uchebnoto delo v Haskovo predi Osvobozhdenieto* (Teaching in Haskovo before liberation), *Izvestiya na muzeite v Yugoiztochna Bulgaria* (Information from the museums in south-western Bulgaria), IMYB II, Plovdiv 1979; idem, *Kodeks (Kondika) na tsarkvata “Sveta Bogoroditsa” v Haskovo* (Codex of the Sveta Bogorodica Church at Haskovo), IMYB VII, Plovdiv 1984; idem, *Borba za tsarkovno-natsionalna nezavisimost v Haskovo* (Struggle for ecclesiastical and national independence at Haskovo), IMYB VIII, Plovdiv 1985; I. Dobrev, *Nachalo i razvoy na novobalgarskoto uchilishte v Haskovo* (Origin and development of the modern Bulgarian school at Haskovo), “Narodna prosveta”, 1908, No. 8; idem, *Postroyavaneto na tsarkvata “Sveta Bogoroditsa” v Haskovo* (The building of the Sveta Bogorodica Church at Haskovo), “Vekove” 1983, No. 6. Mr Dimov has told me in the course of conversation that the codex has been translated into Bulgarian, prepared for printing, and submitted for publication.

of the bourgeois population of Haskovo, its inhabitants' occupations, and its ethnic composition. It enables us to trace the changing financial and social status of the bourgeoisie of Haskovo, which created the necessary conditions for capitalist relations to develop.

The codex contains a number of facts which allow us to perceive it as a codex of the ecclesiastical community of Haskovo. In one of the aforementioned wills, for instance, we read: "Gift of 33,333 piastres, given to *our community* by our late fellow citizen Ioan Haji Dimitris to build and endow a girls' school"<sup>2</sup>.

The facts noted down in the codex indicate that the community of Haskovo took decisions that applied to everyone and granted certain sums for various purposes. In 1843, for instance, the community determined that the priests of the province would receive 6.20 piastres each for a baptism, of which 2.20 would be for the benefit of the school<sup>3</sup>.

The codex shows clearly that the gradual strengthening of the upper echelons of the bourgeoisie and its strong role in social life gave the Christian community a new form. By degrees, from a mediating agency between the subjugated Christians and the foreign authority, the community became a national agency with increasingly broad functions in the sphere of ecclesiastical, economic, and cultural relations. A national agency, which, with its tenacious struggle against certain negative effects of Greek spiritual and cultural influence, was perceived and identified itself as Bulgarian and took part in the mass movement for national emancipation. Directly or indirectly, that struggle finds a place in the codex and its stages roughly coincide with the time when the codex was written in the following three different ways: first, it is written in Greek, then in Bulgarian in Greek letters, and at the end in Bulgarian in the Cyrillic alphabet.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Haskovo had established itself as an important intellectual centre. The Bulgarian population increased rapidly, as did the number of crafts and trades, in which Bulgarians were in the majority. As in the other urban centres, the largest social stratum of the bourgeoisie which developed in Haskovo

2. *Kodeks na tsarkvata "Sveta Bogoroditsa"*, p. 2.

3. *Op.cit.*

during the Enlightenment was that of the artisans and skilled craftsmen. The codex mentions fourteen professional guilds which contributed various sums to the building of the Sveta Bogorodica. The money given reflects the economic status of the various guilds in the town's economic life.

Haskovo and the surrounding province played an active part in the exchange of commodities in the domestic and foreign market, chiefly through the annual fair at Uzundjovo, the largest in European Turkey. In the nineteenth century, the merchants from Haskovo were in contact with the various European centres. Thus, for instance, in 1834, a special sultanic *berat* was bestowed upon Haji Dobri Genev, granting him the right to trade all over the Ottoman Empire, while Haji Ivanco Mincev traded with Trieste. Some local merchants and craftsmen managed to acquire property, and there gradually developed in Haskovo a group of prosperous people who began to play a certain part in the socio-political and spiritual life of the town<sup>4</sup>.

In the early nineteenth century, these people managed to organize themselves, and in 1819, we learn from the inscription on the stone at the base of the throne in the Sveta Bogorodica, they built the first Orthodox church in the town. Later, in 1837, the *nouveaux riches* merchants and craftsmen, together with the concerted efforts of all the Christians in the town and the province, managed to build the large church of the same name on the same site.

Almost simultaneously with the church, in the courtyard and next to the old school—which was probably a monastery school—a new school was built in 1836 at a cost to the community of 47,756 piastres. Then, between 1831 and 1839, 14,976 piastres and 20 parahts were spent on maintaining the school, building auxiliary structures, paying the teachers' salaries, purchasing new books, repairing the old school, and other expenses<sup>5</sup>.

From the memoirs of Stojan Kozuharov, we understand that this was a Lancasterian school and the children were taught in Greek<sup>6</sup>. This is also

4. N. Dimov, *Borba za ...*, pp. 123-124.

5. *Kodeks na tsarkvata "Sveta Bogoroditsa"*, pp. 11, 38.

6. S. Kozuharov, *Vazrazhdaneto na narodnata knizhnina v gr. Haskovo i okolnostta mu* (The renaissance of our intellectual studies in the town and province of Haskovo), "Kitka" 1983, No. 2, p. 139.

apparent from the codex —from the part concerning the school's expenses between 1839 and 1843. For this period of time, the teacher Ioannis Tsitsou was paid 3,458 piastres, while Ioannis N. Zafiridis received 600 just for the year 1840<sup>7</sup>.

It was this Tsitsou who was sent by the Metropolitan of Plovdiv, Nikephoros, to Neophytos of Rila in 1838 to study the Lancasterian method and to become the head of the Haskovo school<sup>8</sup>. Clearly this was a Greek-Bulgarian school in which the children were taught in Greek by the Lancasterian method or monitorial system.

So thanks to the infiltration of Greek education and culture and the strong position of the diocese of Plovdiv in the town, Haskovo became one of the noted centres of Greek intellectual influence in the area. This is clearly apparent in the codex too, which is written in Greek from 1831 to 1853, a rule which also applies to the names of all the trustees and witnesses, whether Bulgarians or Greeks.

The Sveta Bogorodica Church was built and the school founded at a time when the Bulgarians had already begun to contradistinguish themselves at a national level from Greek intellectual dominion, and to seek the way to their cultural and national emancipation. Two strong movements were born at this time: modern Bulgarian education and culture and the struggle against Greek ecclesiastical dominion.

The Bulgarians of Haskovo, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the Christian population, were also drawn into this struggle. This is reflected in the names in the codex, where, though distorted by being written in Greek, such names predominate as Ivan, Stojko, Dobri, Stojan, Petko, Geniu, Beliu, Peniu, Mitiu, Raico, etc.<sup>9</sup> This is also confirmed by a report by the Greek deputy consul in Plovdiv, Kanakaris, written in 1863. He states that Haskovo has 20,000 inhabitants, of whom two thirds are Ottomans and one third Bulgarians. Further on, in contrast to the other inhabited areas in which Kanakaris specifically mentions the presence of Greeks and gives their number, for Haskovo he stresses that the Greek influence there is based on the "Hellenizing Bulgarians" (the term *grakomani* is used in Bulgarian literature), who

7. *Kodeks na tsarkvata "Sveta Bogoroditsa"*, p. 23.

8. I. Snegarov, *Prinos Kam bibliografiyata na N. Rilski* (Contribution to the biography of Neophytos of Rila), Sofia 1951, p. 187.

9. *Kodeks na tsarkvata "Sveta Bogoroditsa"*, pp. 16, 18, 22, 29, 54, 68.

constituted half of the Christian population<sup>10</sup>.

The first sign of the struggle for national emancipation in Haskovo is the decision by the local notables to find a Bulgarian teacher to teach their children in their mother tongue. Strange as it may seem, a considerable part was played in this by Akakios, the bishop of the Metropolitan of Plovdiv, Nikephoros. It may be that his activities were prompted by a desire to forestall the expected intellectual and religious rift between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. The important thing is that Akakios visited Haskovo frequently and advised the notables of the town, and especially Hristodul Valcev Sismanov, to establish a Bulgarian school like those at Gabrovo, Koprivstica, Panajuriste, and elsewhere so that the children could learn in their mother tongue<sup>11</sup>. Akakios seems to have played an important part in the intellectual life of the people of Haskovo, for his signature as a witness is seen in several places in the codex where accounts have been settled<sup>12</sup>.

Thus in 1845, the leaders of the Bulgarian movement in Haskovo took advantage of the absence of Haji Stavros Primo, the leader of the local *grakomani* —who had recently arrived in the town and was now away on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem— to bring the teacher Stojanco Nikolov Stamboliev from Kazanlak. This is indirectly apparent in the codex, where the signature of Primo —as a member of the community— is missing from the settling of accounts for 1845, while a sum of money paid to the teacher Stojan is recorded on 23 April 1846<sup>13</sup>.

The education of girls did not lag behind that of the boys. The data in the codex show that the teacher Anastasia received 3,500 piastres for three years (1847-1850). There is no mention of a girls' school or the payment of a female teacher prior to 1847, so we may conclude that the girls' school was founded in that year<sup>14</sup>.

The Greek faction did not welcome the development of the

10. Angelos N. Papakostas, *Τα Ελληνικά σχολεία στην Ανατολική Ρωμυλία*, Αρχείον του Θρακικού λαογραφικού και γλωσσικού θησαυρού, period II, vol. 16, Athens 1951, p. 146.

11. G. Dimitrov, *Knyazhestvo Bulgaria* (The principate of Bulgaria), Plovdiv 1895, p. 193.

12. *Kodeks na tsarkvata "Sveta Bogoroditsa"*, pp. 20, 22, 24, 26, 31, 33.

13. *Op.cit.*, p. 37.

14. *Op.cit.*, p. 41.

Bulgarian schools. Primo and his supporters embarked on a stubborn campaign to have the Bulgarian teachers dismissed and the Bulgarian language banned, the latter having been introduced into church ceremonies and rituals at that time. The murder of the teacher Athanasi Colakov in 1852 raised doubts that it had been planned by his opponents. Then the teacher Anastasia left the town. This probably happened in the summer of 1855, because this is the last time she received her salary of 1,556.20 piastres<sup>15</sup>, for the period between 14 February 1853 and 11 June 1855.

The hard-fought struggle for control of the leadership of the religious community was eventually won by the newly awoken Bulgarian element. This is reflected in the codex by the disappearance of Primo's name from the lists of witnesses to the various records. His name appears for the first time in a document of 1843. It is also in those that followed until 1845 and also from 1847 to 1850. We meet it for the last time in a document of 1853, when the codex ceased to be written in Greek.

Having failed to gain control of educational and ecclesiastical affairs, the *grakomani* founded their own school for boys in 1853, and a girls' school later on. In 1861 they built their own church: it was consecrated to the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and services were held only in Greek. They then founded a Greek community, which continued to exist after liberation from Ottoman rule. In 1859, the boys' school, which was in the Varos district, was attended by 40-50 children, who were taught by Athanas Paskov<sup>16</sup>. In 1863, their number went up to about 100, and the teacher was now Athanasios Sosiadis, who had moved there from the Pazardjik school and also taught Bulgarian. The girls' school was still functioning, with about 50 pupils<sup>17</sup>.

In 1859, the main Bulgarian school had about 260 pupils and three teachers, two of whom taught classes and one in the Lancasterian section. The teachers were Hrysant Athanasov, Zahari Hristodulov, and Georgi Theoharov. In the same period, the school founded in the Coban district had 60-70 pupils, taught by Tjanko Delcev. A girls' school was

15. *Op.cit.*

16. N. Dimov, *Prinos kam istoriyata na gr. Haskovo prez Vazrazhdaneto* (Contribution to the history of the town of Haskovo during the Enlightenment), pp. 60, 61.

17. Papakostas, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

also operating in 1865<sup>18</sup>.

The constant concern of the ecclesiastical community of Haskovo (which, after 1861, was already essentially Bulgarian) for education is also reflected in the codex, where we find the names of almost all the teachers who worked in Haskovo (after 1853 only in the Bulgarian schools) until the liberation.

The development of culture and education in the town received a strong impetus from the Zarja cultural association, which had its premises in one of the ground-floor rooms of the Bulgarian school. The earliest evidence of its existence for the time being is the codex, in which the sum of 1,725 piastres is recorded among the accounts for the period 1861-1863 as having been loaned by the association's trustees Ivanco Hristodulov and Angel Dobrev<sup>19</sup>.

After the Crimean War, the struggle intensified for the independence of the Bulgarian Church and for the Bulgarians to gain recognition as a separate nation in the Ottoman Empire with the right to an autonomous cultural and religious life. The new situation is reflected in the codex, which in 1853 starts to be written in Bulgarian in Greek script, while from 1860 we find names written in the Cyrillic alphabet. When it was decided to convene a church council in 1858, the province of Haskovo appointed Stojan Comakov as its representative. There are a few references in the codex to the sums which the Bulgarian community in Haskovo designated either for Comakov himself (6,000 piastres in all) or for the council (1,040 piastres)<sup>20</sup>.

The struggle, which became increasingly grim after the council, the imminent split, and above all the long existence of a Bulgarian school led to another change in the writing up of the codex. From 1866, all expenses and income are recorded in Bulgarian, although the names of some witnesses continue to be written in Greek.

18. N. Dimov, *Prinos kam ...*, pp. 60, 61.

19. *Kodeks na tsarkvata "Sveta Bogoroditsa"*, p. 63.

20. *Op.cit.*, pp. 73, 81.