



Book Review:

***Cities in the Balkans: Spaces, Faces, Memories.* Roumiana Il. Preshlenova – editor. Sofia, Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, ISBN: 978-619-7179-20-0, [https://balkanstudies.bg/images/Cities in the Balkans.pdf](https://balkanstudies.bg/images/Cities_in_the_Balkans.pdf) Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology**

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The newly published volume *Cities in the Balkans: spaces, faces, memories*, edited by Roumiana Il. Preshlenova, is a result of a conference¹ that was held on 2-4 October 2019 in Sofia and brought together established and younger scholars from the field of Balkan Studies. The volume focuses on several Balkan cities - Athens, Sofia, Belgrade, Varna, Plovdiv, Istanbul (Constantinople),

¹ The conference “The City in the Balkans: Spaces, Faces, Memory” was organized by the Institute of Balkan Studies with Centre of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and dedicated to the 150th Anniversary of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The conference was supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science under Cultural Heritage, National Memory and Social Development National Research Program.

Thessaloniki (Ottoman Salonika) and Zagreb. The articles contribute to a more in-depth study of the cultural and social importance of the Balkan cities, their development, and the transformations of the Oriental Balkan city in the Modern Period. The state of the art, the opera, and the theatre as part of the urban culture, as well as some literary approaches and historical sources for urban studies, were also reflected in the articles. Most of the articles deal with historical and cultural topics, but the volume also includes literary studies.

The main topic of the volume is presented in Roumiana Il. Preshlenova's contribution *From the Balkan City to the City in the Balkans: Transformations at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Century*. In the research, the ideas of urban development, as well as those of Nationalism and European Influence in the Balkan cities are reflected in a comparative approach.

Modern City in the Balkans: Directions and Perspectives of Research is the topic of Dobrinka Parusheva's article. In it, she presents an overview of the main ways in the research on the modern cities in the Balkans, from mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, recommends an interdisciplinary view over the life in the city, and suggests new perspectives of future research on the topic.

Andreas Lyberatos makes comparative research on the sonic environment of three Balkan capital cities (Belgrade, Sofia, and Athens) during their transition to the industrial era. His study offers an interesting perspective on the urban sounds and their influence on the socio-cultural specifics.

Nikolay Aretov's contribution to the volume *Dreaming Constantinople: an alternative version of Petko Todorov and Nikolay Raynov* reviews the Byzantine capital as a key place in the Bulgarian national mythology and, as a complex object of desires, aspirations, hatred, and fears.

Alexandre Kostov presents a study on the new technologies in the Balkan cities, and gas lighting introduced in Ottoman Constantinople as part of the European modernization of the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Another article, that of Kalina Peeva, examines Istanbul's transformation from "decadent" to the "Pearl of Turkey" in the period between the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and the end of the Democratic Party's rule in 1960.

Young Turk Coup and urban political life of Bulgarians in European Turkey after 1908 are the main topics of Zorka Parvanova's study. The research implies that Bulgarians left a specific and identifiable trace in the new political life of the Turkish Republic.

Yura Konstantinova offers a study on Ottoman Salonika as a city that awakens nostalgic and national emotions in Bulgarian individual and collective memory.

Salonika is the object of study also in Malamir Spasov's research on the past, memory, recollections, and history of the Bulgarians in "Simvasilevusa". In his article M. Spasov offers an emotional description on the imagery of the past and reminds us the classic reflections of David Lowenthal: *"In the past one feels at home. One comes from that home, where the ones before him are, to go back one day and become one of them, a home for those that are to come. Think of it, that home is in one and one is that home. That's why the past is cozy. Our awareness of the past is rooted in memory. Memory permeates all aspects of our life. Even our present is largely dedicated to memory, insofar as we spend a great part of it in fortifying our ties with the past. Our memory of the past is an indispensable condition for our sense of identity."* (p.177)

Greek Symbolism, 1920s poetic generation, urban spaces, and the poetry of Caesar Emmanouil are reflected in Fotiny Christakoudy–Konstantinidou's study *Urban Space in the Greek Poetry of the 1920s (Based on examples from Caesar Emmanouil's works)*. In her research, F. Christakoudy–Konstantinidou is offering a "glance" on the poetic viewpoint of the Athenian urban life by arriving to conclusions, among which, e.g., regarding Caesar Emmanouil: *"the neo-symbolism of Greek poetry tends to be transformed from eccentrically descriptive and gravitating towards exoticism into deeply lyrical."* (p. 217)

The paper of Joanna M. Spassova-Dikova discusses issues regarding the relationship between theatre as a "living art" and urban culture on the way of Europeanization and Modernization of Bulgarian culture after the Liberation.

Another interesting research in the field of art and cultural studies is presented by Alexandra Milanova in an article on opera and urban modernity in Bulgaria, since the late 19th century: *"By studying the inception and development of opera theatres in particular Bulgarian cities, and through its focus on the liaison between music and localities, this paper should add to the vast body of scholarship in social and cultural history to do with the city and the meaning of urbanity in Bulgaria."*

The study of Valeria Fol presents some documents of historic interest from the personal archive of Nikolay Fol, Director of the Varna People's Theatre in 1943–1944, on the modus operandi of the theatre during WWII and its transformation into a symbol of modernization and Europeanization.

Another article, that of Maria Levkova-Muchinova, presents the characteristics of the social and property profile of the Bulgarian economic elite in Plovdiv in the 19th century through the history of a local wealthy family, the Chalakovs.

Royal funerals, posthumous honours, the peculiarities of funeral culture, and civic ceremonies of the sovereign families in Bulgarian cities after the Liberation (in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century) are the topics of Valentina Vaseva's study.

Georgeta Nazarska focuses on the significance of the few women who were awarded the Honorary sign of Sofia for their charity work in the social space of the Bulgarian capital in the first half of the 20th century.

Elmira Vassileva analyses several aspects of the Protestant activities of the American missionaries - evangelistic, educational, literary, medical, and relief work, among the Bulgarians in Bitola (Monastir) in the 19th and the early 20th century.

The article of Antoaneta Balcheva reflects the ideas of the Bulgarian intelligentsia about the various images of the city of Zagreb as an administrative and cultural capital, as a collective image of Croatian history and cultural identity, that connects the political and spiritual history of Bulgarians and Croats.

The city and the urban development have a central role in the perception of history, culture, and traditions of every modern society. The spirit of the surroundings leaves an identifying trace in human perceptions. It is no surprise that many cities that constituted important cultural and social centres, were called not by their actual name, but simply “The City” and become a symbol of national identity and source of inspiration.

This interdisciplinary volume, using different approaches and methods, contributes to the further understanding of the Balkan cities and their influence on the history, and socio-cultural life and the literature of the Balkans.