

REZENSIONEN

MAREK JAKOUBEK: *Vojvodovo, edno nepoznato češko selo v Bălgarija* [Vojvodovo – Unknown Czech Village in Bulgaria]. Sofia: Paradigma 2013. 211 p. ISBN 78-80-261-0236-6.

After a publication about Vojvodovo in my blog about tourism in Bulgaria and the Balkans, I was contacted by a Czech scholar, Marek Jakoubek, who has been researching the unique village of Vojvodovo in northwestern Bulgaria. Marek Jakoubek, who is currently the head of the Institute of Ethnology at the Charles University in Prague, is the author of a number of publications detailing the village's interesting history. One of his latest works, published in Bulgarian, is the book "Vojvodovo – Unknown Czech Village in Bulgaria" (Sofia 2013), which is a multi-faceted collection of seven articles and studies completed with a fascinating personal foreword and a neat timeline of Vojvodovo's history. The topics in the book cover many fields: for example, the history of the establishment of the village, or the character of the villagers' religiosity in separate essays on the individual ethnic or religious groups who settled in Vojvodovo.

What makes Vojvodovo so special is that it was founded by ethnic Czech settlers in 1900, when about twenty evangelical families from the Czech village of Svatá Helena in Banat established their new home there. It was built from scratch, at a place called "Gladno pole", 15 kilometres from the Danubian town Orjahovo (chapter "Săsek – a forgotten Czech village in Bulgaria", pp. 19–38). The Czechs, being devoted Protestants, founded and built there a specific community of 'believers' that lasted for fifty years. Their village differed from the others not only in its religion and language, but also in its architectural style, methods of land cultivation, costumes, songs and cuisine.

Jakoubek's book focuses on many important aspects of this small, but vibrant Czech community in Bulgaria's history and daily life. It is fascinating, for example, to read how hundreds of Czech colonists transported all of their belongings on hand-made rafts on the Danube all the way from the Banat in what is today western Romania. In the years following, the village of Vojvodovo was, by the way, referred to from the outside as the "Banat village" (*banatsko selo*).

Shortly after settling in Bulgaria, most of the Vojvodovo Czechs joined the local Methodist church. Religion, with a heightened morality and an ascetic lifestyle, determined everyday village life, as well as the relationships with other ethnic and religious groups. Vojvodovo residents withdrew from all worldly delights, including dancing, singing (except for religious songs), theatre, drinking alcohol, or smoking. Music and dancing were forbidden even during wedding parties. In fact, one of their few forms of entertainment was to go to the train station after Sunday's church service, wearing their exotically foreign folk costumes and colourful dresses. There, they would sing in Czech for the entertainment of the stunned train passengers, who would often ask the engine driver to delay the departure for just one more song (chapter "The Czechs of Vojvodovo through the eyes of their neighbours", pp. 49–50)!

Vojvodovo villagers were renowned for their religious fervour, as well as for the exemplarity of their farming technologies and administration of communal matters (pp. 45–49). Vojvodovo was admired by the local Bulgarian population as well as the Bulgarian state administration which proclaimed the village, in the words of a Bulgarian minister, exemplary. Vojvodovo enjoys this kind of reputation in the Bulgarian regional context and within Bulgarian academic discourse even to the present day.

It is remarkable that the Czechs in Vojvodovo, while they dominated the village in numbers, shared it with Slovaks, Banat Bulgarians, Serbs and other nationalities, most of whom were colonists from Austria-Hungary (chapter “On the Paulicians of Vojvodovo”, p. 146). Vojvodovo did not form a miniature melting pot, however. The Czechs were zealous Evangelicals who largely stayed within their own community and even kept their ties with urban Czech settlers in Bulgaria (of which there were many at the turn of the century) to a minimum. On the other hand, they preferred to marry people of the same faith (Protestants), without any regard to their ethnic origin.

The last chapter of this particular Czech village was written after World War II, when the majority of Vojvodovo Czechs relocated back to Czechoslovakia. Resettlement was part of wider post-war migratory processes organized under international agreements. Vojvodovo Czechs, successful farmers, decided for relocation because they feared the coming collectivization of agriculture in Bulgaria. Later many regretted their decision, because in Czechoslovakia they were neither allowed to run private farms, nor to practice freely their faith. Today, Bulgarian Czechs and their descendants live in several villages in South Moravia, and many still consider Bulgaria their homeland (chapter “Vojvodovo calendar”, p. 196). They love to remember and cherish their beautiful memories of Bulgaria, a country which once accepted their ancestors with open arms, and offered them the opportunity to establish a new existence.

Vojvodovo, in turn, to this day boasts an architectural style more akin to that of the Czech lands and Central Europe rather than the Balkans. Though the Czech community was resettled to Czechoslovakia by the 1950s, its architectural (and to some extent cultural) heritage is still largely intact – however, efforts to preserve this jewel must be undertaken. Jakoubek’s *Vojvodovo – Unknown Czech Village in Bulgaria*, is an excellent source to getting know this tiny piece of the Czech Republic in the forgotten Bulgarian Northwest. It is written with great attention to detail and rich in information.

Sofia

TODOR BOŽINOV

THEDE KAHL, MICHAEL METZELTIN: *Sprachtypologie*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2015. 200 p. ISBN 978-3-447-10442-5.

Comme le précise le sous-titre, cet ouvrage est «Ein Methoden- und Arbeitsbuch für Balkanologen, Romanisten und allgemeine Sprachwissenschaftler». À vrai dire, ce sont surtout les deux premières catégories qui sont concernées, car les spécialistes de linguistique générale apprendront peu de choses à la lecture du livre.