

PARTICIPATION OF THE GYPSIES (ROMA) IN THE BALKAN WAR 1912-1913

Velcho Krastev¹, Evgenia Ivanova²

¹ Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum - BAS

² Regional Museum of History - Stara Zagora

tehnitari@abv.bg; eivanova@nbu.bg

Abstract. *According to the Tărnovo Constitution and Bulgaria's military legislation, Gypsies in the Principality of Bulgaria (1878-1908) and the Tsardom of Bulgaria (1908-1947) served in the Army as all other subjects of Bulgaria. During the Balkan War (1912-1913) mobilisation, the boys born between 1866 and 1892 were levied in both the regular army and the army of volunteers. There were Gypsies among the conscripted.*

Gypsies, together with all other soldiers, took part in many battles, memorable for their regiments and battle glory of Bulgaria's Army. Some of the soldiers' military files trace the whole battle history of their regiment during the war. The number of those killed, wounded or who died because of diseases and wounds was not small. Gypsies who died were buried together with the other Bulgarian soldiers. Those who fought bravely were awarded military honours, raised in rank and took junior field-grade positions.

Key words: Gypsies, Army of Bulgaria, infantry regiment, Balkan War

The aim of this contribution is to outline the Gypsies' presence in the Bulgaria's army and their participation in the First Balkan War (1912-1913). According to the Tărnovo Constitution and Bulgaria's military legislation, Gypsies in the Principality of Bulgaria (1878-1908) and the Tsardom of Bulgaria (1908-1947) served in the Army in all types of military forces as all other subjects of Bulgaria. Being trained soldiers, they were called up and took part in the wars of Bulgaria from the second decade of the twentieth century. It is an issue that has remained unattended to by scholarship so far. An arbitrary reference in the monograph of the philosopher Boyko Mizov *The Bulgarian Gypsies: Everyday Life, Psychology, Culture* is probably one of the very few exceptions. And Blagovest Nyagulov – in the ninth volume of the History of Bulgaria (issued by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), in the section devoted to ethnic minorities – briefly addressed the recruitment of a part of the Gypsies into the regular army and their participation in the wars as an aspect of the process of their integration into the Bulgarian civil nation (Мизов, 2006-II: 218; История на България, 2012: 569).

Our research on the participation of the Gypsies in the First Balkan War counts on a considerable amount and variety of documents and other sources. Due to the limited volume of this contribution only the military formations/units recruited from

¹ This article was translated by Dr. Yordan Lyutskanov; the translation was edited by Mr. Lubomir Stoytchev.

regions with high density of Gypsy population are attended to here. We testify the enrolment of Gypsies on personal level basing on different archival data – alphabetical regimental roster books, order books, regimental diaries, other official documents, personal archives. When possible, we inform about the sub-ethnic identity of the recruited Gypsies.

We use the ethnonym “Gypsies”, for this is the name under which this ethnos appears in the particular sources, i.e. the sources we have based our research on. The term “Roma” was brought into circulation much later – in 1971.

The dates are given according to the “Old Style” (that is, according to the Julian calendar).

BUILDING A MASS BULGARIAN ARMY

The Bulgarian statehood was restored as an outcome of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 (usually called by native sources “Liberation War”). The Treaty of Berlin being signed (1 July, 1878), a new state emerged on the map of Europe, the Principality of Bulgaria. It was flanked from the south by an autonomous Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia that comprised what was known as Northern Thrace. The Bulgarians of Macedonia and Southern Thrace remained under direct Ottoman rule; Northern Dobrudzha was ceded to Romania and the Sandzhak of Nish to Serbia. The fragmentation of the Bulgarian ethnic territory, i.e. the territories populated by Bulgarian ethnical majority disturbed the spiritual, educational and economical unity of Bulgarians that had been built during the National Revival period. The Bulgarians’ struggle to maintain their unity and to gain political and territorial unification left a deep imprint on the history of the Third Bulgarian State.

With the restoration of the Bulgarian state, building one of its institutions, the army, began. The legal aspects of the Bulgarian armed forces were an object of interest in the Constitution and in other early legislative acts. The Tŕrnovo Constitution, adopted by the First Great National Assembly in April 1879, endorsed the principle of mass conscription, disregarding ethnicity and religion. On 15th of December 1891 the first Constitution of Armed Forces Act in the Principality was enacted. According to it, the Bulgarian army was divided into three categories: forces under arms, reserve forces, and militia. The total eligible to carry guns male population aged between 20 and 45 was subject to enlistment (*Държавен вестник/ The State Gazette*, No. 36 from 15th of February 1892). The amended and complemented version use of the Act from 1897 stipulated the aim of building a mass army, and the principle of compulsory military service requires that all the eligible male population should undergo a military training.

In the wake of the 20th century, given the still unsolved national question, the aggravation of the military-political situation in the Balkans and the increasing danger of a pan-European war, a reform of the Bulgaria’s Army became more and more necessary. Further development of the army was strongly stimulated by the new Constitution of Armed Forces Act adopted on 20th of December, 1903 (*Държавен*