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### **THE SETTLEMENT ETHNICITY STRUCTURE AND THE CONVENTS OF THE RILA MONASTERY (THE EXAMPLE OF GABROVO AND NEVROKOP)**

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**Abstract:** *The paper analyses the impact ethnicity structure of on the process of refusal to accept monks of the Rila Monastery and the closure of its convents in the Bulgarian settlements. Two urban centres are under consideration, Gabrovo and Nevrokop, characterised by a different ethnicity structure. While Gabrovo is a purely Bulgarian settlement, Nevrokop has a mixed population. The author analyses the intensity of the processes and the influence of the different ethnic groups with their economic and political possibilities to achieve the desired results.*

**Keywords:** Historical Demography; Bulgarian Revival; migrations; monks; monasteries; Ottoman Empire.

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During the first half of 1860s, just after the Easter Action in Istanbul (03 April 1860), a movement was initiated which consisted in the refusal of the Bulgarians from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople spreading across the whole of the Bulgarian ethnic area. Part of this struggle was associated with the expulsion of the taxidiotes (i.e., the Orthodox monks seconded to convents or raising funds, *Translator's note*) and the closure of the convents belonging to the Jerusalem and Mount Athos (aka '*Holy Mountain*' as adopted by the Eastern and Southern Slavic languages, *Translator's note*) because of their affiliation to the Istanbul Patriarchy. This struggle also involved the Rila Monastery's clergymen. This was owed to the policy of the holy coenoby over the reference period, which showed hesitations regarding the struggle for church independence.

This paper analyses the movement of the Bulgarians in two of the main centres: Gabrovo and Nevrokop (today's Gotse Delchev). The result of this struggle was the recall of the taxidiotes and the closure of the convents belonging to the Rile Monastery. The background to the expulsion of the clergymen in Gabrovo was the Bulgarian municipality. Their reasons were exposed in the letters written by the last Rile taxidiote, the hieromonk Cassian. In Nevrokop, the removal of the clergyman Christophorus was connected with the sharp reaction of the representatives of the Constantinople Patriarchate and specifically of the Metropolitan of Drama – Agatanghel, against the presence of the Rila clergy. Over the reference period, the movement for autonomous Bulgarian Church entered its decisive and critical stage and this also impacted the Rile Monastery, which was then connected with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The proposed documents show that the Bulgarians in these settlements could not rely on the support of the holy coenoby, and at the same time deprived themselves of highly educated and dogmatically prepared representatives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia. Despite the motives and actions in Gabrovo and Nevrokop, the result was the same: the taxidiotes in both settlements were recalled and the convents belonging to the monastery were closed.

Usually, the Bulgarian historiography considers the concrete actions and it is accepted that they are connected first of all with the church independence struggle. This paper traces the impacts of the ethnic structures featured by these two settlements over the development of the above mentioned processes.

During the Bulgarian National Revival, Gabrovo was a purely Bulgarian settlement. According to travellers' opinions, this township had 1000 houses in the first half of the 19th century, while their number was 1000 to 1100 by 1862. According to the Ottoman statistics, 1869 saw a grown number of Christian households and it was 1367, houses that belonged to Christian population, whose number was nearly 7000 people. Moreover, the first ever census conducted in the Principality of Bulgaria in 1879 featured results demonstrating a growth in the number of the Bulgarian population, which was already 7958 (Tsonchev 1996: 22–26, 256–257). Frenski 1981: 245). This manifests the fact that the town was characterised by a gradual rise of its Bulgarian population, which was an active actor in the church independence struggle. Gabrovo and its district had hardly any Muslim population: until 1876, the whole of the kaza contained an exceptionally low number of Muslim households, 25, while the number of Muslim dwellers in the same area in 1879 was merely 14. The analysis of the ethnic structure imposes the conclusion that there were no obstacles

to develop the main National Revival processes in both Gabrovo and its surrounding settlements.

In Gabrovo, as early as the second half of the 18th century, the Rila Monastery had its own convent and regularly sent taxidiotes, who were also some of the first teachers in the ‘monastic schools’ (meaning “schools at monasteries”, however, starting from early 19th century appeared some private schools, also called ‘cell schools’ as the premises the classes were given were either monastic cells or small, cell-like classrooms in buildings other than churches or monasteries, hereinafter: ‘cell schools’, Translator’s note). The convent was located in the centre of the settlement, In Gabrovo, as early as the second half of the 18th century, the Rila Monastery had its own convent and regularly sent taxidiotes, who were also some of the first teachers in the ‘monastic schools’ (meaning “schools at monasteries”, however, starting from early 19th century appeared some private schools, also called ‘cell schools’ as the premises the classes were given were either monastic cells or small, cell-like classrooms in buildings other than churches or monasteries, hereinafter: ‘cell schools’, Translator’s note). The convent was located in the centre of the settlement, right by the Assumption Church. Even in the first half of the 19th century it enjoyed authority and trust among the Gabrovo society (Tsonchev 1929: 352). This was also confirmed by the long stay of the clergyman Sylvester in the convent as he was there for 19 years (1850–1869) (Regional Museum Archive, no. 850, no. 853).

The closure of the convents was part of Bulgarians’ struggle for church independence. The beginning of the repressive actions was set with the ostentatious expulsion of the Vatopedi clergyman Grigory from Gabrovo in the early 1860s, which was a widely commented event among the Bulgarian society (Tsonchev 1929: 355; Indzhova 2013: 215–216, 220–221). The Revival press thoroughly reflected and showed those actions of the Gabrovo Bulgarian municipality, which were perceived as a model for the elimination of unwanted Greek taxidiotes in the Bulgarian lands. Historiography has numerous examples of those actions.

The sharpness of the struggle and the decisions of the Gabrovo Bulgarian municipality were dictated only by the attitude of the Bulgarians towards the Rila Monastery. In the letters of the last Rila taxidiote, Cassian to the monastery, one can trace the mechanism of taking over the functions of the Rila Monastery’s clergy. One of the measures set by the Gabrovo Bulgarian municipality was to impose a high *taksid* (i.e., ‘secondment of a clergyman’, *Translator’s note*) fees. Once the interrelations of the Bulgarians with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople were broken off, the *taksid* fees became payable were to be paid to the respective communities. In this regard, in a letter from Gabrovo, the clergyman Cassian (10.12.1869) wrote to the abbot of the Rila Monastery that the Gabrovo Bulgarian municipality had set the fee for the *taksid* in the amount of 1500 kuruş. At the same time, it wanted <him> to pay a fee for the previous three years, when a representative of the monastery in the city was hieromonk (a monk who is also a priest in the Orthodox Church, *Translator’s note*) Sylvester (Regional Museum Archive no. 306, no. 307; Pencheva 2017). The preserved letters clearly show the seizure of part of the religious functions and especially the sacrament of “confession” by the taxidiotes and the burdening of the priests with this duty. Some rituals, such as the water consecration ritual, also became the prerogative of priests. The letters show a struggle between those “old” and those