

From a comedy of evidence to epiphany: Jovan Cvijić and Fernand Braudel on being Bulgarian

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Abstract. The present article is a journey through texts of several authors in trying to find out the sources and reasons for accusing Bulgarians being “less gifted than other people, slow thinking or clumsy”, attributed by Machiel Kiel (1985, 352) to the French historian Fernand Braudel (1972-1973). During the journey we find out that the main source and argumentation for this claim comes from the Serbian historian Jovan Cvijić (1918) whom Braudel cited as if congenially on the subject. After establishing the facts on file in dealing with the problem we come to two conclusions that point in radically different directions. The first of them amounts to expected confirmation - that prejudices persist whatever the evidence. Wherever there is an appropriate intentional stance, corresponding means for its fulfillment will be found or forged. The second conclusion, however, is rather surprising - that by providing and apparently relying on a falsified evidence one can nevertheless come to high apprehension of what remained firm below the surface of historical dynamics that went on for millennia for Bulgarians in Bulgaria even in such troublesome case as theirs involving a ‘clash of civilizations’ with Ottomans.

Keywords: Bulgarian history, Bulgarian identity, concepts of history, profane and eloquent in history, chronotopes and styles of historical narrative

1. Coda: The multi-ply ambivalent accusation of Machiel Kiel with citation of authority to justify his case

In the Conclusion section of his book dealing with the cultural history of Bulgaria in the Balkan and Ottoman context during 1360/70-1700 AD the Dutch historian Machiel Kiel made the following rather controversial claim:

That the Bulgarians are less gifted than other people, slow thinking or clumsy (Braudel) has more to do with our own prejudices than with the actual situation. It is sufficiently refuted by the majestic creations of the First Bulgarian empire (Kiel 1985, 352).

In this short citation consisting of two sentences from the coda of his monograph Kiel made a set of identifications and assertions that look challenging - each on its own and compared to each other. To start from the second one, the overall assertion in it appears to be that of high recognition of the historical standing of the First Bulgarian Kingdom during the time it existed between 683 and 1014.¹ The attribution looks superb, as far as the “majestic creations of the kingdom of Bulgarians” are concerned. The overall purpose of this sentence, if put in the context of the first one, is to provide some kind of a balancing compensatory eulogy for the highly negative previous one, which is no less superlative, but in the opposite direction - in despising Bulgarians.

The first sentence, instead, is much more problematic from the point of view who is asserting what. In its first clause Bulgarians are identified as “less gifted than other people, slow thinking or clumsy” and this opinion is ascribed to the famous French ‘immortal’ Fernand Braudel.² In the second clause Kiel questions this uncomplimentary opinion while at the same time identifying himself as belonging to the camp of those who believe in this ‘prejudice’, as he himself qualifies it. With three successive ‘turns of the table’ in two sentences we tend to feel lost who is supposed to say and to assert what about Bulgaria and Bulgarians and where is the truth in between them.

There are certain independent reasons to believe that Machiel Kiel indeed belongs to the camp of those specialists in Bulgarian, Balkan and Ottoman history that are prejudiced against Bulgarians if we get outside his own paying lip service recognition. The overall point of his cited book is to justify the thesis that Bulgaria performed worst of all other Balkan societies during the historic period between 1360 and 1700 AD, and before that - during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1184-1396 AD). In particular, he (this time without hiding behind certain authority’s shoulders) explicitly expressed a strong negative opinion about the intellectual capacities of Bulgarians along the following lines:

Only one Bulgarian-born Muslim was ever entrusted with the Grand Vizieral seal and this was in the 18th century ... And from the many Bulgarian-born youths selected for Ottoman service, very few rose to be provincial commanders or the like⁶ [6 Because this selection was based on the talent of the boys this tells us something. We come across multitudes of Albanians, Serbs, Georgians, Hungarians, etc. but very few Bulgarians, also in the other functions (in top Ottoman administration and executive structures...)] (Kiel 1985, 292).

“Bulgarian-born Muslims” is a widely ranging category, starting with boys taken as *devshirme* ‘blood tax’ for Janissaries from the Christian population of the Ottoman Balkans up to the end of 17th century, going through forced Is-

¹ The qualification of the First Bulgarian Kingdom as ‘empire’ would sound to a Bulgarian ear as self-aggrandizing, although it is used in the English professional terminology on the subject, as one can ascertain from the citation of Kiel provided here.

² According to the French tradition the members of the Académie Française were dubbed ‘immortals’.

lamization and finishing with voluntary acceptance of Islam by the members of Christian population. The only Grand Vizier of Bulgarian origin, identified by Kiel as Kalafat Mehmed Pasha, who was in charge 1778-1779 (Kiel 1985, 292), was, in any case, not recruited as *devshirme*, as he lived during the second half of the 18th century. Kiel, as one can ascertain from aforementioned citation, is almost explicit as far the “talent of the boys” selected from Bulgaria for Ottoman services was concerned, compared to those taken elsewhere from the imperial territories in Europe and the Caucasus. It becomes thus obvious that he indeed shares the belief that “Bulgarians are less gifted than other people, slow thinking or clumsy” although he refuses explicitly to accept personal responsibility for this claim as formulated, and even includes himself among those that find this opinion a ‘prejudice’, in the respectable company of Fernand Braudel to be sure. We will leave for another occasion the discussion why Machiel Kiel himself found appropriate to cherish this and other prejudices about Bulgaria and Bulgarians and concentrate instead on the reasons Braudel found possible to have such an opinion about us, if at all.

2. Looking for the reasons Fernand Braudel, purportedly, had found Bulgarians “less gifted, slow thinking or clumsy”

Braudel (1973) dedicated four and half pages of his monumental two-volume work to Bulgarians and Bulgaria. What he has to say about them he owes mainly to the book of Serbian self-pronounced ‘anthropogeographer’ Jovan Cvijić (1918) and several German scholars that wrote on the subject before the Second World War. The only Bulgarian author he used as a source is Sakâzov (1928). He also cites the famous Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov, but secondhand from the book of Cvijić and in the following context:

The latter [Ottoman landed aristocracy; M. S.] lived comfortably off the labour of the patient and hard-working beast of burden, the Bulgarian peasant, the typical plainsman, slave of the rich, harshly disciplined, ground down by work, thinking only of his next meal, as his compatriots describe Baja Ganje, the peasant of Bulgarian folklore. Aleko Konstantinov paints him [Baja Ganje; M. S.] as coarse, ‘brutal to the core’. ‘The Bulgarians’, he says, ‘eat voraciously and are utterly preoccupied with the food they are absorbing. They would not interrupt their meal if three hundred dogs were killing each other all around them. Sweat stands out in their brows ready to fall into their plates’ [Cvijić, 1918, 481]. In 1917, a war correspondent penned a hardly more flattering portrait: ‘They make excellent soldiers, disciplined, very brave without being foolhardy, obstinate without being enthusiastic. Theirs is the only army that has no marching songs. The men march forward dogged, silent, uncomplaining, indifferent, cruel without violence and victorious without joy; they never sing. From their build and deportment, one has an immediate impression of obtuseness, of insensitivity and clumsiness. They look like unfinished human beings; as if they had

not been created individually but as it were mass produced in battalions. Slow in understanding, they are hardworking, persevering, eager for gain and very thrifty [*ibid.*, 481] (Braudel 1973, 778).³

The French original of the passage of Jovan Cvijić (1918) from which Braudel cites several critical lines in marshalling evidence about Bulgarians runs as follows:

La population est saine et forte. Malgré le régime séculaire des cilly elle est restée laborieuse. Les Bulgares sont d'infatigables travailleurs, mais ils sont grossiers et vulgaires à l'extrême. L'écrivain bulgare Aleko Konstantinov, dans son ouvrage *Baja Ganjôy* dit de ses compatriotes qu'ils sont aujourd'hui encore «crus et brutaux, grossiers et communs jusqu'à la moelle» «Les Bulgares mangent voracement, ne s'occupant que de ce qu'ils absorbent; ils ne se dérangeraient pas, quand trois cents chiens s'entre-tueraient à leurs côtés. La sueur qui leur perle du front menace de tomber dans

³ We cite from the English translation of the monumental book of Braudel (1973). This work has been also translated from French into Bulgarian. The quality of the rendition, however, is not the best possible: „Последната [поземната аристокрация; М. С.] живее охолно на гърба на това търпеливо и работливо гобиче, готово да понесе всичко, каквото е българският селянин, истински човек от равнината, роб на големците, дискриминиран, затъпял от работа, загрижен за прехраната си; такъв, каквото сънародниците му описват бай Ганьо. Алеко Константинов ни го представя с дебелашки обноски и „груб до мозъка на костите“. „Българинът, казва той, не се шегува, триста псета да се сгавят, не могат го заглуши. Едри канку пот замрежиха челото и като че се стремяха да рукнат в чинията му.“ През 1917 г. един военен кореспондент му прави не по-ласкав портрет: „Те са отлични войници, дисциплинирани; много смели, но не дръзки; упорити, но без ентузиазъм. Това е единствена армия, която не пее строеви песни. Хората пристъпят вироглави, тихи, неуморни, безразлични. Жестоки без насилие и победители без радост; те не пеят. В стойката им и в поведението им веднага се забелязва нещо грубо, просташко и недодялано. Това се несвършени хора. Те като че ли, така да се каже, са правени вкупом, но много наведнъж. Те схващат бавно, работливи са, търпеливи в усилията, алчни за печалба, много пестеливи...“ (Braudel 2000, 121-124; transl. from French by Veselina Pieva). In this translation we find expressions like *пристъпят вироглави* “proceed in a headstrong way” for what we have in the English translation of the French original as “march forward dogged”, *победители без радост* “winners without joy” for “victorious without joy”, *несвършени хора* “imperfect people” for “unfinished human beings”, etc. And at the basis of all of these inconsistencies come the vague insinuations of the anonymous journalist himself, who spoke about, e.g., being *cruel without violence*, etc. As one can ascertain, the circuit of errors, misunderstandings and misconceptions closes thus in a circle - from French to English and Bulgarian and back to English. The main source of falsification is to be found in the vaguely descriptive anecdotal data from the single meeting with marching Bulgarian soldiers of an anonymous war correspondent of a newspaper, as well as in the identification due to Cvijić of the literary character of Bai Ganyo with the Bulgarians in general (“the Bulgarians”, “Les Bulgares”) in the misquoted citation from Aleko Konstantinov. In the Bulgarian translation of Veselina Pieva, in this place appears „българинът“ in third person singular, i.e., “the Bulgarian”. As worded in the context, it still may lead to the false generalized interpretation. As we will shortly see, A. Konstantinov uses „българинът“ in his own text as a contextual synonym of Bai Ganyo himself.

leurs assiettes.» Tant de plats nous étaient offerts «que je me suis hâté de manger à en crever» dit Baja Ganje (c'est le sobriquet par lequel les Bulgares se désignent familièrement entre eux). Aleko Konstantinov a parfaitement décrit ce qu'il appelle «les turpitudes et les bassesses de la vie bulgare». On nous permettra de renvoyer pour plus de détails à son ouvrage (Cvijić 1918, 481).⁴

The second testimony of an anonymous war correspondent of the newspaper *Figaro* is, however, not on the same p. 481, as given by Braudel (1973), but in a different place in the book of Cvijić. It is again taken by him as a trustworthy source on the subject of the nature of Bulgarian mentality in terms of anthropology:

Un correspondant du *Figaro* écrit dans ce journal en 1917: «Les Bulgares sont d'excellents soldats, disciplinés, très braves, mais sans témérité, obstinés, mais sans enthousiasme. C'est la seule armée qui ne sache pas de chansons de route. Les hommes avancent, têtus, silencieux, durs à la peine, indifférents, cruels sans violence et vainqueurs sans joie; ils ne chantent pas! Dans leur structure générale, dans leur façon de se tenir, de marcher, on remarque tout de suite je ne sais quoi d'épais, de gourde, de mal raboté. Ce sont des hommes inachevés. Ils n'ont pas l'air, pour ainsi dire, d'avoir été faits individuellement, mais à la grosse, par bataillons. Lents à comprendre, ils sont laborieux, patients dans l'effort, âpres au gain, très économes. Ils sont dénués, à un point surprenant, de tout instinct spéculatif, de tout pouvoir et de tout désir de progrès, d'amélioration morale.» (Cvijić 1918, 487-488).⁵

Braudel didn't cite some additional evidence marshalled by Cvijić in order further to strengthen his case against Bulgarians:

K. Jirecek, savant éminent, qui fut ministre de l'Instruction publique en Bulgarie, écrit: «Je suis bulgarophile, mais je sais que beaucoup de savants et d'hommes d'Etat, en Europe, considèrent les Bulgares comme un peuple fort, mais sans aucune valeur intellectuelle». Enfin, le ministre hongrois de Kalay, écrit «qu'on exagère le mérite des Bulgares, que le talent politique d'un Stamboulov reste isolé, et que les intellectuels bulgares sont sans talent» (Cvijić 1918, 488).

As a source for these statements Cvijić points to an article by prof. Jirecek “publié dans la *Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung* et traduit dans la *Samouprava* du 14 septembre 1914”.⁶ This detail is worth mentioning, as an article from a German newspaper was found possible to be reproduced after the beginning of the

⁴ This passage is also to be found in the Serbian edition of the book, as presented and discussed below.

⁵ This passage is also to be found in the Serbian edition of the book, as presented and discussed below.

⁶ *Samouprava* “Self-Government” was the daily newspaper of the Radical Party that led the Kingdom of Serbia through its Golden Age (1903-1914), as well as through the First World War.

First World War (on 28 July 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia) in a Serb newspaper at a time when the Kingdom of Serbia was already in war with Germany.

It hardly deserves mentioning that such sweeping generalizations in terms of national mentality as given above are, to say the least, highly speculative and opinionated, of dubious origin and questionable authority in order to be at all considered worth of a qualified refutation. If there is something remarkable about them, it is the point that they were accepted as credible and reproduced again and again. Our point of interest in providing and discussing them in certain detail is to be found, however, on a different plane.

3. The anthropogeographic case of Jovan Cvijić against Bulgarians and its reception by Braudel and beyond

The motivation of Cvijić for presenting Bulgarians the way he did was straightforward - to prove his case that they are a nation with lately emerged national consciousness (compared, e.g., to Serbs) that furthermore brought together people with different and/or unclear ethnic background. What was shared and united them was the *raya* "serf" psychology of blind obedience and low culture. It is with this mind-set that he wrote the passages that attracted the attention of Braudel. It is also both curious and suggestive to acknowledge that the style of argumentation and language of these accusations comes in a different light if worded not in French and/or English, but in Serbian and translated from it into Bulgarian:

Становништво је здраво и снажно. И поред вековног читлучког облика привреде остали су радни и вредни. Бугари су неуморни радници, али су неотесани и прости до крајњих граница. Бугарски писац Алеко Константинов у своме делу „Баја Гање“ каже за своје земљаке, да су још и данас „неотесани и сурови, груби и прости до сржи...“ „У јелу су, вели он, прождрљиви и том приликом само о њему мисле и не узнемиравају се: срце Бугарин не шали се, триста паса да се покољу не би га загушили. Уз то му са лица падају грашкe зноја“. „Толико нам је јела било спремно, да сам се журио да једем док не пукнем“, вели Баја Гање (ово је подругљив надимак којим се Бугари између себе зову) Алеко Константинов је савршено описао оно што он назива „срамотом и нискошћу бугарског живота.“ Нека нам је допуштено, да ради више појединости упутимо читаоца на његово дело (Cvijić 1931, 146-147).

“Населението е здраво и силно. И въпреки вековната спашийска организација на стопанството е останало трудољубиво и прилежно. Българите са неуморни работници, но са негодялани и прости до крайност. Българският писател Алеко Константинов в своята творба „Бай Ганьо“ казва за своите земляци, че и днес все още са „негодялани и сурови, груби и прости в крайна степен...“ „В храненето, казва той, са лакоми, (в такава ситуация) мислят

само за храната и нищо друго не ги занимава: сърба българинът, не се шегува, трисста псета да се сдавят, не могат го заглуши. Егри kanku пом пагат от челото му.“ „Толкова храна беше приготвена за нас, че бързах да се наям до пръсване“, казва Бай Ганьо (това е подигравателен прякор, с който българите се наричат помежду си). Алеко Константинов е описал свършено онова, което нарича „срам и низост в българския живот“. Позволяваме си, за повече подробности, да насочим читателя към неговото произведение” (Cvijić 1931, 146-147; transl. by Rositsa Stefcheva).

We can ascertain that the interface between the language of the historical narrative and the context of accepting it as one to be identified with or rejecting it as one that is written by foreigners can acquire quite surprising turns migrating from French to English, to Serbian and finally to Bulgarian.

The citation by Cvijić from the literary work of Aleko Konstantinov was also not immune to certain manipulation in form and content. If we compare his citation with the Bulgarian original of “Bai Ganyo”, the passage attributing to Bulgarians the habit of “eating voraciously”, etc. runs as follows:

И наустина, бай Ганьо разлѳму супата си до макваз степен, цѳото един непривикнал човек би се отровил. И почна да сърба; ама сърба българинът, не се шегува, трисста псета да се сдавят, не могат го заглуши. Егри kanku пом му замрежиха челото и като че се стремяха да рукнат в чинията му. Бай Ганьо сръбне веднъж откъм върха на лъжицата, остави лъжицата и затисне лѳтата влага с два-три залъка хляб; пак вземе лъжицата, сръбне супа, смръкне с носа си навътре и пак два-три залъка хляб (Konstantinov 2005, 61).

In the first translation into English of the book of Aleko Konstantinov that appeared recently in the USA this passage is rendered in the following way:

And indeed, Bai Ganyo spiced up the soup so much that person unaccustomed to it would have been poisoned. He began to slurp it up. And when a Bulgarian slurps, it’s no joke. Three hundred dogs at each other’s throats can’t drown him out. Big beads of sweat broke out on Bai Ganyo’s forehead and were ready to gush down into his bowl. He’d slurp once from the tip of the spoon, then he’d set the spoon down and quench the spicy liquid with two or three mouthfuls of bread; again he’s take up the spoon, slurp the soup, sniffle, and again, two or three mouthfuls of bread (Konstantinov 2010, 53).

Both from the original, as well as from the competent translation it becomes obvious that the behavioural pattern is attributed to Bai Ganyo as a remarkable example of a Bulgarian with bad manners who would slurp whenever there is occasion and opportunity to do so. There is certain difference in being an illustrious example of a satirically represented habit of some Bulgarians with low culture to being something all Bulgarians are expected to do as far as they are

identified as such: “The Bulgarians eat voraciously and are utterly preoccupied with the food they are absorbing. They would not interrupt their meal if three hundred dogs were killing each other all around them. Sweat stands out in their brows ready to fall into their plates” (Braudel 1973, 778, citing Cvijić 1918, 481). While the exchange of ‘the Bulgarians’ of Cvijić with ‘a Bulgarian’ may look as an improvement in the English translation of “Bai Ganyo”, it still has similar implication. This way of translation also falsifies in an obvious from linguistic point of view way the original intention of the author of the literary character Bai Ganyo, if we assume that it carries the implication that if we have ‘a Bulgarian’, he would necessarily be inclined to slurp soup the way Bai Ganyo does. The careful inspection of the original shows that *българинът* “the Bulgarian” as a synonym referring back to “Bai Ganyo” in the previous sentence, while carrying out certain insinuation that may be this literary character, is not alone in having this table manner. It is one thing to express certain satirical insinuation and something completely different to interpret this chain of coordinated reference according to the rules of logical necessity as applying to all members of the set “Bulgarians”. It is thus quite remarkable that all authors and translators cited here, were inclined to make a mistake in a comparable direction.

For Cvijić the pattern from the time of the Ottoman rule he identified as *raya* psychology tended to reoccur after Bulgaria acquired independence, including at the time of the Balkan and First World War. Even the fearless performance of the Bulgarian army found appropriate ‘justification’ along the negative lines up to the level of negating the custom of singing together to the Bulgarian soldiers:

Један дописник *Фтара* пише у овоме листу 1917 године: „Бугари су изврсни војници, дисциплиновани, врло храбри, али без смелости, упорни, али без одушевљења. То је једина војска која не зна за песме на маршу. Крећу се погнутих глава, ћутљиви, чврсти према тешкоћама, равнодушни, гневни без жестине и победоци без радости, они не певају! У целокупном њихову склопу, у њихову начину држања и кретања пада одмах у очи нешто као тешко, укочено, рђаво истесано. То су недовршени људи. Чине утисак, да се тако изразимо, као да нису стварани индивидуално, већ у маси, батаљонима. Спори у схватању они су марљиви и истрајни у напорима, лакоми на ђар и врло штедљиви. Лишени су, до невероватног ступња, сваке склоности за размишљањем, сваке способности и сваке жеље за напретком и за моралним побољшањем“ (Cvijić 1931, 180).

“Един кореспондент на *Фтар* пише в сџица вестник през 1917 г.: „Българите са изключителни војници, дисциплинирани, много храбри, но без смелост, упорити, но без ентузијазъм. Това е единствената армия, която не пее, докато марширува. Те се движат с наведени глави, мълчаливи, твърди в изпитанията, равнодушни, гневни, но без ярост, и победители без радост, те не пеят! В цялостното им устройство, в начина, по който се държат и се движат, веднага се забелязва нещо тежко, сковано, зле издзялано. Това са недовършени хора. Оставаят впечатлението, така да се

узразим, че сякаш не са създавани индивидуално, а като цяла маса, на батальони. Бавни в разбирането, те са усърдни и издръжливи в действията си, лакоми за печалба и много пестеливи. Те са лишени в невероятна степен от всякаква склонност към размишление, от всякаква способност и желание за напредък и морално усъвършенстване“ (Cvijić 1931, 180; transl. by Rositsa Stefcheva).

The repetition of the same forged manipulations in different languages contributes by itself making us even more clearly aware to what degree they pile up to false insinuations.

Braudel was very well aware at the time when he wrote his book that still not much was known about the Ottoman past of the Balkan Peninsula: “Balkan historians and geographers have not always judged it with truly scientific detachment - even a Cvijić” (Braudel 1973, 776). Under the circumstances, however, he regarded him as closest to being objectively detached. For this reason Braudel repeatedly relied on his authority. He, for example, cited Cvijić in support of his idea that a civilization “cannot simply transplant itself” (Braudel 1973, 770). This is especially true about a civilization that is based on cultivation of agriculture and that tries to avoid at all costs the possibility to be expelled from the geographic region it is supposed to populate. And exactly this was the case with the peasants that populated Bulgarian lowlands since time immemorial.

In a different place, discussing the history of the people located at the hillside landscape that overlooks the Adriatic, along the edge of the Dinaric Alps, from along Istria up to Ragusa or Antivari Braudel again pays homage to the interpretation of Cvijić (1918) claiming that it is “full of insights” (Braudel 1972, 56). Obviously, the French historian found certain congeniality in the anthropogeographic speculations of his Serbian colleague.

Taking all this into account it still remains somewhat puzzling that Braudel took seriously his claims about Bulgarians and most of all the evidence presented in their ‘favour’ by Cvijić, having in mind their anecdotal content.

Bulgarian historians, instead, found the way of treatment of Bulgaria and Bulgarians in the publications of Cvijić as among the most opinionated and falsifying presentations based on an openly chauvinist stance on his side and it is no surprise to arrive at such an evaluation if he committed mistakes on elementary level in marshalling circumstantial evidence and generalizing sweepingly over it in the examples and accounts provided above. The early reactions of Bulgarian scientists to the anthropogeographic speculations of Cvijić can be found in the works of Ichirkoff (1907) and Miletich (1929, esp. 77-78). From the new literature on the subject one can consult, e.g., Hristov (2004, esp. 46ff.) for further orientation.

In Serbia the role of Jovan Cvijić and the position of his anthropogeographical school in the early stages of the development of ethnology in Serbia were found undeniably significant, but today their influence is considered largely obsolete. In spite of that, in some recent critical reviews, Cvijić’s work and its importance for the development and shaping of ethnology as a discipline in Serbia are contested as highly controversial (cf. Prelić 2014). In this respect, Milenković goes as far as to point out that “Jovan Cvijić, the founder of the academic eth-

nology in Serbia, set the course for development of our humanistic social science towards ethno-phantasmagoria” (Milenković 2008, 50). Further critical assessments of the oeuvre of Cvijić by Serbian specialists can be found, e.g., in Pišev (2009; 2010). Slobodan Naumović is more apologetic instead when he points out that: “[...] supposedly fanatical Balkan Romanticists as Vuk Karadžić or, later, Jovan Cvijić have managed to pass on to posterity [a paradoxical lesson; M.S.]. Namely, even if we do have a non-scientific cause to defend, if we champion it in the most chivalrous way known to us, the results might not be lost to science” (Naumović 1998, 116).

4. The closing statement of Braudel about the right of Bulgarians to live where we find them

Using the false and misleading circumstantial evidence of Cvijić Braudel nonetheless comes at the end of the four and a half pages presentation of Bulgarians and Bulgaria (Braudel 1973, 776-780) to conclusions about their destiny that are opposite in orientation to the ones offered by Cvijić (1918) and later ascribed to him by Kiel (1985). The reason for this falling apart is Braudel’s own foundational conviction that the pace of history has several different chronotopes (ways of conceptualization and description that are faithful on different planes of the way of implementation of historical time and space).⁷ He describes these three different levels of interpretation of history in the Preface to the first edition of his book as follows:

1. Description that is devoted to a history whose passage is almost imperceptible, that of man in his relationship to the environment, a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles;

2. Description in which one can distinguish slow but perceptible rhythms. One can call it in a certain sense social history, the history of groups and groupings. It can be studied, as Braudel did, in terms of economic systems, societies, civilizations;

3. Description in terms of ‘traditional’ history - that of deeds - on the scale not of man, but of individual men. This is a history of “brief, rapid, nervous fluctuations, by definition ultra-sensitive” (Braudel 1972, 20-21).

⁷ The term was originally introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). In his treatment, a *chronotope* is a way of representing configurations of time and space in language and discourse. In our case, following the proposal of Braudel, chronotopes would be the historic narratives at different time-and-space scale. The narratives are supposed to represent the way of formation and action of cohorts of historical events at different levels with their relations and circumstances. Braudel’s representation of being-a-Bulgarian closest to *sub specie aeternitatis* would be the one that was offered by him as epiphany. The latter pattern of conceptualization and description finds itself in the strongest possible contrast to the profanity of the way Bulgarians were represented in historic perspective by Cvijić (1918).

The whole discussion of the 'Bulgarian case' is placed by Braudel in the section of his book dealing with overlapping civilizations. In it he emphatically opposes the view that 'civilizations are mortal'. Mortal may be their ephemeral blooms, but their foundations remain (Braudel 1973, 775). It is against this background that he comes to the troublesome problem of civilizational contacts, as it is when we have violent conflicts between neighbouring civilizations, one triumphant (or believing itself to be), the other subjugated (and dreaming of liberation) (*ibid.*, 776). Such an illustrious case are the Balkans that were conquered by the Ottomans at the end of the 14th century and lived under their dominion for several centuries. In this respect, it is impossible to underestimate the impact of the Ottoman (not just Turkish) cultural imprint. The Ottoman economy in the Balkans lived comfortably off the labour of that patient and hard-working beast of burden, the Bulgarian peasant, "the typical plainsman, slave of the rich, harshly disciplined, ground down by work, thinking only of his next meal, as his compatriots describe Baja Ganje" (*ibid.*, 778). It is here that Braudel slips along the lines of the cunning characterization of Bulgarians, provided by Cvijić (1918), and begins to cite him as quoting from Aleko Konstantinov's *Bai Ganyo*. The description in question is, however, at the level of the fastest pace of the historical narrative. If we switch, instead, to the level 3 of the chronotope, the situation becomes different up to incommensurability:

For the Bulgarian people life was a succession of invasions. And yet the Bulgarian retained what was essential, for he remained himself. Whatever his borrowings during the long cohabitation, he did not allow himself to be swallowed up by the invading Turk, but safeguarded what was to preserve him from total assimilation: his religion and his language, guarantees of future resurrection. Firmly attached to the soil, he clung to it doggedly, always keeping the best regions of his dark earth. When the Turkish peasant from Asia Minor settled alongside the Bulgarian, he had to be content with the wooded slopes or marshy plots bordered with willows, down in the hollows, the only land left unoccupied by the *raia*. When the Turks finally departed, the Bulgarian found himself a Bulgarian still, the same peasant who five centuries before had spoken his own language, prayed in his own churches and farmed the same land under the same Bulgarian sky (Braudel 1973, 780).

It is quite revealing to acknowledge that the key features for Bulgarians to remain "true to themselves" during the long-term Ottoman rule in the Balkans - language, religion and the claim for certain territory as *Vaterland* - are identical to the ones considered as the pillars of nationalism. The only peculiarity concerns the way of linking to the geographic territory - through the peasants' attachment to the 'soil', to the 'dark earth' they own and cultivate that was shared in the community of those living in the lowlands before the advent of the fully blown nationalism.

Braudel used the eloquent style with metaphoric and/or poetic expressions in his historical prose, e.g., as "farmed the same land under the same Bulgarian sky", when discussing the chronotope of the 'eternal history', the history that developed in what looked almost like self-recurring cycles through time. One

can appreciate these majestic movements best, as it turns out in the case we are discussing, if/when one juxtaposes them with such 'colourful' data as provided by Cvijić (1918) in the Bulgarian case on the basis of anecdotal evidence of an anonymous journalist and a falsified example from the Bulgarian literature. Using Cvijić's book as his main source for portraying Bulgarian *mentalité* "mentality",⁸ at the end of his section dedicated to Bulgaria and Bulgarians Braudel engaged in a very unusually looking in the context of the previous discussion extended eulogy of being Bulgarian in the direction opposite to the one attributed to him by Machiel Kiel (1985) - not at all along the lines that they are "less gifted than other peoples, slow thinking or clumsy", personified by "Baja Ganje, the peasant of Bulgarian folklore", but that "when the Turks finally departed, the Bulgarian found himself a Bulgarian still, the same peasant who five centuries before had spoken his own language, prayed in his own churches and farmed the same land under the same Bulgarian sky".

In a different publication Braudel (1988) argued for the existence of *la France profonde*, the "deep France" based upon the peasant *mentalité* that despite all of the dynamics of French history and the Industrial Revolution had survived intact up to the present age. It is, most probably the case, that in his *apologia* for Bulgarians he intended to express comparable idea - about *la Bulgarie profonde*, "the deep Bulgaria". Even if we assume that being the case, there is still a radical contrast in the two examples, because Braudel arrived at the statement about 'the deep Bulgaria' in a much more unexpected and thus surprising way - on the basis solely of negative evidence by foreign, i.e., non-native Bulgarian, observers, unlike the French case, which is easier to predict for the obvious reason that it is based on own evidence that is close to his heart.

5. Conclusion

In looking for the source of the attribution that Bulgarians are "less gifted, slow thinking or clumsy" we made a whole journey through texts of specialists in Bulgarian, Balkan, Ottoman and European history in order to acknowledge that we face a comedy of evidence. The first lesson to learn as a result of our discussion is that prejudices persist whatever the evidence. Wherever there is a wish, corresponding means for its fulfillment will be found or forged. The second lesson went, however, in the opposite direction. It was indeed surprising for us to find out that the falsified evidence can nevertheless serve in the hands of earnest historians like Fernand Braudel as 'pedestal' and counterpoint for high recognition of what remained firm below the surface of historical dynamics that went on for millennia for Bulgarians in Bulgaria even in such troublesome case as theirs involving 'clash of civilizations'.

⁸ It is appropriate to note that the French *mentalité* was borrowed in Bulgarian as *менталитет* (as well as in Serbian) up to the level of using it technically in professional writing, e.g., in linguistics and other human sciences. Its definition in RBE (1977-) is "certain way of thinking and behaviour". In English *mentality* is used in a more restricted and cautious way, the closest meaning to the one intended in *Bulgarian mentality* (or *mentality of a Bulgarian*) being "mode or way of thought" (Merriam-Webster online: *mentality*).

6. Postscript

If we assume that Braudel was right in his way of modelling history at different speeds in space-time, there is still certain difference in justifying his case about French vs. Bulgarian mentality that could be used as a proof that even on the longest run there is really no perspective *sub specie aeternitatis* in it. The peasant *mentalité* in Bulgaria, unlike France, suffered in recent times a heavy blow as a consequence of the forced mass collectivization of the land in the early 1950s of the last century during the Communist rule. Under these circumstances, it remains to be ascertained to what degree it still survives and/or can be revived intact as a cornerstone of the Bulgarian identity on a par with language and religion.

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