

Title:

National identity and assimilation in relation to the social environment in Plovdiv (18th – 19th century)

Abstract:

The dissertation presented here arises from the perception of national identity being a kind of collective identity, which is designated by state (political) as well as non-state (cultural) nation-constituting symbols. I have tried to examine the permanence, stability and objectivity of these symbols in relation to the social environment in Plovdiv during the process of national awakening as part of Bulgarian national movement (18th – 19th century).

During this period the central position in Plovdiv's social environment was held by a numerous group of people so-called Graecomen. Graecomen voluntarily renounced their Bulgarian-origin identity and exchanged it for a Greek identity. The origins of Graecomania may be found in the long-term cultural and economical co-existence of the Bulgarians and the Greeks. Since the Middle Ages there was a stable Greek community in Plovdiv, which dominated significantly the social climate. This dominance became the key motivating factor for the spread of Graecomen as Bulgarian burgers tried through the means of a favourable marriage to infiltrate the Greek community and in this way to achieve a higher social status. The highest level of intensity of Graecomania was seen in the second half of the 19th century when the Greek elite atmosphere in the city was maintained not by the "ethnic" Greeks but the Graecomen of Bulgarian ethnic origin.

Graecomania of the inhabitants of Plovdiv, which was not a result of a purposeful politics of assimilation but of a personal decision, subject to booming circumstances, shows that stability of nation-constituting symbols is in actual fact relative and the awareness of national identity is far too closely linked to each specific historical situation and subjective choice of each individual.

Key terms:

National identity, Graecomenia, Plovdiv, Greek diaspora, Bulgarian national movement, the 18th and 19th century