INTRODUCTION

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The Social Stratification of the Balkan Town: An Introduction

The major articles in this issue derive from a colloquium on The Social Stratification of the Balkan Town held at Boston University, May, 1978. Since very little work has been done on this topic it was necessary for the authors to present material which has not been previously assembled and systematized. Of course, a few papers cannot adequately cover a theme so broad and for an area as diversified as the Balkans. Yet, it seems appropriate to ask what these studies in combination tell us about stratification in the urban areas of Southeastern Europe. Have they advanced our knowledge? Do they point to any useful conclusions? At the risk of taking some statements out of context or even of over-generalization I shall set forth what seem to me to be some useful findings, particularly about various social strata.*

VARIOUS SOCIAL STRATA

The elite, or notables

Following the Greek War of Independence the upper stratum of Greek society, centered chiefly in the new revitalized capital of Athens, changed markedly. At least four elements comprised this stratum. The first was the wealthy landowning group which had provided community leadership under the Turks but had participated in the War of Independence. A second element included the Phanariotes, who had been living principally in Constantinople and other Ottoman cities as well as in various European cities and had achieved distinguished careers. They had a modern mentality, a broad culture and a good knowledge of foreign languages. They had contributed politically to the struggle for independence and came to Athens to assume the most important public

*Reference will be made in this summary to some colloquium papers which will be published elsewhere and do not appear in this issue. They are the following: "Social Organization and Social Differentiation in 19th Century Athens," by Litsa Nicolaou-Smokovitis; "Social Organization and Social Stratification in the Greek Islands of the Northeastern Aegean during the Nineteenth Century," by Dimitrios Smokovitis; "Stadt und Land im Osmanischen Reich: Aspekte von 'Rurban Sociology'," by B. Papoulla; and "Thessaloniki on the Eve of World War I and its Aftermath," by D. J. Delivanis.
offices. A third group was that of the wealthy Greeks of the diaspora who came to Athens from various parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. They had not been involved in the War of Independence but succeeded in marrying into some of the more distinguished families which had suffered financial hardships during the War. Finally, the military leaders of the revolution, though originally from lower social strata, constituted a new military aristocracy. The upper clergy were also a part of the elite.

According to Nikolaou-Smokovitis, (see footnote*) later in the nineteenth century the upper stratum described above was succeeded by a new plutocratic class whose dominant element came to be the wealthy Greeks of the diaspora, which gradually displaced the leading families—some of whose lineages went back to the Byzantine Empire. In one sense this reduced the importance of the traditional elite based on landholding and ushered in a dominant upper middle class which became the strongest economic force in the Athenian society and obtained important political positions.

In the northern Aegean islands the upper social class in the nineteenth century differed from island to island with respect to its sources of income and the part played in the liberation struggle against the Ottoman Empire. In Chios, the upper income grouping consisted of the mastich producers, large landowners (growing chiefly citrus fruits), and the big merchants as well as the sea captains. In Mytilene the upper-income grouping included those who owned land and those who were the political and economic administrators of the island. In Limnos the big landowners were mostly Greeks who lived in Egypt but who visited the island in the summertime. In Samos the elite were the notables who were members of the Vouli (senate), whose president was a hegemon appointed by the Sultan. (Smokovitis, see footnote.*)

Bulgaria offers a contrast to Greece in that liberation in 1878 found no aristocratic families to participate in the organization of a modern state. The nearest thing to an elite at that time was the chorbadzhii, a number of whom departed with the Turks. These are described in Meininger's article. They performed administrative functions, which involved them in dealings both with Ottoman officials and with the higher Greek clergy. Many of them were also merchants. They did not all hold office because they outnumbered the administrative posts, with tens of chorbadzhi families living in a given town. They held themselves apart from the rest of the population and married amongst themselves. Yet this traditional elite was being challenged by emerging new elites, the most powerful of which were the capitalist businessmen. However, when we look at Sofia in particular we note (Lampe, Table 4) that public officials and employees comprised almost 25 percent of the population in 1905. Lampe accordingly states that Sofia's most powerful political class was officialdom and the officer corps.

When he turns to Bucharest, Lampe calls attention to the wealthy boyar class, whose importance is attested to by their opulent villas and their repre-
sentation in the national legislature. In Belgrade whereas the proportion of public officials and employees was about 25 percent (as in the case of Sofia) more of them were property owners than in Sofia. In Belgrade the merchants apparently played a greater role than in Sofia since they could control Serbian exports and dominate the boards of the large private banks and even the central bank.

Salonica presents an interesting case study in itself. It was a leading city in the Ottoman Empire, its population being just over fifty percent Jewish, and it remained under Turkish control until well into the twentieth century. Dumont's article, through the use of unusual archival material, constructs for us the stratification patterns within the Jewish community, indicating the importance of leading rabbinical families as "notables" as well as the significance of a rising merchant and industrial elite. The study by Delivanis (see footnote*) describes how the city was divided up according to ethnic groupings, each with its own social layers, so that one cannot speak of an overall stratification system for Salonica as a whole.

This brief excursion into the elites of the Balkan towns shows us that the elites differed from country to country and were tied in with the historical events that transpired. Those that participated actively in the wars of liberation survived into the postwar period but those that were badly compromised with the retreating authorities lost their superior status. With the coming of rudimentary modernization to the Balkans in the later nineteenth century, position based on landowning no longer had political monopoly but had to be shared with a rising commercial and industrial stratum.

Commercial and Industrial Stratum

The Balkan countries have for centuries been a crossroads where caravans crossed from Asia to Western Europe and from Russia down to the Aegean. Merchandising varied with the form of transport (camels to railroad trains), the goods in demand and the security of the areas through which the goods passed. With the growth of the towns and cities the merchants became a permanent element, with some dealing in large-scale exchange while others became petty merchants and shopkeepers. Under the Ottoman Empire, as Meininger's article describes so well, many non-Turks were involved in supplying the needs of the Sultan's court and military requirements (food, uniforms, etc.). Castellan shows that much of the activity of the emerging elite in Serbia after independence from the Turks was devoted to supplying agricultural produce, including livestock, to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Of the eighty Belgrade citizens with a fortune of over 3,000 ducats (24,000 francs) in 1863, all were involved directly or indirectly in commerce.

As already indicated in the case of Athens and some of the Aegean Islands important merchants were part of the elite. In three of the Balkan capitals, as Lampe's Table 4 shows, the number of merchants was not large. In Bucha-
rest, for instance, the merchant owners totaled about 10 percent in 1905 whereas in Belgrade traders and shopkeepers in the same year numbered about 13 percent while traders and bankers in Sofia accounted for 16 percent of the city's active population. Salonica's Jewish community at the end of the nineteenth century had a small aristocracy of millionaire businessmen and a comparatively large group of tradesmen with capital of medium importance. Others in the merchant category would include some brokers, small shopkeepers and peddlers (Dumont).

A fundamental question to be posed at this point is the extent to which those who accumulated capital through trade utilized this capital for industrial development. Dumont indicates that the large business establishments in Salonica remained essentially oriented towards trade and banking and were very cautious as regards industry. For one thing, import-export business presented much less risk than industry; second, the political disorders in Macedonia did not encourage long-term investments in infrastructure. Investments had to bring immediate profit and mobilize but a relatively limited part of the available capital.

In Northern Croatia, as Karaman points out, artisan activity dominated the manufacturing in the cities, but by the turn of the century such craftsmen had decreased to about two-thirds and by 1910 to just over half of all employed in manufacturing. Another way to describe the shift to industry is to note that in 1900 manufacturing enterprises in the seventeen cities and towns accounted for 36 percent of all business and 31 percent of all workers but in 1910 these figures had risen to 53 percent of all businesses and 49 percent of all workers. However, Zagreb was the only truly industrial city in Northern Croatia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In Bulgaria, according to Berov, the number of industrial enterprises with over 10 employees increased from 70 in 1895 to 345 in 1911. He attributes this growth, averaging about 13-14 percent per year, to the widening of home markets, the growth of public construction and the increase of import duties from as much as 14 to 65 percent. Special financial privileges were given to big enterprises and labor also become increasingly qualified. Sofia, however, was a special case. First of all, as Lampe mentions, Sofia was not a major trading center in 1886 and by 1912 only 25 percent of all imports paying customs came through the capital city. Exports through Sofia were half that percentage. In the early 1900s the government pursued a policy of favoring Sofia as an industrial center (in terms of loans and investments) over Ruse or Plovdiv but results were far from successful.

Belgrade, on the other hand, was Serbia's trading center and also a border town. This trade did not promote industry directly. Also the easy access to Central European manufactures proved another factor holding back industrial development.

At the turn of the century in the Balkans as a whole it would seem that the
merchant stratum, though not moving heavily into industry, was part of an industrializing society. In some areas the industry developed from the crafts, elsewhere it was dependent upon governmental investments, but in the largest, most significant projects it was based on foreign capital and entrepreneurship.

**Artisans**

Meininger gives a detailed picture of artisan activity which holds true for most of the Balkans in the pre-liberation days and even beyond. In the towns of the Danubian vilayet 48.8 percent of the population engaged in crafts in the 1860s. Elsewhere artisans also composed the most numerous element in Bulgarian town society. The role of the guilds gives this stratum a particular consistency, an ethos of its own. "In general, Bulgarian guilds were professional organizations which looked after most of the interests and needs of the artisans they grouped together." They fostered an esnaf (guild) morality, a love of work and provided a route to a definite goal—that of being a master. Guilds worked on democratic principles, formed the vanguard in the campaign against chorbadzhi misrule, and extensively participated in the cultural rebirth of the Bulgarian people. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century there were about one hundred separate crafts and trades being practiced in the Bulgarian lands. It was not unusual for a master to concentrate on the sale of goods produced and the acquisition of larger amounts of raw material, accumulating greater profits, eventually joining the merchant class.

Meininger places apprentices and journeymen as part of the artisan grouping. As assistants they endured harsh and demanding conditions, received little or no pay, but did have a goal in sight. Berov also mentions the fact that they were not statistically categorized as workers in the official census because their labor was not yet highly productive and was passed off as schooling.

In Serbia, too, the guilds (called esnafi) existed. Castellan notes that they were based on Islamic law and had to be headed by Turks. But in 1828 the Serbs separated from the Turks to form their own autonomous corporations which rose to forty in Belgrade in 1839. These groups persuaded their government to restrict the entry of artisans from Western and Central Europe, though a number did continue to arrive. Seventy different crafts were recognized, some traditional (e.g., tailors) and some new (watchmakers from Switzerland).

In Croatia-Slavonia, according to Karaman, artisan activity first dominated the manufacturing. Enterprises in which the artisan carried on his craft alone or with at most from one to five apprentices accounted for a third, or 32 percent, or the total number of craft-industrial entrepreneurs and workers in all of Croatia-Slavonia as late as 1910.

The importance of the artisans is also stressed by Lampe who, in his Table 4, shows that at the turn of the century they were the most numerous occupational category for Sofia and Bucharest and fell just slightly below public employees for Belgrade. He notes that wage labor was rapidly replacing family
members or young apprentices, a fact which made artisan activities decisive for the labor movement in pre-1914 Belgrade, though less so in Sofia and Bucharest.

Salonica also had its share of artisans. Among the Jews these numbered a few hundred but this does not count the Christian and Moslem artisans. Each group was interested in getting a corner on a particular trade, even to the point of not accepting a member of another faith as an apprentice. Dumont indicates that over half of the Jewish craftsmen were in four trades: tinkers, cloggers, carpenters and tailors. A study of the artisan activity shows the penetration of new styles in housing, furniture and clothing from Western Europe, so much so that the artisans could hardly keep up with the demand.

The artisan stratum provides a case of mobility at either end of the scale. As master craftsmen became successful they often were able to move into the merchant-industrial grouping, though many still kept their guild affiliation. At the other extreme, as numbers of apprentices working to become masters declined, they were replaced by wage labor which developed links with the nascent working class.

Intelligentsia and white collar workers

The role of the intelligentsia in the Balkans has been two-fold: first, they were prominent in the movements toward political independence; second, they were called upon to lead the economic and social development of the newly-established states.

Teachers played a predominant role in making their fellow-countrymen aware of their nationality and in agitating for political action against the Ottoman authorities. The article by Meininger spells out in considerable detail the struggles in which the teachers in Bulgaria were involved before and after Liberation. Yet the university education in the Balkan countries was not addressed to the needs of industrial development. Lampe indicates that in the pre-1914 period university enrollment exceeded one percent of each city’s total population. There were over 1,000 students in Belgrade and 4,500 in Bucharest. Over half of them, however, were enrolled in the faculty of law as preparation for careers in government and politics; the physical sciences attracted only 20 percent of Sofia’s students and barely 10 percent at Bucharest and Belgrade. The specialized schools which trained teachers, artisans or accountants had combined student bodies of less than half the universities’ numbers.

The Jewish community in Salonica developed schools that reinforced the learned professions. After completing these schools the young people from the rich families went abroad for further study and returned home. After the Young Turk revolution the Salonica community comprised 300 teachers, 40 chemists, 30 lawyers, 20 doctors, 25 dentists, 10 journalists, and 5 engineers (Dumont). Delivanis (see footnote*) observes that the intelligentsia was one stratum that cut across all ethnic groups in Salonica in the early 1900s,
although very few Turks qualified as members.

In his article Berov describes how the new Bulgarian intelligentsia took shape at the turn of the century. Before Liberation, as already noted, it consisted primarily of teachers. In the eighties and nineties, it was comprised chiefly of state officials, along with teachers, judges, and some technically-trained people. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, it began to include private lawyers, doctors, dentists, engineers, architects, musicians, actors, artists, and writers.

The emphasis upon government officials is stressed in other articles. Castellan, in describing early Serbian officialdom, points out the contradictions inherent in trying to follow two models—the Ottoman which practiced the art of baksheesh and the Austro-Hungarian, with the actuality being closer to the former. In Athens, the goal of the arriving migrants from rural areas early in this century was not to become part of an industrial proletariat but was that of penetrating into the system of services, public and private, which were continuously increasing. They hoped to obtain a position in the urban lower middle class. (Nikolaou-Šmokovitis—see footnote*).

Lampe calls attention to the surprising fact, mentioned earlier, that public officials and employees comprised almost 25 percent of the populations of Belgrade and Sofia in 1905, making them the largest occupational group.

Admittedly this grouping, like others previously discussed, is a loose agglomeration of those in the learned professions as well as those holding down government jobs or doing clerical work in private establishments. Most members saw themselves in between the elite and the working or blue collar grouping, even to the point of letting their little fingernails grow long to signify that they did no manual labor.

**Blue collar workers**

The authors of the articles being discussed here obviously differ in their definitions of what constitutes a working class. Berov would include all employees who are hired, while others would make a distinction between wage earners and those who are salaried. Or, the difference might lie in the kind of work one did: office work would mean white collar position and labor in industry, transportation, and construction would constitute a different stratum.

In Bulgaria in the past century some apprentices and journeymen could not find employment and joined the ranks of hired manual labor, which also included those who did routine manual tasks in an urban setting (carters, porters, warehousemen, cleaners). Such individuals lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Hired labor was often migratory and tended to concentrate in the larger cities (Meininger).

Lampe combines the artisans, industrial and transport workers into a single class and notes that they made up 40-50 percent of the occupational structure of Bucharest, Belgrade and Sofia. He then describes the formation of trade
unions and political activities in which the workers engaged. In the Aegean islands the workers were engaged in agriculture and in sea-faring. They had low incomes and no political power. (Smokovitis—see footnote*).

In Salonica the workers clustered around the tobacco industry, with one factory at the beginning of the twentieth century employing five to six hundred workers, mostly women. To the tobacco workers, numbering perhaps 2,000 in all, must be added those employed on the railways, tramways, the port construction company and some foreign enterprises (Dumont).

Agricultrists

Another important stratum in the late nineteenth century Balkan town is the agriculturist, or peasantry. It is hard in this day and age to realize that in 1887 46.3 percent of what was then defined as urban population was engaged in agriculture in Bulgaria. By 1910 this had fallen to 26.6 percent (Berov). Of course, Sofia—the capital city—in 1905 had only 3.7 percent of its active population listed as peasants, but it was not typical of the other towns in the country. Peasants in Belgrade and Bucharest were a miniscule part of the population in the early 1900s, but that would not hold true for other towns in Serbia or Romania. (Lampe, Table 4).

As a matter of fact, one author (Papoulia—see footnote*) has suggested a rural-urban continuum, stressing as did Castellan that the peasant connections in the city give it a rural character that has degrees of similarity to village life—known as the "peasantization" of the city.

Even though peasants did not constitute a major proportion of the population of the major cities their number for the country as a whole reminds one, as most of the authors mentioned, that urban development in the Balkans must be seen against the fact that 75 to 80 percent of the total population lived in villages. Cities grew as peasants flocked in, with expected consequences.

The connection between the peasant and urban working class should not be overlooked. As agricultural prices declined and overpopulation of rural areas occurred, numbers of villagers left to seek their fortunes in the cities. Because of their lack of training most of them ended up as manual laborers, though occasionally one gained a government job through some helpful connections. The peasantry themselves did not identify with the working class but took pride in the ownership of their own land. Only where there were large estates, as in the case of Romania, were the villagers thought of as agricultural laborers, with some interests in common with the slowly emerging urban proletariat.

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This brief review of the papers in this issue selects among many topics which they treat only one: namely, social stratification. This was selected instead of social class because it is a less complicated concept and one which relies on basic statistical data more than does the concept of social class. By concentrating on social stratification, involving as it does occupational structure, property holding and perhaps some social characteristics such as education, one could establish some statistical bases. Once these are available, then the discussion of class could proceed on a more realistic and empirical foundation.

Some of the authors quoted here would probably consider some of the strata described above to be bona fide social classes and would even give them different names or labels. Others might want to combine two or three strata, or at least parts of them, in a different way and designate the new combination as a class.

Stratification carries with it the ranking of people into categories according to various criteria. These criteria may be those used by the local people in ranking themselves or they may be measures employed by the outside investigator to determine the ranks. Social classes, in contrast to strata, may be much more self-conscious, with members aware of others in the same class and of their standing in society. But the most important difference in the use of strata and classes is the stress in class analysis upon the relationships between classes and, in Marxist terms, the conflict that ensues over the access to means of production. Strata, then, are static categories though stratification can itself be viewed as a process which sorts people into social groupings, while class is thought to be a dynamic concept.

Students of stratification usually indicate the social function that each stratum performs for the society as a whole, whereas many interested in social class stress class conflict as a major element in social change. Because of the different theoretical orientations in the articles reviewed it seemed best to deal only with social strata as being a neutral term.

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The major papers in this issue are representative of the activites of the Association internationale d'études du sud-est européen (AIESEE), founded in 1963 with headquarters in Bucharest, and funded primarily by UNESCO. It is a unique organization in that Balkan scholars from several disciplines come together periodically to discuss some topic of mutual interest. These meetings take place even in times of high political tension between countries since the participants have learned to engage in discourse despite well-recognized political and ideological differences, and can meet under the UNESCO aegis.

More than that, scholars from outside the Balkans who are interested in this part of the world have formed themselves into seventeen or eighteen
national committees, whose members participate in the various activities of the association.

Every four or five years an international congress is held. The first one took place in Sofia (1966), followed by one in Athens (1970), and by one in Bucharest (1974). The fourth congress is being held in August, 1979, in Ankara. Several hundred people attend these congresses and can listen to papers by Albanians, Greeks and others from Eastern Europe as well as by those from East Central and Western Europe, the Soviet Union, America and Canada. It is most unusual to find such a nationality mixture where such tolerance is shown to the views of those who disagree, despite occasional sharp debates.

Much of the work of the Association occurs in its several Commissions, which hold colloquia or seminars annually or bi-annually on some topic related to the field covered by the Commission. One such commission is that on Economic and Social Development, whose focus is primarily on periods prior to the early twentieth century. A second commission on Contemporary History deals, as its name implies, with studies of this century.

At the meeting of the Commission on Economic and Social Development held in Hamburg (1977) the U.S. National Committee for AIESEE was asked to be in charge of the next Colloquium. Funds were obtained from the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe of the American Council of Learned Societies (which appoints the U.S. National Committee and serves as the United States sponsoring body for AIESEE), and from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), which was able to cover travel costs of some of the East Europeans. The Colloquium, attended by thirty people from six countries, was held in May, 1978 at the Boston University Osgood Hill conference center.

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