

BOOK REVIEW

Violeta Kotseva, PhD

Associate Professor,

Department of “Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology”

Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” – Bulgaria

[vkkoceva@uni-sofia.bg], ORCID 0000-0001-9573-7926

Contribution to the History of Health Education in Bulgaria



Abstract: *The review discusses the monograph Health Education in Bulgarian Society in the XIXth Century (until 1878) [Здравната просвета в българското общество през XIX век (до 1878 г.)] by Vladimir Terziev. The book traces the development of health education in Bulgaria in the second half of the 19th century. The author aims to analyze the modernization of the Bulgarian society through the prism of scientific medical knowledge and the process of its dissemination. In a broader perspective, the book highlights the clash between traditional and scientific medicine. The author's ambition is to write a narrative in the spirit of social history with elements of interdisciplinarity. The analysis follows a historical approach with commentary on written sources.*

Keywords: *health education; medicine; social history.*

Terziev, V. (2024). Health Education in Bulgarian Society in the 19th Century (up to 1878). Sofia: Avanguard Prima, ISBN 9786192399658, p. 404 [in Bulgarian].

<https://academicabooks.bg/product/здравната-просвета-в-българското-общ>
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Vladimir Terziev's book¹ presents, examines and analyzes health-educational initiatives in Bulgarian society in the period 1856-1878 and their role in establishing the norms of modern scientific medicine. In the context of the wider modernization of Bulgarian society during this period, the book's focus on the clash between tradition and modernity via an analysis of new norm of health and healing, is undeniably relevant. Given that for a long time the themes of hygiene and health culture have been marginal to our humanities, a detailed analysis of this aspect contributes to attempts at clarifying the history of health care. The lack of a comprehensive study on health education in view of the rise of modern (bio)medicine further underlines the timeliness of the chosen topic.

The book is based on Terziev's PhD thesis, defended at the Faculty of History at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The author currently works within the established traditions of Bulgarian historical scholarship, relying on analysis and comparison of written sources and maintaining a positivist attitude toward facts and details.

Structured into an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography, the book spans 404 pages. The bibliography includes extensive archival material from the State Archive and its branches in Smolyan, Varna and Plovdiv, as well as those held at the Bulgarian Historical Archive. It draws on published archival collections, memoirs, early printed books, periodicals, scholarly research and online resources, demonstrating a very good command of the literature and digital sources on the subject.

The main aim of the study is to trace the emergence of modern health knowledge during the Revival period and the ways in which it spread (p. 6). Already on p. 11 the author frames the project as a study of everyday life, social relations and changes in perceptions through an analysis of the process involved in the replacement of traditional medical knowledge with modern knowledge. The author explores health education as a reflection of Revival period education and as part of the history of health care in the country. He rightly notes that health culture is a key marker of the transition of Bulgarian society to the Modern Age (p. 12).

The introduction outlines the study's chronological scope, methodology, and key sources. The main methodology focuses on the analysis of historical sources and data. Given the interdisciplinary nature of

¹ Терзиев, В. (2024). *Здравната просвета в българското общество през XIX век (до 1878 г.)*. София: Авангард прима.

the topic which combines three scientific fields – history, medicine and culture – a broader interdisciplinary approach might have provided a more solid basis for the conclusions drawn from the work, although in places the author ventures into the intermediate zone between history and cultural anthropology.

The first chapter deals with the main forms of health knowledge in 19th century Bulgaria. Terziev consistently addresses several focal points: folk/traditional medicine; modern medicine and the clash or co-existence between them, as well as the degree of scientific knowledge among Bulgarians of the time. Drawing mainly on historical data, the author engages with the notion of cultural dualism (after M. Georgiev), a term describing in this case the coexistence of two medical systems which are distinct both in terms of content and philosophy. The study remains mainly historical and this in some parts prevents the author from expanding his analysis. The rise of modern medicine is not a linear process of replacement and disappearance of some cultural forms at the expense of others. The coexistence of different medical systems is visible, even today. Every healing practice exists thanks to shared knowledge about the causes of diseases and their respective treatments. If there were no publicly shared trust in their efficacy, they would soon disappear. Even today, healers continue to enjoy significant popularity. A cultural analysis of the period would show that science-based medicine was familiar to only a handful of educated medics, while the vast majority of the population shared a radically different worldview whose needs were filled by traditional healers and their healing practices.

The second chapter examines the modernization of Bulgarian health culture during the Revival. The author Vladimir Terziev consistently discusses the context shaped by the reformist acts of the High Gate (Високата порта); the increased interest among Bulgarians in the medical profession and its gradual establishment as one of the prestigious professions among the emerging Bulgarian intelligentsia; and the influence of modern health knowledge on pharmaceuticals.

The third chapter is devoted to health education within the framework of Revival period education. The author pays special attention to hygiene as a form of disease prevention. It is a meaningful approach that most clearly shows that modern medicine was built on a radically different understanding of disease, requiring not only treatment but also prevention of disease that demanded a complete change of worldview and therefore lifestyle.

The fourth chapter analyzes the distribution of health-related printed publications (books, brochures, press) during the Revival period. The author offers a systematic look at the main titles published during the era, focusing on the role of the printed press and the main themes that health literature advocated during the period as part of the broader transformation of medical concepts.

Vladimir Terziev demonstrates thorough knowledge of the historical literature on the subject. He skillfully integrates sources into a coherent narrative while using them to analyze the process of modernization of Bulgarian society.

Throughout the book, Terziev traces the coexistence of traditional and scientific medicine, framed as a stark opposition – the former is unscripted, non-institutional, passed down within the family and family circle but accepted and shared by all, and the second is institutionalized through norms outlining the parameters of a healthy body and society. Throughout the text, the author walks in the safe and comfortable field of facts and written data. Yet, a cultural analysis would have given greater depth to the study. Replacing one concept of health and healing with another requires tracing broader societal processes of modernization. Strict reliance on historical methods and analysis in studying societal processes risks schematic or hasty conclusions. The use of data that go beyond the chronological scope of the study could also have illuminated the complexity and non-linear character of these developments. Also missing from the text is an exploration of the ‘consumers’ of modern health culture – who were they, were they mainly urban dwellers, or were there rural and uneducated populations among them? Answers to such questions would further clarify the impact of health education on Bulgarian society during the Revival period.

These observations, however, do not diminish the significance of the book. Terziev’s study makes an important contribution to the history of health care, particularly health education in the years following the Crimean War. With the vast amount of source material collected, the book provides a valuable foundation for further analysis and new analytical perspectives.