

When Life Confirms Our Scientific Searches!

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[for the book: Dragoljub Dzhordzhevich „*Ha koњу c лaптoпoм y бисaгaмa*” („On Horseback with a Laptop in the Saddlebags”), published in 2010 by the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and Prometey Publishers]

In the “life” of science, as in the life of society, at times things happen that seem strange at first but ultimately prove quite logical. When Her Majesty History makes sharp turns, overturns strata, and changes her appearance and manners in a dramatic way, then come those starry moments for the creative minds in science who until then had worked long and patiently, devotedly and productively, without having the fruits of their efforts receive the attention and recognition they merit. Until that moment such scientific research was looked upon with an element of hauteur, and even with demonstrative disregard or belittling of the work and its results. But in crucial moments of history, social problems and dilemmas arise with such explosive force that their solution brooks no delay, so important are they for the present and future of a society. It is these problems that the far-seeing researchers we are referring to had focused their attention and efforts on, discerning their significance and eventual consequences and historical results, and proposing various courses of action for alleviating or resolving the issues, but without giving wide publicity to the value of their research and findings. And now, Life and History have decided that that these problems can no longer be concealed or overlooked or belittled. The impact of these problems has become too obvious, and the consequences, too disturbing or too menacing for society. Concerns about these problems and dilemmas grow, the dangers loom large, and there is no turning away from them, no way not to cry urgently for help from the people who are intimately acquainted with the matter. And so the value of these researchers quickly begins to grow in the public eye!

The above mentioned holds equally true for the researchers and writers who are involved in revealing and interpreting the secret corners of Romany life, of Romany mentality and existence in general or in a specific society. That is why, in times like the

present, it is important and useful to turn our attention to scholars who have devoted their lives to penetrating and explaining these mysterious corners. Undoubtedly, in coming to know the work and achievements of such researchers, we will find similarities in the tensions that occur in neighbouring countries and societies. Especially when it comes to neighbouring Slavic countries and the role and importance of the “Roma problem” for their national biographies!

We have before us a very interesting and unquestionably useful scholarly work: the monograph by Professor Dr. Dragoljub Dzhordzhevich „*Ha koњу c лaптoпoм y бисaгaмa*” („On Horseback with a Laptop in the Saddlebags”), published in 2010 by the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and Prometey Publishers.¹ This is a pioneering work for the school known to Romology experts as the “Niš Romology” school. The monograph has seven chapters and a foreword by Prof. Dr. Rajko Dzhurich. Being devoted to the discipline of Romology, the work bears the sub-title of “Introduction to Romology Studies”. The author’s ethical and self-demanding attitude to his work as a scholar shows through even in the sub-title: even though he proposes original views and gives a solid demonstration that he is outlining a new scientific discipline, Prof. Dzhordzhevich modestly estimates his achievements as simply an introduction. This characterization only enhances the interest in the thematic sphere of his research, but it is also a sort of investment in the reader’s attention to all that Romology has to offer. And what it can offer is considerable indeed!

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Prof. Dzhordzhevich frankly and captivatingly reveals the world of this new discipline. He leads us to its roots, unveils the secrets and subject of Romology, confronts us with the dilemma as to whether this is a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary field, shows us the place and role of the combining of sociology and Romology, acquaints us with the subtle differences between Roma studies and Romology, clarifies the delicate aspects of the paradigms and tools used by this new discipline. Dzhordzhevich presents (with panoramic scope and systematically) the most important theoretical and methodological characteristics and social-historical connections of Romology with the vicissitudes of history and science. In order to adequately present the new discipline to the scientific community, the author should present the essential references to the mentality and life of the Roma. That is why it is important to focus the theoretical analysis on the place and role of interculturalism in Roma mentality and existence, the recognition and legitimization of Roma culture, which has long been rejected and underestimated in scientific discourse, the imperative (especially in our time) of political correctness towards this culture, and last, the integration of the Roma into society. These are all very significant problems, present to some degree and in some form in our own, Bulgarian society and scientific studies. In our country, as in Serbia, great hopes are set on Roma integration, hopes that should enable a change in the lifeworld and quality of life of the Roma themselves and of those who are in social contact with them. Dzhordzhevich believes integration should be based on an intercultural foundations and paradigms, as the means for the eagerly desired changes and prosperity of the Roma, but also as a defense against possible ethnic or other assimilation. Such integration must make a breach, and achieve success, in the field of social-economic life, where the Roma have always been marginalized, but also in the legal and political sphere, with regard to which, at least so far, the Roma have shown themselves lacking in solidarity, political culture and the kind of organization that might accelerate and ensure the changes in mentality and life of their community. With respect to these shortcomings, there is an evident dramatic problem with the Roma political parties and NGOs, which have proven incapable of winning the trust and recognition of the Roma community, of achieving substantial, valuable goals. But integration must also penetrate into the cultural sphere, for the preservation and transmission of cus-

toms and traditions guarantee that the unique identity of the Roma will continue in time. And since life must go on even after the death of individuals and generations, it is important what the culture of death will be like, whereby the transfers of identity over time are ensured.

While discussing the place and role of multiculturalism and ethno-cultural neutrality, Prof. Dzhordzhevich aims his analysis beyond the Serbian boundaries and includes comparative analyses of trends in Bulgaria and Macedonia as well. Leaning on Kimlick's idea of ethno-cultural justice, the author proposes his own logic and mechanism for Roma integration, of a kind that might avoid possible concerns about assimilation.

The author ties his analysis of the social-economic troubles of the Roma to the paradigm that regards this community as a specific ethno-class in society, a class having its specific, in some places very particular, position on the labour market. The author uses empirical sociological findings to argue his views and generalizations regarding the motivation and behaviour stereotypes of the Roma on the labour market, their connection with legal and illegal work, the dramatic reversals and shifts from traditional to modern economic activity, the quickly diminishing profile of Roma crafts and professions, the growing reliance of the Roma on the family and their specific projects for the future as a people that has not escaped the vicious circle of its centuries-long plight.

The portrayal of the dramatic Roma destiny would not be complete without reference to the tragic events of the Second World War. The third chapter of the work is devoted to the Roma Holocaust. This topic is not just a memory, nor an object of purely sociological and Romological analysis. It can at times be a terrible reality, such as in the case of the two-year old Roma child Goran Matakovich, who was denied burial by the residents of his village. A contemporary case has thus become an object of analysis that lends comprehensiveness to the study of the sufferings and stigmatization of the Roma in the past and at present.

The next chapter is devoted to the sociology of Roma religiosity. The author reveals the specifics of confessional pluralism and religious discrimination against the Roma, as well as the paths of increasing Protestantization of certain Roma groups. Protestantism is treated as a typical illustration of the present-day de-territorialization and de-symbolization of previous religious trends and practices that were of

enduring historical validity for certain Roma groups. The changing realities and mores in present times determine and catalyze a proselytism that is capable of changing certain traits of the picture of Roma everyday life. We come across similar problems in our country as well!

The fifth chapter of the work is devoted to the typology of cult locations. The author particularly stresses the insufficiency of sociological studies and analyses of Roma cult places and the ritual practices corresponding to these. Referring to several examples, the author provides a theoretical analysis of the transfer of memory over the centuries (through the preservation and maintenance of sacred cult places), and on the mixture of colourful rituals that are preserved, or else modified, over time. Without using Pierre Nora's concept of "places of memory", Prof. Dzhordzhevich is essentially presenting us precisely such places, which have possessed symbolic importance for many Roma in the past and present.

The author has also included in the scope of his analysis the culture of death, the phenomenology of death among the Roma, how it is marked and paid respect to through rites, rituals, and cult places. The attitude of people to Roma burials is, in fact, a measure of the tolerance or intolerance towards this ethnic group on the part of the "other" ethnic groups.

Roma cemeteries, their specific features and maintenance, prove to be places of contiguity and communication between the different ethnic, ethno-cultural, and ethno-religious identities. These places are very indicative as regards the status and role, importance and recognition, of the Roma by society. The positioning of cemeteries, their degree of maintenance or of abandonment, aggression against the traits of identity memory they contain and represent, are important cultural accretions that tell and preserve the stories of links and distances between ethnic, religious, and ethno-cultural communities. This topic provides a golden opportunity for sociological and Romological analysis.

In the last chapter the author devotes attention to the Niš Romology school, to the factors of its emergence, to its paradigmatic background, which combines the ideas of interculturalism and the stratification formulas of Max Weber, to its interesting history, ranging over more than a quarter of a century, and to its research efforts and achievements. The cadres and creative profile of the Niš Romology

school are not purely sociological, for the team of researchers involved in it also includes philosophers, ethnographers, linguists, political scientists, and other specialists. The team has to its credit 165 scholarly publications, including 16 books and 14 collections, some of which have been translated into six foreign languages.

Prof. Dzhordzhevich sees nothing surprising in the fact that the city of Niš should have been the birthplace of this school. This is a pioneering city as regards Roma emancipation: a city in which more than 30 thousand Roma live today. It is quite natural that the University of Niš should have become the leading centre in Romology studies, providing impulses and setting the tone for other research teams in this important field.

The book has other merits as well. It is not a purely abstract, theoretical presentation of the topic. In it the reader will find empirical sociological material as well as interesting interviews/dialogues by the author with people expertly knowledgeable on the secrets of the Roma soul and Roma life. It is written clearly, very readably and enthrallingly, which makes it accessible and useful for a wide audience beyond that of specialists in the field.

Of course, narrow specialists might not agree with some of Prof. Dzhordzhevich's theses, such as the view of the Roma as a particular ethno-class, etc. Yet the work remains highly interesting in its approaches and original solutions; it is certainly of high practical-applied importance and well worth the reading by a wide audience. In fact, even those points in which readers might differ from the author seem to have a positive side, for in some cases a scholarly work might prove more useful by the provocations it offers than by its definitive and imposed conclusions and the simple formulas supplied.

It is well known in the world of science that the raising of questions may be more difficult and more valuable than the answers given to those questions. The formulation of questions requires positive creative thinking! For when we disagree with the views and answers, we seek additional knowledge and more sources on the given topic. And this leads us deeper and deeper into the field. A provocation may thus prove to be to the benefit of a given scientific discipline. Precisely such is the provocation supplied by Prof. Dzhordzhevich's book as concerns the field of Romology!