

**BUILDING UP MODERNITY: ENTREPRENEURIAL BULGARIAN ARCHITECTS IN VELIKO TURNOVO (1878–1944)**

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***Abstract:** As construction proves the most indicative economic marker, the correlation between architecture and economics outlines the overall political and economic context as the major factors that determined the architectural outlook of Veliko Turnovo and reveals symptomatic facts about the professional activities of the architects who worked there during the period of the Third Bulgarian State (1878-1944). The entrepreneurial activities of the Bulgarian architects, who constituted the modern townscape of Veliko Turnovo, are analyzed within the political, economic and legislative context in order to reveal concrete professional careers' details. Comparison with the undertakings of the architects, born in Veliko Turnovo and the region, who migrated to other towns, serves as a base for summarizing major tendencies in the architectural profession in the period.*

**Key words:** architect, entrepreneur, building contractor, Veliko Turnovo, building materials production

**JEL:** L74, N63, N64, N93, N94

Before the actual constituting of the newly elected capital in Sofia in 1879, the public, political and cultural life of the autonomous Bulgaria was focused in Veliko Turnovo, the former capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185–1393) and Bulgarian Revival center, where the Constituent National Assembly of proclamation of Turnovo's constitution, four of the sessions of the Great National Assembly<sup>1</sup>, the inaugurations of Prince Alexander Battenberg (1879) and Prince Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1887), and the Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia (1908) took place (Palangurski, 2020; Petkov, 2011, pp. 30-45). Undoubtedly, fundamental role in the political, economic and cultural development of

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<sup>1</sup> In Veliko Turnovo were held the First, Third, Fourth and Fifth sessions of the Great National Assembly.

the town in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century played the Bulgarian Prime Minister born in Veliko Turnovo Stefan Stambolov<sup>2</sup> (1887–1894), whose efforts managed to transform the former Ottoman province into a modern state.

The short-lived efflorescence of Veliko Turnovo after the Russo-Turkish war (1877–1878) was ended by the devastating earthquake in 1913, series of wars and the national economic catastrophe in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by another three decades-long period of economic difficulties. Devoid of consistent part of its intellectual elite as result of the migration in heading metropolitan governmental and superior administration positions in Sofia, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the decayed town used to belong to the administrative districts of Lovech and Gorna Oryahovista. Respectively the economic blight stimulated the consecutive leaving of technical specialists. In spite of the fact that in that period of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom in Veliko Tarnovo were born a number of Bulgarian architects, including the outstanding interwar Bulgarian modernist duo Radoslav Radoslavov (Kirova-Delcheva, 2020, pp. 218-224) and Konstantin Dzhangozov or one of the first Bulgarian female architects and acclaimed modernist Victoria Angelova-Vinarova. They developed successful careers either in the capital or abroad, some of them spent limited time in the town at the beginning of their careers or contributed individual objects<sup>3</sup> (Tsonev, 2001, pp. 7-8).

In the context of the insufficiency of technically competent Bulgarian specialists after the Liberation of Bulgaria<sup>4</sup> in 1878 (Tsonev, 2001, pp. 7-8), Veliko Turnovo attracted a number of foreigners such as Franz Bilabel, Giovanni Mossuti, Karl Kincler, Paul Eger, etc., who served as district and town engineers and architects at the local technical administration services (Ganchev, Doychinov & Stoyanova, 2000; Zheleva-Martins, Furkov, 2009, pp. 200-215). The initial architectural and building legislative standards stimulated this ambivalent situation as the professional practice of experienced but non-academically educated designers and builders was regulated by the Law of Construction of Private Buildings in Principality of Bulgaria (Правила за строење на частни здания в градовете на Българското княжество) issued in 1881 and the Law of the Public Auctions (Закон за публичните търгове) issued in 1883 and amended in 1893, until it was finally confined by the Law for improvement of the

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<sup>2</sup> Stefan Stambolov (1854–1895), was a Bulgarian revolutionary leader, politician, journalist, poet and lawyer, who served consecutively as a deputy, chairman of the parliament, regent and Prime Minister (1887–1894).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, architect Radoslav Radoslavov spent in Veliko Turnovo the decade after his graduation in Paris.

<sup>4</sup> Although several Bulgarian engineers and probably the first Bulgarian architect graduated abroad in 1870s, followed by about a dozen of technical specialist in 1880s, their number remained insufficient to serve the developing Principality of Bulgaria and province of Eastern Rumelia, especially as some of them preferred careers in education or finances.

settlements in the Principality of Bulgaria (Закон за благоустройството на населените места в Княжество България), issued in 1897 (Kostov, 2015, pp. 295-296; Ivanova, 2018, pp. 257-259).<sup>5</sup> Therefore the modern model of academically educated specialists coexisted with the traditional way of designing and building contracting, set by the Ottoman guilds.

The beneficial legislative context determined the fruitful work of Stoyan Gerganov (1865–1906),<sup>6</sup> architect and entrepreneur, who shaped the modern townscape of Veliko Turnovo in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first and the last steps of Gerganov’s remarkable 17-year career were marked by his activities as building contractor as it started with the undertaking of the fence of the State Secondary School for Girls, situated in the new westward located center of the town (Kirova-Delcheva, 2020a, pp. 55-60), while his last enterprise was the bell-tower of the church “Assumption of St. Mary” in Strazhitsa, where eventually he was buried nearby.

Although non-academically educated, Gerganov demonstrated high technical competence and excellent structural knowledge<sup>7</sup> as the quality and durability of his eclectic, predominantly neo-classical featured designs of the family houses of Turnovo’s social elite and the first modern hotel in the town “Boris I” as well as his undertakings of public, industrial and infrastructure objects as the elaborated scaffolding and installation of the Stambolov’s bridge, the up-to date equipped Hadzhislavchev’s brewery or the stone-cladded mausoleum at Dryanovo monastery resisted the strong earthquakes in 1913, 1977 and 1986, which affected the townscape in the 20th century. (Kirova-Delcheva, 2019, pp. 271-293, Kirova-Delcheva, Partov, 2021). Despite of the lack of information about the professional training during the first decade after his moving to Veliko Turnovo in 1879, the eclectic, neo-classical features of Gerganov’s architectural designs, shaped by the application of technical innovations and imported building materials, testify that apparently he gained an essential experience in European stylistics and building techniques. (Kirova-Delcheva, 2019, pp. 271-293).

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<sup>5</sup> Държавен вестник, III, 59-60, 19 август и 22 август 1881; Държавен вестник, XX, 2-5, 3 януари, 11 януари, 13 януари и 15 януари 1898.

<sup>6</sup> Stoyan Gerganov (1865–1906) was born in Kereka, a village of building tradition near town of Dryanovo.

<sup>7</sup> Държавен архив – Велико Търново (ДА – Велико Търново), Ф. 1161, оп. 1, а. е. 5.



**Image 1.** Stoyan Gerganov, Veliko Turnovo, 23 April 1895.

*Source:* ДА – Велико Търново, Ф. 1161, оп. 1, а.е. 10.

**Image 2.** House of S. Ivanov, Veliko Turnovo, designed and built by Gerganov in 1896.

*Source:* ДА – Велико Търново, Ф. 1161, оп. 1, а.е. 10; а.е. 27.

The warehouse on “Vasil Levski” boulevard in the peripheral western industrial area of Marno Pole, founded by Gerganov in 1891 and later managed by the partnership “St. Ts. Gerganov & G. Rusev Ltd.”, became an essential instrument of Stoyan Gerganov's both design and building activities as it provided imported building materials and decoration for his European styled architectural designs and undertakings. In 1893 Gerganov's warehouse already consisted of three large wooden pavilions, which hosted the carpentry workshop for prefabrication of joinery and processing of timber for floorings and ceilings, as well as the two-story building on the opposite side of the street, which comprised a shop and office in the ground floor and Gerganov's family home in the upgraded lightweight upper floor. Initially the warehouse on “Vasil Levski” boulevard offered mainly imported timber material, processed and transported to the construction sites by the company horse carriage, while later it expanded with a shop, which offered a variety of personally selected building materials and details for accomplishment of his much elaborated designs. The product range of the shop for wholesale and retail included imported construction and furniture fittings such as modern locks, hinges, nails, reamers, various carpentry and stone tools, glue, bricks, Italian cement “Portland”, terracotta flooring tiles, zinc roofing sheets, cast iron decoration such as railings and columns by “R. Ph. Waagner”, plaster decorative elements such as frontons, cornices, stucco details etc. (Ganeva-Mitova, 2009, pp. 399-

401; Kirova-Delcheva, 2019, pp. 271-293).

The comprehensive practical overview on design and construction from concept to on-site realization of Stoyan Gerganov impacted his son Rashko (Ralph) Gerganoff who emigrated at the age of 18 in the United States, obtained a bachelor degree of Architecture and become one of the acclaimed architects in Michigan in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Ganeva-Mitova, 2009, pp. 399-401; Kirova-Delcheva, 2021a, pp. 198-207).

In 1903 or three years before Stoyan Gerganov's death, architect Georgi Kozarov settled in Veliko Turnovo to become the first Bulgarian architect who served at the local administration. Georgi Kozarov (1872–1953), who was born in Sliven, studied Technology in Prague, Engineering in Wien and graduated Architecture in Stuttgart. He worked shortly in Burgas and Sofia, before marrying Anastassia, the daughter of the local tycoon Slavcho Hadzhislavchev in 1904 and becoming district architect in Veliko Turnovo for over 25 years (1903–1927). A person of versatile interests, Kozarov served in the wars and was an active member of the tourist association “Trapezitsa” in Veliko Turnovo and of the Bulgarian Engineering and Architectural Society (BIAD) and editor of its magazine, to which he contributed detailed researches<sup>8</sup>. Kozarov, who opened a private architectural bureau in 1906 in Veliko Turnovo, participated in the design and supervision of the construction of several public buildings there such as the District Council, the “Trapezitsa” chalet on Tsarevets and the library of chitaliste “Nadezhda” (Ganchev, Doychinov, 2002, p. 160; ).

Kozarov's career also was not limited to pure architectural design activities as he established a ceramic factory for producing bricks and tiles in partnership with his brother in law Michail Hadzhislavchev. Kozarov's factory was situated in Kaltinets area, eastwards to the nearby major rail crossroad Gorna Oryahovitsa. Kozarov's factory become a core of the developing industrial area, as three years later next to it was constructed the large sugar factory of Rudolph Picka (1912).

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<sup>8</sup> For Nikola Fichev, Dobri Zheliazkov, Art school in Tryavna, etc.



**Image 3.** Georgi Kozarov

Source: <https://iridasliven.com/2020/03/22/арх-георги-козаров-кметът-аристокр/>

**Image 4.** The ceramic factory in Kaltinets

Source: <https://www.g-oryahovica.bg/news/150-godini-grad-gorna-oryahovitsa---suvmeštna-initsiativa-na-istoricheskiya-muzei-i-obshtina-gorna-oryahovitsa---iii-chast>

Kozarov's ceramic factory was founded in 1909 or just a couple of years later than the establishment of the factory for production of hydraulic lime and cement in Zlatna Panega near Lukovit by the partnership company managed by architect Petko Momchilov, one of the most distinguished names among the first generation of academically graduated Bulgarian architects, who was born in Gorna Oryahovitsa <sup>9</sup> (Yotov, 2015).

The ceramic factory in Kaltinets was equipped with Belgian machinery – desiccator, elevator, locomotive, etc. and a chimney of 40 meters height. Meanwhile Kozarov managed the construction of the up-to-date technologically equipped mill and the pasta factory near Balchik. While the lime and cement factory in Zlatna Panega bankrupted and was liquidated in 1918, Kozarov upgraded and modernized his factory in 1913, which was distinguished for high quality production at the Plovdiv Fair in

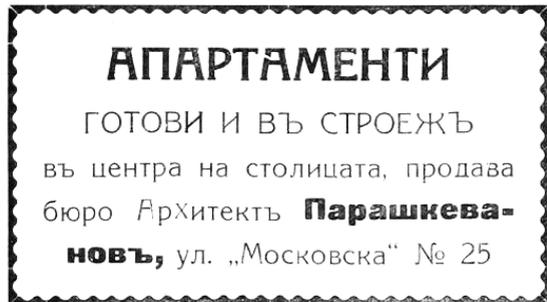
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<sup>9</sup> Petko Momchilov (1864–1923), descendant of the famous family from Elena, was born in Gorna Oryahovitsa and graduated Architecture in Prague. Momchilov served as a Head of the Architecture Department at the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Public Works (1895–1905) and was founder of the Bulgarian Engineering and Architectural Society (BIAD) and its deputy chairman (1893). Momchilov designed the high schools' buildings in Ruse and Varna and the Mother's Home Hospital in Sofia. Together with architect Yordan Milanov, who was born in Elena, Momchilov designed Alexandrovska Hospital, the reconstruction of the Koca Dervish Mehmed Pasa Mosque (the Black Mosque) into the church "Sveti Sedmochislenitsi", the Central Mineral Bath, the Central Prison and the Synodal Palace in Sofia. The acclaimed architect Momchilov became the first honorary citizen of Gorna Oryahovitsa (1898).

1934. The long-lasting entrepreneurial initiatives of Kozarov included also the undertaking and management of the construction of the bridge of significant size that crossed Yantra River at Radanovo near Veliko Turnovo in 1928 (Yotov, 2015).



Гечатница „Отець Паисий“ В. Търново. Пор. № 27.



**Image 5.** Advertising of the company „Domstroy” of Dimitar Bradvarov

*Source:* Янтра, 1935.

**Image 6.** Advertising of the company of Lazar Parashkevanov

*Source:* Комедия, 1928.

Another architect that started his career at the local technical services in Veliko Turnovo at the beginning of the second decade of 20th century was architect-assistant Dimitar Bradvarov, who participated in the finishing of design, supervised and probably undertook the finishing of the construction of the Library and repairs of the building of chitaliste “Nadezhda” and was associated with the design of a number of private houses and various buildings in Veliko Turnovo (Kirova-Delcheva, 2021b). In the mid-1930s Bradvarov served as inspector at Knyazeska Str., 10 in Turnovo and probably participated in partnership of the construction and financial savings’ company „Domstroy”, based in Sofia<sup>10</sup>, therefore demonstrating interest in building construction of residential architecture. In this aspect Bradvarov’s professional career was similar to the start of career of Lazar Parashkevanov, an acclaimed Bulgarian architect, Minister of Construction, who was born in Hotnitsa and who designed and constructed the first multi-levelled condominiums in Sofia in the 1920’s.<sup>11</sup> (Tsonev, 2001, pp. 146-147). The information about the

<sup>10</sup> Янтра, I, 6, 30 март 1935, с. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Lazar Parashkevanov (1890–1977) was born in the village of Hotnitsa near Veliko Turnovo. After participating in the Balkan Wars and the First World War, he graduated Engineering and Architecture in Prague (1920). Parashkevanov, who was friend of the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (AUA) and Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliyski, designed the building the Union Agricultural House (today the National Opera) and “Georgi Asparuhov-Gerena” stadium in Sofia.

establishment of the partnership technical metal foundry “Art Ltd.” in 1926 by architect-assistant Lazar Gabrakov, who also served in the local technical services, supplements the context of the entrepreneurial activities of the Bulgarian architects in Veliko Turnovo.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion investigation of the undertakings of the architects in Veliko Turnovo reveals informative tendencies for the architectural profession during the period of the Third Bulgarian State. Stimulating legislative regulations and the favorable economic context of the governance of Stefan Stambolov (1887–1894) favored the development of the architectural and entrepreneurial practice of Stoyan Gerganov, supported by a his warehouse and retail store of imported building materials. Consecutively Gerganov’s position as architect of Veliko Turnovo’s elite was replaced by the architect and entrepreneur of versatile interests Georgi Kozarov, incumbent district architect for circa a quarter-century, who established and developed the ceramic factory in Kaltinets near Gorna Oryahovitsa. The deteriorated economical situation in Veliko Turnovo in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century failed to sustain profitable architectural practices and the architects born there preferred to leave the town after graduation. Architects Dimitar Bradvarov and Lazar Gabrakov balanced between administrative service in the technical administration in Veliko Tarnovo, private commissions and undertakings as building contractors or producers of building materials in order to sustain livings. The tendency for combination of design and enterprising activities of the architects, who worked or were born in Veliko Turnovo, was proved on national scale by the undertakings architects Petko Momchilov and Lazar Parashkevanov, who respectively established the first cement factory and undertook the first condominium-building company in Bulgaria. Career of designers in civil architecture proved financially insufficient to sustain the living of neither traditionally trained nor of the academically educated Bulgarian architects from the first and the second generation in Veliko Turnovo, thus resulted in their participation in a range of undertakings from building contracting of various buildings or infrastructure objects to establishment of production of various building materials that supported the technical realization of their architectural ideas. The tendency of balancing simultaneously between administrative positions, private design practices and enterprising careers, proved symptomatic not only for the specialists in Veliko Turnovo, but also for their counterparts on national level. The architects active or born in the town and the region demonstrated highly innovative and ambitious biases and talents, realized in successful enterprises. Their initiatives for import and implementation of innovative materials, instruments and techniques as well as their local production as pivotal instruments for the on-site design realizations, contributed to the overall economic context in Bulgaria in the period 1878–1944.

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<sup>12</sup> ДА – ВеликоТърново, Ф. 90К, оп. 4, а. е. 448.

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