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AN AWAKENING AT THE BOSPHORUS: ROBERT COLLEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE'S BULGARIAN STUDENTS AND GRADUATES (1864-1967)

In the early 1990s the leader of a small but influential political party, which is in principle associated with the Turkish-speaking Bulgarian voters, said that Bulgaria's way to Europe leads through the Bosphorus. These words caused one of the major political controversies in the post-communist Bulgarian society and are still not fully forgotten. In so speaking the said leader meant that the economic prosperity of Bulgaria, striving in those years to a full membership in European Union, depends actually on the investments made by Turkish companies. In reality it did happen in part although this fact is not explicitly admitted by most of the Bulgarian leaders. Such politically colored controversies remain usually limited within the very contemporary political framework and historical reminiscences are in principle lacking. One, however, could draw a parallel between these controversial words and the generations of Bulgarian leaders who happened to study at a college on the Bosphorus, and namely the so-called Robert College. Being the oldest American college outside the United States of America and founded in 1863 by American Protestant missionaries in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which then still included the Bulgarian lands, the college attracted a lot of Bulgarians, quite many of whom became later leaders in the process of Bulgaria's national and political emancipation. Many of them continued their study at prestigious universities in Europe. After graduation most of them returned to Bulgaria and served its newly established institutions. Prior to World War I the college gave education to two Bulgarian prime ministers and twelve ministers, tens of deputies to the national assembly, hundreds of city- and town mayors, prefects, and men of good public reputation. In other words, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century one of the most important ways of Bulgaria to Europe led indeed

through the Bosphorus. And more precisely, it led through Robert College on the Bosphorus.

Robert College's history covered three quite different periods in Bulgarian history: the foundation and the first years of the college coincided with the last decades of Ottoman rule in the Bulgarian lands (1863-1878); the improvement of the college coincided with the development and strengthening of the independent Bulgarian state (1879-1944); and finally that period in the college's history, which is associated with its ongoing Turkification (that ended up in 1971 by transformation of one part in a private secondary school and another part in a Turkish state university, the Bosphorus/Boğaziçi University), coincided with the post World War II Sovietization of the Bulgarian state. Unintentionally, the men, who were engaged with the establishment and the further development of the college, found the college quite tightly connected, as they frequently admitted, with the fate of the Bulgarian people. Thus, Bulgarians played an important role in the college's history and equally the college itself played a significant role in Bulgarian history. This fact explains the necessity of a closer look at that uncommon symbiosis which involved Bulgarians, Americans, Europe and the Bosphorus.

Being restricted within the limitations of the present paper, what I am intended to do here is just to highlight the place and role of the Bulgarians who studied and eventually graduated from Robert College, leaving the in-depth analysis for a future extended publication. In other words, what I am going to present here is an outline rather than a comprehensive study. I am convinced, however, that even so, one needs to put the problem in a way, which differs from the previous studies by using new approaches and raising new questions. It could be done through access to archival sources that have been until recently almost inaccessible (or with very limited access).

The available researches on Robert College are based mainly on published memoirs of the college's presidents, instructors, and graduates and they neglect almost completely the bulk of available archival documentation, preserved in the USA and Turkey. Hence an in-depth academic research on history of Robert College based on documentary evidences is still lacking.

Amongst the published memoirs the most well-known are probably the memoirs of the first president Cyrus Hamlin (1863-1877),¹ of the second one George Washburn (1877-1903),² which are published in the original language and translation (in Turkish and Bulgarian),³ and the third president Caleb Frank Gates (1903-1932).⁴ The memoirs of Lynn Scipio, who established the Engineering School at Robert College in 1912 and stayed there as an instructor until 1942,⁵ as well as of Aptullah Kuran (class of 1948), who was vice-president between 1969 and 1971, and then president of the newly established the Bosphorus University, are also well known.⁶ A lot of scattered information can be also found in the memoirs of many of the college's alumni,⁷ some Bulgarians including (Mihail Madjaroff, class of 1877,⁸ and Assen Christophoroff, class of 1931⁹). These are more or less explored in several studies on Robert College done by May Fincanci,¹⁰ Keith M. Greenwood,¹¹ John Freely,¹² Ivan Ilchev and Plamen Mitev,¹³ as well as others.¹⁴ There are also several studies on the Bulgarian students and graduates of Robert College based mainly on memoirs and partly on Bulgarian archives and limited to the early period of the college's history.¹⁵ Robert College was also studied within broader-scoped studies on the history of foreign schools in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.¹⁶

As for the archival material, Robert College has a relatively big and well organized archive, which has been recently removed from the Board of Trustees' New York Office to Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library and is now available for academic research.¹⁷ It includes correspondence, governance documents, faculty files, building and facilities files, students and alumni registers, newspaper articles, as well as an extensive collection of photographs.¹⁸ Until recently the acquisition of Columbia University remained, with a few exceptions, almost unexplored. However, within the framework of a project entitled "Robert College of Istanbul's Bulgarian Students and Alumni" and conducted at New Europe College, Bucharest (the 2010-2011 Black Sea Link Program),¹⁹ in the fall of 2010 I had the opportunity to explore the New York archive.²⁰ Another collection, by far much smaller, including correspondence of Cyrus Hamlin and George Washburn, as well as letters sent by various persons, Bulgarian students of Robert College including, to Henrietta (Hamlin) Washburn, Cyrus Hamlin's daughter and George Washburn's wife, is at present preserved in Houghton Library, Harvard University.21

On the other hand, a great number of documents related to the establishment and function of Robert College, as well as to issues concerning its faculty and student body, are available at the Ottoman Department of Turkey's Public Record Office (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*). In particular, these are part of the official correspondence between the

Ottoman authorities and the college's presidency, as well as residence, travel and research permits given to members of the faculty staff and to the students, governmental investigations concerning the educational policy and practices in the college, etc. The Ottoman archival material, which is available in Istanbul, is not previously systematically explored. Within the framework of the above-mentioned project at New Europe College, in April 2011 I explored some of these archival documents, which number tens of hundreds (according to the online catalog of the Turkish Public Record Office). There exist a number of documents related to Robert College collected mainly in the archive of the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekaleti*) and the Istanbul Directorate of Education (*İstanbul Maarif Müdürlüğü*). Those of them dating from Atatürk's period (1923-1938) are explored by Ayten Sezer.²²

As said above, the goal of the present research is to outline the place and role of Robert College in formation and development of Bulgarian political elite and intelligentsia. It requires a closer look at the nature of the college itself, its theory of education, as well as the social background and the career of the Bulgarian students after graduation from the college. By doing a multiple career-line analysis and outlining the professional, social and intellectual profile of Robert College's Bulgarian alumni, one can find out certain similarities and a given logics lying behind them. In so doing, typical career models or, in Dobrinka Parusheva's words, "collective structure of the individual ways to the top" could be figured out.²³

By focusing on Robert College's curriculum influenced by the Protestant educational ideals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on the one hand, and on the career-line analysis of Robert College's Bulgarian alumni, on the other, the present research attempts to outline the general profile of those Bulgarians who were educated in a leading American Protestant educational institution located in the heart of the Ottoman Empire. The research hypothesis dwells on the assumption that the educational background had much to do with the political affiliation of the Bulgarian leaders during pre-1878 Liberation movement and in post-Ottoman Bulgaria. It is well known that most of the Bulgarian alumni of Robert College became later leaders and active members of Liberal and Democratic parties and the research will suggest a plausible explanation of this.

Foundation and Nature of Robert College

When George Washburn, the second president of the college, accounts in his memoir its foundation, in the very beginning he makes it clear that although it was founded by Christopher Robert (d. 1878), a New York merchant descended from a French Huguenot family, "the truth is that the college grew out of the natural development of American missions in Turkey."²⁴

The missionaries considered Asia Minor (Anatolia) "Bible Land". Therefore they aimed at regaining this land from Islam to Christianity by propagating the Christian principles through education, social (i.e. hospitals) and publishing activities, and engaging with gender and political issues. The official recognition of the American presence on Ottoman soil in 1830 facilitated the missionary activities which had been so far secretly executed. These missionaries were sent mainly by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the Missionary Society of Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as by Women's Board of Missions, American Bible Society, and a few others.²⁵

In 1824 the first American Protestant school on Ottoman soil was opened in Beirut with seven students. In 1834 a similar school for Armenian boys was opened at Pera (Beyoğlu) in Istanbul. In 1859 ABCFM opened the so-called *Euphrates College* in Harput (today's Elazığ), which attracted local Armenians, who called it *Yeprad College*. From 1824 through 1886 the American missionaries operating within the Ottoman borders (mostly ABCFM) opened nearly 400 schools.²⁶ On the eve of World War I (1914) there were 426 American schools in the Ottoman Empire with 25,000 students.²⁷

Adnan Şişman claims that besides its activities to open Protestant churches in order to proselytize Ottoman subjects, to establish hospitals and orphanages, to set up presses to print texts used in the missionary services, ABCFM aimed also "to open schools in order to stimulate the minorities to resist the Ottoman state and to achieve their independence, to train students who would be leaders of the future independent states and who would serve the American interests."²⁸

Mithat Aydın also emphasizes the "historic part", which the American missionary schools played in the process of establishment and development of new national states, especially Bulgaria. According to him, the real reason lying behind the systematic approach to provide their students an education of best quality in order to train them as future national leaders was that in so doing the American missionaries secured their success and presence among the minorities.²⁹ One can speculate also that the missionaries put emphasis on the distinction between the ethnic minorities which were attached to the Orthodox Church (since the Ottoman state recognized not ethnic minorities but religious communities through the so-called *millet* system) in order to weaken the impact of the Orthodox church and hence to have a basis to strengthen their own influence over the weakened links of the Orthodox chain.

According to George Washburn the American missionaries saw "nothing corresponding to an American college in the empire", that is, they noticed the lack of institutions of higher education, and therefore Christopher Robert, being advised in 1857 by missionary H. G. Otis Dwight's sons James and William Dwight, decided to establish such a college.³⁰

Robert College was founded through the outstanding personal efforts of Cyrus Hamlin (d. 1900). As Washburn remarks, "Dr. Hamlin was the College."³¹ He was sent by ABCFM to Istanbul in 1840 in order to restart the activity of the missionary school at Pera, whose activity was meanwhile suspended because of the opposition of the Armenian Patriarchate. It was restarted with two Armenian students but closed again in 1841 due to the complaints of the influential Patriarchate. Then in 1843 it moved to Bebek, a neighborhood on the European side of the Bosphorus, with 22 male students (mostly Armenians). In 1856 Hamlin left ABCFM because of disagreements in view of the school curriculum and began in 1860 preparations for the establishment of Robert College. The college opened its first school year in September 1863 first in Bebek and moved later to the nearby neighborhood Rumeli Hisarı.

Although Robert College was founded and sponsored by missionaries who belonged previously to ABCFM and relied upon the school network established by the Board throughout the Ottoman Empire, it was by no means attached to the Board itself. As Washburn points out, James and William Dwight suggested Christopher Robert to found a college, "not in any way connected with the Mission and tolerant of the religious prejudices of the natives."³² Washburn points out, however, that the religious status of Robert College had been made clear in the constitution adopted by the trustees.³³

While ABCFM insisted on education based strictly on Protestant values, it seems that the college was not aiming at proselytizing students belonging to different Christian denominations to Protestantism and this

was a key for attracting students from the local communities, the basic aim being to strengthen Christianity among them as a whole. Washburn draws attention to the fact that small number of Robert College's graduates had become clergymen and that few of them had been Protestants.³⁴ In his annual report for 1914 the then Robert College's president Caleb F. Gates wrote the following (p. 6):

"Robert College was founded as a Christian College. Its Constitution requires that the Scriptures be read at least once every day of the school year, and that all the students and faculty attend. The purpose of its founders was clearly to make it a Christian College, and the Administration of the college holds strongly to that purpose. We aim to present Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and to make sure that every student shall understand the claims of a true Christianity. No pressure is brought to bear upon students of other religions to change their faith, but the presence of students of other religions does not modify our presentation of Christian truth."³⁵

Robert College preceded the foundation of the so-called *Mekteb-i Sultani* (Imperial School) at Galatasaray, which was opened by the Ottoman authorities in 1868 as a replica of a French lycée (that is, during the French influence in Constantinople in the first ten years of Abdulaziz's reign between 1861 and 1876, as Washburn points out³⁶), and the first Ottoman university, so-called *Darü'l-fünun* (House of Sciences) which was established only in 1874 (and reestablished in 1900).

Hence Robert College was quite unique an educational institution which differed more or less from the missionary schools, from any American college (being established outside America and adapted to the local specificities and necessities³⁷), and from the other schools on Ottoman soil. In his book *The Bulgarian Principality*, published in 1878, Konstantin Josef Jireček, a Czech historian and slavist, who became later Bulgarian minister of public instruction, points out that although Robert College's level is similar to that of the Czech gymnasia, the graduates of the latter should envy those young Bulgarians for the independence, freshness and quickness of their spirit which could be developed only in the good schools of the practical Americans."³⁸

Robert College's Theory of Education

In Washburn's annual report for 1896-1897 (p. 10-12) one can find quite comprehensive a description of the college's educational ideals. Under the heading "Our Theory of Education" he says the following:

"All agree that there is something in our system of education which has developed a new class of men in the East of a higher order than had been seen before... It is based upon the belief that the true object of college education is the development of the facilities and the formation of character... The primary object of the studies is to exercise and develop mental power, rather than to cram the memory with learning. We do not profess to give a technical education of any kind, but to discipline the minds of our students that they may be able to master any science, or profession, which they may take up after they leave the college. But, above all, our object is to develop and form the character of our students. Moral development, spiritual discipline, is the most essential part of education. This cannot be secured from the study of books. It must come chiefly from the personal influence of the teachers over the students, not only in the chapel and the classroom, but in personal intercourse at all times. There must be such a development of character that when the student goes out from the influence of the teacher he shall be already under the control of fixed principles, based upon the law of Christ, which will strengthen him against temptation and make a true man of him. That we have had some success in forming such characters... is probably the secret of the reputation which the college has gained in the East."³⁹

In his memoir Washburn puts the same in a different way:

"Our theory of college education is not new. In substance it is as old as Plato and Aristotle. Its chief end is the highest possible development of character. The principal work of the College is disciplinary... The most important work of the College is to train and develop the physical, intellectual and moral powers of the student... The discipline of these powers, the training of the will, the formation of habits which will bring the life into harmony with the will of God, this is the highest and best work of the College. Such is our theory..."⁴⁰

The theory of education applied at Robert College was based on the Protestant ideals of education which implied a humane relationship between teacher and pupil and the following three distinctive modes of child-rearing: "evangelical" (more authoritarian and repressive), "moderate" (stressing on duty, discipline and training of self-control), and "genteel" (more easygoing and encouraging self-assertion) modes of child-rearing.⁴¹ It is obvious that out of those three modes Robert College provided education based upon the "moderate" one.

That the college was considered an important tool for formation of individuals with certain ideals and political attitudes is obvious from Washburn's pitiful note about a leading Bulgarian politician who happened to be attracted to study in Russia instead of Robert College. He explains in his memoir that after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871

"Russia took the place of France as the chief enemy of the College and used her influence to turn Bulgarian students from Robert College to Russia for their education. Unfortunately for Bulgaria she opened the way for a boy in Tirnova, where Dr. Long was a missionary, and a friend of this boy, whose name was Stambouloff, to go to Russia for a free education in a theological school. If he had come to Robert College he would have had other ideas of government than those which he learned in Russia. He was probably the strongest man that Bulgaria has produced and saved Bulgaria from Russian domination; but so far as the internal government of the country was concerned he too often fell back upon Russian methods."⁴²

In the course of time the college's educational ideal to develop strong characters superseded its religious character. "With the increasing enrollment of Turks in Robert College and the growth of nationalism, the religious character of the College raised in important question," as Caleb F. Gates admits in his memoir.⁴³

A report, entitled "Perspectives for Robert College" and written in 1953 by David Garwood and Hilary Sumner-Boyd (p. 3), reveals, "Though Robert College grew out of the missionary movement of the nineteenth century and in its first half-century partook of the missionary spirit, this aspect of the College's purpose and character is now entirely superseded. Nevertheless, the development of character, high ideals, and integrity by example and precept remains the guiding principle of the institution."⁴⁴

Robert College's Course of Study and Academic Degree

Cyrus Hamlin considered Robert College a continuation and enlargement of his work at the Bebek Seminary⁴⁵ and set up Robert College along the same lines as the Bebek school, that is, with students going through the preparatory division before going on to the collegiate level.⁴⁶

Washburn explains in his memoir that the college's curriculum had been settled down upon "a program of studies for the four college classes which was based upon what was generally adopted at that time in New England colleges, but modified to adapt it to the practical wants" of its students. He stresses, however, that the great practical difficulty was the multiplicity of languages. Besides the English, the language of the college, the Latin, needed in order its diplomas to be recognized by the European universities, and the French, which every student wished to study, the Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish students had to learn the official Turkish language, as well as their own languages in order to be able to "hold their places among their own people." Hence each student studied at least five languages.⁴⁷

It is not surprising then that, according to Washburn, there were wags proposing that the college should be named Babel College.⁴⁸

According to a *Tabular View of the Course of Study in Robert College*, appended to a printed advertisement for the academic year 1870-1871, prepared during Hamlin's presidency in English, Armenian, Bulgarian, and Greek and providing information about the college, its admission rules, course of study, terms and fees,⁴⁹ as well as Washburn's account for the year 1875 in his memoir,⁵⁰ the college's curriculum included lectures in the following disciplines:

- Mathematics: algebra, book keeping (optional), geometry, trigonometry, analytical geometry (optional), calculus (optional), surveying, navigation, and mathematics of astronomy (optional);

- Sciences: natural history; zoology, physiology and hygiene, botany (optional), physics, chemistry, astronomy, analytical chemistry (optional), geology, mineralogy (optional), quantitative analysis (optional);

- Humanities: physical and political geography of the world, history, history of civilization, philosophy of history, political economy, commercial law, parliamentary law, international law, mental philosophy (psychology), history of philosophy, moral philosophy (ethics), Paley's evidences (William Paley's *View of the Evidences of Christianity*, 1794), oratory (rhetoric), disputation, logic, English, French, German (optional), Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Latin, and Turkish languages, drawing, painting, and music (optional).

In an advertisement for the college signed by Washburn and published in Bulgarian in the newspaper *Danube* on August 8, 1876, along with the above-mentioned subjects Italian Language and pedagogy are also mentioned.⁵¹

Thus Robert College provided four years of undergraduate course in the Liberal Arts with its two branches, and namely *trivium* (including grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and *quadrivium* (including mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and music), as well as in the sciences. Its graduates received the degree of *Artium Baccalaureus* (A.B.) or *Bachelor in Arts* (B.A.), *Bachelor in Sciences* (B.S.), *Bachelor in Engineering* (B.E.) as of the School of Engineering was opened in 1912 (the older division was named College for Arts and Sciences). As Washburn remarks, in 1868, that is, the fifth year of its operation, the Armenian student Hagopos Djedjizian and the Bulgarian student Petco Gorbanoff were the first students who were selected by Cyrus Hamlin to graduate and who received the degree of B.A.⁵²

Robert College's Student Body

When Robert College started its educational activity on September 16, 1863, there were only four students enrolled. By the end of the first school year their number increased to 20. In the course of time the total number of enrolled students increased gradually to exceed one thousand in the mid-1950s.⁵³ There were some drastic drops in number both of the enrolled students and the graduates due to the negative impact of the wars between the nations which were represented in Robert College's student body such as the 1897 Greek-Turkish war, 1912-1913 Balkan wars, and World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945). The Great Depression (1929-late 1930s) also exerted depressing effect on the enrollments figures, as the annual report for 1931-1932 reveals.⁵⁴

A prospect of Robert College for 1890 provides the following overall statistics about the student body: whole number of students, 1863-1890: 1,551; graduated, 1868-1890: 263; average time spent in the college by non-graduates, 3 years; by graduates, 6 years.⁵⁵

In 1903 Washburn summarized the enrollment and graduation figures as follows: "At the end of forty years we had done something for the education of more than 2,500 young men of many nationalities. The average length of time spent in the college by these students was about three years; 435 of them graduated with honor, after from four to seven years in the college. Of these 144 were Armenians, 195 Bulgarians, 76 Greeks, 14 English and Americans, 3 Germans, 2 Hebrews, 1 Turk."⁵⁶

The number of Robert College's graduates was quite moderate. Moreover, the increase of the number of enrolled students did not lead automatically to an increase in the number of graduates. The latter was over 10 percent of the number of enrolled students only six times between 1868-1930, and namely in the classes of 1877, 1884, 1886, 1887, 1888, and 1894. George Washburn gives an explanation of this by drawing attention to the 1860s- and the 1870s-Ottoman realities:

"If we take the whole number of students who have entered the college since its foundation, no more than one in six has completed the course and graduated. The reason for this is that when the college was founded the only idea that the people of Turkey had of education was the acquiring a practical knowledge of three or four languages, and this idea is still very common. Then again the majority of our students come to the college to be prepared for business and are always ready to leave when their parents find a promising opening for them. Many are too poor to complete their education. Again in Turkey proper there are very few openings for Christians in professional life or in government offices, so that the need of a college education is not apparent... But we have never measured the value of our work by the number of our graduates. The average length of time spent in the College by those who have not graduated is more than three years. We do what we can to induce those who are of more than ordinary ability to finish their course, because there is a great need of such men to become leaders of their people..."57

The above-mentioned prospect of Robert College for 1890, prepared by Washburn, stresses the same situation:

"In the early history of the College very few of the students remained to complete their course and graduate. Their parents could not understand the necessity of so long a course of study. Even now many students enter without any intention of graduating, but the proportion of graduates is steadily increasing.

The graduates of the College have already played a most important part in the History of the East, especially in Bulgaria, where they have filled the highest offices of State, and exerted a vast influence in the moral, intellectual, and political development of the people."⁵⁸

As a matter of fact, Robert College itself considered the first three decades of its history a "Bulgarian period". An unsigned article, which appeared in a college newsletter in 1923 under the title *Bulgarian Alumni* of Robert College, points out the following:

"The first period in the history of Robert College may be termed the Bulgarian period. From 1868 to 1890 the majority of its graduates were Bulgarians. This period includes the time when Bulgaria became independent and was building up a new kingdom. They had great need of educated men for leaders and they found them in the graduates of Robert College who contributed very much to the founding of this new state. Nine of the graduates of Robert College became cabinet ministers and two of these held the office of prime minister."⁵⁹

Robert College's "Bulgarian Period"

In the concluding chapter of his memoir Washburn remarks that the Bulgarians "had discovered" Robert College.⁶⁰ It is the third chapter, however, where he explains how this "discovery" happened:

"When they began to seek for enlightenment their attention was first directed to Robert College by Dr. Long, then an American missionary in Bulgaria and later a professor in the College. Although Dr. Hamlin had interested himself in the Bulgarians in 1856 and used his influence to have missions established in Bulgaria, it does not appear from their correspondence that earlier he or Mr. Robert had ever thought of them as possible students in the College, and Mr. Robert died without knowing that he had played an important part in founding a new state in Europe."⁶¹

Further in his memoir Washburn stresses how important Dr. Albert L. Long (d. 1901) was for the recruitment of Robert College's Bulgarian students. In the academic year 1872-1873 Dr. Long was appointed professor of natural science at the college and Washburn describes him in the following way:

"He had been a missionary of the American Methodist Church in Bulgaria for some twelve years, where he had won the confidence and affection of the people and with Dr. Riggs had translated the Bible into Bulgarian. It was through his influence that Bulgarians first came to the College. No college president ever had a more devoted and efficient associate, and he was a tower of strength in the College until he died in 1901, mourned by all Bulgarians and by every student who had been under him."⁶²

On the occasion of Dr. Long's death in 1901 Washburn repeats the same.⁶³ As a matter of fact, since the Bulgarians lacked institutions of high and higher education well until their political emancipation in 1878 (with few exceptions) they used to send their children to foreign schools in order to provide them with education of contemporary standard. The Bulgarians first explored the educational opportunities within the Ottoman Empire. In the early nineteenth century they used to send their sons to the renowned Greek schools on Ottoman soil, as well as to western and central Europe. Toward the mid-nineteenth century they turned gradually to the capital city of Istanbul, where new Ottoman and foreign schools were opened. After the Crimean war (1853-1856) Russia's gymnasia, theological seminaries, military schools and universities became more attractive for Bulgarians because of the lower fees and the closeness of religion and language.⁶⁴ The education of those Bulgarians was financially supported either by their relatively wealthy families or by sponsors (charity organizations and rich individuals).65

According to the rough statistics about Robert College, provided in an unsigned text, entitled *American Educational Institutions in Bulgaria* (1860-1948), "for a period about 80 years more than 300 Bulgarians graduated from the college. Besides the graduates there were another 2,000-2,500 students, who did not finish their study because of financial, family and other reasons."⁶⁶

According to the earliest lists of students to be found in Robert College archive, the first Bulgarian student, Petar Sitchanoff, enrolled in 1864.⁶⁷ The preserved annual reports for the 1950s are the latest sources to mention the presence of Bulgarian students at Robert College.⁶⁸ According to the preserved alumni records, between 1868 and 1967, 330 Bulgarians received a B.A. degree, Kiril Kirof being the last one (1967), and 9 others a B.E. degree from the School of Engineering.⁶⁹

Washburn provides clear evidences of how the international political dynamics affected the presence of given nationalities, Bulgarian in

particular, in Robert College. As he explains in his memoir, after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 "Russia took the place of France as the chief enemy of the College and used her influence to turn Bulgarian students from Robert College to Russia for their education."⁷⁰ This may explain the fall of the number of Bulgarian students from 40 in 1871-1872 to 31 in 1872-1873, and then the increase again up to 43 in the next year (see Appendix).

In the course of twelve successive years, from 1877 through 1890, the Bulgarian students outnumbered the students of other nationalities, despite some inconsistencies. Even the fact that in 1878 northern Bulgaria became a widely autonomous Principality and southern Bulgaria an autonomous Ottoman province under the name Eastern Rumelia did not affect at all the Bulgarian enrollments at Robert College. Moreover, the peak of Bulgarian students at the college ever was in the school years 1881-1882 and 1882-1883 (105 and 110, respectively). The reasons for this remarkable presence of Bulgarian students in Robert College were the lack of an established schooling system in the immediate aftermath of Bulgaria's liberation, on the one hand, and the prestige that Robert College succeeded to achieve among the Bulgarians in pre-liberation time by supporting morally the Bulgarian emancipation movement, on the other.

After 1883 there was a significant decrease in the number of the Bulgarian students. On the one hand, this coincided with the school reform in the Bulgarian principality initiated by the minister of public instruction Konstantin Josef Jireček and concluded in 1883. Due to this reform the number of Bulgarian gymnasia had significantly increased. Washburn was also aware of this and wrote in his memoir: "The number of our Bulgarian students had already fallen from 110 to 71, owing to the opening of similar institutions there."⁷¹

On the other hand, a struggle for the young Bulgarian minds had taken place. In the early 1880s the Bulgarian prince Alexander suspended the Constitution, being supported by the Conservative party, and brought in Russian officials to govern the country. In 1882 and 1883 the Bulgarian cabinets were headed by Russian generals (L. N. Soboleff and A. V. Kaulbars), who, in the course of "the Russification of everything", in Washburn's words,⁷² took measures to restrict the activities of the American Protestant missionaries, the closure of two American schools including (in Svishtov and Lovech). In 1883 the Russophile Bulgarian newspaper *Slavianin* accused publically Robert College for destructing the Orthodoxy of its students, recommending the Bulgarians to withdraw their children from Robert College and to register them in Bulgarian gymnasia. Its publications affected to a certain extent the Bulgarian public opinion and some Bulgarians really did so.⁷³

The "Bulgarian period" terminated after the second anti-Robert College campaign, executed during 1888 and 1889, this time by the newspaper *Selianin*, an issue of the Bulgarian Orthodox Synod. Vasil Karayovoff, who graduated from the college in 1881, had published several articles, recommending the Bulgarians not to send their children to Robert College since its training level had been lower than that of a Bulgarian gymnasium and because of its anti-Orthodox policy. This caused another serious fall in number of the enrolled Bulgarian students.⁷⁴ It was also true for the number of Bulgarian graduates after the late 1880s. Robert College's president Washburn was aware of this and stated in his memoir that in the academic year 1888-1889 the number of students was less due to "the unsettled state of affairs" in Bulgaria, where "all the Bulgarian troubles came from Russia". Washburn concludes that "it was this generally unsatisfactory state of things which so greatly reduced the number of Bulgarian students."⁷⁵

The first three decades of Robert College's history were mainly associated with the Armenian and Bulgarian students, whose number exceeded almost twice the number of the following nationality, the Greeks, not to speak about the Turks, the Jews, the English native speakers and those of any other nationality. However, if taken into consideration the number of the students, who had completed their course of study and graduated from the college, it is obvious that the Bulgarian graduates prevailed significantly over the Armenians and the Greeks, as the table below clearly shows.

Number of Robert College's Students and Graduates between 1863 and 1890

	Armenians	Bulgarians	Greeks	Turks	Jews	English speakers	Others
Students	1344	1338	727	52	13	183	630
Graduates	89	146	18	-	2	5	2

According to Their Nationality

After the fall in number of the Robert College's Bulgarian students in the late 1880s, the Armenians became for a while dominant in terms of registered students.⁷⁶ However, as of the mid-1890s through 1924 the Greek students outnumbered significantly the other nationalities represented at Robert College, and as a result a few years later (the period in which the Greek students completed their courses at the college) the number of the Greek graduates became prevailing over the graduates of other nationalities.

Washburn gives in his memoir the following explanation of the Greek outburst:

"For the first time in the history of the College the Greeks outnumbered the Armenians and the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians had fallen off, owing to the establishment of the government gymnasia, where students were educated at very small cost to their parents, and on account of the many difficulties put in the way of Bulgarians coming to Constantinople by the Turkish government. Constantinople was no longer a political or a business center for Bulgaria. The Armenians were suffering from the political troubles here and in the interior. The Greeks, on the other hand, had come to realize at last that this was not a Bulgarian college, that it was no part of its object to attack or weaken the Orthodox Church..."⁷⁷⁷

Washburn claims that from 1891 the Bulgarians no longer constituted the majority of Robert College's graduating classes,⁷⁸ although four years in the 1890s (that is, almost half the decade) the Bulgarian graduates were still prevailing over the students of other nationality according to the figures provided by Washburn himself.⁷⁹

After having left a remarkable imprint on Robert College's first three decades, the Bulgarian students had always been a sentimental issue for the college authorities, and especially for its second president George Washburn, who was personally engaged with the Bulgarian movement for national emancipation in the 1870s. In the 1899 annual report (p. 6) he wrote the following regretful statement:

"The number of Bulgarian students is less than the many years, to out regret. There are various reasons for this. Russian influence is now very strong there and is actively exercised to prevent students from coming here. There are good schools of all grades in the country, either free or very inexpensive, and for three years past the financial condition of the country has been very bad. It is essentially a farming country and there has been a succession of bad harvests."⁸⁰

Three years later the situation was the same as the 1901 annual report (p. 8) reveals: "It is many years since we have so few Bulgarian students and we regret the loss but it was due to financial condition of Bulgaria for the past four years."⁸¹

Besides the economic conditions, the wars, in which Bulgaria was involved, had also negative effect on the enrollment of Bulgarian students at Robert College. According to Gates's annual report for 1910-1911 the Bulgarian students boycotted the annual Field Day, "owing to national feeling" on the eve of the 1912-1913 Balkan wars.⁸² The situation in the college during the wars seemed far from being peaceful as Gates reveals in his memoir: "It can easily be imagined what a severe test was imposed upon the students of Robert College by these events. Their respective nations were at war with one another. Students and teachers were being called for military service, and many were anxious to know the fate of their families."⁸³ In his annual report for 1912-1913 (p. 59) Gates points out that the Bulgarian Department had suffered more from the war than any other.⁸⁴ The college was in a similar troublesome situation during World War I. An Ottoman archival document, dated June 8, 1915, reveals that the Bulgarian students had missed the annual exams at the college since they had returned to their homeland.⁸⁵ Gates's annual report for 1915-1916 provides a description of the difficult conditions under which the school had been operating for during the Balkan Wars and the first two years of World War I.⁸⁶ As a result the number of Bulgarian students decreased more that trice from 64 in 1913-1914 to 19 in 1918-1919, while in the following years their number reached and even surpassed the prewar average figures. Besides the end of war, another important reason for the increase of the number of enrolled Bulgarians was, as the Bulgarian historian Nikola Natchoff pointed out in the 1920s, that with regard to its course of study Robert College was in between classic gymnasium and university and therefore with no analog in the Bulgarian schooling system.87

The annual report for 1925-1926 (p. 29-30) reveals that there were 102 registered Bulgarian students and makes the following comment:

"This is a very creditable showing when we remember that the college fees for Bulgarians increased... and that the Bulgarian students have been required to study Turkish for five periods per week, although this language is of very little use to them. In view of the fact that an American school is to be established in Sofia...it becomes a question whether the number of Bulgarian students doing to Robert College will fall off. The present indications are that there will always be Bulgarian parents who will be glad to send their children to Robert College which has played such an important part in the history of their country and which has given to Bulgaria some of its most renowned leaders."⁸⁸

The annual report for the next 1926-1927 (p. 8) draws attention to the smaller number of the Bulgarian students due to the increase of the fees and explicitly underlines that "the Bulgarian element is a very important one in the college and we should be very sorry to have it diminished."⁸⁹

Robert College's Bulgarian Alumni

After graduation from Robert College most of its Bulgarian alumni continued their education mostly in prestigious European universities, and occasionally in the states. Law, medicine, and economics were the most popular fields of specialization. The following table shows the occupation that the Robert College's Bulgarian graduates chose and practiced during their lifetime, according to data provided by the college's alumni records.

Bulgarian Graduates' Choice of Profession

Occupation	1890	1900	1967
Businessmen (merchants, bankers, financiers, insurers, accountants, farmers, entrepreneurs)	35	45	85
Teachers (including professors and school directors)	66	79	86
Government officials (mostly of high rank)	33	38	43
Jurists (judges, lawyers)	30	50	67
Physicians	16	19	22
Army officers	14	15	15
Editors/Publicists	9	10	10

Preachers	2	2	2
Engineers	5	6	21
Translators/Interpreters	7	9	12
Other	1		5
Unknown	7	15	66

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The table shows that most of the Bulgarian graduates were involved in business and financial sector. It is not surprising since most of the Bulgarian students were from families of wealthy Bulgarian merchants and entrepreneurs such as Taptchileshkoff, Geshoff, Madjaroff, Baldjieff, to mention but a few. However, quite many students did not choose their father's business but became judges and lawyers, physicians, engineers (especially after the establishment of the Engineering School to Robert College), diplomats and translators (due to the high level of the language skills adopted at the college). Many of the Bulgarian graduates of Robert College became after graduation teachers, 16 of them in the college itself: Petko Gorbanoff (class of 1868), Stephan Thomoff (class of 1869), Stephan Panaretoff (class of 1871), Ivan Slaveykoff (class of 1871), Constantine Stoiloff (class of 1871), Peter Dimitroff (class of 1872), George Peneff (class of 1880), Theodore Shipkoff (class of 1881), Peter Voikoff (class of 1883), Stoyan Manoloff (class of 1887), Tzvetan Ilieff (class of 1893), Svetoslav Salgandjieff (class of 1895), Bojil Bijoff (class of 1897), Cyril Panaretoff (class of 1912), Jupiter Petroff (class of 1915), George Popoff (class of 1920). However, in most cases the teaching position was only temporarily held. As a whole Robert College's Bulgarian alumni pertained to the upper middle class, which, according to sociologist Max Weber's definition, consists of well-educated professionals with graduate degrees and comfortable incomes.

Since college prospects for the years 1890 and 1900 provide quantitative data about all alumni's choice of profession,⁹⁰ juxtaposition between the overall data and those related to the Bulgarian alumni can outline some specifics as far as the Bulgarian alumni are concerned. Besides the figures the following table reveals also the percentage of increase in number of the preferred professions.

		Bulgarians 1890	Total 1900	Bulgarians		Total	Bulgarians	
Occupation	Total 1890			1900	1967	Increase 1890- 1900	Increase 1890- 1900	Increase 1900- 1967
Business Finances	75	35	110	45	85	47 %	29 %	89 %
Teachers	71	66	88	79	86	24 %	20 %	9 %
Government	46	33	50	38	43	9 %	15 %	13 %
Jurists	36	30	50	50	67	39 %	67 %	34 %
Physicians	24	16	37	19	22	54 %	19 %	16 %
Army officers	17	14	20	15	15	18 %	7 %	0 %
Editors/ Publicists	10	9	12	10	10	20 %	11 %	0 %
Preachers	10	2	12	2	2	20 %	0 %	0 %
Engineers	5	5	10	6	21	100 %	20 %	250 %

Alumni of Robert College's Choice of Profession

The table shows clearly that the teaching positions were attractive for the Bulgarian graduates of Robert College predominantly in the period prior to 1900. It could be explained with the fact that in the late nineteenth century a modern educational system was established in Bulgaria, as mentioned above, and it needed well prepared faculty members. It was also true for the army positions since the newly established Bulgarian army had great need of officers. There is a striking disproportion between the Bulgarian graduates and the graduates of other nationality with regard to the following three fields: business, law and government. When juxtaposed the increase percentages between 1890 and 1900, it becomes evident that, in comparison with the other nationalities, the Bulgarian graduates were more inclined to take positions in government and judicial system at the expense of being engaged in business. It is not surprising since amongst the nationalities represented at Robert College in those times it was the Bulgarians who were creating their own state institutions.

This phenomenon was specific for the independent Balkan states established in the nineteenth century, as R. Daskalov points out. According to him, these states pursued economic policies of protectionism and encouraging of the infant industries that created a close parasitic relationship between business and the expanding bureaucracy. Yet, it was not business but civil service that was more attractive and education was pursued with the purpose of procuring an office in the state apparatus.⁹¹

Prior to World War I many of the Robert College's Bulgarian students and graduates served their people and state by choosing public career.

Some of them such as Petko Gorbanoff (class of 1868), Stephan Thomoff (class of 1869), and Alexander Ludskanoff (class of 1875) took part as intelligence officers in the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war, one of whose major results was the Bulgarian political emancipation.⁹² As Washburn points out Ludskanoff, in particular, "had distinguished himself on the staff of General Skobeleff, who spoke of him to me in the highest terms. The necessity of such appointments grew out of the ignorance of the language of the country by the Russians, and the presence of a large number of Bulgarian volunteers in the Russian army."⁹³

In the Constitutional Assembly which took place in the medieval Bulgarian capital Tarnovo in 1879 and whose aim was to accept a constitution for the newly founded Bulgarian Principality, the presence of members, who were Robert College's graduates (four in number),⁹⁴ was of vital importance, as attested by Washburn in his memoir:

"The Assembly itself was unique, made up largely of peasants, many of them in their sheepskin clothes, and I think that there was no one in the assembly who knew anything about parliamentary law except the old students of Robert College, who were in force. There was not a member who had had any personal experience in civil government."⁹⁵

The presence of Robert College's graduates in the Provincial Assembly of Eastern Rumelia seems to have had been even bigger since according to Konstantin Josef Jireček's testimony, among its members there were "no graduates of a Russian school but more of them being from Robert College."⁹⁶ The above-mentioned article *Bulgarian Alumni of Robert College* points out that "The graduates of Robert College first taught the Bulgarians the principles of Parliamentary procedure."⁹⁷ The same article cites Washburn's words from his memoir: "The most important thing that we ever did for them was the educating of their young men to become leaders of their people at a time when there were very few Bulgarians who knew anything of civil government in a free state."⁹⁸ It is not surprising since amongst the educational institutions which the Bulgarians went to in pre-Liberation period Robert College seems to have been the only one, which provided classes in parliamentary law.

The above-mentioned article points out also that the Bulgarians "had great need of educated men for leaders and they found them in the graduates of Robert College who contributed very much to the founding of this new state" and it was true not only for the Bulgarian parliament, but also for the Bulgarian central and local government.

Since the newly established Bulgarian state had to make its political elite ad hoc^{99} relatively a big proportion (12 percent) of the Bulgarian ministers during the period 1879-1915 were not graduates of universities but colleges and even secondary schools (i.e. gymnasia), among them students and graduates of Robert College.¹⁰⁰ Two prime ministers, Constantine Stoiloff (class of 1871) and Todor Ivantchoff (class of 1875), nine ministers, tens of city mayors and provincial governors, as well as diplomats were graduates of Robert College. Other three Bulgarian ministers studied at the college but did not finish its course of study. 11 percent (12 out of 108) of the Bulgarian ministers and prime ministers during the said period were students and graduates of Robert College (classes of the 1870s and 1880s, when the Bulgarian students and graduates prevailed over the other nationalities in the college) and they prevailed over those who graduated from other schools and colleges.¹⁰¹ As Ivan Ilchev points out the certificates given by the college were enough for their holders to have higher positions in the Bulgarian government.¹⁰²

Hence, if the period 1863 to 1890 could be termed the "Bulgarian period" in Robert College's history, one can justifiably term the years 1879 to 1915 the "Robert College period" in Bulgarian history.

As for the political affiliation of the Robert College's Bulgarian graduates, most of them who became ministers and prime ministers during the period 1879-1915 belonged to the liberal and democratic parties. As a matter of fact during that period the cabinets of the liberal/democratic parties were more than those of the conservative/people parties. Graduates of Robert College became ministers predominantly in the first decade of the twentieth century. It is worth mentioning that amongst the eight members of the Bulgarian liberal-democratic cabinet headed by Petko Karaveloff from March 4, 1901 through January 3, 1902 there were three graduates of Robert College, and namely Ivan Belinoff (class of 1876), Ivan Slaveykoff (class of 1871), and Alexander Ludskanoff (class of 1875). During his private visit to Sofia in December 1901 Washburn saw all the Bulgarian ministers, those who were graduates of the college including (although according to him they were four).¹⁰³

The private secretaries (*aid-de-camp*) of the Bulgarian rulers Alexander of Battenberg (1879-1886) and Ferdinand I (1887-1918) were alumni of Robert College: Svetoslav Taptchileshkoff (class of 1875), Marin Marinoff (class of 1876), Verban Nicoloff (class of 1876), and Ivan Exarchos (student in 1866-1867).¹⁰⁴ Washburn narrates in his memoir that during the visit of Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria to the college in 1896 he "made himself very agreeable to the Bulgarian students, and took afternoon tea at Kennedy Lodge, where he was kind enough to say that Robert College had been a nursery for Bulgarian statesmen and he hoped it would continue to be so..."¹⁰⁵ In his annual report for 1895-1896 (p. 11) Washburn repeats Prince Ferdinand's words that "Robert College had been a nursery of Bulgarian statesmen" and concludes: "I can think of no other example in history of such a relationship between a college and a state as that which all the world recognizes as existing in this case and which was so gracefully and cordially acknowledged by Prince Ferdinand."¹⁰⁶

Besides, the Robert College's Bulgarian graduates tended to be Russophobe rather than Russophile. The attitude towards and relationship with Russia played an important role in the Bulgarian political life. Washburn attests, for instant, the following for the years 1888-1889:

"All the Bulgarian troubles came from Russia... Prince Alexander had been removed, but now Prince Ferdinand and Mr. Stambouloff blocked the way, supported by the great majority of the Bulgarian people... Murder and treason were patronized and paid by Russia, and it was pitiful to see how some really honest and patriotic men were deceived and won over to the belief that it was necessary for Bulgaria to sacrifice everything to please the Czar. Some of them were graduates of Robert College, although in general our alumni were loyal to Bulgaria rather than to the Czar."¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The foundation of Robert College in Istanbul in 1863 as a higher educational institution coincided with the process of Bulgarian emancipation from the Ottoman rule and with the transitional period from a traditional to a modern society in which education was considered to be of significant importance. Robert College's theory of education and curriculum provided its students an opportunity to achieve knowledge and skills which were needed exactly in that historical moment. In other words, Robert College taught the Bulgarians the know-how of the civil government. A significant part of the newly formed elite in post-Ottoman Bulgaria spent its schooling years at Robert College which made the college itself extremely popular among the Bulgarians and somewhat a hallmark.

A report by D. Atanasoff, entitled *Like Robert College* and published in the same issue of the above-mentioned *Newsletter* (1923), emphasizes exactly the same. He reports that the Bulgarian government had taken a decision to grant the American Board of Missionaries a piece of land near Sofia in order to remove the American School, founded in Samokov in 1860, nearer the cultural center of the country. The decision was presented to the Parliament and the records of its session on June 14, 1920, "reveal in most earnest way the prevailing sentiment toward American educational institutions." According to Atanasoff, the most striking evidence of this sentiment was the words "Like Robert College" of the then Bulgarian Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliyski, who by comparing this school with Robert College actually attested that in the Bulgarian public opinion Robert College had gained status of an unquestionable hallmark of high standard of education and excellence. The report concludes with the following remark:

"At that moment of recollection doubtless the Prime Minister pictured Bulgaria in the days long before her independence and recalling the past historical events he saw the spirit of Robert College watching, guiding and directing ... Americans have just cause to feel proud that Robert College gave to many of the leading Bulgarian citizens their education so that it has played a peculiar part in the making of the Bulgarian nation."¹⁰⁸

Year	Students	Graduates	Year	Students	Graduates
1-1863/64			53-1915/16	55	2
2-1864/65	1		54-1916/17		1
3-1865/66	9		55-1917/18		1
4-1866/67	16		56-1918/19	19	6
5-1867/68	16	1	57-1919/20	34	3
6-1868/69	41	5	58-1920/21	34	4
7-1869/70	35		59-1921/22	21	1
8-1870/71	41	5	60-1922/23	35	1
9-1871/72	40	6	61-1923/24	53	2
10-1872/73	31	1	62-1924/25	72	2
11-1873/74	43	5	63-1925/26	102	2
12-1874/75	45	7	64-1926/27	91	4
13-1875/76	33	7	65-1927/28	62	3
14-1876/77	42	5	66-1928/29	56	2
15-1877/78	50	3	67-1929/30	57	4
16-1878/79	54	6	68-1930/31	37	5
17-1879/80	77	4	69-1931/32	53	6
18-1880/81	89	9	70-1932/33		5
19-1881/82	105	5	71-1933/34		6
20-1882/83	110	5	72-1934/35		3
21-1883/84	91	14	73-1935/36		2
22-1884/85	71	9	74-1936/37		3
23-1885/86	71	12	75-1937/38		3
24-1886/87	70	13	76-1938/39		
25-1887/88	60	16	77-1939/40		
26-1888/89	52	6	78-1940/41		
27-1889/90	45	3	79-1941/42		
28-1890/91	41	7	80-1942/43	5	
29-1891/92	52	4	81-1943/44	2	
30-1892/93	60	6	82-1944/45	3	
31-1893/94	44	6	83-1945/46	4	
32-1894/95	36	6	84-1946/47		
33-1895/96	37	3	85-1947/48		

Appendix: Robert College's Bulgarian Students and Graduates (1864-1967)

ORLIN SABEV (ORHAN SALIH)

34-1896/97	38	5	86-1948/49		
35-1897/98	49	6	87-1949/50		
36-1898/99	45	3	88-1950/51	5	
37-1899/1900	39	2	89-1951/52	7	1
38-1900/01	34	4	90-1952/53	17	1
39-1901/02	29	2	91-1953/54		
40-1902/03	28	7	92-1954/55	12	
41-1903/04	23	1	93-1955/56		1
42-1904/05	34	1	94-1956/57		3
43-1905/06	37		95-1957/58		1
44-1906/07	39	2	96-1958/59		1
45-1907/08	54	4	97-1959/60		
46-1908/09	67	4	98-1960/61		
47-1909/10	70	3	99-1961/62		
48-1910/11	68	4	100-1962/63		
49-1911/12	57	7	101-1963/64		1
50-1912/13	65	2	102-1964/65		
51-1913/14	64	6	103-1965/66		
52-1914/15		7	104-1966/67		1

NOTES

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