

ROMANIES, OUR NEIGHBORS*

When in the late May, 2000, I obtained as a gift the book entitled "Romanies, Our Neighbors" with the dedication encouraging me to read it "profoundly and critically" the first thing I asked myself was whether I was competent enough to estimate such a "study" since my scientific knowledge about the Romanies was meager regardless of my rich personal experience with them. Though I was some time before an associate of Professor Dragoljub B. Đorđević and Dragan Todorović during their research of the religious life of the Romanies living in the villages of Niš and their cemeteries, it seems that they could have made a better choice when looking for a person to review critically their book. However, even a look at the referential literature informed me that the authors used the works recently published thus giving me a sign that romology as a science is in the very process of its constitution; thus, I decided to prepare this review hoping that in this way I am giving my modest (indirect) contribution to the development of this young discipline.

My previous companionship with Đorđević and Todorović has, however, made me uncertain about which approach to choose in writing this review even before I took to reading the book. Namely, it is not unknown that in the scientific circle there is a practice of doing things on the principle "favor for favor" that can be, apparently, of mutual benefit but at the same time it objectively damages both the personal and the scientific reputation. On the other hand, if the objections to the quality of the work done are unavoidable, what is the reviewer to do? Is it less "sinful" to break an agreement or to meet the agreed terms in a responsible way hoping that the authors will accept the possible remarks with good will. I have decided to do as my conscience tells me.

The book *Romanies, Our Neighbors* (subtitle "Romanies of Donji Komren") is a result of the collective effort of a group of the authors who are bound to Donji Komren either by birth or place of residence. It is done within the project entitled "SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF THE ROMANIES IN SERBIA IN THE TRANSITION PROCESSES - INTEGRATION, ASSIMILATION OR SEGREGATION?" supported by the "Research Support Scheme of the Open Society Foundation, grant No. 287/1998." led by Professor Dragoljub B. Đorđević, ph. d. Its publisher is a non-government organization "Komren Sociological Encounters" founded in the middle of 1999 and already well-reputed for its publishing undertakings. The book appeared in the early May 2000 at the time when the first "Komren Encounters" dealing with "A Sociological Insight into the Romanies' Fate" took place. I got acquainted with the idea of publishing a special study devoted to the Donji Komren Romanies at the very beginning while the fact that its publication happened at the same time as the "Komren Encounters" tells about a previously determined term that surely influenced the volume as well as the contents of the book but also certain shortcomings that have been noticed, as it has turned out, even by the author of

* Dragoljub B. Đorđević (editor), *Romi naše komšije - Donjekomrenski Romi*, Komrenski sociološki susreti, Niš, 2000.

the preface.

The book has about eighty pages with the following chapters: "People of Donji Komren (and of Niš) about the Romanies" (D. B. Đorđević) in which the results of one of the nine public opinion investigations in Niš within the project "Local Public Opinion about Local problems" carried out in the late 1999 and early 2000 are presented; then, "Sociologists of Komren about the Romanies" (A. Kostadinović) which is a questionnaire filled up by several sociologists who also come from Komren; then, "Romanies of Donji Komren" (M. Radaković) comprising geneology of the Donji Komren Romanies and their present socio-economic status preceded by a brief "identity card" of the settlement itself; "All of Trajko's Gypsies" (M. Krstić) in which the author presents some brief sketches and memories of the Donji Komren Romanies; "Donji Komren Romanies as Schoolchildren" (Ž. Jovanović) in which the teacher of the local elementary school speaks about his experiences in working with the Romanies' children; "Donji Komren Gypsy Cemetery" (D. Todorović and D. B. Đorđević) and "Donji Komren Romanies in the Objective" (D. Krstić) which is a photo serial dealing with the Donji Komren Romanies' everyday life. The book is equipped with the preface, the afterword, the authors' note, an extensive list of literature and a summary in English. It is illustrated with some thirty black-and-white photos; some of them are accompanied with respective texts while the others are, as has been already mentioned, included in the special photo section.

The word "study" at the beginning of this review is under the quotation marks since it fits only to one part of the book. Though Jovan Živković, ph. d., says in the Preface that it is a "sociological-ethnological study" it can rather be considered as a monograph and thus regarded as a popular science work. Regardless of this slight objection, the book "Romanies, Our Neighbors" is a really "precious gift to the Donji Komren Romanies by the people of Donji Komren" as it is said in the Preface.

The authors of particular essays though with no academic education have done their part satisfactorily regarding the fact that no one has expected more of them. Marjan Radaković has shown, as an experienced chronicle writer-amateur (the author of the monograph about Donji Komren in the edition "Village Chronicles" published by the Board for the Village Studies of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences), once again, that by self-improvement and with a little help of the tutor one can achieve very solid scientific results. But, when speaking about the professionals, certain objections can be made to Professor Andon Konstadinović, ph. d., for the questionnaire entitled "Sociologists of Komren about the Romanies" that has been carried out, or at least it seems so, only for the sake of including, in a written form, the Komren sociologists who have failed to give any true scientific contribution to the book. It can be also objected to Professor Djordjević for building up a comparative analysis of the public opinion research considering the attitudes of the citizens of Niš and Donji Komren by using only the sample of of 30 examined from his place of residence.

In any case, beside the stated shortcomings, partly explained by the desire to have the book published in a given deadline and partly by the fact that there were no previous similar investigations of the given topic that the authors could rely on in their work or even build them up, the book "Romanies, Our Neighbors" deserves the attention of the scientific and of the wider reading public. It can be a useful instruction to the future investigators of the Romanies' population in general showing to them how they should (and how they should not) work.

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