

Polina Tsokova

THE ACTIVITIES OF NEVROKOP BISHOPRIC IN THE PERIOD OF THE WARS 1912-1919

(Summary)

With its liberation in October 1912, the diocese of Nevrokop was included in the limits of Bulgarian kingdom. Being the only diocese in Aegean Macedonia, that was not included in the Greek state, the Nevrokop bishopric was burdened with the responsible task to continue its patriotic activity, to encourage and help the national and cultural development of the Macedonian Bulgarians. The Bulgarians in its diocese, having their settlements included in the Bulgarian state after the Bucharest treaty from 1913, were able to freely express their national feelings. In the circumstances of political equality they had the possibility to conduct their religious practices and education in their own language in the traditional spirit and the achievements of the Bulgarian exarchate up to 1912. In the separated from the Bulgarian state neighboring regions in Aegean Macedonia, the ideas and aims of the church-school struggles that started with the Revival were still difficult to achieve. That is why the mission of the Bulgarian priests whom the Nevrokop bishopric send in Aegean Macedonia at the time of the First World War, had such a special importance – beside their immediate duties, they had to encourage their fellow-countrymen, to raise their national self-esteem and to inspire their confidence in their own strength. As a center from where the church deeds for Drama', Seres' and Zahna's regions were conducted, Nevrokop was asserted as an important center of political and spiritual life in Eastern Macedonia during the difficult war-time period. In the newly liberated towns and villages, the Nevrokop bishoprics, in its capacity of a

cultural-national institution, continued its revival tradition to organize and direct the social life. The reopening of the Bulgarian churches and schools, the use of Bulgarian language in the liturgies and the performing of the church rituals by Bulgarian priest equals in importance with the biggest success in the church-school struggles, achieved by the Bulgarians in Macedonia at the time of the National Revival. The defeatist mood among the Bulgarian community after the Salonika armistice of 29 September 1918, define the leading role of the church institution in Nevrokop to unite the citizens and to offer spiritual support in their hardships. In the same fashion as during the military course of action, the priests took care not only for the religious needs of the numerous refugee families, but also took part in their economical support too.