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The Pro-Boer Campaign in Bulgaria and Bulgarian Volunteers in the South African War of 1899–1902

(Abstract)

Bulgarians were among the 2,600 foreigners who took part in the South African War, also known as the Second Anglo-Boer War. Their presence helped to make this colonial conflict a matter of international importance. This paper is an attempt to consider the Bulgarian involvement within a context of the pro-Boer campaign in Bulgaria, using published sources of a Bulgarian and international origin and applying the biographical method. Bulgarians travelled to the Transvaal at their own risk and expense. Most of them had military experience and, evidently, expected to improve their combat skills in a modern war against a leading European army. Their sense of kinship with the Boers was evoked by a nationalist paradigm. Bulgarians tended to view the Boers as fellow agriculturalists whose way of life was being threatened by a stronger nation. Most Bulgarians believed that the British Empire, the adversary of the Boers, was to blame for the revision of the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano at the Congress of Berlin. Therefore, Bulgarians delighted in the British misfortunes in the South African War. This sentiment may explain why no volunteer from Bulgaria is known to have fought for the British in that war. Bulgarian volunteers, representing various social groups and occupations, took part in some of the major battles of the South

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African War. The involvement of these volunteers was an expression of the Bulgarian solidarity with the Boers. Investigating this phenomenon gives us a deeper understanding of the problems and aspirations of Bulgarians at the turn of the twentieth century.

Keywords: South African War, Second Anglo-Boer War, Bulgarian volunteers, pro-Boer campaign in Bulgaria, Bulgarian nationalism.