

AN UNREALISED IN SOFIA COLLECTION OF STUDIES ON GOGOL (1932?): AN ATTEMPT AT RECONSTRUCTION

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Abstract. This article is situated in émigré studies and tries to reconstruct a possible conceptual framework and creative history of the *Collection of Studies on Gogol*, which was being prepared for publication in Sofia in the early 1930s. I use in my research the "microscopic method" proposed and practiced by Professor Piotr Bicilli. My only source of reconstruction are Bicilli's published letters to A. Bem (1931–1934), as I have not discovered a manuscript of the collection or any other information about it until now. P. Bicilli started to collect articles in 1931 in Sofia, and A. Bem contributed to the initiative, working in Prague. The collection might have been planned as a festschrift on the occasion of upcoming 80th anniversary of N. Gogol's death (1932). Several participants in the Dostoevsky Study Seminar in Prague, which was highly appraised by Bicilli, were invited to contribute to the collection. Besides being a joint émigré project, the collection was declared as a common Russian-Bulgarian initiative, which involved scholars from the Sofia University. *Collection of Studies on Gogol* remained unpublished, and the formal reasons, for that were financial, but behind them we can see other reasons related to the capacity of "Russian Sofia" as an émigré centre and to the ability of limited number of adherents around Bicilli to withstand a publication that offers "new readings" and places Gogol between realism traditionally assigned to him and modernist interpretations. Quests and reflections around the *Gogol Collection* gave an impetus to studies of works of Gogol and Dostoevsky works and coincided with the most fruitful period in the field of literary studies in Bicilli's life – the first half of the 1930s, when he offered a conceptual model for the Russian literary history.

Key words: Gogol Collection; P. Bicilli; A. Bem; émigré centre; festschrift

НЕСОСТОЯВШИЙСЯ В СОФИИ «ГОГОЛЕВСКИЙ СБОРНИК» (1932?): ОПЫТ РЕКОНСТРУКЦИИ

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Аннотация. Статья относится к эмигрантологическим исследованиям. Ее автор с помощью «микроскопического метода», предложенного и практиковавшегося проф. П. Бицилли, пытается реконструировать творческую историю и вероятную концептуальную рамку готовившегося к изданию в Софии в начале 1930-х гг. «Гоголевского сборника». Так как к этому моменту автору не удалось найти рукопись сборника или какую бы то ни было информацию о нем, то единственным источником реконструкции стали опубликованные письма (1931–1934) П. Бицилли к А. Бему. Сборник, вероятнее всего, задуман как юбилейный по случаю предстоящего 80-летия со дня смерти Н. Гоголя в 1932 г. Статьи начинают собираться в 1931 г., организацией издания в Софии занялся П. Бицилли в сотрудничестве с А. Бемом, находившимся в Праге. Для участия в сборнике были приглашены многие русские ученые – члены пражского Семинария по изучению творчества Достоевского. Деятельность этого общества очень импонировала Бицилли. Будучи общеэмигрантским проектом, сборник являлся и совместной русско-болгарской инициативой, в которой участвовали и ученые Софийского университета. Формальные причины того, что издание не состоялось, сводятся к финансовым трудностям, но за ними скрываются другие, ставящие вопрос об интеллектуальной «инфраструктуре» русской эмигрантской Софии и возможности ограниченному кругу единомышленников Бицилли продвинуть и отстоять издание, предлагающее «новое понимание» Гоголя на фоне традиционного реализма и модернистских интерпретаций. Поиски и размышления в связи с «Гоголевским сборником» дают толчок гоголеведению и достоевсковедению Бицилли и совпадают с самым «литературоведческим» периодом в творчестве ученого – первой половиной 1930-х гг., когда он предлагает концептуальную модель русской литературной истории.

Петкова Г. Несостоявшийся в Софии «Гоголевский сборник» (1932?): опыт реконструкции

Ключевые слова: «Гоголевский сборник»; П. Бицилли; А. Бем; эмигрантский центр; юбилейный сборник

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One of the tasks of émigré studies for the time of its existence since 1998 has concerned the preservation of archives and manuscripts, publication of unknown texts and thus filling in gaps in cultural memory. But along with this privilege, émigré studies should also draw attention to unrealised initiatives – those editions which were conceived and conceptualised in the émigré reality of the first wave, but were not published, were scattered or lost for different reasons.

In the scholarly legacy of Piotr Bicilli, besides the first part of *A Brief History of Russian Literature* whose second part was issued in Sofia in 1934, we can find out one more unpublished book, titled *Collection of Studies on Gogol* (“Gogolevskii sbornik”). I have discovered information about its creative history in P. Bicilli’s 1931–1934 letters to Alfred Bem who was living then in Prague [Bicilli 2002: 131–138]. All my attempts to find the manuscript, individual articles planned for it, or a list of articles to be included have turned out unsuccessful. The lack of any records about the fate of the collection, on the background of its active preparation gives me grounds to qualify it as “unrealised”.

Russian émigré scholars who chose to live in Bulgaria during the 1920s did not succeed in creating their own autonomous academic field and were forced to bind their teaching and research activities to the only Bulgarian university at that time – Sofia University. In December 1923 P. Bicilli accepted the proposal to become the Chair of Modern and Contemporary History at the Faculty of History and Philology. With his arrival in Sofia in 1924, along with lectures in history, he tried to institutionalise his interest in Russian literature

and culture in the form of a lecture course. But, save for his first academic year (1924–1925), the professor did not teach philological disciplines until the moment he left the university in 1948. I suppose that the reason for his withdrawal from literary courses was his reluctance to cross the line and enter the territory of the officially chosen for a lecturer in Russian literature professor Mikhail Popruzhenko¹.

Bicilli compensated that with lectures in literature delivered in Russian People’s University in Sofia, founded on the 3rd of April 1927; with texts written “on the occasion” of writers’ anniversaries; with publications in history of Russian literature and Russian literary language, which later developed into a *Reader in History of Russian literature* (in two parts, 1931 and 1932), into a the second part of *A Brief History of Russian Literature. From Pushkin to the Present Day* (1934), and in studies, published in the *Annual of Sofia University* after 1935.

Bicilli started his work on *Collection of Studies on Gogol*² in 1931 and the book could be placed in the sociobiographical context of this moment. By this time he had already declared his interests in Russian studies and had become an influential figure in the émigré scholarly field and in Bulgarian academic realm. With the help of “microscopic analysis”, proposed and practiced by the professor, I will try to reconstruct the events around the compiling of the *Gogol Collection*, its possible conceptual frame and the role of P. Bicilli.

The method of “microscopic analysis”, mentioned by Bicilli in numerous reviews and administrative records, allows us to identify and individualise the events. He says that looking into

¹ Mikhail Popruzhenko’s academic genealogy was linked to the Imperial Novorossiysk University, the place P. Bicilli also came from. In Bulgaria, Popruzhenko delivered lectures on Russian literature, but did not manifest himself as its explorer. He dedicated his efforts to the Old Bulgarian studies and enjoyed the support of Slavophile circles. Bicilli’s reluctance to challenge the status of his colleague probably was due to personal reasons, concerning the kinship links between M. Popruzhenko and the family Florovsky. Bicilli was in close relations with some members of this family. See: [Petkova 2017: 60–97].

² Hereafter, *Gogol Collection*.

details or free work with “small but typical facts”¹ and their assembling in a “tendency” is a qualification limit for a researcher. The “microscopic method” is an interpretative technique the professor mastered to perfection and exploited in a number of studies.

The main sources of my reconstruction are the letters of P. Bicilli to A. Bem [Bicilli 2002: 122–150] – valuable documents showing not only his quests in the field of literary studies, but also the mechanisms which he used in his research. Ideas of other scholars often provoke reflections, and letters to adherents become an intermediate textual space, where certain conceptions are articulated and later developed into reviews and critical articles. Till this moment I have not been able to discover Bem’s answers to Bicilli’s letters in “the full list of Bicilli’s addressees” [Gerashko, Kudryavtsev 2009: 66] in the fund of the professor Bicilli Collection in the Manuscript Division of the Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House) in St. Petersburg.

Bicilli’s letters to Bem² cover the period between 1929 and 1938. Before introducing the theme of *Gogol Collection*, in a letter from 28 December 1929 Bicilli writes that he has received and read two scholarly editions, published in Prague in 1929: the collection *About Dostoevsky*, edited by Bem³ (Bicilli promised to review it), and the anniversary *Pushkin Collection*, where Bem participated with a publication [Bicilli 2002: 128]. In letters from 1930 Bicilli still did not write about an initiative dedicated to Gogol, but from a letter sent on 1 April 1930 it is clear that he had been in-

vited by Bem to write an article for a subsequent volume of *About Dostoevsky* [Ibid: 129].

For the first time the title *Gogol Collection* appears in Bicilli’s letter to Bem from February 1931 [Ibid: 131]. It is obvious from the letter that this edition had been discussed by them before this moment and was about to be published. Bicilli was engaged in its preparation⁴ in Sofia and had already chosen the theme of his article: his intention was to compare “Viy” by Gogol to Turgenev’s “Ghosts”. In this letter he asks Bem to consult him about “stylistic coincidences in works of Gogol and Turgenev”, because he “has discovered a number of parallels” between them, which could be used in the *Gogol Collection*; however he has fears that these parallels could have already been well-known and it could turn out that “he has discovered America” [Ibid: 131].

Thus, at the beginning of 1931 the decision about a forthcoming publication of *Gogol Collection* was a fact. As far as in letters written till February 1931 this project is not discussed, probably the idea took shape during the 5th Congress of Russian Academic Organizations Abroad, held from 14 to 21 September 1930. A. Bem attended the academic forum and presumably took the responsibility to coordinate activities on compiling the collection in Prague. We can suppose that the volume, which repeats the title of a collection already published in Kiev in 1902 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Gogol’s death, was conceived on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Russian writer’s death, which was to be celebrated in 1932. The forthcoming edition follows the structure of the the *Pushkin Collection*, con-

¹ In his report on the scholarly works by participants in a procedure for holding the academic position of *Privatdozent* at the Department of New and Newest History in 1940, Bicilli enumerates the following “qualities” of a “true historian”: “historical intuition, i. e. vision of the historical facts in their specificity; an ability to perceive the complexity of historical problems and to concentrate on them; emancipating from any pseudoscientific preconceived notions; attention to “petits faits” and impeccable accuracy and cautiousness in the study of the historical sources” [Archive of Sofia University, fund 1, inventory 35, l. 23]. The report is written in Bulgarian, and Bicilli translates “petits faits” as “small facts”: “[...] [the candidate] analyses a multitude of ‘petit faits’, *minor*, but for that very reason quite typical *facts*...”: [Ibid, l. 21; emphasis added].

² It is difficult to say when Bicilli and Bem met each other for the first time – this most likely happened during the III Congress of Russian Academic Organizations Abroad, which took place between 25 September and 1 October 1924 in Prague. Probably relations of mutual sympathy were established between them. Besides teaching Russian language in Charles University and History of Russian literature in the Russian Pedagogical Institute “Jan Komenský”, Alfred Bem was actively engaged in educational activities among émigré community working as a Secretary of the Russian pedagogical bureau in Prague. Bicilli also participated in the professional leadership of the Russian émigré school in Bulgaria in the period 1929–1935, and became a member of school committees. Bem’s method of “minor observations” corresponds to the “microscopic method” of Bicilli [Bubenikova, Petkova 2002: 122–123].

³ After the first collection *About Dostoevsky*, printed in 1929 in Prague, a second and a third volume followed under the same title in 1933 and 1936.

⁴ See the letters 1) from February 1931: “The faster authors send their articles, the better” [Bicilli 2002: 131]; 2) from 10 March 1931: “We are waiting for articles for *Gogol Collection* [Ibid: 132]; 3) From 27 April 1931: “And so, send other texts for *Gogol Collection* more quickly” [Ibid: 133].

sisting of scholarly articles and studies without an introduction, yet with a postscript which could unite them and indicate the jubilee idea behind the collection.

The tradition of an author's posthumous celebration in Russian culture began to assert itself in the 1860s; according to A. Vdovin it turned into a "canon of the posthumous celebration" [Vdovin 2010: 82] with the celebration of the centenary of Lomonosov's death in 1865. Publication of a collection of research articles became a part of an "anniversary ceremony" [Dolgushin 2016: 195], including a series of events: liturgy and memorial service, solemn assembly, public lecture / report, literary evening, publishing a collection with descriptions of the celebrations.

But how were the jubilee writers' anniversaries instrumentalised for preservation of community memory and in a struggle against denationalisation of young people in the context of the first wave of émigrés? What kind of ceremonies were reproduced and / or invented in each host country and how did they combine ritual practice with scholarly representation? What kind of illusion about a unified Russian academic or scholarly space beyond the barriers of the host countries did they create? How did these ceremonies dialogue with the local (regional) reception of canonical names from the Russian national pantheon or famous figures from the émigré reality? Émigré studies are still searching answers of all these questions. The anniversary *Gogol Collection* at the beginning of the 1930s might have exploited to maximal extent the symbolic potential of an "anniversary from the death" of a writer who was a part of the canonised Golden Age of Russian literature. However the connection with pre-revolutionary interpretations of Gogol, which placed the writer between realism and demonism, the examination of the Soviet literary space, which "appropriated"¹ Gogol quite cautiously before the centenary of his death in 1952, the articulation of a different – émigré – reading: all this to a great extent depended, as it becomes clear, on the profile of the émigré center where an edition was being prepared and implemented, and more precisely – on the capacity of its scholarly or intellectual environment.

From Bicilli's subsequent letters (from 27 April and 29 May 1931) we understand that Bem sent him the required information about Turgenev's "Ghosts" and an article for the *Gogol Collection* [Bicilli 2002: 133] that – Bicilli assured him – was to be published. In May 1931, contributors to the collection were already chosen; among them were S. Zavadsky, S. Hessen, R. Pletnyov. Bicilli asked them to send their articles as soon as possible. In addition to Bem's manuscript, Bicilli got an article written by Prof. V. Zenkovsky, which was "too long" and "should be reduced" [Ibid].

The mentioned names of future contributors were associated more or less to the Study Seminar on Dostoevsky organised by Alfred Bem in 1925 in the Russian People's University in Prague: V. Zenkovsky, S. Zavadsky, S. Hessen, R. Pletnyov. All of them but Hessen, were authors of texts included in the already mentioned first collection *About Dostoevsky* (1929). According to Bem, the Seminar on Dostoevsky was rather a "scholarly community" than an "ordinary university seminar" [Bem (1933) 2007: 286]. People around the seminar were established scholars united by their interests in Dostoevsky's works. They discussed the early works of the Russian writer and questioned "the old understanding" of D. Merezhkovsky and L. Shestov, who denied "the great significance" of early Dostoevsky's works [Bem (1929) 2007: 51].

Many of the seminar participants, including Bem himself, began to show interest in S. Freud's views under the influence of psychiatrist Dr. Nikolai Osipov, a follower, translator and populariser of the Viennese doctor in Russia, and started to apply psychoanalytic approaches in their research. At this moment the seminar was perceived as an "important counterweight" [Bubenikova 1999: 7] to the traditional for pre-revolutionary Russian criticism religious-philosophical reading of Dostoevsky's work.

In the second collection *About Dostoevsky* (1933) Bem included a list of seminar paper titles in chronological order. We can see there [Bem (1933) 2007: 287], under "№ 45" Bicilli's text *Why did Dostoevsky not write "The Life of the Great Sinner"*, issued in the same volume. In her survey of the collections, the Czech scholar M. Magidova says that P. Bicilli was a "relatively frequent guest" of the seminar and travels to Prague periodically

¹On the "modest" Gogol's jubilee in Moscow in 1927, dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the writer's death, and on "fears" of the government of Soviet Union to "appropriate" Gogol, see: [Nevskaya 2013: 128–129].

(“from time to time”), but she does not give more details [Magidova 2007: 11]. Various problems of the collections are discussed in Bicilli’s letters to Bem. From Bicilli’s letter of 28 December 1929, we understand that he received an invitation from Bem “to write about Dostoevsky”, which is “extremely tempting, but at the same time almost risky, even in technical aspect, as given that in Sofia we are hampered in receiving the latest Russian publications” [Bicilli 2002: 128].

This theme was discussed again in the following year in the aforementioned letter from 15 April 1930. In it Bicilli thanked to Bem for a “willingness” to get his “article” for the impending second volume of the collection *About Dostoevsky* [Ibid: 129]. The surviving early 1930s documents in the service records for the professor in the Archive of Sofia University indicate two business trips abroad having Prague as their destination: 1) from 1 to 25 June 1930¹ and 2) in February 1931, when the route included Riga, Revel [Tallin] and Berlin². However, the second journey might have not been realised³, as we understand from the second letter, written in February (there is no date) to Bem. I guess that Bicilli read the mentioned text *Why did Dostoevsky not write...* within Bem’s seminar in June 1930.

Apparently the activities of the émigré scholarly circle in Prague appealed to Bicilli and the collections *About Dostoevsky* intrigued him. In his letter to Bem from 15 April 1930 he notes that he begins to perceive Dostoevsky “differently than before” and the collection *About Dostoevsky* and Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky Creative Art*, published in 1929, played a great role for that [Bicilli 2002: 130]. High evaluation for these books initially formulated in letters to Bem was later developed in professor’s reviews. In letters to Bem Bicilli shows a high interest in actual studies on Dostoevsky – he shares views with Bem and Bakhtin, but also demonstrates his

disagreements with some of their opinions. Bicilli says that “Bakhtin does not explain how the harmony comes out of the polyphony” [Ibid]; in 1936–1937 he turned down the proposals made by Bem to participate in a new volume of the collection *About Dostoevsky*⁴.

Bicilli himself wrote four reviews for the collection *About Dostoevsky* – they complement each other and add new ideas and nuances to Bicilli’s reflections provoked by the first Prague collection and Bakhtin’s book. They were published in the following periodicals and comply to their profile: *Literary Voice (Literaturen glas)* – a newspaper for literature, art and public affairs [Bicilli 1930a: 4]; *Voice (Golos)*⁵, Russian émigré newspaper, issued in Sofia [Bicilli 1930b: 2]; *Numbers (Tchisla)*, an émigré almanac for literature, art and philosophy, printed in Paris [Bicilli 1930c: 240–242], and the journal *Bulgarian Thought (Bulgarska misal)*, edited by the professor M. Arnaudov⁶ from Sofia University [Bicilli 1930d: 515–520]. Two of the three reviews printed in Bulgaria were published in newspapers and came out soon after Bicilli received the collection *About Dostoevsky*. The professor had promised to write them in a letter to Bem from 28 December 1929 [Bicilli 2002: 128]; they became a fact on 25–26 January 1930 and are very close to propaedeutic presentation of the collection for a reader non-specialist; in the first place, they put an accent on the creative history of the edition: the collection is the result of searches of a specific scholarly community – the Dostoevsky Seminar organised at the Russian National University in Prague by its editor A. Bem.

On the other hand, namely in Bulgarian language reviews, apparently written one after another, changes in research canon, imposed by the seminar in Prague, are mentioned for the first time (in *Literary Voice*), and later (in *Bulgarian Thought*) the professor extends this the-

¹ Archive of Sofia University, fund 1, inventory 35, l. 77.

² Ibid, l. 59.

³ See Bicilli’s letter to Bem from February 1931: “I hoped so much that I would see you and was almost sure that I would come, but everything failed. Traveling in our time is a difficult task” [Bicilli 2002: 130].

⁴ The themes proposed by Bem were *Dostoevsky and the West* and *Dostoevsky – a Politician* (letter from 11 March 1936) did not intrigue Bicilli and he refused working on them. Obviously, the invitation of Bem was renewed, but Bicilli did not accept the new proposal to write about “the style of Dostoevsky’s publicism”. His argument is that he has “never worked” on this topic and “will not be able to do that from now on, because there is not enough time” (letter from 6 March 1937 [Ibid: 139–140]).

⁵ In a letter to Bem (28 December 1929) Bicilli writes about the local Russian newspaper: “Alas! Nobody reads *Voice* [Bicilli 2002: 128].”

⁶ In his letter to Bem from 28 December 1929 Bicilli describes *Bulgarian Thought* as “the most solid journal” among Bulgarian literary periodicals [Bicilli 2002: 128].

sis and claims that the shift in the research canon is manifested not only in émigré studies, but also in research papers published in Soviet Russia: Bicilli cites the studies of L. Grossman, K. Istomin, M. Bakhtin, the collections edited by A. Dolinin and N. Brodsky [Bicilli 1930d: 516]. Both above-mentioned Bulgarian language reviews qualify the collection of Bem *About Dostoevsky* and M. Bakhtin's book with a definition "new", introduced in their title: *A New Light for Dostoevsky's Works* [Bicilli 1930a: 2], *Dostoevsky in the Light of New Research* [Bicilli 1930d: 515], and in the very fabric of the text: "new direction", "new school" [Bicilli 1930a: 4], "new research", "a new kind of fiction", "a new aesthetic category" (Bakhtin's polyphonic novel is meant) [Bicilli 1930d: 515, 516, 518].

The review in *Literary Voice* points out the Dostoevsky Seminar in Prague as a bearer of this "new direction" in research of Dostoevsky. Authors in the published collection, who represent a "new school", uncover "countless connections" between Dostoevsky's early works and late novels of the writer thanks to the "microscopic survey" [Bicilli 1930a: 4].

Bicilli speaks about "the growing interest in Dostoevsky in Russian society – not only in Russia, but also among Russian emigration" [Bicilli 1930d: 515]. "New surveys" on Dostoevsky revise "earlier judgments" of his literary work before penal servitude and surmount "old aesthetic categories" applied to Dostoevsky's novels. They explain both the "high artistic value" of the author's early works and "their significance for understanding the aesthetic and philosophical genesis of his great novels" [Bicilli 1930d: 515].

The most important articles in the collection, according to Bicilli, were A. Bem's "Dramatization of Delirium (Dostoevsky's 'Mistress')"

and D. Chizhevsky's "To the Problem of Double (From the Book on Formalism in Ethics)", while the latter one had to be complemented with "The Double: A Petersburg Poem" by F. M. Dostoevsky (Notes by a Psychiatrist) by Dr. N. Osipov [Bicilli 1930a: 4; Bicilli 1930b: 2]. The high esteem of Bem's and Chizhevsky's texts is repeated in Bicilli's letter from 15 April 1930, which coincides in time with the creation of reviews corpus and obviously precedes the review in *Bulgarian Thought* [Bicilli 2002: 129–130]. Bicilli adds two articles to the already mentioned texts in his reviews: Prof. Zenkovsky's article about "the attitude of Dostoevsky to Gogol as his source"² [Bicilli 1930b: 2] and S. Zavadsky's text on the definition of the drama in the light of Dostoevsky's novels, which supplements the text of Vyacheslav Ivanov *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*³ [Bicilli 1930b: 2; Bicilli 1930d: 517].

In the context of Bicilli's reviews and letters to Bem at the beginning of the 1930s that precede the idea and preparation of *Gogol Collection I* will dare to make the following conclusion: Bicilli expected that the collection would avoid the "canons of the old aesthetics"⁴, would present *new readings* and repeat the approach of the collection *About Dostoevsky* or will be able to compare match it.

Announced as a joint émigré project, the *Gogol collection* received support of the Bulgarian academic community in the person of already mentioned Prof. Mikhail Arnaudov from Sofia University, who was literary historian and ethnographer – in his letters Bicilli underlines his leading role⁵.

Prof. Arnaudov was associated with hopes for publication of the collection⁶, which periodically revived and darkened, as well as with a disappointment that unfavorable financial circumstances were not surmounted, which could have

¹The Ukrainian Slavist and philosopher D. Chizhevsky, who had lived in emigration since 1921, reviewed Bicilli's book "Essays on the Theory of Historical Science". Bicilli mentions in his reviews the names of scholars who were invited to participate in the *Gogol Collection* – Bem, Zenkovsky, Zavadsky (we know that from his letters to Bem). If we assume that Bicilli invited colleagues whose texts had impressed him, was Chizhevsky among the invited authors?

²The title of Zenkovsky's text is *Gogol and Dostoevsky*.

³The title of Zavadsky's text is *A New Definition of Drama in the Light of Dostoevsky's Novels*.

⁴I borrow the phrase from Bicilli's review *Dostoevsky in the light of new research* [Bicilli 1930d: 516].

⁵In his letter from 16 July 1934 Bicilli calls Mikhail Arnaudov a "spiritus rector" [Bicilli 2002: 137]. In a preserved part of Arnaudov's archive in the Scientific archive of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (fund № 58K) I was not able to find any traces referring to *Gogol Collection*. In this fonds there is only one letter by A. Bem from 2 November 1930, but its content is not connected to the collection.

⁶In the above cited letter to Bem from 16 July 1934 Bicilli writes: "On the occasion of the *Gogol Collection* – spiritus rector – Arnaudov, gives hope that in autumn [it will be published]. [...] I think that eventually he will carry out the initiative" [Bicilli 2002: 137].

happened with good will and some efforts¹. The tone of the letters introducing Arnaudov is comradely and respectful. At the beginning of 1930s, Prof. Mikhail Arnaudov was an authoritative figure – not only for his scholarly contributions, but also for his institutional positions: he had founded the already mentioned journal *Bulgarian Thought* in 1925 and had been a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences since 1929. His term as a rector of Sofia University in 1935–1936 academic year coincided with discussions for and against publishing of *Gogol Collection* still or once again on-going.

In his short letter from 10 March 1931 Bicilli uses first person plural when he introduces the position of organisers of *Gogol Collection* (“we are expecting”) and first person singular form when he writes about his necessity to get information about Gogol’s influence on Turgenev (“I would like to get”²). From this letter and from other letters to Bem we cannot understand which people “were expecting” articles for *Gogol collection*. It is clear that Bicilli was not alone. Was Prof. Arnaudov one of them? They could be other figures from the university, from cultural circles in Bulgaria or the émigré community. Was *Gogol Collection* thought in Bulgaria as a part of future Bulgarian-Russian celebration of the Russian writer? In the early 1930s joint initiatives related to posthumous celebrations of great Russian writers were established – for example the jubilee meeting on March 22–23, 1931 in Sofia, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Dostoevsky’s death. Whatever the motivation of both parties was, obviously *Gogol Collection* can be considered a joint undertaking of the Russian émigré and Bulgarian academic communities.

In April and May 1931 Bicilli received the articles of Bem and Zenkovsky and was waiting texts by Pletnyov, Hessen and Zavadsky. In December the same year in his letter to Bem the professor

mentions the name of the journalist and editor Gleb Voloshin³, who might also have participated in the preparation of the edition and “has already written” to Bem, according to Bicilli, with regard to the *Gogol collection* [Bicilli 2002: 133]. Voloshin might also have been engaged in organizational work around compiling the collection⁴. From the obituary for Voloshin, published after his death in 1937, we learn that he was an author of works in literary studies on Gogol and Dostoevsky which remained unpublished [Plavinsky 1937: 8].

In 1932 events took a more definite turn. On 25 February 1932, Bicilli informs Bem that the *Gogol Collection*, if not “finally buried”, obviously is not a priority during the “crisis in the world and in Bulgaria” [Bicilli 2002: 134]. He asks Bem to “upset” Zenkovsky with these news. He had recently written to Zenkovsky and “lied” him promising that “the collection will be published in the near future because these were Arnaudov’s rosy hopes” [Ibid]. In this situation, Bem and Zenkovsky had to decide whether to withdraw their articles in order to be published elsewhere, or to “put them on ice” with Prof. Arnaudov [Ibid]. Bicilli recommends the latter and adds bitterly: “We can see all sorts of surprises: all of a sudden we could find money. After all, if the will is there, we can find them now” [Ibid].

The theme of *Gogol Collection* was discussed again in 1933. On 22 September, Bicilli writes to Bem that “Voloshin is convinced that *Gogol Collection* will be published”, although he himself is rather skeptical of the possibility of printing; yet he adds that in October the same year “the question has to be solved” [Bicilli 2002: 135]. In a letter from 8 April 1934, obviously in response to Bem’s question, Bicilli expresses his doubts that “*Gogol Collection* will be published soon”, although he does not lose hope that this “eventually will happen” [Bicilli 2002: 137]. On 16 July 1934, again in an answer to Bem’s question about the collec-

¹ Letter to Bem from 25 February 1932: “In turn, I will upset you: if the *Gogol collection* is not finally buried, then in any case it will obviously remain in the writing table...” [Bicilli 2002: 134].

² Cf.: “Dear Alfred Ljudvigovich, // Please, tell me if you received the letter, sent three weeks ago. If it was lost, I will write you again: I would like to receive some quite important references from you. We are waiting for articles for the *Gogol Collection*” [Bicilli 2002: 132].

³ Gleb Voloshin-Petrichenko (1892–1937) had a lower education and was a publicist, journalist, secretary of the Association of Russian writers and journalists in Bulgaria. Bicilli presents him as a “good acquaintance” in a letter to Bem from 19 March 1930. He recommends Voloshin’s article dedicated to Dostoevsky for the journal *Slavia*, issued by the Slavic Institute in Prague, and asks Bem for assistance. See more: [Bicilli 2002: 129], [Bubenikova, Petkova 2002: 142].

⁴ The correspondence between Voloshin and Bem could throw more light on the role of Voloshin in the process of compiling the *Gogol Collection*. It is preserved in the collection of A. Bem in the Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech literature. See: [Bubenikova, Petkova 2002: 142].

tion's printing, Bicilli mentions that M. Arnaudov "gives hope that this could happen in autumn" and that "ultimately he will solve the problem of publishing" [Ibid: 137].

In later letters – written in October 1934, in 1936, 1937, 1938 – the *Gogol Collection* is not mentioned. It is not clear whether the articles of Bem and Zavadsky were withdrawn, but I suppose that these articles and the texts of other authors included in the planned collection were published later in other editions. I have not been able to discover a standalone text of Bicilli, built on comparative reading of Gogol's "Viy" and Turgenev's "Ghosts". However, the professor did not give up working on the theme of Gogol, which he developed in the comparative perspective typical for him ("coincidences and borrowings"¹). In the chapter *General Character of Russian Literature after Gogol* in *The Brief History of Russian Literature*, written and published in 1934 in Sofia, he notes that Turgenev is close to Gogol "with his inclination to the fantastic, the belief in the mysterious, hidden, "occult" aspect of being, with his presentiments and meaningful dreams" [Bicilli 1934: 39]. In this context the novel "Ghosts" is also mentioned.

In 1934 several texts dedicated to Gogol's works were published. While being occasional texts, they actually refer to another anniversary – the 125th one of his birth: "The Art of Gogol", "Gogol as a Person" (both in Bulgarian language), "Gogol and the Classic Comedy". An article from 1934 featuring two anniversaries – "Gogol and Chekhov", is based on a comparative aspect of literary studies. Bicilli uncovers a number of interesting parallels between Gogol and Dostoevsky in his study "The Problem of Internal Form in Dostoevsky's Novels" (1945–1946); the idea about the next study "The Problem of Man in Gogol's Works" (1947–1948) might have been conceived in the mentioned text.

But the project *Gogol Collection* – designed in Sofia in early 1930s – was not realised. The visible and announced reason for that was the lack of financing as a result of the world crisis and the whole atmosphere in Europe at that time. Despite this situation Bicilli often repeats in his letters that the issuing of the collection is possible

even in the existing financial circumstances. This fact raises a lot of questions which may find their answers if we discover the manuscript of the collection or more information about it.

Why was this project unsuccessful on condition that it was a joint émigré initiative supported by Bulgarian academic community? Why did Bulgarian participants in the project refuse to fight for it – if we can trust to Bicilli's words that resources for its printing could be found? Did Bicilli have followers in this initiative and who were they? Was Sofia thought as a scholarly centre with its own autonomous research field concerning Russian literature, was this field responsive and open to practices of literary criticism both in the émigré community and in the mother country? Or Sofia was only the place where printing the collection was financially profitable? The last hypothesis has its grounds: in a correspondence between Bicilli and Vadim Rudnev in August – September 1936 an opportunity to transfer printing of the periodical *Modern Notes* (*Sovremennye zapiski*) to Bulgaria is discussed, because "here it will be quite cheap" [Bicilli 2012: 588].

However, the 80th anniversary of Gogol's death was not uncelebrated in Sofia. Bicilli and two of his followers and friends were among the main participants: the editor of the newspaper *Voice* Gleb Voloshin and the teacher of philosophical propedeutics and Russian literature at Sofia Russian High School Ivan Nilov. The major figure in organization of commemorative initiatives was Gleb Voloshin.

A meeting in memory of Gogol was held on 15 May 1932, Sunday, in Sofia. It was organised by the Union of Russian Writers and Journalists in Bulgaria, whose secretary was G. Voloshin. P. Bicilli participated in the event with a paper about the comical and the artistic devices creating the comic effect in Gogol's works²; I. Nilov spoke about the influence of the classical tradition on the form of Gogol works. Mikhail Pogodin's paper contains a jubilee element and describes the commemoration of Gogol in Danilov Monastery, held on the 40th day after the writer's death. Excerpts of Gogol's works were read during the event. The chairman of Slavic Society Stefan Bobchev, his brother – Prof. Nikola Bobchev, the literary critic

¹For "coincidences and borrowings" in the metalanguage of Bicilli and as a research instrumentarium see the monograph: [Petkova 2017].

²I have not discovered a publication of this text.

Nikola Atanassov attended the event as guests. In the audience there were students from the émigré high schools in Sofia.

Less than a month later, on 19 June 1932, again on Sunday, when the Day of Russian culture was celebrated in Sofia, Voloshin published in the newspaper *Voice* an editorial article titled “Jubilee Dates”. In a fragment dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Gogol’s death Voloshin raises the question about the place of the writer in Russian literature in the light of actual “debate on realism of Gogol” [Voloshin 1932: 2]. The reconsideration of the author’s place in Russian literature reflected a striving of literary critics to eliminate clichés in the perception of Gogol’s works. Thus, “dispute on Gogol has become a dispute on Russian culture itself and this argument has not been solved till today” [Voloshin 1932: 2]. The pathos of the article is entirely in defense of the notion about Gogol as that Gogol is a realist; probably the view of Voloshin would be similar in his article in *Gogol Collection*. A possible direction of interpretation in the collection – rethinking of modernist understanding of Gogol (Voloshin quotes Vasily Rozanov) and the defense of “realism” in Russian writer’s works – has been identified. Which could be others? Behind the question of differences of opinions, different theses, and overcoming or not of canonical readings which *Gogol collection* could have proposed, there is another question –

why a *Bicilli circle* in Sofia (the professor, Ivan Nilov, Gleb Voloshin) was not able to stand up for this edition.

If we judge from the energy invested by Bicilli in the compiling of *Gogol Collection*, it is clear that this project was of significance for him. The commitment to its realisation turned out to be not only organisational – it rather counterbalanced various deficits. “Russian Sofia” as an émigré Russian centre obviously failed to reproduce / imitate “Russian Prague”, which apparently impressed Bicilli as a scholarly field and a milieu of academic communication. On the other hand, even if the anniversary articles replaced the missing lecture courses in Russian literature, they remained a scattered, and not an institutionally sanctioned discourse, which would not have been the case with a collection of texts of eminent scholars in the field of émigré humanities. In the end, the searches and reflections around the *Gogol Collection* stimulated Bicilli’s efforts in exploring literary works of Gogol and Dostoevsky and stabilised his research preferences in the field of Russian literature. Thus, the preparation of the *Gogol Collection* coincided with his most fruitful period in the sphere of literary studies – the first half of the 1930s, when he created and published books and texts which offered a conceptual model for a Russian literary history.

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