

150 YEARS OF THE PARASKEVA NIKOLAU DONATION HOSPITAL, VARNA

Vladimir D. Vasilev †, Georgi R. Marinov

DEAR COLLEAGUES AND GUESTS,
Welcome to Varna,

The history of the city of Varna, like the history of each city, is rich in events, many of which have disappeared or are forgotten, but others have not disappeared and are not forgotten and have become symbols of the city not only in the past but also today and in the future!

In the rich history of Varna, there are many such symbols that exist until today.

Please see two of them:



*The first sea temple, St. Nicolay Mirlikiyski Miracle Worker, in Varna opened in 1865.
Photo by Petko Momchilov*



*The building of the Paraskeva Nikolau Donation Hospital in Varna, in which today the Museum of History of Medicine in Varna is disposed.
Photo: From the collection of the Museum of History of Medicine in Varna*

These two buildings have different uses but are related to one another by an important circumstance. Both - the temple St. Nikolay Mirlikiyski Miracle Worker and the Paraskeva Nikolau Donation Hospital were built with the funds bequeathed by the wealthy patriotic Paraskeva Nikolau living in Odessa (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-b; in Bulg.). They exist until today, they are used according to the will of their donor, they are located in the heart of Varna, and greatly contribute to the unique appearance of the seaside city.

The construction of these buildings is an element of the ascending development of the city of Varna after the Crimean War (1853-1856) during which Varna was already the largest port on the Black Sea. The rapid development of the city after the war also led to its rapid international recognition, with 8 countries having consuls or vice consuls in Varna working with the city administration and citizens. In 1860, a Bulgarian municipality and a Bulgarian school were opened in Varna, and in 1862 a new school building was built, the lower floor of which in 1865 was converted into a church (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-a; in Bulg.).

Biographical data for Paraskeva Nikolau are scarce. From what he wrote down in his will, we learn that he was called Parashkev, that he was the son of Nicholas Varnenets, and that he was born in Varna.

He moved to the city of Odessa, where Varna merchants had good connections at the time. In Odessa, he lived and worked for the rest of his life, became prosperous, and left a significant legacy.

During his lifetime - about 1850-1851 - the donor filed with the Metropolitan of Varna, Porfirios, and with the elders and rulers of the Varna Municipality, informing them that he wanted to bequeath funds to be used for the construction of a hospital, a church, and other charitable purposes in the city. The earliest preserved official document of this file is a letter sent by him on June 21, 1851 from Odessa, which is now stored in the State Archive in Varna. The following is

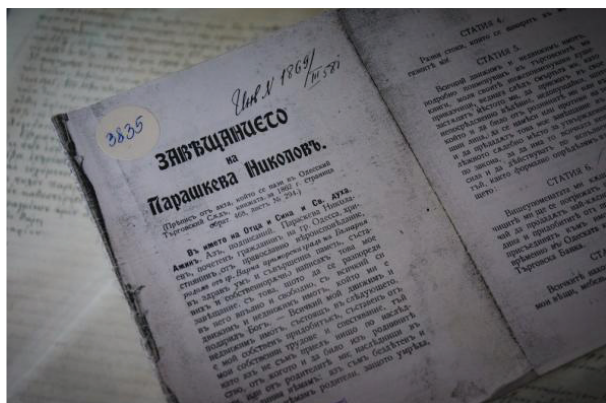
a part from the translation of this letter by Vladimir Vasilev, MD (1969):

“In anticipation of the coming of death, I decided to make a will, according to which I leave a sufficient part of my property for my relatives and the rest I decided to designate for common cause and worship ... I considered it a good idea to build a hospital in my home country, deciding on the construction and furnishing it about 100,000 pennies, and for the daily expenses it needs, to invest in the aforementioned Moscow upbringing house 50,000 silver, which may reach up to 75,000 ... and only the annual interest should be taken each year by the trustees of the maintenance hospital for its upkeep.”

After the death of Paraskeva Nikolau, his will was submitted for execution before the Odessa Commercial Court on 14.VII.1862.

It provided paragraphs for the construction and maintenance of a hospital, a charity:

- 18th - 25,000 silver rubles for construction and furnishing,
- 19th - interest on another 80,000 silver rubles for annual maintenance. The remaining amounts should be transferred to the hospital fund.¹



„The will of Paraskeva Nikolau. Varna, 1904”. The original kept in the library of the Museum of History of Medicine, Varna.

Photo by Petko Momchilov

Funds are also donated for:

- construction of a temple in Varna in honor of St. Nikolai Mirlikiysky Miracle Worker;
- providing dowries to orphaned girls when they are married;
- payment of scholarships to Varna boys to continue their education in Athens by studying trade (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-a; in Bulg.).

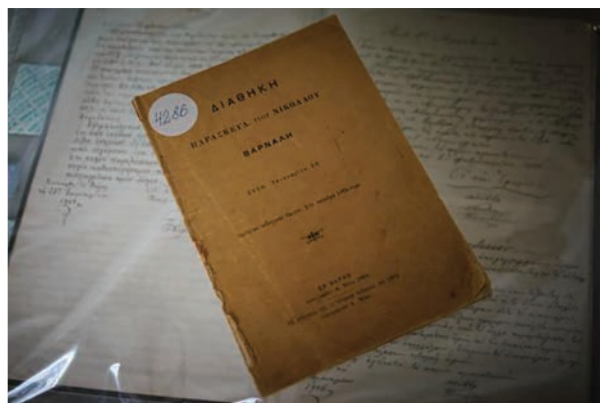
The hospital was opened in 1869 on the day of the Holy Prophet Elijah because there was a chapel dedicated to the Holy Prophet Elijah in its court, which still exists today. These first and only civilian hospital in Varna before the Liberation had

18 hospital beds and 12 staff members, incl. two doctors, a pharmacist, a host, two supervisors, three staff members and a priest. The doctor had to have a doctorate in medicine and the pharmacist to have a diploma. The first serial number of an admitted patient was dated 7/20 November 1869 (Vasilev, 1969, in Bulg.).



The chapel of St. Prophet Elijah built in year 1836, which is included in the park of Paraskeva Nikolau donated Hospital.

Photo by Petko Momchilov



The opening of a hospital in a new especially built for this purpose building opened up a new page in the lives of Varna people and their ideas about modern healthcare. Its activity was carried out in accordance with a special regulation² (Vasilev, 1975; in Bulg.), which was subject to updating, which introduced requirements that had not existed in our country so far:

- qualification of the hospital's medical staff - doctor with doctorate from university and pharmacist with diploma;

- moral and ethical treatment of the sick, with orphans, elderly, vagrants and mad people being treated at the hospital;
- free treatment for all patients, regardless of religion, nationality or gender;
- prohibiting the doctor from receiving money and gifts from patients! (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-c. In bulg.).

All of the mentioned above shows us that here, in Varna, 10 years before the Liberation of Bulgaria, new humane, highly moral and ethical norms were born and formulated, on the basis of which the future health care system of Free Bulgaria was built (Vasilev, Vl. 1979; Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-b).

It is very wise for the Renaissance clause in the will of Paraskeva Nikolau to grant scholarships to children from Varna to study commerce and other sciences in Athens.

Such a scholarship was awarded to a native of Burgas, but together with his family he moved to live in Varna, a future great Greek writer and poet, Konstantinos (Costas) I. Varnalis, to study theology or literature at the University of Athens (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-a).



*The monument erected in honour of the donor Paraskeva Nikolau next to the Temple of St. Nicolay Mirlikiyski Miracle Worker in Varna, which is preserved to this day!
Photo by Petko Momchilov*

Very humane and noble is the clause in Paraskeva Nikolau's will, by which the donor has ordered a part of the donated funds to be used to provide funds for orphaned girls in marrying them (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-a).

As seen from the above, the testament of Paraskeva Nikolau is an extremely great patriotic and philanthropic work, dedicated by the patriot Paraskeva Nikolau to his native Varna and its citizens! It is noteworthy that the contribution of Paraskeva Nikolau is deeply meaningful, related to

the basic spheres of the life, faith and traditions of the people of Varna:

- Protecting and preserving the Christian faith!
- Launching a modern European-style hospital healthcare.
- Providing support for orphaned girls when they get married.
- Sending Varna's children to Athens to continue their education by providing them with fellowship scholarships (Vasilev, Marinov, 2019-a).

Today Paraskeva Nikolau's unique donation to his hometown - Paraskeva Nikolau Hospital, after 150 years of faithful health service, has a new prestigious and respectable mission: to preserve and show to today's and future generations the unique collection of the Museum of History of Medicine in Varna and the Black Sea, from prehistoric times to the present day!



December, 12th, 2020. Presentation of the author's team of the book: 150 Years of the Establishment of the First Charity Hospital in Bulgaria, 150 Years in Service to the Healthcare in Varna

¹The will of the Nicolas Paraskeva –Varna, 1904. Museum of History of Medicine, Varna., Инв. № 4286. The will of the Nicolas Paraskeva on gr. Lenguige, /xs..c./ -Konstantinopolis, Музей по история на медицината, Варна. Инв. № 4130.

²Понастоящем в ДА-Варна се съхранява споменатата по-горе: Печатна Брошура „Правилник на болницата Параскева Николау-варненец (28.I.1889 г). Печатница „Л. Ниче-, Варна (ф.83К, оп.1, а.е. 81. л.1), а в библиотеката на Музея за история на медицината във Варна се съхранява „Правилник на дарителската болница „Параскева Николау /на гр. ез./, Константинопол, 1875, инв. № 4285.

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