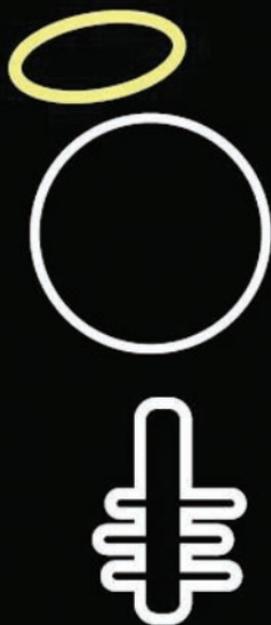


# BONES OF CONTENTION



THE LIVING ARCHIVE OF VASIL LEVSKI AND  
THE MAKING OF BULGARIA'S NATIONAL HERO

 CEU PRESS

MARIA TODOROVA

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Maria Todorova



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*To the memory of my father,  
who is part of this story*



# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	IX
PART I.	
Bones of Contention, or Professionals, Dilettantes, and Who Owns History .....	1
1. A “Social Drama” at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences ...	9
2. From Breach to Crisis .....	39
3. No Redress, or Where Are Levski’s Bones? .....	65
4. A Socialist Public Sphere? .....	83
5. “Professionals” and “Dilettantes” .....	109
6. Recognizing the Schism, or What Is Worse: Bad Professionals or Good Nationalists? .....	139
PART II.	
The Apostle of Freedom, or What Makes a Hero? .....	175
1. What Is a Hero and Are Heroes Born? .....	185
2. The “Making” of Vasil Levski .....	203
3. A Banner for All Causes: Appropriating the Hero .....	237
4. Contesting the Hero .....	267
5. The Literary and Visual Hypostases of the Hero .....	289
6. From Hero for All to Dissident and Back .....	307
PART III.	
The National Hero as Secular Saint: The Canonization of Levski .....	347
1. The Split, or How a Bicephalous Organism Functions .....	359
2. The Canonization and Its Implications .....	373
3. Levski and the Bulgarian Church: Memory and Narration ..	399
4. The Orchestration of a Grassroots Cultus .....	429

5. Commemoration, Ritual, and the Sacred . . . . .	447
6. Heroes and Saints: the Dialectics of Reincarnation . . . . .	477
CONCLUSION . . . . .	503
APPENDIX . . . . .	515
I. The Scholarly Consensus on the 1956 Excavations until the 1980s in the Writings of Stamen Mikhailov: A Critical Analysis . . . . .	517
II. The Discussion at the Academy of Sciences: 10, 12, and 27 February 1986 . . . . .	528
III. Letter of 20 Bulgarian Historians to Todor Zhivkov, 4 May 1987 . . . . .	562
IV. Poems Written by Citizens on the Topic of Levski's Grave . . . . .	567
V. Letter of Radka Poptomova, April 1987 . . . . .	571
VI. Letter of the Medieval Archeology Section at AI, June 2001 . . . . .	576
VII. The Double-headed Hierarchy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (1996–2004) . . . . .	577
VIII. School Questionnaires on Levski . . . . .	579
INDEX . . . . .	587

# INTRODUCTION

This book is about documenting and analyzing the living archive around the figure of Vasil Levski, arguably the major and only uncontested hero of the Bulgarian national pantheon. In the course of working on the problem, it became clear that this cannot be a finite task. The processes described, although with a chronological depth of almost two centuries, are still very much in the making, and the living archive expands not only in size but constantly adds surprising new forms. While archives continue to occupy an almost sacral place both in the public imagination (as the repositories of truth) as well as in legitimizing the historical profession (as the centerpiece and major tool of the historians' work), they have become themselves objects of sophisticated scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> It has been long (although not broadly) recognized that “ar-

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, Bruce Grant's idea that I present my story under the overall rubric of the living archive. I am using “archive” here in a very broad sense, beyond its institutional meaning of a repository of documentation, but still within its physicality, rather than in a purely metaphorical sense, as a synonym for memory, i.e. any non-archival documentation, cultural memorization, electronic or other storage and oral communication. Archives have become a significant topic of late, especially within cultural history. On archives and their meaning, see: Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive in Cultural History*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995; Randolph Starn, “Truths in the Archives,” *Common Knowledge* 8.2 (2002), 387–402; Kenneth E. Foote, “To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture,” *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990), 378–92; Jo Tellebeek, “‘Turn’d to Dust and Tears’: Revisiting the Archive,” *History and Theory* 43 (May 2004), 237–48. It is on the basis of colonial historiography, especially in the Indian context, that archival presumptions have been most fruitfully critiqued: Thomas Richards, *Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, London: Verso, 1993; Nicholas Dirks, “Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History,” in Brian Keith Axel, ed., *Historical Anthropology and Its Futures: From the Margins*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, 47–65; Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of His-*

chives do not simply arrive or emerge fully formed; nor are they innocent of struggles for power in either their creation or their interpretive applications.”<sup>2</sup> They are loci of dynamic encounters not only between scholars and historical “traces,” between the present and the past, but sites of contestation between institution builders both at the time of their genesis and in the course of their preservation. In the past several decades the notion of the archive itself has opened up to include materials that have not been conventionally covered under this rubric: oral testimony, novels, the press, material artifacts, art.<sup>3</sup> This study is both an attempt to create a personal archive of Levskiana (from the plethora of existing archives), to describe and analyze it and, at the same time, to unpack its meaning and transparently detail its making.

The project itself started as an investigation of nationalism, turned into one on communism and postcommunism, and remained, above all, an experiment in writing a living archive. My interest in Levski began as an offshoot of an attempt to make sense of what has been called Balkan nationalism but consists, in fact, of very different phenomena in terms of their genealogy, typology, articulation and intensity. I had been specially interested in the metaphoric glue (shorthand for cohesive processes or ideologies) that keeps nations together, in a word, in national symbology, and had been thinking of a comparative history of the national symbols of Greeks, Turks, Bulgarians, Romanians, Albanians, Serbs and the other South Slavs. All of this was building on a loose hypothesis that there exists a correlation between the cultural articulation of nationalism and its practical goals and strength. The more I looked into this metaphoric glue—analyzing the phases of nation building, the history of educational institutions and commu-

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tority, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005; Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archive and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 87–109.

2 Antoinette Burton, “Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories,” in *Archive Stories*, 6.

3 Marilyn Booth, “Fiction’s Imaginative Archive and the Newspaper’s Local Scandals: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” in *Archive Stories*, 274–95; Nicholas B. Dirks, “Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History,” in Brian Keith Axel, ed., *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002, 47–65; Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 21–4, 138–40.

nications systems, the history of language and language reforms, the development of the polity, in a word, at the different aspects of constructing “the imagined community,”—the more my interest shifted from the nature and functions of the glue to its “brand names.” That is, it shifted to the question of why one type of glue is preferred over another, and what this can tell us about the specific characteristics of separate nationalisms. It is a question that has interested other observers, and various scholars have suggested various answers within diverse explanatory frameworks. Here is one from a very different period:

The most suggestive antithesis between the Greek soul and the Bulgarian soul rings out in the popular poetry developed in Greece and Bulgaria during the Turkish occupation. During this dark age, the popular muse of the Greeks, as that of the Serbs also, sang of the ancient glories and the exalted deeds of heroes who frequently turned against the Turkish tyrant; by contrast, Bulgarian popular poetry cannot offer us a single historical or heroic poem: it can only take in certain Bacchic or amorous poems; or, indeed, in the absence of any other sort of hero, it exalts the *haidouts*, otherwise known as brigands, who have absolutely no connection with the Serbian *hajduks* or the Greek *klefts*. The latter are national heroes, after a historical model; the Bulgarian *haidouts* are common-law criminals, devoid of personality and lacking even the virile audacity of ordinary brigands.<sup>4</sup>

This merciless verdict, written almost a century ago, at the height of the Greek–Bulgarian animus at the end of the First World War is not merely an illustration of the *Zeitgeist*, obsessed as it was with the national soul and character, as well as with the collective (un)conscious, and mostly with the virtues of one’s own national psyche. It points to the weight allotted by nationalists to the heroes of the nation as the tangible embodiment of its soul, next to language as its intangible quintessence. National heroes are a recognized cornerstone of the symbolic repertoire of nationalism:

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4 Vassilis Colocotronis, “L’Ame bulgare et l’âme greque d’après la poésie populaire,” *Revue de Grèce* 1.1 (1918), 129–43, 129, cited in Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982, 66, 137.

While definitions of grandeur and glory vary, every nationalism requires a touchstone of virtue and heroism, to guide and give meaning to the tasks of regeneration. The future of the ethnic community can only derive meaning and achieve its form from the pristine “golden age” when men were “heroes.” Heroes provide models of virtuous conduct, their deeds of valor inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, they are not necessarily the central pillar of its symbolic order. In a Balkan context—the first larger comparative circle, in which Bulgarian nationalism can be understood—the national imaginary has diverse foci. In the Serbian national imagination, alongside the attention to heroes, the special focus is on an epic and a battle; in the Greek, on the classical past and the notion of direct continuity; in the Romanian, for all the controversies over “the ideal prince,” it is on events and their commemoration (the 1848 revolutions or the 1919 unification).<sup>6</sup> In the Bulgarian case, however, *pace* Colocotronis’s verdict, there is a clear orientation to national heroes. What emerges is not only the centrality of heroic figures in general but the ubiquity of one particular national hero: Vasil Levski. In this sense, one can posit a distinct particularity of Bulgarian nationalism (that itself underscores Bulgarian history in the past two centuries): an unusual concentration of competing and contesting discourses and appropriations on the same figure. If a parallel instance has to be found, it would point out

5 Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 65. Commenting on this, Linas Eriksonas (“The National Hero: A Scottish Contribution,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 30.1–2 (2003), 83 rightly points out that the understanding of the central role of the hero can produce complete consensus among otherwise feuding exponents of different theories of nationalism. For an extensive review of the literature on heroes and heroism, see Part II, Chapter 1, and Part III, Chapter 6.

6 Wayne Vucinich and Thomas Emmert, *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Keith Brown and Yannis Hamilakis, *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003; Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation. Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996; Keith Hitchins, *The Identity of Romania*, Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 2003; Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001.

mostly in the direction of the role of Joan of Arc in French history and self-perception, or Abraham Lincoln in the American one, all chronological, factual, and structural differences notwithstanding. The other obvious parallel is Giuseppe Garibaldi who was hailed as “a popular hero, a saint, a second Christ,” and among the Sicilian peasantry his red shirt was reputed to repel bullets.<sup>7</sup> One is told that “historians judge him to have been the only great democratic leader of truly humble origins in the nineteenth century, and that surely this fact goes a long way to explain his extraordinary fame and the cult surrounding him.”<sup>8</sup> This book is, among other things, about another great democratic leader of humble origins who apparently has escaped the gaze of the self-appointed tribunal of historians who are gate-keepers to the assembly of nineteenth-century heroes.

It is my belief that the choice of Levski as the pinnacle of the Bulgarian national pantheon explains much about the specific characteristics of Bulgarian nationalism. In a larger framework, the Levski problem is intimately involved with the question of historical heroes and the nature of hero worship in general, the relation between chronometric and mythopoetized time, as well as the link between masculinity and gender, and heroism. I am particularly interested in how the hero-creating process depends on the historical context, what its specificities are within differing socio-political frameworks, and specifically the link between sainthood and heroism.<sup>9</sup>

This is a historical study of the posthumous fate of the major figure of the Bulgarian national pantheon in the course of over a hundred and fifty years. By concentrating on the symbology of nationalism and the mechanisms of hero worship, I am trying to understand the particular role of cultural processes and artifacts in the formation of national identity. The study takes as its narrative focus the life, death and, especially, the posthumous fate of what has arguably become the sole truly uncontested Bulgarian hero: Vasil Levski (1837–1873). The saga of Levski’s posthumous fate not only parallels the development of modern Bulgaria, it is its embodiment. The tribulations of the hero are an allegory of the evolution of Bulgarian nationalism. In the Bulgarian

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7 Martin Thom, “How I made Italy,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 17, 2005, 8.

8 *Ibid.*, 9.

9 For an extensive survey, see Part III, Chapter 6.

pantheon of national heroes, Levski, an early and arguably the greatest martyr of the nineteenth-century national revolution, became the only unifying and uncontested figure, accepted by a whole range of mutually incompatible parties, institutions, movements and ideologies. He has been evoked as the ultimate authority and has been on every banner: believer and atheist, republican and monarchist, conservative and radical. His hero worship does not necessarily unite the nation, but precisely these efforts at appropriation for opposing causes underlie the claim for his unique and truly national status. The analysis of Levski's consecutive and simultaneous appropriations by different social platforms, political parties, secular and religious institutions, ideologies, professional groups and individuals demonstrates how boundaries within the framework of the nation are negotiated around accepted national symbols.

By exploring the vicissitudes of his heroicization, glorification, consecutive appropriations by different, often opposing political forces, reinterpretation, commemoration and, finally, canonization, the book seeks to engage in several broad theoretical debates, and provide the basis for subsequent regional comparative research. I hope that such analysis would allow us to arrive at more nuanced conclusions about the lately much-debated character of Balkan nationalism as well as about the manifestations of nationalism in general, apart from the historical specificity of a particular case. The impressive literature on nationalism has emphasized its extraordinary intensity, passion and conviction in general. It is only natural that most research has chosen to concentrate on the cases of particularly forceful and persistent nationalisms, looking for correlations with religious myth, or belief in the mission of "chosen peoples." In contrast, instances of nationalism not characterized by a virulent form (to differentiate it from simply national identity), have not attracted enough scholarly attention. By concentrating on a relatively "weak" case, I hope to provide a historical explanation for its causes and manifestations.

On a further level, the Levski story engages organically with a variety of other general theoretical questions. Most broadly, it offers insights into the problem of history and memory, with its concomitant aspects: the question of public, social or collective memory as treated by historians; the nature of national memory in comparison to other types of memory; the variability of memory over time and social space;

alternative memories; memory's techniques like commemorations, the mechanism of creating and transmitting memory. The reevaluation of the role played by memory in recent works has followed two main directions as far as the historical discipline is concerned. The bulk of the scholarly production is concentrated on commemoration. The other direction, which encompasses the whole genre of "invention of tradition," interprets the ways in which history is remembered and transmitted as an important indicator of power relationships. With very few exceptions, historians do not squarely deal with the relationship between memory and history, or the exact mechanisms of constructing and transmitting memory.<sup>10</sup> It is one of the goals of the present study to address these problems by using the Levski case.

In the past several decades Levski's figure was embroiled in a number of disputes in Bulgarian social life, of which two assumed the characteristics of what Victor Turner defines as social drama, and became a metaphor for professional and political rivalry, an illustration of the great fight over "who owns history."<sup>11</sup> One was the dispute over the unknown remains of Levski that involved archaeologists, historians, architects and one of the most popular writers, Nikolai Khaitov. In the 1950s, during archeological excavations accompanying the building of socialist high rises, graves were discovered in the sanctuary of an early modern church, and this resonated with rumors since at least the

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10 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York: Harper & Row, 1980; Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence B. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols., New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–1998; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994; Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith, eds., *Between History and Histories. The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993. On the Balkans, see Maria Todorova, ed., *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, London: Hurst, New York: New York University Press, 2004.

11 Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, 1981, 137–64.

1930s about the reburial of Levski's remains in this particular place. The reburial controversy and the search for Levski's bones, whence the title of my book—*Bones of Contention*—had a meaning different from the reburial mania which swept over the post-communist space.<sup>12</sup> The narrative of the dispute between the archaeologists and the writer offers a privileged glimpse into the world of Bulgarian intellectual life, and specifically Bulgarian academia under communism. It also allows one to question some of the established theoretical premises with which Eastern European communism was axiomatically approached, more concretely the application of the categories of civil society and the public sphere.

By choosing to describe an episode of late communism in Eastern Europe and thus recreating some of the atmosphere in a particular setting, I am not trying to whitewash all the shortcomings, failures or crimes of the communist regimes. I am acutely aware that any "historization" confronts the past at the same time as it complicates it, and a very fine line runs between complication, understanding and apologia. I don't believe that *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. Nevertheless, up until now the literature criminalizing the whole socialist period has been so preponderant that it needs a counterbalance, of course one that is aware of the pitfalls of its own approach. If Bulgaria in the late communist period emerges in this account as an almost completely normal socialist state with its own completely normal intellectual and public debates, so much the better. It will show a country with its own reflections and longstanding traditions, instead of the usual standard, generic and boring narratives of triumphant collapse of communism, rebirth of civil society, and democracy galore.

It is my sense that the reburial controversy had serious consequences for the understanding of social processes as well as for historiography. The reburial debate is one of these rare instances when the material offers the historian a unique opportunity to experiment with it and approximate the role of the judge. Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Zemon

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12 See Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; István Rév, "Parallel Autopsies," *Representations* 49, 15–39; Andrei Pippidi, *About Graves as Landmarks of National Identity*, Discussion Paper No.13, Budapest: Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study, 1995. For an analysis of this issue, see Part III, Chapters 5, 6.

Davis and Partha Chatterjee are among the historians who have fortuitously concentrated on trial cases in order to raise questions about the nature of historical truth.<sup>13</sup> While the reburial controversy did not assume formal legal dimensions, the attempts at resolution acquired the underpinnings of a formal investigation, and this gives the historian the luxury not only of reconstituting the factual and intellectual environment of the event but also of trying to adjudicate the case itself.

The other scandal was the quarrel between the two patriarchates of the newly split Bulgarian Orthodox Church, in which the secessionist church resorted to a legitimizing tool very different from its usual political argumentation: the canonization of Levski in 1996. This story opens a window on the climate during the ongoing post-communist decades, and specifically the reactions over the phenomena some call by the generic name of globalization. It also offers an opportunity to approach politics as a form of cultural interaction, to enchant it with a richer sense of what it might consist of or, as Clifford Geertz would define it, “to elaborate a poetics of power, not a mechanics.”<sup>14</sup> This work is thus an effort to think through problematic issues of the uses of history, its relations to memory, nation-building, ritual and the quest for a dignified individual identity over the *longue durée* of several and opposing political regimes.

The diachronic span of the narrative brings it to the present, and this forcefully poses the problems of personal memory, lived experience and participant observation. How can one write a scholarly account, if one is, in some cases, an observer and even a participant with or without a stake? While I am addressing the issue in the relevant places, suffice it to state here that I strongly oppose the stereotype that only outsiders (ethnic, social, kin, or ones not belonging to the same time period) can be “objective” or at least non-partial. This may seem superfluous were this a purely anthropological study meant to be con-

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13 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentieth-Century Miscarriage of Justice*, London: Verso, 1999; Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983; Partha Chatterjee, *A Princely Impostor? The Strange and Universal History of the Kumar of Bharwal*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.

14 Clifford Geertz, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, 123. For more on this, see Part III.

sumed within the confines of a discipline that has failed to be bothered by such issues quite some time ago.<sup>15</sup> It is, however, still an argument within the historical profession.

I feel like the narrator in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* who explains his conception of investigating his half-brother's life:

As I planned my book it became evident that I would have to undertake an immense amount of research, bringing up his life bit by bit and soldering the fragments with my inner knowledge of his character. Inner knowledge? Yes, this was a thing I possessed, I felt it in every nerve. And the more I pondered on it, the more I perceived that I had yet another tool in my hand: when I imagined actions of his which I had heard of only after his death, I knew for certain that in such or such a case I should have acted as he had.<sup>16</sup>

“Personal memory,” “inner knowledge,” “lived experience”: these are all categories that have somehow been delegitimized in scholarly research (except if they are the object of this research) as mired by affect, and affect by some pedantic definition is being opposed to thought and cognition.

Yet, it is precisely the organic link between affect and cognition that I am striving for in this book. I would like to endow my analysis with what some authors have called affective specificity.<sup>17</sup> “Inner knowledge,” I would claim, offers access to facets which are unreachable through other means. It allows the elevation of particular aspects

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15 For a penetrating survey of the posited dichotomy between insiders' and outsiders' approaches, based on a critique of Malinovskian and Boasian anthropology, see Matti Bunzl, “Boas, Foucault, and the ‘Native Anthropologist’: Notes toward a Neo-Boasian Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* 106.3 (2004), 435–42. See also James Buzard, “On Auto-Ethnographic Authority,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.1 (2003), 61–91.

16 Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, New York: New Directions, 1959, 33.

17 The notion of “affective specificity” is borrowed from Ruth Katz and Ruth HaCohen, *Tuning the Mind. Connecting Aesthetics to Cognitive Science*, New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 2003, ix who explain that when during the late Renaissance, a concerted attempt was made to render musical art more expressive, it resulted in the systematic marriage of music and words, which “branded music with meaning, while music endowed words with affective specificity.”

of the story so as to tune them to the basic “key” of a period or conjuncture.

The tonality is something that is heard as a totality, and it is my aim to make it heard as a melody, rather than to decompose it to its particulars. I am in no ways rejecting the rigors of the profession, and preaching what has become lately fashionable in some historical circles, namely that there is no difference between history and art, particularly fiction, and that both depend solely on comparable rhetoric, history merely making an utopian claim to truth. I will address some of these issues further in the book but suffice it to say that “inner knowledge” and “personal experience” in no way challenge the formal claim of history to knowledge. What they do afford, however, is a more honest, hence more visible, approach to the strategies employed. After all, if the historian is a professional remembrancer,<sup>18</sup> (and if the historian’s central role is in preserving and presenting social alternatives) it would be a loss not to follow these unusual but privileged pathways guided by insight.

All of this also explains my choice of genre, which is a collection of, at times, fractured narratives rather than a totality of structured explanation. These fractured narratives are not mere facets of an existing whole, but frames that systematize the seeming chaos of life. Too often the existing sources impose limits on the elaboration of these frames and it is the “personal memory,” “inner knowledge,” and “lived experience” of the narrator that creates the coherent whole.

Working on this story opened episodes deeply buried in my own memory. I vividly remembered the little gestures on Levski’s behalf during the 1980s when laying flowers at his monument was interpreted in our circle as a kind of semi-dissident symbol. Looking back those twenty years ago brings forth a self-critical chuckle. It reminds me of the anecdote of a well-known Bulgarian Social-Democrat in the inter-war period who celebrated Labor Day, May 1, by creeping under his bed, covering himself with a blanket and singing the *International* in his mind. Nonetheless, the self-congratulatory feeling of justified and fulfilled opposition is still recognizable. Following the reburial contro-

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18 The phrase belongs to Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. A History of the World, 1914–1991*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, 103, who defines historians as “professional remembrancers of what their fellow-citizens wish to forget.”

versy and then rereading it, I also remembered how, as a child, I myself once found a human skull in the vicinity of the National Library, where workers were digging in order to install the new water-supply system. I triumphantly carried what I was convinced was Levski's skull to my school, and presented it to the director. To her credit, she was quite sanguine and never tried to disabuse me of my patriotic discovery, although I am sure she immediately but tactfully disposed of it.

I was clearly carried away by the narrative of Levski's case and, for the first time in my professional life, I genuinely understood what has been affirmed as the historian's deepest motive: to tell a story because, when all is said and done, it is a very good yarn. Besides, I was aching to get again to an archive, talk to people, spin a narrative, embroider side-stories. I also wanted to do something purely Bulgarian for a change. When Georges Bizet wrote *Carmen* in 1875, his father told him he would never write anything better. Bizet died the same year at age 36. My father didn't tell me this after I had written *Imagining the Balkans*, although a few years ago, when he heard I had been awarded a John Simon Guggenheim and a NHC fellowship for this project, he exclaimed bemused: "Someone is giving you money for *that*?" My mother tactfully never did but would have told me, I think, that I should write something better. I didn't die the same year, so here is the result. It may not be better but it is completely different.

Despite my love for it, this could not become an opera, although at times I was playing with the idea of an oratorio. In the end, the structure most closely resembles the sonata form. The introduction—an *allegretto (molto moderato)*—with an emphasis on personal memory is followed by three main sections. Part I, the *exposition*, is about the sites of production of historical knowledge, their claims and competition. It has two themes in different keys: a dominant one, in a major key, what the politically incorrect nineteenth century used to call the "male theme" (the narrative of the archeological excavations and the social scandal over the different interpretations), and a subordinate one, the "female theme" in a minor key (the analysis of motives, the questioning of categories and similar destabilizing topics). Part II, the *development*, is, very broadly, about the uses and abuses of history. It is a diachronic survey of the different appropriations of the hero over roughly a century and a half. It is one of considerable tonal instability, as it moves through a number of keys and pitches: poetry and

literature, historiography, journalism, memoirs, textbooks, archival documentation, the press, paintings, monuments. It also prepares the “double return” to Part III, the *recapitulation*, about the meaning of ritual and heroes in contemporary society. Here, the main theme of the exposition—the social scandal—is recapitulated but restated in a different narrative: the formal canonization of the hero. Its orchestration involves instruments from anthropology, history, journalism, political science, and sociology. A brief *coda* brings the long piece to a close by suggesting the usefulness of the category “weak nationalism.” This adds a new melody and potentially threatens to become a fourth part, but handling a symphony was not part of the original design.

Research on this study took a number of years as it was always somehow a side-effect of other, seemingly more important issues. Analysis of the material and an early writing stage began during my stint as fellow of the National Humanities Center (2000–2001) and the Vienna-based *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* (2001), both of which provided a wonderful creative atmosphere. After a personal interval, I resumed work on the manuscript in the paradisiacal environment of the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin* where I was a fellow in 2004–2005. It is there that this work took on its present shape and was almost completed. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my fellow friends and colleagues, as well as to the scientific and administrative staff of WIKO, who have influenced this work in more ways than they suspect. The numerous debts to a host of individual friends and colleagues that I have incurred in the course of writing for ideas, suggestions, stories, and other help are acknowledged, with gratitude, in the appropriate places in the text. Last, but not least, I am deeply appreciative and indebted to the Central European University Press which, at a moment of dominant corporate and market thinking, took the risk with a sizeable manuscript and didn’t even fuss about the footnotes. With their decision, they also allowed me to finally let go. Lastly, I am dedicating this book to my last memories of my father. Age and illness slowed him down until he quietly passed away in 2003, but they made his humanity all the more apparent.

July 18, 2007 (on Levski’s 170<sup>th</sup> birthday)  
Champaign, Illinois



# PART I

BONES OF CONTENTION,  
OR PROFESSIONALS, DILETTANTES,  
AND WHO OWNS HISTORY



**I**t was in late December 1985 when my old friend Diana Gergova called me over the phone, and asked to meet her urgently. We had been inseparable since the 1960s in high school, and later as history students at the University of Sofia. At the time of the call, I was associate professor of Balkan history at the University of Sofia, and Diana was a research fellow at the Archeological Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She acted also as party secretary of the institute.<sup>1</sup> She immediately came to the point: my father, at that moment acting as vice president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, had been requested to mediate over a long-standing dispute between the Archeological Institute and one of the most popular writers—Nikolai Khaitov—which had gone out of control. Diana was soliciting my help in persuading my father to “objectively” look into the case and not succumb to pressure: after all, we all had heard about Khaitov’s “connections” high up. Among some intellectual circles, in particular, Khaitov had acquired a bad name because it was rumored that he was appropriating the labor of many of his collaborators, that he had somehow stolen the private archives of old scholars and writers, and was using them indiscriminately without acknowledgment, that he meddled in spheres that should only be within the perimeter of specialists, that, in a word, he was poking his nose too much in other people’s affairs. It was also said that he made a lot of money from his publications and used it to buy off collaborators, and that he had created a virtual publishing and propaganda empire. To complete the picture, it was affirmed that he had intellectually burnt out: after his wonderful short stories of decades ago that made his name, he was producing only journalistic writing, and as for the short stories themselves, there were those “reliable” rumors that were questioning his authorship. Like most of my contemporaries, I adored Khaitov’s *Divi razkazi*

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<sup>1</sup> In those days, this was an important leadership position in an academic institute, next to the director, the vice-director, and the scientific secretary. While it was in theory an elected post (from within the ranks of the institute’s party members), it had to be sanctioned from above. The role of the party secretary, unlike in the first decades of communism, was more administrative than ideological, and in the 1980s a liberal or well-intentioned party secretary could be an important and useful mediator between the rank and file, and the upper echelons of the Academy or the party. I believe this was the role Diana was playing in the institute.

(*Wild Stories*). I did not pay much attention to the rumors: after all, the same accusations about appropriated work had been hurled on so many writers, not least upon Shakespeare.<sup>2</sup> As for the political insinuations, I even refused to give an ear to them: this was an age-old game that could be broken only by refusing to play it. But my lights went up, and red they were, when Diana told me that Khaitov's new line was to accuse Bulgarian historians of any degree of vice situated in the range between lack of patriotism and national apostasy. More concretely, he was revisiting the 1956 excavations in the center of Sofia, specifically in and around the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska," and flatly accusing the archeologists that they had, willingly or unintentionally, destroyed the remains of Bulgaria's greatest hero—Vasil Levski—who had been reburied in the church in 1873.

Let me remind the reader that December 1985 was the end of the first year of the unfortunate and deplorable renaming campaign of the Bulgarian Turks, known by the pompous name of the "revival process"

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2 The only exception that caught my attention to some extent was the affair with Ekaterina Tomova's book *Zabravenite ot nebeto* (Forgotten by the Skies), Sofia: Otechestven front, 1981. Tomova had been one of Khaitov's close collaborators and worked at the journal *Rodopi*, where Khaitov was editor-in-chief. She had been sent by him to collect stories in the Rhodopes which he treated as his own material. Some of it he published as documentary addenda to the journal, others he obviously used as starting points for his own short stories. Tomova rebelled against this and published the collected stories in the above-mentioned book. She maintained that she kept religiously to the oral rendering with minimal linguistic normalization. The book enjoyed tremendous popularity because it gave a glimpse into the complex and picturesque mental life of centenarians from one of the most far-away regions of the country. Khaitov tried to sue Tomova for breach of contract and she left the journal. His later comments that she had never produced a single book beyond this work are unfair. Tomova published a volume of poetry in 1989, a novel in 1994, and collection of short stories in 1997. On the other hand, I had admired Khaitov's polemic style and stance against the historian Petir Petrov, whose bombast I had always disliked and whom I later loathed because of his excessively zealous role in the renaming campaign of the Bulgarian Turks. To be sure, Khaitov himself wrote from the point of view of a staunch nationalist, but his critique displayed such an acumen for reliable sources and logical analysis, that he totally won me over. See Nikolai Khaitov, "Rodopskata istoriia v niakoi statii i knigi na prof. Petir Petrov" (The history of the Rhodopes in some articles and books of Prof. Peter Petrov), *Istoricheski Pregled* 2 (1977), 99–105, as well as Petrov's response in the same journal, 105–9.

(*vizroditelen protses*). I was teaching Ottoman history, and was known least of all for any national zeal. So, next day, I duly marched into my father's study, proudly reminded him that I had never asked for any favors nor had I lobbied excessively on anyone's behalf, and told him to be on the alert against nationalist excesses on the part of Khaitov. He said he would. A few weeks later, in January 1986, he called me over the phone, and asked that I stop by. When I came, he handed me two thick files without a single comment. These were the materials that Khaitov and the opposing side, the archeologists, had deposited before the discussion that was to take place at the Academy of Sciences. And this is where my story about the bones of Levski starts.

There are several goals I would like to pursue in this part. Through a narrative of the dispute between the archeologists and the writer Khaitov, I would like to offer a glimpse into the world of Bulgarian intellectual life, and specifically Bulgarian academia under communism. This is not meant to provide any kind of generalizable narrative with the pretension of representativeness. Yet, so many (if only cursory) generalizations have been advanced about the monotony and placidity of intellectual life under communism, and particularly about Bulgarian intellectual life, or rather lack thereof under socialism, that it would be interesting and instructive to offer a "thick description" of *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* in one particular case. It is not a case chosen to extol any kind of great or dissident achievement, but precisely its ordinariness and comic, even ludicrous overtones are closer to the general atmosphere of late socialism.<sup>3</sup>

This brings me to a further goal: by taking a close look at the arguments of the contestants, I want to explore to what extent or even

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Richard Crampton, in his otherwise very readable *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) does not delve at all on the cultural aspects of what he characterizes as "the placidity of the domestic political scene" (202). The only one-and-a-half page exception is devoted to the career of Liudmila Zhivkova, and that in the larger framework of the characteristics of Bulgarian nationalism, and specifically its relationship to Russia (204–5). The same is the case with his *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 382–4). The otherwise useful and perceptive, but brief overview of the Balkans in the second half of the twentieth century by Bernard Lory has nothing specific to say on cultural and scholarly life in Bulgaria (*L'Europe balkanique de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris: Ellipses, 1996). Not that these accounts are in any way wrong, but they put too much premium on ideology.

whether the real issue in the controversy had to do with ideology, either communist or nationalist, although the dispute was surely clad in the discursive conventions of both of these ideologies. The crux of the matter, according to me, was a fight centered on the monopoly over historical knowledge, in a word, over who owns history, to use Natalie Zemon Davis's felicitous phrase.<sup>4</sup> This is something that reaches far beyond the concrete case, which played itself out in the framework of Bulgarian academe. It cannot be understood by looking simply at the characteristics of the communist system, although surely, some systemic features account for certain specificities.

The question is a fundamental and structural one about the production of historical knowledge in any contemporary society. Michel-Rolph Trouillot rightly insists that "the fact that history is also produced outside of academia has largely been ignored in theories of history. Beyond a broad—and relatively recent—agreement on the situatedness of the professional historian, there is little concrete exploration of activities that occur elsewhere but impact significantly on the object of study." As he shows, "the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."<sup>5</sup>

The reason for this relative neglect of historical theory, is because theories of history rarely examine in detail the concrete production of specific narratives. ... [M]ost scholars would readily admit that historical production occurs in many sites. But the relative weight of these sites varies with the context and these variations impose on the theorist the burden of the concrete. ... The heavier the burden of the concrete, the more likely it is to be bypassed by theory. Thus even the best treatments of academic history proceed as if what happened in the other sites was largely inconsequential. Yet is it really inconsequential that the history of America is being written in the same world where few little boys want to be Indians?<sup>6</sup>

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4 Natalie Zemon Davis, "Who Owns History? History in the Profession," *Perspectives. American Historical Association Newsletter*, 34.8 (November 1996).

5 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, XIX.

6 *Ibid.*, 22.

Mediated by the narrative of my story, I would also like to give some idea of the climate during the last roughly dozen post-communist years, and specifically the reactions over the phenomena some call by the generic name of globalization. It is always the case, as Steven Feierman has perceptively written about the place of microhistory in an African setting, that “there is a danger that it will come to be viewed as one more piece of charming and exotic local color. Yet microhistories at their best challenge the categories of analysis underlying larger and more general historical narratives.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Jacques Revel’s comment on the work of Carlo Ginzburg and other Italian historians who concentrate on small-scale events, communities or individuals, affirms that “the change in the scale of observation revealed not just familiar objects in miniature but different configurations of the social.”<sup>8</sup> What comes out clearly are a host of amazing continuities between the pre- and post-1989 periods, which are usually divided by a presumed deep chasm. Of course, the real challenge is not to create dichotomies but rather emphasize both continuity and rupture, but the post-1989 literature has generally erred more in the direction of rupture. A revision of the perspective might allow us to question the universal applicability of strict periodizations coming exclusively from the realm of political history.<sup>9</sup> Analyzing the agents’ behavior in the story may also offer unexpected conclusions about the character of civil society, whose existence has been so axiomatically brushed off from any depiction of real existing socialism. On the other hand, one may be less sanguine about the positive effect of embroidered case studies. After all, “the heavier the burden of the concrete, the more likely it is to be bypassed by theory.”<sup>10</sup>

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7 Steven Feierman, “The Creation of Invisible Histories,” in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999, 206.

8 Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Histories. French Constructions of the Past*, New York: The New Press, 1995, 46.

9 One may argue that in this case the proper “closure” comes not from the *annus mirabilis*, but from the biological passing away of the main (as well as the tangential) protagonists: Nikolai Khaitov, Stamen Mikhailov, Georgi Dzhangov, Sava Bobchev, Nikolai Todorov, Velizar Velkov, Dimitir Angelov, Nikola Mushanov, Liudmila Zhivkova, Dimitir Kosev, Nikolai Genchev, and the list is growing daily.

10 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 22.

Finally, why am I starting with a personal story? It is not merely to play with open cards and fend off accusations of a personal *parti pris*, something that will probably happen anyway. Rather, I would like to experiment with the genre of writing, and attempt to produce a convincing scholarly historical account that stretches the borders of conventional narrative by resorting at times to what some colleagues would refer to, disparagingly, as personalized journalistic prose.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between history as a lived event and history as an account of that event has been at the center of a long controversy over what actually is history. Oral history, as well as contemporary history (what the Germans aptly call *Zeitgeschichte*), have developed as imaginative fields, accepted as not being oxymorons, only after the Second World War. I do not claim to have mastered Bourdieu's art of participant objectification, but I am trying.

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11 Of course, reflexivity and the use of "I" have not been new to the historical profession, although to a much more limited extent than in anthropology, and this should explain the tinge of apology in these remarks. One can still hear in historical circles a resistance to this mode of "naval gazing" even as it has been used economically. There might be problems with the over-use of "I," but when Marianne Weber writes the 700-page biography of her illustrious husband Max Weber referring to herself in the 3rd person singular, one begins to wonder not only about academic conventions but about the reasons for his breakdown. Yet, what academic conventions one has been socialized in are probably dominant here, and I have to state that English is much more friendly to this mode of expression. When I write in English, I have become comfortable using the first person singular; but to this day, I scrupulously avoid it when writing in Bulgarian, although it has become much more evident among the younger generation.

# 1. A “Social Drama” at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Social dramas, as Victor Turner describes them, are “in large measure political processes, that is, they involve competition for scarce ends—power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity—by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce—goods, territory, money, men and women. Ends, means, and resources are caught up in an interdependent feedback process.”<sup>12</sup> What is significant is Turner’s insistence that social dramas are not merely a representation (oral or written) of discord or conflict in society, and as such only a story with its “discernible inaugural, transitional, and terminal motifs” to use Hayden White’s terminology.<sup>13</sup> For Turner, these “dramas of living” are universal processual forms, “public episodes of tensional irruption” which “constitute isolable and minutely describable units of social process.”<sup>14</sup> They represent “a spontaneous unit of social process and a fact of everyone’s experience in every human society.”<sup>15</sup> Because of their universality, they can take on different forms: in most societies they are agonistic, with clear-cut profiles of contestants and argument; in some cultures, elaborate codes of etiquette are able to mute the abrasiveness of the conflict; still in others direct confrontation can

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12 Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and Stories About Them,” in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 148. For his extended argument, see “Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors,” in Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974, 23–59.

13 Turner uses the term “story” as opposed to “chronicle” in the sense introduced by Hayden White in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. While the chronicle is a mode of conceptualization that arranges events in the temporal order of their occurrence, the story entails their further arrangement into a spectacle with discernible beginning, middle, and end.

14 Turner, “Social Dramas,” 33.

15 Turner, “Social Dramas,” 145.

be avoided and conflict would be low-key.<sup>16</sup> And, of course, social dramas occur among groups of individuals who are tied by real or common history, and shared values or interests. Yet, all cases, Turner hypothesizes, can be aptly studied as having four phases: “breach, crisis, redress, and *either* reintegration *or* recognition of the schism.”<sup>17</sup>

In February, 1986, then, when the debates at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAN) took place, the “scandal” had matured to the point where it had reached the phase of redress. Victor Turner again:

In order to limit the contagious spread of breach, certain adjusting and redressive mechanisms, informal and formal, are brought into operation by leading members of the disturbed group. These mechanisms vary in character with such factors as the depth and significance of the breach, the social inclusiveness of the crisis, the nature of the social group within which the breach took place, and the group’s degree of autonomy in regard to wider systems of social relations. The mechanisms may range from personal advice and informal arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery and, to resolve certain kinds of crises to the performance of public ritual.<sup>18</sup>

The discussion in BAN had been indirectly initiated by the archeologists who sought a venue to popularize their views in their sincere (I believe) conviction that they were artificially being silenced. The story, as far as my father (I henceforth refer to him both as “my father” and as Nikolai Todorov), was concerned, began for him in the following way. In late November 1985, he had been summoned to the office of Academician Angel Balevski, the president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Balevski turned to my father in the latter’s capacity as vice president of the Academy, responsible for the social sciences and humanities, as well as the Academy’s publishing house. Nikolai Todorov was asked to head a new commission to delve into the disputes around Levski’s grave, and also to pronounce himself on

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16 *Ibid.*, 148. “Social dramas... can be isolated for study in societies at all levels of scale and complexity. This is particularly the case in political situations, and belongs to what I now call the dimension of ‘structure’ as opposed to that of ‘communitas’ as a generic mode of human relatedness” (*ibid.*, 33).

17 Turner, “Social Dramas,” 145.

18 *Ibid.*, 147.

the Archeological Institute's demand that the discussion of Khaitov's book at the Medieval Section of the institute, which had taken place in September 1985, be published by the Academy. My father had no previous knowledge of the Levski dispute. In the 1950s he had been a graduate student in Moscow, and had missed the details around the excavations. He did not know about the archeological controversy at the time. At the end of the 1970s, when the affair flared up again, he had been appointed Ambassador to Greece (1979–1983), and had missed the work of the historians' commission under the leadership of Academician Dimitir Kosev (hence Balevski's demand for a "new" commission). After getting acquainted with the materials deposited by the Archeological Institute, Todorov became convinced that if published as is, this material would only intellectually discredit the institute.<sup>19</sup> He also deemed it premature to create a new commission, since not even the whole existing archeological documentation about the excavations had been assembled, systematized or even offered by the Archeological Institute. He therefore suggested to Balevski that, instead, a discussion should be organized with the direct participants in the excavations; that all existing documentation should be gathered and systematized; and that, subsequent to the scholarly debates, all materials together with the critical assessment of the documentation, should be printed by the publishing house of the academy.<sup>20</sup>

In the following weeks the two sides to the dispute were asked to, and deposited materials to which they both had access prior to the debates. The debates themselves took place in February 1986, in the course of three meetings, on February 10, 12, and 27, and were duly recorded.<sup>21</sup> There were altogether eighteen participants in the meetings, including Nikolai Todorov. These included the first two members of the excavation team of 1956: the archeologists Stamen Mikhailov, the leader of the excavations, and Georgi Dzhingov, who kept the diary of the excavations at the time. To them were added Magdalina

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19 Nikolai Todorov, ed., *Arkheologicheski dannii po spora za groba na Vasil Levski v tsirkvata "Sv. Petka Smardzhiiska."* *Dokumenti i stanovishta* (Archeological data about the dispute over the grave of Levski in the church "Sv. Petka Smardzhiiska." Documents and opinions), Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1988 (henceforth referred to as *BAN volume*), 341.

20 *Ibid.*, 5–6.

21 The verbatim report of all three meetings is published in the *BAN volume*, 277–379.

Stancheva from the Museum of the City of Sofia who, while not directly involved in the excavations, had had access to them, and the architect Stefan Boiadzhiev who had been engaged in conservation works since 1956. These four were, so to say, witnesses to the events of 1956. The working group from the Archeological Institute consisted of the Director of the Institute Dimitîr Angelov, Velizar Velkov, Dimitîr Ovcharov, Ivan Sotirov, and Diana Gergova. The so-called Khaitov team was made up of Khaitov himself, the architects Georgi Kolev and Nikola Mushanov, the artist Mikhail Benchev and Dr. Spas Razboinikov. Present were also three representatives of the Ministry of Culture: Rumen Katincharov, Simeon Ianev, and Marko Semov. Before taking a closer look at the redressive dispute itself, let us first reconstruct its prehistory, and especially the events that produced the breach and the crisis in the “social drama.”

Vasil Levski, caught by the Ottoman police on December 27, 1872 near the northern Bulgarian town of Lovech, was taken to Sofia where he stood trial in January 1873. Sentenced to death on January 14, 1873, he was hanged on February 6, 1873 (all dates are old style).<sup>22</sup> While there is consensus on the date and the time of his hanging (a couple of hours before dawn), all other details entail different versions: how long did he hang from the gallows, where did his confession take place, who was the confessor, was there a funeral service (*opelo*) after he was taken down, did the Bulgarian community receive his body, where was he buried and by whom, and was he eventually reburied? All these questions have not only factual value but, as we shall see further, deep moral and political implications. The most widespread belief and the only still current textbook account holds that Levski was betrayed by one of the Lovech Committee members—Pop Kristiu—a priest. It also holds that Levski was buried close to the gallows, but that the exact location is unknown.

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22 Bulgaria switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar after the First World War. The date of Levski’s hanging—February 6, according to the Julian calendar—would have fallen on February 18, according to the Gregorian one (adding 12 days for the nineteenth century). However, when transforming the date in the twentieth century, the usual 13 days for this century were erroneously added, resulting in February 19. This latter date has become broadly accepted and has been conferred such symbolic status that despite scholarly objections, the likelihood of it being rectified is minimal.

The reason for the varying and often controversial versions was that they were all based on subsequent memoirs which were put down in written form and published several decades after the event, mostly as a result of the nationwide campaign to gather recollections about Levski, initiated on the eve of the centennial anniversary of his birth (1937) and the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his hanging (1938).<sup>23</sup> Even the single recollection from a much earlier period, that of his confessor Pop Todor, was still shared only over a decade after Levski's execution.<sup>24</sup> With very few exceptions, all the recollections were indirect: they were stories told by someone who had heard a witness (usually a relative or a friend) speak authoritatively of the events. The few which represented direct witness accounts belonged to individuals who had been children or adolescents at the time, and who had seen the body on the gallows, either because their teacher had taken them to the place of execution or because they lived nearby. The only two accounts by mature witnesses and actual participants in the events belonged to two priests, and they were, in fact, mutually exclusive. One was the recollection of the above-mentioned Pop Todor who was widely accepted

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23 Most of these memoirs were published in 1937 and 1938 (with a few earlier or later) in the periodic press of the time, chiefly the newspaper *Mir*, but also the newspapers *Zora*, *Sofia*, *Dnes*, *Zaria*, *Slovo* and the journals *Rodina*, *Serdika*, *Demokratiia*. Some have been later reproduced numerous times. For a comprehensive work, see Stefan Karakostov, *Vasil Levski v spomenite na svremennitsite si* (Levski in the recollections of his contemporaries) and its numerous revised editions: Sofia: Nov sviat, 1940; Sofia: Ivan Koiumdzhiiev, 1943; Sofia: Partizdat, 1973; Sofia: Partizdat, 1987. A useful collection of memoirs is Liubomir Doichev, *Levski v svetlina: Lichni spomeni i otzvuisti ot spomeni. Izvori za biografia*, Sofia: Toncho Tsonevski, 1943, who, in addition to the journals and newspapers published in the capital, collected reminiscences from the local press, and excerpts from books as well as unpublished letters. His volume is also replete with useful commentaries and a meticulous index, something very rare for the time.

24 Pop Todor (1836–1891) spoke to Zakhari Stoianov sometime after 1885, a few years after the latter had published Levski's biography (1883). Stoianov left a written, but not verbatim, account of this testimony, which is kept in his archive in the National Library in Sofia (Bulgarian Historical Archive, BIA II A 8675). For the text of Pop Todor's testimony, see Nikolai Khaitov, *Grobû na Vasil Levski* (The Grave of Vasil Levski), Plovdiv: Khristo G. Danov, 1987, 35–7; also in: Nikolai Khaitov, *Izbrani proizvedeniia* (Selected Works), vol. 3, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1989, 36–8. In fact, the first to mention Pop Todor and his story as Levski's confessor was Stoian Zaimov, *Vasil Levski—Diakonû*, Sofia: Khr. Olchev, 1895.

as Levski's confessor, and which dated from the 1880s. The other belonged to Pop Khristo Nikolov (Takiia) who claimed that he had administered the confession to Levski. His story was published in 1937 as a recollection of Damian Bogoev who had heard it at the time from Pop Khristo himself, and in the presence of others.<sup>25</sup>

This poses the question of what constitutes legitimate historical evidence. Does all this mean that memoirs are unreliable, and should be dismissed altogether as a means to reconstruct factuality, to be used only as an illustration of the popular imagination? Nikolai Genchev in his popular and influential book on Levski distinguishes between two types of memoirs about the hero: the first, that he calls the "graveseekers' memoirs" are, according to him, "sclerotic and biased, espoused by crafty treasure-hunters"; the second type of memoirs he defines as "the folk memoiristic tradition which is calm and even-handed. It does not stain other graves. For this tradition it is sufficient that Levski's legacy has been fulfilled." He then passes his verdict on the utility of these two types of sources: "For history and national psychology both types are important. One could wish success to the first, while hoping to calm down its hysteria. The second one could be studied and utilized as a reliable measure for the spiritual proclivities of the Bulgarians."<sup>26</sup> Aside from the fact that this classification is totally illogical (after all, why should the "sclerotic" or "hysterical" members of the nation be excluded from an overview of its proclivities?), its primary purpose is to delegitimize some of the recollections which do not square with Genchev's own views. Nonetheless, Genchev is right in emphasizing what is the unique quality and distinguishing characteristic of oral sources: that they "tell us less about events, than about their meaning."<sup>27</sup> Yet what is discernible in his verdict is the typical patron-

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25 See detailed commentary in Ivan Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski. Biografiia*, Sofia: Direktsiia na izkustvata pri ministerstvo na informatsiata i izkustvata, 1947, 716–7, 1075. The title page indicates 1945 as the year of publication, the typographical details on the back page give 1947, and the number of copies as 4,000. All further citations are according to this edition. A new one was published last year: Ivan Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", 2007.

26 Nikolai Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1987, 206–7.

27 Alessandro Portelli, "What makes oral history different," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 67 (reproduced from *History Workshop*, 1981, no.

izing attitude of the traditional archival (or generally textual) historian toward oral sources, and the implicit dismissal of the contribution they can also make to facticity.

Ivan Undzhiev, Levski's first scholarly biographer whose work is unsurpassed until today, and a much more patient and meticulous researcher, was not so quick to dismiss: "Despite all their weaknesses, the memoirs should not be pushed aside altogether. The recollection is always something subjective, and an event like this cannot be easily encompassed in all its totality. Whatever small part of the truth they contain, these rare recollections about the Apostle's last minutes cannot be ignored."<sup>28</sup> Undzhiev knew what he was talking about. Although he always thought of himself as a mainstream historian, a traditional biographer, he was to a great extent an oral historian *avant la lettre*. He never subscribed to "the dominant prejudice which sees factual credibility as a monopoly of written documents," well aware that a lot of written documents are either the uncontrolled transmission of unidentified oral sources or often the controlled (and therefore inexact) transmission of identified ones.<sup>29</sup> Faced with the extreme dearth of documentary sources on the period and on his hero, Undzhiev's biography of Levski was in large measure based on oral accounts, many collected for the specific purposes of producing an official scholarly biography.<sup>30</sup> Already at the end of his over 1,100-page biography, Undzhiev did not focus on a detailed critical analysis of the memoirs specifically relating to the execution and burial of Levski, comparing the recollections in all their specific points, and reconstructing a more or less reliable narrative, but was satisfied with mostly narrating them at length.<sup>31</sup> He attributed the amount of contradictory information partly to the fact that the recollections had been assembled so late, clearly sharing the view that memory fades with time, and that fresh memories are more reliable. That some memories fade with time is undeniable but contradictions between testimonies hardly have to do with this, as freshly

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12, 96–107). He adds that "oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."

28 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 719.

29 Portelli, "What makes oral history different," 68.

30 For how Levski's biography was produced, see Part III, Chapter 3, on memory and narration.

31 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 713–9, 1070–84.

assembled but mutually exclusive witness accounts on big events and the courtroom practice persuades us every day. It seems that the belief in the inferior quality of oral sources, when or because they are distant from events and thus undergo the distortion of faulty memory, is just another prejudice. The very same charge can apply to written sources as well.<sup>32</sup>

Besides, as has been noted, oral narrators utilize certain aids to memory, which preserve the sharpness of the recollection. These are the numerous repetitions of the storytelling, the frequent discussions with members of the community, sometimes the recourse to formalized narrative. In addition, oral sources can compensate the temporal distance with an immediate personal involvement.<sup>33</sup> There is, therefore, no clear-cut correlation between the reliability and authenticity of the source and its temporal closeness to the event it describes.

More poignantly, Undzhiev pointed to the central and sore point of the Bulgarians' national discourse: their comparatively weak national feeling. He lamented that "we thought too late of asking witnesses and contemporaries about this event" and in an oft cited passage he wrote:

The circumstance that the grave of the Apostle remained unknown can be explained neither simply by the conditions of the oppressive realities nor by the events that absorbed our attention after the liberation. A significant amount of guilt lies also with the weak historical consciousness of the people, something that could not be expected to be different within the continuous misery of bondage.<sup>34</sup>

A recent scholarly contribution to the Levski debate pays close attention to the body of recollections, and subjects them to critical as-

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32 Portelli, "What makes oral history different," 68: "While written memoirs... are usually credited until proven to be in error, they are as distant from some aspects of the event which they relate as are many oral history interviews, and only hide their dependence on time by assuming the immutable form of a 'text.'"

33 Ibid., 68–9.

34 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 718, 1076. It is symptomatic that the words in Bulgarian for both the phrases "oppressive realities" and "misery of bondage" are identical and allude to slavery: "the realities of slavery" and "the misery of slavery." They tally with the standard reference to Ottoman domination as "Turkish yoke" or "Turkish slavery."

assessment for the sake of opting for the most reliable factual line. Ivan Petev acknowledges the controversies in the sources but refuses to disqualify them; moreover, their comparatively late appearance he attributes not to orchestration and imagination but to the fact that they were not sought out for a long time. In the classical tradition of critical historiography he maintains, however, that "while this is no easy task, scrutinized in the light of the logic of events, these memoirs permit the contemporary researcher to discover what specific information they pass on, and to what extent it conforms to the historical facts."<sup>35</sup>

At first glance, Petev may be accused of wanting to prove a thesis, and sometimes his argument is forced, let alone impeccable, but, on the whole, he is measured and convincing in laying out a scrupulously argued hypothesis. Himself a historian and professor at the Theological Academy in Sofia, Petev identifies the main controversial tropes around Levski's end and how they are treated in the different memoirs. Summarized, they relate to the following questions: Was Levski betrayed or not? If he was, was he betrayed by Pop Krīstiu or was the latter an innocent victim of slander? When was the confession administered to Levski and by whom? How long did he hang from the gallows? Did the Bulgarian community demand the handing over of his body for burial or was the burial orchestrated by the Ottoman authorities? Was there a priest present at the burial or not, and was there a proper funeral service? Where did the burial take place: in the Bulgarian cemetery on the western side of town or in the so-called mixed "criminal" cemetery on the eastern outskirts? Was it near or away from the place of execution? Was there a reburial and if so, by whom and where?

These are not questions satisfying a mere factual curiosity, albeit about the greatest national hero. The problem of Levski's betrayal touches upon a sore point which has been periodically taken up by some writers or scholars: namely, that not only was the nation immature and unworthy of its hero but it actually gave him away. Specifying the traitor as Pop Krīstiu further put the blemish straight upon the

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35 Ivan Petev, *Po-vazhni momenti ot zhivota i deloto na ierodiakon Ignatii—Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voennoizdatelski kompleks "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1993, 151–2. Petev actually uses the phrase "historical truth" but given the meaning for which he utilizes it, and the weightiness of the category in present day debates about objectivity, I have preferred to render it with "historical facts."

Bulgarian church as an institution. The type of Levski's burial and eventual reburial as well as the scrutiny into the confession and funeral service would shed light on whether the Bulgarian community behaved as abject cowards, or whether there were enough patriotic individuals who, in the face of extremely adverse circumstances, had found the courage to honor the hero's remains and thus his legacy. These are clearly issues very central to the national identity. Petev himself well summarizes the moral stakes that make these questions resonate with a very broad audience in the country: "It has to be emphasized, to the credit of all Bulgarians, that Hierodeacon Ignatii Vasil Levski, as a great son of Bulgaria and a treasured child of the church, was not forsaken in his last moments by his loyal friends and followers."<sup>36</sup>

Most professional historians, on the other hand, from Undzhiev on, have shared the dominant vision of the events, and have considered the obsession with these particular factual details an unnecessary footnote which deflates from the only important issue: Levski's revolutionary ideology, practice, and legacy.<sup>37</sup> Not only is this significant but, according to them, it is the sole aspect worthy of scholarly attention. The rest can be food for the popular imagination and, of course, for the writer's pen but it has no place within a legitimate scholarly discourse.<sup>38</sup> Insofar, then, as there was always present what can be called a revisionist view, it was never represented by mainstream figures, and was more often than not absent from the public's eye. Petev's book, although written by a professional historian outside the usual central institutions of creating historical discourse, can be considered to be one of the very few scholarly representatives of the dissenting, revisionist variety, whose chief exponent in the last decades had become Nikolai Khaitov.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Ibid., 151.

37 Undzhiev's biography actually ends with: "Time has erased all traces and it is highly doubtful whether [the grave] will be ever discovered. But this circumstance has no significance for the Apostle's immortal spirit." (Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 1084)

38 This is shared even by historians who are distant from the heart of the debate. Several of my friends who are far from defensive on the archeologists' account, and even give a sympathetic ear to Khaitov, in the end dismiss the "bone obsession" as primitive, pre-modern and unenlightened idolatry.

39 The biggest and most important institutions producing historical work on the modern period are the Department of History at the University of

Let us briefly follow Petev's reasoning on the several issues that constitute the backbone of the revisionist thesis. It has to be added from the outset that, in the case of Petev, there is an additional central motive, which is not encountered in the argumentation of the other "revisionists." This is the attempt (quite successful in my opinion) to prove Levski's unflinching religious belief until his end, something that is already visible in the title of the book, introducing the protagonist as "Hierodeacon Ignatii Vasil Levski." Mostly, however, I am choosing to introduce the revisionist thesis through his book because it is written in what can be easily described as the acceptable academic genre and language, and in a manner that illustrates the best of the traditions and conventions of historical critical analysis. Khaitov's polemic digressions and his frequent *ad hominem* attacks, on the other hand, as well as his occasional penchant to "silence" evidence not in his favor might detract from appreciating his otherwise very powerful and logical line of reasoning. At the same time, as we shall see, it was precisely Khaitov's style that brought an otherwise lingering but not so passionate conflict to a crisis point, and it is on this aspect that I will lay the emphasis when analyzing Khaitov's particular role.

A good two-thirds of Petev's book is devoted to the question of Pop Krístiu's alleged guilt, a question that has evoked strong passions since at least the 1920s. Although hardly accepted as the dominant version, the revisionists' view of the priest's innocence is making unexpected but significant and successful strides into mainstream territory.<sup>40</sup> More to the issues discussed in this part, the book's last section

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Sofia, the Institute for History and the Institute for Balkan Studies, both affiliated with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. While the Theological Academy has published important work of the highest scholarly standard (suffice it to mention that the late Patriarch Kiril was a foremost scholar of the nineteenth century), it has not carried with it a comparable imprimatur of scientific authority. The other "revisionist" scholarly works, like the ones by Dimitír Panchovki, Nikolai Panaiotov and others, especially as far as the Pop Krístiu motif is concerned, are discussed at length when analyzing the equivocal position of Levski in the Orthodox church (see Part III, n. 103).

<sup>40</sup> For details, see the above-mentioned discussion in Part III. As with most of the discussed issues and in the absence of new documentation, there can be no definitive proven stand; instead it rests mostly on the power and logic of the analysis. Having read practically all arguments pro and con, I myself am inclined to accept the revisionist thesis as better supported by the existing evidence and more carefully argued.

is devoted to the pertinent questions around Levski's execution and burial. The recollections differ widely even when assessing how long the body was hanging from the gallows for public display: from a few hours (from morning till noon) to one, two, even three days. Most, however, concur that the corpse was removed in the evening of the same day when the burial also took place, and Petev himself accepts this as the most plausible version.<sup>41</sup> This, at first glance, minor detail became in fact quite important during the BAN debate about the state of the corpse, particularly when discussing the medical expertise.

On the matter of how Levski was buried, the contemporaries' recollections varied from assertions that his body was arbitrarily "thrown away" by his executioners in an unknown place to different versions of how he received a regular Christian burial in the hands of his community. The former point out that the terror in the town was so great, the arrests among the Bulgarians so extensive, that no one dared even come by the gallows, let alone dare bury the corpse. Others are quite specific about the burial, the most widespread version being that the governor of the Sofia district, Mazhar Pasha, after having inspected the dead body, ordered it to be handed to the Bulgarian priest Pop Todor. Petev scrupulously points out that none of the recollections explicitly addresses the question of whether the Bulgarian community itself asked for the corpse, but judging from the existing Ottoman penal legislation and judicial traditions, he concludes that the body was delivered to the Bulgarians for burial.<sup>42</sup>

The question of Levski's last confession is central for an author like Ivan Petev who is set on proving that "raised in a religious family, educated in the light of evangelical commands, Vasil Levski remained a real Christian throughout his whole life, and up to the last." Again, the memoirs of the period are not unanimous, some denying outright that a confession took place at all or insisting that Levski rejected the attempts to give him the last sacrament. While Petev's opinion that "there is no doubt that Levski had a confession and received the last

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41 Petev, *Po-vazhni momenti*, 140–1. Khaitov, *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 1987, 236–8, on the other hand, prefers noon, in order to accommodate the thesis that the body was not buried in a stiffened position but was flexible enough for the hands to be crossed as in a regular Christian burial (see details in the next section).

42 *Ibid.*, 137–40.

sacrament" may have been worded too categorically, this is still a perfectly plausible conclusion, and it is supported by the majority of the sources.<sup>43</sup> As for the identity of the confessor, Petev proves without reasonable doubt that this was Pop Todor who was the only witness and participant in the events to leave an early (though not verbatim) testimony.<sup>44</sup> Petev is equally convincing about the time and place of the confession: it had occurred, according to him, at the gallows, immediately before the hanging took place (while an alternative version has it that it had taken place in the prison cell). Again, this is not an exotic minor detail: it has consequences about discovering the real identity of the priests who carried out the funeral as well as definitively refuting an ongoing popular belief that Levski had attempted to commit suicide while in prison.<sup>45</sup>

One of the key issues that have bedeviled most everyone of the Levskologists is where his body was buried. It is significant because it is directly linked to the reburial controversy. The majority of accounts point out that it was close to the gallows, and most of them specify the nearby cemetery for criminals on the eastern outskirts of town, in the area where Levski's monument was erected by the end of the century.<sup>46</sup> This was also the presumption of the commission created at the Sofia municipality, which initiated the building of a monument to Levski already in 1878, the year of Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule. The Russian governor of Sofia—P. V. Alabin—wrote in October 1878 to the St. Petersburg Slavic Committee that the remains of Levski would be transferred from the criminal graveyard and buried under the monument. The commission accordingly issued a decree with which it ordered the finding of reliable witnesses who could show Levski's grave.<sup>47</sup> None of the existing very detailed documentary

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43 *Ibid.*, 121–3.

44 *Ibid.*, 124–8. Although in a minority of accounts, Pop Khristo Takiia as well as Pop Kristiu Stoilov (different from the Lovech Pop Kristiu blamed for the disaster) have been identified as possible confessors.

45 *Ibid.*, 129–36.

46 There was another controversy in the 1930s also on whether the monument was built at the exact same place as the gallows, and was solved already by Undzhiev's critical reading of the evidence that it could not have coincided but was close by (Undzhiev, 1072–3).

47 See, in particular, Order No. 5 of the commission of July 23, 1885, which had identified two witnesses claiming to have been present at Levski's

sources around the building of the monument suggest that the remains of Levski were discovered, let alone buried under the monument. Nevertheless, after a great amount of memoirs were published in 1937, a commission from the Department of Museums and Monuments at the General Staff undertook to probe in the foundations of the monument but the partial drilling in 1938–1939 did not produce any results.<sup>48</sup>

There is, however, a detailed body of recollections that points to the Bulgarian cemetery in the western outskirts of town. Here is where Petev provides an exemplary analysis of the memoirs. He carefully examines the descriptions of the funerary procession and the road taken by it, and concludes that it is highly unlikely, if not outright impossible, for it to have crossed the whole town in the evening hours. Never dismissing the good faith in which the recollections were given, however, he suggests that one of the reasons for the controversy lies in the fact that the Bulgarians, not knowing to the last moment what would happen, might have indeed prepared a grave in the Bulgarian cemetery on the morning of the execution, as one of the testaments asserts.<sup>49</sup> Petev then goes on to reflect on why the criminal cemetery was the most likely option. This is not simply because the recollections seem most probable in this regard but also because this version corresponds better to the behavior and motives of the Ottoman authorities.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the

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burial, and specifying two bodily characteristics by which Levski's remains could be recognized, given that his grave was unmarked: a broken front upper tooth, and the bone above the right ear damaged by a bullet *Sofiski Gradski Okrızhen Arkhiv* (SGODA: Sofia City District Archives), Fond 1k, op.3, a.e.178, 6–7).

48 *BAN volume*, 133–5. At the same time, there exists one late solitary recollection of a woman from Karlovo who affirmed she had witnessed the laying of the bones in the foundations (*ibid.*, 135). Also, the drilling was partial and could not be considered definitive (Marin Kalonkin, “Pametnikit na Levski,” *Zharava*, No. 8, March 3–10, 1993, 3. On the other hand, given the highly publicized official act of the opening ceremony of this monument, it seems hugely improbable that this detail would be otherwise not reported or noticed. On the building of the monument see also Undzhiev, 1078–80; Khaitov, *Grobıt na Vasil Levski*, 1987, 22–7.

49 Petev, *Po-vazhni momenti*, 146–8.

50 *Ibid.*, 148–9. Allowing for the fact that the Ottoman penal code and general practice would bespeak a more tolerant attitude, including the permission to exercise the religious ritual of the respective religious community, and dismissing the notion that the corpse was disposed of without the pres-

story of Levski's burial in the cemetery on the eastern outskirts of town has been the most widely accepted also by the mainstream historians.<sup>51</sup> Petev, however, is the first one to give equal and exhaustive attention to all evidence, and to convincingly argue his thesis.

Petev is particularly good in his detective work when establishing the identity of the priests who administered the confession and the funeral service. Moreover, this is not an issue that has direct bearing on the controversy, except that it gives indirectly greater veracity to the

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ence of Bulgarian representatives, Petev nonetheless points out that what the Ottoman authorities surely would have avoided was a lengthy and solemn funerary procession through the whole city toward the Bulgarian cemetery when the nearby cemetery afforded the most likely and economic opportunity for a quick closure. Not least is the fact that Levski, after all, was sentenced as a criminal, and that a couple of weeks earlier Dimitir Obshti, sentenced in the same trial, was hanged and buried in the same cemetery.

51 See, in particular, the 1983 report of the Kosev commission, signed by twelve prominent historians, otherwise totally hostile to the revisionists' views (*BAN volume*, 133–9). An interesting exception is represented by Stamen Mikhailov, the archeologist who led the 1956 excavations and who is the primary object of Khaitov's wrath. In February 1981, at the round table of the newspaper *Rabotnichesko delo*, he argued strongly in favor of the criminal cemetery since, in his own words "the majority of his contemporaries assert that he was buried in the part close to the gallows" and because it would have been the most logical thing to do (*BAN volume*, 126). A few years later, Mikhailov drastically changed his opinion, and in his 1985 deposition switched to the western cemetery, basing himself on two of the memoirs published in 1937 and 1938. He even went so far as to endorse one of them that asserted that during the building of the "Brothers Buckstone" boulevard in the neighborhood of the old Bulgarian cemetery, a funeral was discovered close to the chapel with a preserved skeleton of a 35–40-year-old man and two skulls. The discoverer of the find was convinced these were the bones of Levski and Benkovski's skull, and accordingly preserved them carefully, then transported them to the Department of Military Museums, Monuments and Graves. The colonel in charge said the question of Levski's bones was extremely important but did nothing further, and allowed the bones to rot in the museum's cellar (*BAN volume*, 249–50, 253). While this episode is also an illustration of the constantly looming controversy over Levski's bones, punctuated by occasional "discoveries," it chiefly reflects in a not very complimentary fashion on Mikhailov's embrace of this thesis because it was better underwriting his attempt to dismiss the 1937 recollection about the reburial as a completely untrustworthy fabrication. For a detailed and spirited critique of Mikhailov's arguments, see Khaitov, *Grobû*, 1987, 215–29.

quality of Petev's other findings. His careful reading of the evidence leads him to affirm that Pop Todor, who was the confessor at the gallows, was not present at the burial because he had been arrested in the afternoon after the execution alongside other leading members of the Bulgarian community. The funeral service and the burial itself, on the other hand, had been executed by another couple of priests: Pop Toshe Georgiev Komitata and Khristo Takiia.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Petev adds his read on the reburial issue. He has not much new to say in this respect, mostly endorsing the memoirs of Maria Poppavlova who was the first to mention that Levski's remains were reburied in the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church. Her recollections, first published in 1937 have been reprinted many times, since they are at the foundation of the later controversy. It is still worth reproducing them here. Maria Poppavlova-Lazarova had been the daughter of a Sofia priest and the widow of Iliia Lazarov who had been one of the survivors of the famous Botev *cheta* of 1876, and who had died in 1902. She herself died in 1936 at the age of 86, and had shared her story with Nikola Stanchev, the son-in-law in a family of friends she was frequenting. This is how Stanchev reproduces her testimony (and it is to be emphasized again here that most of the recollections of this and earlier periods were transmitted as second hand accounts):<sup>53</sup>

Grandmother Maria described the hanging and burial of Deacon Levski in the following details. The day of Levski's hanging had been cold and windy. No Bulgarian dared to be at the hanging except two or three representatives of the guilds who had been ordered to be present. Levski was hanging from the gallows 1–2 days, and during that time only youngsters had the courage to come by the gallows. The Apostle's body was buried by Pop Todor close to the gallows.

52 Petev, *Po-vazhni momenti*, 141–7, 149, 151. In this as well as in other details he differs from Khaitov, who does not scrutinize this particular evidence as patiently and accepts literally Pop Todor's testimony.

53 Nikola Stanchev, "De sa kostite na Levski," *Mir*, No.10987, March 6, 1937; also in *BAN volume*, 242; also in Khaitov, *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 1987, 52–3, facsimile in Khaitov, *Grobî na Vasil Levski: Sbornik s istoricheski i arkhologicheski dokumenti i svidetelstva*, Sofia: Goreks Pres, 2002, fig. 12. It is strange, however, that Undzhiev does not mention this particular recollection in his otherwise lengthy footnote on the dispute over Levski's grave, pp. 1074–84.

Until this moment grandmother Maria was speaking calmly but when I asked her where Levski's body was today, she seems to have transposed herself into this dark era, when such questions are answered only under oath that she would not be betrayed to the Turkish authorities. And in all her sincerity and decency she added that the body of Deacon Levski had been dug out by the then sexton of the church "Sv. Parashkeva"<sup>54</sup> on "Maria Luisa" Street, and buried in the altar of the same church. This heroic deed had been accomplished by the late Khristo Khambarkov-Giskata, who was in touch with the members of the Sofia Revolutionary Committee.

The assertion that Levski's body hung from the gallows so long was clearly implausible when juxtaposed to other testimonies. On the other hand, one cannot help hearing Khaitov's later exclamation: "Just imagine that on the next day after the publication of the paper—on March 7, 1937—someone had dug into the altar of 'Sv. Petka' and had come upon the skeleton in the northern part of the altar which was dug out in May, 1956 during the 'rescue' archeological excavations! Would there have been the slightest hesitation where the grave with Levski's bones was?" And he adds even more effectively: "If I would give you a phone call, dear readers, saying that in front of your doorstep, under the mat, I have put two gold coins wrapped in paper, and you would check and find them, will you doubt my message?"<sup>55</sup>

Petev himself used this and other memoirs to establish the identity not only of the two priests but also of the two "servants" referred to in the accounts who helped take down the body. He concluded that these were the above-mentioned Khristo Khambarkov-Giskata, as well as Maria Poppavlova-Lazarova's own husband Iliia Lazarov about whom she does not speak in her testimony. The reason for this was, Petev ventures to guess (not very convincingly), her modesty not to speak of the heroic deed of her own spouse. In fact, the person who does speak of Iliia Lazarov is their daughter Anastasiia Iliieva Bokova who was in-

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54 *Parshkeva* is the phonetically Bulgarianized form of *Paraskevi*, the Greek version of the Bulgarian name *Petka*.

55 Khaitov, *Grobít*, 1987, 55; the second quote comes from a manuscript by Khaitov, which he was preparing for publication in the summer of 2001 and kindly shared with me. Both these quotes, of course, are first and foremost illustrations of Khaitov's rhetorical and polemical adroitness.

interviewed at age 75 in 1956 at the time of the excavations by Professor Khristo Giaurov of the Theological Academy. Her testimony, alongside the one by her mother, has been scrutinized and either celebrated or completely dismissed by the different parties to the debate. In some points, the daughter's information corroborates the mother's; in others it differs from it. This is what she has to say:<sup>56</sup>

I was born in Sofia. My mother was from Sofia. My father was born in the village of Lokorsko in a peasant's household. He died in 1902, around 50 years of age. Shortly before his death he shared with our mother and us, his children (myself and my two late brothers Traiko and Vladimir) the following: "Remember, you should know this, because it may some day become useful for history to know where and how Vasil Levski was buried." Here are a few details as I heard them from my father. In the aftermath of Levski's hanging, late in the evening, my father and Khristo Khambarkov (the churchwarden of "Sv. Paraskeva" who lived in a house in Sofia, on Sredna Gora Street, near the pub "The Grey Horse"), went to the place where Vasil Levski had been hanged with fezzes on their heads and with a wooden wine vessel (*biklitsa*). The weather was cold and icy. There was nobody around except the guards, the fields around were desolate. They started treating the guards. Following the custom, they had to drink first from the vessel. They drank but did not swallow. The guards also drank. They repeated this several times until the vessel got emptied. The wine had its effect soon, since there was some kind of sedative in it; I don't know exactly what. The guards got drunk and fell asleep. The moment was opportune. My father and grandfather Khristo took the corpse off the gallows and put it in an earlier prepared sack. My father carried it on his back, while grandfather Khristo led the way with the lantern. My father was a strong and healthy peasant, and was a true rebel all his life. With difficulty and not entirely without fear they reached the old church "Sv. Paraskeva Samardzhiiska." They were expected by the priest Pop Kristiu whose family name I don't remember. The priest administered the funeral service and then they buried him in the altar of the church, to the left.

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56 Published first in Khristo Giaurov, "Grobît na V. Levski," *Dukhovna kultura*, 39.2 (1959), 30–1; also in *BAN volume*, 138, 242.

There are obvious folkloric elements in this story, especially around the soporific wine potion. Likewise, the identification of the left, the northern side of the altar, as the burial place of Levski can be easily suspected to have been, maybe unwittingly, suggested by Giaurov, since it postdated the discovery of the skeleton.<sup>57</sup> The em-

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57 Bokova's testimony ended with the following statement: "I am giving the above information about Levski's burial in the complete recognition that I have to do this as the daughter of Ivan Lazarov Dzhagarov, a member of the Botev *cheta*, who had participated actively in Levski's burial. I swear with my signature that this evidence is authentic. Sofia, June 11, 1956." This was followed by Prof. Giaurov's note that her testimony itself was written down in his own hand due to Bokova's advanced age. In his 1987 book *Grobî*, 214, as well as during the debates (*BAN volume*, 167–8), Khaitov tried unsuccessfully to persuade his opponents that Bokova's account predated the excavations and was thus even more prescient than her mother's. At one point he even asserts that the date under the testimony was May 11, and that it was only systematized by Giaurov with the other accounts between June 11 and July 30. There is absolutely no confirmation of that. Rather, it is one of the instances which casts serious doubts on the probity of Khaitov's argumentation. One may have attempted to attribute it to his excessive zeal at the heat of the dispute were it not for the fact that he persisted in it even after the BAN discussion, first in his 1987 book *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, and then in publishing the book a second time two years later in his *Izbrani proizvedeniia* (Selected Works), vol. 3, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1989, 211–2. At the same time, immediately after the BAN debates, in one of his statements against Mikhailov of September 1986, Khaitov entirely omits Bokova's testimony in his argumentation, preferring instead to concentrate on the mother's account which is beyond any suspicion of intentional or unwitting manipulation (*BAN volume*, 270–7; reprinted in *Aferata s groba na Levski*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1997, 103–20). It is highly unlikely that Khaitov in his sleuth-like meticulousness when it comes to the errors of others did this unconsciously. On the other hand, one may not be so suspicious and begin to have doubts simply about Khaitov's attention to detail in his advanced age. For example, in his last publication (*Grobî na Vasil Levski: Sbornik s istoricheski i arkhologicheski dokumenti i svidetelstva*, Sofia: Goreks Pres, 2002, 52) he again asserts that Giaurov's questionnaire was taken in 1952 and 1953, that Bokova's testimony predated the discovery of the skeleton on May 30, and that the final date on the manuscript was June 11. These assertions are preceded by the *in extenso* text of the questionnaire (pp. 45–51). In it, Bokova's interview is dated "June 1956" without specifying the day of the month, and it was followed by an additional note dated July 20. The other interviews from the questionnaire are dated June 12, and July 5, 9, 10, 12, 17, 18, 21, 28 and 29, making it impossible for June 11 to be the date of completion. Rather,

inent commission of historians in 1983 dismissed this statement entirely, as it did the testimony of Dr. Petir Dimkov, the hugely popular doctor and author of best-selling books on herbal treatment who corroborated the information in 1982.<sup>58</sup> It deemed these statements totally unworthy and professed that “no researcher who has worked with historical sources would use such testimony for the solution of a scientific problem.”<sup>59</sup> Naturally, one is not expected to treat any memory automatically as factual proof for an event but a careful historian would weigh the credibility of the testifier against his evidence. No one, given Dr. Dimkov’s social status, would accuse him of conscious confabulation or falsification. What can be easily agreed upon is that his story is evidence of a comparatively wide-spread belief in the reburial of Levski in the church. In a word, his “memory” cannot prove the fact of Levski’s place of reburial or that a reburial took place at all, but it is a proof that such a belief was widely held at the time.

Moreover, Dr. Dimkov’s testimony is extremely interesting not so much for the reported facts but for the manner in which they were reported. At the end of his interview, he says that he urged his informants—his father, grandmother Maria Poppavlova-Lazarova, and Vasil Bozhilov—to write down what they knew, but they would all respond: “Come on, who would be dealing with Levski now?”<sup>60</sup> Dimkov’s brief interview does not specify the exact timing of these reactions: judging

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it seems to be the starting date. The manuscript itself was donated by Prof. Giaurov to the library of the Theological Academy on September 3, 1956. The very fact that Khaitov published this text is sufficient proof, if not for his unerring judgment, at least for his respect for historical evidence.

58 In a breach of scholarly tradition, Dimkov’s testimony was dismissed without being cited, let alone described. One can find it published in Khaitov, *Grobît*, 1987, 219, where it was reprinted from the newspaper *Literaturen front*, February 18, 1982, and before that it could be heard on the radio program “Khristo Botev.” It is also published in Khaitov’s latest *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 56. It stated that Dimkov’s father had been the priest of the “Sv. Nedelia” church, virtually next to “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” When the latter’s priest Pop Krîstiu Stoilov got sick in 1882, he confided in Dimkov’s father by saying that he had given Levski the confession, and with the help of two people from the committee, they had carried the corpse over to the church and buried it under the wall of the altar. This happened some time after midnight, and they dug a shallow grave because they were afraid and also in a great hurry.

59 *BAN volume*, 138.

60 Khaitov, *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 56.

from his brief text they could have been uttered both in the 1930s and in the 1950s. This, however, is no reason to dismiss his recollections. They can be characterized by what has been defined by cognitive scientists as gist, memory of meaning or content accuracy. This accuracy is different from the technical accuracy of episodic memory and corresponds to "recalling or recognizing the meaning or content of what has been experienced." As distinguished from technical accuracy that stresses verbatim memory, "content accuracy stresses memory for concepts and ideas, the meaningful, semantic content of the material."<sup>61</sup>

What this semantic memory tells us is the overall atmosphere where it was felt that dealing with an issue such as the reburial or grave of Levski was not significant enough. The phrase "Come on, who would be dealing with Levski now?" should not be read as evidence for neglect of Levski as a historical figure. Levski, pace Khaitov's latest accusations, was never purged from his central place in the Bulgarian pantheon once he was established there at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>62</sup> The phrase can be taken as an illustration of a particular *Zeitgeist*. It can be interpreted in the framework of a relatively weak nationalism or at least a nationalism that is comparatively less vocal and demonstrable, and not so obsessed with its symbolic repertoire. Symptomatically, this tallies well with both Undzhiev's mid-century conclusions about the lack of interest in Levski's grave in the 1870s,<sup>63</sup> as well as my own impressions and memories in the last decades of the twentieth century. The general reaction in my circle of friends, who had no immediate stake in the dispute, was that the whole issue was overblown, that it was actually insignificant, and did not merit the sensationalist attention conferred upon it.<sup>64</sup> If the phrase is indeed the emanation of a *Zeitgeist*, it is a *Zeitgeist* that has had and is having a continuous lifespan.

In any case, researchers less squeamish than the historical commission of 1983, like Petev or Khaitov as well as others before them, did dare try to seek out the reliable information from the existing accounts

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61 Mark H. Ashcraft, *Human Memory and Cognition*, New York: HarperCollins, 1993, 325.

62 See Part II for a detailed account.

63 See above, n. 34. About Khaitov's interpretations, see later in the text.

64 Just a few years ago, when my father heard that I had been awarded a John Simon Guggenheim and a NHC fellowship for this project, he exclaimed bemused: "Someone is giving you money for *that*?"

taken from memory. After all, isn't work on mediaeval sources often confronted by the same caveats? Stamen Mikhailov's attempt, on the other hand, to dismiss both the mother's and the daughter's accounts on the ground that they did not tally, entirely misses the point that the mother's 1937 testimony predated the discovery of the skeleton by two decades. In addition, these were not lonely accounts. It appears that, judging from the oral information, the rumor about Levski's reburial in the church was fairly widespread at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, because it is recorded as "old knowledge" by the early 1920s.<sup>65</sup> Does all this mean that there should not be "the slight-

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65 Most of these accounts have been detailed in Khaitov, *Grobît*, 1987, 219–23. Some of them were originally collected by Khristo Giaurov in 1956 (see the latter's "Grobît na V. Levski," *Dukhovna kultura*, 39.2 [1959]). Others have been assembled by Khaitov himself, in the form of letters or interviews, and published in the 1980s in his magazine *Rodopi*. They have been reproduced in Khaitov, *Grobît na Vasil Levski: Sbornik s istoricheski i arkeologicheski dokumenti i svidetelstva*, 2002, 55–60. One could object that most of these testimonies were given at a time when the excavations of 1956 had already taken place and thus might have been, even if unintentionally, influenced by the renewed rumors. Here we come to the very important criterion about the credibility of the testifiers. Some testimonies, with their categorical tone and internal inconsistencies, immediately raise one's guard. Others are strikingly thoughtful and carefully worded. Dr. Dimkov was already mentioned as a very respectable source. Another is Svetla Raiko-Daskalova, a former minister of justice, who in her testimony published in 1988 recalled how, when she was a little girl (in the 1930s), her grandmother would take her to the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church on Sundays and always admonished her to remember that this was where Levski had been buried (*ibid.*, 58). For me, one of the most convincing testimonies belongs to the now late Prof. Mikhail Genovski, a highly respected legal scholar and university professor, as well as an active member of the Agrarian Union. In his testimony published in 1988 in *Rodopi*, he remembers arriving in Sofia in 1921, upon completion of his high school degree. He was employed as an accountant in an industrial enterprise where he worked during the day, while taking evening classes at the Free University. Once, while passing by the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church in the company of the director of the enterprise who happened also to be one of the trustees of the church, the latter told Mikhail Genovski about Levski's reburial. This was the first time Genovski had heard about this: "How do you know?" he asked his interlocutor. The response was: "Here all elderly people and especially the clergy know about this." Genovski's conclusion: "After this, whenever I would talk with old Sofioters, and the conversation would turn to Levski's burial in this church, they would speak about

est hesitation where the grave with Levski's bones was" as Khaitov would have it? Hardly, but we shall look into this in the next section.

For now, this is the general version of the revisionists' view. In its separate points, it has been argued since the 1920s but received a systematic articulation only in the last decades of the twentieth century. Let me repeat that Petev's reasoning is in no way a definitive proof. This is impossible given the state of the information, and the impossibility to sustain it with material evidence. It is simply one hypothesis amongst other possible ones, but to me it is a quite plausible hypothesis. If Petev occasionally errs on the side of making categorical statements of the type "there is no doubt" and "it can be considered proven," this is not necessarily a sin of logic but of style. It is a trait typical of much scholarly writing which is not enamored with conditional grammatical forms like "it seems probable, plausible, feasible," forms that are deemed to display weakness and hesitation rather than intellectual discretion. Again, I would like to repeat what I had mentioned earlier, that with few exceptions I have preferred to introduce the revisionists' version through Ivan Petev's short book rather than through Khaitov's extensive, earlier and more detailed writings on the question.<sup>66</sup> This is so mostly because the seductiveness of Khaitov's

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this as something widely known. The clergy from several churches in the capital were also confirming this fact." (Ibid., 59) As a real scholar, he was very careful with his choice of words. All he insists on is the widely shared belief among the old citizens of the capital already at the time when he had arrived in Sofia—the 1920s. Finally, there is also Nikola Mushanov's interview for the television in July 1980, in which he mentions recollections of old people that women from nearby villages used to come each year on the day of the execution and light candles at the entrance of the church (*BAN volume*, 120, 320).

66 Khaitov's publications on the Levski problem include four books: 1. *Poslednite migove i grobit na Vasil Levski* (The Last Moments of Vasil Levski and His Grave), Plovdiv: Khristo G. Danov, 1985; 2. *Grobit na Vasil Levski* (The Grave of Vasil Levski), Plovdiv: Khristo G. Danov, 1987 (2nd revised edition of *Poslednite migove*), also published in: Nikolai Khaitov, *Izbrani proizvedeniia* (Selected Works), vol. 3, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1989; 3. *Aferata s groba na Levski* (The Affair with Levski's Grave), Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1997 (a collection of his responses to his detractors, 1985–1991); 4. Finally, a few months before his death, *Grobit na Vasil Levski: Sbornik s istoricheski i arkheologicheski dokumenti i svidetelstva* (The Grave of Vasil Levski: A collection of historical and archeological documents and sources), Sofia: Goreks Pres, 2002. The last is an updated and revised

prose is so powerful that one tends to raise one's guard at first, and as a result becomes immune to the seductiveness of his logic. In addition, Khaitov occasionally commits the sins of omission or of excessive polemic twists, whereas Petev, conforming to the expected rules of scholarly exposition, lays bare the logic of the argument. Most importantly, however, it is my belief that Petev's book or any other like his would not have generated the tension that triggered off the social drama. It would have been consumed as an internal dispute within academe or not even reached the stage of dispute. True, we are not to know for sure because Petev's book appeared much later, after the crisis had reached and passed its culmination.

As mentioned before, almost all the issues of contention had already been in place in the several previous decades, and this is the manner in which they fared. The controversy about Pop Kristiu had been publicly and forcefully voiced already in the mid-1920s, and with time a considerable historiography built around the problem.<sup>67</sup> It had its surges and ebbs but never really threatened to overflow the banks of more or less civilized, even though impassioned, scholarly discourse. The same is true of the variety of questions around the execution and the burial. They would flare up with differing degrees of intensity, usually around one of the bigger anniversaries of Levski's birth or death. They would also produce dramas in their own right but not a social drama.

The 100th anniversary of Levski's birth resulted not only in the first massive publication of recollections in 1937 but also in the formation of a citizens' committee with the express aim to discover Levski's remains. The committee authored three reports, the first two signed by St.N. Koledarov, the third by the whole committee maintaining they

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version of the previous volumes with some new material and occasionally more pointed interpretations. It also differs in the arrangement of the material, with commentaries provided at the end of each documentary entry. Its chief merit, however, lies in the much better quality of the published photographs. Practically all the material in these books has been published (sometimes repeatedly) in different periodical publications, and much of it is reprinted, although somewhat revised in each consecutive publication. Petev himself in many places steps on Khaitov, although he also offers corrections and deviates from some of his interpretations but merely in the particulars.

67 See Part III, n. 121.

had discovered Levski's grave and his bones.<sup>68</sup> Their claim was based partly on the 1937 recollections of the 82-year-old Atanasa Ianeva, partly on the 1937 witness account of a watchmaker who asserted Levski's skeleton had been dug up during the construction of a house in 1923, and that he had preserved the skull. Atanasa Ianeva, eighteen years old at the time of the execution, remembered that Levski had been buried in the cemetery close to the gallows. A few days later, she attended a funeral in the same cemetery, and her godfather, Pop Takiia, showed her Levski's grave. Over 60 years later, and despite the drastic changes in the landscape which had transformed the cemetery in the outskirts of town in one of the densely populated town quarters, she still believed she could identify the place, and pointed it out to the members of the commission.

In 1923 a judge named B. Birzakov had a house built for him on Chataldzha Street, in the above neighborhood. One day the wife of his neighbor, the watchmaker Iordan Iliev, was observing the laborers and saw them unearth a skeleton. Her husband, who shared this information with his old landlord, was told that Levski had been buried there. Iliev then took the skull, and preserved it over the course of 13 years. Finally in 1936, he put it in a paper box and buried it in the field across from his house. In 1937, alerting the citizens committee, the Archeological Museum, and the municipality, and in the presence of their representatives, the skull was dug out. It was impossible to link it to Levski, however, since it had been quite damaged. In addition, the doctor who was sent by one of the newspapers to examine the skull, concluded that it belonged to a 14–15-year-old boy. The judge himself wrote that he had been present at the "discovery," and that there was no talk at the time about Levski. There had been no preserved skeleton, and he gave the skull to Iliev who asked for it. Birzakov himself was furious with the intimation that he may have hidden such momentous information in the course of so many years, and threatened to sue Koledarov for slander.<sup>69</sup>

What is remarkable about this story is how much it reminds us of the 1956 events—the coupling of a memoir with an excavation—yet

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68 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 1081–4. The members of the committee were Ts. V. Boiadzhiev, Sv. R. Karolev, St. N. Koledarov, Dr. Ia. Cl. Namichev, St. N. Stoichev, Al. P. Khitov, Dr. St. Tsonev, and G. Iv. Cherkeзов.

69 *Ibid.*, 1083–4.

how fundamentally different the outcome was. The 1937 “discovery” ended in practically complete fiasco: there was the generally accepted demise of the theory that was never revived, and the only genuinely dramatic element was the unrealized threat of a slander suit. The 1956 skeleton, on the other hand, proved much more resilient, and by the 1980s had provided the basis for the real social drama. How and why did this happen?

In April 1956, the Archeological Institute ordered the beginning of excavations around and within the church “Sv. Petka Samarzdhiiska.” The excavations had been prompted by plans for the restructuring of the capital’s center.<sup>70</sup> They began on May 8, and a week later, on May 17, the newspaper *Trud* published an editorial on its first page under the title “Research around the church ‘Sv. Paraskeva’ in the ‘Center.’ Are Levski’s bones going to be discovered?”<sup>71</sup> The article disclosed the widespread belief that the remains of Levski had been reburied in the church, either in its western part near the narthex or in its eastern part in the sanctuary. It did not, however, explicitly mention the 1937 memoirs of Maria Poppavlova-Lazarova published in *Mir*.

On May 30, 1956 the archeologists discovered a well preserved skeleton in the sanctuary, to the left side of the altar stone which be-



**Figure 1.** Excavations at the northern side of the “Sv. Petka Samarzdhiiska” church in May 1956. Note the crowd of onlookers behind the fence.

Source: Nikolai Khaitov, *Grobít na Vasil Levski: Sbornik s istoricheski i arkheologicheski dokumenti i svidetelstva*, Sofia: Goreks Pres, 2002, 142, fig. 24.

<sup>70</sup> In fact, with a decision of the Council of Ministers of May 7, 1956, it was decided to tear down the church and even out the terrain to the street level. See Khaitov, *Grobít*, 1987, 11. The ensuing brief survey of the 1956 events follows mostly Khaitov’s clear and detailed narrative (11–7).

<sup>71</sup> *Trud*, No. 118 (2995), May 17, 1956. Published also as text and facsimile in Khaitov, *Grobít na Vasil Levski: Sbornik s istoricheski i arkheologicheski dokumenti i svidetelstva*, p. 44 and fig. 13.



**Figure 2.** Article in *Trud*, No. 118 (2995), 17 May 1956. "Research around the church 'Sv. Paraskeva' in the 'Center'. Are Levski's bones going to be discovered?"

came known as Skeleton No. 95.<sup>72</sup> The excavations were visited the very same day by Professor Khristo Ghiaurov from the Theological

<sup>72</sup> See the photocopy of the original diary in *BAN volume*, 9–57. The entry in the archeologists' diary for the day was brief: "At a depth of 100 centimeters under the stone basement, in the northern part of the altar we discover a normal burial. The lower part of the skeleton, from the hips down, the two lower limbs, lie under the foundations of the wall." The next day, the entry specified that the skeleton was 75 cm under the brick basement, and that it protruded some 100 cm from the wall. It also stated that photographs were taken and a sketch made by the museum artist. There were no objects around the skeleton but in the soil nearby two wrought iron nails were found. Additionally they found ceramic fragments and more nails. The same day, May 31, at a depth of 120 cm in the southern part of the altar they reached parts of a skeleton whose skull was still under the stone basement, and photographed it. This skeleton became known as No. 79 (*BAN volume*, 27–8).

Academy who informed the leader of the excavations Stamen Mikhailov that these might be Levski's bones, and offered him the collection of memoirs he had compiled in support of this view. Mikhailov was unimpressed by Giaurov's argumentation. The fact that the lower limbs of the skeleton were positioned beneath the sanctuary wall was for him an irrefutable argument in favor of an early burial, one before the construction of the church at the end of the fourteenth century. In June and July Giaurov continued to collect relevant information, in the course of which he interviewed Anastasiia Bokova, and at the end of July handed copies of



**Figure 3.** Photograph of Skeleton No. 95. A view of the apsidal foundations and the niche holding the legs of Skeleton No. 95 below the knees.

Source: Nikolai Todorov, ed., *Arheologicheski dannii po spora za groba na Vasil Levski v tsirkvata "Sv. Petka Smardzhiiska."* *Dokumenti i stanovish-ta*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1988, 79.

his manuscript "Written documents about Levski's grave" to several institutions and individuals, among them the Archeological Institute, as well as the "Botev-Levski" Institute, whose director was Ivan Undzhiev himself. In it, he insisted that the bones should be examined by specialists in order to identify whether they are Levski's remains. His article was published in the journal of the Theological Academy in 1959, but there was no follow up.<sup>73</sup> When the dispute flared up again in the 1980s Giaurov was long dead but his activities and motives were commented on and they bear mentioning here. The posthumous critique of Giaurov emphasized his credulity concerning the recollections but, after all, he had simply asked for professional expertise on the bones. Interestingly, there was another attempt to shed suspicion on

<sup>73</sup> Khristo Giaurov, "Grobî na V. Levski," *Dukhovna kultura*, 39.2 (1959).

Khristo Giaurov, born in 1889, studied theology in Kiev and became a professor of Ancient Greek and Hermeneutics at the Theological Academy. His grandfather had been killed in the Russo-Turkish (Liberation) War in 1877, and he himself participated and was decorated during the Balkan Wars and the First World War. He died in 1966 (Khaitov, *Grobî*, 1987, 14, 210-4).



**Figure 4.** Photographs of Skeleton No. 95.

Source: Todorov, ed., *Arkheologicheski dannii po spora za groba na Vasil Levski*, 77.

Giaurov’s motives, namely the fact that he had tried to save the church from demolition, as if the two motives—finding Levski’s grave and saving the church from destruction—were mutually exclusive.<sup>74</sup>

It was not only Giaurov’s activities that drew attention to the issue. The article in *Trud* had alerted the public, and people of all walks of

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<sup>74</sup> The anthropologist Boev remembered at the 1981 round table of the newspaper *Rabotnicheskio delo* how Giaurov came to plead with him, saying that if Levski is buried there, the church can be saved. Boev was moved, and decided to help save the church even if Levski had not been buried there. He accordingly went to the Municipal Party Council, spoke to one of the secretaries, and saw to it that the question was raised at the Central Committee, adding the argument that the church had unique frescoes from the fifteenth century (*BAN volume*, 126–7). The same issue was raised by the Kosev Commission in 1983 which cited Giaurov’s letter of August 16, 1956 to Professor Khristo Dimitrov, then head of the Theological Academy. He mentioned in his letter that the chief architect of Sofia Danko Mitov had allegedly said that if it was proven that Levski had been buried in this church, then it would be preserved (*BAN volume*, 135–6). Ascribing to Giaurov the above motive in no way nullifies his belief that Levski’s remains had been discovered. As for the timing of Giaurov’s survey, there were some disputes on whether it entirely postdated the excavations. As was definitively established, he had begun gathering information about Levski’s grave a few years before the excavations, although some of the evidence, like the Bokova interview, was taken after the discovery of Skeleton No. 95, more specifically after June 11, 1956 (*BAN volume*, 150, 374–6; Khaitov, *Grobët*, 1987, 211).

life were showing keen interest. While he didn't reflect it in his diary, Dzhingov had taken a photograph and reminisced later about this:

The interest was great. Here is one of the photographs in my possession, you will see the fence... People were crowding at the fence to watch the excavations when we discovered the skeletons. Professor Giaurov was showing keen interest. When we discovered the skeleton on May 30, Giaurov saw it... Everyone was talking, everyone was talking. And even more. Sava Ganovski came, I think in his capacity as vice president of the Academy, and he saw the church and specifically said we should be careful. Therefore, we made the photographs, therefore we called the museum artist to make a sketch. And Petîr Boev arrived, didn't he? I am jumping over that. I have not reflected it in the Diary.<sup>75</sup>

In the same year, Mikhailov published a study of the frescoes of "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." Two years later, in 1961, his publication on the excavations appeared.<sup>76</sup> Already the respective size of the two publications—a mere twelve pages for the general results of the excavations to the nearly forty pages dedicated to the frescoes bespoke the real interests of the author. Nonetheless, these articles came to be accepted as the definitive scholarly view on the problem, and nothing challenged it in the next two decades. Yet, it has to be noted that "the definitive scholarly view on the problem" took the form of a single paragraph and a footnote in the second publication, in which Mikhailov refuted the Levski link by indicating *inter alia* that No. 95 may have been a female skeleton.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *BAN volume*, 267.

<sup>76</sup> Stamen Mikhailov, "Stenopisite na tsîrkvata Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska v Sofia," *Izvestiia na arkheologicheskiia institut XXII* (1959), 291–327; Stamen Mikhailov, "Tsîrkvata 'Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska' v Sofia", in *Izsledvaniia v chest na Karel Shkorpil. Otdelen otpechatîk*, Sofia: Arkheologicheski institut i muzei, BAN, 1961, 167–78. The second article was also included in *BAN volume*, 104–16.

<sup>77</sup> The emphasis here is on the roots of the conflict as well as on its manifestations and implications, rather than on the subject matter itself. This does not mean that the latter is not of paramount importance in assessing the other factors. It also gives material for a fascinating critical reading in its own right, which is done in Appendix I.

## 2. From Breach to Crisis

It was only 23 years after the excavations, in 1979, that a journal article appeared which revived Giaurov's thesis.<sup>78</sup> What was remarkable was that one of the authors was a direct participant and witness of the excavations—Sava Bobchev. Bobchev, an architect and research associate of the Archeological Institute, had been commissioned in 1956 to be the deputy of Mikhailov, and specifically charged with completing the architectural sketches of the excavations. Immediately following this publication, and in the same vein of reasoning, was a newspaper article in *Puls* authored by a legal historian, a historian of the Revival Period, and an artist.<sup>79</sup> This marked, I believe, the real beginning of the social drama.

[A] social drama first manifests itself as the breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom, or etiquette, in some public arena. The breach is seen as the expression of a deeper division of interests and loyalties than appears on the surface. The inci-

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78 Sava Bobchev and Eduard Baltadzhian, "Kîde e grobît na Levski," *Sofia* 11 (1979) (Khaitov, *Grobît*, 1987, 14). Stamen Mikhailov's response was published in *Sofia* 3 (1980) and he also sent a written explanation to Radio Sofia on February 28, 1980. It has to be added that between 1956 and 1979 the church was restored twice—first partially in 1959 with the participation of architect Boiadzhiev, and then fundamentally in the 1970s under the leadership of architect Mushanov. Bobchev seems not to have alerted Boiadzhiev, who had been his student, and one can only speculate why. Khaitov thinks Bobchev was afraid. In view of Boiadzhiev's late attempt to compromise Bobchev's diary as unreliable, one may surmise that they may not have been on the best of terms. On the other hand, when Mushanov took over, Bobchev approached him, and Mushanov's information to the Committee of Culture headed by Zhivkova set up the subsequent chain of events, which produced the favorable atmosphere in which the 1979 publication appeared.

79 Nikola Gaidarov, Khristo Ionkov and Zhechko Popov, "Za groba na Levski," *Puls*, December 18, 1979 (Khaitov, *Grobît*, 1987, 15).

dent of breach may be deliberately, even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority... Once visible, it can hardly be revoked.<sup>80</sup>

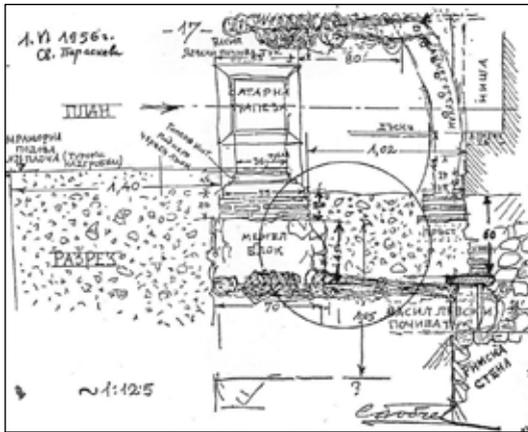
The breach was occasioned by the fact that the dominant thesis was challenged from within the scholarly community, indeed from within the same institution—the Archeological Institute itself. True, there had been an alternative opinion gestating over all these years. What is more, it was in fact articulated by a scholar—Professor Giaurov—and was even published in 1959. In these days, however, a publication in a theological journal did not carry the necessary scholarly, let alone ideological clout, and it was widely believed that Giaurov’s real motivation in putting forward the Levski thesis had been to save the church from destruction.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Giaurov, as the most enthusiastic champion of the thesis, passed away in 1966. The others who harbored doubts, and had spoken up in 1956, were keeping silent.

Or so it seemed when the scandal broke loose in the 1980s, and the archeologists accusingly pointed to this fact in order to undermine the opposing thesis. Bobchev himself came out in the public eye in 1979 with the above-mentioned article but he had not kept his beliefs to himself at the time. As he stated during the round table of *Rabotnichesko delo* in February, 1981, “the discovery occurred by chance but the coincidence is remarkable.” At the time of the discovery he remarked to Mikhailov that this seemed to be something special, a secret, and it had to be duly documented and the position of the skeleton exactly described. “Stamen Mikhailov objected that this had nothing to do with archeology and there are others who can deal

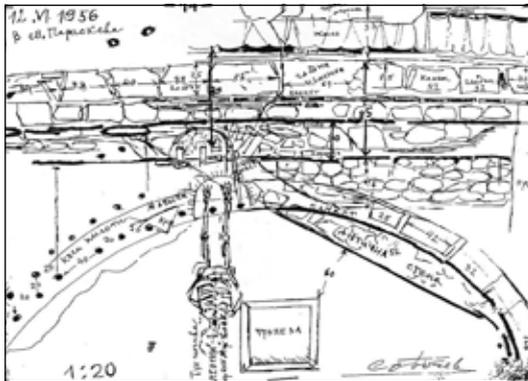
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80 Turner, “Social Dramas,” 146. Turner particularly insists on the altruistic aspect of the social breach which distinguishes it from the breach occurring within a crime that is usually egoistic. The person who occasions the social breach “always acts, or believes he acts, on behalf of other parties, whether they are aware of it or not. He sees himself as a representative, not as a lone hand.” (Turner, 38)

81 See in this vein Magdalina Stancheva’s recollection that Simeon Ignatievski had said at the time: “There is no way Levski’s grave is here but let us allow Gaiurov to help us save the church” (*BAN volume*, 150). Not very logically, the Kosev Commission in 1983 advanced the same argument in order to enfeeble Giaurov’s belief about the reburial, as if the two motives were mutually exclusive (*BAN volume*, 136).



**Figure 5.** Bobchev's sketch of 1 June 1956. The text under the skeleton's legs says "Vasil Levski rests here." Source: Todorov, ed., *Arkheologicheski danni po spora za groba na Vasil Levski*, 67.



**Figure 6.** Bobchev's sketch of 12 June 1956. The text around the skull reads: "Here rests Levski despite Dr. Boev." Source: Todorov, ed., *Arkheologicheski danni po spora za groba na Vasil Levski*, 65.

with it... According to me, St. Mikhailov very boldly and unilaterally decided that the whole story was fabricated. I didn't think so." Bobchev, as a subordinate, did not press further. When a few days later he talked to Giaurov and the latter insisted they had discovered Levski's bones, the bones had already disappeared. "Nobody further inquired how this could happen, why it happened. Nobody."<sup>82</sup> In Bobchev's private diary kept during the excavations, he added a post-

<sup>82</sup> Stenographic protocol of the round table of *Rabotnichesko delo*, February 10, 1981, in *BAN volume*, 121–32. Bobchev's intervention is on pp. 124–5. Bobchev also replicates the version that Dimitir Rizov (the conservationist from the Church Museum) had taken the bones to the metropolitan headquarters, in order to bury them as the remains of an unknown.

script in 1959 stating his belief about the discovery,<sup>83</sup> and his private sketches of the excavations depicting Skeleton No. 95 bear his note "Here rests Vasil Levski."<sup>84</sup>

Bobchev adds that he later tried to write in the press but always received the answer that his opinion could not be published because it would implicate the newspaper as taking sides. Finally, a friend of his in the magazine *Sofia* printed his opinion, but Mikhailov immediately sent a disclaimer accusing Bobchev of disinformation.<sup>85</sup> This is an important detail, especially in view of Mikhailov's and other archaeologists' subsequent complaints that their opinions were not published at all and/or certainly not in the same range as Khaitov's. It is also an accurate illustration on publishing policies under an authoritarian communist regime. The idea that one could publish just anything would never cross anyone's mind, of course. Yet not persevering because censorship was ubiquitous was more often than not a convenient excuse for inertia. In the end, what often was the ultimate criterion for publishability was not the ideological "political correctness," especially not in the later decades of communist rule, but either personal connections in the party/state bureaucracy or perceived connections which made editors malleable to influence or sycophantic even without pres-

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83 Bobchev's diary represents a short notebook of pencil kept notes mostly on the payments of the workers, with some very brief comments from 1959 and 1972. It is published in the *BAN volume*, 58–60. The relevant text for March 26, 1959 reads: "About the human skeleton found on May 31, 1956 to the left of the altar stone, only 75 cm from the modern level, see Notebook No. 5 (in detail). From the earlier investigation by Prof. Giaurov it is clear that the one buried to the left of the altar stone is Vasil Levski, despite the opinions of St. Mikhailov and Dr. Boev, who did not leave any protocol of a commission about the circumstances in which the bones were found. Where the bones are today, nobody knows." The same day, commenting on the preliminary conservation works by the Institute for the preservation of cultural monuments, and especially on the observations of architect Boiadzhiev that the church had most likely had three aisles as Bobchev had suspected from the outset, he writes: "Now it is clear how inadequate and unperceptive were the excavations under the leadership of St. Mikhailov in 1956."

84 Notebook No. 5 of Bobchev's sketchbook contains sketches from different sites in Sofia, twelve from the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiska." The sketchbook is part of his private archive, in the possession of his heirs, and is reproduced in *BAN volume*, 61–75.

85 *Ibid.*, 125–5. This is in fact the 1979 publication.

sure. This does not mean that editors in particular had no real grounds to fear retribution for moves they had taken, and that had angered the authorities or, to be more precise, someone in a high position.<sup>86</sup> What it means is that there were no strict and clear censorship rules on what was or was not ideologically permissible. What was exhausting about cultural politics under state socialism was the almost complete arbitrariness of the system where “dangerous” pieces could suddenly appear without impunity, and trivial ones be suppressed with an uproar. This is, it seems to me, one additional detail, which distinguished a totalitarian from an authoritarian system of the clientelist type.

Going back to Bobchev, he was obviously trying to find an opening and express his views all throughout the period following the excavations of 1956, in a word to occasion what can be described as the breach. The opportune moment came in the 1970s. The architect Nikola Mushanov from the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments had been appointed as the conservationist of “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” in 1969. In 1976, preparing the site on the eve of the 11th Party Congress, his colleague Bobchev visited him and told him about the legend concerning Levski’s grave. At first Mushanov did not take him seriously and was in a hurry to finish the conservation before the opening of the party congress ten days later. Later, however, he reported to the Committee for Art and Culture. A commission was set up in 1978 with Professor Doyno Doinov (himself a historian of the Revival Period, and vice-chairman of the committee), Bobchev, Magdalena Stancheva, and a few others.<sup>87</sup> We have two sets of recollections about the work of this commission: one belonging to Mushanov, and the other to Stancheva. Luckily, they come from two highly re-

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86 The most celebrated case was the publication of the future post-communist president Zheliu Zhelev’s book *Fascism* in 1982 (*Fashizm: dokumentalno izsledvane na germanskiia, italianskiia i ispanskiia fashizm*, Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1982), which resulted in the sacking of the editor-in-chief, and the moral punishment of his internal reviewers, but without any professional consequences for the author himself, who at the time was working at the Institute of Culture, except for the constant psychological dread of repercussions because of the arbitrariness. The other consequence was, of course, the fact that he was propelled into immediate fame and the book became a bestseller overnight. Suppression and censorship—as the Bulgarian communist authorities failed to learn until the very end—were the best advertising devices in a publishing system without proper markets.

87 *BAN* volume, 131, 297.

spected professionals and articulate individuals, who ended up representing the two opposing views in the 1980s.

According to Mushanov's statement at the round table of *Rabotnichesko delo* in 1981, Doinov decided that the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute should be invited to reassess the materials in light of Bobchev's thesis, and he also asked the section "Revival Period" at the Institute for History about all existing materials pertaining to Levski's burial. There was no follow up to this decision; it seems the invitation never even reached the institutes. Having familiarized himself with the arguments, Mushanov took a careful position, trying to accommodate both the lack of material proofs and the persistence of beliefs:

My thesis is that... we have the right to speak of a legend, we are entitled to say that the church is linked with a folk legend or saga about Levski's grave. I think that this gives us enough ground to mark this place of the church in some appropriate way, stating that according to Bulgarian folk legends Levski has been buried here... Beyond this the facts absolutely do not allow us to say: "it was here."

Ever the professional, involved in restoration work and how to present the monuments of the past to the public, Mushanov was reasoning that it would be good to impart some additional meaning to this church in the center of the capital, which was nice but rather poor, and whose frescoes were not that extraordinary from an artistic viewpoint. He shared his view with Professor Doinov and, "as far as I know, he took the question to L. Zhivkova, and she has a positive attitude towards the problem: to mark the place in exactly this way, saying that this is according to the legend."<sup>88</sup>

The journalist Eduard Baltadzhian who co-authored the 1979 article with Bobchev and who was also present at the 1978 meeting, corroborates this information:

At the meeting, Comrade Karadzova said the following on behalf of L. Zhivkova: "Quite apart from whether the scholars and the forum will come to a conclusive result about the real whereabouts of Levski's grave, if it is clear from the discussions that the thesis origi-

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88 *BAN volume*, 131.

nating from Professor Giaurov's inquiry is taking precedence [vzima preves], then we would agree to place such a plaque which would have an educational and patriotic effect on the young generation."<sup>89</sup>

The archeologist Magdalina Stancheva was working at the Museum of the City of Sofia since 1952, and had regularly visited the excavations in 1956. She was also included in the several commissions dealing with the problem of Levski's grave, among them the Commission of the Committee of Art and Culture. In view of the fact that Stancheva and Mushanov ended up defending the different versions of the thesis, it is important to hear her side of the story about the 1978 meetings:

I participated in two commissions about the fate of this grave. The first was a meeting under the leadership of Doino Doinov, which took place in the church itself. It was convened with an order of L. Zhivkova. Present at this meeting were architect Mushanov and his wife, who are not here now. Prof. Bobchev was also there. He was pleading the cause that this was Levski's grave. However, everyone present—historians of the Revival Period and archeologists—said that there are no proofs for that, and it would be therefore improper to mislead people and disingenuous to create a place for worship in this church. At this meeting the wife of architect Mushanov, Zlatka Kirova, and others too, voiced the following opinion: "And why not? After all, why shouldn't there be a place where people could feel at peace and fulfilled, and where they could say: there, it is acknowledged that [the grave] is here, the legend can be validated..." She did not say this with any malicious intention or the desire to misinform. However, my personal opinion is unequivocal: history, archeology and all the sciences which deal with similar problems will lose their authority, if they link a place to an event or to an individual based on such an approach without convincing and exact proofs. I firmly believe that people can be moved only by the authentic, and I therefore have always objected to some of the methods used for restoration and conservation in our country.<sup>90</sup>

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89 *Ibid.*, 132.

90 *BAN volume*, 150. Stancheva's opinion was voiced at the discussion of Khaitov's book at the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute in September, 1985.



**Figure 7.** The "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church after the restoration (present view).

Source: Khaitov, *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 74, fig. 1.

She further added that she had nothing against monuments and mausoleums, and the seeking of graves, but only if they really existed: "I do not believe that the Bulgarian people are thinking now in a less sacred manner about Levski than if a place existed which would be considered to be the resting place of his bones."<sup>91</sup>

These are very important statements, partly because they complicate the parameters of the whole dispute. By the mid-1980s the stakes were already so high and the tone had become so acrimonious on both sides that the conflict was articulated, depending on the side, as the unbridgeable dichotomy between rigorous experts and demagogic dilettantes, or between sloppy, unpatriotic professionals and alert public intellectuals. This was not yet the case at the end of the 1970s. What emerges from the statements of Mushanov and Stancheva, both reasonable in their own right, is a different approach, indeed a different philosophy on how monuments of the past should be preserved. Where Mushanov and his wife believed in somewhat creatively enhancing the restored objects both aesthetically and intellectually, Stancheva shared

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 150.

the view that only absolute authenticity (or rather the way she understands authenticity) is scientifically and pedagogically defensible. One could object to her somewhat purist naiveté—"I firmly believe that people can be moved only by the authentic"—that people are stirred only by "real" things. After all, pilgrimages to the Holy Land or to many a Christian shrine with imaginary relics should have disabused her of her enlightenment illusions about human nature. But what lurks behind her statement is the ethos of a whole generation that desired to transform the existing traditional, often superstitious worldview, into one based on a scientific attitude to life. Thus, she was not moved merely and not even primarily (as would seem a few years later) by the urge to defend the profession from the encroachment of dilettantes. It was the defense of a particular *Weltanschauung* and of a professional philosophy, whether or not one may want to agree with it.

It was during the same period that the restoration of Tsarevets, the residential hill of the Bulgarian medieval kings and patriarchs in Tŭrnovo, was taking place. Only the foundations and fragments of the fortification walls were in place. There are no authentic reliable sources, illustrative or textual, about the exact appearance even of the towers, let alone of the buildings. Yet, the view prevailed that a plausible construction is more valuable than an unimaginative reconstruction. As a consequence, not only the entire fortification walls were erected but also an imposing building like the patriarchal church. Today Tsarevets presents quite a spectacular view but without a firm scholarly foundation, according to a number of opinions. The contrary opinion, still within academia, counters that there is a scholarly basis even if it is based on existing medieval sources by analogy. This clash of different philosophies of restoration is nothing unique to Bulgaria or the communist world. It is constantly encountered in all societies around the world, as the controversies over Williamsburg and Jamestown in the United States for example attest.<sup>92</sup>

Yet what is typical for Bulgaria is the timing of when this approach became prevalent. The 1970s in the cultural sphere are indelibly linked to the name of Liudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of Todor Zhivkov.

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92 See, in particular, "Who Owns History? Conversation with writer William Styron & Williamsburg Historian Cary," *Humanities* 16.1 (January-February 1995), 6-10.

A historian of the Modern Balkans and an art historian,<sup>93</sup> in 1971 she had become Deputy Chair of the Committee for Friendship and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, and a year later Deputy Chair of the Committee for Art and Culture. Four years later, in 1975, she already headed the committee, in 1976 became member of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and in 1979 became a Politburo member charged with science, culture and the arts.<sup>94</sup> It was under her aegis that the highly fanfared celebrations of the founding of the first Bulgarian state, heralded as the oldest European state existing under its original name, took place. It was also during her less than a decade long cultural rule, and with the posture of a communist Maecenas, that an enormous number of monuments were commissioned and erected all over the country. Her ear was thus attuned to the appeal of a story like the discovery of Levski's grave. In other words, the atmosphere created under her leadership provided the favorable conditions for the explosion of the breach. When Bobchev attributed the publication of his article in 1979 to a friend in the editorial office of the journal *Sofia*, he was only partly right. His editor friend was not feeling threatened or even insecure with approving the publication given the overall atmosphere at the time.

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93 She defended her PhD with a thesis on interwar Turkish foreign policy, and later specialized in art history in Moscow producing an attractive volume on the Hellenistic tomb from Kazanlik.

94 For a brief assessment of Zhivkova, see Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 204–5. In the 1970s, and especially after her untimely death in 1981 at the age of 39, she was the object of acute interest in the western press, which heaped laudable accounts on her as a “window to the west,” despite the fact that her distinct physiognomy was a rather idiosyncratic mixture of native nationalism and theosophy with Indian mysticism, garnished with fits of anorexia and séances of spiritualism. There were totally unsubstantiated rumors that she had been assassinated by the KGB. Cast between a sycophantic idealized treatment by the communist historiography and journalism until 1989, and an equally praising evaluation by western observers, although for opposing reasons, Liudmila Zhivkova still awaits a serious treatment of her role as a complex historical figure. An interesting and well documented beginning is Ivanka Nedeva-Atanasova, “Liudmila Zhivkova and the Paradox of Ideology and Identity in Communist Bulgaria,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 18.2 (May 2004), 278–315, although this article, too, has to be seen in the context of the newly emerging idealist reevaluations of Zhivkova by many of her associates.

The question was attracting more and more public attention, and in July, 1980 the Bulgarian national television showed a documentary—"Legend about Levski"—in prime time. All participants of the excavations were interviewed. Milhailov basically reiterated his thesis as it was published in 1961, and added that at the time he did not pay attention to this question because he was totally convinced that it had been an earlier funeral, and that the Levski legend was a mystification. Bobchev, on the other hand, could expound at equal length on his view. As an architect, he asserted, it was impossible not to destroy or at least to dislocate the skeleton during the construction of the site, given the small depth of the funeral. The other interviewees were Dzhingov, Dimităr Buchinski, working as a sculptor at the Archeological Institute and a participant in the excavations of 1956, charged with preserving the frescoes, Dimităr Rizov, a former employee of the Church Museum in Sofia and member of 1937 commission to look into Levski's bones, and the professor of anthropology Boev.

Boev in many ways cuts the most comic figure. Apart from the fact that his memory was failing him, his statement that "Levski, as is well known, was of the Nordic race, and these skeletons were of the Mediterranean race" is a wonderful illustration of the type of scientific discourse he was formed in during the interwar period.<sup>95</sup> If one were more sanguine, one could say that this kind of argumentation could still carry some clout in the 1950s but would have become entirely obsolete by the 1980s. However, even in 1981, during the roundtable discussions, the young director of the film about Levski, Iuri Zhirov, countered Boev by maintaining that Levski was of the Thracian, not Nordic type.<sup>96</sup> The most striking feature of this 1980 documentary, however, is that all in all it leaves the impression of a certain parity in the voiced opinions. While both sides stood firmly by their views and one cannot speak of an authentic exchange of opinions, the effect on the outside observer was that two valid hypotheses are awaiting their scholarly scrutiny. There were also practically no *ad hominem* attacks yet.

The atmosphere had become much tenser at the next round of the public discussion, the aforementioned round table of the party

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95 *BAN volume*, 120. During the TV show, the anchor corrected Boev that "Doctor Bakirdzhiev in 1937 maintained that Levski belonged to the Thracian anthropological type."

96 *BAN volume*, 127.

newspaper *Rabotnichesko delo* in February, 1981. It was presided by Jordan Iotov, the editor-in-chief of *Rabotnichesko delo*, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and subsequently a Politburo member. In his opening words, he evoked the eve of the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state which fell in the same year—1981—and defined the roundtable as a forum to review the stage which the research on Levski's grave and remains had reached. In terms of substantive arguments, there was nothing new that either side added to their respective theses. For the first time, however, one had the feeling that, at least emotionally, the scales were slightly tipped in favor of the reburial argument. One of the historians who was present, himself a nineteenth-century specialist—Khristo Ionkov—spelled his concern which closely approximated an accusation: "The guilt of our colleagues, the archeologists, who were leading the excavations in 1956 is not in denying that the skeleton they discovered belongs to Levski but in their negligence as Bulgarian scholars, and their having lost the bone materials. Especially when they themselves publicly admitted that the issue was spoken of at the time."<sup>97</sup> This, alas, is the conclusion that any unbiased observer of the conflict is bound to reach, even if one totally rejects the reburial hypothesis.

Serious as this verdict was, it never went beyond the personal professional responsibility of the archeologists involved directly with the excavations: the leader Stamen Mikhailov, to be more precise. Another charge was spelled out, however, by a journalist present at the roundtable going far beyond the accusations of negligence. It had the ominous sound of a general denunciation of the profession as lacking in patriotism. Contemplating the reasons for Mikhailov's and Boev's attitude, Zhechko Popov exclaimed: "To me, the explanation lies only in the lack of an emotional attitude toward Bulgarian history often encountered among Bulgarian historians. This is the real obstacle to the urge to find out. ... I am not the only one to have reached this conclusion. The Hungarian scholar Péter Juhász is also amazed at Bulgarian nihilism, the neglect of the traces left by history."<sup>98</sup> While Popov's vilification was a solitary note at this meeting, it signaled the existence of such a discourse that would eventually be revived a few years later with great bravado and success by Khaitov.

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<sup>97</sup> *BAN volume*, 123.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

At this point it was not picked by anyone in the discussion, least of all by the chairman Jordan Iotov. Iotov's interventions, on the other hand, are the ones that signaled the official attitude to the problem. Iotov's statement is interesting in that it represents a cross between wishful patriotic thinking or an unlimited belief in the "people" on the one hand, and a strict devotion to scientific methods on the other hand. From this point of view it is actually the predictable attitude of a genuine utopian communist:

I would distinguish several different levels when approaching this problem: after Levski's hanging, would the Bulgarian people take their greatest son from the gallows? It seems to me, the answer is yes... Looking at the 1956 excavations, it is clear that there are a number of unclear archeological circumstances... And this generates discussions with arguments pro and con. Anthropology, on the other hand, besides dealing with physical appearance, anthropological types, age, and gender, can also contribute to the identification of the buried individual through the method of plastic reconstruction. This involves a graphic sketch and a plastic portrait. It is something widely used in criminology. I have therefore a simple rational suggestion, and I think it is in line with our times: give us the bones. Then this whole dispute will become superfluous.<sup>99</sup>

His concluding remarks to the whole roundtable were also reassuring without any hint of recrimination against the archeologists:

What is the truth? We assembled here not to establish the truth at this stage of the research, being aware that this is a matter for science to decide, but to activate the scholarly inquiry, to approach if not reach the truth. ... My impression is that not enough efforts are directed to finding the bones, as if this is a precluded question. Maybe more efforts should be put in this direction because if we find them the problem will be solved.<sup>100</sup>

A year later, in 1982, architect Sava Bobchev died. A more momentous death, as far as the general atmosphere surrounding the debate

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99 *Ibid.*, 129.

100 *Ibid.*, 132.

around Levski's reburial, had occurred in July, 1981, when Liudmila Zhivkova unexpectedly passed away. She was not personally involved in the dispute but, judging from the existing exchanges, she had cast a favorable eye on the efforts of the "grave seekers." By the time of the roundtable in 1981, the reburial thesis was, at least morally, gradually taking the upper hand. One can only presume, but my presumption is that had Liudmila Zhivkova been alive, the suggested plaque commemorating the legend about Levski's reburial would probably have been placed at the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church. It surely would have met the silent disapproval of many, but it is equally sure that it would not have encountered any open protest.

As it is, Zhivkova's death changed the constellation of power or, at the very least, its perception by the outside world. The new head of the Committee of Culture Georgi Iordanov together with the president of the Academy of Sciences Angel Balevski invited a committee of experts headed by the doyen of the historical profession—Academician Dimitir Kosev—to prepare a report on the current state of the dispute and the position of the historians. This commission consisted of eight historians specializing on the nineteenth century, two archeologists, and two architects.<sup>101</sup> The report, completed in July, 1983, is hardly a complement to the analytical capacities of professional historians, even if one disregards its excessive and uncritical dependence on Boev's dubious anthropological statements.<sup>102</sup> There was, however, one mitigating circumstance: the commission did not have all the existing materials at its disposal, nor did it know about their existence. It had nei-

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101 The full report is in *BAN volume*, 133–9. It was signed by Dimitir Kosev, Krumka Sharova, architect T. Krstev, Nikolai Genchev, Simeon Damianov, Vera Mutafchieva, Doyno Doinov, Dimitir Ovcharov, Nikolai Zhechev, Magdalina Stancheva, Khristo Ionkov, and architect Nikola Mushanov. Both Ionkov and Mushanov became later exponents of the contrary thesis.

102 In one instance, the report concludes that the only way the dispute could have been settled is to check the skull and the characteristics pointed out by Levski's contemporary Nikola Tsviatkov—the broken front tooth and the wound above the ear. This was not done when the skeletons in the altar were discovered because nobody knew about Tsviatkov's information. "And later the skeletons found in the altar, one of which Giaurov suspected of being Levski's, disappeared." Just like that: "disappeared"! The Kosev commission does not even pose the question of how and why the bones can disappear! (*BAN volume*, 138)

ther seen Bobchev's sketches nor the official diary of the excavations, known informally as Dzhingov's diary. For all practical purposes, in its work the commission stepped entirely on Stamen Mikhailov's publications of 1961, since the other piece of evidence that they had at their disposal—the short Bobchev's diary—was fragmentary and in any case consisted simply of entries about the workers' payments.<sup>103</sup> This circumstance made even someone as uncompromising as Khaitov spare the Kosev Commission his unrelenting pen.<sup>104</sup> Quite apart from one's opinion on the quality of the report, it gave its scholarly imprimatur to Mikhailov's thesis, in the hope of tilting back public opinion to what it considered to be the proper scientific position.

To summarize, since the end of the 1950s a breach occurred starting the social drama that came to be known as the affair around Levski's grave. It played itself out as a challenge to the entrenched authority of a scholarly consensus on the problem. Voiced by a challenger, albeit a scholar himself, outside the mainstream academic infrastructure, at the time it was not experienced as a breach; moreover, it never even really caught the public eye in the next couple of decades. However, beneath the seeming quiet, there were deeper divisions that were waiting for an opportune moment to come to the surface. This moment came at the end of the 1970s, and was facilitated by the atmosphere accompanying the patriotic and cultural upsurge on the eve

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103 One of the participants in the commission—Mushanov—commented: “Academician Kosev gave us the specific task to gather all possible documentary evidence in order to discuss all existing theses on the basis of scholarly materials. It was decided then that, with the exception of Professor St. Mikhailov's publication and the Bobchev diary, there were no other scientific sources which would allow us to reach conclusions or which would call for the reassessment of the thesis from Prof. Mikhailov's scholarly article. At that time we knew nothing about your diary [the official diary of the excavations, known as the Dzhingov diary], nothing was mentioned about architect Bobchev's sketches.” When challenged by Ovcharov in 1985 why he signed the 1983 report, Mushanov responded that he was not shown any evidence to the contrary, and thus, in its archeological part, the commission and he personally trusted completely Mikhailov's conclusions. “I signed it with a clear conscience because there was no ground on which to dispute the then existing scholarly interpretation.” After he familiarized himself with the official diary, Bobchev's sketches, and the photographic material juxtaposed to his architectural analysis, he changed his opinion (*BAN volume*, 296–7).

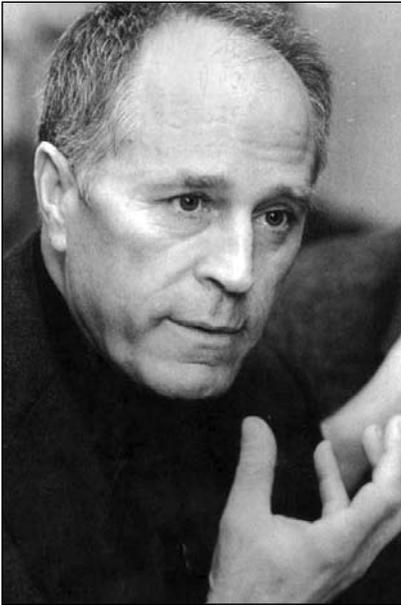
104 *Ibid.*, 173.

of the 1,300th anniversary of the foundation of the Bulgarian state. Once it came into the public eye, a mounting crisis followed, yet it somehow kept short of an explosion. The Kosev Commission was the latest attempt to contain the crisis within the academic profession, by giving the dominant thesis another shot of legitimacy. The shot was too feeble and it came too late. Nonetheless, a temporary truce set in, a kind of general consensus of divided spheres where the scholars were dealing with the general ideas and the scientifically provable truth, and the writers and journalists with some factual details, which feed the popular imagination but were not really considered to be of major significance.<sup>105</sup> And, of course, it was the scholarly sphere that was the dominant one. Or so it seemed for a very brief period.

This precarious equilibrium was broken with the interference in the conflict of Nikolai Khaitov, widely believed to be one of the two contemporary Bulgarian writers, alongside Iordan Radichkov, with, if not the greatest, then certainly at least the most idiosyncratic talent and style. Khaitov was closely and actively watching the developments of the conflict but had not participated in any of the public fora in the early 1980s. When he came out with his detailed account of the controversy and strong endorsement of the reburial thesis in his 1985 book *Poslednite migove i grobit na Vasil Levski*, all hell broke loose: the breach had turned into a crisis. This time the challenge did not come from within academe. It came from a different field which was not under the control of the scholarly sphere, and which had usually been perceived by scholars as privileged vis-à-vis the positions of power. The so-called artistic intelligentsia—especially some actors, artists and a number of writers—were thought to be and often really were on intimate footing with the higher ups. In addition, the new challenge was

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105 That journalists did not bring their efforts to a standstill after Zhivkova's death is evidenced by an interesting entry of the spring of 1982 in the visitor's book of the Levski museum in Karlovo. It is written by the journalist Georgi Takhov, who was working at that time at the popular newspaper *Puls* and later, in 1992, co-edited with Nikolai Khaitov *Istoricheski svidetelstva za groba na Vasil Levski* (Sofia: n.p., 1992). On more than two full-size pages he summarized the debates around Levski's grave, and urged the museum authorities to install a show case with photographs from the "Sv. Petka Samarzhiiska" church and the documentation about the controversy. This, he argued, would "freshen up the exposition and nobody will think that the museum is only about tearing up entry-tickets."



**Figure 8.** Nikolai Khaitov,  
1919–2002.

articulated in a forceful and effective prose, popular enough to reach a broad readership and strongly polemic: even friends of Khaitov would never describe him as shy or easily intimidated by authority.

The entry of Khaitov on the scene effected the

momentous juncture or turning point in the relations between components of a social field—at which seeming peace becomes overt conflict and covert antagonisms become visible. Sides are taken, factions are formed, and unless the conflict can be sealed off quickly within a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen and spread until it coincides

with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of social relations to which the parties in conflict belong.<sup>106</sup>

As Turner insists, the crisis is the turning point “when a true state of affairs is revealed, when it is least easy to don masks or pretend that there is nothing rotten in the village.”<sup>107</sup>

Immediately upon publishing his book, Khaitov sent it to the then Chairman of the Committee of Culture—Georgi Iordanov—who had inherited Liudmila Zhivkova’s post. The letter was brief and stated that after long years of discussions, sufficient facts had been gathered in support of the thesis that Levski had been reburied in the “Sv. Petka” church. Khaitov’s enclosed book was presenting a summary of these facts. Khaitov therefore appealed to Iordanov to consider the possibility, after due discussion, of “announcing the church “Sv. Petka Samarzhiiska” in Sofia to be the grave of the Apostle of Freedom Vasil

<sup>106</sup> Turner, “Social Dramas,” 146.

<sup>107</sup> Turner, “Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors,” 39.

Levski.”<sup>108</sup> The Committee of Culture forwarded Khaitov’s letter and book to the director of the Archeological Institute Dimitir Angelov, asking for a written opinion “in line with the archeological facts.” A second letter to the institute followed, this time by the President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Angel Balevski. It was sent in response to the numerous letters addressed by citizens to the Presidium of the Academy who, in the aftermath of Khaitov’s television interview of August 24, 1985, were asking about the official position of BAN to the issue of Levski’s grave. This letter ordered the Scientific Council of the institute to come up with a written verdict by September 30, which would be published in the mass media.

It is these two letters that led to the September 14, 1985 discussion of the issue at the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute, and then, on October 2, 1985, the discussion at the Scientific Council. It is clear that, despite later insinuations on the part of the archeologists that they were faced with a *fait accompli* and that party pressure had been exerted on them to waste their time with discussing dubious theories, they were actually given ample room to defend their standpoint. It doesn’t need much familiarity with how a one-party system operates, to know that had it been a precluded issue, the church would have been immediately turned into Levski’s commemorative grave, with or without the archeologists’ consent. In the present circumstances, it was clear that in the higher echelons of the party there were those who sided with one or the other opinion, but that the issue itself was not worthy of clumsy authoritarian dictates. This was, after all, the 1980s, not the 1950s, and democratic discussion could be tolerated as long as it did not question immediate state/party politics. Besides, the burning question of the day was the renaming process, and the last thing the authorities wished to foment, was additional intellectual discontent. Hence, the whole issue was handed to the Academy of Sciences for resolution.

The completely new element in the equation was the involvement of the mass media: the press, radio and television. This, added to Khaitov’s immense popularity, made sure that the discussion, unlike during the previous decades, could not be confined within professional circles. Khaitov himself took ample advantage of the new outlets. Energetic and basking in his stature as a public figure, he un-

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108 *BAN volume*, 140.

dertook numerous public lectures and book promotions in Sofia and all over the country. The result was the barrage of citizen's letters to the Academy. Some archeologists were quick to dismiss these letters as organized pressure on the local level by the Khaitov propaganda machine, but they could not so easily dismiss the immediate sting to their professional efforts.

Excavations in Bulgaria were financed partly by the Institute, from the state budget allocated to the Academy, and partly by the support of local administrative and party authorities.<sup>109</sup> Many of the archeologists depended on and cultivated good relations with these authorities on the district, city and village level. It was these relations that secured the local infrastructure—labor, living quarters, food—and guaranteed the successful outcome of the excavations. Moreover, the local moneys allocated for archeological digs would be under the rubric of cultural and patriotic needs. One of the complaints of the archeologists, never spelled out in writing, but which I heard in numerous personal conversations, was that Khaitov's book and its great popularity among this middle and lower echelon of state and party employees had cast the archeologists in a negative light, either as not professional enough or not patriotic enough. This had resulted in the alarming withdrawal of local funds from many archeological sites. In fact, after the debates, the memorandum of the Archeological Institute of June 6, 1986 tacitly recognized this by speaking about the heavy repercussions on archeology from the general distrust towards the discipline fomented by

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109 This is a well known fact, but can be also documented by Magdalena Stancheva's statement at the BAN discussion, that "the Archeological Institute and Museum to this day works with the financial support of the councils from the whole country" (*BAN volume*, 290). The funding of archeology in Bulgaria had gone through different stages and employed varying strategies. When the Archeological Institute was initially funded in 1923, on the directions of King Boris III, it enjoyed enormous governmental support and had also successfully relied on substantial donations. After 1944, the institute lost its previous financial autonomy and money for both wages and excavations came directly from the centralized budget of the Academy of Sciences (BAN). This, however, changed again, "when the Ministry of Culture gained responsibility for allocating funds through local administrative authorities." Douglas W. Bailey, "Bulgarian Archeology. Ideology, sociopolitics and the exotic," in Lynn Meskell, ed., *Archeology Under Fire. Nationalism, Politics and the Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 96.

Khaitov's book.<sup>110</sup> There was, thus, more at stake, than simply countering some irresponsible nationalist's accusations or defending the professional ethos from dilettantish onslaughts.

The "debate" at the Archeology Institute was so pitiful from the point of view of substantive arguments, that it bears mention here only because it led directly to the important discussions at the Academy in February 1986.<sup>111</sup> It is, however, extremely important in view of the rhetoric used by both sides, and especially the archeologists to undermine any legitimacy Khaitov may have claimed as an expert. This is addressed in detail in Chapter 5. The discussion was also important because it showed that any hope that anyone may have harbored for a compromise between the two sides was completely deflated by this meeting. The atmosphere at the meeting was overheated, at times scandalous and chaotic, *ad hominem* attacks were not spared, and it was more than clear that the crisis was getting out of hand.

What this debate demonstrated (quite apart from the language and emotions) was that the archeologists had not taken Khaitov seriously. Most of their interventions did not address the substance of his arguments but were focused on the fact of an assault by a dilettante against a profession. The final opinion of the Archeological Institute, following the discussion of September 14 and the meeting of the Scientific Council on October 2, was summarized in the report of Dimitir Ovcharov from October 4.

Briefly, this report summarized the substantive part of the archeologists' objections to Khaitov's version about a late burial and thus, a possible reburial. It bears enumerating them because practically all of these objections were subsequently dismissed. They consisted of the following: a) Skeleton No. 95 was not the only altar burial; its depth was coeval with the other burials found in the altar and other parts of

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110 *BAN volume*, 468.

111 Most of the factual objections of the archeologists at this discussion were explained or completely overturned, like the position of the corpse, the depth of the burial, and other anthropological assertions. The archeologists also did not address the main points of Khaitov's thesis centering on the hole in the ancient wall, which they flatly denied, and the pilots that had allegedly broken the skeleton's limbs. There were also flat lies, like Dzhingov's claim about the whereabouts of the diary of the excavations, or the defective sketches offered by architect Boiadzhiiev, or the denial that materials had been lost or displaced.

the church; there were no precedents of sanctuary burials; there was no need to dig into the sanctuary wall to lay the lower limbs, when three meters would be enough to lay the body entirely within the sanctuary space; b) architect Boiadzhiev's sketches convincingly destroy the thesis of a hole in the wall; instead he postulates that there was a later natural destruction of the last row of the constructed wall whereas the ancient foundation beneath was intact; c) the discovery of the two holes through the limbs near the knees conclusively show that the bones must have been broken; Khaitov's interpretation of the issue is not only wrong but a falsification, "meant to mislead the reader;" d) the position of the hands in a situation of *rigor mortis* exclude the reburial of Levski's corpse; e) the fact that this was a burial without a coffin is no reason to assume a later or irregular burial: there have been numerous funerals in the Middle Ages without coffins; f) the anthropological expertise of Boev is definitive about the type and especially the age of the skeleton being over 50, whereas Levski was 36 at the time of his death.

Much of Ovcharov's report, however, dealt with Khaitov "rude and ironic-sarcastic remarks, which N. Khaitov addresses in his book against the archeologists in general, and the Archeological Institute in particular. This to a great extent inflicts harm upon the authority of the whole archeological science." In conclusion, Ovcharov insisted that the scholarly view should be publicized through the TV, roundtables, and the press; that it should be published separately by BAN, and finally suggested to the Committee of Culture not to place a commemorative plaque because this "would be in complete defiance of scholarly research and observations."<sup>112</sup> The report was sent to Balevski, as well as a copy to Khaitov, who did not waste any time to respond and deposit his own response at the Academy.

One has to admit that it was quite a brilliant response: the archeologists had offered him plenty with which to exercise his mind and pen.<sup>113</sup> Part of the response addressed the substantive objections. Khaitov dismissed the assertion that the altar burials were coeval; on the contrary, he demonstrated that the diary of the excavations, which the archeologists insisted on being the only authentic source, unequivocally had documented different depths. He also exposed the numerous fallacies in dating the different burials. He challenged Boiadzhiev's

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<sup>112</sup> BAN volume, 189–90.

<sup>113</sup> BAN volume, 191–6.

sketches with the few existing photographs taken at the time of the excavations.<sup>114</sup> Again, basing himself on the newly released photographs by the archeologists themselves, Khaitov convincingly showed that the lower limbs could not have been broken. His comments about *rigor mortis*, referring the archeologists to the standard textbook on forensic medicine was to the point, and the other two objections only demonstrated that Ovcharov had not read Khaitov's book.<sup>115</sup>

Khaitov was at his best, however, when he countered Ovcharov's allegations of arrogance and damage for the archeological discipline:

I will not discuss with Ovcharov whether my book is beneficial or harmful to the whole archeological science. I will only note that I have never and nowhere written nor spoken about the "authority of the whole archeological science" because I am aware no less than Ovcharov is that the archeological science is not Prof. Mikhailov, nor Ovcharov, nor the two of them taken together, not even the whole section of medieval archeology at the AIM. Archeology is a system of research methods and accumulated knowledge, and to accuse it is like accusing chemistry, physics, or mathematics. It is quite another issue that one or another archeologist can make mistakes while basing himself on archeological science. These mistakes affect the authority of the one who has made them, not the authority of the science or its institution. It is unacceptable that the ones who have committed a mistake hide behind the authority of this institution, nor is it acceptable for them to boast with its achievements. In science everyone is

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114 Architect Boiadzhiev's sketches were disowned by Boiadzhiev himself only a few months later, in February, 1986. He had them withdrawn from the discussion, admitting they were defective. In his own words, which produced a storm: "Don't take my sketches for serious, because I drew them in an evening..." (311).

115 Particularly embarrassing was Ovcharov's reliance on Prof. Boev's anthropological expertise. Already during the roundtable discussions of "Rabotnichko delo" his evidence was obviously ridiculous, and during the February 1986 discussions at BAN, the archeologists totally desisted to bring it up. That an otherwise careful and intelligent observer like Ovcharov (I dare say, the only careful and intelligent observer during the 1986 discussion on the part of the archeologists team) would step on Boev in his October 1985 report, attests simply to the fact that, most likely, Ovcharov had not inspected Khaitov's arguments carefully and maybe had not even read them.

responsible for one's mistakes, and Ovcharov, or anyone else, should not attempt to identify the archeological science or the Archeological Institution with Mikhailov. This "strategy" is not going to fly despite his and other members' of the Medieval Section efforts to make their colleague Mikhailov personify archeological science and thus make him immune.<sup>116</sup>

He was stinging in his riposte on Stancheva's comment that he had behaved like an investigator and that there was pressing need to rehabilitate the archeological science from his onslaughts:

I wonder how she expected of me to behave 'on the territory of the archeological institute itself'—on my feet, silent, hat down? The search for scientific truth is a kind of investigation, and if M. Stancheva did not know that, it is time she learned it. Instead of worrying about "rehabilitating archeological science," she should think about the rehabilitation of those of its contemporary representatives who enact outrages in its name.<sup>117</sup>

To the archeologist Iordanka Iurukova' point about being "a representative of a broad circle of dilettantes" and about his "vicious ambition for power" he noted: "That I am a dilettante I don't deny, and there is nothing awful about it. What is awful is when professionals act like dilettantes... Iurukova cannot imagine that besides a vicious ambition for power, one could be inspired also by the desire to denounce a scholarly misdeed and to rehabilitate a long silenced and suppressed truth."<sup>118</sup>

Khaitov ended on a powerful note, comparing the archeologists' intolerance to any kind of critique with what was going on in other sectors of society:

We read every day not only sharp, but sometimes even devastating assessments and critiques in the press against managers, general directors, vice-ministers. Lessons are drawn, punishments are passed and nobody would even think of taking this form of public criticism

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116 *BAN volume*, 192–3.

117 *Ibid.*, 193.

118 *Ibid.*, 194.

for something strange or offensive. Only the archeologists are of the opinion that no one should meddle in their work.<sup>119</sup>

It was these two documents—Ovcharov's report and Khaitov's response to it—that Angel Balevski passed on to Nikolai Todorov in late November, charging him with making a decision about a BAN-sponsored publication of the discussion at the institute. And it was after getting acquainted with the stenogram of the discussions and the report from the institute that Todorov became convinced that a publication would irreparably damage the reputation of the institute. Eager to save the institute from public embarrassment, and hopeful that a better prepared discussion might yield points of consensus, he agreed to organize such a meeting and publish all records in a documentary volume at the publishing house of the Academy of Sciences.

The debates were contentious, but their most important aspect was that the two sides were talking to one another for the first time. In the course of these, often very technical and specialized exchanges, neither of them changed their initial version, but there were corrections in the argumentation of both.<sup>120</sup> At the end of the meeting, Todorov summarized: "We have not reached the stage where we can say that one of these is able to entirely displace the other. There still are arguments in favor of the one or of the other. We cannot come up with a categorical statement from this meeting."<sup>121</sup>

Todorov's proposal that the deliberations of the meetings be published, was supported by everyone. The Director of AI, Dimităr Angelov declared:

We are a country in which scholarship has an important role, it receives great attention. ... Obviously scholarship has to be free, that is different standpoints, different opinions can be articulated. ... I am very happy that this will be solved properly [with the publication of a volume],

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119 *Ibid.*, 195. His next phrase qualifies: "When I say 'archeologists,' I mean the ones who took part in the discussions of September 14 and then at the Scientific Council on October 2, 1985. They expressed their indignation that dilettantes dare meddle in their work."

120 In an attempt to convey some of the flair of the argument, and to also give a closer idea of the factual substance of the debates, they have been summarized in Appendix II.

121 *BAN volume*, 379.

both sides will be heard *auditor et altera pars*, as the Latins would say. I think, that by listening to both sides, we have to take into consideration the arguments [of the opposing side], and they—ours, so that we can reach the greatest precision. I completely support this project proposed by Acad. Todorov for a possible publication.... This will be a very serious work. This is scholarship, after all: hearing several standpoints.<sup>122</sup>

After the conclusion of the debates, the parties were invited to deposit their final statements. The Archeological Institute had done so immediately before the last meeting (February 25, 1986), and had reiterated all its previous opinions.<sup>123</sup> The opponents deposited their statement on March 1, 1986. In order to hand in his final report, Todorov was waiting on the expert opinion of the Research Institute of Criminology at the Interior Ministry. The institute was asked to pronounce itself on the photographs of the three skeletons from the altar space, and give detailed answers to several specific questions that had given rise to acrimonious confrontations at the meetings.<sup>124</sup> The criminologists' statement was completed on March 30,<sup>125</sup> and on April 7 Todorov signed his final report.

This is an important document not simply because it neatly and clearly summarizes the results of the debates, but because it explains the standpoint of the leadership of the Academy and personally of Todorov. It carefully summarized and weighed the two contending theses, and reached the main conclusion "that in the church 'Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska' irregular burials have taken place after the construction of the church. Given the evidence which pointed to this church from

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122 *BAN volume*, 378.

123 *BAN volume*, 380–1.

124 In particular, the criminologists were asked to pronounce themselves, based on the existing photographs, on the following issues: 1. Whether Skeleton No. 79 from one particular photograph, in which it has a skull, but with missing upper limbs, was identical to the one from other photographs where all upper bones are intact; 2. What was the burial position of No. 79 and No. 95; 3. Whether it was possible, in principle, to date the burials taking into account the half-rotten wooden planks and sticks covering the burial ground; 4. Whether and if so how the bones of No. 79 were moved (*BAN volume*, 385).

125 The written response of the criminologists can be found in *BAN volume*, 386–94, and the photoalbum on which the expert opinion was formed on pp. 395–410.

before September 9, 1944, there is the great possibility that one of the skeletons might have belonged to Levski.” At the same time, the report pointed out that “unfortunately, the bones have not been preserved, and the appropriate anthropological research, which could definitively determine whether or not, and which of the two burials could belong to Vasil Levski, cannot be made.”<sup>126</sup>

The cover letter to the report was even more careful in its wording. It acknowledged that

in light of the newly found materials, the expertise, and the debates certain conclusions were reached about later burials (after the construction of the church), which give serious reasons to begin a discussion, this time in the light of historical sources, about the possibility to place a memorial plaque at the church with an inscription stating that according to historical data, the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski had been reburied in the altar of the church by patriotic Bulgarians.”

The wording was explicit that the archeological data were insufficient and it did not preclude the future discussion around historical sources. It did, however, suggest a compromise formula where the tentative and scholarly formulation “according to historical data” would figure largely.<sup>127</sup> Finally, the letter reiterated the intention to publish the full materials from the discussion which at this point amounted to 810 manuscript pages.

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126 *BAN volume*, 417. The whole report is summarized in detail in Appendix II. The accompanying letter to Balevski (417–8) stated carefully that the debates, which point to late burials, “give serious ground to discuss the possibility of placing a commemorative plaque in the church.” This should be done after consulting the historical evidence and the possible inscription should state that it is only according to popular historical evidence that Levski was buried here, since the archeological evidence is lost.

127 The distinction made between archeological and historical data is one between material and textual (written or oral) ones. That historical data (in this definition) can be contested is a permanent problem confronting historians. The cover letter with the report was addressed to Academician Balevski, with copies to Iordan Iotov, member of the Politbureau, Georgi Iordanov, candidat-member of Politbureau and Chairman of the Committee for Cultural Development, Stoian Mikhailov, secretary of the Central Committee, Prodan Stoianov, department head at the Central Committee, and to the Committee for State and People’s Control.

### 3. No Redress, or Where Are Levski's Bones?

When all was said and done, there were two lingering problems that at times were posed directly, at other times were present only obliquely. One was the archeologists' question why all the noise when nothing could be proven categorically. For them, once it was clear that a definitive conclusion could not be accepted or imposed about the remains of Skeleton No. 95, this made the whole discussion immaterial and a waste of time. After all, science deals only with proven theses. In a charitable version, this question can explain part of the implicit passivity of some among the archeologists. In a less charitable one, the passivity was just the outer syndrome of intellectual laziness and professional smugness as well as the iron *esprit de corps*, which motivated the archeological team.

The other question, which interested Khaitov and with him the popular public opinion, was why, after all, confine the debate to the analysis of the archeological data. Why was it impossible to make the appropriate conclusions even without definitive proofs? Already the fact that the later reburial thesis could be launched as plausible provided, according to them, sufficient grounds for unequivocally accepting the possibility of Levski's burial. Also, Khaitov's team felt that the discussion had not been exhaustive and had missed one of the central issues: the whereabouts of the bones. After all, given the possibilities of contemporary science, there could be a very simple check, which would have made the waste of the whole mental and emotional energy completely redundant. Such a solution had been suggested already by Iordan Iotov at the 1981 *Rabotnichesko delo* roundtable. This was a simple DNA test. But where were the bones?

Let us address both these questions by starting from the second and taking the suspense out of the story from the outset: there are no bones. To this day my friend Diana Gergova says that the bones will be found, just like many of the excavations artifacts, which were

discovered in the storage places of the Museum of Sofia.<sup>128</sup> Stamen Mikhailov certainly intimated this, when in his 1980 publication in the journal *Sofia*, he wrote that “Skeleton No. 95 was the best preserved and its bones are at our disposal.”<sup>129</sup> Both he and Dzhingov maintained that the bones, together with the rest of the artifacts, had been carefully sorted out and packaged. However, in the documentary film “The Levski Legend,” which the Bulgarian TV showed on July 16, 1980, Mikhailov said that “as far as I know, this skeleton had been sent to the City Museum.”<sup>130</sup> When directly asked by Khaitov (on September 14, 1985 at the discussion in the Archeological Institute) where exactly the bones were, Mikhailov exclaimed that he didn’t remember what he had been eating yesterday but that they must be either in the Archeological Museum or in the Museum of the City of Sofia.<sup>131</sup>

Some archeologists continue to believe that the bones are simply misplaced. The more circumspect ones quietly muse that they must have been thrown away. In one of the protocols of the Kosev Commission from July 18, 1983, Dimitir Ovcharov says: “I will tell you where the bones are. After Stamen Mikhailov became convinced

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128 Most recently, in a conversation in November 2004 but without giving any factual or logical lead, simply based on “inner belief.” Previously in an email of October 19, 2000.

129 Khaitov, *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 232.

130 *BAN volume*, 119. In his article of 1982 in *Literaturen front*, Mikhailov again reiterates that the bones were stored correctly with their proper inventory numbers but that their condition would not make any kind of anthropological analysis viable. He also specifies, basing himself on Buchinski’s statement, that the bones had been taken to the City Museum of Sofia in the care of Magdalena Stancheva (cited in Khaitov, *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 233).

131 *BAN volume*, 167. On the other hand, Dzhingov seems to have believed that the bones were preserved until his death. In the provincial newspaper *Iuzhno utro* of March 7–14, 1994, published in Stara Zagora, where Dzhingov had arrived to deliver a lecture, the local journalist Georgi Ianev shared the exchange he had with Dzhingov. Asked why the bones had disappeared, he answered: “The bones are in a secure place.” When the amazed journalist required why they were not analyzed now, Dzhingov allegedly said: “And what if they belong to Levski? You know what will happen?... Khaitov will become an academician and do you know what would happen to us, on the other side...” (Khaitov, *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 224–5). Khaitov indeed did become an academician but as a writer, not because of his Levski affair, and nothing ever happened to the other side.

that these were Roman bones [from the Roman period], they have buried them somewhere. This is what we archeologists do. They have not been preserved but they have also not been thrown away.”<sup>132</sup> But he carefully avoided further pronouncements on the fate of the bones, and his opinion was not included in the final report of the commission.

There is considerable and plausible evidence that the bones were actually taken out of the site soon after their discovery and embarked on a virtual odyssey. Consensus exists that during the excavations the bones of Skeleton No. 95 were placed in a sack. In the documentary film “The Levski Legend,” shown by Bulgarian TV on July 16, 1980, Dimitir Rizov said he took the sack and brought it to the Theological Academy.<sup>133</sup> Mikhailov never contested this, and Khaitov makes a lot of it by insisting justifiably that the bones could not be taken out of the archeological site without Mikhailov’s explicit permission. The two professors at the Theological Academy—Ivan Goshev and Giaurov—did not keep the bones but sent the servant of the archdiocese to hand the sack to the Archeological Institute. It has to be mentioned in parenthesis that the three sites—the “Sv. Petka” church, the Archeological Institute and the Theological Academy—form a triangle with sides probably no more than 200 meters each, less than five minutes walk from one place to the other.<sup>134</sup> The servant reached the Archeological Institute and offered the sack with the bones but was told that the director of the Institute Prof. Krstiu Miiatev had ordered that nothing excavated on the territory of Sofia should be accepted but should go directly to the Museum of the City of Sofia.

From here on, the versions differ. Buchinski, in his statement at the TV show in 1980 said that the servant then took the bones back

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132 *BAN volume*, 167. A copy of the full stenogram of the meeting of the Kosev Commission on April 19, 1983 in the office of Academician Khristo Khristov at the Institute of History in the files of the personal archive of Nilkolai Todorov, now at BAN.

133 *BAN volume*, 119. Rizov’s testimony is very brief. He says he presented the bones to his boss, Professor Goshev, who shared the news with Prof. Giaurov, and then Giaurov took hold of the bones. He was at this point interrupted by the next speaker and never came back to his story.

134 Khaitov thinks that the taking of the bones to the Theological Academy by Rizov who, according to Khaitov, was known to be a secret services informant, was a conscious provocation and trap, into which the two perspicacious theology professors refused to fall (*Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 231).

to the excavation site and left them on a big box in the church.<sup>135</sup> However, this was not a witness account, since Buchinski had been sent by the Archeological Institute to Vratsa to gather some material on the gold industry there the very next day after the discovery of Skeleton No. 95. He was, therefore, absent from Sofia between May 31 and June 13, 1956, and when he came back, the bones were already gone. Bobchev, on the other hand, had been struck by the unusual position of the skeleton and had asked Mikhailov to immediately launch a special investigation on Skeleton No. 95. The answer he received from Mikhailov was that “that this had nothing to do with archeology and there are others who can deal with it” and, as a subordinate, Bobchev complied and did not press further. When a few days later Giaurov appeared with the exclamation that they had discovered Levski’s grave, “at that time, the bones had already disappeared.” Bobchev, who was working also at another archeological site in Sofia, had no specific theory about where and how the bones had gone.<sup>136</sup>

When Buchinski returned on June 13, the workers told him that there had been quarrels on the site: some were saying the skeleton was ancient, Roman, others that it belonged to Levski. Apparently, some of the workers must have told him that the bones had been taken to the Museum of the City of Sofia, care of Magdalena Stancheva, because he and Bobchev immediately decided to follow up on this but when they “went to Stancheva to ask about the bones, she said she would tell when she was ordered from above.”<sup>137</sup> At the BAN debates, Stancheva was asked to comment on Buchinski’s statement, and she flatly denied it: “How can I say such a thing. This is a ridiculous response.”<sup>138</sup> As

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135 *BAN volume*, 119.

136 *Ibid.*, 124.

137 *Ibid.*, 122.

138 *BAN volume*, 358. This seems quite convincing, and it is the serious and definitive answer of a respected professional, whereas Buchinski, despite his undoubted sincerity, not only had the reputation of a natural confabulator, but clearly presents often hearsay for a witness account. On Buchinski’s diverse career, see the memoirs of Ivan Venedikov who describes him as highly superstitious and a psychic but, at the same time, with enormous knowledge on different issues, especially geology and folk medicine. “Buchinski could be quite useful but he also was able to inflict great harm because he had no control stemming from an academic (scholarly) morality” (Ivan Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im. Bilgarskata inteligentsiia v moite spomeni*, Sofia: Izdatelska kishtha “Khristo Botev,” 1993, 298–308).

far as her response goes, one might give credence to her objection, but one may be skeptical about her denial that the bones had been delivered to the Museum of the City of Sofia.

In fact, when the Kosev Commission deliberated in 1983, the directors of all three possible institutions, where the bones could have been delivered—the Archeological Institute, the Museum of the City of Sofia, and the Central Historical-Archeological Museum of the St. Synod—wrote official letters, stating that the bones of Skeleton No. 95 were not only not preserved in their depots but had not been ever brought to them.<sup>139</sup> This, apparently, made Mikhailov furious, because in 1989 he gave the following written answer to the representative of the Committee for State and People's Control about the whereabouts of the bones: "All materials from the excavations have to be in the pitiful storage rooms of the Archeological Museum, and all the bones have to be in the Museum of the City of Sofia, despite the fact that some of its employees deny that."<sup>140</sup> During the 1983 debates Kosev had asked Stancheva whether Levski's bones could be recovered, and she answered: "All bones discovered during excavations we send in packages to Boev's institute. When I later asked what happened to them, Boev's laboratory assistant told me that mice had eaten the packaging, the bones got mixed up and are not suited for work."<sup>141</sup> She later insisted she was speaking in general terms, not specifically about Levski's bones, which, judging from the turn of phrase is correct, but a rather disingenuous riposte, since she was responding to Kosev's specific question about Levski's bones. Clearly Stancheva, without knowing for sure, logically assumed that this is what had happened also to Levski's bones. But it is also clear that at the time of the 1983 debates, she implicitly accepted that the bones of Skeleton No. 95 had been delivered to the Museum together with other bones from the site as had been ruled by Miiatev in his direc-

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Khaitov, however, apparently gave credence to Buchinski's information and continued to make much of this information until his death, flatly accusing Stancheva of participating in a cabal to "disappear" the bones.

139 *BAN debates*, 139. Such letters were also sent to Khaitov, when he turned to the respective institutions, *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, Sofia, 2002, 235–6.

140 *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, Sofia, 2002, 233.

141 Protocol of April 19, 1983, *BAN debates*, 171. This, however, was not included in the final report of the commission.

tive that any skeletal remains be handed over to the Museum of the City of Sofia.<sup>142</sup>

In my mind, this is one of the two possible versions of what had really happened. Either, as Ovcharov thought, the bones, after having been delivered back to the site, were discarded, buried back into the ground, because they were considered Roman bones, or, they were sent to the Museum of the City of Sofia and from there possibly to Boev's laboratory, where they were dispersed after mice had eaten out the packaging.<sup>143</sup> In any case, as the Kosev Commission nonchalantly concluded in 1983: "Later, the bones found in the altar space, including the ones which Giaurov thought of as Levski's, disappear." Just like that, into thin air. It is an amazing conclusion, not even followed by a surmise or question where and how the bones might have disappeared, given that this expertise was conducted by the leading Bulgarian historian of the day—Academician Kosev—and signed by a host of the most important specialists from both history and archeology.<sup>144</sup>

142 *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 9.

143 On the other hand, Boev denied that he had been charged with making an anthropological analysis of the bones, and given that any documentation to this effect is missing, one wonders whether the bones, if they had been delivered to the Museum of the City of Sofia, ever left its storage rooms for Boev's laboratory. Boev asserted in 1981 that he had only been called by Mikhailov to visit the excavations a few days after the skeleton had been discovered and inspect it on site, for which he wrote a protocol to the Archeological Institute (*BAN volume*, 126–7).

144 *BAN volume*, 138–9. The signatories, besides Kosev, include Krumka Sharova, T. Krîstev, Nikolai Genchev, Simeon Damianov, Vera Mutafchieva, Doino Doinov, Dimitîr Ovcharov, Nikolai Zhechev, Magdalena Stancheva, Khristo Ionkov and Nikola Mushanov. In fact, during the debates a number of these scholars, like Ionkov, Krîstev, Doinov and Mushanov insisted on finding the bones, but Stancheva, Mutafchieva and others objected and forced a conclusion in the final report that it was possible that the bones had been laid in the foundations of the Levski monument in 1885. As was already pointed above, and as the members of the commission were well aware of, the partial drilling of the foundations looking for Levski's bones in 1938–1939 produced no results. Khaitov is right to take Stancheva to the task when she uses an extra-scholarly argument to promote the thesis about the bones in the foundations of the monument. During the work of the commission she says: "Still, from the point of view of appeasing public opinion, it has to be stated more categorically that the most probable thesis is the one about the bones of Levski being immured in the foundations of the monument." (Protocol of July 18, 1983, cited in *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 235).

No wonder that Khaitov could not resist from spinning an elaborate conspiracy theory around this. He started with the inconsistencies in the archeologists' and Stancheva's statements<sup>145</sup> and concluded that the bones disappeared or were destroyed in the cellars of the Museum of the City of Sofia, with Stancheva's full connivance. He makes a big issue of the fact that in the late 1990s, despite his numerous efforts to meet and interview her again, Stancheva studiously avoided any contact with him.<sup>146</sup> In the end, he holds five people responsible for the mishandling of Levski's remains: Dhingov, Mikhailov and Stancheva as archeologists who were directly involved with the excavations and storage, and two individuals representing the leadership of the Academy of Sciences, the director of the Archeological Institute Prof. Krístiu Miiatev and above all, the president of BAN at the time, the philosopher Todor Pavlov.

Khaitov's publications before 1989 imply, but never fully develop his belief that there was a political conspiracy to prevent the "discovery" of Levski's grave. The farthest he went was to hurl a general accusation to the specialists for having gone "beyond themselves to prove that the Madara horseman was not Bulgarian; some of them denied that the Slavic settlement at Novi Pazar was Slavic; they questioned the inscription of the Chîrgubil Mostich; they questioned Kaloian's ring, and (the peak of self-denial), they trumpeted not only at home but also abroad, that Pliska, the capital of our first kingdom, was not Bulgarian but a whole intact Byzantine town found by the Bulgarians."<sup>147</sup> After 1989, Khaitov who, on the one hand, had been a privileged writer and personally close to many individuals in the party and administrative elite, but, on the other hand, was not a party mem-

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145 On Stancheva, in particular, see Khaitov, *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 1987, 258–261, in addition to his deliberation in the 2002 publication.

146 *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 234, 238. On the other hand, given Khaitov's imperious nature, and the strong negative emotions he was able to evoke in some people, it is no wonder that Stancheva refused to talk to him after the barrage of public accusations he had already made.

147 *BAN volume*, 214. These accusations, although correctly identifying discrepancies and mismanagement, were not all results of ideological pressure. Some were genuine differences between scholarly interpretation or the result of internal professional rivalries. For the latter, see Ivan Venedikov, Ivan Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im. Bîlgarskata inteligentsiia v moite spomeni*, Sofia: Izdatelska kîshta "Khristo Botev," 1993.

ber<sup>148</sup> and was a fervent nationalist, wrote up openly his suspicions which before he shared only orally and privately. In June, 1990 a retrospective check-up at the Archeological institute by inspectors from the Commission for State Control triggered by Khaitov and looking for additional materials about the excavations, discovered a report by Stamen Mikhailov which he had addressed to the then director of the institute Krístiu Miiatev. This report, dated June 1, 1956, and written on the second day after the discovery of Skeleton No. 95 and after the theology professor Giaurov had excitedly visited the excavations, informed that several burials had been discovered in the apsis space and that rumors are going around that these might be Levski's bones. Mikhailov further appealed to Miiatev "to set up a commission, which would investigate *in situ* the position of the individuals buried in the altar space and the possibility that one of them is Levski."<sup>149</sup> Miiatev, on receiving the report, marked it only with the word SERDICA, the medieval name of Sofia, and the report was accordingly filed by the secretary among the materials from the excavations of the Serdica Fortress, which had been ongoing since 1952, and where the report was found in 1990. He never followed up on Mikhailov's suggestion to set up a commission.

Khaitov makes much of the erroneous filing of the report, insinuating that Miiatev had hidden it. This is presumptuous, because if Miiatev had wanted to get rid of the report, he could have easily simply destroyed it. A number of other materials had been lost, like for example, the sketch of the skeleton by the painter Vera Nedkova, and Khaitov has no compunction to suspect a cabal. There is no doubt that Miiatev was well aware of the rumors. He himself had taken part in the 1937 military commission charged with finding the grave. He was also aware of the publication in *Trud* on May 17, 1956. Finally, he had been warned by his colleague Prof. Giaurov with whom he taught at the Theological Academy. At the same time, he never inspected the

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148 Khaitov had entered the Communist Party after the war but was kicked out in late 1949 over disagreements during his stint as a forester in the village of Lisichevo. Ten years later, in 1959, he applied again but the re-entry did not materialize because of his controversial divorce and remarriage. For a detailed rendering of these events, see his posthumous memoirs: Nikolai Khaitov, *Prez sito i resheto. Zhivotoopisanie*, Sofia: Slintse, 2003, 258–9, 342–52.

149 *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 5.

excavations even once, and never entered anything about them in his personal diary, regularly held between 1953 and 1958.<sup>150</sup>

Khaitov never for a moment doubts that pressure must have been exerted upon Miiatev not to follow up on Mikhailov's report. Remarkably, Mikhailov himself never ever mentioned during the BAN debates or the numerous interviews that he had written such a report, although this would have undoubtedly alleviated some of the responsibility and he would have shouldered it with the already deceased Miiatev. According to Khaitov, Miiatev wanted to wash his hands, Pilate-like, and he ordered that all skeletal remains be handed over to the Museum of the City of Sofia, and then endorsed Mikhailov's thesis about the early burial. Khaitov never entertained the possibility that Miiatev, like Mikhailov, may have sincerely doubted that these could have been Levski's bones and moreover, as a classical archeologist, he was not too interested in medieval sites, especially in the case of the saving operations around "Sv. Petka."

Instead, in an amazing flight of imagination, he introduces the figure of Todor Pavlov, at that time a most powerful presence in Bulgarian academe and cultural life in general. A rather dogmatic Marxist philosopher, Pavlov had served as one of Bulgaria's postwar regents until the promulgation of the Republic in 1945, and for many years was the powerful head of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Khaitov's reasoning why Miiatev did not form a commission is that he was aware of the negative attitude of Todor Pavlov, which the latter had perhaps communicated to him orally or over the phone. One can facetiously say that had Todor Pavlov not existed, he would have to be invented by Khaitov, because, like in physics, he was the hypothetical missing element that is needed to prove the theory. Khaitov devotes a whole brief chapter to "The role of Todor Pavlov as an organizer of the Marxist-Leninist revision of Bulgarian scholarship after 1946 and in deciding the fate of Levski's grave." For intrepid readers, there is the phrase in the previous chapter that: "most likely, whether Skeleton No. 95 was destroyed on the personal order of Todor Pavlov will remain a secret forever,"<sup>151</sup> but the whole ensuing chapter is built on this unproven premise.

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150 *Ibid.*, 6–7.

151 *Ibid.*, 11.

Khaitov represents Todor Pavlov as the main party ideologue in the early communist period and a trusted political stooge of the Soviets. His “Marxist-Leninist revision” of Bulgarian cultural life was profound and overbearing, and in archeology it played itself out, according to Khaitov, in the onslaught in 1950 against the traditions of Bogdan Filov and Géza Fehér. In Khaitov’s reading, Bogdan Filov, “this great Bulgarian scholar executed by the People’s Court” together with his Hungarian colleague Géza Fehér, had made significant scholarly contributions about the “proto-Bulgarian essence of the First Bulgarian state and its higher cultural status compared to that of the Slavs.” The destruction of this tradition, designated as “Filovshtina” (“Filovdom”) “meant in practice, the denunciation of the glory of the medieval Bulgarian state and its rulers, which until 1944 was feeding the national consciousness of the younger generations.”

This is, in fact, Khaitov’s credo. An unabashed nationalist, he could never accept or understand the internationalism of the communists, let alone the quasi-internationalism after 1944, which served Soviet or Russian hegemonic rule. While Bogdan Filov had indeed been a leading and solid archeologist, this was not the reason for his trial and execution. Rather it was the fact that he had become Prime Minister of the country in 1940 and regent in 1943, and with his ardent pro-German, fascist and nationalist policies had been instrumental in bringing Bulgaria into the war on the side of Germany.<sup>152</sup> Géza Fehér, on the other hand, had been a Hungarian diplomat and head of the Hungarian cultural institute in Sofia during the interwar period.

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152 Bogdan Filov (1883–1945) was sentenced on February 1, 1945 by the People’s Court alongside the other two regents after the death of King Boris in 1943 (Prince Cyril and General Nikola Mihov), as well as ten court advisers, three prime ministers and ministers of the three last pre-war and war cabinets, a total of 51 persons. They were tried for the involvement of Bulgaria in the war against the Allied Powers and for related war crimes. When, in 1992, a bill was introduced to invalidate the sentences, the European parliament passed a resolution urging the Bulgarian government to withdraw this bill as it would pardon not only those who were innocent of any offenses, but also many who had committed atrocious crimes. Likewise, Helsinki Watch pressed for reconsideration. Nonetheless, in August 1996 the Supreme Court revoked the sentences issued by the People’s Court thus rehabilitating the three regents, the prime ministers and the ministers of the three consecutive cabinets before September 9, 1944.

An amateur art historian and archeologist as well as a charismatic figure, he had been instrumental in promoting the political rapprochement between Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey on a cultural and ethnic basis, downplaying Bulgaria's Slavic connections. While it is true that Slavic archeology in the aftermath of 1944 received unprecedented and unjustified precedence and the proto-Bulgarian component was downplayed, this was simply mirroring the extremes of the interwar period.<sup>153</sup> It is amazing that Khaitov, who questioned Mikhailov and Stancheva's expertise on the basis that they were not trained as archeologists but as classicists, would point to Fehér, whose forays into Bulgarian archeology, while feted greatly at the time, can be only described as wildly dilettantish.

In any case, the "ideologization" of Bulgarian archeology, according to Khaitov, began only with the attempt to counter what he thought had been unfairly described as "wild Bulgarian chauvinism" but was, instead, the non-ideological and purely scholarly achievement of a whole generation of "bourgeois scholars, under the leadership of Bogdan Filov, [Veselin] Beshevliev, [Nikola] Mavrodinov." Khaitov's verdict was that "the ideologization of the academic sphere, which had forcefully started in 1946, was part of the grand-scale Stalinist program to denationalize the southeast European states, which had been handed over to the Soviet sphere of influence, Bulgaria inclusive."<sup>154</sup> Khaitov offers a list of cultural "crimes," some of which happened, most of which were figments of his imagination. These included the order for the complete destruction of all war monuments in 1946 that, in the course of a month, had been turned into gravel and inflicted the first blow on Bulgaria's national pride. That this is an unserious allegation is obvious from the scores of still standing monuments dedicated to different wars before 1944. No monument commemorating the Russo-Turkish war of 1977-1978, the Serb-Bulgarian war of 1885 or the Balkan wars had been destroyed, and most commemorative monuments for the fallen in the First World War were preserved. Where he is right was that after 1944, history textbooks were rewritten, and in the spirit of the new republic, royal titles were left out and, instead

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153 After the war, Géza Fehér did not return to Hungary but emigrated to Turkey, where he was member of the Turkish Historical Association. This colorful figure still awaits a scholarly assessment.

154 *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 12.

of Tsar Boris, Khan Asparukh, Tsar Simeon, students studied them only by their personal names. Equally, the irredentist calls were purged from history textbooks, as were nationalist poems and songs from literature ones. But it is completely false to assert that schools threw away the portraits of the national heroes and writers—Levski, Khristo Botev, Georgi Rakovski, Lyuben Karavelov, Ivan Vazov, Elin Pelin—and substituted them for Bulgarian and Soviet Politburo members.<sup>155</sup>

Khaitov addresses specifically the treatment of Levski, linking it to the onslaught against the Orthodox church. He maintains that this brought about a skewed interpretation of Levski as an atheist, and a predominant attention to Botev and Karavelov at the expense of Levski.<sup>156</sup> Finally, Khaitov saw the same thing happening after 1989, only this time the face of de-nationalization was no longer Sovietization but Eurointegration, which he called “Euro-assimilation.”<sup>157</sup> All of these charges, as already mentioned, Khaitov did not spell out at first in this form. At the beginning, his verdict was oscillating between accusations of unprofessional negligence on the part of the archeologists to suspicions of conscious mishandling and planned destruction. It was only after 1989 that he gave free reign to his rather loose geopolitical imagination.

But where does Todor Pavlov come in? Khaitov’s real grudge against him is over the Macedonian question and especially the handing over of Gotse Delchev’s bones in 1948 to the newly created Macedonian state within the Yugoslav federation. Delchev (1872–1903) was one of the leading revolutionaries of the IMRO (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), that headed the struggle for a free and independent Macedonia. This region, part of Bulgaria according to the San Stefano Treaty (March 1878), was given back to the Ottoman Empire by the provisions of the Berlin Treaty (July 1878). Delchev was a revolutionary in the style of Levski and Botev by whom he was inspired and, although clearly seeing himself as part of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition, he opted for Macedonian au-

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155 Since this has been a widespread allegation, I am addressing the issue in Part Two. In this instance, however, one can safely say that Khaitov is using cheap populist anti-communist rhetoric.

156 This also being a widespread belief, it will be addressed in the second part of the book.

157 *Ibid.*, 13.

tonomy, instead of annexation to Bulgaria. Killed during the abortive Ilinden Uprising in 1903, Gotse was buried in the Rila Monastery in Bulgaria and immediately entered the heroic pantheon of Bulgarian national heroes.<sup>158</sup>

In the interwar period, after the demise of Bulgaria's ambitions over Macedonia in the Balkan wars and the First World War, Macedonia was largely divided between Greece and Serbia with only a small portion annexed to Bulgaria. The Greeks adopted strict anti-Bulgarian and Hellenizing policies toward their new Slavic citizens, and the Serbs treated the newly acquired territories and their population as Southern Serbs. Yet, in the Serbian case, there had been also a parallel tradition alongside the Serbianizing attempts: the promotion of a separate Macedonian consciousness. This had been a strategy developed already in the nineteenth century by the Serbian propaganda machine, after it proved to be a more successful weapon against Bulgaria. During the Second World War, Bulgaria occupied Macedonia as the accomplishment of its national unification, but its policies quickly alienated considerable numbers of people attracted by Tito's underground partisans and the promise of a future independent Macedonia.

In the meantime, from the 1920s on, the Comintern had adopted the vision of a future Balkan communist federation, of which Macedonia would be an indelible part. This vision presupposed the disintegration of Yugoslavia within the federation and was not favored by the Yugoslav communists, who preferred a solution of the national question within the existing frontiers. The mid 1930s saw a radical reversal of Comintern policies. This was the adoption of the principle of the united front, with the common struggle against fascism receiving priority over the strict class principle. For the concrete purposes of the region it meant abandoning the demand for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Instead, in 1934, for the first time the suppression of the Macedonian language was criticized and the demand for a separate Macedonian nation appeared. *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* of 1938 for the first time had distinct entries on a separate Macedonian language and nation.

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158 There is an enormous bibliography on Gotse Delchev. In English, the most detailed and evenhanded account is Mercia MacDermott, *Freedom or Death: The Life of Gotse Delchev*, London: West Nyack, NY: Journeyman Press, 1978.

Accordingly, during the war, there were attempts to devise a special Macedonian alphabet and promote Macedonian literature. It is remarkable that the theoretical framework of Macedonian nationalism was developed mostly by Bulgarian communists, of whom Todor Pavlov was an active participant. The compliance of Bulgarian communists with the policies of the Comintern, in the highly charged atmosphere of the interwar period, when the Macedonian irredenta dominated Bulgaria's internal as well as foreign policies, and was to a great extent the reason for the country's involvement in the Second World War, made the communists easy targets as national traitors.<sup>159</sup>

After the Second World War, a Macedonian republic was created as part of Tito's Yugoslav Socialist Federation. Until 1948, there were negotiations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia about extending the federation to include Bulgaria. In these circumstances, during the 1948 elections, inhabitants of Bulgarian Macedonia, although feeling Bulgarian, were forced by the communist government to define themselves as Macedonian. This trend was reversed immediately after the Tito–Stalin split in 1948, and throughout the whole ensuing period until 1989 relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were fluctuating and tense, but it left the bitter memory and perception of communists trying to de-nationalize authentic Bulgarians and be subservient to “socialist internationalism.”

At the same time, the period after the Second World War saw the building up of national institutions in Macedonia and the writing of a new national history. Understandable as the defensiveness of this new nationalism and its new nation-state was, particularly vis-à-vis Bulgaria, the very fact of appropriating a number of already established Bulgarian national figures or events proved catastrophic for the relations between the two countries. After all, nationalism is by definition exclusionary and the idea of sharing the same national heroes seemed to contradict the very nature of nationalism. Gotse Delchev became one of the figures venerated in Bulgaria and Macedonia, but his undisputed stature in both national pantheons was seen as an oxymoron

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159 On the role of the communist parties and especially the Comintern on the Macedonian issue, see Torsten Szobries, *Sprachliche Aspekte des nation-building in Mazedonien*, Stuttgart: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 1999, 66–82. See also Vladimír Claude Fišera, *Les peuples slaves et le communisme de Marx à Gorbatchev*, Paris: Berg International, 1992, 353–68.

by nationalists on both sides: they could not imagine a pre-national condition, let alone a shared relic. It was in the brief period of warm relations before the 1948 split, and before Stalin had reprimanded the Balkan communist leaders for their initiatives toward a Balkan federation that the Bulgarian Communist Party, in a gesture of goodwill, decided to hand the remains of Gotse Delchev to the newly created federative state of Macedonia and thus symbolically provide their need for heroes with some materiality. Todor Pavlov was the figure behind this action and, as Khaitov put it, "he personally extradited Gotse Delchev's bones from Bulgaria."<sup>160</sup> Todor Pavlov also pronounced a speech on the occasion in which he reiterated his views about the existence of a separate Macedonian nation and language.<sup>161</sup>

It is this fact which is unpardonable in Khaitov's mind and, by analogy, he attributes practically all the items on his "criminal" list to

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160 *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 12.

161 While Khaitov is naturally dismissive of Pavlov and while his attitude is broadly shared in Bulgaria by communists and anti-communists alike, nationalism being, after all, the broadest common ideology, it is worth quoting two passages from Pavlov's writings on the issue. Written in 1945 and 1946, respectively, they sound surprisingly modern and in line with today's dominant constructivist interpretations of nationalism. In the inaugural issue of the journal *Makedonska misîl* he wrote: "The publication 'Makedonska misîl' will undoubtedly play a useful role, if its editors and collaborators should never forget that the new Macedonian national consciousness has not fallen fully developed from heaven, but is the result of a whole series of events, struggles and efforts, some of which date back to before the liberation of Bulgaria. This is a complex process which should be studied from all sides, in its theoretical as well as its historical aspect, and only in this way will the publication make a positive contribution to the future consolidation and development of the new national culture of Macedonia as well as to the new free Democratic Federal Republic of Macedonia." (*Makedonska misîl*, 1.1–2 [1945, Sofia], 2–3) About Gotse Delchev he added: "By the way, we cannot be unjust to the memory of the great Macedonian son and therefore, we must note precisely here that Gotse had written in one of his letters: 'So is there no-one to write even one book in Macedonian?' This exclamation of Gotse's shows that if he had remained alive he would in no case have remained indifferent to the fact that today in Macedonia there is a volume of books, and not only poetic and publicistic ones, written in this very Macedonian language which has been formed to a significant degree and is continuously being improved upon and perfected exactly as a new Macedonian literary language." (*Makedonska misîl*, 2.1–2 [1946, Sofia], 7)

the deleterious effects of Pavlov's treacherous ideology and politics. He then jumps to the Levski issue and concludes:

Is it possible to expect from this party person, from this fanatical ideologue of socialist internationalism, that he would spare Levski's grave discovered on May 30–31, 1956? That he would allow to turn a church into a national holy place in the center of Sofia, especially in the immediate vicinity of the monument of Lenin, which was planned to be erected only 80 meters away from this church?<sup>162</sup>

Even as he allows for some doubt, Khaitov adds: "Even if it hadn't been Pavlov, there were enough party fanatics both in the Central Committee and in the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute who would see to it that the emblem of Bulgarian patriotism would not receive his grave."<sup>163</sup>

That this is complete baloney can be seen from the report sent by Vilko Chervenkov, then minister of culture and Todor Pavlov, chairman of BAN to Todor Zhivkov, then chairman of the Council of Ministers.<sup>164</sup> The report addresses the decision of the Council of Ministers of May 8, 1956 to destroy the part of the "Sv. Petka" church that protrudes above the street level, and leave only the structure below the street level that can be accessed through a special entrance. Instead, based on the archeological and historical studies of the "past several months," Chervenkov and Pavlov propose that the church be elevated to a historical and artistic monument of national significance

<sup>162</sup> *Grobŭt na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 12.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>164</sup> A copy of this report—NM-96 from December 12, 1957—is in the personal archive of Nikolai Todorov, now at the Archive of BAN. It is also reproduced in an abbreviated but otherwise *verbatim* version in Khaitov, *Grobŭt na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 154 with one small error, an obvious typo (month VI.1957 rendered as IV.1957—April instead of the correct June). The copy does not have the original date of the report but judging from the request made at the end that the Council of Ministers, after having annulled its own decision to destroy the church, should ask the Municipal Council to come up with a new plan for the construction of the whole building space with the preserved church by June 1, 1957, the report must have been sent by the end of 1956 or at the latest, the beginning of 1957. In Todorov's report of June 26, 1986, the report is mentioned as dating from February 14, 1957 (*BAN volume*, 477).

and preserved in its entirety: "The preservation of the church 'Sv. Petka Samarzhiiska,' next to the Roman buildings in the yard of the Ministry of Electrification, to the mosque in front of the central baths and to the building of the National Museum, alongside other ancient cultural monuments, which are highlighted in the new municipal architectural ensembles, illustrate the great cultural legacy, created in Sofia throughout the centuries and enrich our capital." The report then goes on to add: "At present, research is being also undertaken linked to the statement that the body of the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski had been transferred and reburied in the church 'Sv. Petka Samarzhiiska.' This research is not yet completed but there are data substantiating this statement."<sup>165</sup> The most ironic circumstance about this report is, of course, that by the time it was written, the bones of Skeleton No. 95 might have already disappeared.

In the end, there exists tacit general agreement that the bones are gone. In fact, one could say that the conflict was not over "bones of contention" but over "non-existing bones of contention."

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165 Khaitov remains unimpressed by the fact that the report comes from both Chervenkov and Pavlov and makes much of the fact that the signature against Pavlov's name at the end is by Sava Ganovski, Pavlov's depute at BAN, and not by Pavlov himself. In a surprising slight of attention, however, he assumes December 12, 1957 to be the date of the report, and is ironic that it came a whole year and a half after the excavations. In fact, the report is explicit about having been written only a few months after the excavations and, judging from its contents, it was most likely written at the end of 1956 (see previous note). Khaitov also offers a rather fanciful conjecture, attributing the whole report to Prof. Miiatev who, judging from his own diary, had several personal meetings with Pavlov whom he even took to the church in August, 1957 (*Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 150–1, 155). The reason, however, why Khaitov concentrates his wrath upon Pavlov in a veritable conspiracy theory has to do not merely with Pavlov's anti-nationalism, but also with his individual characteristics. Pavlov was a domineering and dictatorial personality, and in the Academy of Sciences had assumed the pose of a know-all, who pronounced himself on all kinds of scholarly and administrative issues. While Stalin was still alive, he had attempted to harass the great classical philologist Vladimir Georgiev for opposing Nikolai Marr's teaching. He was rather crude in meddling in internal scholarly and personal disputes. In contrast, Sava Ganovski, although a weak scholar, was considered to be a milder and more human character. This is the plausible reason why Khaitov attributed the saving of the church to Chervenkov and Ganovski, and made Pavlov his chief *bête noire* (Interview with Nikolai Todorov, July 6, 2002).

Whether one believes that the remains were misplaced, thrown away or deliberately destroyed, as Khaitov, until his death, believed they were, the fact is that at the present moment the factual evidence is missing, and even if some day some bones would appear that can be traced to Levski's DNA, I soundly doubt that these would be the bones of Skeleton No. 95.<sup>166</sup> So, then, the response to the question posed by Khaitov and voiced by the public, namely why confine the debate that was taking place at BAN to the analysis of the archeological data and not proclaim the church a temple even without definitive proof, goes to the motivations of Khaitov and team.

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166 In 2003, DNA analysis performed in the laboratory of the Criminology Institute in Sofia examined a thigh bone and a tooth that had been delivered as supposedly belonging to Levski. After comparing samples from Levski's authenticated hair, which corresponded to the hair and saliva of the 82-year-old Bozhana Pachourova from Plovdiv, his closest living relative on the maternal side, the laboratory analysis concluded that the offered "relics" did not belong to Levski (*168 chasa*, October 31–November 6, 2003, 3–5).

## 4. A Socialist Public Sphere?

At first glance, Khaitov's geopolitical confabulations might serve to delegitimize his general credibility. But one shouldn't apportion too much guilt by association. Khaitov's general motivations and his onslaught on the archeologists should be taken apart. His whole worldview, his *de facto* religion and deepest personal attachments were centered around nationalism, and he had devoted himself to rectifying what he thought of as the assimilationist and de-nationalizing tendencies of communism, and after 1989, of globalization. The discussion with the archeologists was not his invention. He picked up an existing debate and turned it into a public event. That he succeeded in doing this, is attributable both to his polemical talent and popularity as a writer, as well as to the opportune conjuncture: the rise of Liudmila Zhivkova and the general move to more openly articulated nationalism, especially in the decade preceding the 1,300th anniversary of the foundation of the Bulgarian state. However, to reiterate, the scholarly issue with the archeologists was not his invention nor his primary passion. He simply gave a powerful imprimatur of credibility to an alternative thesis which served his motives. This thesis not only had been voiced before and was suppressed or neglected, but received also the strong support from respected and serious specialists. In this sense, Khaitov became the *porte parole* of a significant faction of alternative opinion. In fact, at first Khaitov was not necessarily out to get the archeologists and put a blemish on their institution, let alone on their discipline. What he wanted was the public acceptance of the reburial version because this would clean the damaged reputation of Bulgarians who had not saved their greatest hero from an ignoble death and subsequent dishonorable burial. As Bobchev had put it earlier, it is important to know Levski's grave, because "Bulgarians have not left him unburied."<sup>167</sup>

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167 *BAN volume*, 126.

Had the archeologists agreed to such a solution, Khaitov might have left them in peace. But such a solution came with a price for the archeologists, the cheapest of which was a tacit admittance of sloppiness and unprofessionalism. This, they decided, was not worth paying, and they reckoned that they had enough power and influence to win the contest.<sup>168</sup> The important point to make here is that there was a diversity of motives both between and within the debating teams, which turned out to be, in the end, incompatible. The other question, raised by the archeologists—about the redundancy of the discussions, given that the bones were not in place, quite apart from the reasons for this—goes back to the rationale for convening the debates at the Academy of Sciences. While the archeologists, in particular, like to present themselves as victims of a party cabal imposed on them, the truth is much more prosaic. As already pointed out, both sides had their supporters among the higher party echelons but with the highly charged renaming process at the center of political attention and with the growing economic difficulties, the issue of Levski's grave and the fight between some intellectuals seemed too esoteric to command the highest attention, let alone direct involvement. Not worthy of high party intervention, the issue was, accordingly, handed to BAN to resolve.

In this respect and to add to the complexity of motives and framework, while the debates were not the initiative of Nikolai Todorov himself, and his arbitrating role was actually imposed on him by an order of the president of BAN, once he was involved in the proceedings, he felt that the discussion had, after all, served an important function. This complicates even further the social drama by introducing yet another set of motivations. Todorov's motives can be summarized briefly as follows. First was his belief, genuinely shared by some, but not challenged publicly even by the ones who didn't like it, that open and unrestricted discussion was the natural medium of scholarship. For Todorov it was also the natural medium for the democratic exchange

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168 Khaitov was driven, of course, not only by his understanding of patriotism, but also by an enormous *amour propre*, wounded by the allegations of dilettantism. Among his supporters, there were people who were seeking professional redress and others who genuinely believed in rectifying a scholarly omission. The archeologists' motives were also manifold, ranging from the "honor" of the profession and the question of "who owns history" to personal pride and passions and, finally, to genuine scholarly differences. These are the objects of analysis in the next chapters.

of ideas. From this point of view, he treated the debates as a pedagogical laboratory where people were forced to enter into a civilized exchange, to learn how to listen and debate in a refined way. No wonder that during his opening remarks on February 10, 1986, he explicitly referred to the practice of UNESCO, the international organization for cultural cooperation, where he had served, and put in place a procedure, which would allow the calm exposition of standpoints and would prevent the parties from interrupting one another.<sup>169</sup>

He also believed that scholarship was not hermetic and immune against challenges coming from outside a scholarly discipline. Himself with a medical education before graduating in history, and with broad interests, he was open to and welcoming of what we today call interdisciplinarity. Naturally broad-minded, disciplinarian parochialism did not agree with his vision. As a Marxist social historian—and even though Marxism was the dogma of the day—he was quite aware that to a huge number of historians of his and the older generation, the majority of whom was practicing a conventional type of political and less frequently intellectual history, social history was not really considered history but sociology. He was thus attuned to and opposed to the objections of “purists” and looked favorably to imaginative challenges to the status quo. Detesting the disciplinarian isolationism of “insiders,” and deeply suspicious of what he considered a false opposition between professionals and dilettantes, he welcomed any thesis, as long as it was based on and defended with the conventional tools of scholarship.

Improbable as it may sound to many of the archeologists who have persisted in a partisan way to defend Mikhailov’s thesis, one of Todorov’s primary motives was also to create a forum in which to cleanse once and for all the Archeological Institute from the accusation of deliberate destruction of artifacts and lack of patriotism. He did not believe that this was the case but expected that the archeologists would muster all existing documentation and resoundingly refute the accusations. In his preliminary letter to Balevski from January 23, 1986, reporting on how he has prepared for the debates, Todorov explicitly writes: “I propose a fast publication of the gathered archeological documentation together with a critical analysis by the Publishing

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169 Nikolai Todorov was the president of the 23rd session of the General Conference of UNESCO, which had taken place in Sofia in 1985.

House of BAN. This should be a modest-size volume: diaries, photographs, diagrams. This way, however, it will have a positive effect upon the [negative] sentiments that have arisen against the Archeological Institute and the archeological discipline in general.”<sup>170</sup> Khaitov saw very early through this motivation of Todorov and was not happy with it. Orally, he accused him numerous times of sheltering the archeologists, particularly Stancheva, for whom Todorov had great respect. In addition, Khaitov wrote that when the archeologists during the debates were exposed first for not giving all the photographs and then with “selecting” only some and offering merely copies, and his team asked for an official criminal investigation, “Academician Todorov did not agree so as not to throw bad light on one of the oldest units of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.”<sup>171</sup>

170 Personal archive of Academician Todorov, in the Archives of BAN. Little did Nikolai Todorov suspect at the time that the “modest-size volume” would become rather bulky and would engender passionate controversy. In an earlier letter to Balevski, dated January 13, 1986, Todorov shares his preliminary impressions of the materials sent to him through Balevski’s office and particularly the debates at the Medieval Section of AI. He shares his doubts as to whether, as the Archeological Institute insisted, these debated materials should be published as is. As responsible for the Academy of Science’s publishing house, he is ready to publish the materials immediately if he is ordered to do so. However, given the weak argumentation of the Archeological Institute, and especially their strong reliance on the “anthropological expertise, which is a blatant example of anti-science” this, according to him, carries the danger that not only individuals but this time the whole Archeological Institute, as well as the whole Academy of Sciences will compromise themselves in the eyes of the public.

171 *Grobŭ na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 16, 78. It is symptomatic that while Todorov refused to resort to a criminal investigation and publicly supported the thesis that the mishandling of the photographs and their misplacement was the result of sheer negligence, in one of the meetings he shared his amazement and the plausibility of an intentional fraudulent act: “I support the opinion that there was no intention. I have to tell you however that yesterday I saw some of the photographs. There is some ground to suspect an intentional deed. I allow myself to say this because I was amazed at the cutting of the photographs and the disappearance of certain others which suggest that this was not random” (*BAN volume*, 343). In the interview Khaitov gave to Bogdan Krŭstev in June–July, 1991, published only posthumously, he added details about Todorov’s attempts to “guard” his colleagues, especially the older Kosev (Nikolai Khaitov, *Aferata s groba na Vasil Levski. Zapis na razgovora mezhdu Bogdan Krŭstev i Nilolai Khaitov (iuni–iuli 1991)*, Sofia: Artik, 2002, 21, 24).

Todorov was ready to defend the Archeological institute from unsubstantiated accusations, but what incensed him particularly during the debates was the passive and cavalier attitude of the archeologists, who released the material sparingly or even went looking for it only after repeated admonitions, behaving as if they were above any kind of charge. Finally, he was thrown off balance when the archeologists introduced an explicitly “ideological motive” in their response to the final report from the debates.

The memorandum of the Archeological Institute from June 6, 1986 was signed by Director Angelov and the Party Secretary Gergova and circulated widely to party and administrative authorities.<sup>172</sup> It is of particular interest because for the first time it directly addressed some of the opponents’ argumentation, especially the ones concerning architectural, medical or geodesical evidence. In essence, it reiterated the archeologists’ position by characterizing their opponents’ arguments as purely theoretical and speculative. Specifically, it questioned the conclusions of the criminological expertise about the identity of the skeleton in the debated photographs. It also questioned the conclusion of the burials as irregular. The real issue of the archeologists was summarized in a lengthy litany against the manner of Khaitov and the negative repercussions of his campaign:

The popularization of the thesis about Levski’s reburial in the church inflamed public opinion without being able to offer a convincing answer. In addition, let us remind that the argumentation of Khaitov’s thesis in the book was done in defiance of a number of scholarly, ethical and moral norms of our society, by publicly slandering a whole discipline. ... This slandering of the archeological discipline and the Archeological Institute Khaitov turned into a literary device, on whose background his uncertain arguments would seem more plausible.<sup>173</sup>

Thus far the archeologists were staying within the realm of archeological proofs. But at this point, and for the first time in the discussion, they ended their memorandum on an ideological note as the final culmination and without any obvious link to the debate:

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172 *BAN volume*, 466–9. See a detailed overview of the memorandum in Appendix II.

173 *BAN volume*, 468.

A number of important questions linked to the revival process are about to receive scholarly support, as are also a number of other questions of a decisive political and ideological nature. From this point of view the widely created general distrust towards the discipline fomented by Khaitov's book on the question of localizing Levski's grave cannot be quietly overcome... The launching of the least plausible "church" thesis, unsupported either scholarly or ideologically, continues, as well as the accusations against the institute in nihilism and lack of patriotism. Is it not strange that in deciding the most important scientific questions the incompetents are becoming the most competent? Doesn't all this enfeeble the foundations of science, and its rights to play its ideological role, especially in deciding the national questions?<sup>174</sup>

The last sentence of the memorandum defended the rights of the Archeological Institute "as an institute with ideological character" to state its opinion on the eve of the XIII Congress of the BCP, and declared that the question of the Apostle's grave did not have to be turned into a fetish.

Todorov's response to this memorandum of the archeologists, written on June 26, 1986, is much angrier in tone than his final report.<sup>175</sup> He points out that the leadership of the Archeological Institute had been invited to come up with a final statement and had agreed that all documentation be published in a collective volume. Despite this, it produced yet another statement that it sent singlehandedly to a number of institutions, attempting to impose its own vision. He characterized this new attempt of the Archeological Institute as "emotional, and not scholarly" and squarely accused the archeologists of never seriously sticking to the main criterion during the debates, namely, to produce a realistic and methodologically sound interpretation of the facts. Instead, the leadership of the Archeological Institute did not attempt even to find all the existing documentation of the excavations, which was "discovered" later thanks to his persistence and that of Khaitov's team:

It is strange that the leadership of the AI never put in question, neither at the time, nor at present, the scholarly and moral responsibil-

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174 Ibid., 469.

175 Ibid., 475–8.

ity of the participants in the excavations: why they did not preserve the bones found in the altar space, even if they were convinced that they did not belong to Vasil Levski, when the thesis of Levski's burial already existed. If the bones had been preserved, and not hastily or consciously disposed of, they could have been subjected to the existing exact scientific methods.

Who gives the leadership of the AI the right to jeopardize the authority of the whole Bulgarian field of archeology by supporting the assertions of two young specialists who, in addition, had been working under the stress of salvation excavations and who have made, according to everyone, a number of mistakes, typical for the level of the archeological science at the time, but intensified by unfounded hubris and lack of self-control of the leader? To date, the AIM has not organized a serious discussion of this problem at the institute. Is it by chance, that the deputy director of the institute, Prof. Velizar Velkov, gave a positive review of Khaitov's book precisely in view of its archeological aspects?<sup>176</sup>

Todorov's real wrath, however, was reserved for the ideological insinuations in the Angelov-Gergova statement:

What is the goal of the authors of the memorandum when they stress that the AIM has an "ideological character"? Which institute in the humanities and social sciences does not, in a larger or smaller degree, have an ideological character? ... How can public opinion be reassured, until we don't explain the exact fate of the bones, about which the participants in the excavations had been warned that they might belong to Levski?

It is unbecoming for an institute like the AIM, one with an ideological character, to behave as if these questions do not exist. They have been raised not by Khaitov, but already in 1959 and nowadays they cannot be silently passed by or ignored.

I do not think that there is a general distrust against archeology, as the authors of the memorandum assert. However, the existing partial distrust, addressed against certain specialists, cannot be lifted by the bare denial of obvious facts and the repetition of old stereo-

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176 *Ibid.*, 476–7.

types without any argumentation, as in the memorandum, This can be achieved only in one way: through a complex, honest and objective laying out of the problems around the debates over the Apostle's grave. Looking for the truth around this grave is not "fetishizing the memory of Levski" as the leadership of the AI asserts, but the duty of our archeological and historical disciplines... This was the reason to organize the debates at BAN as the only correct means for a scholarly solution to the problems, followed by the decision to publish the whole documentation, together with the arguments of the two opposing versions in a collective volume. A scholarly debate should take place, and it should not be silenced through administrative pressure. In this particular case, the representatives of one of these theses have dominated over public opinion in the course of more than 30 years. Now we have a different situation, and the other thesis has achieved a relative predominance over public opinion. The publication of the BAN volume will allow the continuation of the debates on a scholarly basis.<sup>177</sup>

It is symptomatic that the fate of this publication which was supposed to be the culminating and natural result of this stage, the symbolic document of the redress phase and its resolution, became itself an apple of contention and might be said to have served as the documented open recognition of the schism. It is analyzed in detail below.

Finally, when taking account of all sides in the debates, one should also not underestimate the role of popular pressure. It was already mentioned that numerous citizens' letters had reached the Presidium of the Academy, asking about the official position of BAN on the issue of Levski's grave. Even earlier, during the debates of the Kosev Commission in 1983, the historian and Academician Khristov who throughout was actively against the Khaitov thesis exclaimed: "It is clear that the comrade archeologists have not done their work properly ... Our public is excited and if we make a mistake we can be ridiculed."<sup>178</sup> Nikolai Genchev who was a member of the same commis-

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177 Ibid., 478.

178 Stenogram of the meeting of the Kosev Commission on April 19, 1983 in the office of Academician Khristo Khristov at the Institute of History. Present at this meeting were: Kosev, Khristov, Doino Doinov, D. Ovcharov, Magdalina Stancheva, Khristo Ionkov, Nikola Mushanov.

sion, also pointed out that “the passions around Levski have risen so high that I have received 30–50 materials.”<sup>179</sup> Most archeologists were quick to dismiss these letters as organized pressure on the local level by the Khaitov propaganda machine, but they deserve a closer look.

One of the most striking items in this collection of petitions is a thick student’s notebook consisting of a cover letter and collected signatures.<sup>180</sup> The letter is addressed to the president of BAN Academician Balevski with a copy to the newspaper *Literaturen Front*. Dated February 18, 1986 (at the time of the BAN debates), it summarized the interest that Khaitov’s book had generated among the reading public. It was the object of passionate conversations in every Bulgarian home and working place, because it dealt with Levski, “who is not only our national hero but our national saint,<sup>181</sup> with whose name we all have received our first patriotic Holy Communion.” It then states that since Levski is in the hearts of every Bulgarian, “it is imperative that we have a temple, a sacred place, our Bulgarian Jerusalem, where we can bow and feel the materialized presence of this great Bulgarian in Bulgaria’s past, present and future.” The letter ends with the request that the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences give Khaitov the opportunity to defend his thesis about Levski’s reburial in front of historians, writers, journalists, and politicians at a level usually reserved for a dissertation defense. “And if he manages to defend it as brilliantly as he did in his book, let the church ‘Sv. Petka’ be officially pronounced to be the grave of Vasil Levski.” The letter also asks that the responsible ones for the squandering of Levski’s bones be taken to task, and concludes:

We, the undersigned, are not the whole Bulgarian people. We are only part of it. But weren’t also the ones, who 113 years ago reburied the Apostle’s remains by transferring them from the criminal graveyard to the church’s altar, while risking their own lives, also a small part of

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A copy is in the files of the personal archive of Nikolai Todorov, now at BAN.

179 Ibid., meeting of May 20, 1983 in the office of Academician Khristov.

180 Archives of BAN, Personal archive of Academician Nikolai Todorov. This petition, as well as the other letters analyzed below, are in a file with the title “Others.”

181 The word used is not *svetets* (“saint”) but the broader *svetinia* (“sanctity, sacredness, holy thing, relic”). I have rendered it as saint given the context and the subsequent religious wording about the Holy Communion.

our people? However, they sufficed, in order to wipe the shadow of dishonor from the face of our whole nation.

The signatures are 589 individual entries, all from Varna, and a separate collective one stating that at their meeting on February 10, 1986, several hundred railway workers at the locomotive station (*lokomotivno depo*) “Nikola Karev” in Varna supported the letter. The individual signatures indicate the name, profession and address of the signatories. Among them we encounter captains and sailors, workers, doctors, dentists, school teachers, painters, engineers, students, retirees, drivers, construction workers, economists, actors, pilots, housewives, musicians, singers, a ballerina, economists, officers, athletes, accountants, seamstresses, mechanics, librarians, lawyers, journalists, cooks, people of all walks of life, and different levels of the social or professional hierarchy. Obviously the petition was following a route from work place to work place, explaining clusters of “drivers” or “sailors” and the like.

Of course, this petition may have been the result of Khaitov’s organization and lobbying. Most likely, however, it was initiated and seen through by the efforts of a local journalist in Varna, Dora Nikolova. She herself addressed a letter to Balevski, dated February 25, 1986, with which she forwarded the above-mentioned letter of the over 500 citizens of Varna, adding her explanations. She had brought the notebook with the signatures to the writer Evtim Evtimov and asked Khaitov to see it. The latter, however, scolded her and asked her to take it back, because the “academicians would think that this was a campaign organized by Khaitov himself.” Even if this was the case, however, how does it defy the character of a popular address? After all, these people were not forced to sign the petition. It did not come through any kind of existing official channels. Nikolova herself was obviously a local enthusiast. In a second letter to Balevski, she commented on the public lecture of Dimităr Ovcharov spoken before the public in Varna against Khaitov’s thesis on March 14, 1986. Nikolova was unimpressed and concluded: “Where are the bones? Is this simple negligence or a conscious deed? The Bulgarian people want Levski to have a grave and this is why it celebrates the church and will celebrate it to the end of days, no matter what the scholars think. But still, let our scholars remember that they are eating the bread offered them by our people. And nobody is bigger than the bread.” Nikolova also appended a poem she had written on the topic of the Apostle’s remains, dedi-

308	Милия Върджанова Евангелина младша вълча, Иванов' Д.И.	
309	Снежана Василева Тодричева органозупитор синд. Иванов' Д.И.	
310	Стефан Василев Николев - капитан отлет	
311	Василена Василева Кривоава органозупитор - син. вълчица	
312	Александър Милев Пешитров капитан на флота	
313	Борган Димитров Борганито Калишиак. мисит	
317	Георги Георгиев Вобрев св. тсн. инж.	
315	Зорана Георгиева Парев сл. инженер	
316	Майна Тоданова Мана радиотехник	
317	Александър Уланов Занов доп. проф.	
318	Мира Дв. Манев кам. мисит	
319	Евг. А. Тодороскиев кам. мисит	
320	Николаев Дв. Манев Зам. зупитор	
321	Евгения Силва Силванова физик	
323	Евг. Димитров Димитров - младша	
324	Мария Василева Василева счетоводител	

**Figure 9.** Page from the letter-petition signed by 589 citizens of Varna on 18 February 1986 and sent to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Source: Archives of BAN, Personal files of Nikolai Todorov.

cated to Khaitov. Even weak poems testify to strong feelings...<sup>182</sup> Nor was this the only poetic epistle. Another poem in impeccable rhyme was authored by Kamen Rilski, an obvious pseudonym, who appealed to the leaders of the Academy:

<sup>182</sup> See an illustration of this and the next poem in Appendix IV. The letter of Dora Nikolova to Balevski was forwarded to Nikolai Todorov with the written resolution of Balevski, dated April 1, 1986, that a response be sent to Nikolova in light of the results from the debates.

A pantheon we do not need,  
 In our hearts is Levski.  
 Our children through his grave will seek  
 To bend their heads in silence.  
 And now the honor falls on you  
 It's in your power to admit.  
 Today I'm sending this to you,  
 This plea for your connivance.<sup>183</sup>

A retired teacher—Mitra Stoianova—also sent her letter to Balevski. It was triggered by a radio show on Levski's birthday, written by Marko Semov, a well-known writer and psychologist. Stoianova was deeply moved by the lofty assessment of Levski whom she considered “the only Bulgarian political saint,” but was also worried by what she called “the scholarly drama” which wanted to negate that Levski had been reburied in the “Sv. Petka” church. For her, Khaitov's argumentation was impeccable, and Stamen Mikhailov was moved solely by professional pride and ambition. Stoianova addressed Balevski and the other academicians whose “moral duty and lofty task it is to tear the dark curtain of deceit.” She proposed to place the hair of Levski in a large box in the church. On top of the box Levski's portrait should be hanged, flanked on both sides with small electric bulbs in white, green and red, the colors of the national flag, so that “eternal light should stream over the holy relic: Levski's hair.” She wanted all this to be put in place by May 1, 1986.<sup>184</sup>

Yet another powerful letter was sent to the editorial office of the historical journal *Vekove* with a copy to Balevski. *Vekove* had published a negative article of Khaitov's book by Stanislav Stanilov from the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute, and this provoked the letter of priest Todor Vodenicharov from the village of Karan Virbovka, Ruse District, dated February 18, 1986. What is most interesting about this long, three-page single-spaced letter is its language. First,

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183 The poem is dated November 20, 1985. Archive of Academician Nikolai Todorov. The translation is mine.

184 This letter, written on February 20, 1986, is quite prescient given both the recent canonization of Levski by the alternative Synod, as well as the placing of Levski's hair in the special chapel as part of Levski's museum complex in Karlovo. On this, see here, Part III.

the priest's addressee is not "Comrade" but "Mister," the accepted address before 1944 and after 1989. The language itself is extremely vivid and colorful, poetic and at the same time colloquial, using a lot of general folkloric and regional terms and phrases.<sup>185</sup> It is also peppered with Turkisms, of which Bulgarian nationalism was careful to cleanse the written language, but which has been thankfully, although also very sparingly, preserved in oral speech. The priest writes about the effect Khaitov's book (which he had difficulties obtaining) had on him and of his dismay at the lack of official support for the reburial thesis. "As for the people's support, it is there. If the book goes through a second edition, I have the feeling that it will be as difficult to get it."

He then makes his point about the need for holy places. Even if the unconvincing thesis of Mikhailov were true, this should not prevent us from marking the church as a possible sacred place. After all, Botev's obelisk in the Balkan mountains was not erected at the exact place of his death that was contested, as well as the manner of his death. The important thing is to mark and remember not the something but the somebody, "to see from afar and to know that Botev had existed, no matter whether the bullet had pierced him at the very place of the obelisk." Priest Vodenicharov also gives the example of the 1950 Vatican congregation which revisited the list of saints. In the course of this revision it turned out that data about some saints were missing and they had to be taken off the list. One of the affected was to be St. Cecilia, the patron saint of church musicians, whose name the Santa Cecilia Musical Academy in Rome is bearing. "And so, you see what happens, everything was left as is, because what has been assembled in history should not be wasted but built upon."

Especially interesting are the priest's thoughts about the production of history. He is incensed that the debates are being confined behind closed doors within the strictly "scholarly sphere" and is ironic about the selective use of "professionals" and "dilettantes" in Stanilov's article. According to him, "scientific objectivity" in Stanilov's vocabulary is simply an euphemism for *esprit de corps*. Most striking is his comment on Stanilov's stated disregard for memoirs which the latter calls the litter or leftovers of history. According to

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185 Much to my consternation, I was unable to produce an adequate translation of some of this idiosyncratic prose. It reminds me of the difficulties a translator would have in rendering Radichkov or, for that matter, Khaitov.

Vodenicharov this is simply a strategy to classify uncomfortable facts or sources into a rubric which carries less clout, like “memoirs.” In a clear reference to some of the great discoveries of ancient archeology, he writes: “Isn’t it clear to these professors that what somebody wrote or said at some point of time rests in the popular memory and in time under the name of history? And archeology as a scholarly discipline has in fact attached itself to this history reduced to ‘litter’ and has been only following its traces. Tell me, then, what here should be denoted with the word ‘litter’?”<sup>186</sup>

There is also the letter of the then Metropolitan of Nevrokop, Pimen. Given his later ascendancy to the post of patriarch of the alternative Synod in 1996 and his role in the future canonization of Levski, this letter is of particular interest. Dated June 19, 1986 and addressed to Nikolai Todorov, it states its approval of the concluding report of the BAN debates. Pimen shares that, while carefully having followed the argumentation of both sides in the press, he finds Khaitov position more convincing. His careful phrasing can serve as a model:

It is not in my competence to judge but it seems to me that during the excavations there have been deviations from the scholarly precision of the work, which necessitated a more serious handling and preservation of the artifacts, so much so as informed individuals had been affirming that Levski had been reburied in this church. The timely signals of Professor Giaurov were also ignored. I know him personally and he is widely respected for his serious and critical mind. It was therefore a missed opportunity not to preserve the archeological material for detailed study at an opportune moment.

All of this deserves some, if only preliminary and tentative, theorizing attempts. My central question is: What is the proper category to describe the initiative of the Varna journalist and the petition signed by nearly 600 people? Or the numerous private letters by people from all walks of life? Or poems written for the occasion, even if they are bad

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186 The priest’s letter ends with asking Professor Buzhashki, the editor-in-chief of *Vekove* to respond to his letter, even in disagreement. The copy to Balleviski carries a note to send it to the attention of Nikolai Todorov and the latter has written a resolution, dated March 17, 1986, that the protocol of the debates at BAN be sent to Vodenicharov with an accompanying letter.

poems? Clearly, as far as the Levski debate goes, there was, even within the perceived constraints, a remarkable openness for discussion: in the press, in the institutions and, what is most unexpected and surprising, a popular initiative to express opinions and pressure for their acceptance. Is all this not covered by the category “civil society”? There are different strategies to pursue here. One is to explain off these and similar facts as being outside the realm of “civil society” as it has been applied in Eastern Europe in the 1980s or, at very best, as modest sprouts of an embryonic civil society. Another is to abandon the strict definition and its normative overtones, and enrich and complicate it by the concrete historical ontology. Yet another is to discard the notion altogether. My inclinations are in the direction of the second option, and while my immediate interest here is not so much in reaching a new theoretical explanation and in system building, the concrete goal is to contravene the intellectual straitjacket which the strict application of political science categories impose on the historical record.<sup>187</sup>

There are varying and often contradictory definitions of civil society—beginning with Hegel’s designation of civil society as a sphere of needs distinct from the family and the state, and mediating between them,<sup>188</sup> Tocqueville’s understanding of it as a realm of secondary associations, to present classifications including non-profit organizations only, or only self-organizing communities of common interest,

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187 For an excellent recent analysis of civil society from the perspective of historical social sciences, see Jürgen Kocka, Paul Nolte, Shalini Randeria, Sven Reichardt, *Neues über Zivilgesellschaft. Aus historisch-sozialwissenschaftlichem Blickwinkel*, Veröffentlichungen der Arbeitsgruppe “Zivilgesellschaft: historisch-sozialwissenschaftlichen Perspektiven,” P 01–801, December, 2001.

188 It has been pointed out that, although Hegel ignored the pre-modern history of the concept, it is not a new one, being the Latin translation—*societas civilis*—of Aristotle’s *koinonia politike*. In its ancient meaning, however, it did not distinguish between state and society, and it was Hegel who first bifurcated the concept (Sunil Khilani, “The Development of Civil Society,” in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilani, eds., *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 17). Hegel himself insisted that civil society, both in its emergence and in its formalization in political economy, was a distinct product of the modern world. It presupposed the overthrow of the violence and arbitrariness of slavery and feudalism, and the adoption of a set of legal and cultural norms in which a system of needs could develop (Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate*, London: Profile Books, 2004, 6).

or all forms of nongovernmental cooperation including big business, and finally, all forms of non-institutionalized human activity. Equally, the critique of civil society, whether coming from a normative (Hanna Arendt, Jürgen Habermas), historicist (Carl Schmitt, Reinhart Koselleck, and Habermas), genealogical (Michel Foucault), systems-theoretical (Niklas Luhmann), or feminist critique (Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young) implies a different understanding of the categories state and society and their relationship, with both Foucault and Luhmann squarely considering their posited stark opposition a false dichotomy.<sup>189</sup> Karl Marx adopted Hegel's term *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* but, in his attempt to demystify it, he interpreted it literally, as a synonym of bourgeois society and devalued the distinction between state and civil society.<sup>190</sup> Within the same perspective, while for Marx civil society was first and foremost embedded in the market and he was highly critical of it, for Antonio Gramsci its principal realm was public opinion and culture.<sup>191</sup> There is little doubt that if we apply a strict normative definition of civil society,<sup>192</sup> under communism it was, if

189 For a review of the notion and different approaches and critiques, see Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992; Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings*, Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003, 313–27; Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, 267–303.

190 Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*, 321. See also Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *The American Political Science Review*, 85.1 (1991), 77–96.

191 Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 268. For a very interesting take on “actually existing civil society” in the African setting as influenced by the discourse on civil society in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Capitalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 13–5.

192 A very broad definition is proposed by Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, ix: “a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentiation. While the self-creative and institutionalized dimensions can exist separately, in the long term both independent action and institutionalization are necessary for the reproduction of civil society.”

anything, largely curtailed, controlled and for all practical purposes marginalized. But it is equally imperative to revisit the famous paradigm of a lack of civil society under communism bar the church (especially in its Catholic variety in Poland or its evangelical one in East Germany), and dissident or semi-dissident groups like “Solidarity” in Poland, “Memorial” in Russia, and the mushrooming ecological groups of the last decades under communism.<sup>193</sup>

If we look at the historical genealogy of the concept, it is remarkable that after its early use in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was largely abandoned, to re-emerge powerfully only in the 1970s, notably within the context of the crisis of the East European socialist regimes.<sup>194</sup> It is precisely the specificity of the East European

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193 “Under communism the nations of Eastern Europe never had a ‘civil society.’ A ‘civil society’ exists when individuals and groups are free to form organizations that function independently of the state, and that can mediate between citizens and the state. Because the lack of civil society was part of the very essence of the all-pervasive communist state, creating such a society and supporting organizations independent of the state—or NGOs—have been seen by donors as the connective tissue of democratic political culture—an intrinsically positive objective” (Janine R. Wedel, “US aid to Central and Eastern Europe, 1990–1994: an analysis of aid models and responses,” in *East-Central European Economies in Transition: Study Papers submitted to Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States*, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994, 323, cited in Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, 1). In a similar vein, Katherine Verdery, in *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996, 104–7, 256), approaches civil society as one of the key symbolic operators of societal organization, alongside notions such as nation, Europe, Asia, democracy, clearly demarcating it as part of the discourse of the political opposition in the 1980s and 1990s. For her, the Solidarity movement opened a space for civil society in Poland whereas such a space was practically absent in Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. While her material comes exclusively from and convincingly illustrates the Romanian case in the 1980s and early 1990s, her generalizations reproduce uncritically the presumed divide between East-Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia) and Southeastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, Albania).

194 Besides developments in Eastern Europe, there was also the confluence of other elements that arose during the 1970s: the collapse of authoritarian dictatorships in Latin America and Southern Europe, the rise of ecological movements, and an intellectual reassessment of liberal ideology. As Sunil Khilani observes, although “central to classical Western po-

context that effected an interpretation of civil society such that the very notion as applied to Eastern Europe in the 1980s was premised on a complete opposition between society and the state, and the rhetorical claims of “antipolitics” were taken seriously.<sup>195</sup> The turn to political society after 1989 made a joke of these claims. Pace Cohen and Arato’s noble hopes that East Europeans “would be able to resist the ‘oligarchic’ tendencies of modern political parties” and would avoid the dangerous example of Latin America where the turn to political society implied demobilization of civil society, this is exactly what happened.<sup>196</sup>

I am not questioning the lack or weakness of the principal norms of civil society under late socialism—the absence of realistic guarantees for individual rights, privacy, voluntary association, formal legality, plurality, publicity, free enterprise—but these have been institutionalized heterogeneously and in a contradictory manner also in western societies. Nor am I preaching a pedantic ban of the category of civil society because of the multifariousness of its meanings. It is important, however, to emphasize more its historical and contingent appearance and reappearance at particular junctures of the historical process, and to contextualize the concrete purposes for which it was mobilized.

In Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s (much like for Enlightenment absolutist Europe), civil society was starkly posited as an emancipatory counterweight to the state, validated only by its potential oppositional qualities.<sup>197</sup> Yet, concrete research has shown not only

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litical theory, the concept of civil society was largely moribund during the days when models of state-led modernization dominated both liberal and Marxist conceptions of social change and development,” and it resurged again in the late 1970s and 1980s gaining popularity first among radicals disaffected with Marxism (“The Development of Civil Society,” 12, 16).

195 The most sustained argument in this respect was György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay*, trans. Richard E. Allen, San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984. Compare, for a critical view, with Chris Hann, ed., *Market Economy and Civil Society in Hungary*, London: Frank Cass, 1990; and Chris Hann, “Introduction,” in Hann and Dunn, eds., *Civil Society*, 7–10, 23.

196 Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 67–8.

197 For a historical comparison between the crisis of the social order in late eighteenth-century and late twentieth-century Europe see, in particular, Adam Seligman, “Civil Society as Idea and Ideal,” in Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka, eds., *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, Princeton, 2002, 13–33.

the great variability between the separate societies of Eastern Europe, but has questioned the dichotomy itself. In particular, Chris Hann has suggested a useful distinction between political society in the narrow and in the broad sense. In the first case, he accepts it as an element of the dualist scheme that contrasts the state and its people, and where the political is encompassed entirely by the state institutions. In the broad sense, however, which is the main sense employed by anthropologists, it would correspond to a looser notion of civil society that does not presuppose an absolute opposition between state and society, or the political and the social. This is so, among others, because “in the communist context, virtually all social behavior had political implications.”<sup>198</sup>

To be fair to the historiographical record, the dogmatic opposition between state and society under communism had been questioned before but so strong was the authority of the “antipoliticians” immediately before and especially in the wake of 1989 that seemed to have vindicated their claims, that these early interpretations remained isolated. For example, Moshe Lewin had suggested already in the early 1970s

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198 Chris Hann, “Introduction,” in Hann and Dunn, eds., *Civil Society*, 13, 23–4. In the same volume, see Michał Buchowski, “The shifting meaning of civil and civic society in Poland” (79–98); David G. Anderson “Bringing civil society to an uncivilized place: citizenship regimes in Russia’s Arctic frontier” (99–120); Steven Sampson, “The social life of projects: importing civil society to Albania” (121–42). Hann’s interpretation of political society in the broad sense is reminiscent of but also differs from the one introduced by Partha Chatterjee in *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. In Chatterjee’s use, the category reflects the specificity of the non-Western world, “most of the world,” of being essentially not bourgeois. For him civil society is “typically about a kind of free associative, modern bourgeois life. It is quintessentially *bourgeois* politics,” whereas what he expresses with his category is the adaptation of the governmental political sphere to local exigencies, the processes of adjustment and negotiation, that are fundamentally political. While Hann, for all practical purposes, lifts the boundary between the civic and the political, Chatterjee still preserves a rift between the two, insisting that “the civil does not necessarily translate easily into the political” (*AsiaSource*, Interview with Partha Chatterjee, “Towards a Postcolonial Modernity,” [http://www.asiasource.org/news/special\\_reports/chatterjee\\_print.html](http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/chatterjee_print.html), 9–10). See also Chris Hann’s powerful argument in “Is Balkan Civil Society an Oxymoron? From Königsberg to Sarajevo, via Przemyśl,” *Ethnologia balkanica*, 7 (2003), 63–78.

that the proposed economic reforms by Khrushchev in the 1960s and later by Kosygin triggered what he called the emerging phenomenon of a “civil society recovering.” He had directed his analysis to exploring the relations between state and society and concluded that the introduction of “social and societal factors in our reasoning allows us to see Soviet history and state institutions as much more flexible and responsive to social realities than is generally perceived.”<sup>199</sup> As he nicely summed up “The world is, unfortunately, not immune to despotism and to oppressive states—but, fortunately, no state has ever figured out how to master the complexity of human society.”<sup>200</sup> While Lewin warned that the analysis of civil society must not be predicated on definitions, he offered one himself, in which he stressed the possibility of serious dissidence in social complexes that do not necessarily oppose the state.<sup>201</sup> It was cultural life that he identified as the first arena for spontaneous actions but also the academic world and other groups of specialists which affected individuals, groups, institutions, and the state: “Civil society is talking, gossiping, demanding, sulking, expressing its interests in many ways and thereby creating moods, ideologies, and public opinion.”<sup>202</sup>

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199 Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974, quoted in Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, viii.

200 Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*, 29.

201 “By ‘civil society’ we refer to the aggregate of networks and institutions that either exist and act independently of the state or are official organizations capable of developing their own, spontaneous views on national or local issues and then impressing these views on their members, on small groups and, finally, on the authorities. These social complexes do not necessarily oppose the state, but exist in contrast to outright state organisms and enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. The possibility of serious dissidence from various levels of society cannot be excluded.” (Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*, 80)

202 Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*, 72–9, 146. In the Bulgarian context, and the Eastern European one in general, Andrei Raichev maintains that the Habermasian civil society is to be found in what he calls the Second Network, i.e. the grey, unofficial economy, where an exchange was taking place of status for product, product for product, product for status, and status for status (“Genezis, mutatsiia i degeneratsiia na vtorite mrezi,” *Sociologicheski problemi*, 2003, 1–2).

The notion of public sphere and lack thereof under communism poses similar problems. There is no doubt that as a Weberian ideal type Habermas's public sphere is difficult, if not impossible to locate under state socialism, even in its later decades.<sup>203</sup> Nancy Fraser has pointed out the failure of the dominant socialist and Marxist tradition to distinguish between state apparatus and the citizens' public arena:

All too often it was assumed in this tradition that to subject the economy to the control of the socialist state was to subject it to the control of the socialist citizenry. Of course that was not so. But the conflation of the state apparatus with the public sphere of discourse and association provided ballast to processes whereby the socialist vision became institutionalized in an authoritarian statist form instead of in a participatory democratic form. The result has been to jeopardize the very idea of socialist democracy.<sup>204</sup>

If one were to stick to its theoretical elaboration as a space distinct from both the state and the official economy, "a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state"<sup>205</sup> (but not necessarily as a matter of principle—*my comment*), one could posit the existence of an embryonic public sphere under socialism where people outside the immediate experts engaged in public debate.<sup>206</sup> On the other hand, one can go a little further than simply

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203 Habermas's definition is useful to evoke at this point: "By the 'public sphere' we mean first of all the realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed... Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion—that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express their opinions—about matters of general interest... The expression 'public opinion' refers to the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally practices... vis-à-vis a ruling class." (quoted from Michael Pusey, *Jürgen Habermas*, New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987, 89). See also Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

204 Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus. Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*, New York: Routledge, 1996, 70.

205 *Ibid.*, 70.

206 In order to take account of similar developments—the establishment of various autonomous social, economic, political and religious organizations—Leslie Holmes suggests the adoption of a dynamic interpretation

apply the normative category, which dooms the description and analysis of historical contexts outside of the western “original” to narrative tropes depicting “lack,” “lag,” “backwardness,” and so on. To evoke Shalini Randeria’s thoughtful appraisal of the category for India:

Rather than see civil society with Hall and Gellner as a unique Western achievement, and using its successful realization elsewhere as a yardstick to measure the difference or backwardness of non-Western societies, it may be important to see that the substance of the idea is inherently elusive both in the West and outside it. This is in part due to the complex intellectual history and uneven political realization of the ideal of civil society over several centuries in the West as well as to the checkered history of its translation and conflictual domestication within the framework of colonial rule in most of the non-Western world.<sup>207</sup>

But even in the Western world, as revisionist historiography has demonstrated and Nancy Fraser has synthesized, there are “other, non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres,” and it is the failure of Habermas to examine these alternative spaces which may have led him to idealize the bourgeois public sphere.<sup>208</sup> There is legitimate discussion, for example, about a black public sphere under the regime of Jim Crow.<sup>209</sup> If anything, citizens in East European socialist countries

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of the concept of civil society. He proposes to focus on the term “emergence, which implies a process and perhaps stages.” In this case, it is possible to speak of a nascent civil society that has not yet fully emerged, and has not yet been legitimized by the formal political system (Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 269).

207 Shalini Randeria, “Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal Pluralism in Post-Colonial India,” in Yehuda Elkana, Ivan Krastev, Elisio Macamo, Shalini Randeria, eds., *Unraveling Ties—From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness*, Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2002, 290. See also “Civil Society in an Extra-European Perspective,” in Kaviraj and Khilani, eds., *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, 149–64.

208 Fraser, *Justice*, 74. See also Nick Crossley, John Roberts, eds., *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

209 *The Black Public Sphere*, ed. by the Black Public Sphere Collective, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. See also Elizabeth Brooks-Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993. I am indebted to Nancy Fraser for drawing my attention to this discourse.

after Stalinism fared incomparably better than blacks in segregationist America. Extending his work on multiple modernities and critiquing the assumptions of the liberal conception of civil society, Shmuel Eisenstadt introduces the notion of a non-liberal civil society.<sup>210</sup>

More importantly, instead of denying the existence of a public sphere under state socialism, one should better speak of the specific characteristic deformations of civil society and the public sphere under different regimes. The limitations under communism are self-evident and have been emphatically pointed out in numerous deliberations: party constraints, censorship, administrative and extra-administrative pressure, and so on. The Western liberal democracies have suffered from an alternative set of limitations: corporate, legal, or media-related. There are also a number which paradoxically seem to be common to both of these different social regimes and which cry out for comparative work, most blatantly the amount and character of self-censorship. Paraphrasing Mark Beissinger's apt adaptation of Wittgensteinian philosophy to the application of the notion of empire in the Soviet context, one could say that civil society is not a clearly bounded transhistorical model but a Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" with significant variability over space and time.<sup>211</sup>

Again, the purpose of this excursus is not to attack the (uses of the) categories, but simply to appeal for their careful contextualization. The significant point to make is that, constrained as they were, these illustrations of an embryonic or different type of public sphere or civil society (depending on the approach we prefer) had to be taken and were taken into account, and not necessarily for demagogic reasons. As already said, the Levski grave affair was not of such political importance that the party or state authorities would want to capitalize on it by either responding to or neglecting public pressure. A similar case occurred in 1987, again focusing on Levski, although leaving out the reburial debate. An open letter, signed by 72 prominent intellectuals was sent to Todor Zhivkov on the eve of the 150th anniversary of

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210 Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple modernities, public spheres and social movements in the contemporary era," Dieter Grimm, ed., *Jahrbuch 2004–2005*, Berlin: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, 2006, 45–7.

211 Mark R. Beissinger, "Soviet Empire as 'Family Resemblance,'" *Slavic Review*, 65.2 (Summer 2006), 303.

Levski's birth in 1987.<sup>212</sup> It appealed to Zhivkov to support and facilitate a number of initiatives: 1. The publication of Levski's documentary legacy in a big circulation; 2. The reprint of two authoritative works on Levski by Dimitŕ Strashimirov, out-of-print since the 1920s; 3. A second edition of Nikolai Genchev's book on Levski; 4. the publication of Radoi Ralin's film script on Levski; 5. The publication of Ivan Kolarov's new novel on Levski.

At first glance, the demands of the intellectuals seem so trivial as to make the form of their request incomprehensible. However, if one knows the context and the personalities, then the gesture makes sense. Radoi Ralin was a famous poet, most known and beloved for his incisive epigrams, who had fallen in disgrace after he had published a collection of epigrams, illustrated by Boris Dimovski, with an obvious allusion to the signature of Zhivkov. Nikolai Genchev was a highly popular history professor who had made a reputation as an original and quasi-dissident thinker. This is not the place to focus on whether these reputations were deserved or authentic.<sup>213</sup> The point is that they were perceived as such, and to a great extent the open letter to Zhivkov can be read as an attempt to rehabilitate their work by making use of the social capital invested in Levski's theme. It was clearly also understood in this sense, because Radoi Ralin's book was published only in 1994 and Genchev's next edition also had to wait until after 1989. It is also symptomatic that the letter was signed by most of the figures that later emerged as members of the "Club for glasnost and democracy" and

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212 The letter, dated May 20, 1987 was sent to Zhivkov with copies to the Politbureau member Iordan Iotov, to the Chairman of the Committee for Cultural Development Georgi Irodanov, to the secretary of the Central Committee Stoian Mikhailov, to the president of BAN Angel Balevski, to the chairman of the society "Bulgarian books and press" Valentin Karmanchev, to the editor-in-chief of "Narodna kultura" Stefan Prodev, to the editor-in-chief of "ABV" Filip Panaiotov, and to the chairman of the regional council in Karlovo. A copy of the letter is in Nikolai Todorov's personal archive, now at the BAN.

213 In my personal opinion, while in the case of Radoi Ralin one can speak of authentic dissidence and of someone who had been really marginalized, Genchev's dissident reputation was rather contrived and deftly exploited by him. The phenomenon itself, however, deserves a closer analysis and awaits its historian, given the heroicized recent publication and advertisement of his oeuvre. For an evaluation of his work on Levski in particular, see Part II.

“Ecoglasnost” and who, after 1989, headed the opposition.<sup>214</sup> In this case, there would be no question that this was the gesture of a miniature civil society.

To go back to the reburial debate, a dense reading of the events and their consecutive recreation shows that the authorities were indeed responding to grassroots pressure. In a way, this is what one would expect to happen in a “normal” democratic society. And this is the reading that I am proposing. As long as they were not *seen* as directly challenging the existing political superstructure (either ideologically or personally), some kind of civil society and public debate were tolerated and even encouraged from the late 1960s on.<sup>215</sup> What was not normal was that this “normality” was not expected and not seen as normal. After all, the memory of the late 1940s and 1950s, when party meddling was ubiquitous in culture, was too close to be forgotten, and had created a knee-jerk cautiousness among the generation which had lived through these decades. In addition, my emphasis on *seen* adds the element of arbitrariness and always expected “surprise” that was so typical for late socialism. One could never be sure whether what was logically totally innocuous, might not be *seen* by some apparatchik as dangerous in a most unexpected manner. And reverse, often serious and often calculatedly serious challenges were not noticed, that is *seen* by someone who was supposed to watch. I would add that the notic-

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214 Among the signatories were the future democratic president Zheliu Zhelev, his close collaborators Ivailo Trifonov, Nina Zheliazkova, Dimitir Ludzhev, Zina Markova, Simeon Angelov, the university professors and Academy fellows Nedialko Merdhanov, Khristo Kiosev, Dimitir Avramov, Miliana Kaimakamova, Andrei Pantev, Nikolai Vasilev, Lambo Kiuchukov, Anisava Miltenova, Tsvetana Georgieva, Kiril Vasilev, Ani Gergova, Georgi Gunev, Todor Petev, Evgenia Ivanova, Stefan Doinov, Angel Dimitrov, the writers Georgi Mishev, Georgi Velichkov, Ekaterina Tomova, David Ovidia, Stefan Tsanev, Nevena Stefanova, the painter Boris Dimovski, the actor Konstantin Kotsev and a host of others.

215 Although he used it for a specific critique of liberal democracy, one could here employ Marcuse’s 1965 notion of repressive tolerance. Ironically, this could become another element for a fruitful comparison of the specific constraints of civil society and the public sphere under allegedly such opposing regimes as American and West European societies and East European state socialism during the Cold War. See Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr. and Herbert Marcuse, eds., *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 89–137.

ing or “seeing” procedure was not unconscious, a matter of oversight or stupidity but most often deliberate. As Miklós Haraszti has perceptively observed in his notes on the “velvet prison,” communication between the lines was the dominant feature of socialist culture in the post-Stalinist decades and “the opinions expressed there are not alien to the state but perhaps simply premature.”<sup>216</sup> It is this arbitrariness of the regime, rather than the easy totalitarianism-informed explanations of its behavior, that proved to be intellectually and emotionally exhausting. And then, again, one might choose not to overdramatize this. While writing tongue-in-cheek, Haraszti again is quite evocative:

The reader must not think that we detest the perversity of this hidden public life and that we participate in it because we are forced to. On the contrary, the technique of writing between the lines is, for us, identical with artistic technique. It is part of our skill and a test of our professionalism. Even the prestige accorded to us by officialdom is partly predicated on our talent for talking between the lines.<sup>217</sup>

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216 Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism*, trans. Katalin and Stephen Landesmann, New York: Basic Books, 1987, 145.

217 *Ibid.*, 144–5.

## 5. “Professionals” and “Dilettantes”

When speaking of the BAN debates as Turner’s redressive phase, what is peculiar about the Bulgarian case is that the whole framework upon which the redressive mechanism was based was itself in a legitimacy crisis from the mid-1980s on. By the 1990s it had completely collapsed and this is probably the most salient explanation why the redressive machinery did not “fix” the problem. What the BAN debates did demonstrate, however, is that “it is in the redressive phase that both pragmatic techniques and symbolic action reach their fullest expression.”<sup>218</sup>

The value of the BAN debates, and to some extent their revolutionary character, lay in the fact that for the first time the two opposing factions were forced to enter a mode of discussion. Until that moment the rival thesis—the reburial thesis—was only spelled out in the public realm, and had even gained some notoriety and broad popularity, but did not have the imprimatur of expertise. Throughout the whole period, when it attracted the attention of the mass media and the broad public, the archeologists retreated in a pose of offended professionalism, refusing to take the thesis seriously and *a priori* dismissing it, without even looking into its argumentation. Once they were compelled to enter the debate, they retreated into another pose, that of having been forced into an unnecessary and time-wasting exchange by the party *cum* government *cum* academy authorities, who allegedly were backing the hugely popular Khaitov and rewarding his lobbying talents.

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218 Turner, “Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors,” 41. It is because of this that Turner urged the careful study of social drama particularly during the redressive phase: “When one is studying social change, at whatever social level, I would give one piece of advice: study carefully what happens in phase three, the would-be redressive phase of social dramas, and ask whether the redressive machinery is capable of handling crises so as to restore, more or less, the status quo ante, or at least to restore peace among the contending groups. Then ask, if so, how precisely? And if not, why not?” (40–1)

In fact, as shown above, the authorities were largely responding to grassroots pressure. It was, however, the general arbitrariness of the regime, the lack of any transparency that makes this simple explanation difficult to believe at first sight. As a rule, one was always skeptical of stated motives and the ground was always fertile for conspiracy theories. To a large extent these rules of the game or, rather, the lack of strict rules, were recognized by all sides in the debates. Intellectual passivity was thus a logical cautionary behavior, implicitly cultivated and enjoyed by part of the ruling party bureaucracy. At the same time, prudence became an easy excuse for intellectual laziness. In the case of the archeologists, I don't believe that risk calculations were in play at all. Had there been even the slightest perceived danger of genuine pressure, the invectives on all sides would have been much more toned down and measured. Another balance of power was at play.

Science (in the broad meaning of the word, scholarship) had always enjoyed a lofty, if not necessarily always secure or well-funded (with the natural exception of strategically important hard sciences), position under communism. Aside from the Stalinist follies in science that had had some early but limited repercussions in the newly set up postwar communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the sciences were seen as a semi-independent sphere, where real experts could find a tolerable space. This was true not only for the hard sciences but also for the humanities, with the exception of the most ideological "scholarly" concoctions, like scientific communism or sensitive research areas like contemporary history, and history of the Communist Party. The Archeological Institute, among others, was seen and was self-perceived as the abode of specialists who were doing "real" science, far removed from the ideological and political conjunctures of the day.

If archeology could be used for patriotic purposes, so much the better: after all, this was bringing needed support and recognition, and did it really matter how it was being used when what it researched and discovered was actually "the truth"? This, I would venture, was the broad mindset reigning among archeologists (as well as historians), a mindset that during communism had changed little from the (usually German-inspired) positivist methodology, claiming a truth-discovering aura for their particular scientific discipline. It is difficult to judge how much of this was methodological naiveté, how much wishful thinking, how much technical narrow-mindedness. But after all, archeology as

a discipline in Europe and in the world has only “recently accepted the fact that its occupation is (perceived as) functional to political or nationalist agendas” and that, together with history, it has been instrumental in constructing the official “nation state monumental past.”<sup>219</sup> This has been the case, as shown by recent scholarship, despite the fact of the universal and “almost unavoidable or natural relationship between archeology and nationalism.”<sup>220</sup>

The peculiarly elevated status of Bulgarian archeologists and their respective inflated self-perception was the result of several factors. One was the role of the archeological discipline as a strong nation-state builder already from the nineteenth century on. This, of course, is true also about historiography but the Bulgarian peculiarity lies in the fact that, unlike its Greek counterpart, political history could not by itself establish a direct link to antiquity. It was medieval history that supplied the elevated ties to statehood, which explains the equally lofty status of Bulgarian medieval studies, whereas archeology secured the connection to classical antiquity. It has to be understood also that in the lands of classical antiquity in general, there is an even stronger premium on rooting one’s national project in antiquity, because of its high “social capital” among the developed world as the “cradle of civilization.”

But it is not only this functional explanation that allows us to understand the hypervalue attached to archeology. There was also the strong influence of the elevated status of classical studies and archeology in Europe and Germany at the time, where most Bulgarian inter-

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219 Peter Odermatt, “Built heritage and the politics of representation. Local reactions to the appropriation of the monumental past in Sardinia,” *Archeological Dialogues: Dutch Perspectives on Current Issues in Archeology* 3.2 (December 1996), 115. For an excellent review of the practices of archeology and its link to the nation-building project, see Margarita Diaz-Andreu and Timothy Champion, eds., *Nationalism and Archeology in Europe*, Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1996. Equally valuable is the edited volume Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archeology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

220 Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett, “Archeology in the service of the state: theoretical considerations,” in Kohl and Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archeology*, 3–4. The authors also thoughtfully point out that this relationship between the state and the discipline “is not necessarily corrupt or intrinsically suspect.”

war archeologists had been entirely or partly educated.<sup>221</sup> Thus, when Khaitov made his allegation that “we care more about our Roman and Byzantine roads and mosaics than for our medieval ruins” he was on the spot despite the archeologists’ protestations.<sup>222</sup> At the same time, it has to be added that Bulgarian archeology even today has hardly moved from the paradigm of “a descriptive and a culture historical approach” and has been untouched even by the processualist traditions that have characterized western archeology from the late 1950s on, let alone by the post-processualist or cognitive archeology after the 1970s.<sup>223</sup>

Finally, there was the general suspicion against modern history (weakening with time but still persisting) and the belief in the greater “objectivity” of ancient or medieval studies. This suspicion was generated from two sources. On the one hand, it was the general development of historiography all over Europe, where the prejudices against *Zeitgeschichte* have been gradually overcome only after the Second World War. On the other hand, there was the direct meddling of political authorities into scholarship and the ensuing (very often justified)

221 For a perceptive analysis of the ideological roots of Bulgarian, and generally Slavic archeology, in German archeology and especially the treatment of the category “archeological culture” in ethnic terms, see Florin Curta, “Pots, Slavs and ‘Imagined Communities’: Slavic Archeologies and the History of the Early Slavs,” *European Journal of Archeology* 4.3 (2001), 367–84, esp. 372–3. On the influential figure of the German archeologist Gustaf Kossinna, in particular, see Heinrich Härke, ed., *Archeology, Ideology and Society: the German Experience*, Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2000. For a penetrating general introduction to the problematic of the archeological discipline in the Balkans, which pays special attention to the specific combination between ethnic, national and Marxist ideologies and how they have cast the discipline in a politically active role, see Timothy Kaiser, “Archeology and ideology in south-east Europe,” in Kohl and Fawcett, *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archeology*, 99–119.

222 *BAN volume*, 171. This particularly piqued Magdalina Stancheva who, in October 1985, maintained that “archeology as a science has to be publicly rehabilitated because a whole institute is being accused of bowing only before ancient archeology” (*ibid.*, 188–9).

223 Douglas W. Bailey, “Bulgarian Archeology. Ideology, sociopolitics and the exotic,” in Lynn Meskell, ed., *Archeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 87–110 (here p. 97), which is the best introduction to and analysis of Bulgarian archeology.

perception that one was better hidden from ideological encroachments the farther away in time one specialized.<sup>224</sup>

There was thus a heightened self-consciousness of professionalism that was not challenged by anyone and, in the mind of the practitioners, could not be challenged. There was also little tolerance for critique, none whatsoever for critique from outside the field, and little patience with even modest attempts at self-critical or self-reflective approaches that were dismissed as cowardly or relativistic. It was this self-consciousness that was challenged and wounded by the spirited although, granted, also aggressive intervention of Khaitov.<sup>225</sup> His accusations had many overtones, but the archeologists rightly heard the strongest motive: the accusation of lack of professionalism. The simple scholarly controversy need not have necessarily blown into a real scandal around mutually incompatible positions. But what brought it about was, as already described before, the real stake the archeologists had not only in defending their professional competence in principle but because the scandal threatened their budget.

The preceding sections concentrated on the clash of divergent interpretations but there was little comment on the extra-scholarly rhetorical devices and actual actions taken on by the participants in the dispute. The emphasis was also on the fact that this time the attack on the dominant version came from outside the scholarly field. However, it would be disingenuous to overemphasize this circumstance. Khaitov’s spirited support for the counter-version, which succeeded in tipping the scales, had been tacitly “supported” from within. This fact has been conveniently overlooked, because the way the war trenches were defined, there seemed to be an exclusive opposition between professionals and dilettantes. However, when the first edition of Khaitov’s

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224 I too have been “guilty” of this illusion. Although I easily saw through the elitist pretensions of archeologists and medievalists, and could hardly stand them, my specialization in Ottoman history was for exactly the same reasons: a) it was not that fashionable at the time and it was difficult, and b) I loved social and economic history, and the Ottoman sources in Bulgaria were particularly apt for this type of analysis. Little could I foresee that by the mid-1980s my discipline would become a central focus for the ideological legitimization of the anti-Turkish campaign.

225 Later, Khaitov regretted the use of *ad hominem* abuse: “Today I would not have allowed myself to use the personal jibes and qualifications from years ago.” (*Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 10)

book came out, it had received the imprimatur of two internal scholarly reviews, one of which belonged to the highly respected classicist and archeologist, and at the time, deputy director of the Archeological Institute, Velizar Velkov. In his review, Velkov points out that:

The work of Khaitov is very timely because for the first time it introduces a new, very serious argument in the discussion about Levski's grave, namely the diary of the excavations. The author has truthfully and consistently represented all opinions and has convincingly demonstrated that there had been serious possibilities for a genuinely scientific research on the bones, but these chances were squandered. I believe he has well assessed the archeological literature and has accurately shown its contradictions. The proposed work is without any doubt a contribution in the problematique around Levski's grave and has serious argumentation in favor of the opinion that Levski may have been reburied in the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." I recommend the publication of this work.<sup>226</sup>

Upon the appearance of Khaitov's book, the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute held an internal debate. The protocol of this meeting, from October 2, 1985, was later published as a document in the BAN volume. In it, Velkov was urged to explain his review, and he stated that while he disapproved of Khaitov's tone toward archeology as a discipline and, in particular, toward the leadership of the Archeological Institute, he still gave the book "a positive assessment

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226 The review, dated March 1, 1985, is published in Khaitov, *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 164–5. An original signed copy is in the archives of the "Khristo Danov" publishing house. Another copy is in the archive of Nikolai Todorov, now at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I have personally checked the absolute correctness of the published version against the manuscript one. After 1989, Professor Velkov served as director of the Archeological Institute until his untimely death a few years later. The other review from January 6, 1985, was written by Pantelei Zarev, a professor of literature, who dealt more with Khaitov's powerful style and language, and also highly recommended the work for publication, concluding his review with the remark that thanks to this book, "the place of Levski's grave will be marked, in the words of the author: 'For the memory of the coming generations and for his glory.'" (Nikolai Todorov archive, in the Archive of BAN)

because the facts known before the discussion in the section for medieval archeology allowed to come up with such a thesis.” He emphasizes that the excavations in the church “Sv. Petka” had been compromised. All finds and objects had disappeared; so had the graphic documentation and the photographs. Even the diary of the excavations had appeared with additional entries only a quarter of a century later. “It was strange,” Velkov remarked, “that, when years ago the same question had been discussed by the Medieval Section, neither Prof. Mikhailov, nor senior research fellow Dzhingov had notified about [the existence of] this diary and, instead, discussed the issue without this documentation. Obviously, a scholarly publication on these excavations is needed.” During the meeting, however, Velkov backed away from his review, saying that, in the new light of the sketches offered by Stefan Boiadzhiev, “the hypothesis forwarded by Khaitov can no longer be supported.”<sup>227</sup>

Velkov was obviously under pressure. He was present at the BAN discussions in February, 1986 but his voice was never heard. Instead, he preferred to keep an extremely low profile, and fell back into the posture of a colleague who was not going to break the line, yet, at the same time, would not involve himself actively in defense of a weak cause against his own better judgment. I remember asking him about the affair when we happened to fly together on a plane to Vienna in early 1987. His reluctant but smiling response was: “defense of the profession.” My recollection may be dismissed as partial, yet the few statements of Velkov, and the very fact they were so few, speak for themselves. Mikhailov himself did not fail to register his disappointment with Velkov’s review:

This work [Khaitov’s] does not reflect well on the reviewers either, especially on one of them, the deputy director of the Archeological Institute and a specialist in classical philology, who lately also deals with ancient archeology, but is far removed from the problems of medieval archeology.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *BAN volume*, 188. As already mentioned above, at the time that Velkov accepted Boiadzhiev’s sketches as authoritative, he was not to know that Boiadzhiev himself would withdraw them as false only a couple of months later.

<sup>228</sup> *BAN volume*, 269.

This was obviously a blow under the belt. After all, Mikhailov himself, as Khaitov never tired to repeat, was not an accomplished archeologist, but a specialist in art history, when he started the excavations. More importantly, however, this reflects on something typical for Bulgarian scholarship at the time and still today: its incredibly compartmentalized specialization. In the field of history, one didn't dare pronounce oneself on anything even a couple of decades outside one's own designated period, let alone give legitimate opinions on neighboring disciplines. Interdisciplinarity was, and still is, a foreign category to scholarly praxis.

The discussion at the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute, which took place on September 14, 1985, is a particularly apt site to investigate the nature of the exchange because, unlike the debates at BAN a few months later where the two sides were explicitly (although at times unsuccessfully) ushered to refrain from emotive attacks, emotions here ran high and were expressed accordingly.<sup>229</sup> In fact, it is even incorrect to call this discussion an exchange because Khaitov had not been invited by the archeologists to take part in this discussion. His presence at the meeting was a last-minute arrangement due to the intervention of Academician Blagovest Sendov, at the time vice president of BAN. Khaitov had not been given the 76-page refutation of Mikhailov that the latter presented at the meeting, and even at the meeting itself Khaitov was refused access to the statement. This is why he taped the whole discussion and his response was submitted only in writing.<sup>230</sup> This is a detail that needs to be known in light of the misleading remark of Stanilov, who published a report of the discussion, that "at the meeting Khaitov confined himself to mere ripostes against the speakers in the style of his book." Khaitov was simply not given the floor for a thorough statement.<sup>231</sup>

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229 The stenogram of the discussion is published in *BAN volume*, 138–65, as well as the official protocol of the Archeological Institute (188–90). Khaitov's subsequent written analysis and responses can be found also there, 166–87, 191–6.

230 Letter from Khaitov to Balevski, with copies to Stoian Mikahilov and Georgi Iordanov, dated October 14, 1985. A copy of the letter is in the personal archive of Nikolai Todorov, now at BAN. Khaitov attached to his letter the complete stenogram of the meeting together with his written response. All these materials are published in *BAN volume*, 139–96.

231 Stanislav Stanilov, "Knigata na Nikolai Khaitov 'Poselndnite migive i grobit na Vasil Levski' v sektsiyata za srednovekovna arkheolgiia na Arkheolog-

The discussion itself lasted two hours and heard the opinions of fifteen participants: nine archeologists, two historians, one architect, one anthropologist, a conservationist and a literary scholar. It opened with Mikhailov’s statement, in which he argued for the harmfulness of Khaitov’s book, and in an amazing tirade, called on censorship by scholars:

It would not be exaggerated to say that such low quality books, which increase scholarly mediocrity,<sup>232</sup> have to be carefully and timely screened by specialists and not allowed to be published. And if [such books] do manage to appear because of negligence, they should be discarded just like this happens in industry, and the authors should be forced to give back their honoraria.<sup>233</sup>

Most of the speakers addressed not the factual aspects of the controversy, but stressed Khaitov’s disrespect and the harm he had inflicted on the archeological profession: “Comrade Khaitov is a famous

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icheskiia institute pri BAN,” *Vekove* 6 (1985), 77–9. Stanilov also insinuated that upon being invited by Ovcharov to take the floor, Khaitov allegedly said threateningly, “I will answer where needed!” (79) Thankfully, there is the stenogram of the meeting, at which Ovcharov says: “We are finishing our work. We still have two suggestions. Khaitov is not going to take the floor.” At which Kahitov responds: “No, I will not take the floor. The time is too short... However, I will deposit all my remarks here at your Scientific Council as well as at the Committee for Culture.” He also promised the institute to give them a copy of the taped discussion.

232 The idiomatic phrase in Bulgarian is “the gray current in science.”

233 *BAN volume*, 143. In *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 15, Khaitov maintains that the Archeological Institute insisted, with a letter to Balevski, that the Academy *de facto* confiscate the book from the bookstores. I have not seen this letter and cannot vouch for the exact wording, but, according to Khaitov, it was only after the Academy did not act accordingly, that the Archeological Institute sent a letter to the Central Committee, dated November 18, 1985, asking that Khaitov’s book should be discussed at the academy. This is corroborated by the text of another letter, No. 1429 of the archive of the Archeological Institute of December 18, 1985, and sent to the Central Committee with a copy to Balevski, with the signatures of the Director Angelov and the Party Secretary Gergova. It asked “urgently” that “the second edition of Khaitov’s book should be stopped” and that a discussion at BAN should be held with the participation of all relevant institutions: the Historical and Archeological Institutes of the Academy of Sciences, the university and the Military-Historical Museum.

Bulgarian writer and journalist but he shows total disrespect for our milieu” (Stanislav Stanilov); “According to me, with his writer’s talent, N. Khaitov not only has slandered our section, our institute, and through them the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, but he also has manipulated the Bulgarian reader” (Liudmila Doncheva); “Khaitov stirs public opinion against the Bulgarian archeological science and this foments doubts about its competence, it discredits its prestige nationally and internationally” (letter of 17 archeologists).<sup>234</sup> This was the most frequent motive and it reappeared again and again both at this, as well as later meetings, and has been the dominant complaint against Khaitov despite his equally frequent protestations that he was not generalizing about the whole discipline.<sup>235</sup>

Probably the most pathetic speaker was the historian Tsvetana Pavlovska. While her intervention was not logically consistent and articulate, a few snippets can give sufficient impression of the general atmosphere at the meeting. It also squarely addresses the issue of the sites of production of historical knowledge. Pavlovska pointed out the enormous danger emanating from Khaitov’s book. It had reached deep into the public and she had had many conversations with readers, since

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234 BAN volume, 156, 158. The letter is part of the materials sent by Diana Gergova to Balevski with a cover letter No. 1429 of the Archeological Institute, dated December 18, 1985.

235 At times Khaitov’s protestations were disingenuous given a number of pronouncements of the following sort: “There is another alternative, namely that archeology’s authority is no less threatened if it pronounces that Levski’s grave is not in this church without real proofs, and thus takes away the possibility to rehabilitate the Bulgarians from the charge that they have left the Apostle of Freedom in the criminals’ graveyard out of fear! (As some historians and archeologists maintain).” (*BAN volume*, 172, *Aferata*, 28). On the other hand, Khaitov always insisted that “archeology is a system of research methods and accumulated knowledge, and to accuse it is like accusing chemistry, physics, or mathematics. It is quite another issue that one or another archeologist can make mistakes while basing himself on archeological science” (*BAN volume*, 193). In another instance, commenting on Stancheva’s manner of argumentation, he wrote that even in journalism, let alone, in scholarship, it is not enough to stand behind a version; one had to prove one’s stand: “If it goes on like that, I think that the scholarly reputation of some contemporary archeologists (I am not speaking of the archeological discipline as a whole) is really confronted with a real, though at present little recognized danger.” (*Aferata s groba*, 1997, 29).

she herself was a specialist on Levski.<sup>236</sup> Commenting on the historical treatment of the materials in the book, she exclaimed:

What is this? Journalism, history?... In the first 76 pages he totally deheroicizes Levski, he creates a Levski according to his preference in the image of a Christian protomartyr, he imagines him in shackles, bent, crying and what not. Another thing. Karavelov, whose 150th anniversary we are celebrating now is called a provocateur... What gives you the right to do that?... We have to seek moral and ethical responsibility [from Khaitov] for the way he allows himself to call our great national revolutionary Karavelov.<sup>237</sup>

236 At the time of the discussion, Pavlovska had published one book on the armaments of the rebels during the liberation struggles (*Problemata za viorūzhavane na vīstanicheskite sili v bīlgarskoto natsionalno-revoliutsionno dvizhenie, 1869–1876*, Sofia, 1978). She subsequently published two books on Levski (*Vasil Levski i vīutreshnata revolūtsionna organizatsiia*, Sofia, 1993; and *Vasil Levski nachelo na Bīlgarskiia revolūtsionen komitet v Bīlgarsko*, Sofia, 2001) as well as another two books on the period.

237 Khaitov interjected here that he had not called Karavelov a provocateur, and several voices began shouting he had. They were not right. The fact is that in his attempt to reconstruct Levski’s last moments, Khaitov tried to imagine what Levski might have thought when he saw at the trial the whole documentation of the Central Committee from Bucharest. We know today, he argued, but Levski didn’t at the time, that Karavelov had given the archive to be hidden by a man he trusted, the Serbian diplomatic agent, and that the correspondence was taken by the Romanian secret police and handed to the Turks. Levski, Khaitov reasoned, could have only thought of two options: either the Romanian police had searched Karavelov’s house and had confiscated the documents or “Karavelov was what in our days is designated by the word agent provocateur, a traitor.” (Khaitov, *Grobīt*, 1987, 57–8). In a word Khaitov never actually accused Karavelov of betrayal but said this could have been Levski’s conjecture which made him desperate and sad in his last moments.

The information about the fate of the archive Khaitov had read in Undzhiev, 1054–5. Undzhiev specified that the Lovech archive had been given to Karavelov by Marin Poplukanov. When Karavelov fled to Belgrade in the aftermath of the arrests and during the Sofia trial, he asked his wife Nataliia to transfer the archive to the house of Vase Zhivanovich, the Serbian agent and secretary of the Serbian government, a personal friend and Bulgarophile. It was already kept in his attic when the Romanian police searched Karavelov’s house. Turkish and Romanian spies bribed Dzhuro, Vase Zhivanovich’s dissolute nephew, took hold of the archive and sent it to Sofia. However, Undzhiev notes that the archive has not been discovered yet.

I would advise comrade Khaitov not to deal with problems he does not understand. He has no idea about archeology and this became clear. But he [also] has no idea about Levski. A tearful Levski who writes threatening letters, the man who proclaims revolutionary terror in order to gather means to strengthen the internal revolutionary organization, a topic I am investigating already ten years since this is my planned research...

Levski at the gallows. He suddenly stops being Levski. He becomes a hierodeacon, he prays with tears in his eyes... Who is this Levski? A child, a student will not recognize your Levski, comrade Khaitov, even with 300 graves.<sup>238</sup>

Khaitov's response to Pavlovska was magisterial:

The strange thing is that Pavlovska, despite being a professional historian, insists on describing Levski not according to the primary sources but as she would have it. I would like to ask her why we should be silent about the fact that Levski's hands were in shackles when it is a much repeated fact that he was brought to the gallows in shackles and in chains. And why would he not be bent and worn out when the contemporaries saw him so? Why should we keep his tearful eyes as a secret when the last person who looked him in the eyes says so? Pavlovska evidently does not like this portrayal because it does not correspond to her athletic image of the

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This narrative was recently questioned by Krumka Sharova, "Istoričeskoto značenie na političeskite razkritiia v Bŭlgariia prez esenta na 1872 i nachaloto na 1873 g.," in *Po pŭtia na bezsmŭrtieto ot Kŭkrina do Sofia. Sbornik ot dokladi posveteni na 120-godišninata ot gibelta na Apostola*, Veliko Tŭrnovo: VITAL, 1993, 24. She maintains that this information was based on K. Tuleškov but it is not confirmed. On the contrary, the protocols of the Ottoman court nowhere mention that they have put their hands on the archives of the Central Committee, but that a great number of proclamations, programs, correspondence, and receipts were confiscated during the arrests of the Orkhaniie Committee, the Teteven Committee, and at the time of Levski's arrest. Thus, Sharova convincingly concludes that the Bucharest archive was not betrayed. The point of this lengthy note is solely to give an example of the way information was twisted during the discussions, the high stakes and the impossibility for a calm and civilized exchange of ideas.

238 *BAN* volume, 159–60.

Apostle but this is no reason to demand from the others to picture him as Archangel Michael with wings and a sword in hand.<sup>239</sup>

Khaitov also directly addressed the issue of professional competence and the juxtaposition of professional historians and archeologists to writers: “Why should the dilettantes (the writers) be opposed to the historians and archeologists when it is clear that historical science can ultimately fulfill its social goals only with the help of the writers, when history becomes epos, and historical knowledge becomes an ennobling emotion.”<sup>240</sup>

He summarized the debates of September 14, 1985 as “more of an exorcism rather than an authentic scientific debate” and he felt confirmed in his belief in the existence of a professional cabal of which he had accused the Medieval Section in his book.

The debate over my book on Levski’s grave at the section for medieval archeology was characterized by the total denouncement of my work as offensive, harmful, untenable, but no one touched upon the key questions that can solve the problem: the position of the two holes under the limbs of Skeleton No. 95, the hole in the ancient wall and the so called anthropological expertise. (I do not count the statements of the immediate participants St. Mikhailov, G. Dzhingov and Dr. Petır Boev). No one directed a single critical remark towards professor Mikhailov despite the many leads in my book to his obvious errors... The discussion on September 14 reminded more of an exorcism rather than of an authentic scientific debate.<sup>241</sup>

The polemic brilliance of Khaitov and the pitiful behavior of his opponents should not leave the impression of a black-and-white duel between unprincipled knaves with vested interests and a quixotic hero. For one, there was a genuinely held perception among the archeologists that Khaitov had a blessing from above and this accordingly affected their behavior. In addition, conspiracy theories were not the figment only of Khaitov’s imagination; they were a general preferred explanatory device in the less than transparent atmosphere which was

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239 Khaitov, *Grobıt*, 1987, 59–60.

240 *BAN volume*, 194.

241 *BAN volume*, 180.

characteristic of late socialism. A recent retrospective assessment of the atmosphere by Diana Gergova illustrates this aptly:

At the time that the press began publishing Khaitov's ideas and his books began coming out in a circulation that was unheard of in these days, I was, as you well know, a naive party secretary but a stubborn one. Not a single newspaper was willing to publish the responses written by my colleagues or whenever they did, these were only brief commentaries unable to counter the detailed descriptions of Khaitov. At that point, and with the support of all our colleagues, we turned for help to the Central Committee—nowadays this may seem strange—petitioning that we should be allowed to publish responses and commentaries and that a real discussion should take place. We did not ask the Central Committee to pronounce us to be the right ones, we asked for a discussion. Each time there was an opinion in our favor, a new stagnation would set in and everyone kept quiet. So, at least to me it became clear that it had been decided very high up to turn Khaitov's idea into a common national cause. The latter turn of events had several directions, very interesting indeed, from a scholarly, ethical, and especially political angle, and the uncovering of otherwise discreet mechanisms of manipulation. I somehow think that it all had to do with the renaming process.<sup>242</sup>

In another reminiscence she reconstructed the concrete events as she remembered them:

I will write in the way that the events reached me. One of the first telling moments were the public lectures that Khaitov had started giving. With several of our colleagues, among them the future minister of war Kolio Daskalov, we went to one of Khaitov's lectures, I think on Karnigradska or a neighboring street. The gist of his talk was that, if the Greeks were in our shoes, they would have long identified a place for Levski's grave, because they were real patriots. The Bulgarian archeologists are no Bulgarians at all. Interestingly, after his talk, the floor was given to only one well prepared individual, while my colleagues who asked to speak, were driven away by some

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242 Personal email from August 3, 2000.

heavy-set types, and any discussion was foreclosed from the outset. As far as the atmosphere at the institute was concerned, you know I was then party secretary, and aware of the endless attempts of my colleagues who had researched the problem, to publish explanations and responses to Khaitov’s assertions in the press. Since this would not happen, together with Acad. Angelov and a large group, we wrote several petitions to all party authorities to allow the publication of the archeologists’ opinions. Nobody has asked the Central Committee to take a decision that we were right.<sup>243</sup>

Recently, the posthumous memoirs of one of the leading Bulgarian Byzantinologists, Dimitir Angelov—who at the time was director of the Archeological Institute—were published. Among these memoirs, there is a fragment dedicated exclusively to Khaitov and the BAN debates.<sup>244</sup> While the fragment is not dated, it was clearly written in the 1990s and the fact that the compilers included it in the final publications, bespeaks the weight they accord it. Angelov repeatedly pictures Khaitov as a privileged stooge of the regime and the archeologists as its innocent victims. The arrogance of Khaitov is to be understood only because “he was leaning on the party-totalitarian machine,” while today, after 1989, he attempts to present himself as an innocent victim of “this awful totalitarian machine” (clearly Angelov’s favorite label). Khaitov was creating the legend (and according to Angelov not only legend) that “the First” (Todor Zhivkov) was supporting him in his endeavor to prove the Levski reburial thesis. Angelov’s fragment is not new or interesting as far as the argumentation is concerned: it is a rather faithful reiteration of the general arguments and feelings raised by the archeologists before: that they were unjustly accosted by a well-connected dilettante who had assembled around himself a group of quasi-experts and was playing on the nationalist feelings of the party and administrative bureaucracy; and that pressure had been exerted upon the archeologists and their defense was barred from the mass media. What is remarkable about the piece is simply the fact that it conveys the deep and sincere conviction of Angelov about his rendition of the events. No moment of hesitation, no second thought.

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243 Personal email from October 8, 2000.

244 Dimitir Angelov, *Spomeni*, Sofia: Pradigma, 2004, 168–72.

Angelov mentions that he normally writes his memoirs “not as a simple enumeration of facts but, rather, in the form of ‘impressions,’ ‘visions’ and ‘evaluations.’” Indeed, because had he mentioned facts, then surely he would have remembered that he had authored and signed the infamous memo of June 6, 1986, in which the scholarly debate was made hostage to ideological contingencies with the direct mention of the renaming process against the Turks. He also would have remembered that he himself was the co-signatory of a letter to “the First,” in which the argument against placing a plaque at the church was made, among a host of other defensive arguments, also on the basis of the fact that “by linking Levski to the church, are we not going to pay a high price that would denigrate our efforts at atheist education?”<sup>245</sup> While posturing in his memoirs as a non-nationalist and accusing Khaitov of the sin, Angelov had no compunction in signing a letter which was threatening Zhivkov that if he were to endorse this discrediting of the historical discipline, “this can only please our ill-wishers in Ankara, Skopje, Belgrade and elsewhere.” It is, of course, ridiculous to read the complaints of a host of party members (among them Angelov himself alongside three members or candidate members of the Central Committee) about Khaitov’s omnipotence in the higher party echelons. Most importantly, the letter to Zhivkov against Khaitov worked, and the placement of the plaque was frozen. All of this, however, are facts, and since *de mortuis, aut bene, aut nihil*, let us assume that at a certain age facts are simply displaced by “impressions,” “visions” and “evaluations.”

But Khaitov himself harbored the same complaints. He actually deposited two memos enumerating the publications in the press and exposing the two sides of the debate in 1987 and 1988. There were altogether 20 articles and one TV show, written by archeologists and historians, who espoused the official line against the reburial.<sup>246</sup>

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245 See the text of the letter, dated May 4, 1987, in Appendix III.

246 These articles were written by 13 authors: Ivan Sotirov (2) in *Muzei i pametnitsi na kulturata* 2 (1987) and *Otechestven front*, March 24, 1987; Stansilav Stanilov (1) in *Vekove* 5 (1987); Georgi Dzhingov (4) in *Sep-temvori* (Stara Zagora), June 27, 1987, *Muzei i pametnitsi na kulturata* 3 (1987), *Ludogorie*, June 14, 1987, *Materials of the Second Congress of Bulgarian Studies*, Sofia, 1987; Dimitir Kosev (1) in *Istoricheski pregled* 10 (1987); Nikolai Genchev (1) in *ABV*, May 27, 1987; Doino Doinov (1) in the TV show *Vsiaka nedelia*, February 22, 1987; Khristo Khristov (1),

Against this, Khaitov listed 13 articles, which he had sent to different publication offices, and of which only two were published. Of the remaining eleven, six were rejected, and five never received an answer.<sup>247</sup> As a whole, the archeologists repeated their argumentation avoiding to address the objections of Khaitov’s team. However, all in all, the exchange between the two sides after the BAN debates, skewed as it may somewhat have been numerically in favor of the archeologists, was articulated in a scholarly tone and with a genuine desire to advance the factual knowledge and reach some well supported conclusions.<sup>248</sup>

To doubt that both sides in the debate sincerely believed that they were operated from above is to forget and deny the pervasive amount of manipulability under socialism. It was, of course, often a matter of perception. Journalists, in particular, were extremely sensitive to per-

*Chitalishte* 7 (1987); Dimitir Ovcharov (3) in *Arkheologia* 1 (1988), *Vekove* 6 (1988) and *ABV*, November 29, 1988; Petir Vilev (2) in *Arkheologia* 1 (1988) and *Orbita*, May 28, 1988; Stamen Mikhailov (2) in *Vekove* 2 (1988) and *Literaturen Front* 46 (1988); Vladimir Topencharov (1) in *Otechestven Front*, March 1, 1988; Ilcho Dimitrov (1) in *ABV*, 4 January 26, 1988, 8; Georgi Tsarev (1) in *Istoricheski pregled* 3 (1989). Khaitov sent the two memos with an accompanying letter to Iordan Iotov, with a copy to BAN, on February 10, 1989 (Archive of BAN). All rejected articles were published in 1997 in his *Aferata s groba na Levski*.

247 The published ones appeared in *Otechestven front*, March 24, 1987 and in *Literaturen Front* 44 (1988). *Muzei i pametnitsi na kulturata*, *ABV*, *Arkheologia*, *Chitalishte*, *Istoricheski pregled*, *Vekove*, and the TV rejected his materials. His one response to Kosev’s review was eventually published but supplied by Kosev’s counter-response (*Istoricheski pregled* 7 [1989]). Copies of Khaitov’s memos are in the personal archive of N. Todorov, now at BAN.

248 An example of such gentlemanly exchange was the article of the historian Ivan Sotirov, “Istinata triabva da se tirsì po nauchen pìt,” *Otechestven Front*, No. 12618, March 24, 1987, 4. Sotirov shed doubts on the reburial thesis by arguing that the “Sv. Petka” church of the legend was a different one. Khaitov’s response convincingly refuted this objection (“Istinata ne se kazva, a se dokazva,” *Otechestven Front*, No. 12646, May 1, 1987) but the whole exchange was an example of proper scholarly debate. Ovcharov’s article in *Vekove* 6 (1988) (“Istinata niama dve litsa”) also falls in this category as does the interview with Nikolai Genchev in *Zemedelsko zname*, April 3, 1987. As an exponent of the opponents’ thesis, special mention should be given to the article of the architect Neli Nikolova, “Otnovo za groba na Levski,” *Arkhitektura* 3 (1990), 48–9 (but written in February 1989).

ceived trends in the upper echelons and the extent of self-censorship is staggering. But precisely because of this, one can suspect—judging from the amount of publications emanating from Khaitov in 1985 and 1986, and then the reversal of the trend in 1987 and 1988—that this may have been the result either of direct or perceived hints to the mass media. In any case, it hardly had anything to do with strategic questions like the renaming process (as insinuated in Diana Gergova’s recollections) which were the unchanging political framework of the whole period until 1989. It is symptomatic, however, that Khaitov in none of his numerous memoranda mentioned anything about the renaming process, while the archeologists directly, distastefully and sycophantically alluded to “the revival process” in the Angelov-Gergova signed memorandum of June 6, 1986 analyzed above.

To recognize Khaitov’s polemical gifts does not mean that his manner of debate and argumentation was above criticism. Sometimes his assertions would be forced and there are a number of instances that shed doubt on Khaitov’s meticulousness and sometimes even credibility. Thus, in his latest publication he appropriately reproduced the whole text of the article in *Trud* from May 17, 1956, most likely authored by Giaurov, which summarized the general belief about Levski’s reburial. In his analysis, however, Khaitov never mentions that the “prediction” suggested two possible sites in the church: either in the western part near the narthex or in the eastern part in the sanctuary. For someone who trusts Khaitov, and would not necessarily double-check the newspaper article, the reigning impression is that there is only one version. As Khaitov summarized it: “Thirteen days after [the newspaper article], on May 30, 1956 at 9 a.m., the diggers stumbled upon a 172 cm long male skeleton [...] at the exact same place suggested by *Mir* on March 6, 1937.”<sup>249</sup> This is simply incorrect. The 1937 *Mir* recollection of Maria Poppavlova specified the altar indeed, but not the “exact same place” to the left of the altar stone, which was suggested only by her daughter Anastasia Bokova in June, 1956, after the discovery of the skeleton. And were we to believe Khaitov’s logical conjecture that the author of the *Trud* article was Giaurov, then it is clear that before the discovery of May 30–31, 1956, he accepted as viable both versions: the narthex and the altar.

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249 Khaitov, *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 4.

A similar case of “gently” misleading information occurs with the analysis of the 1937 Report of the Civilian Committee for the Search of the Apostle’s Grave and Bones. The Report begins with the following clumsy (even in the Bulgarian original) phrase: “Given that several years ago some individuals commented and indicated that on the left side, immediately in front of the altar of the church ‘Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska’ on Maria Louisa Street, in which church served and was buried the priest Takia in the yard, under a marble plaque were buried, after the Liberation, the bones of the Apostle by the then living priest Takia, we visited the church.” This document, nowadays in the collection of the Archives of the Military Museum, is published in Khaitov’s documentary collection under the title “Levski’s grave—on the left side, immediately in front of the altar of the church ‘Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska’ on Maria Louisa Street.” The title is a verbatim excerpt from the opening phrase. Given what the reader already knows about the discovery of the skeleton in 1956 in the left side of the altar space, the Report no doubt emerges as yet another exact prediction of the later discovery. What Khaitov does not comment on (but has accurately reproduced in the document) is the next sentence: “The aforementioned [marble] plaque is missing, as is this whole part [of the church], since it was destroyed during the construction of a revenue earning religious building.” The only logical conclusion from this latter phrase is that the writers of the Report were indicating a space *outside* the main church building, in the yard in front of the altar space and to its left.

One can compare this description to a 1956 photograph of the church (taken immediately before the excavations and the building of the Central Department Store—TSUM), which would correspond to the immediate prewar topography of the district. There is a narrow street on the left side of the church with high apartment buildings, before they were pulled down to open the space for the future TSUM. Since the photograph is taken so that one can see the whole right side of the church as well as the apsis, that is the outer walls of the altar space, the left side is invisible. Yet, judging from similar constructions near churches even today, one can imagine that the so called “revenue earning religious building” to the left could have been a little hut-like structure for the sale of candles, icons, calendars and other church artifacts.<sup>250</sup>

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250 Ibid., 62–4; fig. 2, fig. 10 (between pp. 73 and 74).

There are other instances where Khaitov avoids the mention and analysis of inconvenient information, although he never falsifies it. Such is the case of the testimony of Khristo Khambarkov's son, mentioned in Maria Poppavlova's central 1937 account as the sole performer of the heroic reburial. Khambarkov testified for Prof. Giaurov on June 12, 1956, the very next day after Anastasia Bokova's recollection of the events. At that time he was 82, and he recalled in great detail his father's professional and political activities, and his personal acquaintance with Levski. He testified that his father was present at both Levski's confession, and later at his hanging. Yet, at the end of his testimony he adds: "I cannot remember what happened to the body of Vasil Levski." It is quite inconceivable that the father would have mentioned details about Levski's confession and hanging, and would have taken the secret of the reburial to his grave. But even if this is conceivable, and even if there is a good explanation, it is symptomatic that Khaitov does not find it necessary to provide it.

At times Khaitov is unnecessarily pedantic as, for example, when he over interprets the phrase in Dzhingov's diary that the bones were "partly" under the church wall. He reasons that since they were partly under, this would mean that they were also partly over. This is sheer linguistic pettiness: it could be read simply as meaning that part of the skeleton was excavated, that it was in the open, and another part was under the wall, in other words, hidden.<sup>251</sup> Khaitov's interpretation of one of the published nineteenth-century marginalia about construction works at the church in 1802—in the sense that the church had been thoroughly demolished and built anew at the beginning of the nineteenth century—is also forced, according to me.<sup>252</sup> He rightly complains about the elitist claims of the archeologists to be professionals, but he makes the same "under the belt" insinuations about Mikhailov and Stancheva that they were not real archeologists but trained as classicists, and therefore not professionals: "Regrettably, the bones of Levski landed in the hands of two semi-professionals, but with good party standing."<sup>253</sup> Finally, as already described, there is his overall ten-

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251 *Ibid.*, 5.

252 *Ibid.*, 5, 34–5.

253 *Ibid.*, 236–7.

dency to look for conspiracies.<sup>254</sup> As already shown earlier, after 1989 in particular, they went rather wild.

All in all, however, and quite apart from his rhetorical abilities, Khaitov succeeded in putting forward quite a few convincing scholarly reassessments and propositions, not to speak of recovering needed material and exposing inconsistencies. It has to be said here that the name Khaitov stands often for the whole team which included a number of *bona fide* specialists. It is exclusively to the credit of the Khaitov team and his personal dogged stubbornness that the photographs of the excavations, as well as additional material from the archive of the Archeological Institute, were “discovered.” It was also his team and especially Mikhail Benchev’s analysis that exposed the mishandling of the photographs by Boiadzhiev.<sup>255</sup>

It is Khaitov’s personal achievement to spot and then expose the diary of Dzhingov as a later copy. During the BAN debates, as well as to this day, the archeologists were adamant that Dzhingov’s diary be considered the only authentic document reflecting the excavations of 1956. Already at the debates Khaitov pointed out inconsistencies in the entries that most likely indicated that the notes were taken down *not in situ* but written up later. He went so far as to speak of a “manipulated copy of an unknown original.”<sup>256</sup> Dzhingov categorically denied this at the debates, and even wrote an indignant letter (dated February 18, 1987) to the Central Committee of the Communist Party protesting Khaitov’s allegations and calling on a criminal expertise of the di-

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254 A pertinent example is his accusation that the legs of Skeleton No. 95 were deliberately left unexcavated, after it was clear to everyone that their position was the key to the dating of the skeleton. This, according to Khaitov, could not be the result of “ignorance” or “neglect.” “The legs of Skeleton No. 95 were left intact so that there would be no proof that these could be Levski’s bones” (*BAN volume*, 203). Had the archeologists really wanted to destroy any evidence of Levski, they would have dug, found the lower bones, falsified the documentation and “lost” everything, as they did the upper skeleton. The fact that they did not dig further is actually a good proof that they either really believed at the moment that there were no bones under the wall or were afraid to destabilize the building, and/or were convinced that this was an earlier skeleton and the Levski legend was nonsense. In the end, the unexcavated bones were destroyed only in the 1970s restoration works.

255 *BAN volume*, 346–7.

256 *Grobût na Vasil Levski*, 1987, 85–7.

ary. He ended his letter with a call to “fight for the moral purity of socialist society” and “the importance to show the Bulgarian people the truth about Levski’s grave, so as not to turn a random grave dating from many centuries ago into a national holy place.”<sup>257</sup>

Then, in a surprising interview in a provincial paper on June 26, 1987 Dzhingov mentioned that the original diary was part of his personal archive. Always on the watch, Khaitov involved the Committee for State and People’s Control. Dzhingov refused to let go of the original but deposited copies to the committee and to the archive of the institute. There are discrepancies between the original notes and the ones handed in as originals at the debates, and they appear indeed only after May 30, the day of the discovery of Skeleton No. 95. Dzhingov tried to explain them away, but at least in one particular case the difference is flagrant. The original notes contained the coordinates in centimeters of the skeleton vis-à-vis the adjacent walls and the altar stone, and these undoubtedly attested to the fact that the skull was in closest proximity to the altar stone and “touched” its masonry. That it could not survive intact had it been in place before the building of the church is quite obvious. These coordinates were missing from the sketches included in the copy of the diary!<sup>258</sup> While Khaitov’s conclusions based on these discrepancies are too categorical and they cannot prove his contention that these are Levski’s bones, there is no doubt that the diary was finessed in line with Mikahilov’s version. Let us not forget that Dzhingov’s diary was deposited by Mikhailov at the archive of the Archeological Institute only in 1981, two years after Bobchev came in the open with his version of Levski’s reburial and the year in which the first roundtable at *Rabotnichesko delo* was held. Khaitov’s meticulousness in reading and exposing the inconsistencies in the archeologists’ and historians’ positions were characterized by them throughout as petty, arrogant, and the efforts of an amateurish sleuth (one of the archeologists even called him a bulldog)<sup>259</sup> but, if anything, they are a good example of profes-

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257 The full text of Dzhingov’s letter can be seen in *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 200–1. On Khaitov’s earlier analyses of the diary, see *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 219–40.

258 *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 80–2, 134–8. The sketches from both copies are on 135–6.

259 Ovcharov in the debates of September 14, 1985 (*Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 46). Khaitov’s response was that he preferred his bulldog’s attitude to the doves’ mutual billing and cooing between the archeologists.

sionalism that real scholars not only should aspire to but must possess if they have even the slightest claims to be professionals.

What is most exasperating is that the archeologists avoided addressing directly Khaitov's concrete facts but either repeated their own version or retreated in a general pose of offended professionalism. Here is one of the few times that Mikhailov attempts to explain how No.95 could have remained intact: "This is a question we cannot answer, because we do not know where exactly, for what reason and at what depth the digging [of the foundations] took place. The important thing is not some such unknown details but the global fact that during the construction this area had been dug up, at which time some of the skeletons there were damaged."<sup>260</sup> This totally chaotic and illogical circular mental flow does not reflect too favorably on the scholarly pedigree of its author. Mikhailov presents the global fact that skeletons must have been damaged but he refuses, and is impotent, to explain the "unknown detail" about the intactness of No. 95. Buchinski may have been a cheat but he surely demonstrated a much sounder scholarly zeal or simple intellectual curiosity when he informed himself about how one used to build in the past.<sup>261</sup>

One of the important issues on which Mikhailov's theory for the existence of an ancient necropolis under the church was based, hinged on the claim that there had been a burial under the altar stone. However, the only mention of this burial comes from Dzhingov's diary,<sup>262</sup> and it was convincingly demonstrated by Khaitov that the diary was not taken on the spot but was a later edited exposition. The entry came on June 9, at the time when the debate was at its hottest and when the discovery of such a burial was incredibly welcome to Mikhailov. There is not a single photograph to corroborate the find, and architect Bobchev flatly denied that the altar stone had been lifted at all. All of these counterarguments are simply waved off as unprofessional. The real apotheosis of Mikhailov's professional hubris comes in his conclusion:

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<sup>260</sup> *BAN volume*, 259. All of Mikhailov's memo, deposited on February 26, 1986, is on pages 240–69.

<sup>261</sup> *BAN volume*, 122.

<sup>262</sup> *BAN volume*, 43. The entry is very brief and says: "The altar stone was removed. In the humus we found stones and pieces of old tiles and bones. Under them part of a skeleton from a regular burial."

One is amazed at the courage of a writer, a specialist in forestry, to oppose a whole scholarly institute, to question its competence, to teach the archeologists lessons, and instruct them in dating and digging... Following his method, I should teach him, say, about the vegetation of the Vitosha Mountain... No, I am not allowed to do this, just as Khaitov is not allowed to pronounce himself on my archeological excavations, because each discipline has its fine points which are not always accessible to the non-specialist.<sup>263</sup>

Nor was this the only dismissal of Khaitov on “professional” grounds as illustrated already numerous times.<sup>264</sup> It is thus instructive and hugely uncomfortable on account both of the historians and the archeologists to read Khaitov’s justified admonitions about scholarly ethics. *A propos* Kosev’s curt dismissal of the reburial proofs as “unconvincing,” Khaitov wrote: “In a scholarly debate it is easy to say something; it is difficult to prove it. But it is the duty of both small and great scholars to prove what they are saying.”<sup>265</sup>

His accusation of professional bigotry at the time of the meeting of the Medieval Section at the Archeological Institute is especially powerful:

The discussion about Levski’s grave demonstrated the archeologists’ complete intolerance to any kind of criticism... But who are they to

263 *BAN volume*, 268.

264 An illustration of the excessively patronizing tone of the archeologists is their common statement on Khaitov’s book from February 7, 1986: “The training, the self-education and the professional expertise—both the personal experience as well as the collective experience which is handed down in the work process or in the discussions in publications—distinguish the judging abilities of the specialist archeologist from the ones of the interested non-specialist. In N. Khaitov’s book the analysis and the conclusions based on the archeological evidence and facts are these of a non-professional and this is quite natural. Some of the ones who have collaborated with him in one capacity or another in his debates with the historians and the archeologists, are non-professionals too. The specialists that Khaitov managed to attract more than 20 years after the discovery of grave No. 95 for the sake [of preparing] different graphs and sketches used to buttress his thesis with, are not archeologists either. Khaitov should not be considered guilty of unprofessionalism, if he did not pretend that his analysis of the facts and his conclusions are better than the ones of the specialists.” (*BAN volume*, 213)

265 Khaitov, *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 43.

want to stay above any criticism and why do they want such an unseemly privilege? Or are they afraid that their excavations might be criticized tomorrow as Mikhailov’s are being criticized today? And if so, what is wrong with it? What would be wrong is precisely the reverse: the feudalization of an institution because of lack of criticism. Without criticism there can be no real science.<sup>266</sup>

It has to be admitted, of course, that once the debates went off on a bitter acrimonious track, they had a momentum of their own, and a psychological incompatibility built up from which there could be no retreat. In the end, however, the real bitterness of the debate is explicable not in terms of this psychological incompatibility. In fact, it is remarkable that behind the scenes some of the archeologists involved in the debate developed if not friendly, at least “gentlemanly relations” with Khaitov.<sup>267</sup> Developing his understanding of the political, Carl Schmitt posited that “the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy.” He warned, however that “the enemy is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity.”<sup>268</sup>

Khaitov may have been hated by some for his personal arrogance, but the “political hatred” that he engendered stemmed mostly from the totally novel claim, revolutionary and unacceptable for the archeologists, that the production of history is not the prerogative only of institutionalized scholarship. This is not necessarily something that haunts only the Bulgarian scene:

Debates about the Alamo, the Holocaust, or the significance of U.S. slavery involve not only professional historians but ethnic and religious leaders, political appointees, journalists, and various associations within civil society as well as independent citizens, not all of whom are activists. This variety of narrators is one of many indica-

266 Ibid., 61–2. Also *BAN volume*, 195.

267 Phrase of Ovcharov, personal communication.

268 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, transl. George Schwab, with comments by Leo Strauss, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976, 26, 28.

tions that theories of history have a rather limited view of the field of historical production. They grossly underestimate the size, the relevance, and the complexity of the overlapping sites where history is produced, notably outside academia.<sup>269</sup>

It takes, however, a historian of great talent and, at the same time, humility like Trouillot to acknowledge graciously that “the thematic awareness of history is not activated only by recognized academics. We are all amateur historians with various degrees of awareness about our production. We also learn history from similar amateurs. Universities and university presses are not the only loci of production of the historical narrative.”<sup>270</sup> Trouillot rightly pointed out that most people learn their first history lessons through media, celebrations, site and museum visits, movies, national holidays, and primary school books. The views they pick up from here are often challenged and subsequently modified by scholars. Moreover, “as history continues to solidify professionally, as historians become increasingly quick at modifying their targets and refining their tools for investigation, the impact of academic history increases, even if indirectly. But let us not forget how fragile, how limited, and how recent that apparent hegemony may be.”<sup>271</sup>

Trouillot also acknowledged that because of the conventions of historical articulation and “by virtue of its professional claims, the guild cannot express political opinions as such—quite contrary, of course, to activists and lobbyists.” This often leads to the ironic situation that “the more important an issue for specific segments of civil society, the more subdued the interpretations of the facts offered by most professional historians.”<sup>272</sup> Indeed, the statements produced by most historians seem often bland and irrelevant, or as A. N. Wilson puts it: “historians rarely in their writing give the sensation of the drill touching the nerve.”<sup>273</sup> This explains why many who genuinely care about history often look for historical interpretations on the fringes or altogether outside of academia.

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269 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 19.

270 *Ibid.*, 19–20.

271 *Ibid.*, 20.

272 *Ibid.*, 21.

273 Quoted in A. J. A. Morris, “Touch the nerve,” *Times Literary Supplement*, January 21, 2005, 23.

This is the charitable look of an insider in the profession and, of course, many of us have been exasperated by the onslaught of historical journalism, let alone popularizing charlatans who have little patience with the rules of evidence and analysis. There is no doubt that Mikhailov and some of the other archeologists sincerely believed that they were caught in this no-win situation with the public. This feeling is particularly poignant in Mikhailov’s concluding statement at the debates where his tone reminds us of the frustrations of a not very good but licensed doctor practicing conventional medicine, and what he feels are encroachers from alternative medicine, essentially quacks, but with charisma and success.<sup>274</sup> After all, “by becoming a professional, a person set himself apart from the crowd and gained the ability, within his specialized field, to look beneath the surface appearances to the fundamental order of things.” There was an additional pleasant thought that “his expertise was an unselfish, even democratic, service to the community.”<sup>275</sup>

Unfortunately, real life complicates even these simple and, on the whole, believable oppositions. In 1979, when the breach in the social drama occurred, the popular daily *Pogled* published a lengthy article by a mathematician—Borislav Dimitrov. Titled “With simple numbers toward immortality,” this piece argued that simple numbers were ubiquitous in the Apostles’ life: the date and year of his birth and death, the years in which dramatic changes in his life occurred.<sup>276</sup> The mathematician extracted and ordered these numbers in elaborate diagrams which produced a score of symbolic dates from Bulgaria’s history. Numerology is an ancient human pastime and it is no surprise that the

274 *BAN volume*, 240–69. Mikhailov defends himself in particular from Khaitov’s accusations against his “monotonous-pathetic repetitions” by countering that the repetitions reflect that his arguments are steady and consistent. “As for the pathos, there is none in my writings, and this is not accepted in science. It is something typical for the journalistic and writers’ jargon.” (251)

275 Thomas Haskell, “Power to the Experts,” in Haskell, *Objectivity is not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 67.

276 Borislav Dimitrov, “With simple numbers toward immortality: some mathematical considerations about the life and activities of Vasil Levski,” *Pogled*, No. 53, December 31, 1979, 10. It is an immensely entertaining read, no matter that the accepted date of Levski’s death—February 19—is actually wrong, the correct one being February 18.

popular paper in its New Year's Eve edition was catering to an audience looking for "historical interpretations on the fringes of academia when not altogether outside it."<sup>277</sup> We can never be sure about the exact reception of the article by non-specialists but we are certain about its reception by specialists. In the same issue of *Pogled*, the editors printed a column "What the historians think" by three professors, two of whom were the widely accepted premier specialists on Levski: Ivan Undzhiev and Nikolai Genchev. The article was clearly sent to them in order to receive their imprimatur for publication. While cautiously worded, Undzhiev's response was utterly positive:

I read this research article with genuine interest. It is the first mathematical work on dates and events from the life of the Apostle. The author, with great love for Levski's figure, identifies curious coincidences of simple numbers in important vital dates both in Levski's life and in our history. The article does not solve problems, nor does it explain important issues from the life of this great figure. It simply emphasizes and synthesizes the unity of the numbers. And this is its contribution, the result of observation and thought. The article deserves attention, it evokes interest and thought and should be published.<sup>278</sup>

The aging Undzhiev died only a few days after this endorsement. His much younger colleague Nikolai Genchev wrote a much more energetic review:

This work evoked in me an uncommon interest. I had not expected that the life of the Apostle can be approached through the "lens" of numbers. The arithmetic regularities are amazing and inexplicable. Maybe mathematical models in historiography have not yet been really introduced, which explains why we, the "classical" historians, are surprised by the results of Borislav Dimitrov. I think that this research will be broadly utilized in lectures, schools, illustrations of monuments. I therefore warmly recommend its publication and popularization.

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277 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 21.

278 *Pogled*, No. 53, December 31, 1979, 11. All three opinions were published there.

The third opinion by Professor Ivan Ganev also lionized the piece as a contribution to the historical and mathematical disciplines. In addition, it made the pedagogical point that “if teachers of history embellish their lessons with the numerical data of this research, the students will be able to remember and understand better and easier the glorious and heroic past, in which Vasil Levski had lived, fought and given his life for Bulgaria’s liberty.”

Numerology had been of course, an *aide-de-mémoire* in medieval times and there was nothing wrong to step on such illustrious tradition but there was a certain world-upside-down quality to this page of *Pogled*, where three academics were endorsing an arcane arithmetic exercise and next to their column a fiction writer was publishing a short story under the title “Einsteinian celebrations.” Already the graphic design of the page posed the question of where and to whom science belonged. A few days later, on January 11, 1980, the even more popular satirical weekly *Stirshel* published a parody by the well-known satirist Petır Neznakomov titled “With simple numbers toward absurdity.”<sup>279</sup> He offered the funniest spoof of Dimitrov’s article, playing with dates of his own life. His parody ended with an appeal: “But enough! Let us give the word, as in the case of the article of Borislav Dimitrov, to the scholars.” Who are the scholars, who are the quacks?

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<sup>279</sup> Petır Neznakomov, “With simple numbers toward absurdity: some mathematical considerations about my life and activities,” *Stirshel*, 34, No. 1770, January 11, 1980, 2. The piece was from January 4.



## 6. Recognizing the Schism, or What Is Worse: Bad Professionals or Good Nationalists?

Already at the end of the BAN debates it was clear that a compromise, let alone a consensus, could not be reached between the two sides. While Khaitov's framing imagination may have taken him too far—both in the deployment of political conspiracies and in his patriotic claim that the church “Sv. Petka” may have served as a burial pantheon for freedom fighters<sup>280</sup>—his concrete analytical assault on the opposing version was devastating. It irrefutably demonstrated that the “professionals” had been anything but professional. The archeologists, on the other hand, although privately acknowledging mistakes, decided that even a partial concession would open a Pandora's box and publicly closed ranks behind the offended posture of professionalism. A reintegration à la Turner was impossible.<sup>281</sup> The existence of a schism was recognized by the debating parties but they worked hard to deny the other side a niche of existence, and concentrated their efforts on securing exclusive recognition by the political authorities.

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280 Khaitov, *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 348–9. Khaitov's assertion that “Sv. Petka” may have served as a “pantheon for the Bulgarians who perished from Ottoman despotism” was based on the fact that in the altar space there were also other irregular, according to him, burials, one of which was a solitary skull. This coincided with the information of Zakhari Stoianov that the priest Khristo Nikolov had been asked by the Turks to bury the head of Benkovski. While the place of this burial is unknown, Khaitov surmises it may have been the altar of “Sv. Petka” since it was the same priest who participated in the alleged reburial of Levski according to the later memoirs.

281 As already pointed out, in the final phase of the social drama Turner posits either reintegration of the disturbed social group or the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties. At the same time, Turner calls on close scrutiny of the “ordering of political relations which preceded the power struggle erupting into an observable social drama with that following the redressive phase” (“Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors,” 41–2).

At this stage of the debate, the archeologists were particularly active. Their first move was to suppress the publication of the debates' materials. This was all the more flagrant, as before and throughout the debates they had been appealing for a free press for all opinions. The director of the Institute Angelov, in particular, had welcomed the prospective publication in flowery terms at the concluding meeting.<sup>282</sup> In December, 1986, however, he sent a letter to Todorov stating that the materials should not be published before they were inspected, edited and approved by the Scientific Council of the Archeological Institute because they handled mostly archeological issues.<sup>283</sup> Todorov's response was that this was a documentary volume simply publishing the texts of the debates and therefore did not need the approval of the Archeological Institute. The archeologists then resorted to higher pressure. First, an official report was sent simultaneously to the secretary of the Central Committee Stoian Mikhailov and to the BAN President Angel Balevski, signed by the then director of the United Center for History, Mito Isusov. Isusov's first objection was that the volume had been prepared for print by V. Giorova, who had long served as the editor-in-chief of the BAN publishing house and was at present director of the "P. Beron" publishing house. Isusov thought she was not qualified to do the editing, since she had no historical education. Most of his letter was a litany against the onslaught of "dilettantes who attack science with dishonourable means" and not "honestly and objectively." Finally, Isusov accused Todorov of attempting to publish the volume "in complete breach of the publishing norms and traditions of BAN." He suggested that the volume be discussed by the most competent scholars at the United Center for History and only after that a decision about its publication should be taken. A little handwritten note appended to Isusov's report and addressed to Todorov's secretary Rumiana Radeva states: "Comrade Balevski ordered that the volume on Levski be held back."<sup>284</sup> On June 16, while Todorov was in Paris for

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282 *BAN volume*, 377–8.

283 Letter No. 1446 of December 30, 1986 in Archive of BAN, also published in *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 200.

284 The United Center for History comprised all institutions dealing with history, archeology, and folklore, both within the Academy of Sciences and the University, and was meant to coordinate the efforts of scholars dealing with the past. The letter of Isusov, N. 446-ED-11 of May 11, 1987, to Balevski with the handwritten resolution is in the Archives of BAN; the

a meeting of UNESCO, the manuscript was accordingly taken from the publishing house and sent to Doyno Doinov, the director of the State Archives.<sup>285</sup> An excerpt from Todorov's personal diary illustrates how he perceived the atmosphere around the issue of the publication he was preparing:

The historians have been activated to save the archeologists in a most unacceptable manner, with a campaign against Khaitov, with hooligan moves on the part of students. They exert pressure against the publication of the volume. Don't they understand that public opinion will explode in the end? It is impossible to lie endlessly. I called Velko Tonev and was categorical. At first, although hesitatingly, he supported the archeologists' thesis, clearly influenced by the strong pressure. After that he conceded that the truth is really sad and agreed that defending a lie with all possible means can only delay exposing it, but the later it is exposed, the more people it will compromise.

I don't know what they will decide, but I let him understand that I will not bend to pressure. I am ready to step off all my positions. The publication of the volume is the academy's, the historical science's and even the archeologists' last chance to come out of the swamp they are in. The initiative is in their hands but it has to go through a cleaning process by conceding the truth and mostly by acting accordingly.<sup>286</sup>

After Isusov's intervention, the temporary stopping of the publication and the "confiscation" of the manuscript, Todorov prepared a written response addressed to Jordan Iotov, the member of the Politburo who had been involved in greenlighting the above activities. He pointed out that the decision to publish all existing materials and the debates had been the result of a unanimous decision. Moreover, it had been sanc-

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identical one to Mikhailov is published in *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 201–2.

285 Khaitov, *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 329.

286 Todorov's personal diary for March 24, 1987, at which time he was hospitalized. Velko Tonev was then the person at the Central Committee responsible for the historical sciences. Todorov's diary is part of his personal archive at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and has been recently published: Nikolai Todorov, *Dnevnik, 1966–1998*, ed. by Virban Todorov, 2 volumes, Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2007.

tioned by the Presidium of BAN on the grounds that materials of a documentary or administrative nature that were not the result of individual or collective scholarly research did not need the approval of a competent body of scholars. This was to be a documentary collection of the materials and debates, without any corrections, additions or commentaries. Todorov ended his letter with the words: "At this point I am again confronted with the efforts of some of our scholars to involve the Central Committee of the BCP with a decision on this publicly debated issue. It is an issue that should be cleared and analyzed exclusively within the academy. I am stunned at the attempts to suppress the publication of the volume. Why this fear before the truth?"<sup>287</sup>

Todorov also made the rounds to check on the fate of the volume. He first visited Iordan Iotov, a member of the Politburo, to protest the stopping of the book. Iotov told him that Kosev and Isusov had talked to him and strongly insisted that the publication be suppressed. In Iotov's words the book had not been stopped or censored but only "held back" and Todorov should wait with the publication at least until the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Levski's birth had passed. Doino Doinov at the State Archives, whom Todorov visited in order to get back the manuscript, told him that the accusations against him were ridiculous but the fact that none of the archeologists supported Khaitov's thesis made him uneasy. Stoian Mikhailov at first conceded that a decision had been taken to stop the volume altogether but after Todorov's written protest, they decided to only hold it back until after the anniversary.<sup>288</sup>

Finally, Balevski's official response to Isusov with a copy to Mikhailov followed at the end of July. It explained that the publishing norms and traditions of BAN effectively supported Todorov.<sup>289</sup> In

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287 Letter of June 26, 1987, published in *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 203–4.

288 Entries in the Todorov's personal diary for June 23, 24, 25 and July 23, 30, 1987.

289 Letter 01-00-34 of July 30, 1987 in BAN archive, published in *Grobít na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 206–7. To this day the myth of the "illegal" publication is being upheld, most recently in Angelov's above-mentioned memoirs: Dimitir Angelov, *Spomeni*, 171. On the other hand, in an, in all other aspects, sharp response to Todorov's 1990 article in *Literaturen Front*, Mikhailov never complains about the illegality or manipulation of materials in the volume. His reason for dismissing it was that it was full of "empty verbal equilibristics, and with the pettiness of the discussed issues

September, 1987, after the summer celebrations had passed, Todorov finally received the green light for publication. He had decided to publish the volume in a circulation of 2,000 but there were already 7,000 demands, and he finally settled on 5,000 “in order to avoid additional irritations.”<sup>290</sup> The volume appeared in the spring of 1988 to great acclaim. The writer Mikhail Vasilev published a review, praising the book as a “lesson for an authentic scholarly debate, which is the only way to reach the whole truth, however difficult and complex this may be.”<sup>291</sup> In July, *Pogled* announced that the volume was the most sought after book of the month. The literary critic Liubomir Tanev explained the great public interest not only with the respected figure of Levski, the popularity of Khaitov and the public discussions around the grave, but explicitly linked it to the liberating and democratizing influence of the *Glasnost* process in the Soviet Union: “the large and inextinguishable drive to reassess history in the past two–three years, to soberly and fully free ourselves from the imposed clichés and theses, linked to the democratization and glasnost and the great example of the Soviet press.”<sup>292</sup> Todorov received numerous personal letters of ordinary citizens who felt particularly grateful that “the reader was allowed to form his own opinion.”<sup>293</sup>

The suppression of the volume was not the only attempt to silence further debates on the issue. The placing of a commemorative plaque followed a similar course. Already in 1979 Liudmila Zhivkova harbored the idea to place such a plaque were the reburial thesis to prove sufficiently plausible. After the *Rabotnichesko delo* roundtable discussion in 1981, an editorial in the newspaper *Puls* of June 3, 1981 insist-

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can hardly pass for a serious scholarly work that would do honor to the Academy of Sciences.” (Stamen Mikhailov, “Legenda i nauka v protivoborstvo” MS in Todorov personal archive, now in Archive of BAN.)

290 Entry for November 4, 1987 in Todorov’s personal diary.

291 Mikhail Vasilev, “A lesson for a scholarly debate,” *Literaturen Front* 25, June 16, 1988, 2.

292 “Nametsite na edin obzor,” *Pogled* 28, July 11, 1988, 5.

293 See, in particular, the letter of Ekaterina V. Iordanova of October 5, 1988 in Todorov’s personal archive, now at BAN. The writer of this letter indicates that her father—Veliko Iordanov—had been the director of the National Library in the 1930s and instrumental in discovering the documentation of the Levski trial of 1872–1873. On how the trial documentation was acquired by the National Library in 1931, see Dimitir Statkov, “Taino iznasiame ot Turstsiia deloto sreshtu Levski, *Trud*, 71, 2006, No. 48, 10.

ed that the bones be found subjected to a careful anthropological analysis. In the meantime, a plaque should be placed with the following text: "Here, according to the people's memory, was buried the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski." Of course, "people's memory" is a tricky thing but to any careful reader, its trickiness was explicitly suggested in its very inclusion. If anything, this was not simply a compromise proposal, it was scholarly enough precisely by including an imprecise category like "people's memory" in its careful wording. It never suggested that one was dealing with an indubitable fact. Indubitable facts are never introduced with "according to."

The final report of the 1986 debates recommended the possibility of placing a memorial plaque at the church with a similar conditional inscription stating that according to historical data, the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski had been reburied in the altar of the church by patriotic Bulgarians. In accordance with this recommendation, an inscription was prepared by the sculptor Mikhail Benchev. It was mounted not, however, with a decision by the government or municipality, that is by the secular authorities, but with the decision of the church council of "Sv. Petka." The plaque stayed in place exactly three days: it was placed on February 18, 1987, the day of Levski's hanging, and three days later was removed at night by unknown hands.<sup>294</sup>

The archeologists fiercely opposed the recommendation and its implementation. At first their argumentation revolved around the fact that it was unscholarly to recognize a fictive place without final scientific proof. Given the careful and conditional wording, however, they resorted to extra-scholarly arguments and the peak came when they decided to play the atheistic card. Already at the discussion among the historians in 1983, Kosev had suggested that the heightened interest in Levski's grave in the 1930s had been a trick "of the fascist inspired Bulgarian bourgeoisie to direct the attention toward the church" and the one in the 1950s an attempt to simply save "Sv. Petka" from destruction. At the present moment, Kosev surmised, "we have to stop

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294 Khaitov, *Grobî na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 198. Khaitov insinuated that the perpetrators were from the Sofia Historical Museum, but they could be anyone, starting from the municipality down to the Patriarchate itself, if it did not want to collide with the secular authorities. On the other hand, the furtive way of dismounting the plaque does indicate the absence of an official sanctioning institution.

these alarms around “Sv. Petka. It is not out of the question that these could be tendencies from the church and there is an attempt to manipulate the Central Committee to place a sign.”<sup>295</sup> There is little doubt that Kosev himself, given the generation he belonged to and his ideological formation, was sincere in his beliefs. There is equally little doubt that for the others who chose to play the anti-church card, this was a matter of cynical convenience.

Nikolai Todorov was warned that making “Sv. Petka” a holy place where religious demonstrations might become the rule contradicted party policy.<sup>296</sup> Here is an excerpt from his personal diary for April 21–24, 1986:

I completed the report on the archeological excavations around the “Sv. Petka” church... The report was accepted and praised for its scholarly value by Georgi Iordanov, Stoian Mikhailov and Angel Balevski. They specially called me. We also prepared a notification for the press, but it was stopped by Konstantin Kosev, who agreed with Ilcho Dimitrov and Dimitir Kosev that Levski could not have been buried there, and even if it had been true, we should not give advantage to the church. What a degree of class consciousness when it comes to the church! On the other hand, when it comes to the Bulgarian bourgeoisie and even about monarcho-fascism, there is complete toleration and even rehabilitation.<sup>297</sup>

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295 Stenograms of the Kosev Commission from April 19, May 29 and July 18, 1983, in Archive of BAN (a copy is in the personal archive of Nikolai Todorov, now at BAN).

296 *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 1997, 328.

297 Konstantin Kosev, a historian himself and at the time also chairing the department “Science and education” at the Communist Party’s Central Committee, is the son of Dimitir Kosev. The phrase about the rehabilitation of the bourgeoisie is referring to the 1986 publication, under the editorship of Ilcho Dimitrov, of the diary of Bogdan Filov, the prime minister of Bulgaria during the Second World War who was sentenced and executed by the People’s Court in 1945 (Bogdan Filov, *Dnevnik*, Sofia: Otechestven front, 1986). The distribution of this book was suppressed because of fears among the party circles that it could be seen as the rehabilitation of a central figure of the old regime who was an admirer of Hitler. This was a *par excellence* case of communist censorship and the diary itself is not only pretty innocuous but also a needed historical source. The book appeared in a second edition in 1990. The entry in Todorov’s diary,

The earlier quoted letter to Zhivkov of May 4 1987 was signed by twenty historians.<sup>298</sup> It started with the complaint that the specialists were being consciously eliminated from participating in the discussions around Levski's grave and that if hasty decisions were implemented, this would "have unfavorable ideological and political consequences." It alleged that Khaitov, in order to spread his unscholarly opinion, played with his popularity with influential individuals and the public at large. The "only deterrent against the enforcement of his opinion is the counter argumentation of the historians-specialists, who form their opinions on the basis of objective facts." Without at all touching on the argumentation of the Khaitov team—"But can the fatal error during the excavations of the church be considered as serious proof that this is exactly Levski's grave?"—the letter simply stated that Khaitov and Co. used the negligence of some archeologists thirty years ago to compromise a whole discipline and to stir the public. In a shrewdly phrased sentence, the letter warned "that such public insults of the historical discipline aim at discrediting it, and this can only please our ill-wishers in Ankara, Skopje, Belgrade and elsewhere."

The historians further approved of the decision of the Central Committee "to stop the public dispute over Levski's grave because of

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however, is symptomatic and an important illustration of inner party and generational divisions. Todorov himself, born 1921 and given a death sentence, later commuted to life in prison by the fascist court in 1942, was a life-long communist who was very sensitive to the rising reassessment and embellishment of the interwar period, something that was beginning discreetly and burst into the open after 1989. On the other hand, he was an unflinching internationalist and opposed any kind of nationalism. During the renaming campaign of the Turks, he openly stated his views, among others in an interview for the BBC. Ilcho Dimitrov, on the other hand, an excellent historian of Modern Bulgaria and also a life-long communist, was a whole decade younger than Todorov and therefore belonging to the next generation which had not been involved directly in the communist resistance. He also was one of the ideologues of the renaming process.

298 See the text of the letter in Appendix III. A copy of the letter with the original signatures of the historians is preserved in the Central State Archive (*Tsentrallen Dirzhaven Arkhiv, Chastni Postipleniia—TsDA, ChP 130, papka 21*). *ChP 130* is the private archive of Doino Doinov, and File 21 contains materials around the 150th anniversary of Levski's birth as well as the controversies around the grave. Alongside the May letter to Todor Zhivkov, it also has the first version of the letter, dated April 27, 1987, with corrections in the hand of Professor Doinov.

the existing danger of diverting public attention from the main issues of his legacy in the very year of his anniversary. This was, indeed, a reasonable political consideration.” As already said, the publication of the BAN volume was first forbidden, and later delayed. The historians were surprised, however, at the appearance of a second edition of Khaitov’s book in an enormous circulation and were especially troubled by his insistence to place a commemorative plaque:

The hasty placement of a plaque may bring about new complications. Quite apart from neglecting the historical facts, we accept the risk to split the people’s devotion. The traditional pilgrimages to the Apostle’s only monument in Sofia, which is the unquestionable and widely known place of his execution, would be diverted to a questionable object, such as the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” And who, by the way, would want such a diversion toward the church? By linking Levski to the church, are we not going to pay a high price that would denigrate our efforts at atheist education? Let us remind, in this regard, that this particular version about Levski’s grave had been launched at the time precisely by members of the church with a definite goal, which now seems close to realization with the help of new supporters.

The letter was signed by Dimitîr Kosev, Khristo Khristov, Dimitîr Angelov, Veselin Khadzhinikolov, Mito Isusov, Alexander Fol, Krumka Sharova, Evlogi Buzhashki, Nikolai Genchev, Virzhiniia Paskaleva, Veselin Traikov, Konstantin Kosev, Vera Mutafchieva, Dobrin Michev, Doino Doinov, Stefan Doinov, Nikolai Zhechev, Ogniana Mazdrakova, Kirila Vîzvîzova and Rumiana Radkova. These were all leading historians, directors of institutes, editors of important historical journals and specialists on the nineteenth century. At least four of them—the two Kosevs, Fol and Doinov—had also important positions in the party hierarchy. The letter to Zhivkov worked, and the placement of the plaque was frozen.<sup>299</sup>

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299 For interesting details about the relative weight of the different historians and their clout before Zhivkov, see Khaitov, *Aferata s groba na Vasil Levski. Zapis na razgovora mezhdu Bogdan Krîstev i Nilolai Khaitov (iuni-iuli 1991)*, Sofia: Artik, 2002, 21–6.

обреди на почит към Левски пред случаен гроб на неизвестни хора, Няма ли по този начин да накърним неговата светла памет? А ако някой ден все пак бъдат открити гробът и тленните му останки, например в основите на паметника? Не поемаме ли прекалено голяма отговорност пред бъдните поколения?

Уважаеми Другарю Живков,

Като изразяваме със загриженост и чувство на отговорност всички тези съображения, си позволяваме да предложим компетентните инстанции още веднъж да преценят въпроса за целесъобразността от поставянето на надпис върху споменатата църква.

Уверени сме, че във Ваше лице, както винаги досега, ще срещнем пълно разбиране.

04.05.1987 г.

С о ф и я

С УВАЖЕНИЕ:

акад. Димитър Косев

ст.н.с. I ст. д-р Веселин Трайков

акад. Христо Христов

проф. д-р Константин Косев

акад. Димитър Ангелов

проф. д-р Вера Мутафчиева

акад. Веселин Хаджиниколов

проф. д-р Добрин Мичев

чл. кор. Мито Исусов

ст.н.с. I ст. д-р Дойно Дойнов

проф. д-р Александър Фол

ст.н.с. Стефан Дойнов

проф. Крумка Шарова

ст.н.с. Николай Жечев

проф. Евлоги Букашки

ст.н.с. Огняна Маждракова

проф. д-р Николай Генчев

ст.н.с. Кирила Възвъзова

проф. д-р Виржиния Паскалева

ст.н.с. I ст. д-р Румяна Ракова

**Figure 10.** The page with the signatures of the 4 May 1987 letter sent to Todor Zhivkov.

Source: *Tsentralen Dîrzhaven Arkhiv, ChP 130, папка 21.*

There had been also a counter-signing campaign. One such petition to place a plaque was signed in April, 1988 by 150 writers.<sup>300</sup> Another, signed in the spring of 1989 by 50 writers, professors and leading intellectuals was sent to Zhivkov but they produced no re-

300 Ibid., 81.

sult.<sup>301</sup> Things at first seemed to have somehow subsided in the aftermath of November 10, 1989.<sup>302</sup> To be sure, there were periodic polemic outbursts on the pages of the press but they were short-lived and inconsequential. One such exchange came in 1990. On January 18, 1990 Nikolai Khaitov gave an interview in *Trud* in which he insisted on the placement of a memorial plaque. Then, on February 16, 1990 Nikolai Todorov published an article in *Otechestven Front*, summarizing the conclusion of the 1986 debates about “the great possibility” that one of the skeletons in the sanctuary belonged to Levski. He referred to the new democratic spirit in the country, in which the truth about Levski’s grave could be handled differently. He also urged the placement of a plaque with the words “According to a number of data, the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski was reburied here in 1873” and refuted the allegation that such a plaque would be “fetishizing Levski’s memory.”<sup>303</sup>

This article triggered a strong response by Stanislav Stanilov, who after 1989 became head of the Medieval Section of the Archeological Institute. The article is remarkable for introducing a completely new tone in the debates, typical of the situation immediately after November 10, 1989. It was an unabashed *ad hominem* attack on “the

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301 I have not seen this petition. It is mentioned, however, in a letter of Todorov to the citizen Khristo Angelov from Gabrovo and dated April 18, 1989 as a response to Angelov’s letter of March 7, 1989. Todorov was getting numerous letters—personally or referred to him by other institutions—from ordinary citizens asking him about the plaque and he was responding, citing the steps taken by the academy and pointing out that on the particular issue of the plaque it was the municipal authorities that could take the final decision. See also letters from M.D. Georgi Mitev, from Ruse dated October 10, 1986; Radka Ivanova Poptomova from Varna undated (end of April, 1987); Georgi Vankov from Gabrovo dated January 15, 1987; Krum Dimitrov and Kiril Spasov from Kjustendil dated August 2, 1989, all in Todorov’s personal archive, now at BAN. See the text of Poptomova’s letter in Appendix V.

302 “November 10” is the most widespread designation for the watershed leading to the post-communist era. The word “revolution,” or even “velvet revolution” is never utilized in Bulgarian. Another neutral common expression is “the changes.” “The coup d’état of November 10” or, either with deference or increasingly with a sneer depending upon one’s standpoint, “the advent of democracy” and “the reforms” can also be heard.

303 Nilolai Todorov, “Edin neizpilen dilg,” *Otechestven Front*, No. 13370, February 16, 1990.

two friends who wish to acquire the unfading fame of discoverers of a holy relic” and it was full of insinuations against Todorov’s “dictatorial decision” and the fact that “the academician is not an archeologist and has not the slightest idea of the specifics of this science.”<sup>304</sup> However, this was only Stanilov’s modest debut. In a second article he attacked Khaitov as “the plague of Bulgarian cultural life,” Todorov as “a family friend of the Pravets dynasty,” both Khaitov and Todorov as “the two toadeaters on the table of Todor Zhivkov,” among a score of other insults.<sup>305</sup> Finally, in a third article Stanilov fiercely and caustically attacked Khaitov as a pathetic dilettante and a political opportunist hungry for fame and money. He also reiterated the old allegations about the illegality of the BAN volume and that the decision of BAN was taken “under the totalitarian pressure of academician Todorov.”<sup>306</sup>

304 Stanislav Stanilov, “Mezhdú lichnite ambitsii i psevdohistorizma,” *Rabotnitchesko delo*, March 4, 1990. *Rabotnitchesko delo* declined to publish Todorov’s response, and it came out in *Literaturen Front*, April 12, 1990 (“Predizvikan otgovor”), in which Todorov refuted Stanilov’s insinuations about the illegitimate publication of the *BAN volume*. He also pointed out that although some Greek archeologists still dispute that the bones discovered in Vergina belong to Philip II of Macedonia, this did not prevent their being displayed in the Museum of Archeology in Thessaloniki as possibly authentic. He again reiterated that the point was not “to invent Levski’s grave” as insinuated by Stanilov but place a plaque suggesting a possible reburial. There were also responses by Stamen Mikhailov and Dimitir Ovcharov but they were still within the accepted framework and tone of scholarly, even if acrimonious, debate (see *Otechestven Front*, No. 13417, April 24, 1990).

305 Stanislav Stanilov, “Tui petno za khrama (ili kak da se zadirzhish na grebena na vilnata,” *Vek* 21, December 12, 1990, 37. Khaitov wrote a magisterial and amazingly controlled response: “Gorchivata istina,” *Literaturen forum*, March 6, 1991, 10, also published in *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 316–32. Todorov did not find it necessary to respond. The following year Kkaiitov published a small book with documentation around the “Levski affair” — Nikolai Khaitov and Georgi Takhov, eds., *Istoricheskii svidetelstva za groba na Vasil Levski*, Sofia: n.p., 1992—which served as basis for the later full edition of *Grobî na Vasil Levski. Sbornik dokumenti*, Sofia: Goreks Press, 2002.

306 Stanislav Stanilov, “Khaitov lamti za grebena na vilnata,” *Svoboden narod*, March 27, 1991. Stanilov went so far as to mock Todorov about his performance as chairman of the National Assembly and suggest that “he is chairman as much as he is academician in Balkan history. His real title is courtier of the Pravets dynasty” (the latter an allusion to Zhivkov’s birthplace Pravets).

Stanilov's arguments and style should in no way be generalized about the archeologists as a whole. The others did not resort to his methods, nor were these methods taken up by the opponents. They were, however, indicative of the highly politicized atmosphere after 1989. One would have expected that after 1989 and the passing away of what was officially pronounced as a political and politicized public space debates would be held without flashing the political card but, quite to the contrary, this became ubiquitous. Ironically, while in the latter decades of state socialism using a political argument to augment a point was conceived as the peak of bad manners, hurling political qualifications and abuse became the standard manner of discussion in the first decade after the changes. In fact, this is quite natural. After the 1960s, socialism entered a phase of stability and, more or less, accepted rules that extended even over the period of growing illegitimacy of the regime, whereas a chaotic, anarchic and often hooligan atmosphere set in during the early period of transition. In the particular debate over Levski's remains, it played itself out in a visible shift of the main rhetorical trope from "professionalism" to "totalitarianism."<sup>307</sup>

What is most significant, however, about the post-1989 period, as it relates to the further development of the final phase of the social drama around Levski's grave, is that with the exception of one participant, the issue had lost its existential urgency. In the archeologists' case, it was most often the power of inertia or the concern of personal reputations that triggered public statements. In the spring of 2001, however, a new polemic was set off which spilled out into the administrative and political realm. The immediate cause was the placing of a new commemorative plaque on the outside wall of the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." This had occurred in the winter of 2001 with a special consecration by the Sofia Metropolitan Inokentii, the head of the Holy Synod of the alternative Bulgarian Orthodox Church, to whose diocese "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" belonged.<sup>308</sup> According to

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307 This is indeed ubiquitous and can be followed not only in Stanilov's extreme statements but also in the otherwise insipid memoirs of Angelov, as well as in Khaitov's post-1989 writing.

308 The Bulgarian Orthodox Church split in 1992. The mainstream Synod was headed, and continues to be headed, by Patriarch Maxim, while the alternative one was presided over by Patriarch Pimen. After the latter's death, Metropolitan Inokentii led the alternative Synod until it was officially closed in 2004. For details about the split, see Part III.

the priest of “Sv. Petka,” Father Mikhail Milushev, the assembling and placing of the plaque was initiated in late October 2000 by a group of anonymous private donors. The inscription, unlike the careful wording in 1987, was unambiguous: “Patriotic Bulgarians reburied in this temple the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski in 1873.” In addition, the image of Levski on the plaque had a nimbus emphasizing his essence of a saint. When I asked Father Milushev why they had not followed the careful wording of the previous plaque, he laughed: “My dear, the conditional mood is for science. This is a church. People want positive knowledge.”<sup>309</sup>

The architect Andrei Mikhailov, son of the deceased archeologist Stamen Mikhailov, turned to the Archeological Institute in April 2001, and asked for its competent opinion on the question of the reburial. The Section for Medieval Archeology, headed by Stanislav Stanilov, came up with a statement endorsed by the Scientific Council of the institute. Armed with it, Andrei Mikhailov deposited a petition at the Commission for Education and Culture of the Sofia Municipal Council. He reiterated that the placement of the plaque was illegal because only the Commission for Education and Culture had the right to permit such commemorative signs, but the church had not made the appropriate representations to the commission. He went on to add that not only was the inscription illegal but it was also false in that it contradicted the opinion of the specialists. He therefore pleaded that the plaque be dismantled. In a newspaper publication of June 27, 2001 in which he explained his position and acts, Andrei Mikhailov also disclosed his motives: “It is my highest moral and filial duty, in the name of and on behalf of my deceased father Prof. Stamen Mikhailov, to continue the struggle for scholarly truth, a struggle he waged un-

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309 Interview with Father Milushev, July 6, 2001. In fact, this was the third plaque placed at “Sv. Petka.” After the disappearance of the first in 1987, a second brass one, with the same text, was placed in 1992. It was soon stolen and, Father Milushev attributes it to an ordinary criminal theft. In 2001, the Sofia Municipal Council refused to issue an official permission for the plaque, supporting the archeologists’ petition, but the plaque remained in place until 2004 when the alternative Synod was closed down. I have in my possession copies of the official exchange between the church and the municipality, given to me by Father Milushev. Father Milushev himself was removed from his position in 2004, repented and serves as village priest.

til his last breath: against hypocrisy, falsehood and demagogy.” At the same time, he qualified his authority as a fighter for scholarly truth by referring to what can be termed as the authority of the Specialist: “As an architect, I have neither the scholarly nor the moral power to pass scholarly judgments and statements on the question. This right belongs exclusively to the competent specialists in this field. I would be happy if this basic truth gets recognized not only by me.”<sup>310</sup>

The socially accepted as well as self-designated “specialists in the field,” in this case, produced the brief above-mentioned statement, which served as the fundamental scholarly argumentation of Andrei Mikhailov’s petition before the Commission for Education and Culture. It is entitled “Opinion of the scholars from the Section Medieval Archeology at the Archeological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences on the question of the identification of Vasil Levski’s grave in the altar of the church ‘Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.’ Approved in an open vote at a regular session of the scholarly department with an existing quorum of habilitated persons,” it is signed by the section’s head Stanislav Stanilov. The weighty title with the appropriate legal and scholarly accessories—“open vote,” “regular session,” “existing quorum,” “habilitated persons,” “scholarly opinion,” “authoritative institution”—make it mandatory to take a closer look into the kind of argumentation and rhetoric used in this short piece against the plaque.<sup>311</sup>

While it was expedient to resort to the atheism card before 1989, this was obviously unacceptable nowadays. Nor did Stanilov and Co. resort to the argumentation of Mikhailov after 1989 that the reason why it was absurd to place a plaque with a conditional wording was that it would make permissible the placement of similar plaques any-

310 Andrei Mikhailov, “Kogato faktite govoriat, mitologiiata da milchi” (“When the facts speak, mythology should fall silent”), *Stolichen 24 chasa*, June 27, 2001, 4. This publication had been preceded by a briefer note on June 19, 2001, which elicited an angry reply from Nikolai Khaitov on June 22, 2001, both published in the same newspaper.

311 The “Opinion” was published in the same June 27, 2001 issue of *Stolichen 24 chasa* as Andrei Mikhailov’s piece, under the editorial title “Khaitov attempted to slander science.” It is reproduced *in extenso* in an English translation in Appendix VI. Khaitov’s response “S goli ‘meniia’ nauka ne se pravi, gospoda!” came in *Stolichen 24 chasa*, August 24, 2001.

where the legends about Levski would lead us.<sup>312</sup> Instead, the specialists' letter articulated its objection as follows: "This plaque is unnecessary and socially harmful because it leads Bulgarians into a morally intolerable fallacy in the contemporary reading of history." The sentence is an example of a logical oxymoron. On the one hand, there is the seemingly enlightened scholarly approach: the syntagma "contemporary reading of history" means, in Stanilov's vocabulary, a "scientific" reading of history, a reading based on the conventions of historical scholarship, of which scholars are representatives and practitioners. For him, there should be only one "true" contemporary reading of history. I characterize his as a seemingly enlightened approach because a truly enlightened approach would have recognized the plurality of contemporary approaches of which even the scholarly does not offer a single alternative. But the oxymoronic quality comes not from this limited and parochial approach to history. It stems from the evoking of a moral criterion. This time the scholar is setting up a moral taboo—"a morally intolerable fallacy"—to circumvent the writer's contagion. A very scholarly approach indeed!

Nevertheless, when comparing the tone of this comparatively late reaction of Stanilov to his earlier writings, the absence of bitter acrimony is striking. One has the feeling that it was a posthumous tribute to the memory of a colleague and a gesture to the hurt feelings of a son, rather than the anxious struggle of a faction in a debate. Indeed, the faction had no more stake in the debate. The whole infrastructure of how archeology was financed had practically disappeared. It is no longer a matter of striking a professional or patriotic pose. "Marketing" is the latest game and as a journalist hastened to conclude, "the so-called academic archeology is lately in fashion and becomes ever more worldly: archeologists appear in the media, people go to the museums." In the words of one of the most entrepreneurial and successful archeologists nowadays, Nikolai Ovcharov, "Ten-fifteen years ago I firmly believed in the elitist science and, to tell you the truth, I looked upon the tourists as a nuisance. During the last seven years, however, I became convinced that there was no advantage in scholastic science and the

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312 Stamen Mikhailov, "Levski e v sirtseto na bilgarskiia narod," manuscript from April 14, 1990 (in Todorov's personal archive, now at the archive of BAN). I am not aware that this response by Mikhailov to Todorov's above-mentioned article of 1990 has been published.

tourist aspect has become especially important for me. The steady flow of tourists is the only way our objects can be financed for research, restoration, conservation and upkeep.”<sup>313</sup>

Where before the Archeological Institute depended entirely on the state budget and the support of the local municipal councils, today in the words of a critic “the state keeps its monopoly on the [archeological] legacy but in the past 15 years has abdicated from its custody and has thus handed a *carte blanche* to the treasure hunters.”<sup>314</sup> The spectacular Thracian gold mask from the excavations during the summer of 2004 under the leadership of the archeologist Georgi Kitov brought 20,000 visitors to the museum. In nine days the cheap entry tickets (3 leva or 1.5 euros per person) made 60,000 leva, more than the 50,000 Kitov was to receive from the government to continue the excavations.<sup>315</sup>

Today, the central item of revenue for the Archeological Institute comes from its monopoly over issuing excavation permits. In 2003, according to the institute itself, 290 such permits were issued. The inspection of the National Center for Museums, Galleries and Art maintains that the number is 890, but even the smaller figure seems to indicate more ongoing excavations than in all other European countries taken together.<sup>316</sup> According to the then director of the Archeological Institute Vasil Nikolov, 90% of these permits are issued for so called “salvation excavations” and the rest is mostly *ad hoc*, when there is

313 Boriana Gencheva, “Kristonosen pokhod za antiki,” *Kapital* 44, November 6–12, 2004, 9–10.

314 *Ibid.*, 9.

315 *Ibid.*, 9–10. On the uphill competition between archeologists and treasure hunters, with durable damage on archeological sites and scholarship, see A. R. Williams, “Bulgaria’s Gold Rush,” *National Geographic*, December 2006, 106–21.

316 Katia Atanasova, “V zadniia dvor na akademichnata arkheologiiia,” *Kapital* 44, November 6–12, 2004, 12–3. Little wonder that there cannot be effective control over so many archeological objects. In the words of a critic “It is impossible to have a chain, at one end of which you have ‘Christie’s’ and ‘Sotheby’s’ where according to international institutions in 2002 objects that were supposed to have originated in Bulgaria were sold for 1 billion euros and on the other end of which you have innocent archeologists” (*ibid.*, 13). In the words of Neil Broodie, the research director of the Illicit Antiquities Research Center in Cambridge, England, “At the present time, Bulgaria is probably a bigger supplier than Italy and Greece” (Matthew Brunwasser, “Bulgarian relics spark international scuffle,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 23, 2007, 2).

danger from treasure hunters.<sup>317</sup> This monopoly of the archeologists has not been left without its critics but the point to be made here is that the Levski issue, unlike its weight in the preceding period, is completely immaterial to their ongoing work.<sup>318</sup>

It is telling that after 2004, when the split in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was resolved in favor of the mainstream organization, and the commemorative plaque at “Sv. Petka” was removed by the official authorities around Patriarch Maxim, the archeologists remained completely indifferent to the issue. At this point the controversy is exclusively from within the ranks of the clerical establishment. Interestingly, the defenders of the plaque, for example the foundation “St. Archangel Michael” and its representative Bogdan Krıstev, appeal to the secular authorities, in this case the Ministry of Culture, citing the fact that “Sv. Petka” is not simply a church but has been pronounced a national monument under the protection of the National Institute of Cultural Monuments. Thus, the removal of the plaque impinges on the jurisdiction of the Institute, and is illegal.<sup>319</sup>

As Turner theorizes about the political field in the fourth phase, one has to pay special attention to the structure of the whole field which may have changed, as well as the nature and intensity of the relations between parts:

New power will have been channeled into old and new authority and former authority defenestrated. Closeness will have become distance and vice versa. Formerly integrated parts will have segmented; previously independent parts will have fused. Some parts will no longer belong to the field, others will have entered it. Institutionalized relationships will have become informal; social regularities will have become irregularities. New norms and rules may have been generated

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317 The money comes from the big corporations, agencies or ministries who are building roads, bridges, railways and dams (*ibid.*, 12). With the overall unemployment in the countryside and the lucrative trade in antiques, whole villages survive entirely on treasure-hunting (*ibid.*, 13).

318 See also Borianana Gencheva and Borianana Kirilova, “Kak se privatizira arkheologija,” *Kapital* 44, November 6–12, 2004, 14.

319 Silvia Georgieva, “Popskata razpravııa opria i do Levski,” *Sega*, February 14. The Ministry of Culture had sent a letter to the Holy Synod demanding an explanation but had not received an answer by the date of the article’s publication.

during attempts to redress conflict; old rules will have fallen into disrepute and have been abrogated. The basis of political support will have altered. Some components of the field will have less support, others more, still others will have fresh support, and some will have none. The distribution of the factors of legitimacy will have changed, as also the techniques used by the leaders to gain compliance.<sup>320</sup>

The one exception mentioned above, for whom the issue over Levski's grave never lost its urgency, was Nikolai Khaitov. He moved in a kind of determined diachronic ardor through all acts of this dramatic opera, never once changing the words or pitch of his aria. A self-appointed defender of Bulgaria's national honor, for him the confrontation was "not the result of an ordinary debate between dilettantes and archeologists about Levski's grave. It is a debate with the thieves of Bulgarian glory and the falsifiers of Bulgaria's past, who, after fifteen quiet years again are raising their heads."<sup>321</sup> Khaitov not only did not change his position on the issue; his emotional involvement, if anything, intensified. From the outset, Khaitov had outlined four main arguments in defense of his crusade about Levski's grave. The first was his assertion that it was part of human nature, indeed a vital need, to attempt to express in a material fashion its loftiest feelings of veneration toward a given individual by constructing memorial buildings: graves, mausoleums, pantheons. He called on the millennial record of humanity to support his assertion. In this way he effectively countered the widely shared belief among many intellectuals that such a material expression of devotion is, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, sheer idolatry.

This belief was already articulated by Levski's first scholarly biographer, Ivan Undzhiev, who dedicated ten pages in the last footnote of his over 1000-page biography to the problem of Levski's grave: "The question of the grave and the bones of the Apostle is still open, and most likely will never be closed... Time has wiped out all traces, and it is highly doubtful that [the grave] can ever be discovered. This circumstance, however, has no relevance for the immortal spirit of the great Apostle."<sup>322</sup> This has since been voiced by many participants and

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320 Turner, "Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors," 42.

321 Khaitov, *Grobŭ na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 13.

322 Ivan Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski. Biografija*, Sofia: Direktsiia na izkustvata pri ministerstvo na informatsiata i izkustvata, 1947, 1075, 1084.

observers in the dispute, most recently by the journalist Ivan Stanchev: “Gentlemen, at the end of the day do abandon, do stop this unnecessary polemic, and leave the bones and the grave of the Apostle to exist only in the consciousness of the whole Bulgarian nation.”<sup>323</sup>

Not so, according to Khaitov. Surely the ones, for whom graves, mausoleums, and pantheons have been erected, also have their place in our hearts. “‘For the sake of the next generation’ and for ‘His glory’: this is why Levski’s bones and grave have been and continue to be sought. Not because this is needed for his immortal spirit, but because it is ours, the living, vital necessity, as well as the need of those who are coming after us. Quite independently of, and maybe because of the fact, that he is in our hearts.”<sup>324</sup> This would allow to add yet another national sacred place to the existing ones. Finally, it would also conform to one of Levski’s last wishes: “If they hang me, at least my grave will remain in Bulgaria and everyone will know it, whereas if they send me into exile, my bones will rot far away.”<sup>325</sup>

In 1988, in a newspaper article, Academician Vladimir Topencharov wrote that “looking for the material remains of someone—of Levski or the nameless graves of our revolutionaries—means to divert precious intellectual potential from the big goal of our times,” and he characterized this obsession as “idolatry,” “bone-raking,” and “drunken pettiness.” It is important that Topencharov identified the “big goal of our times.” This was democracy: “today, in the period of perestroika, we need Levski’s democracy.” Since Levski is the symbol and reincarnation of democracy, Bulgarians should concentrate on his ideas, not his remains. Topencharov squarely accused Khaitov of diverting the attention of the “Bulgarian democratic community from Levski’s immortal ideas toward his mortal remains.”<sup>326</sup> While Topencharov’s intervention had been solicited by some of the historians, there is little question about the sincerity of his beliefs. By the end of the 1980s

323 Ivan Stanchev, “Ostavete kostite na Apostola na mira,” *Stolichen 24 chasa*, June 27, 2001, 4.

324 Nikolai Khaitov, *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, in *Izbrani proizvedeniia*, vol. 3, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1989, 20.

325 From the memoirs of Nikolcho Tsviatkov, with whom Levski was captured at Kikrina. Cited in Khaitov, *Grobît*, 1987, 20.

326 Vladimir Topencharov, “Ideia, a ne grob,” *Otechestven Front*, March 1, 1988. The word used for “perestroika” was its Bulgarian equivalent *preu-stroistvo*.

there was a growing momentum of oppositionist feeling and its respective articulation, which, most often, took the rhetorical form of supporting *perestroika*. With some reason, Topencharov feared that the passions around Levski's grave took from the passions which the issue of democratization deserved.

Khaitov countered that if looking for the graves of the worthy was idolatry, we should reconsider our whole practice to look for and preserve the remains of deserving individuals. More concretely, he suggested that in this line of reasoning we should not have brought back Rakovski's bones from Romania, not reburied Khadzhi Dimitir's remains in his home place, not erected a pantheon to the Bulgarian revolutionaries in Ruse, not built the mausoleum for Georgi Dimitrov, and not preserved the bones of the fallen in the liberation wars: "If immortalizing the memory of our revolutionaries by means of common graves, tombs, shrines, and mausoleums diverts us from their immortal ideas, is it not high time to think of their destruction? And to stop the television campaign to restore the monuments to the ones who perished in the wars?"<sup>327</sup>

It is, indeed, a powerful argument, and it is definitely not confined to the era of nationalism. Whether it is human nature is difficult to judge, but the urge to mark the graves of predecessors and especially of the select ones among the group, and to venerate remains, is certainly as old as human history. Some have called it a "hunger for facticity."<sup>328</sup> Graves are "the enduring units of society and provide the material symbol of their continuity."<sup>329</sup> One may even sympathize with the enlightened or modernizing or simply ascetic ethos of the ones who despise the practice, but they will not win the realism bet: the long and often bloody wars on "idolatry" throughout human history have always been lost in the end. Khaitov's argumentation was the expression of a general worldview based on a strong attachment to tradition. In fact,

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327 Khaitov's response to Topencharov "Za grobovete na khorata i grobovete na ideite" was also published in *Otechestven Front*, and reprinted in Khaitov, *Aferata s groba na Levski*, 204–5. He also made the similar argument in many of his other writings, e.g. "Istoriata, istoritsite i 'krititsite' na bilgarskii narod," *Literaturen Front* 50, December 10, 1987.

328 Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva, *Levski: Bukvi ot imeto*, Sofia: Primaprint, 2001, 124.

329 Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Perry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 33.

Khaitov was explicit and quite consistent during his lifetime about his beliefs on tradition and conservatism. The April 7, 1967 entry to his diary, which was published only in 1996, reads:

What is tradition? These are the mores acquired through the centuries, tested by time, and having proven their necessity and utility for the survival of the nation, the people, the tribe. And conservatism? A direction in human thought, which believes in tradition, and does not trust the “new” that presses to supplant it. The conservatives hold onto continuity and it is on this continuity (in England, for example) that the great empire is based.

Someone somewhere has spun a yarn and nobody tears it, nobody leaves it. They continue to spin over. Maybe only the atomic bomb will manage to tear it. It is on such continuity and perpetuity that the great empire is based. The other empires soon lose their colonies, because they do not have the qualities of the English. But the English hold on to the last! They have something of the virtues of the Romans. It does not take a genius to understand this. What is the genius feat is that this continuity has entered the bloodstream of a whole nation. Only in this way can the tradition, the unity between past, present, and future be upheld.<sup>330</sup>

Khaitov’s second argument pertained to the Bulgarian nation proper, its self-perception and self-esteem. The final verdict on whether Levski’s bones were reburied would, according to him, clean the Bulgarian nation from the charge that it was totally frightened and passive: “After so many written and repeated accusations, it is important to determine whether, indeed, among the thousands of Bulgarians in Sofia, it was difficult to find three or four less frightened, who would be ready to take Levski out of the graveyard for criminals. If so, let us deservedly carry the shame and the pain, but if the truth is different, why should we and the following generations be burdened by a non-existing guilt?”<sup>331</sup> This is indeed an argument that can be put forward by someone for whom the nation and national allegiance is of prime importance. Yet again, it is not something that is necessarily archaic or Balkan. Khaitov’s argumentation is very comparable to the similar

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330 Nikolai Khaitov, *Dnevnik. Kniga treta i chetvîrta*, Sofia: Zemlia pres, 1996, 8.

331 Khaitov, *Grobît na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 21.

and arguably justified demands that the time has come for the German postwar generations to stop bearing the blame and shame for deeds they themselves had not committed. These demands do not come only from the right-wing fringe but have become a mainstream trope in a society whose democratic credentials no one doubts today.

The third argument was in the same line; in fact, it targeted the heart of what can be designated as the syndrome of weak nationalism.<sup>332</sup> It addresses the issue of the alleged lack of historical feeling among the Bulgarians that Undzhiev had lamented already in the 1940s.<sup>333</sup> Khaitov actually agrees with this self-accusation but thinks that the activities to find the grave, and even the fact that it cannot be found, may in reality counter it, if, indeed, the reburial had taken place.<sup>334</sup>

It is, however, the fourth argument that is of particular interest here. Since the dispute over Levski's grave will not fade away, Khaitov argued, and people will always look for the truth, no matter whether pleasant or not, the crucial question is who has the right to look for the truth. The writer addressed specifically a letter of the Archeological Institute in which it was claimed that the Medieval Section "is the only competent body which can pronounce itself on the objectivity of the archeological conclusions," and that Khaitov was a "representative of a broad circle of dilettantes who meddle in the archeologists' work." Not only was this unacceptable, according to Khaitov, when it comes to such a major question like Levski's grave but it is also unprofessional. After all, he argued, the real question in solving the problem was not so much archeological but needed special reference to other disciplines, like architecture, engineering, and geodesy. Therefore, "there cannot be limitations on the procedures, and no academic institution has the right to monopolize the truths which are somehow linked to it. The truth—as long as it is the truth—is welcome, no matter when, where and in whose head it is reached."<sup>335</sup>

Khaitov continued to fight not only with his pen. Ever since he began his campaign "and to this day" he said in 2001, "I have been asking all consecutive Bulgarian presidents and ministers of culture to continue the search for Levski's bones. Not in a single case have I re-

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332 This argument is developed in the conclusion.

333 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 1076.

334 Khaitov, *Grobít*, 1987, 21.

335 *Ibid.*, 22–3.

ceived a response to my traditional written ‘petitions.’ Despite this, I will send them to the end of my life.”<sup>336</sup> There was something admirable in this dedication and dogged perseverance, quite apart from its exact motives. And it was quite infectious. The entry in my diary for July 5, 2001, after I had spoken to him, reads: “Khaitov is actually attractive with his full-blooded vitality and sharp mind but he is, at the same time, a quarrelsome and resentful hound who is intoxicated by confrontations.”

Well over eighty, and just a year before his death, Khaitov was after his idea with the commitment and ardor of a young athlete. He continued to be active in the mass media. In February, 2002, around the anniversary of Levski’s martyrdom, he was interviewed by Slavi Trifonov in what is, arguably, the most popular show on Bulgarian Television. Trifonov, who started out as a semi-alternative, folksy, somewhat crude but certainly sympathetic and appealing leader of a popular band, has turned into something of an unofficial arbiter investing aspiring politicians and intellectuals with legitimacy, an unexpected combination of Jay Leno, Opera Winfrey and Jim Lehrer. Giving Khaitov the opportunity to present yet again his theses on Levski, he made sure that the issue was alive and has reached the widest possible audience. This does not necessarily mean that Trifonov himself is taking sides. The writer, with his biting tongue, unexpected figures of speech, and powerful and photogenic appearance despite his advanced age, was a welcome investment for any show, and not to be missed.

Levski figured foremost in Khaitov’s thinking, so much so that his personal relations were qualified through the Levski prism. Khaitov’s negative attitude toward Zheliu Zhelev is well known. When confronted with that by an interviewer, and asked to explain his antipathy, Khaitov responded: “This is not a secret. My clash with him dates back to 1987, when I stumbled upon one of his *samizdat* pieces on Levski, in which he characterized me as a ‘besotted jingoist.’ He received a dressing-down in one of my articles in *Literaturen Front* of December 10, 1987, and so, even before the breaking out of democracy, it was clear to me what kind of person he really was, and we of-

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336 Personal interview, July 5, 2001. Khaitov has addressed Todor Zhivkov, Petir Mladenov, Zheliu Zhelev, Petir Stoianov, as well as all ministers of culture from Georgi Iordanov to Moskova (Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 59, 103).

ten argued with Andrei Lukanov over him.<sup>337</sup> The *samizdat* piece in question was Zhelev's "Levski as a historical personality," but it was not true that Zhelev had singled out Khaitov as a "besotted jingoist." In fact, Zhelev never mentioned Khaitov by name but wrote in general about the "false patriotism of the cunning and the besotted jingoism of the dumb."<sup>338</sup> It was, of course, Khaitov's enormous self-centeredness, in addition to his self-crowned hypostasis as Levski's champion that made him oversensitive.

However, it was not only the perceived personal offence which infuriated him. Khaitov was piqued in particular by Zhelev's statement that

We are reluctant to acknowledge even today that Levski had not been betrayed by separate individuals but by the whole Bulgarian nation which was not yet worthy of its freedom. Are not Levski's bitter words, pronounced at the trial, an illustration of this: "Our Bulgarians desire the freedom, but they will accept it only if it is handed to them on a plate in their homes." And this actually happened with the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878.<sup>339</sup>

Khaitov was furious with this, according to him, parody of the Bulgarian nation as a bum and traitor. But, and herein lies the remarkable

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337 Nikolai Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho, da chue...*, Sofia: n.p., 2001, 38, 54. Khaitov occupied a neighboring apartment to that of Lukanov in the same living block on 15, Latinka Street in Sofia, in front of which Lukanov was murdered in 1996. An interesting episode in Khaitov's book elucidates the well-known role of Lukanov, then Prime Minister, in staking on Zhelev as the opposition leader. He believes that Lukanov orchestrated the presidential election in the summer of 1990 in favor of Zhelev. This election, which followed Mladenov's resignation, was the only presidential election that was not by direct vote but in the National Assembly. Khaitov, who valued much more the old Petăr Dertliev, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, confronted Lukanov with the question what made him bet on Zhelev: "Lukanov replied that first, such was the will of the two great ambassadors [the American and the Soviet], and second, that as a Marxist Zhelev would guarantee a peaceful transition much more than the 'hysterical' Dertliev." (57)

338 Zhelev's article which circulated among intellectuals in 1987, was printed in *Literaturen Forum*, January 8-14, 1992, and reprinted in Zheliu Zhelev, *Inteligentsiia i politika*, Sofia: *Literaturen forum*, 1995, 81-94. The quote is on p. 93.

339 Zhelev, *Inteligentsiia i politika*, 90.

trait of his brand of nationalism, while his reaction was emotional, his argumentation always strived to be scholarly. In this particular case, he accused Zhelev of being a sloppy scholar, because he had decontextualized Levski's words from his subsequent statements, so that they would look like a total accusation hurled in the face of a whole nation. In fact, Khaitov was entirely correct to specify that Levski in his statements had immediately differentiated between separate groups within the nation, and quoted Levski's testimony before the Ottoman court:

The educated Bulgarians who expected progress through enlightenment, considered it dangerous and inappropriate to demand rights with arms. They were of the opinion, that instead, progress and education could be achieved through the state, and we should avoid resorting to the help of other nations. Therefore they kept aside from our committee work. The peasants, however, who were forced to pawn their *tapu* for a hundred *gurush* which became several thousands in a few years, they were of a different opinion... These peasants in the desperate situation they were in, and in the hope they could be delivered, whenever we talked to them of revolution, they would come wherever we would pull them. These are my impressions.<sup>340</sup>

It was not only Khaitov's nationalism, and particularly his identification with the peasant, the rural small man, that was offended by Zhelev's melodramatic and overgeneralized accusation. Also offended was the aesthetic of his thinking: precise, documented, indeed scientific.<sup>341</sup>

Khaitov had plenty of old and new scores to settle, and he was never averse to peppered attacks. It is remarkable, though, how Levski

340 *Vasil Levski i negovite spodvizhnitsi pred turskiiia sîd*, Sofia: NBKM, 1952, 204–5. Khaitov exposed Zhelev's partial reading in an interview in *Zemia*, February 18–19, 2000, subsequently published in Nikolai Khaitov, *Troianskite kone v Bilgariia*, vol. 2, Sofia: Khirsto Botev, 2002, 166–70, and quoted in fragments in Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 54.

341 Not that Khaitov himself is above blame for aberrations from his own aesthetic. His ever-growing penchant for conspiracy theory was already mentioned. In the particular case of Zhelev he advanced the fantastic explanation that Zhelev's conscious stigmatization of the Bulgarian nation coincided with the international campaign against Bulgaria, and that this coincidence was far from accidental. According to Khaitov, Zhelev's "conscious falsification" of the record was linked to his "rearing as an opposition leader" (Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 55).

always comes up in any, even the most tangential dispute. Levski's figure genuinely inflected Khaitov's view of the world and of separate individuals. His relationship with Jordan Radichkov who, together with Khaitov vies for the position of the most original recent Bulgarian author but was, arguably, the greater literary figure of the two, was strained. Khaitov's negative attitude, however, did not spill out to denigrate Radichkov's literary *oeuvre* as he did with other colleagues. His chief complaint against Radichkov was the latter's involvement in the activities of the Open Society Institute. Radichkov's greatest and evidently unpardonable crime, since Khaitov kept on repeating it, was the fact that he dared compare George Soros's accounts with those of Levski, and had allegedly said in a documentary film that the financial reports of Soros were cleaner than Levski's famous notebook.<sup>342</sup>

Khaitov was much less charitable about Radoi Ralin, the popular satirist.<sup>343</sup> When it came to spell out his greatest complaint against Ralin, Levski was again at the center: "For me personally, Ralin's most unpardonable activity was his attempt to dethrone Levski [from his pedestal]." Khaitov was alluding to Ralin's script for a film on Levski in the 1970s, and accused Ralin of trying to depict Levski as a simple assassin. In reality, Ralin's script, which was published in 1994, while indeed not gripping, was written in the vein of the mainstream glori-

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342 Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 30, 84.

343 There was no love lost between the two. Khaitov alleged that Ralin was an almost professional slanderer, and he enumerated a number of people who were victims of his libels. According to Khaitov, Ralin was the most hard-and-fast circulator of the calumny about Khaitov's being a member of the fascist Legion before 1944. I remember that this was one of the most persevering rumors about Khaitov, usually supported by "eyewitnesses" who had "seen" a photograph of Khaitov holding severed heads of partisans, but do not remember Ralin's name alongside. Of course, it was an absurdity, meant to taint the reputation of Khaitov who was not even a party member, just as the equally absurd allegation of his "communism" after 1989 was trying to pin him down with what had become a discursive slur. Serious and painful as this allegation had been, even in its absurdity, and even though it never had a serious follow-up, Khaitov spends only a few lines of the over 20 pages devoted to Ralin on this (*Koito ima ukho*, 101–22; the slander appears briefly on pp. 106 and 111). The excerpts from the book on Ralin were published in the newspaper *Nova Zora* V (XII), 14, April 3, 2001, 12.

fiction of the national hero.<sup>344</sup> More than the political slander, what piqued Khaitov was the accusation that at the death of the writer Iana Iazova, he had entered her apartment and plundered her manuscript on Levski.<sup>345</sup>

After 1989, as described earlier, Khaitov openly deliberated on what he really thought about the “plot to destroy Levski’s grave.” The framework was what he called the “political zombinization” of Bulgaria by Stalin. There is no room in Khaitov’s explanatory word for chance, mistakes, or simply indifference. His ordered, sleuth-like mind needs to arrange everything in easily accessible and clearly marked boxes, linked in a transparent arrangement called causality. Bulgaria’s history in the last half century in his worldview is boxed into several easily explicable sub-periods:

a) 1944–1956. This period is characterized by anti-nationalist campaigns, and attempts to obliterate the nation by curbing the existing prewar patriotism. The most notorious examples in a whole array of crimes was the traitorous giving away of Gotse Delchev’s bones to Yugoslavia on the premise that he was not a Bulgarian but a Macedonian; the treatment of Levski’s grave; and the changes in the school curriculum, especially in literature and history, all of this punctuated by Vilko Chervenkov’s 1948 pronouncement that “the biggest enemy of socialism is nationalism.”<sup>346</sup>

b) 1956–1989. Todor Zhivkov’s rule and the return to the national paradigm. Khaitov’s explanation for Zhivkov’s nationalism is worth reading because it introduces the Levski motif from the very outset: “We should not forget that Zhivkov was born in the heart of the revolutionary Balkan range, in Pravets, Levski’s hiding place. He was educated in the local village school, and had been learning Vazov’s *Epopoia*

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344 Radoi Ralin, *Az sim Levski. Kinoroman*, Plovdiv: Izdatelstvo Khr. G. Danov,” 1994. For more on Ralin’s book, see Part II, and the analysis of literary works on Levski.

345 Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 101, 111. Iana Iazova wrote her trilogy in the 1950s, spent most of the 1960s in revisions and rewriting, and died in 1974. Her manuscript, which had been considered lost, was “discovered” in her private fund at the State Archives, and the trilogy was published in three consecutive volumes in 1987, 1988, and 1989. The first volume—*Balkani. Kniga pirva. Levski*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1987—is the one dedicated to Levski. On Iazova and her work, see Part II.

346 *Ibid.*, 47–8.

by heart while he was still nine, and this has formed the backbone of his national pride, something he was able to hide very skillfully when needed.”<sup>347</sup> It is not the simple fact of Zhivkov’s nationalism that appeals to Khaitov; there is also the solidarity with the village boy who had made it to the top. Although Khaitov admits that in 1986 Zhivkov actually caved in to the demands of some archeologists and historians, and postponed the placing of a commemorative plaque on the “Sv. Petka” church, he nevertheless gives him a very high rating as a national ruler. He is unequivocal about the positive role of Liudmila Zhivkova in the Levski affair. She was the one, according to him, who allowed—that is ordered—the discussion about the grave to spill into the press, so that even the “conservative *Rabtnicheskoto delo*” took part in it. She also “had given a written order about a year before her death to prepare the interior of the church ‘Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska’ for the marking of Levski’s reburial. But when she passed away, things were turned upside down.”<sup>348</sup>

c) *post-1989*. This period, according to Khaitov, has seen a return to the anti-nationalism of the immediate postwar period which had been internalized by the generation of “the most de-Bulgarianized” Komsomol leaders socialized in blind devotion to the Soviet Union. They, according to Khaitov, made no attempt to save the country from entering the orbit of the new great power that blew up the Soviet Union, and occupied its place. Quite to the contrary, a significant part of the young generation, according to Khaitov, brought up in the spirit of “socialist and later capitalist cosmopolitanism” despises its own country.<sup>349</sup>

Khaitov’s penchant for conspiracy theory explanations finally got the best of him. Moreover, it did not pertain solely to the Levski case. In 2001, Khaitov collected many of his scattered essays of the 1990s together with some new interviews in a new book—*Whoever Has an Ear, Let Him Hear*.<sup>350</sup> It is a curious and deeply disturbing mixture of realistic down-to-earth, and therefore poignant, at times even cou-

347 Ibid., 48–9. Khaitov’s quite interesting and complex general assessment of Zhivkov as a politician is punctuated by his judgment that for Zhivkov “the Fatherland ideal was not a dead word” (51).

348 Ibid., 74.

349 Ibid., 48. Also *Grobŭt na Vasil Levski*, 2002, 241.

350 Nikolai Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho, da chue...*, Sofia: n.p., 2001. The interviews were with Ivan Gashtilov.

rageous, assessments of the current economic and political situation, with the most far-reaching, extravagant unraveling of alleged internal and foreign conspiratorial plots. The “traitor” Gorbachev had sold Bulgaria to George Bush at their December meeting in Malta; the World Bank was implementing a plan to ruin Bulgaria’s educational system, so that by 2010 the number of literate Bulgarians would be half today’s number; the radiation from the depleted Uranium bombs thrown over Yugoslavia at the time of the Kosovo crisis in 1999 had totally devastated Northwestern Bulgaria; a demographic collapse was waiting to occur with over 750,000 Bulgarians abroad, half of whom with university and high school degrees, and another 300,000 waiting to emigrate; this was accelerated by the lowest birthrate in the world and an ethnic ratio at birth in which only 8,000 ethnic Bulgarians are born to every 40,000 births; the transformation of Kosovo into an American military base in the Balkans had been a military strategy since the 1970s, and was part of NATO’s steady movement toward the natural resources of the East; the Euroatlantic policy towards Bulgaria could be defined as a “war with diminished intensity;” and last but not least, there was always the ubiquitous Soros, whose “outward role is that of a philanthropist, benefactor and theoretician of the new civic ‘Open Society,’ but whose actual role was devoted to one final goal: the closing of nation-states in the name of a new world order headed by one sole world power and one sole global government.”<sup>351</sup> One is almost tempted to exclaim in despair with the writer Boian Biolchev, later Rector of Sofia University: “How could a writer with such talent enter the Association of Bulgarian Writers with his *Wild Stories*, and leave it so boringly with wild talk!”<sup>352</sup>

And yet, is it only the morbid suspicious imagination of an aging tycoon of a sort which is at play here? What makes Khaitov’s word

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351 Ibid., 13–5, 29, 46, 67, 69, 77–8, 81–2, 91–2. Numerous extravagant pages are devoted to Soros and the “Open Society” (11–2, 23–36, 91–101) that don’t differ much from similar assessments in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Russia or elsewhere, with one significant exception: there is not even a hint of anti-Semitism; in fact, Soros’s Jewishness is not even mentioned. This, in the hands of someone who is not shy of articulating sharply his strong opinions, means only one thing: that it is a non-issue.

352 “Lichnata Sveta Troitsa na Boian Biolchev. Razgovor s pisatelii,” *Kultura* 43, October 29, 1999. On Khaitov’s heavy-handed leadership of the writers’ union and reactions to it, see Liuben Ruskov, “Zalezit na zheliarnata gardiia,” *Kultura* 41, October 15, 1999.

resonate with people? It may be the brisk, accessible prose, the genuine passion, the obvious pain at the state of the nation, the often penetrating insights.<sup>353</sup> Of course, nobody knowledgeable would believe that Zbigniew Brzezinski has said that “the United States’ world order has to be achieved with the help of a ranked structure of vassal and dependent states: colonies and protectorates.”<sup>354</sup> Brzezinski couldn’t care less, otherwise he technically could sue Khaitov for misquoting him. But for people who equally don’t care about or haven’t heard Brzezinski’s name, Khaitov’s description of the “ranked structure” with the United States at the helm, followed by the NATO states of the European Union, then “protectorates” like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, all of these comprising the “civilized world,” rings a bell. “It seems,” Khaitov continues, “that the rest of the world, including Russia, China and the majority of the Asian states, fall under the category ‘barbarian.’” When, in the aftermath of September 11, the leaders of the “civilized world” arduously joined a chorus chanting the hypnotic refrain about the assault on the “civilized world,” eyebrows were raised even in the best salons of the “civilized world.” The rest of the world did not raise eyebrows, not even sneer; it did not expect anything different. A standard Bulgarian in the streets has not much time to discern the hair-splitting distinctions proposed to define the notion of “terrorist” in the New York offices of the United Nations diplomats. But a standard Bulgarian, unlike his American counterpart, is curious and reads about the world, and usually has pretty strong opinions about this world. And from his vantage point, the world in his immediate vicinity looked (granted, simplistically) like this: In neighboring Turkey, tens of thousands of Kurds had been killed in a civil war in which they were fighting for their rights, but the Turkish government pronounced them terrorists, and despite verbal criticism on the part of the Europeans, there was no real pressure on it because of American support; on the contrary, the country was being bailed out economi-

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353 While this is not the place to give an overall assessment of Khaitov’s various contributions, it has to be said that in the last two decades under communism, as well as later, he was one of the strongest voices in defense of the natural environment, in fact predating the work of the semi-dissident ecology groups. See his *Bodlivata rozga*, Sofia: Otechestven front, 1975; *Priliucheniiia v gorata*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1970; *Misli za prirodata*, Sofia: Otechestven front, 1978.

354 Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 75.

cally, and was a most important NATO ally. This was the case until at least a couple of years ago, when the new drive toward European integration on the part of the Erdoğan government, has produced a significant shift in the treatment of the Kurds. In neighboring Serbia, with the same structural problem as Turkey, the fortunes of the Serbs have been reverse: they were bombed, and the Albanians pronounced as freedom fighters. Hardly over a year later, these same Albanians were judged to be terrorists in Macedonia. Yet, in Macedonia, the government is not allowed to deal with them and defend its own territory. But in Israel, for decades now, the government is dealing without impunity with the “terrorists” in territories illegally occupied by Israel. Bulgaria is being praised for its “ethnic peace,” but foreign emissaries, NGOs, and scholarly institutions are interested only in the so-called “minorities.” And while Bulgaria was forced to sign the convention on minorities, neither Greece nor Turkey did.

It has to be added that all of this is not merely logical speculation. Every Bulgarian knows personally at least one Kurd, Palestinian, Serb, Albanian, Macedonian, Greek or Turk. They have been listening to opposing viewpoints, they have seen refugees, they have heard NATO bombers in the air, they feel that their fate is of no interest to anyone in the “civilized community.” I repeat: this is more or less what one can hear openly in the streets or in the coffee shops of any Bulgarian city or village, if one cares to speak to people. It is not highest on their agenda, but it is there, and Khaitov articulated it with verve. What he writes and how he writes about Bulgaria’s geopolitical predicament, resonates well with the average citizen:

The geopolitical scheme which is applied to us is not in the interests of the Euroatlantic community which strives to dominate the world. The complete obliteration of a powerless Balkan state, which voluntarily has offered itself to them, will not serve as a good example to the hundreds of small states on the road of the “new Romans.” It would be instructive if these new Romans would read how the ancient Romans treated the cities that had voluntarily handed in the keys to their fortresses.<sup>355</sup>

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355 Khaitov, *Koito ima ukho*, 131.

Khaitov's words are not rallying calls, let alone battle cries. They simply "professionally" affirm the diagnosis that the sick and self-healing Bulgarian patient has given himself, before looking for the saving medicine abroad: emigration. And it is not only Khaitov's pronouncements on the "new world order" that resonate with the public. His disarming verdict of his own illusions after 1989 coincides with their own disillusionment. Like many in Bulgaria, in 1989 Khaitov was swept by the democratic euphoria, and was optimistic about his country's chances to "return to Europe":

In 1992 I had not yet come out of the socialist anesthesia. We were lying so quiet under the Soviet umbrella with the modest but regular ration we were given, that practically all our defensive reflexes had disappeared. Our national muscles had become soft, and the convolutions in our brains had straightened themselves out in a regime of complete absence of the risk to be unemployed and die from hunger. If there was some tension, it consisted in the attempts to secure an easier and better-paid position. At the same time, on the other side of the border, beyond the Iron Curtain, the world was developing in a frenzied pace, arming itself with different technologies and know-how, and preparing itself to defeat and take us over.<sup>356</sup>

I was reading this latest book of Khaitov while riding the bus from Sofia to Vienna in the summer of 2001. It had just come out, and was given to me by Khaitov fresh from the press, even before it had hit the stores, when I visited him in June, 2001. It is only a 130 pages long, and the last response is to a question posed by his interlocutor: "Let me ask you, for a change, what is associated mostly with human happiness?" This is Khaitov's response:

The normally organized human being cannot be happy if the streets around him are full of beggars. As for the permanent feeling of contentment with life, it depends, in principle, on labor and the self-fulfillment brought by it to any inhabitant of the planet, born under the sun. A human being cannot be truly happy without the blissful self-esteem imparted to us by creative labor... I have not seen a happier

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356 *Ibid.*, 83.

man than my father when he walked behind his plough in the field. My mother's element was the harvest. Once she got hold of the sickle, she would start singing and would not stop. She would reap and sing, sing and reap, until the evening. When does one sing? Whenever one is happy. The whole field around Iavrovo resounded with songs and whistles. Barefoot, naked, malnourished, my fellow villagers rose with a song, and went to bed with a song. The main pleasure and support of these people was labor.

After the planned destruction and plunder of the industry and agriculture in 1991, almost half the active population was thrown into the streets. Just think what happens to these close to a million well nursed specialists who have no place and no way to make a living. First and foremost, they daily lose their accumulated knowledge and labor reflexes, and thus literally fall into degradation... A society with mass unemployment can be neither successful, nor stable. And the state is helpless, if it cannot fulfill its most elementary duty—to provide labor to the taxpayers which support it. You asked me in another setting: was there no other way out, could we have avoided this situation?

Now it is obvious how unpardonably thoughtless, indeed criminal, it was to dismantle the old socialist hut through the so-called 'shock therapy,' when this could have been done brick by brick. We could have built the new "market" world simultaneously with dismantling the old. Most people would have been at their posts, and would have retrained, without being wasted and thrown out. And without their sacred right to labor having been violated.

I am not even speaking of the other unbearable challenge to which the laboring people were subjected by the literal plunder of the state pension funds, which had been accumulated by their savings. Could at least part of the money from 'privatization' have gone to at least partly reconstruct these funds? I hardly envy the ones who can be happy and smiling in such circumstances. The so-called civilized world has gone through numerous moral crises. Let us hope that the present neoliberal crisis won't last that long, and that it would leave the Bulgarians the chance to prove again in the next centuries their moral and creative abilities.<sup>357</sup>

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357 Ibid., 132–3.

I had closed the book and had closed my eyes. Why is it never simple? Why are “bad professionals” not really that bad, and why can “good nationalists” actually be good in many respects? True, Khaitov’s style in this book was in many instances too dramatic for my taste, his worldview reeking too much of conspiracy theory. For myself, one of the famous Chudomir pictures appealed stronger in this context. The great writer Chudomir who was also a talented artist, painted this particular one in the 1930s, and had three peasants sitting behind their glasses of brandy. “Hey, brother,” says one, “when will this wretched crisis end so that we can resume our regular poverty?” Questions of interpretation and style apart, Khaitov was pointing his finger unquenchingly at the serious issues. The voice of my neighbor on the seat woke me from my slumber. She was a trendy young woman, roughly my daughter’s age, who was visiting a friend in Vienna, had just finished her beer, and had put a fresh layer of lipstick: “I see you are reading Khaitov. May I borrow the book? I really think he is the best.”

When Khaitov died at age 82 on June 30, 2002, his funeral attracted thousands of admirers. The newspapers did not conceal the polarized emotions he had been evoking—“the cultural battles he provoked were driven by the blind eyes of tragedy”—but they all agreed on his magnificent talent and his larger than life presence in the cultural life of Bulgaria.<sup>358</sup> In one of his latest interviews Khaitov had tried to strike a balance: “Sins I have but no qualms.” The one thing for which he would give half of his life was to make a film about Levski. He didn’t have time for that: as one of the newspapers summed it up: “God took in Nikolai Khaitov.”<sup>359</sup> But Khaitov had already announced that “Levski is the Bulgarians’ God.”<sup>360</sup>

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358 *Kultura* 27, July 5, 2002, 3; *Monitor*, July 2, 2002, 16–7; *Sega*, July 2, 2002, 13; *Sega*, July 4, 2002, 6.

359 *Standart*, July 2, 2002.

360 *Standart*, February 18, 2001.



# PART II

THE APOSTLE OF FREEDOM,  
OR WHAT MAKES A HERO?



In the summer of 1998, I visited the artist Todor Tsonev, who had become famous after 1989 with his exhibition of cartoons of Todor Zhivkov that he had painted during communism, one of the very few cases where the expectation of a “closet full of masterpieces” that were cached away from the forbidding eyes of censorship actually was vindicated. Maria Ovcharova, his close friend and collaborator and a scholar in her own right, had organized this exhibit after 1989, and it triggered enormous interest. For a brief period of time Tsonev became the hero of democracy, the notion which in the first years covered the genuine democratizing transformations in the Bulgarian polity, as well as a pet of the “democrats,” the label given in jest to the anti-communist political leadership. He soon disappointed both the “democrats” as well as the so-called reform socialists, the so-called “blue” and “red” factions, and reverted to caricatures, in which he exposed the pains and evils of “really existing democracy.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Ovcharova, *Totalitarizmit v karikaturite na Todor Tsonev*, Sofia: Bългарски khudozhnik, 1990; *Todor Tsonev ot totalitarizim kîm demokratsiia*, predgovor i sistavitelstvo Maria Ovcharova, Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1992. My impression of Todor Tsonev, which I entered at the time in my diary, was of a very artistic and original individual, with a keen sense of humor, and a strange combination of goodness with a certain malice. He was clearly enormously self-assured and did not have to be persuaded of his worth as an artist. His remarkable sensitivity for social injustice went, also strangely, hand in hand with an almost primitive anti-Americanism, garnered with anti-Semitic pronouncements. This was only an aside of our conversation which was almost entirely about his art and his pre-1989 life, but I report on it, because by 1998 one could hear an emotional reaction against things American, after the previous short-lived pro-American euphoria of the early 1990s. Some of it was the result of a number of American political faux pas vis-à-vis Bulgaria, some was produced by the general amazement at the crudities of “free-market democracy,” behind which the shadow of the new Big Brother was discernible. The anti-Semitic tinge was entirely news to me, as I had never perceived it before in Bulgarian educated and, even less so, uneducated circles, whose attitude could be generalized as between neutrality and philo-Semitism. It may have to do with the general perception of Israel as an US-client state, alongside several economic scandals in which Russian-born Israeli oligarchs had acquired huge wealth during Bulgaria’s privatizations and when the activities of some among them were exposed as fraudulent, they took refuge in Israel. On the other hand, the presence of anti-Semitic texts in some bookstores is part of the general liberalization of the public space, in which articulations of several interwar

When I entered his studio, I was struck by an almost life-size portrait of Levski in uniform, on which the artist was working. It was not a spectacular piece of art. Tsonev was an excellent cartoonist, whose genius lay in the combination of quick and sparse line with strong civic consciousness. He was also working in oil, woodcarving and mini-sculpture, but these were not his forte. Following my surprised gaze, Tsonev explained that he had been arrested for a brief period in the early months of 1989. His interrogator was a young man, and quite humane, according to Tsonev. After Tsonev's release, he visited him from time to time. Then he disappeared for a longer period, and when Tsonev met him again, he had started a successful business. He asked Tsonev to paint for him a huge portrait of the Apostle that he wanted hanged in his living room.<sup>2</sup> Obviously the portrait was accorded the role of an indulgence, only one is not sure whether it was supposed to atone for the pangs of consciousness of the former interrogator or the present businessman.

Todor Tsonev had no qualms about producing this portrait, no doubt because this particular interrogator had been good-hearted, and because he was making a living out of it. He himself held Levski and Botev as his heroes and saints, and told me that he had already made arrangements about his own death. He should be cremated and his friends were to take the urn with his ashes first to Karlovo and sprinkle a handful of his remains in front of Levski's home. Then they should head off to nearby Kalofer and do the same thing in front of Botev's house. The rest of his ashes should be strewn in the fields between the two towns.

Levski has become the ultimate legitimizing authority and his name is the final imprimatur on any political initiative and business enterprise. Analyzing his consecutive and simultaneous appropriations allows one to see how boundaries within the framework of the nation are negotiated around accepted national symbols. Levski's relatively sparse written legacy, while interesting and significant in its own historical context as a testament to the vision of the national revolution

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ideologies, from fascism and irredentist nationalism to innocuous mysticism, have been rehabilitated. In a way, Tsonev struck me as very close to Khaitov in his views, except this element of anti-Semitism, which was never present in the otherwise totally outspoken Khaitov.

*2 Personal diary, August 6, 1998.*



ОЧИТЕ НА БЪЛГАРИЯ към тебе са отправени  
и всеки търси да открие нещо в себе си от теб,  
ние всички искаме да бъдем с теб във времето  
тъй както времето е винаги във теб,  
ОЧИТЕ НА БЪЛГАРИЯ за тебе винаги ще желят  
както само майка жали за първо чедо,  
за първороден син  
защото ти израсна до бесилото като най-големия  
и най-неповторимия ни исполин.  
СЪРЦЕТО НА БЪЛГАРИЯ за тебе винаги ще бие  
и няма сила, която да го спре,  
то в теб ще бъде влюбено  
дори да минат векове.  
ОЧИТЕ НА БЪЛГАРИЯ и нас ще оценяват  
един ден с твоите очи,  
един ден внучето ще ни запита:  
Къде е Левски в тебе дядо, бабо?  
Какво направи за България след твоите деди?!

*Когато животът ме гневно притисне  
със своята сила и груба ръка,  
несетно си сполиям за дядко Левски  
в стихията страшна на тежка борба.*

ФОНДАЦИЯ "Лейди Дайана - Принцесата на народа"

**Figure 11.** Flyer of the charitable foundation "Lady Diana."

in the 1860s and 1870s, has been elevated to the status of Pythia-like pronouncements, and relatively simple utterances have become slogans and allegories for wide political movements or programs. Bulgarians have been weaned on the popular *Ako spechelia, pecheli tsial narod, ako izgubia, gubia samo mene si* ("If I win, I win for the whole nation, if I lose, I am losing only myself"). In the 1980s another one became fashionable and has been widely used especially in the 1990s: *Vremeto e v nas i nii sme viv vremeto* ("The time is in us and we are in the time").

On July 18, 1996, the 159th anniversary of Levski's birthday, a monument was dedicated to Levski in front of the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington, D.C. It represents Levski's bust and carries an inscription in Bulgarian and English of one of these brief thoughts that have achieved mantra-like quality. This time it was one that had hardly been used before. In fact, my oral interviews among Bulgarians who are not historians, have convinced me that they were hearing it for the first time. The text in Bulgarian is *Svoboda i sekimu svoeto*, rendered in English as "Freedom and to each his own." While this is not a mis-translation, it is a misleading translation. Everyone I have asked about their knee-jerk reaction to the phrase (Bulgarians and Americans alike)

interpret it as an illustration of Levski's dedication to individual liberties. Some suggest it shows Levski's understanding of the significance of private property for the independence of the individual, in other words it is unanimously a classical liberal—Lockean or *Rights of Man*—reading. Thus, the monument is meant to transmit to the United States government and the World Bank an assurance of the deeply ingrained individualism and property-abiding propensities of Bulgarians and their growing privatization potential, to counter the unfavorable stereotype of an irredeemably socialist infected population behind the Iron Curtain of culturally unreceptive and unreformable Orthodoxy. There are other innumerable attempts to domesticate a typical revolutionary (or "terrorist"—he was hanged as one) into the politically correct neo-liberal idiom of market capitalism. Recently, I came across the flier of a charitable foundation, featuring the portrait of Levski and an utterly talentless appeal in rhyme. It is a supplication to Levski who is the sole solace in difficult times and it ends with a grandchild asking the grandparents: "Where is Levski in you, grandpa, grandma? What did you do for Bulgaria after your predecessors?" The foundation is named "Lady Diana: Princess of the People."

The inscription on Levski's bust is one of those instances that illuminates the ambiguity of *les mots de l'histoire* ("the words of history" as employed by Jacques Rancière). One is compelled to ask with Hayden White: "What happens to the words of history when they are used as the raw materials for words about history?"<sup>3</sup> Actually, the phrase is encountered *in toto* or in parts in several instances. It is used as a verbatim slogan in a newspaper article of Levski published in Liuben Karavelov's paper *Svoboda* on February 13, 1871. The original dispatch of Levski had been sent at the very end of 1870 or the beginning of 1871, and after some editing and rewriting, Karavelov printed it as the correspondence of "d.L.," that is, "diakon (Deacon) Levski." It is, in fact, one of the most powerful pieces where Levski develops his ideas that Bulgarians should rely only upon their own strengths. "The knife should be speaking; the ink does not help anymore," he writes, commenting on the uselessness of appeals to the European consulates and governments. Not only were they indifferent to the plight of the

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3 Hayden White, "Foreword: Rancière's Revisionism," Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History. On the Poetics of Knowledge*, transl. Hassan Melehy, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 (italics mine).

Bulgarians, but they were actively helping the decrepit empire stand on its feet: “Slavs-Poles are Turkish gendarmes, the French are Turkish engineers, the English—Turkish diplomats, Cossacks-Nekrassovs are Turkish police, Germans—Turkish spies, Hungarians—Turkish brothers, Czechs—Turkish musicians.” It is worthless to complain and expect help from the outside; from now on “we devote ourselves to God and rely on our own muscles.” It is the task of the paper for one last time to inform the world about “Bulgarian public opinion: that we are humans and we want to live in a humane manner; that we have nothing in common with the Turkish government and peace between us is impossible,” and then throw away the ink bottle, and take up arms. And this is followed by the pertinent paragraph:

Today’s public opinion is such that each single nation, even the Turks, have to be free and live among us as people and citizens. Our banner which will be raised on the Balkan Peninsula, will carry only three words: “Freedom and to each his own.” If we, the Christian nations of the Balkan Peninsula, are determined to take the right path and to seek our individual and national freedom, without harming our neighbors, who can prevent us from that?<sup>4</sup>

It is very clear that in the context of the letter, the slogan “Freedom and to each his own” refers, in fact, to collective rights, or to individual rights but the individual rights of the nation as an individual writ large. The whole pathos of the letter is in line with the liberal and democratic nationalism of Mazzini, and there is actually an indirect reference to him in the appeal that “Young Bulgaria” should look to Italy for inspiration. It is, indeed, an echo of the universalist character of European nationalism as it was preached in the first half of the nineteenth century, before it lost its innocence in 1848, and before it was domesticated and harnessed in the carriage of establishments and the extreme right. In other letters or dispatches Levski again used the same phrase. Writing to Gancho Milev in May, 1871, Levski mentioned his ideal of “freedom and a pure republic.” He explained that the future Bulgaria

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<sup>4</sup> *Svoboda*, god. II, no. 7, February 13, 1871; published in Khristo Khristov, Nikolai Genchev, *Bilgarsko vizrazhdane*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1969, 377–9; also in Kirila Vîzvîzova, Nikolai Genchev, eds., *Vasil Levski. Dokumentalno nasledstvo*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1973, no. 13, 68–70.

will not resemble today's empire but "all nations will live under pure and sacred laws... everything will be equal for the Turk, for the Jew etc. whoever they are. ... We do not chase away the Turkish people, or their religion, but the king and his laws, in a word, the Turkish government, which rules barbarously not only over us, but over the Turks themselves." Upon which he concluded that Bulgaria will not have a king but a "people's rule" and "to each his own." In another letter to a wealthy Bulgarian in October 1871, he stated (again in the vein of Mazzini) that "our century is the century of freedom and equality for all nations," and it is our task therefore "to build the temple of genuine freedom and give everyone his own."<sup>5</sup> In both cases, very clearly the allusion is to the rights of different nations who are all supposed to be treated equally.<sup>6</sup>

There are numerous analogous examples which demonstrate that Levski has already been constructed as a ritualized hero, malleable enough to be attached to most any cause. He has been evoked as the ultimate authority and has been on everybody's banner: believer and atheist, republican and monarchist, conservative and radical, all want him as a symbol. Indeed, the saga of Levski's posthumous fate, spanning already close to a century and a half, not only parallels the evolution of modern Bulgaria, it is in many respects its embodiment. The tribulations of Levski the hero are an allegory of the evolution of Bulgarian nationalism. This is a relatively weak nationalism in global terms, and in European terms one of the weakest. Bulgarian nationalism has not produced a powerful pantheon: Levski, as already pointed out, is by far the only uncontested figure. Compared to neighboring nationalisms in the Balkans, present-day Bulgarian nationalism is undoubtedly the weakest but, paradoxically, Balkan nationalism itself is much weaker than most other manifestations of European nationalism: its bitter defensiveness and sometimes nervous savagery is a symptom of its deep insecurity, and in the final analysis, its weakness. The analysis of Levski's consecutive and simultaneous appropriations by differ-

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5 Ivan Undzhiev, Nikola Kondarev, *Sviata i chista republika. Pisma i dokumenti*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1971, 31, 37.

6 Another mention of "Svoboda bilgarinu i sekimu svoeto" occurs in a letter to Panaiot Khitov from May 10, 1871. See Vasil Levski, *Pisma, Statii, Pesni*, ed. Stefan Karakostov, Sofia: Nov svet, 1941, 43, in which Levski is critical of how Serbia has treated and used the Bulgarian movement.

ent social platforms, political parties, secular and religious institutions, ideologies, professional groups, even individuals, offers a fascinating glimpse into the development of Bulgarian political life, as well as into elite struggles over who possesses history.

At another level, the Levski story engages organically in a variety of general theoretical questions. Most broadly, it offers insights into the general problem of history and memory, with all its concomitant aspects: the problem of “public” or “social” or “collective” or “people’s” memory as treated by historians; the nature of national memory in comparison to other types of collective memory; the variability of memory over time and social space; alternative memories; memory’s techniques like commemorations, that are the mechanisms of creating and transmitting memory; the changing nature of memory over time, on the one hand, and on the other, the changing salience of memory over time. It is intimately involved with the question of historical heroes and the nature of hero worship. Is there anything specific about national heroes, or heroes of the age of nationalism? How does the understanding of heroes change over time? What is the correlation between historical heroes and literary archetypes of heroes? Who or what creates heroes and why? Finally, it is closely linked to the historical discipline itself: the nature of producing historical knowledge, the genres of history writing, the place of historiography compared to other memory-producing projects.



# 1. What Is a Hero and Are Heroes Born?

It should be no coincidence that the great interest in heroes as well as the beginning of the study of heroic myth falls on the high age of nationalism. It was also the high age of revolutions, of the advent of mass politics, of science, and the passionate struggle between a numbers of -isms: conservatism, liberalism, socialism, republicanism, romanticism, anarchism, and so on. No wonder that the great debate in an era that saw the shaping of several social science disciplines was about the role of individuals in history, notably heroes, versus the blind operation of structural forces and social laws, and the cumulative role of social groups, notably classes.

It is also not insignificant that the six public lectures on heroes that Thomas Carlyle delivered in 1840, published in 1841 as the famous *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, had been preceded by six public lectures on the revolutions of Modern Europe. It is ironic that Carlyle's explanation for his hero lectures, given his firm belief that "Man is heaven-born; not the thrall of Circumstances, of Necessity, but the victorious subduer thereof," was that he was "driven into that Lecture-room" by the "bayonets of necessity," and the "necessity" he was alluding to was not intellectual drive or moral passion but the need "for subsistence" and employment.<sup>7</sup> He objected strongly to and caricatured what he thought was a prevailing belief that the hero was the "creature of the Time," that "Time called him forth, that Time did everything, he nothing," that "the individual is supposed capable of nothing," and that "there must be organization, classification, machinery ... as if the capital of national morality could

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Carlyle, "Boswell's Life of Johnson," (1832) and Letter of Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, March 16, 1838, cited in Michael Goldberg, "Introduction," in Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* Introduction and Notes by Michael K. Goldberg, text established by Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin, and Mark Engel, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, xxi, xxxv.

be increased by making a joint stock of it.”<sup>8</sup> For all his enthusiasm and polemics against what he considered the dominant spirit of the day, Carlyle was no gadfly. To the contrary: his obsession with heroes was a common and widespread preoccupation, and he represented a high point in the mainstream of Victorian thought. In Lehman’s words, his was “merely the final, high doctrine in a movement which had been for some years under way.”<sup>9</sup> There were few dissenters and critics of Carlyle, among them T. H. Huxley, Thomas Macaulay, and especially Herbert Spencer who ascribed the popularity of the Great Man approach to the satisfaction of “an instinct not very remotely allied to that of the village gossip” and to the preference of explanations “easy to comprehend.”<sup>10</sup> Spencer’s opinion was summarized in the famous phrase, “Before he [the great man] can remake his society, his society must remake him.”<sup>11</sup> These critical voices, however lucid and powerful, were totally lost in the storm of admiration and emulation.

For Carlyle, heroes were the creative drive in history: “Could we see them well, we should get some glimpses into the very marrow of the world’s history... In all epochs of the world’s history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable savior of his epoch;—the lightning, without which the fuel never would have burnt. The History of the World, I said already, was the Biography of Great Men.”<sup>12</sup> True, Carlyle never advocated complete voluntarism. His heroes did not impose their will arrogantly on history. Instead, their heroism intuited the direction of history set by God, deciphered the course of society and acted accordingly: “A Hero, as I repeat, has this first distinction, which indeed we may call first and last, the Alpha and Omega of his whole Heroism, that he looks through the shews of things into *things*.”<sup>13</sup> Here,

8 Quoted in Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, xxxv.

9 B. H. Lehman, *Carlyle’s Theory of the Hero*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928, 132; Eric Bentley, *The Cult of the Superman: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, with Notes on Other Hero-Worshippers of Modern Times*, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1969, 17–62, inserts Carlyle in a chain from Herder, Hegel, Henri Bergson and William James to Nietzsche and Spengler.

10 Quoted in Robert Segal, “Introduction,” in Robert A. Segal, *Hero Myths: A Reader*, Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000, 3.

11 Ibid.

12 Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 4, 13.

13 Ibid., 48.

Carlyle was in agreement with Hegel who wrote about Caesar that he “fulfilled the necessary historical destiny of Rome and the world”:

Thus he was motivated not only by his own private interest, but acted instinctively to bring to pass that which the times required. It is the same with all great historical individuals: their own particular purposes contain the substantial will of the World Spirit. They must thus be called “heroes”... Such individuals have no consciousness of the Idea as such. They are practical and political men. But at the same time they are thinkers with insight into what is needed and timely. They see the very truth of their age and their world, the next genus, so to speak, which is already formed in the womb of time.<sup>14</sup>

As far as the etiology of heroes was concerned, Carlyle was convinced that the heroic is something immanent to the hero: “A Hero is a Hero at all points; in the soul and thoughts of him first of all.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover “hero-worship is just as important as the heroism it admires and fosters by its acknowledgement. To recognize the hero is itself a form of heroism, and it is possible only ‘by being ourselves of heroic mind.’”<sup>16</sup> It is the kind of belief that not only was coherent with the dominant spirit of the age but had a continued influence over generations of scholars and the reading public at large. It is the kind of belief shared by many, if not most people today, and one certainly shared by practically all writers, scholars and public figures dealing with the particular heroic cult of Levski, from the earliest (Zakhari Stoianov or Ivan Vazov) to the latest (Nikolai Genchev or Zheliu Zhelev). We are still, after all, within the *longue durée* of nationalism (even though past its peak) with its fixation on the romantic, the genuine, and the organic, and within the (everlasting) *longue durée* of human society with its need for the ideal, the inspiring, and the heroic.<sup>17</sup>

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14 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (1837), cited in Segal, *Hero Myths: A Reader*, 4. Segal perceptively adds that the only disagreement between them would be that where for Carlyle the hero would be the cause, for Hegel he would be rather a manifestation of change.

15 Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 25.

16 Goldberg, “Introduction,” in Carlyle, *On Heroes*, LXI.

17 It is because I would like to depict in this section the sources of influence and mental world of the scholars and writers dealing with Levski that I am confining this survey to Carlyle as the most prominent ideologue of the

Carlyle expressed his belief in heroism and hero-worship as an imminent human characteristic: “Had all traditions, arrangements, creeds, societies that men ever instituted, sunk away, this would remain. The certainty of Heroes being sent us; our faculty, our necessity, to reverence Heroes when sent; it shines like a pole-star through smoke-clouds, dust-clouds, and all manner of down-rushing and conflagration.”<sup>18</sup> He distinguished between six types or classes of heroes, and although the format in which he offered his spirited analysis was more essayistic than systematic, his work is nevertheless referred to as “Carlyle’s theory of the hero.” The six types were: the hero as divinity—God—exemplified by Odin and other pagan divinities, chiefly from Scandinavian mythology; the hero as prophet, no longer God but a God-inspired individual, represented by Mohammed; the hero as poet, a type existing in all periods, and epitomized by Dante and Shakespeare; the hero as priest, which is a kind of prophet, represented by Luther and Knox; the modern type, the hero as man of letters, exemplified by Rousseau, Johnson and Burns; and finally, the hero as king, embodied in the figures of Cromwell and Napoleon.

This last type—the hero as king—is the “most important of Great Men” and summarizes, “*all* the various figures of Heroism; Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fancy to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do*.”<sup>19</sup> Writing, as Carlyle was, in the high age of monarchism and conservative triumphalism before the great conflagrations of 1848, he was at pains to discredit “all rebellions, French revolutions, social explosions in ancient and modern times” and preached that “there is no act more moral between men than that of rule and obedience.”<sup>20</sup> He conceded they were eruptions spurred by idealism, only in this case, the edifice erected in search of the ideal structure was directed by a bricklayer gone astray: “*He* has forgotten himself: but the Law of Gravitation does not forget to act on him; he and his wall rush down

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“great man in history” theory and hero-worship, and the subsequent engagement with hero-patterns. For a more systematic review of the scholarship on heroism, and especially the constructivist trend in historical and anthropological writing, see Part III, Chapter 6.

18 Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 174.

19 *Ibid.*, 169, 220.

20 *Ibid.*, 170–1.

into confused welter of ruin!”<sup>21</sup> Carlyle could not overlook or neglect “modern revolutionism” but he tried to domesticate it:

May we not say, moreover, while so many of our late Heroes have worked rather as revolutionary men, that nevertheless every Great Man, every genuine man, is by the nature of him a son of Order, not of Disorder? It is a tragic position for a true man to work in revolutions. He seems an anarchist; and indeed a painful element of anarchy does encumber him at every step—him to whose whole soul anarchy is hostile, hateful. His mission is Order, every man’s is. He is here to make what was disorderly, chaotic, into a thing ruled, regular. He is the missionary of Order.<sup>22</sup>

“Modern revolutionism” for Carlyle began with Luther, and while the French revolution might have overthrown the divine right of kings and outwardly denied hero worship, the slogan for liberty and equality was, in fact, the repudiation of sham heroes. Napoleon was, at bottom, a man of order who hated anarchy but he was one of the exemplars gone astray: his system, “this Napoleonism was *unjust*, a falsehood; and could not last.”<sup>23</sup> In the end, the greatest hero “is called *Rex*, Regulator, *Roi*: our own name is still better; King, *Könning*, which means Can-ning, Able-man.”<sup>24</sup>

Carlyle made the explicit distinction between the divine and the human, but allowed for mythic heroes to be considered as divine figures. Segal comments that it is conventional, in the academic study of myth, to distinguish between mere heroes and gods: “Yet, contrary to convention, heroism can blur the line between the human and the divine—not by demoting gods to humans but by elevating humans to gods.”<sup>25</sup> This is achieved by hero myths. First in 1863 but systematically in 1871, Edward Tylor suggested that most hero myths follow a uniform plot.<sup>26</sup> In his posthumous 1876 publication “The Aryan

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21 *Ibid.*, 170.

22 *Ibid.*, 175.

23 *Ibid.*, 220–1.

24 *Ibid.*, 169.

25 Segal, “Introduction,” in Segal, *Hero Myths: A Reader*, 6.

26 For a historiographical review of work on the hero pattern, see Alan Dundes, “The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus,” in *In Quest of the Hero: The Myth of the Birth of the Hero; The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and*

Expulsion and Return Formula” Johann Georg von Hahn described a sixteen-incident pattern defining a universal hero applicable to all human societies, and thus launched modern hero pattern research. This was followed by the studies of Adolf Bauer in the 1880s, Heinrich Lessmann in 1906, Emmanuel Cosquin in 1908. Otto Rank, applying Freudian insights, proposed a similar pattern, even as he avoided identifying incidents, in his most influential work *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909).<sup>27</sup> Next came research by Karl Schmeing (1911), Paul Franklin Baum (1916), Eugene McCartney (1925), and Alexander Krappe (1933). Special mention should be made to the groundbreaking work of Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktales* (1928), about the place of heroes in fairy-tales. In the English-speaking world, most influential became the twenty-two-incident pattern of Lord Raglan in his book *The Hero*, published in 1936, even as he was blissfully (or arrogantly) ignorant of the previous work in the field. After the Second World War, the most significant contribution was Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1956), as well as Alan Dundes’s study on Jesus and the hero pattern in the 1970s, although the steam of hero pattern studies has somewhat subsided since.

What characterized most theorists before 1945 is that, as a rule, they were little concerned with the historicity of heroes. They did not explicitly deny that heroes may have been based on real historical figures, but they posited that the concrete aspects of their heroism weren’t. The attention was on the analysis of the structural components of myth and ritual, and the psychoanalysis of the myth-maker and the reader’s ego. Lord Raglan, in particular, was adamant that “heroes had no claims to historicity” and that “the traditional narrative has no basis either in history or in philosophical speculation, but is derived from the myth; and that the myth is narrative connected with a rite.”<sup>28</sup>

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*Drama, Part II; The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, 185–8.

27 The latest reprint of the English translation of Otto Rank is in *In Quest of the Hero*, 3–86.

28 Lord Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama*, cited here from its reprint in *In Quest of the Hero*, 87–175, specifically 89, 99, 108, 137. Raglan considered either of the two propositions—that myth is a statement of historical fact clothed in more or less obscure language, or that it is a fanciful or speculative explanation of a natural phenomenon—patently false (89).

Lord Raglan distributed his twenty two incidents characterizing the hero pattern into three main groups around the three principal rites of passage: birth, initiation, and death.<sup>29</sup> In a tongue-in-cheek survey of the Levski case and juxtaposing it to this model, it will be clear that he corresponds significantly to the pattern. Let us take a close look at all the twenty two incidents. The first seven pertain to the hero's birth: the mother is a royal virgin, the father is king, often related to the mother, the circumstances of the conception are unusual, the hero is reputed to be the son of a god, there is an attempt (usually by the father) to kill the son, but the son is spirited away and saved. Clearly these incidents around the birth as a rite of passage do not correspond with the Levski case (as they mostly do with Jesus, whom Lord Raglan did not take into account), but Raglan himself does not posit royal parentage as a condition *sine qua non*: it is only "whenever there are royalties available."<sup>30</sup> However, the same element in Rank's scheme is "child of distinguished parents"<sup>31</sup> and Levski's hard-working and honest parents were deemed "distinguished" in the moral universe of nineteenth and twentieth-century Bulgaria, where the most "noble" background is of poor, but alert and industrious people.

As far as the other two rites of passage are concerned—initiation and death—the Levski case conforms quite splendidly with many incidents. For instance, we can find analogues of the next four items of Raglan—the hero is reared by foster parents in a far country (8), we are told nothing of his childhood (9), on reaching manhood he returns and goes to his future kingdom (10), he is victorious over a king or a giant, or dragon or wild beast (11)—in Levski's difficult religious apprenticeship with his maternal uncle, running away from him, and then joining the Belgrade legion of Rakovski, where he enters his future kingdom—the revolution and serving the liberation of his people, and achieves such distinction that he is nicknamed "the Lion" (Levski).

Raglan's next incidents are the marriage of the hero to the princess, his becoming the king himself whereupon he reigns and prescribes laws (items 12 to 15). The absence of marriage is an obvious

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29 *Ibid.*, 148. The table of the 22 items (p. 138) is also reproduced by Robert Segal, "Introduction," *In Quest of the Hero*, xxiv; and Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus," 188–9.

30 *Ibid.*, 148.

31 *In Quest of the Hero*, 188.

difference, that is also a glaring absence in Jesus, and Alan Dundes makes much of this by providing an imaginative interpretation of Mediterranean family relations in Oedipal terms, and claiming that it was this male-oriented worldview which produced the lack of marriage as a significant element of the Christian ideal. I don't find the Freudian framework in this instance particularly evocative, nor do I think that there is something particularly Mediterranean in askesis. Moreover, if one were to take askesis as a spiritual ideal more seriously, then one could also trace the presence of a metaphoric marriage (to the national revolution in the case of Levski, to the Christian ideal in the case of Jesus) and the subsequent service to the idea, in the realm of the ideal kingdom.

Dundes's study of Christ and the hero pattern squarely dealt with the issue of the hero's historicity. He drew attention to the work of Francis Lee Utley who had applied Raglan's criteria to the case of Abraham Lincoln, and finding a complete fit, highlighted the distinction between the individual and his biography with respect to historicity.<sup>32</sup> Dundes accordingly applied it to Jesus:

The fact that a hero's biography conforms to the Indo-European hero pattern does not necessarily mean that the hero never existed. It suggests rather that the folk repeatedly insist upon making their versions of the lives of heroes follow the lines of a specific series of incidents. Accordingly, if the life of Jesus conforms in any way with the standard hero pattern, this proves nothing one way or the other with respect to the historicity of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

Raglan's next batch of incidents focusing on the end of the hero (items 16–19: losing favor with the gods or the subjects, being driven from the throne, meeting a mysterious death, often at the top of a hill), can find fairly straightforward analogues in Levski's life: his frustration with the revolutionary work in the last years of his life, his contested leadership, his trial and execution at the gallows that were immediately seen as a

32 Francis Lee Utley, *Lincoln Wasn't There or Lord Raglan's Hero*. CEA Chap Book. Supplement to CEA Critic 22, No. 9. Washington, DC: College English Association, 1965.

33 Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus," 190.

symbol of Golgotha. Finally, the last items (20–22: the hero's children, if any, do not succeed him, his body is not buried but nevertheless, he has one or more holy sepulchers) are again relevant. The last two are literally identical, and while Levski had no children, the disarray in the revolutionary movement following his death can be interpreted in the vein of the mythical pattern.

Levski is too historical and recent a hero to make it possible to trace the hero pattern and be able to disentangle folklore from biographical fact. However, there are elements of his historical life that “fit” the pattern so well that this, in turn, immediately reflects back and “heroicizes” the life accordingly. But if this is the case, then the legitimate question is: are heroes born? Is there something ontologically heroic, immanent to a certain human type, or else, is the heroic an attributive constructed characteristic? Better still, is it at all productive to separate the ontology of heroes from their construction? Let us summarize the bare facts of the historical life of our hero.

Levski was born in 1837 in Karlovo in a craftsman's family. Upon the death of his father in 1851, he helped his mother in procuring for the family. He became a novice to his maternal uncle—an abbot—and in 1858 was ordained as a monk with the name Ignatii. In March, 1862 he abruptly left for Belgrade where he joined the Bulgarian legion organized by Rakovski whose aim was to train young Bulgarians for future military clashes with the Ottomans. There Vasil Ivanov Kunchev acquired the nickname Levski (from *lev*, *liv*, “lion”). With the disbanding of the legion—having become an embarrassment to the Serbian government in its attempt to reach an arrangement with the Porte—Levski left Belgrade in the fall of 1862 and returned to Karlovo where he served as a deacon. In 1864, at Easter, he broke with his religious career, and in his own words took the vows to serve “the fatherland... to serve it until death.” In the next two years he taught in a couple of villages, and in early 1867 emigrated to Romania in order to join the *cheta* (military band) of Panaiot Khitov. As the standard-bearer, Levski criss-crossed Bulgaria, later joined the Second Bulgarian legion in Belgrade, and after its disbanding returned to Bucharest. By that time, he was deeply disappointed with the existing tactics of revolutionary struggle, and believed that only a solid and meticulous preparation within the country could be effective. He managed to convince one of the *émigré* organizations to send him on a tour of Bulgaria, and

in 1868 and 1869 traveled through the country twice, creating a network of revolutionary committees. On his return to Bucharest, he became one of the co-founders of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC), and in the course of a year tried hard but not very successfully to persuade his fellow émigrés that the center of the revolution should be moved to Bulgaria proper, and the movement should be emancipated from any connections and dependence on foreign powers (Serbia and Russia in particular). In May 1870, Levski returned to Bulgaria, and in the course of the next two years he was a veritable legend among the population with his enormous energy and singular ability to evade arrest. He organized hundreds of revolutionary committees, and formed a second, internal center in Lovech. During this period he also worked on the statutes of the organization, the best source for his political views. In April–May 1872, he participated in the first general assembly of the BRCC that adopted an official program and statute. Some of his ideas were adopted, but in general the documents reflected the ideas of the revolutionary emigration in Romania headed by Karavelov. The organization would have only one center, in Bucharest. The newly elected six-member Central Committee was chaired by Karavelov; Levski was elected member. He returned to Bulgaria in July 1872 and began feverish preparations for the national revolution. In the fall of 1872, an abortive operation by his estranged and undisciplined deputy, not authorized by Levski, led to the arrest of a number of revolutionaries. Their careless disclosures jeopardized the organization, and on his way to Bucharest to discuss the aggravated situation, Levski was captured by the Ottoman police (December, 1872). Tried by an emergency court, he was condemned to death and hanged in Sofia on February 18, 1873.<sup>34</sup>

This brief biography should not be seen as a travesty on a national hero on whom tomes have been written that could easily fill a library: there have been some 4,300 works (biographies, academic monographs, scholarly and newspaper articles, belles-lettres, poems) published on Levski since 1986. Contemporaries knew much less than that, and one could argue that until at least after the First World War, there was not in place the ritualized celebratory attitude toward an abstract, essentially generic, national hero. Between 1872, the year be-

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<sup>34</sup> There is no question about the correct date of Levski's execution but the widely known and officially commemorated date is February 19.

fore Levski's death, and the beginning of Bulgarian independence in 1878,<sup>35</sup> there were only 28 literary pieces (newspaper entries, polemical letters, poems) that mentioned Levski or were dedicated to him. With the exception of his mention in Khitov's memoirs, all the rest were triggered by his execution in 1873. Thirteen (maybe fourteen) belonged to Karavelov and were printed in his Bucharest edited revolutionary paper *Nezavisimost* ("Independence"), eight were written by Botev in his papers *Zname* ("Banner") and *Svoboda* ("Freedom"), one was the memoir of Khitov, in whose *cheta* Levski had served, two unsigned ones lamented his death. These materials were all published by the Bulgarian émigré press in Bucharest and authored by Levski's closest associates. Only three pieces came out in the loyalist Bulgarian press in the Ottoman empire: one a short news piece about the trial and execution in *Dunav* and two in *Turtsiia*, accusing Levski of misleading the Bulgarian people, calling him "a lowly person and a *haidut*," and maintaining that he, as well as Karavelov, did not enjoy public support among the Bulgarians.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore impossible to endorse the widely held view of one of Levski's early researchers who, in his 1943 analysis of Levski's first important 1883 biography by Zakhari Stoianov wrote that while Stoianov had to struggle in order to popularize Botev's greatness and oeuvre, "this was almost redundant for Levski, the reason being that Levski had become immortal and the favorite among a great part of the enslaved Bulgarian nation already during his life."<sup>37</sup> Levski was indeed a widely known and popular figure

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35 Bulgaria, after the partitioning by the Congress of Berlin in June/July, 1878, comprised only the lands north of the Balkan Mountains and the former *sandzhak* of Sofia, and had autonomous status with an elected Christian prince under the suzerainty of the Sultan. Eastern Rumelia, that is Thrace, the lands south of the Balkans, were given a measure of self-rule, but were under the direct rule of the Porte. Macedonia was unconditionally returned to the Ottoman Empire. In 1885 the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia declared their unification, and the country acquired full independence in 1908. For all practical purposes, however, 1878 is considered the birthdate of Bulgaria's independence. Both in history books and everyday speech, it is referred to as "the Liberation" (*Osvobozhdenieto*).

36 Vasil Levski. 1837–1987. *Bio-bibliografîa*, Sofia: Natsionalna biblioteka. "Kiril i Metodii," 1987, No. 13–40. The anti-Levski diatribe belonged to Nikola Genovich (*Turtsiia* 9, No. 7, March 31, 1873).

37 Stefan Karakostov, "Predgovor," in Vasil Levski (*Diakonît*). *Cherti iz zhivota mu ot Zakhari Stoianov*. *Kritichno izdanie pod redaktsiata na Stefan Kara-*

but he was not yet singled out and, according to the testimony of the same researcher, by 1881 Botev was the one who held the imagination of the Bulgarian youth.<sup>38</sup>

One of the best-known specialists on Levski, Nikolai Genchev, has been at great pains to insist that although a minority, the major figures of the national struggle did recognize Levski's prominence and superiority. He based his evidence first and foremost on Karavelov and Botev, and on some additional, if brief and scattered, pronouncements by Filip Totiu, Panaiot Khitov, Khristo Ivanov, and Danaïl Popov. Filip Totiu's opinion was taken from a letter to Ivan Kirshovski of April 1, 1871, in which he characterized Levski as someone "who works indefatigably for the common benefit."<sup>39</sup> Khitov himself commented in a letter from 1872 on the Project of a Statute for the organization and turned to his addressees, one of whom was Levski, as "patriotic gentlemen acting for the people's liberation." In another letter of September, 1872 to Karavelov, Khitov said that it would have been fairer if Karavelov's drama "Hadzhi Dimitir" would be dedicated not to him but to the ones who had organized the *cheta* or even to Levski, who "at least is working, while I have not been doing anything during the past five years."<sup>40</sup> Khristo Ivanov wrote to Levski in July, 1872, asking him to take care of himself, because "others we can gain more easily, but someone like you we can never gain."<sup>41</sup> And there was Danaïl Popov, critical of Levski for a long time but when Levski was finally caught, he wrote to Karavelov in January, 1873 that "our best Bulgarian—V. Levski—has been wasted, and I wish him from the bottom of my heart that he could somehow get off."<sup>42</sup>

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*kostov*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa V. Ivanov, 1943, 5. Karakostov's "Introduction" appeared under the title "Zakhari Stoianov kato biograf na Levski" in the second edition of the same book published in Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Rila," 1946.

38 Karakostov, "Predgovor," 6.

39 Nikolai Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1987, 139. At the same time, Genchev is too good a historian not to recognize that the context in which Filip Totiu praises Levski in this and another 1871 letter to Levski himself, comparing him favorably to Panaiot Khitov, is to a great extent dictated by Filip Totiu's personal rivalry against the other legendary leader of the older generation of revolutionaries.

40 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 140.

41 *Ibid.*, 140.

42 *Ibid.*, 141.

The relationship between Karavelov and Levski was not always smooth. There were basic differences on how they understood the strategic and tactical aspects of organizing a revolution, especially the issue of the primacy of the internal organization over the one in emigration, and the dependency on foreign support. Levski insisted on moving the center of the revolt to Bulgaria proper and was highly critical of the contemplative position of the émigrés and Karavelov in person. In February, 1871, Karavelov published a brief report of Levski in his newspaper *Svoboda*, and added that it was written by “an honest, patriotic and active individual, ... whom we wholly trust.” In the same issue of the paper, he addressed himself to Levski (a way of communication that was adopted by the revolutionaries), stating: “We wish you luck, but at the same time would advise you to speak little and work a lot. It is difficult to change from a horse to a donkey.” These are the only two written mentions of Levski coming from under Karavelov’s pen during the Apostle’s lifetime. The patronizing tone of the latter is unmistakable, and it seems that doubts over Levski’s ethos and behavior were shared at some, albeit brief, moments, by Karavelov.<sup>43</sup> Their relations were smoothed out by the spring of 1872, during the first general assembly of the BRCC that, as a whole, adopted Karavelov’s viewpoints and opted for a single center in Bucharest. An elected member of the six-person Central Committee, chaired by Karavelov, Levski immediately returned to Bulgaria to resume his practical activities.

Genchev rather summarily asserts that in the minds of his contemporaries the living Levski was present in a synthetic image, derived from the above characteristics by the six revolutionaries, as “the premier Bulgarian and the main figure of the national revolution.”<sup>44</sup> This is a forced conclusion, and Genchev was closer to the actual situation when he wrote that “Levski had not been the commonly accepted leader of the liberation movement. His rights as the main leader were questioned by solid journalists, by scholars and poets, and by leaders of the *cheti*. In the eyes of the cabinet revolutionaries in Bucharest he passed for someone simple and uneducated. Some internal revolution-

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43 *Ibid.*, 142–3, 145. Genchev also accepts the attribution of the lion-like pseudonym to Levski being traced to Karavelov, although there are numerous versions in this respect.

44 *Ibid.*, 144.

aries too, dared compare themselves to him, questioning his extraordinary powers.”<sup>45</sup>

It was Levski’s execution that dramatically changed Karavelov’s attitude. As chairman of the organization, he felt responsible for the blow. Strangely, he kept silent for several months and only on August 11, 1873 published an obituary, describing the Apostle’s last days. It is a dramatic and passionate piece but thoroughly unreliable. Karavelov describes in a kind of testimonial prose, how Levski was tortured in his cell, all his teeth pulled out, his flesh torn piece by piece with tongs, and his body pierced by the bare knives of the surrounding soldiers. It ends with his execution: “When the Turkish legislator saw that nothing would come out of the mouth of this Bulgarian saint, it ordered that he be hanged. Levski was hanged half-dead. May his memory live forever.”<sup>46</sup> Even before that—in June, 1873—Karavelov wrote authoritatively that Levski had been betrayed by Pop Krístiu, and a year later reiterated his accusation by calling him Judas, monster and ostracized by popular consciousness.<sup>47</sup> That Levski’s death became a crucial turning point for Karavelov has been well documented. By 1874 Karavelov had despaired over the revolutionary alternative and began preaching the evolutionary road, through the dissemination of science and education.

Botev, on the other hand, was even further radicalized after Levski’s end, and perished, weapon in hand, during the abortive April Uprising of 1876. He had shared an abode with Levski and in an early letter to Kiro Tuleshkov wrote that his “character was unparalleled,” that he would be joyful and singing even during the greatest cold and starkest hunger.<sup>48</sup> Botev lamented his loss in terms comparable to Karavelov’s and was equally devastating of Pop Krístiu’s alleged betrayal. He extolled Levski’s significance, writing that his and his collaborators’ activities make them “rare apostles of the revolution not only for our nation but also for the more advanced ones.” Botev also published his famous wall calendar, in which Levski figures as a mar-

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45 *Ibid.*, 139.

46 *Ibid.*, 147–7.

47 *Ibid.*, 148–9.

48 *Ibid.*, 143.

tyr.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, he wrote his poem dedicated to Levski's death, in which the Christ-like image is unmistakable:<sup>50</sup>

O mother mine, dear land of my birth,  
Why do you cry so bitterly, dismally?  
You, dread raven, accursed bird,  
Over whose grave do you croak so grimly?  
.....  
Weep! For there by the city of Sofia  
Stands a black gallows-tree verily, verily,  
There you finest son, Bulgaria,  
Hangs from the gallows-tree heavily, heavily.  
  
Horribly, grimly the raven croaks.  
Wolves are out howling, the dogs run wild.  
Old folk hotly their God invoke  
To the sobbing of women, the screams of a child.

While Genchev was right to point out that Karavelov and Botev shaped the public discourse on Levski as it developed in subsequent decades (the earliest evaluation as martyr of freedom, his political canonization, as well as some factually debatable tropes, like the treason and its agent, the trial, the execution), it is impossible not to speculate about what would have happened had the revolutionary vision and verdict not become the Whig interpretation of history after 1878. This does not mean denying the heroism of a figure like Levski but only qualifying that it is possible merely within a specific intellectual framework: the teleology of the nation (and the nation-state). Just for illustration, one can briefly articulate an alternative (or counterfactual) version. That Bulgaria became an independent nation-state in the latter half of the nineteenth century was an intended but not predetermined outcome. With hindsight, taking into account the end of both the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires after the First World War, the British

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49 *Ibid.*, 150–1. On the wall calendar, see Part III.

50 Khristo Botev, "The Hanging of Vasil Levski," in *Anthology of Bulgarian Poetry*, translated by Peter Tempest, Sofia: Sofia Press, 1980, 88. For the Bulgarian original, see any edition of Botev's poems, for example his collected works—*Sibrani sčineniia*, Sofia, 1976, vol. 1.

and other colonial empires after the Second World War, as well as the Soviet Union (increasingly interpreted as an empire) in the 1990s, one might seal the fate of empires in the age of nationalism, and speak of the law of imperial entropy. But I doubt that the emergence of independent nation states can be formulated as a law. As Ernest Gellner has remarked, “the number of potential nationalisms which failed to bark is far, far larger than those which did, though *they* have captured all the attention.”<sup>51</sup> Greece became a nation-state; so did Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. But Kurdistan never did. And until 1992 nobody was thinking seriously of Bosnia as an independent state, while now we already have a substantial academic output arguing its historical roots and its glorious Hegelian march to self-achievement, understood as state-achievement. This is true, in some cases to a lesser degree, about Slovenia, Slovakia, Moldova and other of the newly emerged independent states on Europe’s map.

Had Bulgarians had the fate of Kurds, for example, and given that they would also have an intelligentsia dedicated to the national cause, Levski probably would have made it as a hero in an alternative history, or would have received honorable mention in some outside account by an author interested in exotic identities. If mentioned at all in an imperial account dealing with botched secessionist movements, he most likely would have been depicted either as a terrorist or even less glorious, as a burglar, the way he was sentenced, and executed by the Ottomans in Sofia in 1873, and then buried in an mass grave in the cemetery for criminals. Even allowing that in the case of Bulgaria, given the general parameters of great power struggle and balance in Europe at the time, its emergence as an independent entity was inevitable, this is not the case with the timing. The country could have emerged after the First World War, with the final collapse of the Ottomans, like Albania or Macedonia, and judging from small power appetites and plans in the 1860s, there could have even been attempts at partitioning it among the earlier comers on the Balkan scene. If that was the case, Levski most certainly would have made it into the pantheon of heroes any nation-state worth mentioning bothers to create, but it is uncertain he would have presided over them.

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51 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983, 43.

I suppose that even dedicated nationalists of the variety called only patriots (moderate nationalists, without the excesses of chauvinism) would make allowance for such an approach. What, however, would be unthinkable to them, is the meddling with the ontology of the hero. “The clue for understanding Levski’s personality and especially his constant presence in Bulgarian life after his death, wrote former president Zheliu Zhelev, is to be found first and foremost in the meaningful substance of his work, in the reality and lofty significance of the very struggle for national liberation, in the fact that the struggle of Levski and his associates was not a pursuit of utopian ideas, not running after empty chimeras.”<sup>52</sup> Entering the pantheon of heroes are, according to Vera Mutafchieva, “the ones who have earned and suffered for their place in the pantheon.”<sup>53</sup> It is the lack of historical distance, sometimes the lack of sensitivity or strong values that, in this reading, prevents the timely recognition of heroes, but the underlying assumption is that heroes exist objectively, completely independently from whether they are recognized or not, and it is the great merit of poets, historians, and the like, to discover them and shed the light of recognition onto them, much like objective nations were discovered and released from the realm of forgetfulness.

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52 Zheliu Zhelev, “Levski kato istoricheska lichnost,” in Zheliu Zhelev, *Intelligentsiia i politika*, Sofia: Literaturno forum, 1995, 83.

53 Vera Mutafchieva, “Za bilgarskata natsionalna mitologija,” *Septemvri* XXXIV, No. 11, November 1981, 179.



## 2. The “Making” of Vasil Levski

The first post-Liberation decade—the 1880s—saw the publication of the first biography of Levski by Zakhari Stoianov (1883) that immediately engaged contemporaries in a heated debate about the assessment of Levski’s role.<sup>54</sup> Now that the outcome of the Russo–Turkish war had vindicated the effort of the revolutionaries, there were no doubts about the general assessment of Levski, similar to the ones voiced in the pre-1878 period by individuals or groups suspicious of revolutionary radicalism.<sup>55</sup> There was also no question about recognizing his important presence in the revolutionary movement; the debate was around his place relative to the contribution of the other revolutionaries, and also to the different social groups participating in the national movement, particularly pitching against each other the movements of the so-called “old” and “young” which, after 1878, had coalesced around the two opposing party formations of Conservatives and Liberals.<sup>56</sup>

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54 Zakhari Stoianov, *Vasil Levski (Diakonit)*. *Cherti iz zhivota mu ot Zakhari Stoianov*, Plovdiv, 1883. Critical editions were published in 1943 and 1946: *Vasil Levski (Diakonit)*. *Cherti iz zhivota mu ot Zakhari Stoianov. Kritichno izdanie pod redaktsiata na Stoian Karakostov*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa V. Ivanov, 1943 (Pechatnitsa “Rila,” 1946), and later in 1965 (*Sichineniia v tri toma*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel), 1977 (*Vasil Levski*, Sofia: BZNS) and 1997 (*Biografii; chetite v Bilgariia; Feiletoni; Khudozhestvena publitsistika*, Sofia: Zakharii Stoianov). Strictly speaking, Levski’s first biography came out in 1882—G. Ia. Kirkov, *Vasil Levski (Diakonit)*, Sredets, 1882—but it had more the character of a passionate *laudatio* by a relative of the Apostle (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 161–2, 173). Stoianov’s most popular biography was followed by Stoian Zaimov’s, as well as biographical essays by Filip Simidov and Ivan Kirshovski (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 163).

55 For the negative assessments of Levski, see Part II, Chapter 4, “Contesting the Hero.”

56 At present, the best overview of the debate over Levski is Nikolai Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1987, 160–70. As for the terms defining the different political trends in pre-independence Bulgaria, Plamen Mitev makes the convincing point that rather than retrospectively term them as conservatives, liberals or revolutionaries, it would be better to stick

The image of Levski that Stoianov offered to the public elevated him to the peak of the revolutionary achievement and focused on the link between his human ordinariness and simplicity, and the extraordinary and sophisticated achievement of his activity: “the modest deacon, the psalm-singer, the teacher from Voiniagovo who had nothing but his upright character, determination and passionate patriotism, what a strong and famous hero he became.”<sup>57</sup> Clear autobiographical overtones could be seen in this portrayal, especially the identification with Levski of someone without any formal education, who had made it from a humble shepherd to speaker of parliament. A strong critique of Stoianov’s biography was voiced by S. S. Bobchev who objected that the subscribers, supporting this publication, had not paid him in order “to raise Levski on stilts and put him way above all other revolutionaries.”<sup>58</sup> He accused Stoianov of inaccuracies and partisanship, particularly misrepresenting the contribution of the circle around the brothers Georgievi. He maintained that committees had existed even before Levski, and that Stoianov was exaggerating his contribution. In an angry and powerful response, Stoianov reiterated his belief in the pioneering character of Levski’s activities: “I maintain with historical pride that Vasil Levski is the head of the Bulgarian revolutionary activists... With respect to literature, I hold as such L. Karavelov. If anyone knows of figures greater than these two, let him raise his voice.”<sup>59</sup> Technically, Bobchev was right to question Stoianov’s fac-

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to the self-designations of the period: “young” versus “old.” The so-called “old” were clustered around two main organizations—*Dobrodetelna družina* (the Virtuous Party) in Bucharest and *Odesko nastoiatelstvo* (the Odesa-based board of trustees)—and followed a reformist and moderate line in their dealings with the Ottoman Porte, at the same time demonstrating their strong links to and coordination with Russia. They were particularly opposed to the militant revolutionary actions which were the tactics preferred by the so-called “young” around the Secret Bulgarian Central Committee and the followers of Rakovski and later Karavelov, Botev, and Levski (Plamen Mitev, *Bilgarskoto Vizrazhdane*, Sofia: Polis, 1999, 109–10).

57 Zakhari Stoianov, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia, 1983, 59, cited in Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 162.

58 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 163.

59 Zakhari Stoianov, “Otvoreno pismo do g-na C. Bobchev, redactor na v. Maritsa,” in *Vasil Levski (Diakonit). Cherti iz zhivota mu ot Zakhari Stoianov. Kritichno izdanie pod redaktsiata na Stefan Karakostov*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa V. Ivanov, 1943, 21.

tology in many instances, but in the end the clash was one about the general assessment of the conservative and liberal wing in Bulgarian political life. Implicitly, the debate was about intellectual and political legitimacy, and about social control and cultural hegemony. Even after Levski emerged as the unchallenged revolutionary patriarch, these were still the basic disputed questions. Only the discourse had shifted from the evaluation of Levski's relative place to who had ownership over him in his absolute presiding position.

During this entire period, one can observe the gradual growth of a commemorative industry around Levski: from the very early (and very slow) initiative to build a monument in Sofia which culminated with its inauguration in 1895, and the first modest provincial celebrations,<sup>60</sup> to the 25th anniversary of his execution in 1898 and the publication of a small volume, to the celebrations in his birth town of the 30th anniversary and the inauguration of a monument in Karlovo in 1905 (see Plate 1). Beginning with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of his death in 1923, but especially with the solemn and scrupulously organized commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Levski's birth in 1937, an elaborate and systematic ritual of commemoration came into place. It would have its ebbs and flows, but it was never suspended. Indeed, there was a geometrical progression in the size of the literary output on Levski: in the first 54 years after his death and until the 100th anniversary of his birth, some 740 titles had come out; until the end of the Second World War, their number had doubled; and the next 40 years until 1986 had added another almost 3,000 titles. This does not take into account the avalanche of publications on Levski in the late 1980s and during the 1990s.

So, when former president Zhelev rhetorically and sardonically asked whether any serious Bulgarian could ever harbor the thought that a mausoleum or a memorial for Levski or for Botev would add anything to their achievement or to the charisma of their personalities, he had forgotten that there had been an industry which had been doing precisely that for over a century.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the president himself asked his question at a speech delivered at the monument of Levski in Sofia on the 120th anniversary of his execution.

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60 One of the very first was organized in Lovech, the town in whose neighborhood Levski was caught: *Svoboda* 1, No. 28, February 11, 1887.

61 Zheliu Zhelev, "Levski kato istoricheska lichnost," 87.

Genchev outlines three layers in the memory literature dedicated to Levski. One comprises the memoirs of the first generation of Levski's contemporaries at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, such as collaborators who knew him personally, like Panaiot Khitov, Khristo Ivanov, Ivan Drasov, Kiro Tuleshkov and others; revolutionaries who had no personal contact with him; and finally, his relatives. The second is the material gathered by Dimitir Strashimirov under the auspices of the "National Committee Vasil Levski" immediately after the end of the First World War. The third, in the words of Genchev, is material "completely legendary, assembled around 1937, when the 100th anniversary of Levski's birth was celebrated and the press was filled with all kinds of fables, which have no value as historical evidence."<sup>62</sup> Genchev's periodization is persuasive, although the differentiation between the first and second period is artificial, the only criterion being intentionality: in the first case the memoirs were written and published without any outside impetus, in the second case, triggered on the urging of the researchers. More problematic is Genchev's evaluation of the evidence emanating from the separate periods. One can actually posit that any material stemming from the period after 1878, and even after Levski's death in 1873, has about itself something of the legendary, insofar as it is marked by a retrospective glance.

Still, there is a certain virtue in separating the material before 1937, insofar as most of it can be defined as having been based on lived experience. I very pointedly don't privilege and don't use categories such as immediate or authentic knowledge or experience, although Walter Benjamin actually implied the element of immediacy in his definition of storytelling where the bodily presence of the story-teller and the story-listener supply the parameters of the lived experience: "A man listening to a story is in the company of the story-

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62 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 155. Genchev subjects the material of the first layer to an excellent content analysis, exploring its contributions on several hotly discussed topics: the question of the betrayal, the trial, the alleged attempts to rescue Levski, his hanging, and the issue of Levski's grave. He convincingly concludes that, with the exception of the second question where the publication of the trial protocols comprise an immediate historical source, all the other issues are mostly the fruit of legend and fantasy (Ibid., 156–60).

teller."<sup>63</sup> Of course, every experience is mediated, except perhaps the narrow philosophical definition of experience as a sensuous empirical reflection of the external world, the "immediate sentient observation, which is generally prior to any reflection on its meaning."<sup>64</sup> Yet one should not be necessarily crucified over "the sterile choice between naïve experiential immediacy and the no less naïve discursive mediation of that experience."<sup>65</sup> I also do not go here into the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, the two German notions for experience that denote, on the one hand, the immediate pre-reflexive response to external and internal stimuli and, on the other hand, the knowledge accumulated in the process of interaction between self and the world.<sup>66</sup> More useful for our purposes might be the distinction made by Edward Bruner between life as lived or reality (reality being what is really out there), life as experienced or experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and life as told or expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated).<sup>67</sup> Although I find it difficult to define in any coherent quantitative or qualitative terms the distinction between experience resulting from how reality presents itself to consciousness, and experience resulting from the expression of someone else's experience of reality, I still would endow lived ex-

63 Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hanna Arendt, New York, 1969, 100 cited (with thanks for the reference) in Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Between Narrating Bodies and Carnal Knowledge," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Summer 2005, 501.

64 Martin Jay, "Songs of Experience: Reflections on the Debate over *Alltags-geschichte*," *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, 44.

65 Martin Jay, "The Limits of Limit-Experience: Bataille and Foucault," *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, 78.

66 On the debates over the category of experience, see the very useful historiographical survey by Kathleen Canning, "Problematische Dichotomien: Erfahrung zwischen Narrativität und Materialität," *Historische Anthropologie. Kultur. Gesellschaft. Alltag* 10.2 (2002), 163–82; the deconstructivist critique of the category is in Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry*, Summer 1991, 773–97; the most extensive philosophical treatment belongs to Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, Cambridge University Press, 1933 (reprinted 1966).

67 Edward M. Bruner, "Experience and Its Expressions," in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986, 6.

perience with some unique qualities, though this does not guarantee that the sources coming out of this experience are better or necessarily more reliable.

It is generally accepted that the first full-fledged literary portrait of Levski was created by Ivan Vazov, the unchallenged patriarch of modern Bulgarian literature. It was his way of articulating ideas and emotions about Levski that virtually modeled the way subsequent generations have been thinking about this hero. In 1881 Vazov wrote his enormously popular epic poem "Levski," but Levski had been part of his poetic pantheon from 1876 and on to 1905.<sup>68</sup> Without ever having met him in person, he introduced Levski's physical appearance in his 1883 novel, *Nemili nedragi* (*Outcasts*), and most Bulgarians know this opening by heart: "Levski was of average height, thin and slender; eyes grey, almost blue; moustache reddish, hair blond, face white, round and haggard from incessant thought and vigil, but animated by a constant and natural mirth! Strange! This young man who was preaching the dangerous thought of freedom and death, who subjected himself daily to dangers, this son of the night, of the desert, of adventures, possessed a cheerful nature."<sup>69</sup> It is an extremely effective as well as efficient introduction, following on Vazov's regret that Levski's only existing photograph could not convey the loftiness of his character: "Art had been unable to represent his striking face." By calling the photograph "art" and positing its weakness when faced with the power of reality, and by placing himself implicitly outside the realm of art, Vazov secured a claim for documentary authenticity to his own word.<sup>70</sup>

68 Levski is mentioned in the following poems by Vazov: "Buntit" (1876), "Na Kom" (1880), "Trakiiia" (1886), "Slivnitsa" (1887), "Damianu Gruevu" (1903). Alongside *Nemili-nedragi*, Vazov described Levski in two widely read stories: "Apostolit v premezhdie" and "Chistiit pit," as well as in the less-known short story "Iz krivinite (Edno vizpominanie)." See Stefan Karakostov, *Vasil Levski v spomenite na svremennitsite si*, Sofia: Ivan Kuumdzhev, 1943, 165–83 (this is the second edition of Karakostov's book which came out first in Sofia: Nov sviat, 1940, and was published again in revised editions as *Levski v spomenite na svremennitsite si* in Sofia: Partizdat, 1973 and 1987). See also Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 166–9. Vazov's works, which have undergone numerous editions, have been collected in *Sibrani sichineniia*, 22 vols., Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1955–1979. Here, the 1996 edition of the novel is used.

69 Ivan Vazov, *Nemili-nedragi*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1996, 82.

70 There are, in fact, seven known photographs of Levski: three portraits,

Indeed, the physical portrait of Levski follows the criteria with which, in the nineteenth century, Ottoman tax and other records would describe an individual—height, eyes, moustache and hair—a convention still very familiar to the first post-Ottoman generation that was reading him (see Plates 2 to 5).

Vazov mostly focused on Levski's character, particularly the two main qualities that made him tower over all the other revolutionaries: persistence and tenacity. Levski, in Vazov's description, "had something of Kableskov's enthusiasm, of Benkovski's firmness, and of the strength of the Karadzha. But he also had something that they lacked: "unflinching patience and persistence" (*nepokolebimo tŕpenie i postoianstvo*). Vazov summed up Levski's spirit as "the manifestation of a force emerging from centuries of suffering, from an ocean of humiliation." He crisscrossed Bulgaria in the course of seven years, "visited about a hundred villages and towns, founded committees, taught, encouraged, threatened the wealthy ones, angered the Turks, steady to the point of impossibility, persistent to the point of madness (*postoianen do nevŕzmozhnost, uporit do bezumstvo*).<sup>71</sup> This is how Vazov recapitulated Levski's essence:

Such was the individual known under the names of the Deacon, Vasil Levski, the Apostle, whom fate had sent to lead a host of preachers and martyrs of freedom, in order to move the masses, to generate events, to engender the future! ... A small Hus, who could not become a giant, since he lacked the space in which to unfold, and who would have been crucified in Judea, and burnt at the stake in the Middle Ages, just as he was hanged in the nineteenth century... Three tortures, three symbols: the crucifixion, Torquemada's fire, the gallows—three deaths, invented throughout the centuries to punish the dishonorable and the immortal.<sup>72</sup>

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two full-sized images in uniform, and two group photographs, all dating from the late 1860s and early 1870s. For a detailed description, see Radka Stoianova, "Portretite na Vasil Levski," *Sviata i chista republika: Dokladi i nauchni sŕobshteniia ot sesiata po sluchai 100-godishninata ot gibelta na Vasil Levski*, Iambol: Gradski komitet na BKP, Gradski naroden sŕvet Iambol, 1973, 58–65.

<sup>71</sup> Vazov, *Nemili-nedragi*, 84–5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Here Vazov clearly established Levski in the genealogy of archetypal heroism and martyrdom, something achieved in almost the same turn of phrase, but in rhyme, in the poem “Levski.” In fact, the characterizations that Vazov used for Levski, even the exact turn of phrase have been so deeply internalized that they were verbatim (but without acknowledgment) reproduced to me in oral interviews with Bulgarians whom I asked why they considered Levski their hero.

One can approach *Nemili-nedragi* as the prose version of Vazov’s powerful *Epic for the Forgotten* (*Epopeia na zabravenite*). The two works are contemporaries, and Vazov must have worked on them simultaneously, although technically the poem “Levski” preceded the novel. *Nemili-nedragi* was published in Plovdiv in 1883, and the twelve poems of the *Epic* Vazov wrote in two spurts. The first five poems were written in three days in 1881—“Levski,” “Benkovski,” “Kocho,” “Bratia Zhekovi,” “Kableshkov”—and were published in the poetic collection *Gusla*. The remaining seven were written in 1884, and together they formed the *Epic*. But these were not two identical works in accompanying genres. According to the literary critic Milena Tsaneva, the *Epic* dealt with the great historical personalities, whose glory encompasses both their own heroic deed and the unnamed deeds of hundreds of their collaborators. These first Vazov seems to have perceived as already perched on their monuments’ pedestals, and he depicted them accordingly in verse and an intonation replete with pathos. The latter, most of whose names have been lost, continue their historical life only through the medium of their unnamed achievement, and Vazov celebrated them in a good-humored, nostalgic and close to autobiographical prose.<sup>73</sup> While Levski was present briefly but emblematically in *Nemili-nedragi*, his cameo appearance was a veritable montage, com-

73 Milena Tsaneva, “‘Nemili-nedragi’—geroi i problemi,” *Nemili-nedragi*, 1996, 5–6, 15–6. Vazov openly acknowledged himself in the character of the young Brichkov (*ibid.*, 9, 124–5, 128). In 1894, Vazov dramatized his novel under the title *Khishove*, and in 1899 published a second reworked version. Since then, this drama has been one of the permanent great hits on the Bulgarian theatrical scene, most recently in the National theater “Ivan Vazov.” In a way, it has become the emblem of Bulgarianness, and today the Bulgarian-German student organization in Berlin bears its name.

pletely different in tone and execution from the rest of the text and practically identical to that of the poem.<sup>74</sup>

Since 1880 Vazov had moved to Plovdiv, the capital of Eastern Rumelia, where he co-edited the newspaper "People's Voice" (*Naroden Glas*) with Konstantin Velichkov. The paper's publisher, Dragan Manchov, was one of the two most significant publishers of textbooks, and himself a prominent author of history textbooks. One editorial at the time lamented, "when giants are missing and midgets wake up, when the time of the great self-sacrifices, of big and heroic deeds has passed."<sup>75</sup> Vazov incessantly satirized the new society whose ideal was the "practical man."<sup>76</sup> His "forgotten" ought to be understood not literally; numerous monuments in their honor were being raised but the post-Liberation society was not moved by their lofty ideals of self-sacrifice and heroic deeds. It had turned entirely to a new idol: the golden calf. Vazov deplored the ignorance of Bulgarians not only of their history but also of their geography. A Bulgarian who knows geography well, would not visit Sliven, and "will know much better the whereabouts of New Orleans in North America or of Algiers, than the unfortunate birthplace of Khadzhi Dimitir... But what can one expect of a nation which is proverbially apathetic and ignoring itself..."<sup>77</sup> This was an open challenge to the syndrome of underdeveloped nationalism, and Vazov took it upon himself to redress the aberration. It is remarkable that he had a clear, entirely conscious, and openly articulated idea of how powerful words and monuments can be in "developing these worthy feelings that give a nation the right to live."<sup>78</sup>

In creating what has been characterized since as the Bulgarian poetical iconostasis without a peer, as the most powerful instrument

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74 Tsaneva, op. cit., 13–4, makes the point that neither Levski, nor Botev, whose names are often mentioned in the novel, actually are part of the plot line. Levski's appearance, as already stated, is a lyrical aside, and Botev emerges only in a sentence which sets him apart from the other protagonists.

75 *Naroden glas*, January 5, 1883.

76 Milena Tsaneva, *Ivan Vazov*, 3rd edition, Sofia: Prosveta, 1995, 14.

77 Ivan Vazov, "Irechek i bilgarskoto otechestvo," *Naroden glas*, January 23, 1882, printed in Ivan Vazov, *Sibrani síchineniia. Pilno izdanie*, t. XXI. *Kritika*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1950, 68–9.

78 Editorial in "Naroden glas," No. 444, November 9, 1883, cited in Tsaneva, *Ivan Vazov*, 15.

of national education, Vazov had three immediate inspirations. Two of them challenge the paradigm of a hermetically sealed, organic national culture, but are at the same time an apt illustration of the powerful and creative absorptive and adaptive genius of this national culture in the making.<sup>79</sup> In his conversations with Ivan Shishmanov, the Eckermann to Vazov's Goethe, and a leading intellectual figure in Bulgaria, Vazov reminisced on the conception of his epic cycle. He had read in a Russian book about the Finno-Swedish poet Runeberg and his cycle of odes to Swedish patriots, and the fact itself constituted a powerful motivation. There is no indication that Vazov was familiar with Runeberg's poetry itself. He was however, intimately familiar with and deeply influenced by Hugo's *La légende des siècles*: "The pathos and form of *Epic of the Forgotten* I owe to Victor Hugo. I had just read his *La légende des siècles* and I was charmed by the élan, the broad range of the French poet."<sup>80</sup> At the same time, as the literary scholar Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva convincingly argues, Vazov's statement was actually misleading. He had received *La légende des siècles* as a gift from his friend Konstantin Velichkov after he had already written the first five poems of his cycle, including the one on Levski. Therefore the readings characterizing his own *Epic* as a reminiscent echo, textual dependence, or synthesis of a foreign genius with native talent, are forced and naïve. The phenomenon has to be approached through the concept of intertextual relations, and "the existence of an identical language that was 'caught' in the texts of Hugo and Vazov by means of different redactions of its development."<sup>81</sup>

The most immediate impetus for the writing of the epic came, however, from an article by Zakhari Stoianov, the great memoirist of

79 Svetlozar Igov, *Istoriia na bilgarskata literatura 1878–1944*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bilgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1993, 30.

80 Ivan Shishmanov, *Ivan Vazov. Spomeni i dokumenti. S predgovor, dobavki i belezhki ot Mikhail Arnaudov*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1976, 232–3.

81 Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva, *Levski: Bukvi ot imeto*, Sofia: Primaprint, 2001, 20–1. The reason for Vazov's own statement might be the iconic status Victor Hugo had acquired in Bulgaria. For example, the artist Georgi Dancho, who had produced one of the most popular lithographs of "Liberated Bulgaria" (1879), followed by four lithographs of Levski (1887, 1888 and 1897), Khristo Botev, Zakhari Stoianov, Raicho Nikolov and Stefan Stambolov, added in 1897 one sole foreigner to his visual pantheon: Victor Hugo (19–20).

the revolutionary struggles, himself a revolutionary and active political figure in the new Bulgaria, and the first biographer of Vasil Levski who finished his work in 1883, and published it in 1884.<sup>82</sup> This article, which Stoianov published in April, 1881 in the newspaper *Rabotnik* in Eastern Rumelia, dealt with revolutionaries who had ended their life with suicide. It was a defiant celebration of the proud romantic suicide against conventional Christian attitudes. Stoianov wrongly included Benkovski in this list of heroes while himself describing his murder in his masterpiece "Notes on the Bulgarian insurrections" whose first volume was published in 1884. Likewise, the alleged attempt of Levski to kill himself in prison during the trial, has remained unproven, most likely the abode of legend. Interestingly, Vazov was stimulated simply by the list of names published by Stoianov; the motif of suicide was not at all the moving force. In the case of Levski, he even completely disregarded it, maybe because the hanging of Levski had become the most powerful image already with Botev's poem about Levski, and because it allowed him to elaborate on his powerful metaphor of the gallows as the Cross.<sup>83</sup>

In splendor and shame, like the crucifix, hallowed!  
 The sight of your victims has made our hearts ache,  
 We've seen from your bar bodies swing and shake  
 And southerly winds with the dead limbs playing,  
 And jubilant tyrants their venom displaying.  
 O glorious scaffold! You shine with the light  
 Of heroes who died here! Most holy sight!  
 A terrible token, a sign of that freedom  
 For which in your shadow folk die and lie bleeding,  
 The lion, the hero: all honor is due  
 To those who to this day still die upon you.  
 For in that dark age we refer to as "bondage"  
 The rogue and the spy and the man with no honor

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82 Zakhari Stoianov, *Vasil Levski. Chetite v Bilgariia. Khristo Botev*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1980. This is the 8th edition of *Levski*, the 9th of *Chetite*, and the 10th of *Botev*.

83 Tsaneva, *Ivan Vazov*, 23–7. This motif, of Levski as the Bulgarian Christ, was taken up but never completed by one of the greatest Bulgarian poets, Petko Iu. Todorov (1879–1916). See Igov, *Istoriia*, 164.

Would peacefully die in their bed, their conscience—sold,  
 But death on your bar, holy scaffold, was always  
 No mark of disgrace—but on earth fresh glory,  
 A summit from which a brave heart could survey  
 Toward immortality the straightest way!<sup>84</sup>

The absence of Botev from the gallery of the “Bulgarian poetical iconostasis” is glaring. True, Vazov had immortalized him (without mentioning his name) in the poem “Radetski,” written in 1876, and included in the collection *Priaporets i gusla*, but the immense popularity of the poem was due mostly to its arrangement as a popular march, arguably the best-known melody and song among Bulgarians (*Tikh bial Dunav se vilnuva*). The argument about a more limited gallery, based only on Stoianov’s list is weak, because the suicide motif is present neither in Rakovski’s, nor in Paisii’s, nor Benkovski’s lives. If anything, Botev’s gesture could be and has been interpreted as suicidal and his popularity and stature as martyr was unequalled and comparable only to that of Levski. Most likely, given that Botev was also widely accepted as an unrivalled poetical genius, Vazov prudently kept silent on his one brilliant literary competitor, even though Botev’s oeuvre produced in his short tumultuous 28-year-old life, was incomparably smaller.<sup>85</sup> It is symptomatic that until 1891—twenty years after he had met Botev for the first time—Vazov never said a word about Botev’s poetry, and the first time he pronounced himself on his dead rival was in a long critical essay that he published anonymously.<sup>86</sup> It is ironic (and

84 Ivan Vazov, “Levski,” translated by Peter Tempest, in <http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=283&WorkID=10651&Level=3>. For the Bulgarian original, see any edition of Vazov, also: <http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=14&WorkID=909&Level=3>.

85 Vazov (b. 1850) and Botev (b. 1848) were contemporaries, and the comparisons between their political activities, as well as poetic talents, must have haunted Vazov. They had met as early as 1871 and, according to his own testimony, Vazov had briefly fallen under the influence of Botev’s fiery atheism and socialist leanings, but never engaged in the national revolutionary movement (Zdravko Dafinov, *Priatelstva i sipernichestva mezhdu bilgarskite poeti, pisateli i krititsi: Dokumentalna khronika 1845–1945*, Sofia, Iztok-Zapad, 2006, 26–7, 31–2). Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 173, suggests also that Vazov may not have forgotten and forgiven Botev for his early mockery of his poetry. Botev’s ironic verses are in Dafinov, op. cit., 45.

86 The essay came out in *Dennitsa*, II, 1891, No. 6, 272–82, No. 7/8, 314–



**Figure 12.** Ivan Vazov, 1950–1921.

rather pathetic) to read the lines of Vazov’s wounded *amour propre*, in which he explains that his emphasis is more on the “negative aspects of the poet-patriot. We did this on purpose. To adulate our unforgettable singer, to join in the dense choir of unconditional praise seemed superfluous.”<sup>87</sup> Vazov allows for Botev’s originality and poetic genius but at the same time finds that not a single one of his poems reaches beyond good quality and is always beneath perfection. The gist of his

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25, No. 10, 442–54 under the signature “X” but in the annual table of contents Vazov declared his authorship. Long excerpts are reproduced in Dafinov, *op. cit.*, 123–5. Tsaneva, the undisputed expert on Vazov, takes great pains to explain off Vazov’s negative stance *vis-à-vis* Botev not as literary envy but as an attempt to counter the popularity of socialist ideas among the Bulgarian youth of the 1880s and 1890s who held Botev as their role model. It is a rather unconvincing defense, and she never succeeds in explaining why Botev was left out of the gallery of the *Epic*. Her attempt to show that Vazov always listed Botev as a great revolutionary and that he had an elevated presence in his poetry and prose proves, in the end, rather weak. She cites a poem of Vazov from 1886 (“Prolog” from the collection “Slivnitsa”) in which Benkovski, Levski and Botev are mentioned alongside the medieval kings Krum, Simeon and Samuil as sacred symbols of Bulgaria. True, but while the others are just mentioned with their names or with a human attribute (mountain hero, Macedonian hero, soldier, singer), Levski is decorated as “our saint” (136). See Tsaneva, *Patriarkhăt: Etiudi vîrkhu tvorchestvoto na Ivan Vazov*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo RIK-I-S, 2000, 119–37, and the quoted literature about Vazov’s attitude to Botev.

87 Dafinov, *op. cit.*, 125.

ire was in the elevated status Botev had reached in the first decade after 1878 that rivaled Vazov's aspirations to be the sole prince of poetry: "Botev has been allotted the honor of enjoying a kind of unconditional cult that is based more on a patriotically exalted emotion rather than on a sober and mature evaluation of his merits... In its extremes, this idolatry reaches comic overtones... This emotion, brought to its extreme, is turning into a national vice."<sup>88</sup> To counter this, Vazov concentrated on creating an "unconditional cult" around Levski who obviously was no threat to him in the realm of words.

While the *Epic of the Forgotten* became an instant classic, and Vazov enjoyed the patriarchal seat in Bulgarian literature already during his lifetime, his work did not remain unchallenged during his day. This was especially true by the turn of the century when the literary circle *Misil* ("Thought") came forward with a program not only challenging but squarely denouncing and denying the social and aesthetic basis of the older generation presided over by Vazov.<sup>89</sup> Dr. Krístev, a German-trained philosopher and editor of the journal *Misil*, one of the first professional literary critics, accused Vazov of only superficially describing Levski, never reaching a profound psychological portrait, of overstated and empty rhetoric, of creating an inflated and pathetic image, far removed from the genuinely revolutionary, unique and original figure of Levski.<sup>90</sup> Vazov readily admitted to the excess of pathos: "I emulate the solemn, elevated, philosophical tone of [Hugo's] odes," and about the poem "Levski": "It is entirely Hugoan—his majestic phraseology, the grave, exalted tone of his odes," particularly his "Evirandus," to which "Levski" bore literal resemblance.<sup>91</sup>

88 Ibid., 123. Vazov's great nemesis and chief poetic rival Pencho Slaveikov (until his death in 1912) held Botev in the highest esteem and compared his genius to Lermontov and Petófi (ibid., 250).

89 For the main esthetic ideology of *Misil*, as well as concretely about the differences from Vazov on issues such as the philosophy of history, language and genre, see Galin Tikhanov, *Zhanrovoto síznanie na kríga "Misil." Kím kulturnata biografíia na bílgarskíia modernízím*, Sofia: Akademiia, 1998, 61–2, 84–100, 104–7, 113–8, 206–21.

90 Kr. Krístev, "Velikiat apostol. Psikhologicheski eskiz," *Misil* VIII, No. 2, 1898, 105–15; also in K. Krístev, *Etiudi, kritiki, reitsenzii*, Sofia, 1978, 695–707. Mutafchieva, "Za bílgarskata natsionalna mitologíia," 187, replicated this accusation without referring to Krístev.

91 Shishmanov, *Ivan Vazov*, 232–3.

There was more to the anti-Vazov hostility, that burgeoned in the decade before the Great War, than mere rejection of style. A new generation of Bulgarian intellectuals had emerged overthrowing what it thought of as the localism, provincialism, traditionalism, national romanticism and unimaginative social realism of the old generation of whom Vazov was the most illustrious representative. It came with a new modernist philosophy and aesthetics, opposing a Nietzschean individualism to the strong collectivism of the old guard, preaching psychologism and the aesthetics of a pure, non-social art, that, in the Bulgarian case, never quite reached anti-social overtones.<sup>92</sup> Thus, in the last two decades of his life (he died in 1921), Vazov's was not an undisputed voice: he was challenged by an influential group whose much shorter life-span coincided with his own (of the four major figures of *Misil*, Pencho Slaveikov died in 1912, Iavorov in 1914, Petko Todorov in 1916, and Dr. Krıstev in 1919).

Yet, what is significant about the challenge to Vazov's rendering of Levski's image by the Bulgarian avant-garde literati is that it did not question his elevation of Levski to the peak of the Bulgarian pantheon. For Dr. Krıstev, Levski remained "the most noble son of Bulgaria"<sup>93</sup> and he made a special effort to supply an alternative reading that would nevertheless confirm Levski's stature. This reading was imbued by the fashionable psychologism of the times. For Krıstev, neither Zakhari Stoinov's self-educated simplicity, nor Stoin Zaimov's superficiality and lack of talent, let alone Vazov's "false phraseology and empty rhetoric" could solve "the enigma" of Levski.<sup>94</sup> Only an approach inspired by insights into the character and temperament of the individual could shed light on his essence. Krıstev's exercise in this respect was to offer a psychological comparison between Benkovski, Botev and Levski. The first two he explained in terms of unbridled passions and tempestuous temperaments, making them, especially Botev, identical to the archetypal Giordano Bruno. Because one would expect from such anarchic and blasphemous temperaments a revo-

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<sup>92</sup> Igov, *Istoriia*, 150–63.

<sup>93</sup> The quote comes from a devastating article on the state of the Bulgarian intelligentsia, where Levski is not mentioned by name but which ends with the phrase: "Such is the state of the Bulgarian intelligentsia on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the death of the most noble son of Bulgaria." (Kr. Krıstev, "Bilgarska intelligentsia," *Misil* VIII, No. 1, 1898, 13)

<sup>94</sup> Krıstev, "Velikiiat apostol," 106–7.

lutionary outburst, this predictability makes their activities less valuable and, according to Krístev, even less revolutionary than Levski's.<sup>95</sup> Levski, on the other hand, was characterized by "a quiet temperament, a maidenly mildness, and humility," and this meekness of the heart was linked uniquely with an exemplary consistency, immense determination and even mercilessness. Therefore, Krístev concluded, "great is not the one, on whom nature has abundantly heaped some quality, but the one, whom it has endowed with contradictory powers and disposition, and who exercises enormous will to bring them in harmony."<sup>96</sup> The greatest clue to Levski's character lay, according to Krístev, in the deed of unfrocking and embracing the revolutionary path. All of this made "even the most revolutionary *words* of Botev pale before Levski's revolutionary *deed*" and in a self-critical but rather murky gesture Krístev pronounced Levski as the sublimated practitioner whose "deed cannot preserve the transcendental purity which we, the literati, rave for."<sup>97</sup> Krístev went so far as to pronounce himself on Botev, who likewise had perished in the uprising, that "there is practically no merit in a deed, which is effectuated by some such passionate revolutionary temperament, an individual emancipated from any respect toward the sacred, such as Botev." When, however, the same deed results from "a modest, quiet nature, which lives in accord with the morality of trite mediocrity, from a personality which is stimulated neither by mighty passions, nor by an enlightened philosophical mind, we don't know how to name it but as an act of genius."<sup>98</sup>

The only reason I devote so much space to these arbitrary pronouncements of Dr. Krístev, unsupported by the record and rather pompous and pretentious, if understandable in the framework of the intellectual *Zeitgeist* of the time, is that in the 1980s and especially after 1989, there was a temporary return to this kind of rhetoric and approach, if not in the mainstream historiography, then certainly in popularizing essays and conversations. This was to be explained only partly by a reactive attachment to psychological explanations against the officially imposed, most often reductive, communist sociological analysis. Mostly, it was the unreflective and uncritical rehabilitation

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95 Ibid., 108–9.

96 Ibid., 110–1.

97 Ibid., 112–3.

98 Ibid., 114.

of anything produced before the Second World War, especially by the "ivory tower" intellectuals of the turn of the century, with whom intellectuals a century later liked to identify.

Vazov's authority was questioned not only on philosophical and stylistic grounds. The open anti-clerical and even anti-religious pathos of the poem "Levski" attracted its own critics.<sup>99</sup> It seems that it was precisely Vazov's interpretation, and the subsequent emphasis on Levski's break with his holy orders that contributed to the complicated and ambiguous attitude of the church toward the hero. Vazov himself appears to have harbored profound religious doubts, if not an openly stated position as a non-believer, but projecting this onto Levski seems to have been forcing the evidence.<sup>100</sup>

Despite these challenges, there is no question that the poem "Levski," alongside "Paisii" and above all "Shipka" from the *Epic of the Forgotten* had become the most popular Bulgarian poems. They were recited at patriotic gatherings, commemorations, school meetings. The poem "Levski," as well as Vazov's short stories about the hero, figured as a central item in all commemorative volumes published on the occasion of Levski's anniversaries.<sup>101</sup> As already mentioned, Vazov's literary

99 Ivan Vizirev, "Levskii v stikhovorenieto, ozaglaveno s imeto mu, ot Iv. Vazov," *Bilgarski tsirkoven pregled* 4, No. 11–2, Nov.–Dec. 1898, 80–9.

100 Shishmanov, *Ivan Vazov*, 141. The whole question of Levski's attitude to the church and religion, and his standing as a lapsed deacon, merits a separate study, especially in view of the dispute over his canonization by the secessionist church, and it is dealt with in Part III. For the best summaries on the question to date, see Ivan Petev, "Religioznostta na ierodiakon Ignatii (Vasil Levski), *Troianskiiat manastir v natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie. Po sluchai 120 godini ot osnovavaneto na revoliutsionniiia komitet v manastira ot Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenoizdatelski kompleks "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1992, 44–55; *Po-vazhni momenti ot zhivota i deloto na ierodiakon Ignatii—Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenoizdatelski kompleks "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1993; Vladimir Bakirdzhiev, "Ierodiakon Ignatii (Vasil Levski)—niakoi kanonicheski aspekti za polozhenieto mu v tsirkvata," *Troianskiiat manastir*, 26–33.

101 *Sborniche Vasil Levski. Za spomen na 25-godishninata ot smirtta na Levski*, Sofia: Bilgarsko narodoobrazovatelno druzhestvo, 1898; *Sborniche "Vasil Levski." Izdaden po sluchai polagane osnovniiia kamik na pametnika na Levski v rodniiia mu grad*, Plovdiv: Pechatnitsa "Stara planina," 1903; *Vasil Levski. 1873–1923. Vizpomenatelen sbornik po sluchai 50-godishninata ot obesvaneto mu v Sofia*, Sofia: Izdanie na Stolichnata obshtina, 1923; *Vizpomenatelna kniga Vasil Levski. 1837–1873–1937. Naredili Khristo Borina i*

image of Levski became the essence of the historical portrait that was disseminated through the school system.<sup>102</sup> In a sense, Vazov became the Pygmalion to the mythical Levski: his words brought the myth to life. Mutafchieva claims that Vazov's approach to Levski demonstrated that, unlike Rakovski, Volov or Kableskov, "Levski had already become a legend... he had already entered the pantheon, in a word, there was no place for him in a poetic cycle of the forgotten," and Vazov began the cycle with him simply because of Levski's unchallenged presence.<sup>103</sup> This was clearly not the case. Not only does it underestimate Vazov's crucial, creative, and consciously undertaken contribution in shaping the national pantheon; it squarely contradicts the evidence from the period.

It took some time before Levski was turned into a legend. The first commemorative volume, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of his death, was a gesture of unmistakable political nostalgia, very much in the vein of Vazov's pathos:

When honest figures, honorable characters and lofty deeds fade away from the life of a people, when ideals disappear and the straight roads become crooked, when fog falls and one sinks in the swamp, then the best salvation for the nation is to turn to the past and there find consolation and lessons, examples and encouragement, ideals and directions. In such times, the nation is lucky to have the chance to celebrate some great anniversary, to remember a noble name.<sup>104</sup>

It exalted the acquired liberties, built upon the shoulders of the heroic revolutionaries, "in whose ranks Vasil Levski took one of the premier

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*Vicho Ivanov. Komitet za otpraznuvane 100-godishininata ot rozhdenieto na Apostola na svobodata, Plovdiv: Izdava Karlovskoto sdruzhenie "V. Levski," 1937.*

102 It was not only Vazov's portrait of Levski that was adopted by the school-books. His poetical oeuvre in general was a centerpiece of literature, history and geography textbooks. See Maria Radeva, "Ideiata za natsionalno edinstvo i dostoinstvo v prosvetnata politika na bilgarskata dirzhava sled Osvobozhdenieto," *Izvestiia na bilgarskoto istorichesko druzhestvo XXXV*, 1983, 166.

103 Mutafchieva, "Za bilgarskata natsionalna mitologija," 187.

104 *Sborniche Vasil Levski*, 1898, 13–4.

places." The text, written by Todor Vlaikov, held that Levski was the first to have propagated the idea that the nation should gain political freedom through its own efforts, but it did not oppose him to, and even less so, elevate him above, the rest of the revolutionaries. At the same time, it adopted the Christological metaphor, which had been already suggested by Botev and later by Vazov.<sup>105</sup> The introduction to the second such volume, published in 1903, at the time of the 30th anniversary of his hanging, already had Levski "at the head of the line of honorable fighters and figures."<sup>106</sup> It is only with the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Apostle, however, that he is explicitly evoked as a legend.<sup>107</sup>

A look at the first history textbooks after the creation of the independent state can illustrate the case even better. Textbooks have lately become a favorite subject and source for historians.<sup>108</sup> They provide the documentary evidence not only for the content of national ideas inculcated in the population but are the best illustration of the mechanism employed by the effort to produce a relatively homogeneous population sharing in a common body of knowledge and values—the nation. This essentially instrumentalist approach to textbooks is not necessarily a great methodological insight of historians in the past decades. It was well understood and articulated by contemporaries in the nineteenth century. Practically all history textbooks would be prefaced

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105 Ibid., 11, 13.

106 *Sborniche "Vasil Levski,"* 1903, iii. It is also from this volume that one learns about the reactivation of the Karlovo Cultural Society, existing since 1868 and very active until 1878. In 1893 it was reformed under the name "Vasil Levski" and the first item on its agenda was the erection of a monument for Levski (ibid., 48–58).

107 *Vizpomenatelna kniga Vasil Levski,* 1937, 5: "His name today is a legend."

108 Hilary Bourdillon, ed., *History and Social Studies: methodologies of textbook analysis. Report of the educational research workshop held in Braunschweig, Germany, 11–14 September 1990*, Amsterdam: Berwyn, PA: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1992; Otto-Ernst Schuddekopf, *History teaching and history textbook revision*, Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe, 1967; Wolfgang Höpken, *Öl ins Feuer? Schulbücher, ethnische Stereotypen und Gewalt in Südosteuropa*, Hannover: Hahn, 1996; Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms—Textbooks and Yugoslav Union before 1914*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990; *History Education and the "Other" in History. Abstracts of Papers*, Second International History Congress, Bosphorus University, Istanbul, 1995.

with reflections on the need to know the history of the nation. This need was deemed natural because the nation was believed to be an organic whole, an individual writ large, and while “we all, peasants or townsmen, artists or merchants, educated or ignorant, laymen or clergymen, are different in our way of life, we share the same fatherland, speak the same language and are one great family, called the Bulgarian nation.”<sup>109</sup> Just as any of us would like to know his own past, so all of us should know the common past. This was, of course, a circular argument, declaring that the interest in the past stems from the existence of the nation, where the existence of the nation was to a large extent premised on sharing this body of common historical language. This argument was not necessarily the result of a logical fallacy, but a conscious propaganda attempt. It seems that the early nation-makers were far less caught in the notion of the reified organic anthropomorphic nation than the later exponents of the national idea, and they had a levelheaded appraisal of the influence of books. One of the first advertisement for book sales in a Bulgarian newspaper from 1859 is addressed “to the Bulgarians who are cool in their nationality, we have nice national books that can warm them up.”<sup>110</sup>

In the two decades before 1878, a remarkable network of modern schools was built up in Bulgaria: altogether, in the period 1830–1878, over 2,000 schools (elementary and high schools) were opened.<sup>111</sup> Instruction in history was served by the textbooks of Voinikov, Shishkov, Tsankov and others. The number of schools and students rose drastically after 1878, and with it the need for more and updated textbooks. This became especially urgent after 1876 with the publication of Konstantin Jireček’s *Geschichte der Bulgaren*, considered the first comprehensive scholarly treatment of Bulgarian history. The first textbooks in the Bulgarian Principality were not regulated: there was no provision for textbooks in the first law for public education from 1885. Writers and publishers had no limitations, and teachers were

109 D. V. Manchov, *Kratik izvod ot bilgarska istoriia. Knizhka za uchenik v osnovno uchilishte*, Plovdiv, Svishtov, Solun, 1880: Pechatnitsa i knizharnitsa na D. V. Manchov, 1880, 1.

110 *Malkiat list na Bilgariia*, god. I, no. 40, December 30, 1859, quoted in Ivan Ilchev, *Reklamata prez Vizrazhdaneto*, Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Marin Drinov,” 1995, 197.

111 Angel Dimitrov, *Uchilishteto, progresit i natsionalnata revoliutsiia. Bilgarskoto uchilishte prez Vizrazhdaneto*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1987, 99–100.

free to choose from the variety of textbooks offered. This went on until 1897, when a “Statute for Textbooks” was adopted by the Ministry for National Education (*Ministerstvo na narodnoto prosveshlenie*). Until the end of the 1890s, therefore, one can assume that textbooks were a most reliable barometer of the ideas and knowledge shared widely by the educated Bulgarian elite, and deemed appropriate for pedagogical and nation building purposes.<sup>112</sup>

The most popular and widely used of the newly published history textbooks were the ones authored by Dragan Manchov and Stefan Bobchev. The majority of their work was published in Plovdiv, the capital of Eastern Rumelia, and even before the unification served the unified schools system in both Bulgarian states. Manchov was the most significant Bulgarian publisher alongside Khristo Danov, and was the author of at least two history textbooks already in the early 1870s.<sup>113</sup> His updated history textbooks passed through numerous editions after 1878. The third edition of his brief history, compiled for elementary schools, came out in 1880, and covered the events of the nineteenth century in barely three pages: a page on the church struggle, half a page on the April insurrection of 1876, and a page on the Russo–Turkish war of 1877–1878. There was no mention of Levski or of any revolutionary initiative, organization or individual.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, the full text for the public schools did devote half a page to Levski. He was described as the organizer of a network of secret committees comprising thousands of members in the provinces around the Balkan mountains. His activity was known to the Turks but he was difficult to capture because of his unusual agility. Finally, as a result of unintended negligence on the part of a friend,<sup>115</sup> he was caught by the

112 Maria Radeva, “Uchebnitsite po bŭlgarska istoriia (1879–1900) i vŭzpitaneto na natsionalni chuvstva i natsionalno sŭznanie,” *Godishnik na Sofiiskŭia Univerzitet*, tom 75, 1982, 90–1; Ani Gergova, *Knizhminata i bŭlgarite*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1991, 177.

113 Dragan Manchov, *Kratik izvod ot bŭlgarskata istoriia*, Plovdiv, Svishtov, Bitolia, 1872; *Bŭlgarska istoriia za narodni uchilishta. Stikmil ot razni sŭchineniia po bŭlgarska istoriia*, Plovdiv, Svishtov, Solun, 1874. See also Konstantin Punev, *Dragan Manchov. Knigoizdatel i radetel za bashtin ezik*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestveniiia Front, 1989.

114 D.V. Manchov, *Kratik izvod*, 88–90.

115 Although not mentioned by name, Manchov obviously had in mind Dimitŭr Obshti, because in the next sentence he mentions that “Levski and his friend” were hanged. D. V. Manchev, *Izvod ot bŭlgarskata istoriia za*

Turks, tortured, and hanged in Sofia. While Manchov's prose was controlled and sparse in praise (he mentioned simply that Levski struggled courageously before he was caught, and that he did not betray any of his friends), Levski's revolutionary activities were the only ones mentioned between a survey of the school system and the outbreak of the Eastern crisis in 1875.

Stefan Bobchev, the future influential legal historian, began publishing his history textbooks in the early 1880s. By the mid-1890s, his high school history had become the most popular and prestigious text in the school system.<sup>116</sup> The first edition of his *History of the Bulgarian People* was published in 1881, and its subtitle *After Dr. K. Ĵireček* explicitly indicated that this was a school adaptation of the first scholarly rendering of Bulgarian history. In his circa 300-page work, Bobchev devoted a 10-page chapter to political-revolutionary movements and literature. Having described the activities of G. S. Rakovski, Panaiot Khitov, Khadzhi Dimitir and Stefan Karadzha, and especially Liuben Karavelov as the central figure of revolutionary organization and propaganda, Bobchev devoted slightly under a page to Levski. Characteristically, the paragraph introducing Levski, begins with: "As far as the propaganda among the Bulgarian population is concerned, it was becoming systematic and organized," and Levski became the leader of this activity. Levski's resolution, his ability to avoid arrest, his courage and loyalty during his trial followed even verbally the description of Manchov, except that Bobchev introduces the accusation that a priest had betrayed Levski.<sup>117</sup>

Bobchev published also two brief versions of his history: one for elementary schools, another for high schools. In the latter, Levski was introduced as the most prominent of Karavelov's assistants.<sup>118</sup> The text for the elementary schools stressed the tortures to which Levski had been subjected after his arrest and described him for the first time

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*narodniti uchilishta*, Plovdiv, Svishtov, Solun: Pechatnitsa i knizharnitsa na D.V. Manchov, 1879 (4th edition), 188–9. Same text in the 5th edition of 1881.

116 Radeva, "Uchebnitsite," 102.

117 S. S. Bobchev, *Istoriia na bilgarskii narod (Po D-r K. Ĵireček)*, Plovdiv, Sofia, Ruschuk: Izdava knizharnitsa na Khr.G.Danov, 1881, 257–8.

118 S. S. Bobchev, *Kratik uchebnik vırkhu bilgarskata istoriia ot nai-staro vreme do dnes*, Plovdiv: Izdanie i pechat na Khristo Danov, 1883, 106–7. This was the second edition, the first being from 1882.

as a martyr, but he still was not the exclusive figure of the Bulgarian national revolution that he had become a century later.<sup>119</sup> Still the inclusion of the element of inhuman tortures and Levski's martyrdom was a first step in the direction of mythologizing his figure. In fact, as is well attested and as historians would unanimously agree, Levski was handled respectfully by the Ottoman court, and he was not subjected to any physical abuse. The legend of the tortures during the trial was spread by Karavelov on the pages of his paper *Nezavisimost* in August of 1873, in a brief message in which one can read also the first formulation of Levski as a "Bulgarian saint."<sup>120</sup> An anonymous poem dedicated to Levski and mentioning the "sacred gallows" was also probably penned by Karavelov.<sup>121</sup>

This assessment of Levski continued also after the regulation of school textbooks in 1897 when they had to be specially approved by the Ministry of National Education. Thus, the 1899 edition of Bobchev's *History* put its emphasis again on Rakovski and especially Karavelov as his heir in the revolutionary struggle. Levski was praised as courageous, intelligent and resolute, the most important figure in the revolutionary circle of Karavelov. Likewise, Iurdan Popgeorgiev's 1914 history textbooks characterized Levski as "Karavelov's right hand."<sup>122</sup>

Post-liberation textbooks offered patriotic accounts with a very clear idea of the educational effects of historical knowledge. The bulk of these historical surveys was devoted to the medieval period: the two Bulgarian empires from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries.<sup>123</sup> As mentioned, the aim of the textbooks was to disseminate in a popular form the knowledge assembled by Jireček.<sup>124</sup> His history itself empha-

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119 S. S. Bobchev, *Kratki razkazi iz bilgarskata istoriia*, Plovdiv: Khr. G. Danov, 1883, 54.

120 Nikolai Genchev, *Levski, revoliutsiinata i bideshtniat sviat*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestveniiia Front, 1973, 148; also Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 126–7. Karavelov's information about Levski's tortures is in *Nezavisimost* III, No. 47, Bucharest, August 11, 1873, 374.

121 *Nezavisimost* III, No. 37, Bucharest, June 2, 1873, 292.

122 Quoted in Radeva, "Uchebnitsite," 114–6.

123 Maria Radeva, "Ideiata za natsionalno edinstvo i dostoinstvo v prosvetnata politika na bilgarskata dirzhava sled Osvobozhdenieto," *Izvestiia na bilgarskoto istorichesko druzhestvo XXXV* (1983), 157–71, esp. 159, 161.

124 Jireček published his historical account of Bulgaria in 1876 in Prague, simultaneously in German and in Czech: *Geschichte der Bulgaren*, Prag:

sized the medieval period (over two thirds of the text), describing the Ottoman centuries as the Dark Ages of Bulgarian history. Jireček had conceived of the history in the early 1870s, and by March, 1875 had completed it; the publication in separate parts began in the second half of 1875. His narrative spanned the period from antiquity to 1875 but the account ended with the results of the struggle for church autonomy in 1870. The history's last three chapters covered the beginnings of the new educational movement, the church struggles, and a brief survey of modern Bulgarian literature. It was Jireček's contribution to popularize the achievements of eighteenth and nineteenth century Bulgarian cultural figures like Father Paisii, Sofronii Vrachanski, Vasil Aprilov, Nikolai Palauzov, Georgi Sava Rakovski, the brothers Dimitir and Konstantin Miladinov, Panaiot Khitov, Marin Drinov. There was no mention, at the same time, of the existing political attempts at emancipation, and of any of the revolutionary leaders, with the one-page exceptions on Rakovski's legion and the *chetas* of Panaiot Khitov and Philip Totiu (1866–1868).<sup>125</sup> There was, consequently, nothing on Levski in the first edition. Although Jireček was intimately familiar with Levski's case and post-independence Bulgarian development (between 1879 and 1884 he resided in Bulgaria holding high administrative positions, among them minister of education), Levski did not make it to the main text of the later manuscript addenda, either. More tellingly, his name did appear in the addenda to a lengthy and learned footnote in Chapter V, explaining some of the features of everyday life of the Bulgarians in the ninth century from the *Responsa Nicolai papae*, the answers of Pope Nicholas I in 866 to the questions of King Boris I after his conversion to Christianity, and some other Byzantine

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Verlag von F. Tempsky, 1876 and *Dejini naroda buharsceho*. Very soon two Russian translations appeared: one in Odessa, the other in Warsaw. It was the Russian translation by F. K. Brun and V. N. Palauzov which had an enormous effect on the Bulgarian intelligentsia. After the Liberation, the first Bulgarian translation of the history appeared in Tirnovo in 1886. Jireček had been constantly urged to consider a new expanded edition of his work, and he had gathered numerous notes on different aspects of Bulgarian history but he never published them before his death in 1918. The 1978 Bulgarian edition has added the extensive corrections and addenda in the footnotes from the archive of Jireček. See Konstantin Ireček, *Istoriia na bilgarite. S popravki i dobavki ot samiia avtor*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1978.

125 Jireček, *Geschichte*, 557.

sources. Explaining the phrase "slaughter the dog," Jireček pointed out that it still exists as an idiom in the Bulgarian vernacular, and quoted Zaimov's 1884 book *Minaloto*: "It could be said of Karavelov, Kínchev and Levski that they slaughtered the dog, as Bulgarians would say about people who have the greatest influence in social affairs."<sup>126</sup>

Characteristically, Jireček ended his penultimate chapter with the following statement:

The Bulgarians, a peaceful and industrious folk, maybe yield to the Serbs, Greeks, Albanians and Romanians in militancy and national pride; in industry and agriculture, however, they are far ahead of their neighbors... Everyone was predicting a brilliant future for Bulgaria, especially after the opening of the railways in Thrace and Macedonia in 1873. What these wonderful lands, lavishly endowed by nature and populated with an industrious people, need most, however, is a more humane and reasonable government... The outbreak of the Hercegovinian insurrection (1875) gave an impetus for a new state of affairs. The next year Bulgaria was befallen with the awful, well-known catastrophe, whose description falls out of the framework of this survey.<sup>127</sup>

This had left the authors of the post-Liberation textbooks to write up their own versions of the political and revolutionary struggle of the Bulgarians, especially in the last two decades before 1878. In terms of format, the textbooks were almost wholly built around the biographical principle. Students were exposed to the biographies of the Bulgarian khans and tsars (Asparukh, Krum, Boris, Simeon, Peter, Samuil, Asen I, Kaloian, Ivan Asen II, Ivan Shishman) as well as the great religious and cultural figures (Cyril and Methodius, Kliment Okhridski, Patriarch Evtimii, Grigorii Tsamblak). To the latter were added the major figures of the Bulgarian Enlightenment: Paissii of Khilandar and Sofronii Vrachanski. This reflected not merely contemporary historiog-

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126 Jireček, *Istoriia*, 148, n.10.

127 Jireček, *Istoriia*, 593. This is the corrected and expanded paragraph as it appears in Jireček's archives and as it was published in the Bulgarian edition of 1978. The corresponding text in the German edition is identical, except for minor turns of phrase, and the addition of the last sentences about the revolt in Hercegovina (Jireček, *Geschichte*, 561–2).



**Figure 13.** Official program for the inauguration of Levski's monument in Sofia, 22 October 1895.

Source: *Sofiiski Gradski Okrŕzhen Arkhiv*, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 192.

raphy but first and foremost the romantic endeavor to present the historical message around strong individuals, “the builders of history.”<sup>128</sup> It is all the more symptomatic in this respect that while Levski definitely figured among the major revolutionary figures of the age, he was

<sup>128</sup> Radeva, “Uchebnitsite,” 92.

described in a matter-of-fact fashion, devoid of the immoderate superlatives of a later period. As already stated, in this period textbooks reflected the ideas circulating among the educated elites who were making a conscious effort to forge a nation out of a comparatively passive population as far as national identity was concerned. They were using all possible methods to instill a feeling of pride in the heroic history of their fatherland, and the fact that the rendering of Levski's activities is full of respect but without the elements of later glorification has to be taken to reflect the dominant views harbored about him in this period.

On October 22, 1895, Levski's monument in Sofia was inaugurated amidst criticism leveled at the ruling circles for their lack of involvement and interest in this figure.<sup>129</sup> As far as the opening ceremony was concerned, the accusations were not entirely fair. The committee for the celebration, one of whose members was Ivan Vazov, had prepared an elaborate program. On the eve of the inauguration, Vazov's drama *Khishove* was staged in honor of Levski. In the morning at 9 a.m., a memorial service took place "for the soul of Deacon Ignatii Vasil Levski" at the "Sv. Kral" (today "Sv. Nedelia") church. Half an hour later, a solemn procession took off for the monument. It was arranged according to a strict protocol, led by the orchestra, followed by Levski's collaborators and students, Levski's relatives, present ministers, former ministers, members of parliament, present and former municipal authorities, military officers, officials, professors and teachers, students, the home guard (*opîlchenie*), and a number of different societies (Macedonian, Croatian, German, Czech, Italian, Swiss, the agrarian, the engineering, the society of bicyclists), closing with ordinary citizens. The monument was opened by the King,<sup>130</sup> after the consecration of the clergy, and there was an elaborate musical program, military parade and wreath laying. The evening ended with an official dinner for Levski's relatives and fireworks for the public.<sup>131</sup>

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129 "Otkrivaneto pametnika na Levski," *Svoboda* 10, No. 1790, October 23, 1895, 2–3.

130 Interestingly, while Ferdinand von Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1861–1948) was only Prince (1887–1908) at the time of the inauguration, and adopted the title King (*Tsar*) only in 1908 (until his abdication in 1918), the official program announced him as His Highness the King (*Negovo Tsarsko Vîsochestvo*).

131 *Sofiski Gradski Okrîzhen Arkhiv* (SGODA: Sofia City District Archives), Fond 1k, op. (*opis*) 3, a.e. (*arkhivna edimitsa*) 192, pp. 2–6.

Raising a monument dedicated to Levski had been initiated already in the first months of the existence of the post-Ottoman administration. In November 1878, it had been decided to begin a fundraising campaign for the monument.<sup>132</sup> In February, 1879, circulars were sent to all district centers, asking for support to commemorate the deed of the Deacon Ignatii Levski: “Levski has once and for all succeeded in erecting a magnificent monument in our hearts and souls but, for the sake of posterity, we are initiating the construction of a monument in his memory near Sofia at the road to Orkhanie, at the same place where he was hanged, and where his bones, together with the head of the famous hero Georgi Benkovski, will be transferred from the cemetery.”<sup>133</sup> The fundraising initiative was not very successful. There were positive responses from different places—Sliven, Stara Zagora, Pirdop, Vratsa, Kiustendil, Pleven, Ruse, Orăkhovo, Samokov, Sevlievo, Pazardzhik, Razgrad, Varna—but the total sum gathered was insufficient. In their letter, the representatives of the town council of Stara Zagora wrote: “As you would know, poverty is rampant in our town and we could barely gather 20 franks.” The Vratsa council sent 102 franks and praised the “holy initiative.” It also asked about the approximate price of the monument, because it wanted to raise a monument to Botev who had been killed near their town.<sup>134</sup> The building of the monument was discontinued because of financial difficulties, and a

132 Claudia Weber, in her article “‘Opiti za sîzhiviavane’—kîm nachalata na bîlgarskata kultura na pametta,” *Balkanistichen forum* 1–3 (1999), 159, attributes this initiative to the Russian governor at the time, Alabin, basing herself on the evidence from a protocol of the commission for the building of Levski’s monument, dated March 10, 1884 (SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 166, pp. 3–4). In fact, Alabin simply gave his permission for the gathering of funds from the provincial cities by initialing, on November 27, 1878, the report of the police chief handed to him on November 23, 1878 (SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 145, p. 2). This report, on its part, was triggered by the decision of the Sofia municipal council in the summer of 1878 to build the monument, and its letter to the Sofia police chief, in which the municipal council asked him to lobby Alabin to support this “popular initiative” (Letter No. 179 of August 11, 1878, SGO-DA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 145, p. 1).

133 SGO-DA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e.151, p. 1.

134 SGO-DA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 151, pp. 3–36. Claudia Weber points out that of the 44 city councils addressed in February, 1879, by September, 1879 only 12 had responded, and a mere 1,500 leva had been gathered (Weber, 159).

new fundraising campaign began in 1884.<sup>135</sup> By 1888, the Sofia town council had gathered 35,000 levs.<sup>136</sup> It is at this point that the construction of the monument resumed at a slightly different nearby location, and was completed in 1892.<sup>137</sup> The final costs of the monument amounted to 75,000 levs, of which 40,000 were granted from the state budget.<sup>138</sup>

In her otherwise pioneering and interesting article on the beginnings of Bulgarian commemorative culture, Claudia Weber makes the hasty assertion that the fact that the population would hardly contribute donations to the projected monument for Levski illustrates that "clearly the veteran Vasil Ignatii Levski was to a great extent unknown to the Bulgarian population and the motivation to give money for his monument did not gain strength for many years." Based on this observation, she concludes: "The Levski cultus in the last decades of the nineteenth century was in any case regional and his inclusion into the canon of national martyrs needed further 'work on the myth.'"<sup>139</sup> The claim for Levski's "regional" status is wholly arbitrary, and conforms

135 The correspondence of the commission for building the monument is in SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 166, pp. 1–14. Despite the financial difficulties, there was great enthusiasm, and the Czech architect Kollar prepared his project for the monument, and gave technical advice for free. The three great living poets at the time—Ivan Vazov, Petko Slaveikov and Stefan Stambolov—were each asked to offer a verse to be mounted on the monument. (p. 5–5A)

136 Of this sum, 20,000 levs were granted by the National Assembly, 12,500 from the budget of the Sofia town council, and the additional modest support from other municipal councils (Ruse, Vidin, Troian, Dupnitsa, Svishtov) and private donations: SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 6, a.e. 184, 17; Fond 1k, op. 6, a.e. 173, 2, Fond 1k, op. 6, a.e. 174, pp. 2–9.

137 Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia: Bilgarski khudozhnik, 1976, 17 attributes the postponement of the official opening of the memorial to partisan struggles. Veneta Ivanova, "Kim postigane na natsionalen oblik v bilgarskoto monumentalno izkustvo (1878–1918)," in *Iz istoriata na bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo. Sbornik ot studii*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bilgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1976, 85–6 explains that the change of location was closely linked to the development of the municipal architectural plan. Only 10–15 meters away from the initial placement, was the crossroads of two major roads, and placing the monument at the center was thought to secure it a prominent view.

138 Weber, 160.

139 Weber, 160.

better with the latest theories on nationalism rather than with nineteenth-century Bulgarian realities. When Zakhari Stoianov published his biography of Levski in 1883, the circa 3,000 copies of the book disappeared from the bookstores in a few days, 2,000 of them alone in Plovdiv, not in Sofia. There is also interesting evidence of informal school practices which propagated and strengthened the Levski worship. Working on a completely different project, I came across several independent testimonies from completely different parts of Bulgaria that the highlight of school parties in the 1890s and later were *tableaux vivantes* replete with fireworks that illustrated the hanging of Levski.<sup>140</sup>

Claudia Weber is right on target about the gradual maturing of the Levski myth. She is also right about the gradual process of making “peasants into Bulgarians.” However, she is conflating two issues: a not strongly or universally developed national consciousness with the readiness to donate. Poor or impoverished people, especially with war on their minds (coming out of one in 1877–1878, and a new one in 1885) can hardly be expected to donate money for monuments when they had little to survive on. Passionate national movements in their beginning phases are least of all concerned with monuments, which mostly feed the retrospective glance of already established polities.<sup>141</sup>

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140 Karakostov, “Predgovor,” 17–8, 24–5. Stoianov immediately undertook a second edition after appealing to contemporaries for additional material and receiving an avalanche of letters. Deeply involved in the political turmoil of the mid-1880s, he could not complete this task before his early death in 1889. The information for the *tableaux vivantes* comes from the memoirs of Nikola Vizharov (1877–1964) a village teacher in the 1890s in the districts of Kiustendil and Dupnitsa, and Ivan Danov (1893–1985) who remembers the acts as a schoolboy in Vratsa at the turn of the century (*Tsentralen Dîrzhaven Arkhiv*, TsDA, Sp 322 B, l.27; Sp 517 B, l.28).

141 In 1888, the National Assembly approved only 20,000 out of the desired 30,000 for the construction of Levski’s monument, but, on the other hand, there was not a single voice in opposition to allotting a permanent pension to Levski’s impoverished sister Anna Kunchova (Karakostov, “Predgovor,” 19–21, 27). It is true, that even a few decades later, there were critical voices commenting on the negligent attitude of both state authorities and people toward the graves of national heroes. Thus, in May, 1937, a retired colonel addressed the minister of education, informing him of the destitute state of St. Cyril’s grave in Rome and appealing to the state to take appropriate measures. He also added that while on a visit to Ruse, he took his children to visit the grave of Liuben Karavelov. At the graveyard, one of his children noticed an abandoned cross with

Equally problematic is Weber's claim that "the Bulgarian 'invention of tradition' was at the outset an extra-state undertaking," which "throws remarkable light on the weakness of the Bulgarian state as the bearer of the national commemorative culture."<sup>142</sup> According to her, there were two groups that took up the task of creating repositories of memory: the temporary Russian administration and the network of local veterans' committees. Indeed, the first monuments dedicated to the Russo-Turkish war, were erected during the two-year term of the Russian administration and, after 1881, teams of Russian engineers and architects toured the country to find appropriate places for war memorials. Equally, it was the veterans' organization that initiated the building of a monument for the Tsar-Liberator Alexander II, and the state gave its decisive support only in 1899, opening the way for the successful completion of this magnificent monument in 1907.<sup>143</sup>

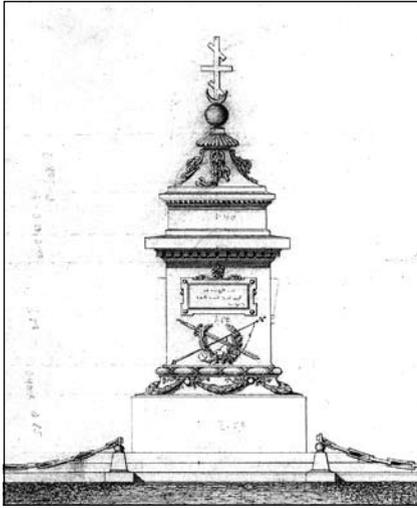
On the other hand, Weber does not take into consideration both the decisive state financial support for Levski's monument, and the fact that the state had initiated another huge undertaking coinciding with this project. This was the decision, taken already by the First Constitutive Bulgarian National Assembly (April 1879) to build a "temple-monument for our fatherland's liberation," the future "Alexander Nevski" cathedral in the capital city. It was reiterated by the Second National Assembly (March-December 1880), which decided to build the temple from voluntary donations. Prince Alexander accordingly issued a decree and set up a committee, and on February 19 (March 3), 1882, the foundation stone was set. It was hoped that

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the name of Stefan Karadzha, one of the legendary heroes and a martyr for Bulgaria's independence. "Thank God, we don't have graves for Botev and Levski!" the colonel exclaimed, "Our generation accuses the ones who have not preserved them, but now we would be blushing (with shame)" (F. 177, op. 2. a.e. 863, p. 10). While this is a poignant comment on the weak or non-existing culture of commemoration, it certainly doesn't warrant conclusions about national consciousness.

142 Weber, 159, 160. The author maintains that Sofia, as the capital and political center, was unsuccessfully attempting to impose a supra-regional commemorative culture. This statement conforms better to the post-1871 German realities rather than to the cultural politics in a much smaller territory like Bulgaria. While her article has the great merit of introducing a new approach and discourse to Bulgarian historiography, it unfortunately subordinates the historical particulars to the procrustean bed of theory.

143 *Ibid.*, 160-166. See also SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 196, pp. 4-5.



**Figure 14.** An early sketch of architect Kollar for Levski's monument.  
Source: *Sofiiski Gradski Okrızhen Arkhiv*, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 169.



**Figure 15.** Levski's monument on Sofia. Present view.

the construction would be completed by 1885, but the war prevented this.<sup>144</sup> At the same time that the campaign to gather donations for Levski's monument was going on, a parallel campaign for the support of the temple was launched, and it was very energetic. If the state, that is the government, should be characterized in any way, it was not as a "weak bearer of the national commemorative culture" but, rather, as a discriminating and selective one. Most of its efforts went behind the erection of the grandiose temple that, as a religious structure, had the enthusiastic support of the church; was a unifying symbol of independence, rather than only a monument of one strand in the liberation movements; and, finally, served as a gesture of gratitude to the liberator Russia. In this respect, the accusations leveled against the ruling

<sup>144</sup> SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 199a, 7; Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 154, pp. 1–8.

Only in 1896, after the opening of Levski's monument, was the initiative taken up again, a final plan approved in 1904, and by 1905, after more than two decades of fundraising, the committee had gathered a little over half of the estimated 3.7 million leva for the construction (SGODA, Fond 1k, op. 3, a.e. 199a, p. 7). The cathedral "Alexander Nevski" was completed and officially consecrated only in September 1924, a good 45 years after it was planned.

elites of an ambivalent, if not quite indifferent, attitude toward Levski, are more to the point.

Three years after the inauguration of Levski's monument, at the time of the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Levski's death in 1898, the Ministry of War was criticized for keeping the army and the officers away from the commemorative initiatives.<sup>145</sup> It was mentioned earlier that for several decades after independence there were debates around the proper evaluation of Levski, about the general assessment of the revolutionary movement, and finding his exact place in the revolutionary pantheon. Once the highest place was accorded and became unchallenged, the debate shifted to which movement, party, ideology or institution best represented the ideas of Levski, in a word, to who owned Levski. While this is the object of the next chapter, suffice it to say here that the watershed came after the end of the First World War.

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145 "Zashto voiskata ne praznuva?" *Svoboda* 12, No. 2183, February 6, 1989, 3.



### 3. A Banner for All Causes: Appropriating the Hero

The voluminous body of scholarly work on Vasil Levski, among which some genuine and masterly contributions stand out, is focused entirely on the historical figure and its activities. The first and only analysis of Levski's posthumous fate is Genchev's chapter on "Vasil Levski in the Bulgarian historical memory," which he published in his 1987 book on Levski. In it, Genchev makes an attempt to explain the abrupt turn in the Levski discourse after the Balkan Wars and the First World War. He contends that history itself vindicated Levski's ideas. The reason for this, according to Genchev, is the critical reassessment of the political platforms which were characterized by excessive dependence on great power patronage that led to the two national catastrophes in the second decade of the twentieth century. Looking back to the lessons of history, the new generations refuted these disastrous policies and opposed them with the national platform of Levski which maintained "that only an independent and unengaged development, only a society of guaranteed political and social liberties, only a complete spiritual upsurge can bring out the Bulgarians from the enslaved chaos of their history and psychology."<sup>146</sup>

Apart from the fact that this somewhat murky explanation is replete with romantically inflated nineteenth-century abstractions, it is also patently untrue. For all the attraction of Levski's ideology and especially his revolutionary practice, history did not vindicate him. *Realpolitik* in the nineteenth century meant balance-of-power among the great powers, and straightforward great power patronage for the rest. Bulgarian liberation was achieved as a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, and sanctioned by great power consensus at Berlin. Nor was this the exception to the rule. The representation of the Serbian and Greek historical myth has managed to shift the attention primarily to the internal effort, but neither the First Serbian Uprising can be envisaged without the Russo-Turkish war of 1806–1812, nor is

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146 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 176.

Serbia's subsequent autonomy and independence conceivable without the treaties at Adrianople (1829) and Berlin (1878). The same is true for Greek independence that came as the end-result of great power bargaining, in which the status of the newly formed state was raised from autonomy to independence in direct correlation to the cut in size. And despite the strong republican strain in the Greek and Bulgarian national movements (of which Levski was a powerful exponent), alternatives to monarchies were not even mentioned, let alone discussed or considered. Genchev, however, was entirely correct with the timing—the early postwar years—and the result: “All doubts in Levski stopped as if cut off by a knife. What followed was a crazy race to appropriate his historical immortality. Every political force, party or trend in Bulgarian life was in a hurry to put his fair image on its banner, to recommend itself as his follower.”<sup>147</sup>

Thus, in the 1920s, the Levski myth was finally shaped, and the whole mechanism of transmission was in place: the sacred text, its dissemination through textbooks, the regularized educational system reaching each and every child through normative texts, the elaborate commemorative ritual. The standard explanation has it that the reason Levski began presiding over the heroic pantheon was the result of a vindication of Levski's ideals. There is no doubt that the humiliating defeats of Bulgaria as a result of the Balkan and First World Wars (known as the First and Second National Catastrophes), served as a sobering shock to the jingoistic irredentist nationalism. The crown, in the person of King Ferdinand, was completely compromised and accused of reckless adventurism. Not only did this cost Ferdinand the throne and he abdicated in favor of his son Boris, but it cost the medieval Bulgarian kings the throne of the heroic galaxy. Not that they were demoted, but if before the wars the greatest heroes were Tsar Simeon, Khan Asparukh, Tsar Ivan Asen II and other great political and military leaders, only gradually and often distantly followed by the constellation of nineteenth-century national revolutionaries, now the order was reversed. One could say that here was a vindication of their republican and democratic ideas, together with their internationalist nationalism (if this oxymoron is allowed). This, however, is not the sole satisfactory explanation of Levski's personal ascendancy.

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147 *Ibid.*, 176.

It is my belief that two circumstances were decisive in this respect. The first concerns the fact that the generation of Levski collaborators or simply contemporaries was, as a whole, extinct by the 1920s. This meant that there were no alternatives to a unified, unchallenged and presiding heroic assessment of Levski. After 1878 there could be no dispute about the construction of Levski as hero. His elevation as the ultimate Bulgarian hero, however, could and did encounter fair resistance. After the 1920s, living memories could compete no longer. In the second circumstance, the generation of contemporaries of Vazov—the author of the standard text which became *the* body of basic knowledge and evaluation of Levski—was likewise gone, and so were the critics to Vazov's view or simply rivals to his style. Just as this passage of the contemporary generation was necessary for the literary "canonization" of the hero, so it was needed for the "canonization" of the text. That the two coincided in time was an outcome of the fact that Levski (1837–1871) and Vazov (1850–1921) themselves were contemporaries; it should not have any further methodological significance.

So, in a way, the old prejudice against what the Germans call *Zeitgeschichte*, or contemporary history, may be justified, after all: one needs the distance of time in order to begin a levelheaded and "objective" quest. Live contemporaries can be an impediment to this. It is all like the Swahilli saying that contends that the deceased who remain alive in people's memory are called "living dead." It is only when the last to have known them passes away that they are pronounced completely dead.<sup>148</sup> Only, myth seems to need the services of this exact same time distance. Myth is not used here in its popular connotation of traditional story or in its pejorative meaning of false story. Rather, I employ Bruce Lincoln's classification of narratives from the point of view of the narrators' claims and their reception by the audience. There are, in this model, four types of narratives: fables, legends, histories and myths. Fables do not make truth-claims, but present themselves and are accepted as fictions. Legends claim truth-power but they enjoy neither credibility nor authority over their audience. Stories that offer accurate accounts of past events and have credibility are history. Myths are the small class of stories possessing both credibility and authority. Building upon both Malinowski, who describes myth as a so-

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148 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 195.

cial charter, and on Geertz's notion of "model of" and "model for" reality, Lincoln posits that "a narrative possessed of authority is one for which successful claims are made not only to the status of truth, but what is more, to the status of *paradigmatic* truth... Thus, myth is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors *can then* construct society. It is also a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed."<sup>149</sup> Levski is the literary hero of both these narratives.

It is symptomatic that serious historical research on Levski began precisely in this period. At its first meeting on April 24, 1923, the newly founded "Vasil Levski" People's Committee decided to launch "a strictly scholarly and critical" volume, which was to include Levski's biography, as well as memoirs of living revolutionary collaborators.<sup>150</sup>

149 Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society. Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 24–5. In a subsequent study, Bruce Lincoln offers a sweeping history of myth from the ancient Greeks to the present, and specifically analyzes the relationship of myth and ideology. Weighing the evidence against scholarship as myth, he concludes: "If myth is ideology in narrative form, then scholarship is myth with footnotes." (Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, 209)

150 This organization, with a seat in Sofia and a branch in Karlovo, existed from 1923 until 1950 with three consecutive chairmen: Petir Popov, Vasil Tantilov, and Dr. D. Kirov. Its activities can be seen in the Protocol book of the "Vasil Levski" People's Committee, at the Central State Archives (*Tsentralen Dirzhaven Arkhiv, Chastni postipleniia*, TsDA, ChP 940, here p. 1). Its statute was adopted at the general inaugural meeting on March 19, 1923, and its first clause enumerated the aims: "a) to gather all memoirs about Vasil Levski and publish his full biography together with the assembled documentation; b) to perpetuate his memory in his birthplace Karlovo; c) to support the Apostle's cult; d) to assist in writing and publishing the history of Karlovo" (*Ustav na narodniia komitet 'Vasil Levski'*, TsDA, Fond 264, op. 6, a.e. 1528, pp. 32–4). In a March 20, 1950 letter, the committee informed the minister of interior that as a result of its activities in the course of 27 years, it had fulfilled its mission. Its mandate had expired because of the war—it had no meetings since 1940 and most of its members were ill or could not continue their membership, so it decided to discontinue its work. According to the statute, its funds and archives were to be handed to the Karlovo-based community center (TsDA, Fond 264, op. 6, a.e. 1528, pp. 10–1; TsDA, ChP 940, p. 146, Protocol 75, March 8, 1950).

The person charged with this task was Dimitir Strashimirov, himself a permanent member of the committee and a well-known scholar who in 1907 had published the valuable “Archive of the Revival.”<sup>151</sup> One of the main tasks of the committee was to secure funds with which to finance Strashimirov’s research trips around the country, in which he was assembling documentary material and interviewing people. By 1924, the committee had opened a “Levski” account at the Sofia Popular Bank, where, among others, moneys collected from school performances were flowing in. Two years later, it could pay 20,000 leva for the manuscript of Pop Mincho and cover Strashimirov’s expenses in Lovech and Karlovo in the amount of 3,250 leva.<sup>152</sup>

The committee’s protocol book makes it clear how onerous a task the compilation of Levski’s biography was. Five years after he undertook the job, Strashimirov reported that the first documentary volume was ready for print, and it came out in 1929. While work on the second had advanced, he was waiting to include the Ottoman documentation on the trial against Levski, on which a team of Turkologists, headed by Vladimir Todorov-Khindalov was working.<sup>153</sup> Overwhelmed by petty squabbling and suffering from bad health, in 1929 Strashimirov resigned from the committee but promised to deliver on his duty to

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151 Dimitir Strashimirov, *Arkhiv na vizrazhdaneto*, Sofia: Ministerstvo na narodnoto prosveshchenie, 1908. Earlier Strashimirov had published a biography of Botev (1897) and a history of the April Uprising (1907). Another historian—Ivan Klincharov—who likewise had begun his scholarly oeuvre with a history of the April Uprising of 1876, and a biography of Botev, published a biographical book on Levski at the exact same time that Strashimirov began his meticulous gathering of materials for the definitive biography: Ivan G. Klincharov, *Vasil Levski-Diakonit: Zhivot i revoliutsion-na deinost*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Rodopi,” ca. 1924.

152 TsDA, ChP 940, p. 10 (Protocol 6, March 18, 1924); p. 17 (Protocol 11, October 6, 1926).

153 *Vasil Levski: Zhivot, dela, izvori*, vol. 1. *Izvori*, Sofia: Narodniat komitet “Vasil Levski,” 1929. A couple of years earlier Strashimirov published *Levski pred kibrinskata golgota*, Sofia: Fakel, 1927 (later editions 1991, 1995), strongly endorsing the version in favor of Pop Kristiu’s betrayal. By 1934, Strashimirov had still not received copies of the Ottoman documents from the National library (TsDA, ChP 940, p. 66, Protocol 38, September 14, 1934) and the second volume never materialized. The materials on the trial were published only in 1946: *Sledstvenoto delo na Vasil Levski i negovite spodvizhnitsi. Prevod ot turski V.T.Khindalov. Stikmil za izdanie St. Ilchev*, Sofia, 1946.

finish Levski's biography.<sup>154</sup> This he never managed to complete before his death in 1939, at age 71. Already during his illness in 1938, Strashimirov's assistant Ivan Undzhiev was asked to take upon himself the task of producing the scholarly biography. While Undzhiev stepped on the enormous research work of his predecessor, it is no doubt it was his own achievement that produced the first scholarly biography of Levski.<sup>155</sup>

154 See TsDA, ChP 940, p. 29 (Protocols 18 & 19, May 5, 1928) arguing about the ever expanding volume of the publication and the size of the honorarium to be paid; p. 72 (Protocol 41, December 3, 1935) complaining that for twelve years Strashimirov had not delivered, giving him a deadline of March 1, 1936 and threatening the job would be commissioned to someone else; p. 75 (Protocol 42, December 12, 1935) with Strashimirov's explanatory letter and his belief that a hasty biography would defy the scholarly purpose of the undertaking; p. 83 (Protocols 43 & 44, April 3, and June 17, 1936) on the resumption of the commission.

155 It is strange then, that Genchev, who heaped praise on Strashimirov, mentioned Undzhiev only in a brief sentence, while acknowledging that his was the most complete biography (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 177, 182). On Undzhiev's work and the challenges of producing the biography, see Part III, Chapter 3. The secret to Genchev's underestimation of Undzhiev was solved in 2005, when his memoirs of the 1980s were published posthumously. There, Genchev characterizes Undzhiev as lively, nice, full of humor and eloquent, but also "a weakling, deprived of the spirit that could make him kindred to the Apostle. He therefore did not succeed in grasping and explaining the greatness of V. Levski, his historical daring, his Christian fanaticism and in his books represented the Apostle coiffed according to the clichés of communist political journalism" (Nikolai Genchev, *Izbrani proizvedeniia*, Tom 5 *Spomeni*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Gutenberg," 2005, 260). This bombastic accusation, implicitly establishing Genchev's own kindred spiritual link to the Apostle, is completely unfounded for anyone familiar with Undzhiev's biography, all the more as it had been completed in 1943, before anyone had an inkling that "communist clichés" would become the rule. It does however throw the image of the late Genchev in a questionable light. Having been told that Undzhiev's son-in-law may have been the initiator of the Central Committee's attack on his book, Genchev, although not really suspecting the octogenarian Undzhiev, still rudely refused to give him a copy of his book (He writes at length how "the old man" kept asking him for a copy, addressing him with the diminutive "Nikolaicho," but Genchev told him he had decided not to give a copy precisely to him: "The old man kept quiet and moved on. I did not see him again, he died soon after" (Genchev, *Spomeni*, 261).

The publication of Levski's scholarly biography was not the committee's only activity. It deliberated for years about restoration work on Levski's birth place, a task completed by laying the foundations of the future Museum of Levski in Karlovo.<sup>156</sup> The peak of its ambitions in the 1930s was to organize a proper national celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostle's birth in 1937. In 1936, when the committee first approached the government for permission and support for the celebration, the prime minister refused to even grant an audience, and later it was informed that the sum of 150,000 leva promised from the state budget was crossed out by the minister of finance. The committee did not despair and continued its lobbying efforts. Some of the members were prepared to settle for a local celebration in Karlovo but others insisted that only a general national commemoration merited the great achievement of the Apostle. In the end, the celebrations were postponed for the fall (October 31, 1937) and were confined to Karlovo. The government did not commit and no financial backing was received, but the Ministry of Education at least gave permission for morning meetings in Sofia and some other cities, organized by actors and literati. It also allowed journalists and writers to issue a commemorative paper on the day of the event, and for school lectures dedicated to Levski to be initiated by the committee through the Ministry of Education.<sup>157</sup>

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156 Levski's deserted birth house had collapsed already before 1878, but the ruins were regularly honored by the citizens of Karlovo during celebrations, and there were many ideas of how to transform the courtyard into a commemorative place, beginning in the 1900s. The small house was erected in its original appearance in 1933. Despite the great desire to open it as a regular museum with great pomp at the 100th anniversary of Levski's birth, this did not materialize, and the museum was quietly opened a few years later. It became a state museum in 1945 and, after 1968, part of the Municipal Historical Museum. In 1955 and 1965, additional buildings enriched the exposition. In 1992, the museum became again an independent entity and in 2000 the chapel "All Bulgarian Saints" was added to the museum complex. For the history of the museum and its exposition, see Dora Chausheva, "Az, Vasil Levski, v Karlovo roden," *Muzei "Vasil Levski" Karlovo*, Sofia: Fondatsiia "Vasil Levski," Karlovo: Muzei Vasil Levski, second edition, s.a. [2005], 50–64.

157 TsDA, ChP 940, p. 90 (Protocol 46, December 1, 1936); p. 92 (Protocol 47, February 2, 1937); p. 97 (Protocol 49, March 4, 1937); pp. 98–100 (Protocol 50, June 2, 1937); pp. 104–5 (Protocol 52, September 10, 1937). TsDA, Fond 177, op. 2, a.e. 863, p. 11 (Letter of the Committee

That the government was weary of giving a green light to a nationwide celebration had little to do with Levski and everything to do with the nation. After a couple of turbulent decades, since 1935 Bulgaria was under the royal dictatorship of Boris III, and the price for relative political stability was the complete curtailment of parliamentary freedoms. Boris relied on particularly uncharismatic politicians, and did not allow for a national election until 1938, when candidates ran individually in a strictly controlled campaign, since party lists were banned. In such a highly authoritarian climate it was little surprise that the government was cautious not to endorse public gatherings that might run out of hand, given Levski's democratic grassroots appeal. This knee-jerk reaction of the government is much reminiscent of Ioannis Metaxas' famous ban in neighboring Greece of studying Pericles' funeral speech at schools, not because it was anything but "truthfully grand of democratic ideas," but because it "may be misunderstood by the students as indirect criticism of the vigorous governmental policy and, in general, of the trend of the present state."<sup>158</sup>

When in late December, 1936 the citizens of Karlovo organized a committee for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Levski's birth, they submitted its statute to the scrutiny of the Ministry of Interior. Its tasks were formulated as follows: a) to popularize its patriotic goal among the Bulgarian nation within the confines of the Kingdom and beyond through the publication and dissemination of texts, images of the Great Apostle of Freedom, pins, and so on; b) to organize celebrations, meetings, talks; c) to ask for help from the government, the municipalities, the Holy Synod, school trustees; d) to launch a subscription for private donations. The ministry gave its permission at the end of January, 1937. The statute was accompanied by a list of the governing body of the committee (eighteen individuals in all). In addition, two separate lists with the names of the said individuals were appended, one signed by the mayor of Karlovo, the other by

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to the Ministry of Education of September 10, 1937, carrying the minister's initialed agreement).

158 The ban was issued first for the district of Iannina in February, 1937, and soon made general for all Greece. Published in "Censor's Instructions," *Spectator* CLIX, August 19, 1938, 293, cited in Leften S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, New York: New York University Press, 2000 (first edition 1958), 673.

the district police officer. The mayor's list gave each person's profession and, in a separate column, the mayor's verdict over the "honesty and reliability" (*chestnost i blagonadezhdnost*) of the citizens. Luckily for the involved, the entry against each name was "yes." The district police's chart was more elaborate. Besides profession, it supplied date and place of birth. Then three last columns entered information on "political convictions in the past," "past manifestations," and "present activities." There were four former members of the National-Liberals, three of Liapchev's *Sgovor*, three of Tsankov's National-Socialist movement, two each from the Radical and Democratic Parties, one (a teacher) was a broad socialist, and three did not belong to any party.<sup>159</sup> With the exception of three (one a MP, the other two described as prominent politicians), the others were designated as "without manifestations."<sup>160</sup>

As a follow-up, a year after the celebrations, the mayor of Karlovo and the police-chief issued a protocol, dated January 2, 1939, as a response to the demand of the Plovdiv District director from November, 1938. Based on the gathered documentation about the political reliability of the individuals involved in celebrations of Levski's centennial anniversary, they concluded that "about the said individuals there are no data that they have been adherents of communist, anarchist or violent methods of socio-political struggle, nor that they are members of organizations banned by the law."<sup>161</sup> A few years later, the director of the Fifth Boys' high school in Sofia that bore the name of Levski, asked for permission from the minister of education to issue a commemorative paper on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Levski's hanging. He explicitly pointed out that the paper would be written only by the teachers, in order to emphasize Levski's "sacred patriotic

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159 The National-Liberal Party was founded by Stambolov in 1886; Liapchev's *Sgovor*, a right-of-center coalition, came to power in 1926 and ruled until 1931; Tsankov's fascist National Socialist Movement was founded in 1932; the Democratic Party of Alexander Malinov was in power in 1911–13 and 1918, and, in coalition with the Radical Party, headed Bulgaria's ruling People's Bloc (1931–1934). The "broad socialists" are one of the two splinter organizations, alongside the "narrow," into which the Social-Democratic Party split in 1903.

160 TsDA, Fond 264, op. 6, a.e. 1512, pp. 2–3, 6, 17, 25–6.

161 TsDA, Fond 264, op. 6, a.e. 1512, p. 5.

achievement” and support the “lofty patriotic spirit in the present auspicious times.”<sup>162</sup>

Levski and what he stood for had little, if anything, to do with this attitude of the authorities. In the circumstances of the 1930s, they could not be accused of neglecting a revolutionary figure as had been done at the end of the nineteenth century. After the 1920s, Levski’s image had already become the object of a universal cult and a receptacle of most incommensurable views and visions. As the volume published by the Karlovo Society on the occasion of Levski’s centenary put it: “Much had been said and written about Levski to date. Where only his image has not been hung! His name today is a legend.”<sup>163</sup> The volume itself was conceived in the accepted manner of similar editions: starting with Levski’s autobiographical poem, followed by the mandatory pieces of Vazov and other poets, writers and scholars (Khristo Borina, Dimitfir Strashimirov, Todor Vlaikov, Petfir Miiatev, Vicho Ivanov, Ivan Undzhiev, Petfir Dinekov). This particular one had added also a contribution in harmony with the contemporary *Zeitgeist*: an “anthro-genetical-biological” essay by one Dr. Vasil Bakîrdzhiev, a student of Ernst Kretschmer. Applying Kretschmerian typology, Bakîrdzhiev defined Levski as a mixture between the athletic and the pyknic type, and as a typical cyclothymic personality, in full contrast to the schizothymic nature of Botev. Anthropologically, he was said to belong to the Thracian racial group and particularly to the blond anthropological type (blue eyes, blond hair, white skin). All of these features corresponded to a host of characteristics so marked in Levski: sociability, naturalness, responsibility, realism, thriftiness, decisiveness, adaptability. Little surprise, Bakîrdzhiev’s analysis concluded with enumerating the main features of the “complete cyclothymic genius” such as Levski. These included first and foremost his qualities as leader. Even his insurrectionist, revolutionary activities were praised primarily for their leadership aspects. He was also defined as a “statesman with definitive and correct views on our near and distant neighbors,” citing two brief and somewhat critical pronouncements on Serbia and Russia, completely taken out of context.

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162 TsDA, Fond 177, op. 2, a.e. 1678, p. 6.

163 *Vîzpomenatelna kniga Vasil Levski. 1837–1873–1937*. Naredili Khristo Borina i Vicho Ivanov. Komitet za otpraznuvane 100-godishininata ot rozhdenieto na Apostola na svobodata, Plovdiv: Izdava Karlovskoto sdruzhenie “V.Levski,” 1937, 5.

And, of course, equally taken out of context, were quotes indicating his endorsement of the “Bulgaria-Thrace-Macedonia” ideal.<sup>164</sup>

In the mid-1930s Levski had already become everybody’s acceptable hero but not quite yet as elevated above the rest as half a century later. One can see this in the 1935 statutes of a quasi-Masonic organization—the Fraternity of the Bulgarian Spirit—that circulated around the capital. It was stipulated that the statutes could be copied by hand or on a typewriter but not printed, and they should be shared only with consecrated individuals. This was clearly a nationalist organization calling on preserving the Bulgarian spirit in “all lands populated with Bulgarians,” the most popular slogan in interwar Bulgaria with a special focus on Macedonia. One of the central duties of the members was to preserve and remember the advice of the Bulgarian leaders: “secular and spiritual, civilian and military, fighters and saints-martyrs.” These were enumerated in the following order:

- a) Khan Krum, so that one is always sober and honest; b) the Holy Tsar Boris-Mikhail, so that one would always be loyal to the Bulgarian Orthodox faith and the Bulgarian distinctive education; c) the first Bulgarian teachers—the Seven Saints,<sup>165</sup> St. Ivan Rilski and Patriarch Evtimii and the people’s educators, so one contributes to the development and growth of the Bulgarian spirit; d) the Bulgarian Kings Simeon, Roman, Samuil, the Asen brothers, Rakovski and Levski, Botev and Benkovski, so that one is ready to fight for the liberty of all Bulgarians and for all the slaves in the world; e) Father Paisii, so that one never renounces one’s kin and language, and passes onto one’s children the Bulgarian dreams and ideals; f) Iordan Hadzhi Konstantinov Dzhinot from Veles, who always says: “I am Bulgarian even if this is against God”;<sup>166</sup> g) all Bulgarian patriots, so that one defends the Bulgarian name and the Bulgarian cause in front of all foreigners, and acquaints every more significant foreigner with what he

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164 Vasil Bakirdzhiev, “Vasil Levski. Antro-nasledo-biolozhki ocherk,” *Viz-pomenatelna kniga Vasil Levski*, 125–32.

165 The Seven Saints are Cyril and Methodius, and their five students: Kliment, Naum, Gorazd, Sava and Angelarii.

166 It is the prominence of this nineteenth-century patriot from Macedonia in the list of model figures that clearly points to the Macedonian irredenta as the primary dream of the organization.

has achieved and what our nation has achieved for the progress of humanity, and seeks friends for Bulgaria and supporters of our dream.<sup>167</sup>

Levski was one of the four nineteenth-century national revolutionaries who was chosen next to the three revered kings as a fighter for liberty. The patron of the organization, however, was King Boris-Mikhail. His icon, next to the Sts. Cyril and Methodius was to be placed in the house of every brother.

A few years later, on October 1, 1940, the Mayor of Sofia, engineer Ivan Ivanov, announced the renaming of three central Sofia arteries that henceforth were to bear the names of Italy's King Victor Emanuel III, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. He proudly emphasized that one of these streets was starting "from the monument of our most sacred national hero Vasil Levski."<sup>168</sup> By that time, Levski had been already appropriated by the extreme right as well but again, not as the exclusive summit of heroic achievement. Much like the majority of East European regimes in the interwar period, Bulgaria was dominated by authoritarian and nationalist politics, nourished by the open wound of the Neuilly fiasco, and gravitating mostly around the anti-parliamentarianism of the crown. At the same time, its fascist organizations, although with much greater strength than the latest historiographical fashion would like to accord them, never quite reached the social prominence and mainstream influence that their analogues in neighboring Romania or Croatia did, let alone their ideological models in Italy and Germany.<sup>169</sup> Of the great variety of organizations gravitating to the extreme nationalist right, several in the 1930s were openly espousing a pronounced fascist ideology, the most prominent being the Union of the Bulgarian National Legions (*legioneri*, Legionnaires), founded in 1931, and the Warriors for the advancement of Bulgarianness (*ratnitsi*), founded in 1936, both with ambivalent

167 TsDA, Fond 177, op. 2, a.e. 697, 64–6: *Ustav na pobratimstvoto na bilgarskiiia dukh*.

168 SGODA, F. 1k, op. 3, a.e. 880, 31.

169 Nikolai Poppetrov, "Ideino-politichesките skhvashtaniia na 'Siiuz na bilgarskite natsionalni legionii' i 'Ratnitsi za napredika na bilgarshtinata' v godinite na Vtorata svetovna voina," *Istoricheski pregled* XLVII, 1991, No. 6, 55. See also Nikolai Poppetrov, "Faschismus in Bulgarien. Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung," *Südostforschungen*, Bd. 41, 1982.

and often hostile relations with the crown.<sup>170</sup> Without going into the ideological and somewhat pedantic discussion of whether these were authentic fascist formations or only unduly labeled as such, there is little doubt that both consciously and openly fashioned themselves after and emulated Hitler and Mussolini, alongside all the usual repertoire of the extreme right: strict hierarchy with a Leader; military organization; anticommunism; anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-parliamentarian position; nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism; loyalty to the Third Reich; and in the case of the Legions, in particular, a mysticism consciously reminiscent of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's Legion of Archangel Michael in Romania.<sup>171</sup>

What interests us here is to what extent and how exactly these organizations evoked the legacy of the revolutionary democrats of the nineteenth century, Levski included, and how they coopted them. An influential publication of the Legions was the Plovdiv based monthly "Might: Journal of Fascist Thought" (*Mosht: Spisanie za fashistka misil*). Most of its publications were theoretical articles explaining the fascist ideology in its Italian and German variant, with numerous translations from other European languages on the issues of corporatism, anti-Semitism and racism. Fascism was approached as one of the great revolutions of modernity. Where liberalism and democracy were seen as revolutions of the bourgeoisie, and socialism as a revolution of the proletariat, fascism was the revolution of the state.<sup>172</sup> What is striking is that the language of the contributions is completely universalist, Bulgarian history proper is rarely mentioned, and neither

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170 For an updated and detailed survey of the extreme nationalist organizations of the interwar period, see Nikolai Altinkov, *Narekokha gi fashisti: legioneri, otetspaisievtsi, ratnistsi, brannitsi, rodozashtitnitsi, kubratisti*, Sofia: Tangra TanNakRa, 2004; for all its valuable assembly of material, especially interviews with many surviving activists of these organizations, its posture of objectivity suffers from too many polemical pages dedicated to proving that there was no fascism in Bulgaria and clearly settling old scores, at the expense of an in-depth analysis of their ideology and activities. See also Zheliazko Kolev, *Siiuz na bilgarskite natsionalni legioni*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976. The best account of Bulgarian fascism today, despite its brevity, is Nikolai Poppetrov, *Fashizmът v Bilgaria. Razvitie i protivi*, Sofia: Kama, 2008.

171 Poppetrov, "Ideino-politicheskite skhvashtaniia," 54.

172 *Mosht* I, Feb.–March 1933, No. 2–3, 85.

Levski nor any of the nineteenth-century revolutionaries are evoked as predecessors.<sup>173</sup>

Much the same is true of *Prelom* (“Turning Point”), the journal around which the Legions’ movement coalesced.<sup>174</sup> Its subsidiary—the monthly *Prelom* issued by the youth organization of the Legions in Varna—published numerous nationalist articles evoking the ideals of the “fighters of the pre-liberation period” as models for the young generation in a formulaic manner, but none of the figures were mentioned by name. The only exception was a casual mention of Botev, a fact quite ironic in itself, given that Botev was the only leader with pronounced socialist ideas.<sup>175</sup> There was no casual mention of any of the nineteenth-century nationalists in the *Program of the Union of the Youth National Legions*. This was a classic statement of the fascist creed around its chosen pillars: nationalism, religion, revisionism, re-militarization, censorship, anti-parliamentarianism, anti-internationalism, anti-socialism, ban on parties, corporatism, and extreme xenophobia.<sup>176</sup>

Of course, the claim to continue the national liberation struggle was implicit in the very name of the Legions, that harked back to the first Bulgarian legions created by Rakovski in Belgrade in the 1860s, whose participant Levski had been.<sup>177</sup> The one explicit mention of

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173 I had the opportunity to peruse only the first year of the journal’s publication which is kept at the National Library in Sofia (A 404, Plovdiv, 1933). Especially striking is this lack of mention in the article of N. Ushev, “We need national awareness!” which does not evoke any of the national Bulgarian figures but instead rants against the influence of foreign influences such as the egalitarianism of “the Jew Jean Jacques Rousseau” and “another Jew Karl Marx-Kishel Mordokhai” (N. Ushev, “Neobkhodimo e natsionalno osiznavane!” *Mosht* I, Feb.–March 1933, No. 2–3, 69–9).

174 *Prelom* I–VII, Sofia, 1930–1938.

175 “We are only half a century apart from the heroic accomplishments of the fighters of Shipka. Only half a century away from the immortal deed of the giant Botev and the innumerable actions of the unknown fighters for the unification and liberation of the Bulgarian tribe.” *Prelom* I, 5, Varna, March 1933, 40.

176 “Programa na Siiuza na Mladezhkite Natsionalni Legioni,” *Prelom* I, Varna, May 1933, 72–4.

177 In fact, this is explicitly stated in 1999: “The Bulgarian National Legions are the continuators of the ideas of the founder of our national revolution—Georgi Sava Rakovski, considered to be the first Legionnaire, and the legion, created by him in 1862, is the first legion whose participant was the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski” (Khristo Simeonov, *Bilgarski*

names is the text of the Legionnaires' oath, as communicated in the memoirs of one member who took it in 1938: "We, the Bulgarian Legionnaires call on you to wake up to fight for the ideas of Georgi Sava Rakovski, Levski and Botev. Let us unfurl our national flags on which the holy message of our history is written: Fatherland! Bread! Liberty! God and Bulgaria call on us to take an oath, and live and die for it!"<sup>178</sup> The same impression follows from reading the works of the Legions' leader Ivan Dochev (1906–2005). His first publication, where he popularized the platform of the Legions, gave mention of only one historical figure: Father Paisii.<sup>179</sup> Dochev's other writings were exclusively and monotonously obsessed with his anti-communism.<sup>180</sup> There is no doubt that Levski was held in high esteem by the Legionnaires but he was not separated from the rest of the national revolutionaries, not did the latter figure that prominently in their ideology. According to Poppetrov, resorting more actively to the ideals of the Revival Period and especially to Levski came only after a number of activists around the journal *Natsiia i politika* joined the Legions.<sup>181</sup> The Warriors for the

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*natsionalni legioni. Minalo i nastoiashite*, Sofia: n.p., 1999, 7). Simeonov himself was a participant in the Legions from 1937 on, and since 1997 is the chairman of the Union of the National Legions, revived in 1994. The organization, which had been banned in 1944, was briefly revived in 1945 and banned again in 1948 (Zheliazgo Kolev, op. cit., 150–6).

178 Cited in Simeonov, *Bilgarski natsionalni legioni*, 33.

179 See Ivan Dochev, *Koi sme i za kakvo se borim*, Plovdiv: Siiuz na bilgarskite natsionalni legioni, 1938, 79. Dochev emigrated after 1944 and lived in Germany and later in the United States. He returned to Bulgaria after 1989. There are two volumes with his latest interviews: M. Kumanov, I. Petrov, *Interviuta s Ivan Dochev*, I, II, Shumen, 2002, 2003.

180 Ivan Dochev, *Osem godini legionna borba*, Plovdiv: Siiuz na bilgarskite natsionalni legioni, 1938; *Ibid.*, *Shest desetiletiia borba protiv komunizma za svobodata na Bilgariia*, Sofia: Siiuz na bilgarskite natsionalni legioni, 1998.

181 Poppetrov, "Ideino-politicheskite skhvashtaniia," 60. *Natsiia i politika*, a monthly journal, began publication in 1935, edited by Stefan Klechkov. It seems to have been published until 1939 when it declared its position for an united Europe and against the war. Poppetrov (*ibid.*, 60) characterizes the circle around the journal as authoritarian. Judging from the range of publications, discussions and comments, the journal had a broad political profile, with a main focus on the cultural and political ideas of the National Revival. Several issues during 1937 were dedicated to Levski (especially, *Natsiia i politika* III, 1937, No. 2, 7). While clearly supporting a nationalist program, the editorial board did not shy away from presenting opposing positions and interviewed a broad array of intellectuals, includ-

Advancement of Bulgarianness (*ratnistsî*) likewise considered themselves heirs of the national struggles of the nineteenth century, but in their case the reference to the past was even more cursory.<sup>182</sup>

The reason to go into some detail of how the nineteenth-century revolutionaries were evoked in the thought and practice of the extreme right-wing fascist organizations is to see to what extent the widely shared belief in the 1970s and 1980s, promoted mostly by Genchev, that Levski was not the preferred figure by the communists, is based on reliable evidence. Genchev founded this allegation on a double argumentation. The first was that since Levski had become the patron of the Legions and their preferred hero, he was seriously delegitimized in the eyes of the communists who, at the same time, had named the external communist radio, communicating from Moscow during the war, after Khristo Botev. The second was that because of Botev's explicit espousal of communist ideas, he had always been held on a higher pedestal than Levski, particularly after 1944. The first argument, as demonstrated above, is an obvious misreading of the evidence. Neither the fascists, nor the communists in the interwar period split Botev and Levski, or claimed them as exclusive ideological representatives.<sup>183</sup> In fact, Botev figured laudably in the writings of the most prominent fascists. Genchev's second argument was equally gratuitous and is going to be dealt with below.

Before trying to demonstrate how this belief came to take root and Levski become the sole and highest pinnacle of the Bulgarian heroic pantheon in the last decades of communist rule, let us remain for a moment in the interwar period. For all the plasticity his (and equally Botev's) image had acquired, and for all its wide and various utiliza-

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ing from the left (for example, the agrarian Mikhail Genovski or the communist Emil Shekerdzhiiski, *Natsiia i politika* II, 1936, No. 7–8, 224–8.

182 Poppetrov, "Ideino-politicheskite skhvashtaniia," 64. For a detailed survey of the ideology and activities of the *ratniks*, see Altinkov, *Narekokha gi fashisti*, 260–327.

183 The name of Levski was prominent and obvious only in the title of the biweekly newspaper *Levski*, "a newspaper for the civic and physical education of the Bulgarian youth." This newspaper was published during 1942 and was clearly a subsidiary of the Legions. It featured nationalist, fascist, and anti-Semitic and anti-communist articles, some by Alexander Nikolov, one of the leaders of the Legions, N. Ushev, a regular author in the fascist *Mosht*, and others.

tion, Levski continued to be an unquestioned hero of the left, and his ideas were subjected to much more detailed analysis and nuanced appreciation in their midst. He was most obviously one of the symbolic heroes of the socialist movement, and an analysis of his place within this ideology in the first half of the twentieth century is not only appropriate at this point, but also mandatory. The reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, with the monopoly of the communist cause after the Second World War, the evaluation of Levski by the socialists was transformed from one among existing interpretations and appropriations to the dominant one. This, while the obvious, is the more conventional reason. After all, while the socialists certainly emphasized Levski's democratic ideas and his stature as a genuine representative of the people, the image coming out of their writings did not differ significantly, if at all, from the one articulated by other political groups. As already pointed out, a consensus had developed and, especially in the interwar period, it was a matter of appropriation and legitimation in his name, rather than one of reinterpretation. Levski had become a paradigmatic symbol and, as with any symbol, "people who use it differently can mobilize disparate audiences (both internal and external) who think that they understand the same thing by it."<sup>184</sup>

The other reason is much more interesting and has to do with the image of Levski and the place he acquired in the 1970s and especially the 1980s, the last decade of state socialism. It is directly linked with the oeuvre and influence of the historian Genchev, and the curious twist he introduced, that resulted in a relatively broadly shared perception of Levski as not appropriately valued by the communists, and therefore elevating him to a quasi-dissident symbol. While this is the subject of the last section, here I will give a close reading of how the socialists, especially Dimităr Blagoev, the founder of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and Georgi Bakalov, one of his closest but independent-minded associates, dealt with Levski and his legacy, in an equally close juxtaposition to the interpretation offered by Genchev of this treatment.

The first mention of Levski by Blagoev came as early as 1886 when he published a lengthy critical brochure—*Nashite Apostoli* (Our

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184 Katherine Verdery, "Whither 'Nation' and 'Nationalism'?" in Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation*, London, Verso, 1996, 227.

Aspostles)<sup>185</sup> —in response to Zakhari Stoianov’s memoirs on the revolutionary movement which had appeared in the previous years to great acclaim but also to critical scrutiny. According to Genchev, Blagoev in this piece lay emphasis on Botev, Karavelov, Angel Kínchev and Volov as the great revolutionaries, while Levski came out as someone with a “‘talented nature,’ but without a clear idea about the power relations within the revolution.” Genchev accused Blagoev of attributing all the great ideas of the revolution to Karavelov and Botev because they were “‘espousing ‘the great ideas of present day’s humanity,’ that is, the ideas of socialism.” He therefore concluded that Blagoev “lay the foundations of a permanent banter *vis-à-vis* Levski, defining him as a simple-minded and uneducated fantast who, in contrast to Botev and Karavelov, even while being of a ‘talented nature,’ did not know what he was doing.” Following Genchev, “the socialists gave all their preference to Botev at the expense of Levski, because they were sympathetic to the utopian ideas of the former.”<sup>186</sup>

This interpretation of Genchev became very influential among his students and close circle, but it was a complete misreading of Blagoev and, I dare say, a deliberate one. It thus begs for a close re-reading. Blagoev in this strongly polemical brochure accused Zakhari Stoianov of merely adopting or rather aping the revolutionary discourse while remaining completely alien to the quintessence of the great revolutionary ideals of the period. The main thrust of Blagoev’s argument was directed against the irresponsible accusation of Stoianov that no learned or wealthy person had been risking anything for the nation’s liberty.<sup>187</sup> In this respect, Stoianov, himself undereducated, although of great literary talent and still greater political ambitions, was making a claim about the character of the authentic national revolutionary heroes. For this reason, he identified with Levski and Benkovski

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185 The full title of the brochure was *Nashite Apsotoli. Zakhari Stoianov kato publitsist, revoliutsioner, apostol i patriot*, Sofia, 1886 (hereafter cited from Dimităr Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. I, Sofia: Izdanie na BKP, 1957, 203–75).

186 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 165.

187 The literal quote from Stoianov’s *Zapiski* is: “Go back a few years, when your heads were to be chopped off, and recall whether a single educated or wealthy person came to your help with their knowledge or their wealth, whether there is somewhere out on the bloody field a single grave of these so-called benefactors?” (cited in Blagoev, *Nashite Apsotoli*, 230)

as social types, and elevated them high above the rest of the revolutionaries. Blagoev was protesting against Stoianov's cheap populism and particularly against the latter's conflation of knowledge and education with wealth. Blagoev was essentially defending the intelligentsia's role as a revolutionary force.<sup>188</sup> He was absolutely explicit about this: "Everyone knows that V. Levski and Benkovski, whom, due to [Stoianov's] understandable affection for them, he specially emphasizes and repeats, had been apostles and organizers of the revolution according to the plan, prepared by the 'Central Revolutionary Committee' headed by L. Karavelov and Khr. Botev."<sup>189</sup> The most one can conclude from this is that Blagoev may have underestimated somewhat Levski's personal ideological contribution. Yet, even after a century of research on the Bucharest Revolutionary Committee, nobody denies that Levski was a member of the Central Revolutionary Committee headed by Karavelov, and that the debates among them concerned mostly issues of strategy. In his polemic, Blagoev did not juxtapose Levski to Karavelov and Botev, but countered Stoianov's juxtaposition of the "true" revolutionaries Levski and Benkovski to the "intellectuals": "[Stoianov], while emulating Benkovski in his hatred against the 'grammarians,' goes so far as to forget that the present circumstances, in which our nation lives, are different. Now knowledge and 'learned heads' are necessary."<sup>190</sup>

It is in this context that Blagoev enumerated the names of Karavelov, Botev, Angel Kîncev, and Volov, who were known to have been well educated. Karavelov and Botev in particular had left considerable oeuvres, and were the two most important publishers and revolutionary ideologues in the last revolutionary decade. It was only nat-

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188 "As a rule, the ordinary people, with little needs and minor means of existence, are able to endure for whole centuries. Such people need an intelligentsia that is dedicated to their interests and ready to die for their enlightenment, liberty and happiness... This intelligentsia is aware that the power lies in the people, that it is a zero without the people and everything should be done for and through the people and with their immediate participation. But the so-called 'learned heads' are also necessary for the simple, open-minded and honest fighters... Who, if not the developed heads of L. Karavelov, Khr. Botev, Angel Kîncev, Volov, inspired many a simple but honest soul with the revolutionary spirit?" (Blagoev, *Nashite Apsotoli*, 229–30)

189 Blagoev, *Nashite Apsotoli*, 232.

190 *Ibid.*, 231.

ural that Blagoev would not mention Levski in the same line. First, Levski was exempt from Stoianov's cheap anti-intellectualism, and it was Blagoev's goal to polemically counter it. Secondly, anyone who reads Levski's modest prose will come to the natural conclusion that we are dealing with the work of an extremely intelligent and honorable person, but one who lacks a protracted formal education and does not have either the literary ease or years-long practice to articulate his thoughts in writing. There is nothing shameful or patronizing in this. After all, there exist enough educated but unintelligent individuals.

Besides, the socialists were neither the first nor the only ones who "underestimated" Levski's lack of formal education. According to Vicho Ivanov, editor and publisher of the officially sponsored commemorative volume for Levski's centenary:

Vasil Levski did not have the acquired culture of his more learned brothers—Rakovski, Liuben Karavelov, Khristo Botev. But Levski was where the people were—with their suffering and hopes, with their sorrows and small joys. With his elemental nature, with foresight, with a healthy and original feeling for the historical mission of the people, he raised himself high up not only in the consciousness of his contemporaries but also among the following generations.<sup>191</sup>

It is true that in the aforementioned brochure, because of the reasons pointed above, Blagoev focused mostly on Botev and Karavelov, and referred to Levski only peripherally. There is no question that he characterized Karavelov and Botev as "the main leaders of the revolutionary party" and their ideas as the ones "espoused by present day's humanity."<sup>192</sup> But there is equally no reason to allege that Blagoev valued their ideas only because they were socialist, as the shrewd and unwarranted insertion by Genchev suggested, namely that Blagoev praised Karavelov and Botev because they "espoused 'the great ideas of present day's humanity,' the ideas of socialism."<sup>193</sup> In fact, in all his comments Blagoev defined Karavelov and Botev first and foremost as republican democrats, specifying Karavelov as a political radical, and

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191 Vicho Ivanov, "Neuizvimiiat," in *Vizpomenatelna kniga Vasil Levski*, 1937, 99.

192 Blagoev, *Nashite Apsotoli*, 227, 232.

193 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 165.

Botev as a radical and utopian socialist revolutionary or, in his preferred terminology, as a *communard*.<sup>194</sup>

Blagoev's attitude to Botev is of particular interest, given the cavalier way in which Genchev accuses him and the socialists in general of elevating Botev at the expense of Levski and pitting the two heroes against each other. What is interesting for the first independence decades, and up to the Balkan Wars and the First World War was the fact that Botev, quite apart from any socialist propaganda which in this period was relatively marginal any way, was the most popular hero of the youth. Ivan Shishmanov, in 1905 minister of education and least of all a socialist sympathizer, pronounced himself to be "a fanatical admirer of the Bulgarian national genius and in this respect having the rare pleasure to share the idol of our youth—Botev."<sup>195</sup>

Blagoev was careful and actually quite adamant not to claim a direct link to Botev's utopian socialism. In his 1901 response to an article presenting Botev as a typical representative of Bulgarian socialism, Blagoev wrote that "the socialist ideas of Khristo Botev were rather utopian or a mixture of the petty-bourgeois ideas of Proudhon, the anarchic ideas of Bakunin and the utopian socialism of Chernishevskii, as were the socialist ideas of most socialists in the world in this period, and especially the Russian ones, with whom Botev had lived. This, of course, does not prevent us from appreciating Botev highly."<sup>196</sup> Blagoev's other pronouncements on Botev, chiefly in critical reviews, never contrast him to Levski but are directed against the attempts to de-politicize Botev and present him to the youth simply as an anodyne poetic genius.<sup>197</sup> If there is any comparison at all, it is with the ideas of

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194 See especially Blagoev's *Prinos kîm istoriata na sotsializma v Bîlgariia*, in Dimitîr Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. XI, Sofia: Izdanie na BKP, 1960, 47–62; Blagoev, *Nashite Apsotoli*, 209–42.

195 Cited in Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. X, 1959, 281. The quote comes from a polemic article of Blagoev— "Neglupava politika," *Novo vreme*, IX, kn. XI–XII, Nov. 1905—in which he comments critically on the educational and cultural program of Shishmanov, who, in appealing for national harmony and against class divisions, in effect attempts to take away the brunt of oppositional potential seething within the youth.

196 Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. VI, 1958, 598.

197 Blagoev, "Botev pred sîda na 'estetichnite,'" (1891), in Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. II, 1957, 69–86; "Khristo Borev kato poet i zhurnalist," (1897), in Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. IV, 1957, 376–95.

Karavelov, especially their different approaches to the idea of a Balkan federation.<sup>198</sup>

If Blagoev's oeuvre leaves the impression that there is somewhat more on Botev than on Levski, this is in part because Botev was often depicted as a precursor of Bulgarian socialism, and Blagoev took great pains to explain the differences between Botev's utopian and anarchic socialism and his own "scientific" variety. All in all, Levski, Botev and Karavelov are allotted the same space as the post-1878 politicians Petko Karavelov and Stefan Stambolov. As a whole, however, the national revolutionaries, for all of Blagoev's admiration toward them, were not his central reference points. Looking at the name register of his *Collected Works*, the most mentioned names are Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautski, August Bebel, Ferdinand Lasal, Georgi Plekhanov, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg (the last three are mentioned about the same amount as Levski and Botev), and of the Bulgarians Georgi Kirkov, Georgi Bakalov, Todor Vlaikov, Nikola Gabrovski, Gavril Georgiev, Ivan Evstatiev Geshov, Ianko Sakizov.<sup>199</sup>

Speaking of the national revolutionaries as a whole, Blagoev normally referred to the triad—Karavelov, Levski, Botev (in changing order)—as the most prominent leaders of the revolution.<sup>200</sup> In his major work—*Contribution to the History of Socialism in Bulgaria*—he offered a critical analysis of the national movement, especially of the revolutionary party of the 1860s. The place of Levski among its leaders was explicit: "[The revolutionary party] had its 'apostles' of the revolu-

198 Blagoev, "Khristo Botev," (1887) in Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. I, 1957, 281–99. Of particular interest is Blagoev's polemic against a fellow socialist who, in an article in 1892, extols revolutionary terror and defends Botev against accusations of "safe-breaking" with the argument that the aim justifies the means. "Can a social democrat write such nonsense?" exclaims Blagoev. "Today social democrats everywhere reject the dirty means in their struggle for the triumph of socialist ideas. To utilize dirty methods, to steal and kill every single wealthy person, because they themselves steal, is against the principles of socialism. The principle of social democracy is the struggle against the whole 'economic category,' not against separate individuals; it is a political and class struggle, not one with murder and robbery" (Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. II, 1957, 229–31).

199 *Spravochnik kim sichineniata na Dimitir Blagoev*, Sofia, 1967.

200 Blagoev, *Sichineniia*, vol. I, 1957, 49, 112, 225, 272, 60, 48; vol. III, 1957, 466; vol. VI, 1958, 655; vol. XX, 1964, 486.

tion, remarkable agitators and organizers. The most remarkable among them was without any doubt Vasil Levski. Thanks to his organizational talent, determination and energy in 1873, when he was betrayed to the Turkish authorities by a priest, Bulgaria was covered by revolutionary organizations.”<sup>201</sup> Blagoev’s interpretation of Levski focused mostly on his role as a practical revolutionary, not as an ideologue. Whenever he dealt with the ideology of the revolutionaries, he spoke, on the one hand, of Karavelov as a “radicalist,” aiming at a democratic liberal republic of the Swiss and American type, or, in Blagoev’s vocabulary, “a bourgeois democratic republic”; and, on the other hand, of the “communards” around Botev with their utopian socialism. In 1898, on the eve of the 25th anniversary of Levski’s execution, Blagoev dedicated a special article to the hero.<sup>202</sup> Having laid out the stages of development of the revolutionary tactics, culminating with the idea of a broad internal revolution, Blagoev concluded: “The idea was prepared, the plan arranged. But to put it in practice, a man of strong spirit, iron will and heroic courage was needed. A practical genius was needed, a genius organizer, someone able to fire up the slaves, to stir them up for struggle. This practical genius was found in the person of the former deacon Vasilii, in the person of Vasil Levski.”<sup>203</sup>

Blagoev also singled out Levski for his personal charisma, a motive which has continued to be one of the most powerful aspects in the Levski cult:

Levski belongs to this rare species of social figures whose image is immune to human malice and slander. His image remains pure and radiant despite the desire of his enemies to find some kind of stain, the tiny feather of a wing that may throw even the faintest of shadows upon him. Levski is the epitome of the brightest national organizational spirit devoid of any self-interest; he personifies the pure and ideal aspirations of this spirit.<sup>204</sup>

Levski’s ideals remained, according to Blagoev, unfulfilled. These were his democratic and republican ideology, and specifically the idea of a

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201 Blagoev, *Sichinennia*, vol. XI, 1960, 48.

202 Blagoev, *Sichinennia*, vol. IV, 1957, 546–55.

203 *Ibid.*, 547.

204 *Ibid.*, 549.

Balkan federative republic that he had adopted from Karavelov.<sup>205</sup> For Blagoev, it was the serendipitous meeting of two geniuses—the theoretical one of Karavelov and the practical one of Levski—that put the revolutionary idea in practice. Such an “underestimation” of Levski’s ideological contribution was considered to be a crime by Genchev, and he attributed the same tendency, as well as the opposition to Botev, also to Georgi Bakalov, probably the most prolific and influential Marxist literary critic of the interwar period.<sup>206</sup>

A look at Bakalov’s work will demonstrate not only that an artificial opposition between Levski and Botev was not being perpetuated but that any such attempt was consciously being opposed. Bakalov’s debut on the topic of the national-liberation movement’s ideology started in 1924 with his book *Our revolutionaries—Rakovski, Levski, Botev*, but most of his work on the great nineteenth-century figures fell on the decade of the 1930s.<sup>207</sup> He wrote one explicit essay on the rela-

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205 Ibid., 550–1. Blagoev had developed this idea also earlier, in 1886, in *Nashite Apostoli*, 232–3. Genchev was particularly irked by Blagoev’s phrase that “Levski, even if he was a simple ‘deacon, abadzhi and servant,’ his convictions and plans were rigorously determined, due to his talented nature. He was advocating a Balkan republic.” The point, however, of this phrase, which Genchev wrongly took out of context in order to hurl the allegation that the socialists were underestimating Levski as a simple and uneducated practitioner is different. It has to be understood in the framework of the polemic against Zakhari Stoianov, whom Blagoev accused of trying to explain off Levski, Benkovski, Volov and others as “duped” by the Balkan federative idea of Karavelov and Botev. On the contrary, Blagoev maintained that “V. Levski, Volov, Ang. Kinchev and many other apostle-revolutionaries are convinced, not ‘duped’ [ubedeni, ne ‘zabludeni].” (233)

206 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 179–81.

207 Georgi Bakalov, *Nashite revoliutsioneri—Rakovski, Levski, Botev* (1924). In the 1930s, Bakalov directed the editions of the influential series “Znanie” that published historical, sociological, literary and political works with a sociologist profile. Bakalov’s favorite thinker Plekhanov was featured alongside Kropotkin, Chernishevskii, Marx and Engels, Paul Lafargue, Maxim Gorkii, Feuerbach. Between 1932 and 1938, “Znanie” published the following brochures by Bakalov dedicated to the national-revolutionary problematique: “Bilgarskoto natsionalno-osvoboditelno dvizhenie,” “Ruskite priiateli na Khristo Botev,” “Zavetite na vizrazhdaneto,” “Khristo Botev kato kritik,” “V zashtita na Khristo Botev,” “Bunt protiv Levski,” “Aprilskoto vistanie i Benkovski,” “Khristo Botev,” “Bacho Kiro,” “Vasil

tions between Botev and Levski. Its opening could not be less ambivalent: “Equally sweet beat the hearts of these among their heirs who care about their deeds, when they think about the one or the other. In terms of appeal, admiration of their personalities and love, they don’t have rivals in the memory of the following generations. In the Bulgarian pantheon of the immortals the first place is reserved for them.”<sup>208</sup> Bakalov then follows the way in which the two men reached their revolutionary credo: “Botev, more in a speculative, theoretical manner, shaped under the influence of the Russian revolutionary democratic ideology; Levski, through the difficult road of personal experience, of self-taught practice.” What brings them together in complete accord is their belief in the revolution as the only effective strategy and tactic for liberation.

Bakalov presents Levski as a practitioner of genius, and he attributes to him “the purely Levskian idea” of preparing the revolution by means of a preliminary organization of a whole system of committees which would cover the whole country. “This seemingly simple idea, as befits all ideas of genius, raised the liberation struggle on a higher level, put it on the only possible track that could lead it to victory.”<sup>209</sup> Bakalov insists that this “idea of genius” belongs to Levski, who not only applied it in practice but also conceived of it, and he specifically opposes the attribution of the idea to Karavelov who, according to Bakalov, only gave it its literary shape.

It is in this context and as a defense, not as an accusation, that Bakalov writes: “Nobody considered Levski, whose education was rather wanting, as a theoretician. This, however, does not mean that he did not have his own, original ideas which enriched the treasury of the revolutionary ideology.”<sup>210</sup> This, however, irked Genchev immensely and, instead of giving it the proper contextual analysis it deserves, he introduced the above quote from Bakalov with “he [Bakalov] does not fail to remind us that ‘nobody considered Levski, whose education was

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Levski,” “G. S. Rakovski.” All have been reprinted in Georgi Bakalov, *Izbrani istoricheski proizvedeniia*, eds. Zhak Natan and Alexander Burmov, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1960.

208 Georgi Bakalov, “Botev i Levski,” *Bunt protiv Levski*, Sofia: Radikal, 1938, 27.

209 *Ibid.*, 29.

210 *Ibid.*, 28–9.

rather wanting, as a theoretician.”<sup>211</sup> We are back to the populist anti-intellectualism of Zakhari Stoianov.

If Bakalov can be considered somewhat unjust, it is in the direction of Karavelov, but never towards Levski. Neither is Botev elevated in any way. As already said, the whole tenure of the essay was the parity between “the two greatest Bulgarians before the liberation.” Moreover, in this essay, Bakalov did not deal at all with Botev’s socialist ideas. It bears mention that, similar to Blagoev, in his other works Bakalov also made it clear that according to him Botev should not be considered a forerunner of Bulgarian socialism, except in the most symbolic and conditional sense. He considered Botev a revolutionary democrat permeated with the ideas of utopian socialism very much in the line of Lenin’s characterization of Chernyshevskii. At the end of the day, however, he defined Botev, as well as Levski, as the leaders of the agrarian/bourgeois-democratic revolution in Bulgaria. This interpretation of Botev brought Bakalov the characterization of not being “correct and consistent,” of harboring a misunderstanding, of being misguided by an erroneous political interpretation. Luckily, this came after the Second World War, when he was no longer alive.<sup>212</sup>

All of this is not meant to elevate Bakalov’s analysis to the pedestal of a “correct” interpretation against the subsequent dogmatism. In fact, Bakalov himself was inspired by an unabashed presentism in his evaluation of the historical legacy of Botev and Levski. What he chose to stress was their dedication to the revolutionary program and tactics, their elevation of the avant-garde professional revolutionary organization as the natural leader of the movement. Given the contemporary factional struggle within the socialist movement in Bulgaria and Bakalov’s eventual siding with the “narrow,” it is symptomatic that he found a quote in Botev which extolled the virtues of “narrow organization.”<sup>213</sup>

211 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 180.

212 Zhak Natan, “G. Bakalov kato istorik-marksist,” in Bakalov, *Izbrani istoricheski proizvedeniia*, 16–7.

213 Bakalov, “Botev i Levski,” 32. On the political factionalism of the Bulgarian socialist movement, see, in English, Joseph Rotschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883–1936*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959; Nissan Oren, *Bulgarian Communism, The Road to Power, 1934–1944*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971; John Bell, *The Bulgarian Communist Party from Blagoev to Zhivkov*, Stanford,

Keeping in mind the period when Bakalov wrote his essays about Levski, with the Bulgarian communist party banned and with open repression against left-wing ideas, his analysis of Levski presaged the famous periphrastic of the communist period. Bakalov described in detail the character of Levski's clandestine military struggle, the principles and tactics of an illegal and centralized revolutionary organization, and the qualities necessary for an effective professional revolutionary: "The professional revolutionary has to possess all the qualities enumerated by Levski: judiciousness, perseverance, courage and magnanimity, all in agreement. If only one of these qualities is missing, Levski foresees the disgrace of the revolutionary."<sup>214</sup> The interests of the organization are, according to Levski, above anything else, and this is what prompts him to use violence as well as advocate an iron discipline and severe punishment, the capital inclusive, for any activities that might jeopardize its security.<sup>215</sup> Levski's "secret police" is the terrorist organization of the party whose goal is to create "a sound conspiratorial organization as an avant-garde of the popular revolution."<sup>216</sup> Only Levski could be the legitimate garb for this unabashed revolutionary manual.

For all of Bakalov's undoubted sophistication, he falls at times into the procrustean bed of rigid class analysis. Levski is the apostle of the "democratic revolution with the small property [rural] contingent of its warriors," he had to adapt himself to the exigencies of the time in administering the oath over the gospel, and he didn't notice the contradiction between his desire for a crown over the lion's head in the revolutionary seal and the written slogan "Death or Republic."<sup>217</sup> Arguing against the appropriation of Levski by "our present bourgeoi-

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CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986.

214 Georgi Bakalov, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: St. Vasilev, 1934, 19. It is appropriate to present the exact words of Levski, given the fruitless disputes about his lack (or not) of education and refinement. They come from a letter from Levski to Karavelov from September 16, 1872: "I have not delegated the work to anyone else because if he is all right in one thing, in another he isn't (if he is determined, he will not be judicious, if he is judicious, then his fear doesn't allow him to make a further step, and with fear what has been achieved gets spoilt)... Give work to such people that are judicious, persevering, courageous and magnanimous—if a leader lacks any one of these [qualities] for the holy job, he will shit on it (will defecate) anyway." (Ibid., 8)

215 Bakalov, *Vasil Levski*, 19–27, 36; Bakalov, *Bunt protiv Levski*, 10, 14.

216 Bakalov, *Vasil Levski*, 32–41.

217 Ibid., 6–8.

sie,” Bakalov asks rhetorically: “Whose side would the present bourgeoisie take if it lived in Levski’s times?” His response is that it would fill the ranks of the *chorbadzhi* (the local wealthy elites), the ranks of Levski’s murderers. In contrast, Levski is described as a “proletarian genius” and in the words of Bakalov “only a hopeless idiot can assert that the Apostle would have hesitated to find his place in the ranks of his people, and the people today, this is the proletariat.”<sup>218</sup> Bakalov’s class analysis of Botev falls along the same lines. This is not the place to comment on Bakalov’s rhetorical zeal nor on the nature of the *Zeitgeist*. What is important for our purposes is that in his endeavor he never juxtaposed the two figures of Levski and Botev at each other’s expense, contrary to what Genchev would have us believe.

It is clear that in the interwar period there was an acute struggle to appropriate Levski as the authentic representative of a class, party, or movement. The same can be said for the figure of Botev, since both had achieved enormous legitimation power. These attempts, however, did not necessarily starkly falsify their ideas and activities, nor did they pitch them against each other, either by the political left or by the political right. It was a matter of highlighting or exclusively emphasizing the nationalist component of their legacy (by the right) against the same tendency of underscoring their revolutionary potential (by the left). It is actually very interesting that incompatible worldviews which often clashed in bloody armed struggle (in the 1920s, as well as the 1940s), never really adopted one figure to the exclusion of the other. While Botev’s socialist ideas were stressed by the socialists, they were rarely used to discount his inspirational presence for the extreme right. When Levski’s nationalism or his religiosity were underscored by the right, this never served as a pretext to distance themselves from him on the left.<sup>219</sup> Both

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218 Bakalov, *Nashite revoliutsioneri—Rakovski, Levski, Botev*, 29, quoted in Natan, “G. Bakalov kato istorik-marksist,” 12. An interesting aspect in Bakalov’s class analysis is when he describes the two directions in the Bulgarian revival; one, the Prussian road to capitalism, characterized by the compromise position of the bourgeoisie *vis-à-vis* the *ancien régime*; the other the American road, the road of decisive struggle. “In our case,” Bakalov writes, “the notables followed the Prussian road, the poor the American one” (Bakalov, “Dvete linii na bilgarskoto vizrazhdane,” in Bakalov, *Izbrani istoricheski proizvedeniia*, 347–50, here 350).

219 The most explicit “right-wing” version of Levski’s reception comes from an émigré political bulletin of the so-called Bulgarian Secret Revolution-

Levski and Botev had been explicitly accepted as common national figures: it was rather a matter of who was more loyal to their legacy.

It is therefore difficult to accept Genchev's contention that three different conceptions of Levski floated in the ideological space in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Bulgaria: one belonging to Zakhari Stoianov "who elevated him on the pedestal of a great organizer of the national revolution;" another espoused by Stefan Bobchev and Stoian Zaimov who, while equally admiring Levski, sided with the ones "who were looking for more reasonable ways to achieve independence;" finally the socialists who allegedly "gave all their preference to Botev at the expense of Levski, because they were sympathetic to the utopian ideas of the former."<sup>220</sup> Genchev never explained clearly what the difference between the three conceptions was (which is not to say that there isn't any). It seems that what he defined as "conceptions" were rather three different emotional attitudes and levels of appreciation that he attributed to the objects of his analysis. Equally, his contention that Blagoev, alongside Stoianov and Dr. Krístiu Krístev, initiated the tendency to setting Botev and Levski against each other in an unhealthy comparison, is not supported by a careful scrutiny of these authors' oeuvre.<sup>221</sup> It is a position that Genchev needed, however, in order to construct his own emancipation of Levski. In his attempt to raise Levski to the

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ary Committee in Exile (Western Europe) that published a mimeographed paper on the occasion of the 99th anniversary of Levski's hanging in 1972: *Levski. Emigrantski politicheski biuletin na bivshi politicheski zatvornitsi i kontslageristi*, Bilgarski revoliutsionen komitet v izgnanie. Zapadna Evropa, II, February, 1973. A copy is preserved in the National Library in Sofia under call number Б 11057. It sounds like a rather primitive latter-day response to Bakalov's social analysis of Levski, protesting against the class division of the Bulgarian nation and the interpretation of Levski, Botev and the other national heroes as representatives of revolutionary internationalism. Levski, according to them, never divided the Bulgarian people, he was "pure in his patriotic feelings, pure as morning dew." The article "Whose is Levski" by Boris Iliev, concludes: "Levski does not belong to any class, let alone to the present despotic communist regime which pretends to represent the working class. Levski belongs to our national history, to the Bulgarian people as a nation. Levski belongs to the sound patriotic forces that dedicated their youth and life to the struggle against the red tyranny... Today the giant of the Bulgarian national liberation struggle belongs to the resistance against bolshevism and is the sacred banner of this difficult but holy struggle."

<sup>220</sup> Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 165.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

potential pedestal of the dissidents' banner or at least to an accepted quasi-oppositional icon to the communist regime in the 1980s, Genchev himself was forcing the evidence and pronouncing Levski as the central, exclusive and most prescient ideologue of the revolution, setting him far apart from all other nineteenth-century revolutionaries.

## 4. Contesting the Hero

In 1898 when Blagoev mentioned that Levski had his enemies, and was lamenting the insufficient attention to his person and ideas, he was not far off the mark. Despite the icon-like and, as we shall see in Part III, literal iconic status of Levski, as well as the correct impression of his universal acceptance, there were questions raised about his personality or his interpretation both by his contemporaries, as well as today. The story of the hero's contestation, while muted as a whole and without much real effect, deserves to be told, because it allows for a more complex glimpse into national debates and at social cleavages.

The only open and thoroughly negative assessments came from among some of Levski's contemporaries. The story can appropriately begin with Khristo Georgiev, the wealthy merchant from Karlovo, whose monumental seated figure together with his brother Evlogi, flanks the main entry to the University of Sofia.<sup>222</sup> During his first tour of Bulgaria in 1868–1869, in which he began to build up his carefully organized network of revolutionary committees, Levski was trying to collect funds for his expeditions and especially for arms purchases from the wealthy Bulgarians in Walachia. This came at the height of the tension between the groups of the “old” and the “young.” While there had been differences of opinion about how to organize the national movement of the Bulgarians in emigration, the clash over tactics was exacerbated after the Crimean war and especially in the 1860s. The brothers Georgievi, especially the younger Khristo who was considered

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222 Khristo and Evlogi Georgievi, who originated from Karlovo, had most of their business run from Bucharest. Khristo (b. 1824) died relatively young, already in 1872 of natural causes, while his older brother Evlogi (b. 1819) lived until 1897. The generous endowment which Evlogi transmitted on the part of the two brothers, laid the basis for the building of Sofia University. The two huge bronze statues were placed in 1934 to commemorate them as benefactors (Dochka Kisiova-Gogova, “Skulpturnite figure na daritelite na Sofiiskia universitet i tekhniiat avtor,” in *Daritelite. Evlogii i Khristo Georgievi*, Sofia, 1998).

its leader, were the most influential members of the *Dobrodetelna družina*, the organizational nest of the “old” in Bucharest and they were vehemently opposed to the clandestine preparations for a revolution, to the military actions and in general, to what they saw as the radical ideology of the “young.”

In April, 1869, Khristo Georgiev wrote a letter in response to the message of Naiden Gerov, the Bulgarian man of letters who was serving as Russian consul in Plovdiv between 1857 and 1876, and who had reported about his meeting with Levski in this city. Georgiev informed Gerov at length about the activities of Theofan Rainov<sup>223</sup> whom he characterized as a “chief Turkish spy,” how he “spends well for himself” and especially supports Kasabov of the Secret Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee: “Every Bulgarian knows that Rainov is a Turkish spy, and he is approached only by the likes of Kasabov, for the lucre.” On the last line of this letter, as a kind of postscript, Khristo

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223 Theofan Rainov was born the same year as Levski—1837—in Karlovo.

The son of the celebrated teacher Raino Popovich, he studied with Naiden Gerov, and later worked in the firm of his relatives, the brothers Geshhev. He studied trade in Vienna, and was the firm’s representative there. From Vienna he financed Rakovski’s legion in Belgrade in 1862. After the firm’s bankruptcy, he settled in Constantinople, and participated in the so-called “spy triumvirate.” In the 1860s, the foreign minister Ali Pasha organized a spy service headed by Schneider Efendi, a Jew and the son of the secretary of the Ottoman Embassy in Vienna. After the revolutionary bands of 1867–1868, the spy service decided to approach the Bulgarians and penetrate the revolutionary emigration. It offered the position to Manol Efendi who discussed it with his friends Theofan Rainov and Dr. Mirkovich. The three men decided to utilize the Porte’s money for patriotic purposes. The first 3000 Turkish lira that Manol received were used by Rainov to support the endeavors of the revolutionary emigration in Bucharest, and by Dr. Mirkovich to prepare the grounds for an uprising in Northern Bulgaria. Their activities were clearly well known, and Georgiev’s reference to Rainov as a Turkish spy was disingenuous. In 1869, Rainov visited Bakunin and Mazzini as a representative of the Secret Central Committee. After the death of Manol Efendi, the scheme was discovered, and the funding was discontinued. Dr. Mirkovich was caught and tortured. Rainov fled to Vienna and Zurich. After 1872, with the death of Ali Pasha, Rainov returned and became manager of the railway line Plovdiv–Saranbey. He continued his revolutionary activities, and in 1877 had to flee again. He entered Bulgaria with the Russian army, and after 1878 held a number of important jobs: regional magistrate of Karlovo, prefect of Plovdiv, and others (Undzhiev, *Levski*, 834–6).

Georgiev advised Gerov not to trust Levski: “*Stiga sega tolkova, na prikazkite na Diakona kazhete da ne davat uverenie*” (“Let me stop here, tell [people] not to believe in the tales of the Deacon”).<sup>224</sup>

On May 30, 1869, Gerov wrote to Georgiev again, informing him of the proclamations Levski was distributing around the country:

Six or seven days ago the Deacon left. Here and wherever he went, he has been showing a proclamation in Bulgarian to the Bulgarians, with a seal from the “temporary Bulgarian government,” and another one in Turkish to the Turks. However, he had only one copy of each so he only showed them but did not leave any around. I saw them. The Turkish one I couldn’t read but the Bulgarian one is not worth it, sheer nonsense. And I am afraid that some simple souls might be fooled and duped, and will suffer and bring suffering to others. I also have another suspicion. The Deacon, wherever he goes, constantly asks for money to spend, so he might be cheating the people only to get their money.<sup>225</sup>

In his response letter of June 14, 1869 from Bucharest, Georgiev wrote: “The proclamations that you have seen with the Deacon have been printed here by Rainov and Kasabov, and were all given to the Deacon for distribution. The Deacon is the one who concocts the false letters for Rainov to recommend himself as a good spy. Whatever Rainov, Levski is the same; both would sell their father for money.”<sup>226</sup>

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224 Letter of March 11, 1869 from Bucharest, in *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov. Pisma, dokladi i materialy za Vizrazhdaneto na bilgarskiiia narod*, Pod redaktsiia na T. Panchev, I, Sofia: Bilgarska akademiia na naukite, 1911, 293. Also cited in Ivan Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski. Biografiia*, Sofia: Direktsiia na izkustvata pri ministerstvo na informatsiata i izkustvata, 1947, 248; also in Georgi Bakalov, *Bunt protiv Levski*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Radikal,” 1938, 21.

225 *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 296). Also in Petir V. Karaivanov, *Vasil Levski po spomenite na Vasil Karaivanov*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestveniiia front, 1987, 222–5. Vasil Karaivanov was a cousin and associate of Levski.

226 *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 297. Also cited in Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 254, but wrongly dated May 30, 1869, the date of Gerov’s letter. In a follow up letter of July 18, 1869 to Khristo Georgiev, Naiden Gerov matter-of-factly informed him that Vasil Levski (the Deacon) had been in Sopot and someone accused him of having stolen his coat and held on to it.

There has been a persistent trope about Levski's intention to kill Khristo Georgiev who had refused to give financial aid to the revolutionary movement. It comes from another revolutionary figure, Khristo Ivanov, and was first mentioned by Zakhari Stoianov who had evidently consulted Ivanov's unpublished memoirs, but was bypassed by all other biographers. According to Ivanov, Levski ostensibly could not go through with his plan, because he could not secure from Karavelov the key to a house where he would hide after the murder. On the other hand, Undzhiev considers the information of Ivanov unreliable and thinks that there was only a verbal threat behind this.<sup>227</sup> Undzhiev clearly wanted to cleanse the image of Levski from accusations of terrorism, and judging from today's reception of Levski, has largely succeeded. A former friend of mine with whom a few years ago we discussed the nineteenth-century revolutionary figures exclaimed that she liked Levski because he was "so mild, non-confrontational, unlike Botev, whose discourse is intolerant." When I pointed out to her the epistolary evidence of Levski himself, she offendedly pursed her lips but insisted Levski's blue eyes were not fanatic.<sup>228</sup>

It is, in fact, instructive to go to Levski's accusatory letters themselves. While the archives do not have evidence for a concrete and direct threat on Georgiev's life, several of the letters dating from 1871 have been preserved. With a circular letter from the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee dated March 10, 1871, Levski was given the right to apply the terrorist principle. The circular took the shape of a letter with a generic addressee "Mr..." It warned that whoever refused to give everything for the cause of liberty "will be damned and very soon will be sent... you figure where. The traitors, the rich,

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Levski managed to flee but there were proclamations in the coat and several passports. Arrests followed. There is no evaluative comment in this letter. (*Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 299)

227 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 253.

228 I did not want to see disappointment in her own blue eyes but this, too, is an unsupported fact. Karavelov refers to Levski's eyes as "blond," i.e. light-colored and this may be the closest we can get to the real color. Vazov, who had never seen him, described them as "grey, almost blue." They were grey, according to Stoian Zaimov, and blue, after Zakhari Stoianov who also had not met him. In a personal letter from Levski of July 1, 1872, he himself refers to his eyes as *shareni* (multicolored), and this is how they are described in the official Ottoman protocol at the trial (Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 6-7).

the tyrants and the Turkish toadies will hang on the same tree as our enemies.” The letter further stated that the revolutionaries would provide a receipt for everything received but if “someone does not take part in our popular movement, he will be considered a traitor and enemy” and urged the receivers to quickly decide whether they were “with us or against us.”<sup>229</sup>

There are at least two preserved letters of the kind written in Levski’s handwriting. They were sent to Ivan Furnadzhiev and his sons in Karlovo and started with the opening: “Kaleko Ivane i Vie Petre i Khristo v Karlovo.”<sup>230</sup> Another letter to Gancho Milev from Karlovo of May 10, 1871 was signed by the Revolutionary Committee.<sup>231</sup> While the terrorist tactic was applied very sparingly and from that point of view Undzhiev’s assertion that this was mostly meant to intimidate may be true as a whole, there were instances where there was a genuine follow-up. In a letter to Karavelov from 1872, in which he complained of the behavior of Dimitir Obshti, Levski mentioned in a post-script that “Velichko effendi will be exalted one of these days head down.”<sup>232</sup> Velichko Stoianov of Ruse managed to escape but the assassination plots against the Deacon Paissii of Lovech, *chorbadzhi* (an elder or wealthy person) V. Kozlev from Liaskovets and many others did succeed.<sup>233</sup>

The aim of all this evidence is not to make the point that Georgiev’s wrath against Levski was justified or to demote Levski to a terrorist, alongside all the other revolutionaries. It simply aims at historically contextualizing a genuine revolutionary of the type Europe knew in the second half of the nineteenth century, and to contravene today’s stale politically correct tendency to denounce “illegal” violence as terrorist, while tacitly underwriting the “civilized” and “legal” violence of

229 Vasil Levski, *Pisma, Statii, Pesni*, ed. Stefan Karakostov, Sofia: Nov svet, 1941, 191–3. For a detailed study of the funding of the national movement, especially Levski’s tactics, see Antoineta Kirilova, *Finansirane na bilgarskoto natsionalnorevoliutsionno dvizhenie 1868–1975*, Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 2007.

230 *Ibid.*, 193. The originals are in the Historical archive of the National Library “Sv. sv Kiril i Metodii,” papka 60, inv. No. 6024a.

231 *Ibid.*, 35–9.

232 *Ibid.*, 98.

233 Krumka Sharova, “Krizisni iavleniia v BRCK prez liatoto i esenta na 1872 g.,” *Istoricheski pregled* 3, 1991, 6–9.

the powerful.<sup>234</sup> It is also to remind that heroes are not uncontested and that there were fierce social and ideological cleavages in Bulgarian pre-independence society that have been smoothed out only by the Whig pen of later historians. Nevertheless, it is only fair to mention that neither the trope of assassinating the internal enemy or the assembling of money through raids for revolutionary purposes, much as they figure as genuine or at least tolerable revolutionary acts, became part of the national mythology. They were silenced without falsifying them, and Levski's popular biography was subconsciously cleansed of these deeds that gave way to other mythological structures.<sup>235</sup>

There is another letter of the kind, written by Levski's younger brother Peter to Khristo Puliev and dating from 1876.<sup>236</sup> What

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234 This is not the place to review the enormous literature on revolution and terror which has been produced in European historiography from the French Revolution on and which has and continues to divide historians as much as it does political thinkers. Suffice it to mention one of the latest grand reactions to the politically correct tendency—Arno Mayer's *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000—which contests the thesis of terror as an inbuilt element of revolutionary praxis and of the Enlightenment ideology in general, as well as the reviews it engendered by Carla Hesse and William Rosenberg, "Review Articles: Arno Mayer on Revolutionary Violence—Two Views," *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (December, 2001), 897–907.

235 Nikolai Aretov, *Natsionalna mitologiia i natsionalna literatura: Siuzheti, izgrazhdashti bilgarskata natsiunalna identichnost v slovestnostta na XVIII i XIX vek*, Sofia: Kralitsa MAB, 2006, 458.

236 The letter itself is clearly of the extortionist genre. Dated February 12, 1876, it was signed by Levski's second younger brother Peter who a few months later joined the Botev *cheta*, then fought as a volunteer in the Bulgarian corps (*opilchenie*) as part of the Russian army in the 1877–1878 war, was severely wounded, treated in Russia, and after 1878 served as gendarme (*strazhar*) in Karlovo, where he died of tuberculosis in 1881. Written in an extremely colorful language, the letter deserves to be published in extenso, since it also illustrates the shared attitude of some circles toward Levski: "Mr. Khristo N. Puliev, Sir, I greet you so that you would know that I am alive and well to this hour and I pray to God for your health. But today I come to inform you as I would a sincere patriot and compatriot because you might think otherwise. When I arrived as a Bulgarian from Istanbul and came to Your Honor as someone who was not known by anyone, and I had no word of Wallachian and could not even ask for water, but Your Honor, when I entered from the door and greeted you, instead of saying 'God bless you' as [one would] to a compa-

is remarkable about this letter is that it was appended to a letter by Khristo's elder brother Evlogi Georgiev to Naiden Gerov, four years after Khristo's death. In this letter dated February 24, 1876 from Bucharest, Evlogi reports that "I am attaching a copy of a letter from someone from Karlovo [*niakoi si karlovets*] who had been accepted by our Khristo in Galats. That's the kind of patriots we have!"<sup>237</sup> The amazing thing is that although the letter from the "someone from Karlovo" clearly alluded to Levski by name and was signed by his brother, Evlogi did not even consider it expedient to register the connection. To him this was unknown and undeserving quantity not worthy of the title "patriots," and he clearly shared Puliev's verdict of Levski as a bandit (*haidut*). On the other hand, it gives credence to the skepticism about the threats on Khristo's life because otherwise it is highly unlikely Evlogi would not mention them.

Naiden Gerov himself did not have to be persuaded by his two correspondents. He shared their opinion of Levski and considered his efforts "sheer nonsense" (*prazna rabota*). He also doubted Levski's motives and honesty, and suspected him of merely "cheating the people only to get their money."<sup>238</sup> Of the over 3,000 letters published in the two volumes of correspondence of Gerov between 1911 and 1914, only twelve mention Levski, and in none is he a central presence, with

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triot, in order to cheer me up since I have run away from the Asiatic dogs and have lost my fatherland, but here there are compatriots and patriots, who know what patriotism means, but Your Honor immediately treated me as if I had done you some great harm and you asked me 'Aren't you the brother of the *haidut* (bandit) Vasil Levski.' You should have better struck me with a knife instead of using this word but now I am asking you to send me 10 liras in order to purchase some necessary things that I need very much for the spring. If you do not send them to me, I will know that you are neither a compatriot, nor a patriot, and let me know it, because when I get to Karlovo, I will first kill your mother and then will burn even your mice. I remain in hope and anxiously expect your answer. Bucharest, Moshilor Street 40, Stoiko Bragadzhiiia. Only, beware and do nothing to this fellow because he is completely innocent, and I cannot help laughing. Your humble [servant] Peter Karaivanov the third Levski." The letter is in *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 142. On Peter, see Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 71–2.

237 *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 141.

238 Cited in Undzhiev, *Levski*, 271, who explains it away with the remark that Gerov could not think otherwise since he totally relied on Russia.

the exception of Iordanka Filaretova's letters where he figures, but as part of the overall arrests and the Sofia trial of 1873.<sup>239</sup>

As the acting Russian consul, Gerov turned to Filaretova, widow of a prominent teacher and educator Sava Filaretov, who was living on a Russian pension in Sofia, for information about the attack at Arabakonak as well as the trial against the revolutionaries. Upon receiving the news of Levski's capture and trial from Filaretova, Gerov wrote to Count Nikolai Pavlovich Ignatieff, the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, and to Evlogi Georgiev on December 2, 1872: "All of this is the work of the former Deacon Vasil Levski from Karlovo who in the past 3–4 years has traveled around Bulgaria preaching that there allegedly exists some committee which is preparing the liberation of the Bulgarians, and he has managed to mislead many (*i e izlǐgal mnozina da mu sia podvedat*)."<sup>240</sup>

The assessment of Levski's influence as insidious and contagious was also the verdict of Russian diplomacy, not only Gerov himself—a Bulgarian—but a subject of the Russian emperor, as were, by the way, both the brothers Georgievi and Iordanka Filaretova. The disapproval came also from under the pen of the Russian consul in Adrianople Ivan Aleksandrovich Ivanov. In a letter to Gerov of January 8, 1873, apparently not having realized that Levski was already caught, he exclaimed: "The information you sent me about the Sofia trial is amazing. I can imagine what the poor Bulgarians have to endure under the cruel handling of the Turkish bureaucrats. For example, the young man they caught for nothing in Tulcha. If they also caught Levski, this gentleman with his testimony will surely expose also some more completely innocent Bulgarians." There is no follow-up in the existing archival correspondence showing if Ivanov eventually revised his dismissive opinion, after the news about Levski's firm stand and courageous

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239 Three letters are from Khristo Georgiev to Gerov, two from Gerov to Khristo Georgiev, one from Evlogi Georgiev to Gerov, one from Gerov to Evlogi Georgiev, three from Filaretova, and two from the Russian consul Ivanov. Outside these twelve letters there is also one letter by Levski himself from Belgrade, dated February 1, 1868 and asking for rifles. This letter hints at how he is thinking but all in all it is somewhat inarticulate (*Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 987). Filaretova's letters pass no judgments, only inform of the gossip around Levski's capture and activities (*Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, II, Sofia, 1914, 639–42).

240 *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 131.

behavior at the trial. Rather, in his next letter to Gerov of January 17, 1873, Ivanov reiterated his vision of the innocent people being infected with revolutionary propaganda, something very much in line with the official worldview of the Russian authorities at the time: "Where did they capture Levski, do you know? The poor Bulgarians, they get into a trap with such people, without the slightest hope for the future, at least in this minute, and have to endure such misfortunes. One cannot help feeling sorry for the innocent victims."<sup>241</sup>

As summarized by Georgi Bakalov in the 1930s, "in the circle of the Russian consul and the 'notables' Levski was completely alien, incomprehensible and hostile. He thus appears in [Gerov's] *Archives* in a distorted image, not in his real historical grandeur."<sup>242</sup> Yet, to ascribe the similar opinions of Bulgarians to Russian influence or pressure, as Undzhiev in a particularly weak attempt did, is to miss the strong divisions among the strategists of Bulgaria's future at the time and to fall into the cheap trap of attributing everything that would disclose internal national fractions and frictions to outside, particularly Russian, influence or pressure.

In fact, the most uncompromising attacks on Levski's integrity came from the Istanbul-based Bulgarian elites as well as from the ones close to or integrated into the Ottoman governing apparatus in the provinces. Nikola Genovich, the editor of *Turtsiia*, the organ of the Turkophile Party in Istanbul, wrote in a comment about Levski's trial: "Can a whole nation be called a rebel, because Karavelov is a Serb

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241 *Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov*, I, 683–4. Ironically, the caption by T. Panchev at the beginning of the letter says: "Regret about Levski" whereas the letter actually regrets the plight of the Bulgarians misled by Levski. With the exception of Gerov who, although Russian consul in Plovdiv, as a Bulgarian was better informed than the other diplomatic representatives, Levski had not appeared in name in any of the European diplomatic correspondence before his arrest. During the trial, his significance as the leader of a clandestine organization is realized for the first time by a number of European consuls in Ruse (Krumka Sharova, "Istoricheskoto znachenie na politicheskite razkritiia v Bilgariia prez esenta na 1872 i nachaloto na 1873 g," in *Po pitia na bezsmirtieto. Ot Kikrina do Sofia. Sbornik ot dokladi posvetena na 120-ta godishnina ot gibelta na Apostola*, Veliko Tirnovo: IK "Vital," 1993, 22–4.

242 Georgi Bakalov, "Levski v 'Arkhiva' na Naiden Gerov," in Georgi Bakalov, *Bunt protiv Levski*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa Radikal, 1938, 26; Bakalov, *Izbrani istoricheski proizvedeniia*, 117–39.

agent and publishes a mutinous paper in order to cheat the corn-growing Serbs out of their gold, with which he buys lowly individuals and *haiduts* such as the recently hanged in Sofia Dimitir Obshti and Vasil Levski.”<sup>243</sup> While Genchev asserts that this was “the only written slander against Levski after his death,” Krumka Sharova shows that both the provincial newspaper *Dunav*, as well as the capital based *Turtsiia*, published virulent attacks on Levski as “assassin,” “scoundrel,” and “haiduk” who fooled the naive Bulgarians.<sup>244</sup>

Nor was the critique of Levski confined to the circles that refuted any radical activity. His stature among the revolutionaries was not unambiguous. His frictions with his aid Obshti are common knowledge, and are reflected in every school account of the last year of his activities where it is the unilateral action of Obshti, his capture and subsequent immoderate boasting of the scope of the organization that allegedly dealt it an unrecoverable blow. Never is there mention of Obshti’s motives, beyond psychological explanations of impatience and adventurism. These were, however, widely discussed within the revolutionary circles at the time and during the first years after independence. Sharova, one of the best researchers of this period, demonstrates convincingly the inevitable contradiction between the centralizing and decentralizing principles in the revolutionary movement. She insists in particular that the crisis in the organization preceded the Arabakonak adventure of Obshti, and was an inbuilt problem of its structure and tasks. The central question for the revolutionaries, after the initial creation of the network by Levski, was the collection of money for arms. The organization, created by penniless émigrés, and drawing its membership mostly from among petty artisans, merchants, poor teachers, clergymen, and peasants, never disposed of the needed resources. Wealthy Bulgarians refused to contribute and this triggered the above-mentioned famous circular “threatening letter” of March 10, 1871. The letter, which sounded more like an extortion letter did not prove effective either. By the spring and summer of 1872 the internal revolutionary organization had reached a critical state of affairs. Levski returned to Bulgaria on July 1, 1872 and decided to resort to attacks,

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243 *Turtsiia* IX, No. 7, March 31, 1873, Supplement.

244 Nikolai Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1987, 152; Krumka Sharova, “Osnovopolozhnitsite na nauchnite znaniia za Levski,” *Istoriia* 5, 1997, 26.

and to apply the principle of revolutionary terror. His motivation was, on the one hand, to procure funds, and on the other, to forestall the dangers of betrayal.

What followed was a series of political assassinations: an attack against *chorbadzhi* N. Arnaudov from Etropole, who had the reputation of a corrupt and greedy potentate and refused to give money; the already mentioned assassination of Deacon Paisii of Lovech who promised but did not give money, and threatened to speak; the assassination of the Liaskovets *chorbadzhi* V. Kozlev; the unsuccessful attack on the house of Dencho Khalacha and the murder of his servant that is the mostly wide known instance of these terrorist activities (it was leveled as an accusation against Levski during his trial, and he bitterly regretted and was repentant about this incident). There were also plans, albeit unsuccessful ones, to murder high-standing Bulgarians like Velichko Simeonov and Ivancho Penchovich from Ruse, and a host of others to be observed and, if needed, liquidated. According to Sharova, and contrary to Levski's conviction that the secret revolutionary police would easily and cheaply deal with the problems, this turn of events cost the organization very dearly. It alerted the authorities who followed up with arrests and surveillance, and it upset the organization's other plans, creating unease and fear among the committee members. All of this coincided with the growing activity of the Ottoman government against the Bulgarian movement after Midhat Pasha became Grand Vizier in the summer of 1872. Midhat Pasha immediately closed down the democratic newspaper *Makedoniia* and arrested its editor-in-chief, Petko Slaveikov, accusing him of keeping contacts with the Bucharest-based committee of Karavelov. He also sent directives to the police to be especially watchful against the Bulgarians. Sharova's overall verdict is that "judged by its results, the action to gather money in July–August, 1872 and the political murders of the 'black souls' drew the attention of the Turkish authorities and triggered their active countermeasures against the Bulgarians, without contributing significantly to the gathering of the necessary sums. In addition, it logically and psychologically prepared the Arabakonak attack."<sup>245</sup>

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245 Sharova, "Istoricheskoto znachenie na politicheskite razkritiia," 18–9; "Krizisni iavleniia v BRCK prez Liatoto i esenta na 1872 g.," *Istoricheski pregled* 3, 1991, 3–24, here 11.

This attack on the Ottoman treasury convoy at Arabakonak has been traditionally attributed to Obshti's single-handed decision and blamed for the subsequent demise of the organization.<sup>246</sup> Sharova calls for a revision of this thesis, showing that Levski himself was considering this operation, only he wanted to better prepare it and leave Obshti out or at least not leave it entirely to him. The attack itself, quite contrary to today's received wisdom, was well prepared and carried out, and for a whole month the authorities had no lead. To this date it is unclear how and through whom the Ottoman police managed to get to the perpetrators but most likely this was by means of infiltration of spies into the revolutionary network.<sup>247</sup>

The conflict between Levski and Obshti may have also had personal psychological dimensions but at its heart it was the irresolvable conflict of opposing strategies: one, embodied by Levski, focusing on centralism as a *conditio sine a qua non* of any kind of clandestine revolutionary work and insisting on his extraordinary powers as leader of the internal organization; the other, represented by Obshti, calling on the majority vote as the highest principle of the organization and insisting on a broad distribution of revolutionary tasks among the leaders. The clash had apparently gone out of hand by the summer of 1872 and when in September Levski asked the committee in Bucharest to remove Obshti, he added that the latter "has in many respects deserved a death sentence but will be pardoned for now."<sup>248</sup>

That it was a matter of colliding viewpoints about strategy and not simply the clash between two individuals is evidenced by the series of opposition to Levski, by both individual members and whole committees. The most dramatic one was by Anastas Popkhinov (P. Khinov, after 1878 known as Anastas Khristov Popov), brother of Danail Khristov Popov, a merchant in Walachia who served as the liaison between the internal committee and the Bucharest Central Committee, and was an intimate of the circle around Karavelov. A friend of Obshti, Anastas was offended by Levski's remark that he should not open the

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246 It was revived in *Demokratiia* 41, February 19, 2001, seeking to promote a clean, tame, anti-revolutionary image of Levski. It claimed he considered the attack an adventure, and felt he had no right to expose the people.

247 Sharova, "Istoricheskoto znachenie," 13–7.

248 Sharova, "Krizisni iavleniia," 15.

revolutionary correspondence, a remark Anastas took as a sign of distrust. On August 5, 1872 he sent Levski a letter in which he accused him of idleness: “The wrong has to be righted. I will go with him [Obshti] to K. [Karavelov] in Bu. [Bucharest] and will tell him everything. There is no [endless] heap of money to stay in one place for 3–4 months and only eat. You know well that bees themselves give their due to the drones only for so long; then they cut their wings when they see that these only want to eat without doing anything. You reproach [Obshti] but you have no right to do so. He brings you money, not you to him...” Anastas Popkhinov even resorted to an open and crude threat: “Don’t even step on my feet, because I will rise at one point, and will sting you in the forehead (*shte ta klatsna*) so that you will never forget me.”<sup>249</sup>

His brother Danail Popov also complained of Levski in a letter to Karavelov of October 3, 1872: “From all that Levski is writing, I see utmost confusion (*edni nerazbori*)... From many people I learn that V.L. acts in a completely arbitrary manner, without consulting anyone on anything... On the other hand, he is complaining that they don’t listen to him. Why should they listen only to him when even the ‘Rules’ don’t posit this? Why doesn’t he accept to agree with the other members around and follows only his own opinion?”<sup>250</sup>

There were also whole local committees who were alienated by some of Levski’s activities. For example, in July, 1872 Levski decided to convene a general assembly within Bulgaria. The Etropole Committee, chaired by Todor Peev, was against; so was the one in Teteven, but also the one in Tîrnovo, headed by Khristo Ivanov, a very close and trusted friend of Levski. The reason for this opposition was that people were cautious about the activities of the Ottoman

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249 Unzhiev, *Levski*, 564. Anastas Popkhinov’s animosity and intrigues is described also in D. Strashimirov, *Levski pred Kîkrinskata Golgota*, Sofia: Sibiiia, 1995, 42–6. Strashimirov explains that Anastas’s hostility stemmed from the spring of 1872 when Levski opposed his election as delegate from Pleven to the General Assembly in Bucharest. Popkhinov continued to write against Levski even after his death, while he was in exile in Diarbekir. From Pleven, where he died in 1898, Popkhinov, in a letter to his brother Danail, accused the local revolutionary leaders Marin Poplukanov and Dimitîr Pishkov of living on the stolen committee’s money, and that they, as well as Levski, were doing everything only for their own interest.

250 Sharova, “Krizisni iavleniia,” 19–20.

police and fearful to invite recrimination by the authorities. In their refusal however, they were careful to act according to the Statute of the Revolutionary Committee, quoting the principle of majority vote. Levski was furious with the cautious response and sent letters (e.g. the one of September 16, 1872) to Karavelov complaining of the committees cowardice. Another factor contributing to the crisis was the structure of the internal organization itself. It had grown in size, the local committees had an increased appreciation of their own abilities, and the organization could no longer be managed by a sole person. Levski resorted to two strategies, without dismissing the centralizing principle that he strongly believed in. One was the creation of regional centers with whom he would have contact, and they would further communicate the decisions to the smaller local committees. The other was delegating powers to assistants. Thus, he gave special powers (*pil-nomoshtiiia*) to some of his trusted friends: M. Tsvetkov in Vratsa; I. Stoianov for Northeast Bulgaria; the above-mentioned Khristo Ivanov for Ruse and Tîrnovo. The criteria for his choices apart from personal trust were unclear, and Khristo Ivanov in particular, despite his lofty patriotism, was unsuccessful mostly due to his lack of education. But Levski refused to give or renew the special powers to Obshti.<sup>251</sup>

Finally, there is the case of the priest and member of the Lovech Revolutionary Committee, Pop Krîstiu, who was accused already before independence of having disclosed Levski's whereabouts and who bore the brunt of the national arch-traitor. The historiographical controversy about his alleged betrayal is explored in the next part, but what is worth mentioning here is the opinion that Pop Krîstiu harbored about Levski. In 1879, Pop Krîstiu had sent a letter to the Plovdiv newspaper *Maritsa*. This letter was never published in the newspaper and it became known only when it was found in 1882 at the end of the *trebnik*, his prayerbook, after the finger-pointing had brought Pop Krîstiu's to the brink of suicide. In this letter, known as "Dopiska na pop Krîstiu," he speaks with hatred about the punitive tactics of the revolutionaries in Lovech and Levski in particular:

These people, who were honest and wise and knew how to proceed with their work in a reasonable way, why did they resort to such non-

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251 Ibid., 16.

sense and barbarisms, in order to bring the whole cause to this end? Who killed the Deacon Paisii and why was he killed when he was an innocent man who, even when he was dying, did not betray his assassins, although he knew them. Who killed the innocent young man in Lovech (in Dencho's house) and why? And why did he go there? To raise a nation or to rob homes and kill people?<sup>252</sup>

In the same letter, Pop Krístiu was dismissive of the post-liberation posturing of the revolutionaries and pointed out that it was Russia which had liberated Bulgaria, and that the ones who were now heaping the benefits of being heroes had acted in a very different manner in those days: "When Russia was shedding her blood for you, you were running in its steps to plunder and speculate, and to sell a piece of bread for 1–2 francs to this same overexerted Russian soldier who was going ahead with his rifle and through the utmost difficulties, in order to liberate us!"<sup>253</sup>

It is only natural that the open dismissal of Levski would come from among his contemporaries and, almost exclusively, during the pre-1878 period. As already Georgi Bakalov perceptively noted: "This aspect—the obverse side of attitudes toward Levski—today can hardly be researched. The result from Levski's activities, albeit not direct—

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252 Dimitîr Strashimirov, *Vasil Levski*, I, Sofia, 1929, 680. Also in Nikola Kondarev, "Pop Krístiu ne e predal Levski, no e bil donosnik na turskite vlasti," ("Pop Krístiu did not betray Levski but was an informer for the Turkish authorities"), *Istoričeski pregled* 3–4, 1999, 206–7. The letter was written in response to the accusation published in 1979 in the journal "Slaviani," that had initiated the collection of funds for Levski's monument and had mentioned that the priest who had betrayed Levski was still living (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 156). On the *trebnik*, see Strashimirov, *Levski pred Kikrinskata Golgota*, 68 ff. The story is reproduced in greater detail in Dimitîr Panchovski, *Predatelite na Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Litera Prima, 1996, 64–71. Panchovski thinks that the packet sent by Pop Krístiu may have never reached the editorial quarters of *Maritsa* but was confiscated from the post office by Marin Poplukanov, then regional magistrate. The full text of the letter is in Stefan Karakostov, *Vasil Levski v spomenite na svïrmennïtsite si*, Sofia: Ivan Koiumdzhiev, 1943, 310–22.

253 Panchovski, *Predatelite*, 67. This is somewhat differently quoted in Strashimirov, *Levski pred Kikrinskata Golgota*, 58 but the gist is the same: "It is strange, how they think they have accomplished a great deed; they even dare say that they themselves, and not the great Russia has accomplished it."

the liberation—was so positive that all dark spots were forgotten. Who would dare criticize and judge the historically vindicated Levski and boast one's disagreements and debates with him as a special merit?"<sup>254</sup>

Hereafter, the story of attitudes toward Levski is based not on immediate experience but exclusively on the competition about the appropriation of a central national symbol. The distinction should not be overdone, however, because in both cases the opinions are inflected by the horizon of desired expectations for the future of the polity. While this was the topic of the previous section, it is worth highlighting the tropes and places where the contestation of Levski took and still takes place.

It was already pointed out that for the early Bulgarian socialists and future communists in the interwar period, Levski, alongside the whole radical revolutionary movement, was seen as an endorsement of the legitimacy of political struggle through revolution. Bakalov's 1938 book *Bunt protiv Levski (Revolt against Levski)* opened with the rhetorical question whether it was even possible that someone would dare attack or renounce the great Apostle. Bakalov answered by saying that it had not yet come to that, but the direction taken by many historians was leading surreptitiously to it, and this tendency was the "renunciation of political struggle (and in the circumstances of complete injustice this struggle could be nothing but revolutionary)."<sup>255</sup> Accordingly, Bakalov dealt with the conflict between Levski and Obshti in light of the developments within the socialist movement at the time. It had been split between the factions of the "narrow" and the "broad," reflecting different approaches to the strategy of the organization. When Bakalov exclaims that "the revolt against Levski was the fruit of a hazardous deviation and factional blindness, a damaging display of political and moral decay," one can clearly hear the overtones of the later political debate within the socialist movement. When he endorses Levski's "iron discipline, which would not stop even before applying the highest punitive measures" against the adventurousness of Obshti and the lack of discipline of Anastas Popkhinov, one can again see his support for the "narrows" cause.<sup>256</sup>

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254 Bakalov, *Bunt protiv Levski*, 5.

255 Ibid., 3.

256 Ibid., 14, 17.

Throughout the postwar period and until 1989 this became the dominant historiographical interpretation and, by far, the only official one. The first gentle hint at reassessment began with Krumka Sharova, a respected historian of the Revival Period and specialist on Karavelov who, in the early decades of communist rule, did much to uphold Karavelov's stature as a significant leader of the revolutionary organization against the dogmatic tendency to brush him off as a mere educator and oppose him to Levski as the organizer and practitioner, a tendency that had its roots already in the prewar period. She called for an end to repeating the simplistic scheme whereby it was Obshti's single-handed adventurism and lack of discipline that led the organization into a cul-de-sac and pointed out that the crisis was brought about with the application of revolutionary terror. She introduced the explicit notion of revolutionary terror in the practice of Levski for the first time, substituting for the hitherto euphemistic definitions: "As a matter of fact, the actions aimed at forceful seizure of money and capital punishment for real or potential traitors are forms of revolutionary terror, known also among other clandestine revolutionary organizations."<sup>257</sup>

Still, Sharova's was a mild form of criticism: "Undoubtedly, Levski was absolutely right to have high demands on the committee members, but it is equally doubtless that not everyone could have his amount of self-sacrifice, courage, and experience in the secret revolutionary work in the conditions of the Turkish rule. And the objective fact of persecutions on the part of the authorities cannot be discounted. Maybe here, as well as in the temporary concentration of revolutionary terrorist actions, the heroic romanticism of the era took the upper hand over Levski's sober realism. Romanticism, by the way, is typical for any revolutionary movement, especially an underground one."<sup>258</sup> The criticism was slightly more explicit in the 1999 lecture course on the Bulgarian Revival by Plamen Mitev, a university professor teaching during this period. He summarized the existing dogma as resting on "two untruths": the fictitious opposition between Karavelov and Levski and, more importantly, the postulate that "the authorization of Levski as chief apostle in the country is something natural and determined, something positive, without which the cause of the national revolution

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257 Sharova, "Istorisheskoto znachenie," 15.

258 Sharova, "Krizisni iavleniia," 14.

would have suffered.” This, he reasoned, effectively “imposed on the revolutionary organization the principles of conspiracy, the secret mail system, the secret police and revolutionary terror” and was the chief reason for the symptoms of crisis. In Mitev’s verdict, “it contradicted the principle of majority vote—the Bulgarian Central Revolutionary Committee’s basic principle.”<sup>259</sup>

Again, as in the case of Bakalov and as is normal with every consecutive historiographical reassessment, one can hardly avoid hearing the overtones of today’s *Zeitgeist* with its professed credo in democracy and majority rule.<sup>260</sup> At the same time, this is the farthest that a tentative criticism of Levski would go, according to me. After all, we are still living in the regime of sovereign national states, despite the new understanding of sovereignty, and Levski is without any doubt one of the major figures of the national pantheon. Quite contrary to Genchev who thought that Levski was not valued enough during the communist period, it is today that in the historiography he is being carefully “demoted” from the exclusive peak of the national pantheon (or, rather, the exclusive peak is being populated with a number of other figures) and his ideas are credited for being “one of the highest achievements in the political revival of the Bulgarians.”<sup>261</sup>

It is difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether there had been critical notes toward Levski among the broader population. There is an interesting passage in Khristo Radevski’s memoirs, which he published only in 2000. The entry of his diary for September 17, 1972 recalls his overhearing the conversation of two six–seven-year-old girls during his stroll through the park: “Do you know what kind of butcher he was?” “Who, Levski?” “He, of course. If someone didn’t obey, he

259 Plamen Mitev, *Bilgarskoto vizrazhdane. Lekstionen kurs*, Sofia: Polis, 1999, 116–7.

260 There should be nothing wrong with this in principle, except that democracy is not analyzed as a historical phenomenon but taken as a slogan. The tensions between democracy, majority rule, centralized government and extraordinary powers has been the object of much contemplation by political thinkers, and is especially pertinent today in the United States. While Fareed Zakaria (“The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997) coined the term “illiberal democracy” for a particular geographic context, it deserves to be theorized as a periodically structural element of the process in general.

261 Mitev, *Bilgarskoto vizrazhdane*, 116.

would come and cut his head off.” Radevski was distressed but ends this brief report with something reminiscent of a written sigh: “This is a conversation overheard by an adult.”<sup>262</sup> While certainly not widely held, it is a view, which had been obviously held and discussed in family circles in the capital city.

There is another, equally if not more interesting, passage coming from under the pen of one of the most talented and idiosyncratic Bulgarian writers, Dimităr Khristov Chorbadzhiiski, known as Chudomir (1890–1967). In the interwar period he was a frequent contributor to the left-wing press, and after the Second World War until his death chaired the “Iskra” education club and was director of the Historical-Ethnographic Museum of Kazanlık. His diary spanned the period 1947–1967 and was first published only in 1994. On February 26, 1951, Chudomir noted that one of the first socialists in Bulgaria, Kosta Bozveliev, had died bequeathing his library and archive to the “Iskra” club. Chudomir was delighted and had been going through and arranging his papers. The entry ends with a comment: “A nice person, wonderful soul, human, honest and ... vain. All Bulgarians are like that. Levski and Botev too, all photographs, all posing, all skulls and knives... Same thing with bai Kosta: everything is separated, arranged, signed, waiting only for the biographer or the historian to come and begin. I don’t reproach him. This seems to be a human quality. I only note.”<sup>263</sup>

This, of course, is not criticism directed specially to Levski. One may even agree with Chudomir that it is not even criticism at all but a good-hearted chuckling observation. Still, it is an extremely important glimpse into what I would maintain is a dominant attitudinal trait in a majority of Bulgarians. The genius of Chudomir and his immense popularity lies in his unrivaled ability to capture and represent this mixture of self-irony, sometimes cruel mockery, practical idealism, and skepticism against everything which smacks of inflated loftiness. Virtually every Bulgarian, I think, would agree with Chudomir as a whole, but virtually every Bulgarian would exempt Levski from his list, maintaining that Levski’s simplicity, ordinary speech, and modesty set him apart. One may even say Levski’s man-of-the-people posture is his

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262 Khristo Radevski, *Razgovor sîs sebe si. Nepublikuvan dnevnik*, Sofia: Zakharii Stoitianov, 2000, 114.

263 Chudomir, *Dnevnik, 1947–1967*, Kazanlık: Fondatsiia Chudomir, IKK Slavika, 1994, 125.

most appealing trait that has won him the popularity among the nation. Having written this sentence, I realize that it would evoke a storm of protest: that it is not *posture* but precisely Levski's authenticity as a man of the people. This, of course, invites us to deconstruct notions such as authenticity as well as rigidly held ideas of what it means to be "of the people." Yet, for our purposes here this is not necessary. What is significant is that, quite apart from Levski's ontology that may indeed have contributed to his being singled out, there is a public readiness and desire to construct one's authentic hero as a counterpoint to the standard version and image of a heroic figure.

This section will end with a counterpoint, making room for probably the only expressly negative evaluations of Levski in recent years. They are in no way typical either in terms of Levski's reception or in terms of any kind of social representativeness but it is precisely their exceptional character that can shed additional contrasting light onto the image of the hero. One is written by a relatively young historian who failed to complete his dissertation, and teaches high school history. He offered a view in his book "Christianity and History" that harked back to the church's early twentieth century repudiation of the national revolutionary movement but without exempting Levski. In a bombastic prose that matches the extreme laudations of Levski, he introduces this "dubious figure, imposed on the Bulgarians as their national hero and propped up at any price, even sacrificing the whole Bulgarian nation." Inspired by his own royalist and Christian Orthodox values, the author's portrait of Levski is a litany of unmeasured invectives: "a semi-literate former legionnaire from Belgrade," "a rebel intoxicated by his own greatness," a mere athlete without intellectual qualities, "a criminal killer of a fourteen-year-old boy," whose philosophy "merely substituted the pagan idols of the pre-Christian period" and led directly to atheism, and whose republicanism is a virtual treason of the Bulgarian historical tradition. At the same time, it is an account that correctly locates the beginnings of the Levski cult in Vazov and while not original in any of its allegations, is nonetheless surprising in refusing to succumb to the mythology.<sup>264</sup>

The other denunciation comes from Dimitir Bochev who had studied philosophy in the 1960s and defected to Germany in 1972. He

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264 Stefan Chureshki, *Khristianstvo i istoriia: Kîm filsofiata na bilgarskata istoriia*, Sofia: GALIKO, 1998, 225–38.

worked for the East European radio programs of *Deutsche Welle* and *Free Europe* and, after 1989, had published several literary works in Bulgaria. In an interview he gave for the widely read *168 chasa*, he was asked:

“What do you think of Levski?”

“The Apostle for me is above all a child-assassin. It is well known that he strangled a youth in order to avoid the risk of betrayal. But Dostoevski writes that if at the entrance of the gates to Heaven there is a single child’s tear, the one who provoked it, should not be admitted. The heroic deed is not worth the child’s tear. There exists no heroism that is not ready to sacrifice human life for an idea. According to me, man should live imperceptibly, causing as little evil as possible.”

“You mean heroes are criminals?”

“Heroism is a crime, and the heroes are demons of evil. Sometimes I wonder what kind of scoundrels live in the memory of this nation, from Khan Krum to Todor Zhivkov. Khan Krum drank wine from the skull of his military adversary Nikiphor, who had fought honestly and valiantly. We, his descendants, are proud with this fact, instead of being ashamed of the kind of barbarians our gene has started.”

“Are you ashamed of being a Bulgarian?”

“Neither proud, nor ashamed. This is a random factor in my life.”<sup>265</sup>

The rest of the interview is prone to similar overarching outbursts: for example that Darwin had become religious at the end of his life and this definitively overthrew his theory of the origins of species; or that history was just an accumulation of facts whereas literature is a spiritual act. Some of these outbursts are garnished with Nietzschean overtones, namely that the only important thing in life is ecstasy, which Bochev had allegedly achieved in a commune in Germany with narcotics; or that the writer has no responsibilities, he writes only for himself. On the other hand, there are also a number of accurate if banal instinctual verdicts and insights about the barbarization of the world and the lack of human progress punctuated with the excesses of the Middle Ages and Dachau, as well as about Bulgaria’s provincialism, nationalism, and present criminality. In the end, as a potential indictment of

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265 Dimităr Bochev, *168 chasa*, July 10–6, 1998, 20.

Levski, this piece is especially impotent given the contrast between the professed philosophy of imperceptible life and the typical bombastic absurdities of a self-described gadfly.

This survey of attempts to contest the eminence of Levski as the sublime Bulgarian hero can reach the only conclusion that these challenges have been rare and rather indecisive. The only serious ones were during his lifetime when he was not even deemed a candidate for heroic status; after that they have been, to say the least, half-hearted. There exists a widely accepted ethical taboo to question his lofty position. Before going into the final twist of Levski's posthumous fate—of elevating him even higher than his heroic peak, into a position of dissident hero, which during the communist era would confer upon him an absolute sacredness—let us offer a brief survey of the different genres in which Levski has appeared.

## 5. The Literary and Visual Hypostases of the Hero

For a long time the “novelization” of Levski was resisted. Vazov’s *oeuvre* introduced the fictional genre in the treatment of Levski (both in his poetic ode as well as the short stories), but the latter somehow acquired the status of documentary evidence in public perception, although Vazov had never (and did not pretend) to have met and known Levski. Levski’s biographer Stoianov also had never met Levski and suffered profoundly from this “deficiency.” His first attempt at biography (moving away from the memoirist genre) was Levski, and he was adamant that it was true to facticity and resisted the temptations of any literary modeling.<sup>266</sup> Yet, the choice and arrangement of facts and, especially, the silencing of others, already was bespeaking the imagination of a literary creator.

Levski has not had the luck to interest writers of the caliber of Thomas and Heinrich Mann, or Lion Feuchtwanger and Ivo Andrić. Most of the prominent Bulgarian writers who produced historical fiction after Vazov—Stoian Zagorchinov, Fani Popova-Mutafova, Dimităr Talev, Emililian Stanev, Anton Donchev, Gencho Stoev—avoided the topic.<sup>267</sup> The one significant exception in this respect is the work of Stefan Dichev. To a much lesser extent and in a somewhat different genre, the other significant writer of historical fiction, Vera Mutafochieva, also exercised her pen with Levski. Stefan Dichev (1920–1996) is, without any doubt, the writer whose work symbolizes Levski’s fictionalization. The author of numerous historical novels, Dichev fictionalized themes from antiquity to the nineteenth century, and did not

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266 Lipcheva-Prandzheva, *Levski*, 132–4. She also shows how other biographies were “arranging” facts according to the already existing myth (135–9).

267 For a review of Levski’s image in the interwar poetry after Vazov, with special attention to Pencho Slaveikov (who mentions Levski often in *Kîvava pesen*) and a poem dedicated to Levski by Kiril Khristov, see Tsvetana Romanska, “Obrazît na Levski v bilgarskata poezîia,” *Uchilishten pregled* XXXVII, 1, 1938 (Separatum, Sofia: Dîrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1938).

confine himself to Bulgarian history.<sup>268</sup> In 1956 he published a huge novel *Za svobodata* (“For Liberty”), consisting of two parts: one, dedicated to and entitled “Rakovski,” the other one on Levski. In 1959, the novel was awarded the prestigious Dimitrov Prize for 1954–1958, and underwent numerous editions.<sup>269</sup>

It is a work that is amazingly well researched. In a way, Dichev can be defined as Undzhiev plus some literary talent, and a larger palette. He has learned his history in all details, and has delivered some captivating scenes and images, especially (for this reader) the complex character of Midhat Pasha, the Danube vilayet governor and future Grand Vizier, in his relationship to the Bulgarian question. He has painted a full-blooded portrait of Levski against the international diplomacy and ideologies of the nineteenth century, as well as against the intricacies of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement. Still, the book is more of a literary illustration of a historical narrative, rather than a novel using a historical theme or, to formulate it differently, an arrangement for direct speech of a well-known composition in indirect speech. It is a book that is also broadly “correct,” according to the exigencies of the day. Dichev has not allowed himself any arbitrary deviation from Levski’s dominant interpretation. Pop Krístiu is the traitor, there are the depictions of class conflict among the Bulgarians, there is the odd but moving scene of “class solidarity” with the Turks, there are the differences of ideology and tactics with the other revolutionaries.<sup>270</sup> For all this, it offers an emotional and dynamic narrative that has remained largely unsurpassed.<sup>271</sup>

268 Besides *Za svobodata*, he is the author of *Rali*, *Neulovimiât*, *Mladostta na Rakovski*, *V labirinta*, *Podzemniata na Saint Jean d’Acre*, *Zavoevateliat na mirazhite* (about Alexander the Great).

269 Here, the sixth edition has been used: Stefan Dichev, *Za svobodata: Istoricheski roman v dve chasti. Kniga pîrva. Rakovski. Kniga vtora. Levski*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1986–1987. His two shorter novels—*Neulovimiât* and *Mladostta na Rakovski*, are abbreviated adaptations of the larger work (see Stefan Dichev, *Nepokoreni*, Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1986 (3rd ed.).

270 The latter comes from a scene, depicting Levski *en route* with a poor Turk, who dissociates himself from his co-religionists, and describes an idyllic situation of intra-confessional cooperation (Dichev, *Za svobodata*, 86–91).

271 Dichev’s widow, the artist Liliana Dicheva, spoke of the effect her husband’s work had on her in a commemorative speech in 2001. She pointed

There had been persistent but unfounded rumors that Dichev had used the literary work of the interwar writer Fani Popova-Mutafova (1902–1977), and had even published verbatim her books under his own name. Since this work is, among other things, about the atmosphere in which intellectuals lived under communism, a few words are fitting, even as Popova-Mutafova had little to do with either Levski or Dichev. A prolific and influential writer, she had published numerous well-written and well-received historical novels, known for their fervent national feeling. She was also a considerable public figure with unabashed pro-German sympathies, and had pronounced fascism as the best medium for the blossoming of femininity, especially under the “blessed genius of Adolf Hitler” and “the genius touch of Mussolini.”<sup>272</sup> It was these latter activities that earned her a seven-year prison sentence for pro-German activities by the People’s Court in 1945. The sentence was commuted in 1948 when her civil rights were restored, and in 1963 she was reinstated in the Union of Bulgarian Writers whose member she was until her death. Her reinstatement was preceded by the publication of a revised version of her hugely popular 1936 novel *Dishteriata na Kaloiana* (*Kaloian’s Daughter*) in 1962. It was, in fact, a minimally revised text that involved neither a change of style nor even of thematics. The compromise entailed first and foremost a symbolic gesture of self-criticism, and Popova-Mutafova readily and deftly produced it.<sup>273</sup>

The book begging comparison with Dichev’s is the equally voluminous novel *Levski* by Iana Iazova. Written as part of the trilogy *Balkani* in a first draft between 1952 and 1955, it was published in full only in 1987.<sup>274</sup> Iazova (1912–1974) was a young poetess and celebrity

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out his dramatic talent, and the fact that he insisted that novels should be more dynamic and less descriptive. Taking cue from the words of the literary critic Georgi Tsankov, who had pronounced Dichev to be the Bulgarian Alexander Dumas, she reminisced that Dumas was Renoir’s favorite writer, a kind of double family compliment (*Literaturen Forum* 17, May 1–7, 2001, <http://mail.slovo.bg/old/litforum/117/sdichev.htm>).

272 Quoted in Miroslava Georgieva, “Prenapisvane na avto/biografiite: Fani Popova Mutafova,” *Kultura* 16, April 19, 2002 ([www.inline.bg/kultura/my\\_html/2224.fani.htm](http://www.inline.bg/kultura/my_html/2224.fani.htm)); see also Krassimira Daskalova, “A Life in History,” *Gender and History* 14.2 (2002), 321–39.

273 Georgieva, “Prenapisvane,” op. cit.

274 Iana Iazova, *Levski (Balkani. Kniga prva)*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1987.

figure in the 1930s but did not publish after the war. She shared her manuscript with two friends (one was Dimitir Talev) who encouraged her to offer it to the publishing house “Narodna kultura.” She sent a copy to the press in November, 1960, and received a generally positive review but with certain editorial suggestions in July, 1961. There were problems with the size of the manuscript (2,579 pages) but Iazova insisted the book should be published in full. In 1972–1973 she copied and corrected the manuscript again, but this copy was lost. Iazova died in 1974 without descendents, and her papers went to the Central State Historical Archives. Petir Velichkov found the first manuscript of 1960 in the archives, and published several large excerpts in the periodic press in 1984. The whole manuscript of the trilogy was prepared for publication by Velichkov, and came out as three separate volumes in 1987, 1988 and 1989: *Levski*, *Benkovski (The April Uprising)*, and *Shipka*.<sup>275</sup>

The Levski volume (1,075 manuscript pages, 830 printed pages) produced a hype in the literary circles. Part of it had to do with the *femme fatale* stature of Iazova in the interwar period, and the ongoing idealization of this period, especially in the literary sphere among intellectuals in the 1980s. The literary critic Iordan Vasilev (husband of the poetess and future Vice President Blaga Dimitrova, and himself a relentless anti-communist) wrote a review of the book in 1988.<sup>276</sup> At that time (in the 1980s) Vasilev was for me by far the better known name (as husband and collaborator of the popular Blaga Dimitrova), and I was familiar with the review before I got hold of the book only in the late 1990s when I was already working on this project. It was an incredible laudatio: Iazova was compared to Zakhari Stoianov, Simeon Radev, Ivan Khadzhiiski, Geo Milev and Nikola Vaptsarov, all authors who were recognized sometimes decades later, often posthumously. Her book was said to be equal to the ancient Greek mythology, to an ancient tragedy whose hero was the whole people. I was mostly intrigued by Vasilev’s comparison of Iazova to Eco: “If we overcome

275 On Iazova, see the preface and postscripts to her volume, written by Todor Borov, Petir Velichkov, and Petko Totev (Iazova, *Levski*, 5–14; 831–45); Meri Tsvetkova, “Vseki mizh oglupiaval pred Iana Iazova,” *Trud* LXXII, No. 142 (20177), May 25, 2007.

276 “Narodna kniga za Apostola i za negoviia narod,” *Plamik* 32, February 2, 1988, 163–9.

the snobbish fascination with the sensational, until recently, novel of Umberto Eco 'The Name of the Rose,' we shall surely acknowledge that our compatriot has produced, decades before him, something similar in appearance but with far greater spiritual value."<sup>277</sup> Now, this was some verdict and since I continue to be snobbishly dazzled by Eco, my curiosity was heightened.

It has to be said that, similarly to Dichev, Iazova had done massive preparatory work and from that point of view only, her work is a phenomenon in the history of Bulgarian literature. In terms of both ideology and style, this was the antipode of Dichev's. Where he was building a typical realistic novel, replete (although tactfully) with the ideological pathos of the postwar years, she was still in the realm of the nationalism and her typically romantic, even melodramatic style of the interwar years. Where he was building an internationalist message, and trying to highlight the co-existence and cooperation between ordinary Bulgarians and Turks, she set out with a stark dichotomy already in the prologue to her trilogy. This was a brief essay introducing the Balkans as a "stormy crossroads" and a romanticized version of Bulgarian history from antiquity to the fourteenth century in 15 pages. According to this vision, "Bulgarians accepted Christ as a sign of goodwill and a desire to live in peaceful co-existence with the Christian peoples of the peninsula." Their internal bickering, however, brought the Ottoman hordes to the "crossroads of nations," and the Bulgarians "defended themselves alone, holding a sword in one hand, and lifting the cross in the other." When their sword fell, they kept to the cross "as a sign, by which they could be distinguished from the Turks... Jesus Christ and the prophet Mohammed met in the Balkans... For five hundred years the Turks called themselves *Aghas*—masters, and the Bulgarians *reaya*—slaves."<sup>278</sup> The return to the simple nationalistic pathos of the pre-war years held a definite appeal and was supported both by the then communist authorities (discreetly) and today's government (openly).

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 165. One can discern the clichés of interwar nationalism also in the presence of a minor character, a traitor, whose crime is mentioned over and over again, and is persistently defined as "the accursed little Greek," "a worthless little Greek," "the damned little Greek," and "dirty little Greek" (*prokleta, mrîsno, nishtozhno gîrche*, 223, 228, 253, 327, 514, 559).

<sup>278</sup> Iazova, *Levski*, 29–30.

Iazova's Levski was described in all the disguises the historical record had documented: a Turk with a turban; a European banker in a suit; a simple peasant; a rural bumpkin; a shepherd; a wandering Gypsy, a silver-haired monk, a teacher; a dervish; a one-eyed beggar, etc. But when she turned to her own description of his real physical image, Levski was coming directly out of her maiden dreams in the 1920s. This was "a luminous young man with golden blond hair and a sunny merry look in his eyes with the color of the clear skies." He was dressed in "European clothes from the finest material in the latest fashion, as if this man was used to wear only well tailored clothes."<sup>279</sup> It is the Great Gatsby directly out of F. Scott Fitzgerald (and played by Robert Redford). One has to agree with Vasilev about one thing though. Trying to maximize Iazova's achievement in the postwar years, he compared it to her two novels of the interwar period. They were liked and brought her prizes and prestige but, in his words, "were of the type of the average literature for the middling bourgeoisie." This is where she stayed and this, in principle, should support Vasilev's prediction that her Levski novel would be "devoured by the people," but I doubt it.<sup>280</sup>

Propelled by the same elevated and slightly pompous romantic nationalism, but immeasurably more talented in terms of literature, is the over 200-page-long dramatic epic poem, penned by the poet and classicist Radko Radkov.<sup>281</sup> No wonder, the literary critic Petko Totev places it in a direct line from Vazov and Iazova, as his predecessors.<sup>282</sup> This was not the first poetic rendering of Levski after Vazov. Unlike historical fiction, poetry renders itself easier to a brief emotional outburst, and the majority of poets have written at least one poem dedicated to Levski in their lifetime.<sup>283</sup> In 1987, a comprehensive anthology of poetry on Levski was published, collecting the century-long production on the topic. It began with Botev, Karavelov, and Vazov,

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279 Ibid., 652.

280 Vasilev, "Narodna kniga," 164–5.

281 Radko Radkov, *Vsenarodno bdenie za Apostola*, Veliko Tŕirnovo: Abagar, 2001.

282 Petko Totev, "Za vissheto dostoinstvo na choveka," in *Vsenarodno bdenie za Apostola*, 234.

283 At least one has dedicated two whole poetic collections to Levski: the teacher Metodi Grigorov. *Levski e v nas. Pŕirva kniga: 160 godini ot rozhdenieto*. Sofia: n.p., 1997; *Levski e v nas, Vtora kniga*, Sofia: Pechatnitsa na Akad. Izd. "M.Drinov," 2000.

included Pencho Slaveikov, Kiril Khristov, Dimitir Polianov, Teodor Traianov, Elisaveta Bagriana, Kamen Zidarov, Krum Kiuliavkov, Lamar, Alexander Gerov, Atanas Manchev, Plamen Tsonev, Venko Markovski, Valeri Petrov, Evstati Burnaski, Petia Iordanova, Liliana Stefanova, Nadia Kekhlibareva, and others.<sup>284</sup>

A number of other writers preferred the safer middle ground between literature, historiography and journalism. The best is surely Vera Mutafchieva's *Protsesit 1873 (The Trial 1873)* because, unlike most of her other colleagues who have nothing more to add except illustrate the Levski theme, she used it for a fine reflection on the relationship between historiography and literature, objectivity and imagination, written and oral testimony, the value of the archive and of silences.<sup>285</sup> An example of a professional writer or, rather, of a writing artisan, specialized in the patriotic theme, is Konstantin Dufev (1935–2007). The author of no less than 14 books in the past three decades on different national figures, he has at least five dedicated to Levski.<sup>286</sup> Whatever one would think of the quality of a number of other works that have come out in the last few years, they seem to be at least driven by a genuine desire to share one's thoughts and feelings about Levski.<sup>287</sup>

284 *Tvoi edin sin, Bilgariio. Poetichna antologija*, Sist. Alexander Banderov, Dobromir Tonev, Plovdiv: Khr. G. Danov, 1987.

285 Vera Mutafchieva, *Protsesit 1873*, Plovdiv: Khr. G. Danov, 1972. This relatively slim volume of barely over a hundred pages was written in the form of an encounter between a professional historian, stuck in his devotion to the established facts, and his young student who plays out in his imagination the hypothetical confrontation between Levski and Obshti at the trial in 1873, in order to get to the significant philosophical and political themes, as well as emotional atmosphere of the time, that cannot be reached by means of the conventional historical evidence.

286 Konstantin Dufev, *Obrecheni na bezsmirtie*, Plovdiv: Khr. G. Danov, 1976; *Bezpodobniia apostol*, Plovdiv: Khr. G. Danov, 1987 (received the prize of the Union of Bulgarian writers); *Apostola pita: Narode????* Plovdiv: Svetlostrui, 2002; his last work is subtitled film-novel: *Bilgarskiiat Khristos. Kinoroman*, Plovdiv: Svetlostrui, 2004. Khristo Rudnitsi, *Livski skok: razkazi za Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1984 belongs to a different set, popularizing Levski for children.

287 Neviana Konstantinova, *Blian za Levski po pitia kim priiatelite. Poema*, Sofia: Khriker, 1996; Iolo Denev, *Da vizkrisne Levski*, Sofia: Tangra-Benkovski, 1997; Georgi Ganchev's *Vasil Levski. Sviatiat i chistiit*, Sofia: GAN, 2007 (obviously a self-publication) seems an attempt to popularize everything known about Levski in an accessible form; Ivan Kolarov,

In 2006, the poet Stefan Tsanev published an over 500-page volume called *Bulgarian Chronicles* and subtitled *A poem*. It was the first volume of a huge enterprise that was to encompass the whole history of the Bulgarians, and it covered the period from 2137 B.C. until A.D. 1453. It was followed in 2007 by a 350-page second volume, bringing the narrative down to 1876.<sup>288</sup> Tsanev explains his urge to provide his compatriots with something that can overcome the stifling boredom of history textbooks. He directly points to Genchev as his inspiration: “More than twenty years ago, the moment we would sit down with Prof. Nikolai Genchev in the Cinema Club or in the Russian Club, after his third drink he would call out: ‘Hey, poet, why don’t you write an amusing history of Bulgaria!’” Tsanev sees his work as the fulfillment of Genchev’s call. Indeed, for people who have heard Genchev speak at a table, this sounds much like his table talk (after the third drink).<sup>289</sup> The first volume, I am told, sold well. Tsanev complains, in the second one, of the wrath of historians (scholars and teachers alike), as well as literary critics but none of this detracts him from his vocation.

Two chapters in the second volume are devoted to Levski, and the *Leitmotiv* is Levski as Christ (as is the title of Chapter VI: The Bulgarian Jesus). It is a compilation of the well-known facts about Levski and, as in the other parts, a skillful collation of quotes from sources and other works, interspersed with the author’s comments. In his appreciation of Levski, Tsanev is more than conventional. He is equally so about Botev, and his explicit, if predictable, verdict is that these are the two greatest figures in Bulgarian history. He raises rhetorically the question why the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has not

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*Pechelia za tsial narod: biografichen roman za Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv.Kliment Okhridski,” 1993; Ivan Zheglov, *Shpi-ononit Sabri: razkazi i noveli za Vasil Levski: za sredna uchilishtna vizrast*, Stara Zagora: I. Zheglov, 1993; Ivan Zheglov, *Zvezda zornitsa: razkazi i noveli za Vasil Levski*, Stara Zagora: I. Zheglov, 1997; finally, the translation of a Russian novel about Levski belongs to this genre: Alexander Stekolnikov, *Vasil Levski*, Veliko Tŭrnovo: VITAL, 2003.

288 Stefan Tsanev, *Bilgarski khroniki. Istoriia na nashiia narod ot 2137 pr.Khr. do 1453 sl.Khr. Poema*, Plovdiv: Zhanet, 2006; *Bilgarski khroniki. Istoriia na nashiia narod ot 1453 do 1878 g. Poema. Tom 2*, Plovdiv: Zhanet, 2007.

289 Tsanev calls this *Biblical verse* (whence the designation of his work as poem): each paragraph containing as many words as can be pronounced in a single breath.

canonized Levski, and correctly finds the objections unconvincing but stops short of lobbying for the effort.<sup>290</sup>

What Tsanev adds is Levski's personal obsession with—in fact, little disguised enmity toward—Liuben Karavelov, topped only by his open disdain for his Serbian wife Natalia. It is not a new historiographic discovery but for years it had been toned down in the general lore, so it comes as a surprise.<sup>291</sup> Not only is Karavelov used as a foil for Levski, and his opposition to Levski's idea to create two centers of the revolutionary organization (in Bucharest and in Lovech) is interpreted simply as fear of sharing the glory of leadership. There is a curious twist when the incident inspires Tsanev to transparently muse on contemporary developments:

Generally speaking, one can notice in our history a strange phenomenon: the émigrés always consider themselves more clever and significant than the natives. The nuts stay in some free country, haven't got the foggiest idea of what's happening in their ex-fatherland, drink their coffee or wine in a pub, and give advice to their enslaved brethren how to wield their struggle. But hey, come on here and struggle!—as Levski would tell them in a while.<sup>292</sup>

It is a poignant outburst that illustrates better present-day developments when, for the first time in its history, Bulgaria has become an outmigrating country with a sizeable diaspora, and with complex relations to its fatherland. But Tsanev, who bemoaned the fact that history is being rewritten all the time,<sup>293</sup> has become a historian himself and, despite his disclaimers, writes for the present and about it (even when he is not aware of it).

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290 Tsanev, *Bilgarski khroniki (1453–1878)*, 184–5.

291 Not only does Karavelov emerge as an indecisive, pedantic, unimaginative, pompous and arrogant demagogue and intellectual, his whole behavior after Levski's death and particularly his break with Botev is explained as the burden of his guilt (and possibly accusation by Botev) for having unconsciously betrayed the Apostle, after the archive of the Central Committee was stolen and found its way to the Ottoman authorities. (Ibid., 162, 178–81, 187–98, 219–31)

292 Ibid., 196.

293 Tsanev, *Bilgarski khroniki (2137 BC–1453 AD)*, 21.

None of the fictional portrayals of Levski allow themselves any deviation from the biographically documented and later canonized image. This is especially clear with the temptation to describe a love scene. The first biographers, as well as all memoirs are unanimous that Levski was the par excellence ascetic, and there is not even the slightest hint of any liaison. Tsanev is particularly livid with the philistine notion (expressed usually by people who adore Levski but whose worldview does not allow them to deprive him of virility) that an attractive male like Levski would hide in a convent, and not take advantage of the young pretty nuns. Tsanev, quite correctly, emphasizes that Levski remained true to his monastic vows, and his 1864 act was not a hedonistic release but a solemn dedication to a new and lofty cause.<sup>294</sup> In this, he differs slightly from his friend Genchev. Genchev also mocked the philistines and never wrote anything about Levski's intimate life (since there was no evidence whatsoever) but deep down he also could not understand the nature or appeal of abstinence.<sup>295</sup>

Dichev's novel *Za svobodata* became the basis for the sole, but quite successful and popular, feature film about Levski until 1989.<sup>296</sup>

294 Tsanev, *Bilgarski khroniki (1453–1878)*, 184–5.

295 The only way he dared express it in writing was by describing and explaining the people's reticence over this topic in an ambivalent and convoluted prose in one paragraph on the last page of his book: "it is not known, it should not be known, that Levski had a wife or lover... The people know that its hero is a strong man, a veritable lion. But it allows no one to link him with any woman in an intimate relationship... In this case, the people again checks itself... It doesn't want its hero to descend his pedestal for some petticoat. It does not forget that Christ was conceived by God's will. And, as with any taboo, the believers are well aware of the truth, but they avoid it in all cases because they do not want to soil themselves with it" (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 218). Most persistent is the rumored link to the nun Evgeniia (1850–1912), a well respected cultural figure who was Levski's junior, and there is the possibility that they met for a very brief time in Belgrade in 1868 where she studied until 1872. The issue is broached (negatively) in an interesting, to my knowledge still unpublished, scholarly article by Elena Georgieva, curator of the Karlovo museums: "Monakhinia Evgeniia Iv. Boiadzhieva, Levski i romanit Pod igoto." The 16-page article is written in 1986, and is preserved in the private archive of Doino Doinov at the Central State Archive (*Tsentralen Dirzhaven Arkhiv, Chastni Postipleniia—TsDA, ChP 130, papka 30*). It speaks the unsubiding interest in this problematic.

296 In fact, the first feature film about Levski was shot in 1933 by the actor turned director Vasil Gendov, with his wife Zhana Gendova in the role of

Dichev himself wrote the script for the ten-series TV film *The Demon of the Empire*, released in 1971. The film was directed by the theater director Vili Tsankov, and its consultant was Ivan Undzhiev. It featured a cast of the most prominent actors of the time: Ivan Dobrev as Levski, Georgi Cherkelov as Midhat Pasha, Georgi Kaloianchev, Kosta Tsonev, Mikhail Mikhailov, Rusi Chanev, Naum Shopov, Ivan Kondov, Violeta Gindeva, Nikola Todev, Dzhoko Rosich, Dimitir Bochev, Leo Comforti, Ilka Zafirova, Anton Gorchev, Marin Ianey, Zhana Stoianovich, Bogomil Simeonov. Its popularity stemmed exclusively from the fact that it was staged as an adventure film, a kind of national Western, with a focus on Levski's agility, and was fondly referred to as the "Dzhingibi" film (*cin gibi*, Turkish for "demon-like," the epithet for which Levski was known among his persecutors whom he successfully eluded). In a recent interview, Tsankov shared that there was pressure to drop the film, mostly due to protests from Turkey, alleging that it made fun of the Turkish army. Zhivkov himself defended the film, jokingly leaving it to his foreign minister to settle the problem. Asked why today no one dares make a film about Levski, Tsankov replied: "When we were shooting *The Demon of the Empire*, the times were romantic. The Apostle was our hero. Now completely different things are on the agenda. Even the outward similarity would be irrelevant. Our theater and cinema relinquished the chance to experience and emphasize the spiritual. Only the show is valued."<sup>297</sup>

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the nun Khristina. The film—*Buntit na robite* (The Revolt of the Slaves)—elicited an overreaction from the Turkish government. Clearly unaware of or insensitive to the iconic status Levski had reached by that time, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested that this was essentially a Bulgarian national propaganda film that "depicts and demonstrates the imagined tyranny which the Bulgarians experienced under 500 years of Turkish rule" and whose "crude and ugly depiction" would offend the feelings of Turks and "instigate Bulgarian ideas against us." A report by the Turkish consul in Varna even intimated that Zhana Gendova was a former prostitute in the brothels of Paris (Ebru Boyar, *Ottomans, Turks and the Balkans: Empire Lost, Relations Altered*, London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies; *Library of Ottoman Studies* 12 (2007), 144–5). On the early chapters of Bulgarian cinematography, see Aleksandir Grozev. *Nachaloto: iz istoriata na bilgarskoto kino 1895–1956*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1985.

297 Vili Tsankov, "Niamame aktior nito za Levski, nito za Hamlet," *Standart* XIV, No. 5216, July 18, 2007. In fact, another TV film was made in 2003

Physically, Levski's image today is ubiquitous. In all its guises—portraits, sculptures, monuments, paintings, drawings, illustrations, medallions, coins, stamps, even cartoons—it keeps close to the realism of the photographs. The version that—purely graphically—is the most interesting, insofar as it deviates from the canonical realistic image of the photograph, was Levski's canonical image as an icon. Even there, of the three known iconic versions, two stuck pedantically to the portrait.<sup>298</sup> Apart from the seven known photographs, the first artful rendering of Levski's image is a naïve drawing (from 1879–1880) of Levski's execution by Simeon Simeonov (1853–1881). In the 1880s and 1890s, the artist and national revolutionary Georgi Danchev, who knew Levski personally, produced a series of portraits (oil canvases and lithographs) that became widely circulated and immensely popular (see Plate 6). The great painter Ivan Mirkvichka also added illustrations to Vazov's stories in the 1890s. One of the most recognizable images of Levski, also from this period, is the fine bronze medallion (in high relief) on Levski's monument in Sofia, crafted by the Viennese sculptor Rudolf Weir (see Plate 7). Painters and sculptors seem to have been far less coy with the Levski theme than writers. All in all, several dozen portraits or sculptures were produced until the Second World War, and hundreds after the war. A number of the most significant artists touched upon one aspect or other of the Levski topic: Boris Angelushev, Ivan Lazarov, Marin Vasilev, Liubomir Dalchev, Alexander Zhendov, Stoian Venev, Nikola Mirchev, Nikola Kozhukharov, Sergei Ivoilov, Ruska Marinova, Kalina Taseva, Naiden

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but without any impact: *Tainata vecheria na Diakona Levski*, directed by Dimitir Sharkov, Daniel Tsochev as Levski, and historical consultant Bozhidar Dimitrov ([http://programata.bnt.bg/node\\_103/node\\_394/2003\\_7](http://programata.bnt.bg/node_103/node_394/2003_7)). Kirila Vizvizova-Karateodorova, who hated the film, writes in her recollections of Undzhiev that Alexander Burmov had refused to participate in it, after he had read the script: Tsveta Undzhieva, *Ivan Undzhiev: Izgrazhdaneto na choveka i ucheniia*, Sofia: Polis, 2002, 98. It bears mention that Radoi Ralin, the celebrated satirist, also wrote what he called a cinema-novel between 1971 and 1974, likely as a response to the film but published it only 20 years later (Radoi Ralin, *Az sim Levski. Kinoroman*, Plovdiv: Izdatelstvo Khr. G. Danov, 1994). It is a straightforward laudatory story with nothing potentially objectionable ideologically.

298 For the presentation of these images, see Part III.



Figure 16a. Banknote with the image of Levski.

Petkov, Dimitir Giudzhenov, Ivan Petrov, Khristo Neikov, Dechko Uzunov, Zhechko Popov, Todor Panaiotov.<sup>299</sup>

For all of Levski's ubiquity, remarkably there has never emerged a lucrative commemorative industry around his image. True, a few postcards exist (usually reproductions of artists' work, and on sale usually at Levski's museum in Karlovo). A few times stamps with his image were issued: one in 1929, two in 1953, one each in 1957, 1963, and 2007.<sup>300</sup> He is used very sparingly on money signs. Twice in the history of the modern Bulgarian state, commemorative silver coins were cast with his image: once, in 1973, for the 100th anniversary of his execution, and then again, in 1987, for the 150th anniversary of his birth.<sup>301</sup> (See Plate 8.) Levski was even taken out of the banknote images during the last change. Until the end of 1999, his image circulated on the 1,000 leva banknote, next to other prominent historical

299 All the information in this paragraph comes from Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia: Bilgarski khudozhnik, 1976, 5–46. See also Maria Ovcharova, *Botev i Levski i khudozhnitsite satiritsi*, Sofia: Dirzhavno izdatelstvo "Septemvri," 1976. I was also informed that in 2005, a TV show announced the opening of an exhibition in Pleven, at which an artist displayed two wax figures of Levski and Botev. This was the beginning of a whole wax collection of Bulgarian historical figures.

300 Popov, *Vasil Levski*, 44; *Standart XIV*, No. 5216, July 18, 2007.

301 *Catalogue of Bulgarian Coins (1879–2004)*, Sofia: Bulgarian National Bank, 2004.



**Figure 16b.** Stamp with Levski image from 1929 by Khristo Lozev.

Source: Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bŭlgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia: Bŭlgarski khudozhnik, 1976, Reproduction 95.

figures of the Bulgarian Revival Period: the painter Zakharii Zograf on the 100 levs; Ivan Vazov on the 200 levs; the composer Dimitŭr Khristov on the 500 levs; the architect Nikola Ficheto on the 2,000 levs; the writer and revolutionary Zakhari Stoianov on the 5,000 levs; both the educator Petŭr Beron (1799–1871) and the artist Vladimir Dimitrov-Maistora (1882–1960) were on different emissions of the 10,000 levs banknote; finally, Paisii of Khilendar (b. 1722) was on the 50,000 levs. The money signs after 1999 utilized new images spanning the course of Bulgarian history. There does not seem to be any particular criterion for the choice of images aside from the desire to circulate more nationally significant names among the population. However, when talking to people in the streets about this, they would not ponder on the symbolism of the

images but approve of taking Levski off the banknote: it does not behoove his purity to be soiled with money.

Levski cannot be seen on t-shirts (with one exception), and the only tiny pin with his image that I have seen was on sale at his Karlovo museum, next to two small magnets: one with the seal of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, the other with his portrait. Still, it is difficult to resist the commercialization of about everything, and even the official keepers of the Levski flame—the Bulgarian Committee “Vasil Levski” (*Obshtobŭlgarski komitet “Vasil Levski”*) are making use of it but in a solemn fashion. Preparing for the festivities dedicated to the 170th anniversary of Levski’s birth (July, 2007), they have issued 170 medals with Levski’s image that will be distributed to worthy Bulgarians. The medal is accompanied by a new DVD of the group “Episode,” performing patriotic rocks pieces, of which the hit “Levski” is based on Vazov’s lyrics.<sup>302</sup> Finally, a recent fashion has been lately

302 “Patriotichen rok v chest na Levski,” *Trud*, June 24, 2007. The one t-shirt exception is on sale at the website of the Macedonian organization (VMRO) for a mere 6 levs: <http://vmropd.org/magazin.php>. Thanks to Andreas Lyberatos for drawing my attention to this website.

reported to me of tatoos with Levski's image, carried proudly by its bearers as something sacred.

His name is used more often but, as a rule, for serious purposes, like naming streets, schools, and libraries (see Plate 9). At the same time, there have been voices deploring the desacralization of the name. Already in 1937, Emil Shekerdzhiski was concerned that with Levski becoming the name of the local school or sports club, it was losing its message: "This attitude is ruinous for the young generation. It ceases to understand the enormous significance of this national giant."<sup>303</sup> Levski has also become a toponym. Scholars from the Bulgarian Antarctic base on Livingston Island have named after him a mountain peak, rising to approximately 1,430 meters in the western extremity of Levski Ridge, Tangra Mountains, Livingston Island in the South Shetlands Archipelago.<sup>304</sup> Even such a central and sacred national hero as the Albanian Georgi Kastrioti Skanderbeg, whose ultimate position in the Albanian pantheon is reminiscent of Vasil Levski, has a famous three-star brandy named after him, and another cheaper version coming from the "George Kastrioti Distillery." Levski thus far has escaped the appetite of gourmands. But both Skanderbeg and Levski have lent their names to the most popular soccer teams of their countries, in Skanderbeg's case in a charming case of split personality, with "Skanderbeg" (Korca) playing against "Kastrioti" (Kruja).<sup>305</sup> Still, while soccer fans passionately roar *Samo Levski* (Only Levski) in the stadiums and in the streets, and the respective graffiti decorate walls and fences, in their minds this "Levski" is completely dissociated from the Real Levski. Remarkably, the team itself does not capitalize on the name as can be seen from a perusal of its organ—the popular newspaper "Levski."<sup>306</sup>

303 Emil Shekerdzhiski, *Levski za sebe si*, Sofia, 1937, cited in Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva, *Levski: Bukvi ot imeto*, Sofia: Primaprint, 2001, 121.

304 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levski\\_Peak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levski_Peak). Other peaks and ridges named after Bulgarian heroes include St. Ivan Rilski, Shishman, Yavorov, Sparatcus, Asen, Delchev, Vaptsarov, Peshev, Kaloian, Paisii, Botev, Simeon, St. Cyril, St. Methodius, Tervel, Samuil.

305 Gjergji Misha, "L'Albanais George Castrioti Skanderbeg: héros mythique ou civil," in Pierre Centilivres, Daniel Fabre and Françoise Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1998, 188.

306 The newspaper *Levski. Vestnik na privirzhenitsite na FK "Levski,"* founded in 1933, was reinstated in 1991, and has thus far produced 241 is-



**Figure 17.** School photograph, 1987. "Levski, with pioneers, a teacher, two marginals and a portrait of the dissident as a young man."

This section on Levski's image will end with a photograph from the late 1980s, depicting a classroom of third-graders. They have been recently admitted to the membership of the pioneer organization which gives them the right (and obligation) to wear red scarves. The photograph shows the ubiquitous Levski portrait and one could entitle it blandly *Levski in the schoolroom*, were it not for the fact that this is such a typical title that it borders on the boring. Instead, I have called it *Levski, with pioneers, a teacher, two marginals and a portrait of the dissident as a young man*. The two marginals are the two melancholy figures

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sues, coming out every 3 weeks. The first issue of the bulletin *Levski I*, No. 1, November, 1964, a publication of the athletic society "Levski" in Sofia, even printed a satirical story by St. Bebevski about a boy in a history class who cannot distinguish the hero from the team (35-7). Lately, a curious ethnicization of the traditional rivalry between the two premier soccer teams—*Levski* and *TsSKA*—has taken place. *Levski* was bought by Michael Chernii, a Russian-Israeli magnate, and *TsSKA* fans started shouting "kikes" to its players. The response was "Turks" or "fezes" (the traditional Ottoman headgear). When asked why, the *Levski* fans explained that Levski fought against the Turks and they were his greatest enemy; likewise *TsSKA* was their greatest enemy. "Since we are Levski, they are Turks." I thank my brother Virban Todorov for supplying me with this incredible information on athletic identification and ascription.

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to the right of the photograph. They are the two boys with white shirts but without their red scarves. The entire class has been asked to wear their uniform for the day of the photograph. The two have apparently not yet been admitted into the ranks of the select, because they have not forgotten to put on the white shirts. Could one read resignation, if not alienation, in their faces? The boy to the right of the teacher, well within her clutch, does not even wear a white shirt, let alone the red scarf. I have tentatively called him the dissident. I am not sure whether he (purposely) forgot to wear what he was supposed to or whether his mother “was away on business.” In any case, it makes a nice figure of speech. The dissident’s name is Alex. He is my son.



## 6. From Hero for All to Dissident and Back

The review of Levski's reception and appropriation in the interwar period, especially in comparison to the respective reception of Botev, shows that both figures, despite certain idiosyncratic trends in their legacy highlighted by different political groups, had been explicitly accepted as common national figures. Both were truly heroes for all. The assertion that Botev and Levski were pitched against each other already in this period, and that after 1944 the communists had elevated Botev as their exclusive symbol at the expense of Levski who was allegedly largely forgotten, was a later hyperbolic interpolation, dating from the 1970s and especially the 1980s, and serving a particular political idea. This does not mean that Botev had not become the slightly preferred figure in the first couple of decades after the end of the Second World War. As already shown, with his explicit endorsement of the communist ideal, he had been raised as the banner of the communist movement. The whole tenure of communist historiography at the time was also such as to posit a teleological and ideological evolution that had to be crowned with an embrace of the socialist idea. At the same time, the fact that Levski had become the patron of the fascist Legion movement, in no way diminished his status as a major figure in the heroic pantheon. On the contrary, September 9, 1944 was posited to be the materialization of Levski's dream of a "pure and holy republic."<sup>307</sup> The best way to define the official attitude until the 1960s is to say that there was no fascination with Levski comparable to the one that began in the 1970s and continuing until today.

Even as Botev might have been slightly privileged, there was nothing like an obsession with him. A look at the protocols of the Polit-

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<sup>307</sup> *Otechestven front*, August 8, 1946, cited in Claudia Weber, "Geschichte und Macht. Die kommunistische Geschichtspolitik in Bulgarien 1944–1948," in Angela Richter and Barbara Beyer, eds., *Geschichte (ge)brauchen. Literatur und Geschichtskultur im Staatssozialismus: Jugoslawien und Bulgarien*, Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2006, 86.

buro dealing with anniversaries in the 1940s and 1950s, shows that the emphasis was on celebrations of communist events and figures: the yearly official celebrations of September 9 (1944) and of the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as commemorations of Georgi Dimitrov, especially after his death in 1949. This did not mean, however, that these celebrations entirely monopolized the public space. In 1946, the main events and individuals to be commemorated (outside of the official national holidays) were the following: the 70th anniversary of the Batak uprising of 1876; the second anniversary of the heroic death of 138 partisans from the “Anton Ivanov” partisan brigade; the 70th anniversary of Panaiot Volov, a national revolutionary; the 64th anniversary of Georgi Dimitrov; the anniversary of Iane Sandanski’s death (in 1915); the 330th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death; the 10th anniversary of Maxim Gorkii’s death; and the millennial anniversary of St. John of Rila (Sveti Ivan Rilski), the venerated medieval saint-patron of Bulgaria.<sup>308</sup> There were celebrations scheduled to commemorate Botev’s 100th anniversary in 1948 but the budget was comparatively modest, and there was explicitly warning not to extend it further.<sup>309</sup> The 80th anniversary of Levski’s death was commemorated in 1953 and the 80th anniversary of Botev’s death in 1956.<sup>310</sup> In the deliberations about the celebrations, there is nothing to indicate any ideological preference. If Botev’s name is mentioned somewhat more often, it is because the day of his death—June 2—had become the national day commemorating the roll of honor from the struggles for national liberation against the Ottoman Empire, as well as against capitalism and

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308 TsDA, Tsentralen Partien Arkhiv (TsPA), Politbiuro i sekretariat. *Tematicni opisi-chestvaniia 1945–1967*.

309 TsDA, Fond 1, op. 6, a.e. 531, Protokol 143, July 19, 1948; Fond 1, op. 8, a.e. 187, Protokol 26, October 23, 1948; Fond 1, op. 6, a.e. 568, Protokol 4, January 6, 1949.

310 TsDA, Fond 1, op. 8, a.e. 3092, Protokol 479, November 26, 1952; Fond 1, op. 6, a.e. 2829, Protokol 70, April 26, 1956. One can read a preference for Botev in the fact that it was decided to ask the USSR and the other people’s democracies to organize commemorations for Botev in 1956. On the other hand, the then ascending Zhivkov read an enormous paper on Levski, extolling him, maybe for the occasion, even over Botev and Dimitrov: “Osemdeset godini ot obesvaneto na velikiia bilgarski revoliutsioner-demokrat Vasil Levski,” *Rabotnicheskoto delo*, February 20, 1953, in Todor Zhivkov, *Izkustvoto, naukata i kulturata v sluzhba na naroda*, vol. 1, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1965, 40–63.

fascism. By the 1960s there seems to be complete parity: Levski's and Botev's 90th anniversaries were commemorated in 1963 and 1966 respectively and the centenary of Levski's death in 1973 received special attention.<sup>311</sup>

The scholarly output largely continued the trends set up in the interwar period, although there was, of course, the growing allegiance to the new Marxist jargon, especially in class analysis. Undzhiev's seminal biography, started in the 1930s and continuing Strashimirov's work from the 1920s, was completed in 1945 and published in 1947. The 1940s and 1950s saw the publication of specialized works by Khristo Gandev, Nikola Kondarev, Alexander Burmov, Mikhail Dimitrov and others, whose research had started in the interwar period, and Dimităr Kosev added his "Lectures on Modern Bulgarian History" that became the official university course until the publication of the several collective multivolume histories by the Institute of History of BAN.<sup>312</sup> The veritable boom in Levski studies occurred, however, from the 1960s on, at the time of his two anniversary celebrations: the 100th anniversary of his death in 1873 and the 150th anniversary of his birth in 1987.<sup>313</sup>

311 TsDA, Fond 1, op. 6, a.e. 5032, Protokol 19, January 19, 1963; Protokol KD-126, December 27, 1966; Fond 1, op. 35, a.e. 3147, Protokol 400, May 19, 1972.

312 For a review of the historiographical production, see Plamen Mitev, "Istoricheskata knizhnina za Vasil Levski mezhdu dve krigli godishnini," *Istoriia* 5 (1997), 17–24; Rumen Daskalov, *Kak se misli bilgarsoto Vizrazhdane*, Sofia: LIK, 2002, 257–9; Tsevetana Pavlovska, *Vasil Levski i vitreshnata revoliutsionna organizatsiia*, Sofia: Sv.Georgi Pobedonosets, 1994, 3–17; also the literature mentioned in the endnotes to the chapters on Levski in *Istoriia na Bilgariia. Vol. 6. Bilgarsko Vizrazhdane 1856–1871*, Sofia, 1987, 262–324.

313 *Velik i bezsmirten. Materiali ot nauchnata sesii, organizirana na 16 fevruari 1963 g. v gr. Karlovo, po sluchai 90-godishninata ot obesvaneto na Vasil Levski*, Plovdiv: Khristo G. Danov, 1963; As. Kalinkov, B. Cholpanov, D. Khristov, D. Doinov, Ts. Genov, *Voenno-revoliutsionnoto delo na V.Levski, L.Karavelov, Khr.Botev I G.Benkovski*, Sofia: Dirzhavno voenno izdatelstvo, 1964; *Sviata i chista republika: Dokladi i nauchni siobshteniia ot sesiata po sluchai 100-godishninata ot gibelta na Vasil Levski*, Iambol: Gradski komitet na BKP, Gradski naroden svet Iambol, 1973; Alexander Andreev, Georgi Danov, Stefan Doinov, Zina Mrakova, Stoian Neikov, Todor Neikov, Boris Nikolov, Ivan Raikov, *Neulovimiiat (Po stipkite na Levski)*, Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1973; Zhechko Popov. *Bez sin, bez*

At the time of the 1973 centenary commemoration a trend was set that elevated Levski in the subsequent decade to the role of dissident icon. This process can be traced directly to the work of Nikolai Genchev (1931–2000), a much celebrated and popular historian of nineteenth and twentieth-century Bulgarian history. In 1973 he published a small booklet of 150 pages: “Levski, the Revolution and the Future World.”<sup>314</sup> Because this book in particular and its author in general achieved a mythic status, it is mandatory to look at it in some detail. Years later, in his memoirs written in the mid-1980s but published only posthumously in 2005, Genchev wrote that this book “slipped through the authorities’ fingers, and they were really mad against its author, this time with good reason.”<sup>315</sup> The reasons are analyzed below but there is the question about the “authorities.” Genchev lets slip in the next pages that

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*pokoi. Kniga za Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Narodna Mladezh, 1986; Kirila Vizvizova and Nikolai Genchev, eds., *Vasil Levski: dokumentalno nasledstvo*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1973 (this is the edition whose introduction by Genchev was taken off while it was already in print, and substituted by the sole introduction of Vizvizova ); *Vasil Levski, 1837–1987: Bio-bibliografija*, Sofia: Narodna biblioteka “Kiril I Metodii,” 1987; Khristo Khristov, ed., *Vasil Levski (1837–1987). Izsledvaniia*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1987; Kirila Vizvizova-Karateodorova, Zdravka Noneva, Viktoriia Tileva, *Vasil Levski: Dokumentalna letopis, 1837–1973*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Petir Beron,” 1987; Kirila Vizvizova-Karateodorova, Zdravka Noneva, Viktoriia Tileva, eds., *Lichniiat belezhnik (dzhobnoto tefterche) na Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1987; Nikolai Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voeno izdatelstvo, 1987; Ivan Ivanov, *Vasil Levski, 1837–1873: literaturni, metodicheski i bibliografski materialii za podpomagane rabotata na bibliotekite pri organizirane na chesvaniata po sluchai 150-godishinata ot rozhdenieto na Levski*, Sofia: Narodna biblioteka “Kiril I Metodii,” 1987; Khristo Ionkov and Stoianka Ionkova, *Vasil Levski i bilgarskata natsionalna revoliutsiia*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1987 (a wonderfully edited album of photographs from the period of the 1860s and 1870s); Dimitir Tsanev, Stefan Prodev, *Vremeto e v nas i nie sme viv vremeto*, Sofia: Dirzhavno izdatelstvo “Septemvri,” 1986; Nikolai Zhechev, ed., *Nemu raven drug niamashe. Spomeni, pisma i izkazvaniia za Vasil Levski ot negovi sivremennitsi i siratnitsi*, Sofia: Voeno izdatelstvo, 1987; Aneta Inakieva, Iliia Pekhlianov, Miroslav Popov, Roksandra Apostolova, eds., *Pesen za Apostola*, Sofia: TsK na DKMS, 1987; Petir Karaivanov, *Vasil Levski po spomeni na Vasil Karaivanov*, Sofia: Otechestven Front, 1987. Also articles by Virzhiniia Paskaleva, Veselin Traikov, Krumka Sharova, Tsvetan Simeonov, Vasil Boianov and others in *Istorigheski pregled*, 1984, No. 5; 1987, No. 7, 12.

314 Genchev, *Levski, revoliutsiata i bideshniia sviat*, op. cit.

315 Genchev, *Spomeni*, 254.

even though the committee of the press sent a telegram to bookstores to stop selling the book till further notice, two thousand copies had already been sold, and Genchev adds that the remaining eight thousand were released soon.<sup>316</sup> Who in a small country like Bulgaria could publish 10,000 copies of an academic book without the “authorities”? Obviously someone with direct access to the them. The complexity stems from the simple fact that the anonymous “authorities” were a many-headed hydra, and Genchev was friends with only an assortment of these heads.

His memoirs allow us to extrapolate a brief biography in this respect. Born in a poor and uneducated peasant family in 1931, Nikolai Genchev was only 13 at the end of the Second World War, and his vitality, alert mind and charismatic presence made him a natural leader: by 1949 he was already head of his high school’s communist youth organization in Tŭrnovo where he had moved for his studies. Although he could enter the university in 1949, he preferred to join the District Party Committee. In 1951 he decided to pursue higher education and during his student years, he again headed the communist youth organization of the history and philosophy department, already as a party member. Upon completing his education in 1956, he had offers to join the Institute of the History of the Bulgarian Communist Party, to become director of the Tŭrnovo Historical Museum, or to become a professional party functionary in Sofia. After he arrived in Tŭrnovo to assume the directorial post, he was offered to join the city committee of the BCP instead. Genchev refused and through a variety of close friends and colleagues, whose names were later well known in the upper echelons of the party nomenclatura, managed to receive a position as head of the university youth organization of the School for Engineering (*Inzhenerno-Stroitelnen Institut—ISI*) in Sofia. In 1957 he was in charge of the propaganda department *Propaganda i agitatsiia* of the Lenin District in Sofia, and by 1958 he joined the Central Committee of the Komsomol. Already disappointed in party politics since the time of the Hungarian Revolution, his fervor tamed, by 1959 he became an assistant professor at the Department of History of the University of Sofia. During the first few years at the university he produced a booklet, co-authored with Ilcho Dimitrov, on the history of the communist youth organization in the period 1944–1947.

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316 *Ibid.*, 256.

The year 1963, according to Genchev's account, was a turning point for him. For one, he fended off yet another offer to join the party nomenclatura and "forever bid farewell to a political career, in the sense of a party functionary."<sup>317</sup> Secondly, he got involved in a "happening" that set in motion his subsequent lifelong engagement with Levski as well as his reputation as an unpredictable and courageous maverick. The event took place on December 8, the traditional university students' day that had not been celebrated since the war. In 1958 there were voices to reinstate this very popular holiday among the academic community, and Genchev takes credit for being among the ones initiating the campaign. According to him, the celebration among the historians took place on the first floor of the department with a lot of food, drinks and music. There was temperamental dancing on the tables amidst glasses and plates, and around 3:00 a.m. Genchev called on the group "to go to the monument of Levski to pay our respects according to tradition." Everyone headed to the monument that was a 5 minutes' walk away, singing a popular patriotic nineteenth-century song with the refrain: "Enough slavery and tyranny." It is worth hearing the voice of the professor:

Drunk and decisive, I climbed the pedestal and ordered in a loud voice: "Get to your knees in front of the spirit of the greatest Bulgarian!" After this I held the following speech to the silent and kneeling assembly:

"Dear colleagues, we have knelt here in reverential respect before the Apostle. But why did we forget his three precepts: Levski taught us to love our people, and to respect democracy, while we run after every despot. Levski showed how to die for Bulgaria, while we give pledges to foreign states and foreign interests."

The moment I pronounced "It is a shame, my students and colleagues," I saw that the silent kneeling assembly is surrounded on all sides by jeeps and militia. At this moment Ilcho Dimitrov pushed me from the pedestal and started explaining something to the students. I must have thought that, if the militia had heard my words, it would begin to disperse the meeting, so I climbed the pedestal once again and shouted:

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317 Ibid., 112.

“Let us not forget the nice traditions of this holiday! Whoever is ready, follow me to break at least some shop windows on Ruski Boulevard.”<sup>318</sup>

Genchev’s friends tried to dissuade the students from listening to him, and finally, urged by Genchev, they all went back to the university to go on with their drinks, continuing to sing Dobri Chintulov’s patriotic songs. The militia dispersed without any incidents. It needs to be specified that among Genchev’s friends at the event, he names two: Ilcho Dimitrov, his close friend and co-author, future Rector of the University and minister of education in the 1980s, and Georgi Atanasov, likewise his friend and colleague, at the time secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol and future prime minister under Zhivkov in the 1980s.

Next morning, Genchev woke up “with the feeling that I had done something irreparable. It was clear to me that if the authorities learn about the events at the monument, however veiled the meaning of my speech, I won’t get away with it.” Well, one can only note that some of the “authorities” were next to him at the happening. For several days Genchev was expecting to be summoned for an explanation. Finally, at the end of December, Ivan Abadzhiev, another Komsomol leader who missed the happening at the monument simply because he retreated somewhat earlier having been caught with a female student in the cloakroom, asked him to visit him at the Central Committee of the youth organization. There, without ever mentioning the incident, he offered him the post of councilor on youth affairs to the Algerian government. He added that this would offer Genchev the opportunity to see an interesting part of the world and, “most importantly, would allow me to make some money, improve my lot and buy myself a car.”<sup>319</sup> Genchev thought the offer over for a day and concluded that his friends were trying to get him out of the Bulgarian atmosphere, although he did not specify what dangers lay ahead had he stayed. In any case, he defended his dissertation in February 1964, and on March 1, 1964 was already in Algeria where he spent one year, underutilized by

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318 *Ibid.*, 113. Most impressive is the verbatim memory of the drunk professor about his speech. He wrote this specific part of his memoirs in 1984 (p. 115).

319 *Ibid.*, 114–5.

the Algerian government but accumulating materials for a book on the Algerian Revolution that he published in 1967.<sup>320</sup>

When he returned in 1965 and resumed his position at the university, Genchev became closely involved with the journal *Mladezh* (Youth) whose editorial board he joined. He was instrumental in publishing an article by the philosopher Nikolai Iribadzhakov attacking the long-time Politburo member and godfather of academic life Todor Pavlov (incidentally also the founder of the journal in the 1920s) who had become, in the apt phrase of Genchev, “the father of the Bulgarian communist conservatism.”<sup>321</sup> While Genchev somewhat unconvincingly pleads innocent ignorance and claims that at the journal they were not informed about the political configurations in the highest echelons of the party, the critical article against Pavlov earned them the benevolence of Todor Zhivkov. The editors of *Mladezh* were invited to an official dinner with Zhivkov at the former royal residence Vrana. According to Genchev, Zhivkov entertained the group with crude jokes, loud laughter and drinks the whole evening and told them, *inter alia*:

I am a modern person like all of you but my position obliges me to conform to Marxism. Don't think, however, that I am a fool. I even know that this nineteenth-century teaching cannot explain the phenomena of our electronic era. But the people and, especially the youth, need to believe; without belief nothing can be achieved with the young generation.<sup>322</sup>

Encouraged by this highest benevolence (Genchev with his usual wit-ness stressed as a typical Bulgarian characteristic that even the greatest liberals and the most extreme heretics loved to receive a pat on the shoulder by the Sultan), he submitted an article to the journal that was published in August, 1966. This article, entitled “*Magistra vitae, but when?*” became, for Genchev, “the most dramatic moment in my life, the source of all my subsequent tribulations and misfortunes.”<sup>323</sup> Its gist was an attack on the national nihilism of the Bulgarians who had settled for a crudely falsified version of their past. Kievan Rus was only

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320 Ibid., 115–22.

321 Ibid., 126

322 Ibid., 128.

323 Ibid., 125, 129.

a pale copy of medieval Bulgaria but today it had acquired the radiance of a world cultural and political center while Bulgaria was known only to the specialists. What was the reason for the Bulgarians' slow progress, asked Genchev, was it something genetic, was it "because we had not enough real men like Levski"? The article, as he himself summarizes it, "was a spontaneous journalistic outburst of the outrage that was boiling in me, and not only in me, against the continuous and conscious falsification of Bulgarian history after September 9 [1944], deliberately pursued by the Bulgarian communists in the interests of the USSR."<sup>324</sup>

Bulgaria's official subservient and sycophantic attitude vis-à-vis the Russians was widely deplored and widely (though privately) discussed but, while nationalism had received the green light in the 1960s, anti-Russian articulations were taboo. Genchev thus spelled out what was on the minds and hearts of many intellectuals. The journal issue with his article (*Mladezh*, 1966, No. 8) virtually disappeared from the kiosks, and it became the buzz of the city. More important than its contents was the style, out-and-out Genchev: epigrammatic, conversational, making big and splashing generalizations, quick, witty, often risky, often populist, often plebeian, very virile, with frequent sexual innuendo. It was the accepted style of the semi-intellectual café culture but one that few, if any, dared bring openly into the institutional corridors of academia or power. Genchev was performing it with gusto, not only at his lectures, but now also in writing. There should be no doubt that he was endowed with considerable charm: this was the common consensus of both admirers and detractors. Of course, charm is not a commodity that is easily quantifiable, let alone comparable or generalizable. It does not have a gold standard or unit of measurement. Nonetheless, it would be safe to say that Genchev had a particular charm that had (and has) a particular valence in Bulgaria.

The French *Le Monde* and the foreign press in general, picked up on Genchev's article and, since *Mladezh* was the official publication of the Komsomol, came to the conclusion that "Bulgaria was returning to nationalism and attempting to differentiate itself from the Soviets."<sup>325</sup> This was true but this was not how it was scripted above, and Genchev's escapade had some, although not fatal, repercussions. He was rep-

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324 Ibid., 130–1.

325 Ibid., 137.

rimanded at the Central Committee of the BCP for being irresponsible, but his fate was to be decided by the Komsomol organization. According to Genchev, the then Rector of the university, Academician Kosev, called him and told him the Komsomol wanted him fired. Kosev was prepared to fend off the danger for another week but advised Genchev to get directly to Zhivkov. And this is what Genchev did, using the channels of his university male support group, in this case Alexander Fol who was close to Zhivkov's daughter Liudmila. A couple of days later, the Central Committee of the Komsomol received a phone call from Zhivkov who told them not to touch either the editorial board of *Mladezh* or the author of the article.<sup>326</sup> Crisp and efficient. It is also the pattern of Genchev's relationship with the authorities. What is more amazing is how this tolerated *enfant terrible* of the regime managed to acquire the reputation of an authentic dissident.

The next few years following this incident that Genchev describes as "tough years" were punctuated by a series of drunken raucous affairs (mostly whiskey and cognac) taking place exclusively in the company of very highly positioned party gentlefolk.<sup>327</sup> Genchev describes them in painstaking detail, the culmination being his row with Fol at the apartment of Liudmila Zhivkova in 1969, and their subsequent physical fight at the time of the World Congress of Historians in Moscow in 1970. Interestingly, Zhivkova warned Genchev to be more careful because "our regime is multi-layered, the different layers acting independently of each other so that, while one layer can tolerate you, another can crush and suffocate you."<sup>328</sup>

He also found room for scholarship. After having published his first two books in 1964 and 1967—*Izgrazhdane na edinen mladezhki s'iuuz v Bilgariia, 1944–1947* (The Formation of the United Youth Alliance in Bulgaria, 1944–1947) and *Alzhirskata natsionalna revoliutsiia, 1954–1962* (The Algerian National Revolution, 1954–1962)—Genchev began work on a study of Bulgaria's foreign policy in the period 1938–1941. He tried to reconstruct a more complex and nuanced picture of Bulgaria's entry into the war by showing the attempts of the monarchy to maneuver in the complicated situation after the

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326 Ibid., 142, 144, 150.

327 Ibid., 151–2, 156–7, 172–4, 187, 202–3, 211–2 (when he even made a written pledge to stop drinking), 212–21, 246–8.

328 Ibid., 218.

Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, and downplayed the role of the communists. The work was completed at the end of 1967, deposited at the *Nauka i Izkustvo* publishing house and, having finally been reviewed positively, awaited its publication. Apparently 5,000 copies were printed but after the 1968 events and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, as well as the incident with a pro-1968 student group among the historians, the book was destroyed.<sup>329</sup> In fact, Genchev managed to publish its several chapters in different academic publications in 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1972, but it came out as a separate book only in 1998.<sup>330</sup> It was this event, however, that finalized his decision to work henceforth only on the nineteenth-century Bulgarian Revival Period, “still naively thinking that this was neutral terrain where the communists were not directly affected, and I could stay true to myself.”<sup>331</sup>

Genchev’s dedication to the Bulgarian Revival lasted for the next couple of decades and is decisive in turning Levski into a symbolic dissident. He had regularly written journalistic pieces dedicated to Levski even before but they were rather anodyne.<sup>332</sup> In 1973, his aforementioned *Levski, revoliutsiata i bideshtiiat sviat* came out, written according to him in a fortnightly spurt of inspiration. In his memoirs, Genchev explains that his inspiration and ease stemmed from the greatness of Levski, from the fact that he knew all the documentation practically by heart, and “third, because Levski with his undying ideas and deeds majestically rose against all ugliness of our contemporary life. Shown in his full stature, he would expose the contemporary rulers as miserable usurpers, tyrants and nonentities.”<sup>333</sup>

329 Ibid., 238–48.

330 Ibid., 240, 241, 250.

331 Ibid., 251.

332 “Pirvoapostola: 90 godini ot obesvaneto na Vasil Levski,” *Narodna mladezh* 39, February 16, 1963; “Osishtestveni li biakha ideite na Levski? Kim 90-godishninata na Aprilskoto vistanie,” *Narodna armia*, No. 5392, February 17, 1966; “Vasil Levski: Pred 95-godishninata ot obesvaneto na Apostola,” *Narodna mladezh* 41, February 18, 1968, all included in Nikolai Genchev, *Izbrani sîchineniia*, vol. III, Publitsistika, 1958–1991, Sofia: Argo, 2004, 12–6, 26–9, 53–5. The first piece accused the “spearmen of bourgeois science” for trying to persuade the Bulgarian youth that Levski was uneducated and illiterate. The third lamented that had Levski been born in a bigger country or written in a more popular language, he would have been celebrated by the whole world today.

333 Genchev, *Spomeni*, 255.

The book itself consists of an introduction and four parts, dedicated accordingly to Levski's theoretical and practical contributions to the national movement, his ideas for the future, and his personality. The introduction explains that Bulgaria "does not need to substitute the clear tones of the original sound of the genius with the surrogate voices of interpretation," and then goes on to offer 150 pages of interpretation meant to "enrich his image with a novel view," "defend him from the dilettantes who tailor him according to their taste and desire," and bring us back to the "genuine Levski."<sup>334</sup> Inspiration often doesn't follow the sounds of logic but rhetorically we are prepared that this writer has a direct line to Levski's soul.

The book is indeed an inspired apologia of Levski, and rereading it today (as well as reading it back in the 1970s), I was amazed that it produced such an uproar. Already at the time (and today again), I felt uneasy with the cheap jibes at the Ottoman Empire (always called Turkey or the Turkish Empire) as "a "barbarous Asiatic machine," "a laughable sack of rubbish," "an Asiatic barbarous system," "a doomed decayed empire, unable to integrate itself in modern society, where any attempt at progress would lead only to the birth of "oriental Asiatic monstrosities."<sup>335</sup> This wouldn't have triggered a backlash from the authorities; if anything, it was in line with the general assertion of nationalism. True, "Asiatic Turkey" may have been meant to be read also (but not only) as a metaphor of Russia and the Soviet Union, a safe way to direct the invectives, and this interpretation was widespread among his students, not a little cultivated by Genchev himself.

Levski was described as the emanation of all the glories and achievements of Bulgaria, and was pronounced to be the embodiment of all of Bulgaria's heroes' individual qualities, "inspired and ennobled by the humanism of the Renaissance, the light of the Enlightenment, and the liberal freethinking of the nineteenth century."<sup>336</sup> If anything, this pompous turn of phrase would enhance Bulgaria's grandeur and Europeaness. Nor was it objectionable at the time (but uncomfortable to read today) to lambaste the theological literature for trying to depict Levski as a religious person: "In his personality and deeds he is a com-

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334 Genchev, *Levski, revoliutsiinata i bideshtiinat sviat*, Sofia: Otechestven front, 1973, 6, 9, 19.

335 Ibid., 27, 28, 98, 144 and passim.

336 Ibid., 148.

plete negation of God and his terrestrial and subterranean worlds; he is a complete negation of the false and hypocritical Christian morality.”<sup>337</sup>

There were only a couple of passages, well buried in the text, that could have produced an adverse reaction. One was eulogizing Levski’s patriotism, his vision for a free united nation “there, where the Bulgarian lives, in Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia.” These were Levski’s words but they were accompanied by a commentary that this radically distinguished him from later politicians who are ready “to trade like grocers the historical rights of the Bulgarian people.”<sup>338</sup> Given that Thrace and Macedonia were shed from the foreign policy program of Bulgaria after the Second World War, it was a transparent criticism of the communist regime. The other extolled Levski’s political perspicacity, in interpreting his vision for the future government as a division between judicial and executive powers: “in this our remarkable democrat saw guarantees against the totalitarian regime, against the tyranny and despotism.”<sup>339</sup> This was a par excellence instance of East European periphrastic. “Totalitarian regime” was the keyword and synonym for communist power, and this was a direct shot, although one that was well calculated and well camouflaged.<sup>340</sup>

Genchev himself mentions “several transparent hints” in the text that, according to him, infuriated the authorities. First, he deemed, was his assertion that Levski was the greatest Bulgarian figure, an ideological and strategic genius, and “communists cannot calmly accept such a historical verdict when not addressed to one of their own theoreticians or leaders.” This, in view of all the preceding analysis, is rather lame. The second and third “hints” are actually the ones highlighted above: that Levski had been appropriated by everyone, including totalitarian regimes, and “it was clear to everyone, that here the communists were meant;” and that Levski espoused democratic ideas contrary to the ideas and practices of the communist regime.<sup>341</sup>

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337 Ibid., 10.

338 Ibid., 109.

339 Ibid., 112.

340 Ten years later, when the future post-1989 president Zheliu Zhelev wrote his dissident critique of the communist regime, he had named his book totalitarianism but the hint was so transparent that he published it under the title “Fascism” (Zheliu Zhelev, *Fashizmът: dokumentalno izsledvane na germanskiia, italianskiia i ispanskiia fashizm*, Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1982.)

341 Genchev, *Spomeni*, 257–8.

In all other respects, and despite the fact that Genchev described his effort as thoroughly revisionist, the book developed ideas that were not politically objectionable. Some were espoused by other authors, others voiced different scholarly views or nuances.<sup>342</sup> These included Genchev's favorite trope of a "crude distortion of the facts and the truth" in depicting Levski as insufficiently educated and lettered; secondly, the alleged juxtaposition with Botev, already analyzed above; thirdly, the objection to interpreting Levski's ideas exclusively within the framework of Mazzinian ideology; and fourthly, the social characteristic of Levski's ideas.<sup>343</sup>

Writing, as he does in his memoirs, that this book "slipped through the authorities' fingers" is a huge exaggeration. As Genchev explains a couple of pages later, he sent his manuscript to the editor in early July 1972, and she immediately edited it. Fine points like peer reviews and formal board decisions were apparently not necessary for him. The only thing needed was the signature of the Editor-in-Chief Mantov but he was about to leave on vacation, and come back only at

342 For a contemporaneous reaction to the contrast between Levski and Botev, but articulated in a calm academic language, see Petir Dinekov, "Botev i Levski," *Sviata i chista republika: Dokladi i nauchni sïobshteniia ot sesiata po sluchai 100-godishnina ot gibelta na Vasil Levski*, Iambol: Gradski komitet na BKP, Gradski naroden sïvet Iambol, 1973, 18–34. For a passionate journalistic elevation (and inflation) of Levski as the unsurpassed genius of the revolution, see Stefan Prodev, "Levski ili geniiat," (1872), printed in *Duma XI*, 166, July 18, 2000, 13. For an instance of nuanced differences among historians assessing Levski's role, see a conversation between Genchev, Konstantin Kosev, and Doïno Doïnov, published in *Pogled 1*, January 5, 1987 (Genchev, *Izbrani sichineniia*, op. cit., 268–73).

343 Genchev, *Levski, revoliutsiata i bïdeshtiïat sviat*, 11–4, 22–4. He does not develop his third objection. The person highlighting the significance of Mazzini for the evolution of Levski's idea for an independent national movement, was Khristo Gandev, *Vasil Levski. Politicheski idei i revoliutsionna deïmost*, Sofia: Biblioteka "Niva," No. 6, 1946. Genchev conceded this influence but wanted to complicate and nuance it, mostly in order to emphasize Levski's original, not derivative contribution. In this, he actually committed the vice he was accusing others of doing: contrasting Levski to the whole echelon of revolutionaries, like a genius amidst somewhat talented artists (passim, especially 23–5, 149). As for the last part, Genchev pronounced Levski to belong to and represent the whole nation, rather than a particular social group. Claiming to rehabilitate the Bulgarian bourgeoisie as a revolutionary class, Genchev was in line with academic scholarship at the time.

the end of August. Genchev “called Mantov on the phone and chided him for making me stay in Sofia during the summer in order to finish the manuscript, while he dodges and will ruin the publication.” So, Mantov promised he would sign the same evening as he was leaving next morning. Which he did, without having read the manuscript.<sup>344</sup> A month between the delivery of a manuscript and its going to press is a record that can make many a writer in any political regime envious. It was only in February of the following year, after two thousand (of the 10,000 printed) copies were sold, that the book was stopped. What followed was a meeting in the office of the then head of the “Propaganda” division at the Central Committee, D. Dimitrov. After the meeting, at which he was livid and ordered sanctions against the editor, Dimitrov left in his car and had a bad accident. Sofia was filled with the rumor: “This bacho Kolio<sup>345</sup> is a holy man; whoever pesters him will suffer.” Immediately following this sentence, without further explanation, the memoirs report that a few days later, the remaining 8,000 copies were released and sold out practically in a morning. Genchev had to find additional copies from provincial cities.<sup>346</sup> This is the saga of a book that had the reputation of a banned and dissident work but whose 10,000 copies were printed at breakneck speed, and effectively sold.<sup>347</sup>

It is my suspicion that it was not so much what was written in the book that created the reaction against it but, rather, Genchev’s self-advertisement of what he meant to say with it. He had always been (in a tradition typical for and cultivated especially among Bulgarian university historians) better in oral than in written articulation. The same goes true for the politicians. Rather than waste their time reading, they heard what others were saying. And what was being said was that “bacho Kolio” had put the proper dots on all the “i”s: read Turkey, un-

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344 Genchev, *Spomeni*, 255–6.

345 The popular name under which Genchev was fondly known.

346 Genchev, *Spomeni*, 257.

347 Rumén Daskalov, in his very useful historiographical survey *Kak se misli bilgarsoto Vizrazhdane*, Sofia: LIK, 2002, dedicated to the memory of Genchev, characterizes the appearance of his 1973 book “a courageous dissident manifestation recognized as such by the regime” (259). At the same time, Daskalov tacitly recognizes the confluence of Genchev’s Levs-ki cult with the evolution of the communist regime in the direction of nationalism (259, 349).

derstand Russia and their local stooges. Moreover, looking at the exact sequence of events, it seems it was not “the authorities” in general but one particular person—an apparatchik who apparently had been alerted—who reacted to a signal, and after his ominous accident, there was no follow up, except Genchev’s enhanced reputation of a courageous gadfly. All of this does not deny that several times in his life Genchev did suffer some kind of sanction. His 1973 book was eventually distributed but the introduction he had written to the documentary collection of Levski was taken off. His monograph on Russian–Bulgarian cultural relations was virtually destroyed immediately after it was printed. His endorsement of Zhelev’s “Fascism” (as internal reviewer) cost him his position as chair of the history department. But it shows the erratic and essentially arbitrary way the regime was reacting to challenges.<sup>348</sup>

“Exposing” Genchev’s successful self-mythology also does not mean that much of his critique did not build on real aberrations, even as they assumed hyperbolic dimensions. Moreover, the positive reception of his actions and works, and his immense popularity were apparently triggered by a profound unease and displeasure with the official and stale ideologese. By the 1960s it had lost its initial fresh appeal, and the new generations, the ones already born and brought up under socialism, rarely fell under its spell as had Genchev and his generation. As aptly summarized, Lenin had given way to Lennon.<sup>349</sup>

What actually comes as a surprise is how long pedagogical efforts and textbooks lagged behind this disenchantment so obvious in the public sphere, how little they adapted to the new constellations. On the other hand, they offer a glimpse into how hero worship was formed from the youngest age. A textbook for teachers at the kindergarten level from 1976 enumerates the different elements constituting the natural and social environment that children should be gradually exposed

348 For a positive and sympathetic, but also balanced, vita of Genchev, written in 1991 for his 60th anniversary, see his friend Ilcho Dimitrov, “Edin zivot prez pogleda na priiatel,” “...Istoriia ima I stava narod!” *Statii*, Sofia: Sv.Kliment Okhridski, 1995, 244–58. Dimitrov indicates that often the initiative in such cases did not come from the top party or state authorities but were triggered by personal rivalries (250).

349 Karin Taylor, *Lennon, not Lenin: Youth between Socialist Discourse and Realities in Bulgaria of the 1960s and 1970s*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Graz, 2004. Her book has been published as: *Let’s Twist Again: Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria*, Münster: Lit Verlag, 2006.

to.<sup>350</sup> Six elements are defined as comprising the social environment: labor (in the family, agrarian, industrial, in construction, transport, medical institutions); cultural institutions (schools, libraries); national heroes and political leaders; social, political and private celebrations; space (town, village, neighborhood); an idea of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. As for detailing national heroes, this consisted “in acquainting children with the figures of Vasil Levski, Khristo Botev, Georgi Dimitrov and the heroes of the antifascist struggle.”<sup>351</sup> This was, more or less, replicated in the more elaborate 1979 textbook that also gave a concrete breakdown of themes introduced at the different kindergarten levels. Three Bulgarian heroes—Levski, Botev and Dimitrov—exemplified the theme “Motherland” (*Rodina*) (Dimitrov and Lenin were introduced already at the first age level of 3-year-olds, whereas Levski, Botev, and Cyril and Methodius were introduced at the fourth level of 6-year-olds).<sup>352</sup> Of course, these were not themes that monopolized the curriculum, and they were a relatively small part among topics on the family, nature, plants, birds, animals, cooking, cleaning, travel, medicine, but the sequence in the particular sub-field of heroes is a telling one.

A 1984 textbook for the third level of the kindergarten (for 5-year-olds) goes into even greater detail. The teachers were supposed to work on four main aspects: introduce the children to the natural and social environment; develop their language and expose them to belles lettres; develop their visual capabilities; physical education. A set of literary pieces by established writers illustrated the different themes. Roughly one third of the literary works can be said to have been devoted to pedagogical topics with an ideological tinge; the rest consisted of stories, poems, and proverbs on general themes. The breakdown of the 30 poems that can be defined as ideological is the following: 9 patriotic ones (among them a poem each on Levski and Botev); 8 on different

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350 It is remarkable that already in the title and numerous times in the text, the textbook explicitly addresses the “women-teachers for children” (*detski uchitelki*), as only women entered this profession.

351 B. Boneva, M. Vladimirova, Ts. Stoicheva, *Metodika za obuchenieto po zapoznavane s okolnata deistvitelnost: Uchebnik za institutite za detski uchitelki*, Sofia: Narodna Prosveta, 1976, 8–9.

352 Snezhina Makedonska, Marika Chandzhi, Elena Kachulska, Zlatka Viktorova, *Zapoznavane s okolnata sreda*, Sofia: Narodna Prosveta, 1979, 93–5, 111–58.

aspects of labor; 6 on the antifascist heroes (partisans and a poem each on Georgi Dimitrov and Mitko Palauzov, the child partisan); 4 on the Soviet Union; 2 for peace, one for school.<sup>353</sup>

These books are distinguished from the ones published after 1989 in that the latter are much more general, deal at greater length with child psychology, and do not offer detailed and regimented thematic programs.<sup>354</sup> Yet, the older textbooks are still utilized in present-day kindergartens. In 1998, I visited the kindergarten on “Malko Tŕrnovo” Street in one of the central districts of Sofia and spoke with the Director Ms. Oresharova and one of the schoolteachers, Ms. Iotova. I was interested in how children were introduced to historical themes, especially national heroes. Both teachers emphasized they were trying to do this discreetly and juxtaposed their present freedom to experiment with methods to the previous bureaucratic approach and strict discipline when they were careful to conform to the rules. Still, when it comes to the concrete methods, they are not that different. I asked Iotova how she explains to the children abstract notions like heroes: “This is easy: a hero is one who does things for the rest.” The notion is introduced in analogy to notions the children already have mastered. For example, the child that helps lay the table does something for the rest of the class. In a larger group, one does something bigger, until one reaches a large group, like the whole people, all Bulgarians. She compared the situation today favorably to the period before 1989 when celebrations like September 9 or November 7 were mandatory. All the same, there is no quarrel with the pre-1989 period as far as how national holidays were celebrated. Levski is introduced only to the oldest group—the six-year-olds—and they all go and lay flowers at Levski’s monument.

When I asked the Director Oresharova—a well educated pedagogue who quotes Piaget and a host of new luminaries I haven’t heard about—how exactly the children are introduced to national heroes, she was critical: “For example, Levski is always introduced beginning with

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353 Elka Petrova, ed., *Kniga za uchitelia na treta grupa v detskata gradina, Chast vtora*, Sofia: Narodna prosveta, 1084, 52–75.

354 Nadezhda Vitanova, ed., *Aktivnostta na deteto v detskata gradina. Programma*, Sofia: Prosveta, 1993; Elena Rusinova, Dimitŕr Giurov et al., *Programa za vŕzpitanieto na deteto ot dve do sedemgodishna vŕzrast*, Sofia: Daniela Ubenova, 1993, 1995.

the gallows. This creates tension, negative emotions among the children, just like with the ‘Turkish yoke’ and the violence. It produces people without optimism and self-respect, but instead with complexes and feelings of victimization.” I asked why she unconsciously gives the example of Levski, when I posed my question about heroes in the most abstract, and whether he is, according to her, the greatest national hero. “Who else? How otherwise?” When I persisted why she thought so, she became impatient: “I have read enough and it is not a matter of manipulating me; I am able to contextualize.” I told her that textbooks at the end of the nineteenth century had not yet elevated Levski to the peak of the pantheon. “Fine,” she retorted, “it is possible that in different periods political considerations predominated but in the end the real character shines through.” She likes to speak of the *truth*, of *real values*, and that *the people* instinctively know and are the final *objective* arbiter.<sup>355</sup>

But it is too much to expect deconstruction from children’s pedagogues when historians shy away from it. In his review of the National Revival Period in Bulgarian historiography, Daskalov rightly indicates the “double game” of Bulgarian scholars in this field: on the one hand, the consensual overcoming of a number of clichés in the specialized literature; on the other hand, the conscious perpetuation of these clichés in popular histories and textbooks, often authored by them. In his view, Bulgarian historiography of this period will continue to be split between academism and patriotism, scholarship and romanticism, and will essentially present a mixture of both.<sup>356</sup>

Genchev’s own work is a good illustration of this. Between 1973 and 1989, he published no less than 23 popular journalistic pieces specifically on Levski (apart from numerous ones where he was mentioned at length but not as the central theme).<sup>357</sup> In these pieces, he passionately broadcasted his ideas in an accessible prose (especially his interviews which retained his inimitable oral talent). Finally, in 1987 his major opus on Levski came out, that included de facto his 1973 work with

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355 Interview on June 9, 1998. Personal notes.

356 Daskalov, *Kak se misli bilgarsoto Vizrazhdane*, 358–9.

357 Genchev, *Izbrani sichineniia*, vol. III, op. cit., 78–80, 99–101, 157–60, 183–5, 196–205, 206–9, 225–30, 246–7, 263–7, 268–73, 274–6, 277–81, 282–94, 295–8, 299–304, 305–11, 312–6, 317–20, 321–4, 325–8, 345–6, 347–53, 375–88.

an important excursus into the reception of the hero.<sup>358</sup> Yet, he never transcended the deeply ingrained understandings of “authentic truth,” “genuineness,” “real values,” “objective criteria” that characterized and continue to characterize the, as a whole, empiricist physiognomy of Bulgarian historiography. Genchev was no methodological revisionist or innovator. He also was less of a political revisionist than he liked to believe but he did, indeed, achieve no small feat. While insisting on Levski’s universal Bulgarian and human message and appeal (against explicit attempts at appropriation), he, in fact, appropriated him as a dissident banner. That, in the process, he erected himself as Levski’s bard and avatar, goes without saying.

It was this dissident ethos of Levski, as popularized by Genchev, that was embraced by his friend Zhelev, the leader of the anti-communist opposition after 1989.<sup>359</sup> Ironically, it was Zhelev, one of the few authentic Bulgarian dissidents, who put an effective end to Levski’s dissident status, once Levski’s portrait founds its place on the wall behind the desk of the newly elected President Zhelev. Ever since, Levski decorates every incoming president’s office, and is again evoked as the official imprimatur on any political philosophy or action.<sup>360</sup> He is again a hero for all.

Again, he is utilized for a myriad “jobs.” It was announced that with his prescient ideas, Levski had laid the basis for the future Euro-integration.<sup>361</sup> Twice each year, on July 18, his birthdate and, especial-

358 Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, op. cit. All preceding analysis of his ideas in this part have been based on this edition.

359 Zhelev did not miss any occasion to emphasize his affinity with Levski. His views are summarized in “Levski kato istoricheska lichnost,” *Literaturen forum*, January 8–14, 1992, also published in Zhelju Zhelev, *Inteligentsia i politika*, Sofia: Literaturen forum, 1995, 81–94.

360 The fashion to erect Levski busts in front of Bulgarian embassies was already mentioned. I thank Elena Siupiur for informing me of the inauguration of a Levski monument, next to the already existing one of Botev, in Bucharest’s largest park Herestrau on May 12, 2001.

361 By the then foreign minister Solomon Pasi in his speech in front of Levski’s bust in Sofia: Albena Bichvarova, “Pasi: Levski e nashiat prív evrointegrator,” *Trud*, July 19, 2003, 5. Recently, it was reported that Levski’s portrait was placed in the Brussels office of Meglena Kuneva who had been Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs and, since 2007, is the European Commissioner for Consumer Protection (*Trud* LXXI, No. 50, February 20, 2007, 28). Earlier, Kuneva was allegedly praised as “a real

ly, on February 19, the day of his execution, Bulgaria's top managers—president, prime minister, speaker of parliament, city's mayor—dutifully appear before his monument in the center of Sofia in an elaborate ceremony, replete with military honors, wreath laying, and actors' performances. The same, on a lesser scale, goes on in other towns, particularly Karlovo. In the meantime, the ecclesiastical authorities organize memorial services in all major churches of the country, and the number of citizens who participate is growing by the day.<sup>362</sup> It is becoming truly an addition, if not a challenge to Bulgaria's national day, March 3.<sup>363</sup> Levski is the patron of temperance societies, and the inspiration of prisoners.<sup>364</sup> People run in races, swim across the river Danube and climb Mount Everest in his honor.<sup>365</sup>

The scholarship on Levski after 1989 continues unabated. Most of it is in the serious factographical tradition of the previous decades, and much comes from historians with an already earned reputation

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Levskaia" (a clumsy way to forge a feminine form of Levski) by a German foreign ministry official, alluding to her determined tours of Europe aimed at Bulgarian accession to the EU.

- 362 The first such *panikhida* (requiem and commemoration) for Hierodeacon Ignatii, reviving a practice from the pre-communist past, was the memorial service held on February 18, 1990 in the Alexander Nevski Cathedral. Present was President Mladenov and other high local and foreign dignitaries, and the mass was celebrated by Patriarch Maxim. For a perceptive, especially musicological analysis of the service, see Donna Buchanan, *Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, 30–3. I am grateful to Donna Buchanan for lending me the tape of the service as transmitted by Bulgarian TV.
- 363 It is redundant to footnote what every paper on this day reflects. On the other hand, a notable addition to the official figures in 2006 was the counter-demonstration of the arch-nationalist "Ataka" and its leader Volen Siderov, who was announced by his supporters to be a "reborn Levski" (*Standart*, March 4, 2006). For a rebuttal, see Georgi Bakalov, "'Ataka' da ne posiaga na ikonata Levski," *Standart*, February 21, 2006.
- 364 "Borislav Petrov, "Teenageri otkazvat alkohola zaradi Levski. Zatvornitsi retsitirat v chest na Apostola" (Teenagers renounce alcohol for the sake of Levski. Prisoners recite in honor of the Apostle), *Standart*, February 20, 2004.
- 365 "Prepluvat Dunava v chest na Levski," *Standart*, February 19, 2006; "350 uchenitsi i studenti uchastvaha v traditsionen kros za Levski," *Standart*, February 20, 2006; "Potomik na Levski snima na Everest," *Standart*, November 27, 2005.

in the field but there is also a lot in the popularizing and commemorative genre.<sup>366</sup> An interesting addition are the contributions of non-professional historians, especially on the issue of Levski's capture and betrayal, a phenomenon that became possible with the decentralization and liberalization of the publishing business.<sup>367</sup> A continuing and

366 Nikolai Zhechev, Krumka Sharova, Doino Doinov, Stoian Dzhavezov, Boian Botiov, eds., *Bilgarsko vizrazhdane. Idei, lichnosti, sibitiiia*, Sofia: Obshtobilgarski komitet "Vasil Levski," Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 1995; Tsvetana Pavlovska, "Viarvam v republikata..." *Sivremenniiaat republikanizim v epokhata na Bilgarskoto vizrazhdane*, Sofia: GoreksPres, 1999; Pavlovska, *Vasil Levski nachelo na Bilgarskiia revoliutsionen tsentralen komitet v Bilgarsko*, Sofia: GoreksPres, 2001; as well as her already quoted 1997 work *Vasil Levski i vitreshnata revoliutsionna organizatsiia*; Veselin Khadzhinikolov, *Rodove na Vasil Levski i negovi spodvizhnitsi*, Sofia: n.p., 1992; Khristo Ionkov, *Bratiata na Vasil Levski*, Veliko Tirnovo: Vital, 1995; Ogniana Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, *Natsionalnata revoliutsiia, deloto na Vasil Levski i osvobozhdenieto na Bilgariia. Sbornik s materiali ot natsionalnata nauchna konferentsiia—Karlovo, iuli 1997, posvetena na 160 godini ot rozhdenieto na Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Obshtobilgarski komitet i fodnatsiia "Vasil Levski," 1998; Filip Simidov. *Vasil Levski. Dve nepublikuvani biografii*, by Liubomir Zlatev, Todor Bilchev, eds., Veliko Tirnovo: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv.sv.Kiril i Metodii, 1994; *Po p'it'ia na bezsmirtieto ot Kikrina do Sofia. Sbornik ot dokladi posveteni na 120-ta godishmina ot gibelta na Apostola*, Veliko Tirnovo: VITAL, 1993; *Sidebniiat protses sreshthu Levski 1872–1873 g. Istroicheski, iuridicheski i mezhdunarodni aspekti*, Sofia: Siiuz na iuristite v Bilgariia, 2003. See also the other works of Sharova, Mitev, Petev, Daskalov, Pavlovska, and the articles in *Troianskiiat manastir v natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie*, op. cit., quoted in this part, as well as the works of Lalov, Panaiotov, Gaidarov, Petev, cited in Part III, esp. n. 123. Of the popularizing/commerative works, one can mention *I zname, i oltar. Slova i rechi, proizneseni po povod 166 g. ot rozhdenieto na Apostola na bilgarskata svoboda Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Obshtobilgarski komitet "Vasil Levski," Izdatelska kishta "Trud," 1993, memorable mostly for the collection of political luminaries like then President Zhelev, Vice President Blaga Dimitrova, Prime Minister Liuben Berov, as well as the array of leading scholars like Genchev, Doinov, Zhechev, Semov, Pantev and others; also Marko Semov, Georgi Bakalov, Doino Doinov, *Buditeli narodni*, Plovdiv: Letera, 2002 (the article on Levski is authored by Doinov).

367 See here the works of Panchovski and Evrev and Evrev, cited in Part III, n. 121. Also Vasil Stefanov, *Dimitir Obshti sreshthu istoriata: konfliktit mezhdu Vasil Levski i Dimitir Obshti*, Panagiurishte: Miziiia, 1999; Vasil Boianov, *Levski i Lovech. Neiziasneni viprosi ot revoliutsionnata deinost na Apostola*, Sofia: s.n., 1995; Velin Argatski, *Vasil Levski. Apostol na svobodata*, Veliko Tirnovo: VITAL, 1997; Vasil Stefanov, *Dimitir Obshti sresh-*

obviously successful venture, given the constant laments about the shrinking book market, is the publication of new and revised editions of Levski's documentation, as well as the reprinting of some of the better known works on Levski.<sup>368</sup> While the style of writing has not changed, there are two subtle modifications: one is the addition of new topics, some of them quite arcane (like Levski as a pedagogue, as a Freemason or as a linguist);<sup>369</sup> the other is the general suffusion

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*tu istoriiata: konfliktit mezhdur Vasil Levski i Dimitir Obshti*, Panagiurishte: Miziia, 1999; Georgi Turturikov, *Vizkresenieto na Apostola, 1846–1873, ili koga vsishtnost e roden Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Vanio Nedkov, 2006; Rumen Vasilev, *Masonskata lozha i bratstvoto na Levski. Istorichesko izsledvane*, Sofia: Persei, 2005; Konstantin Iliev, "Pazi most – most za pazene," *Kultura* 8, February 21, 2003; the whole oeuvre of Khaitov, quoted at length in Part I belongs here.

368 In many respects, the culmination is the sumptuous facsimile edition of Krumka Sharova, Kirila Vizvızova-Karateodorova, Todorka Tomova, Tsvetoliub Nushev, eds., *Vasil Levski. Dokumenti: avtografi, diktuvani tekstove, dokumenti, sistaveni s uchastieto na Levski, prepisi, fotokopii, publikatsii i snimki. V dva toma. T.I. Faksimilno izdanie na dokumentite*, Sofia: Obshtobilgarski komitet "Vasil Levski," Narodna biblioteka "Sv.Sv. Kiril i Metodii," 2000; a new elegant pocket edition of Levski's *Lichniat belezhnik*, op.cit. is to be seen in the bookstores, as well as a luxurious two-volume edition of his personal note-book in facsimile and transcription: *Lichniat belezhnik (tefercheto) na Vasil Levski, 1871–1872 Bilgaria i Vlashko*, Sofia: Trud, 2007; Undzhiev's seminal biography has been published again in 2007. One should add here also the publication of Genchev's *Spomeni* and the four volumes of his *Izbrani sichineniia*, op. cit., as well as the collection of previously scattered articles (many on Levski) by Doino Doinov, *Istini i zabludi v moia pit prez godinite*, Sofia: LIK, 2000. A tiny 2 by 3 inch booklet with Levski's messages is on sale, reminiscent of an abbreviated pocket bible: *Poslaniiata na Vasil Levski*, Biblioteka "Sofiiski biuletin," N.3, Sofia: IK SA.Alezandrova, 2008.

369 Liuben Dimitrov, *Apostolit kato vizpitateľ*, Sofia: Veda Slovena, 1997; Vasilev, *Masonskata lozha*, op. cit. Three impeccably scholarly volumes by Margarita Simeonova are dedicated to the language of Levski: *Ezikit na Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Trud, 2002; *Rechnik na ezika na Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 2003; *Ezikovata lichnost Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 2007. While there is no doubt that these are valuable studies, in a way a pioneering linguistic-culturological analysis of any existing Bulgarian figure of the nineteenth century, the assertion that Levski "possesses a language (speech), that reaches the perfection of Karavelov and Botev" (*Ezikit*, 285) sound less persuasive. The drive to make Levski, at any cost, a full-fledged representative of the leading intellectual circles, to push him into

of the works in a new discursive field where the principle vegetation is of the genus of “democratization,” “constitutionalism,” “communication,” “tolerance,” “anti-terrorism,” etc.<sup>370</sup> Yet, practically none of the considerable production on Levski belongs to what the historian Andrei Pantev termed as the “inspired idiots of contemporary demythologization.”<sup>371</sup> Instead, all works are written by inspired, let’s call them, non-idiots.

All these illustrations are at the level of the *production* of individual and group, social and political, moral and historical identities. It is more difficult to find evidence for the analysis of the receiving end of the phenomenon, the level of *reception*, that would show how this production—historiographical, journalistic, fictional—is being internalized. In 1998, I launched questionnaires at different school levels, in the hope that this would allow me to have a glimpse at the reception end of the process, and its articulation. The cluster of material at my disposal comes from two locales: Sofia and Plovdiv.<sup>372</sup> The Sofia responses are from one school—the Italian language college in Gorna Bania—and comprise 115 answers (51 from the sixth grade,

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perfection also in this respect, becomes a little obsessive. In contrast, the leading Bulgarian literary critic and historian Svetozar Igov, in a collection of previously published articles, dedicated 14 pages to the literary heritage of Levski, in comparison to the remaining 190 dealing with Botev and Vazov (*Apostolit, geniata i patriarkhit*, Sofia: Khristo Botev, 1996).

370 See, for example, *Vasil Levski i dirzhavnostta. Vtora pravno-istoricheska nauchna sesiia*, Sofia, 17 fevruari 2004 g, Sofia: Siiuz na iuristite v Bigariia, 2004, with contributions on Levski and his ideas on statehood, constitutionalism, republicanism, individual rights, democracy and self-rule, judicial and punitive measures, on the Bulgarian ethnic model, etc.; also Zdravka Konstantinova, *Dirzhavnost predi dirzhavnostta. Svrikhfunktzii na bilgarskata vizrozhdenska zhurnalistika*, Sofia: Unibesitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv.Kliment Okhridki,” 2002, 86–91, 119–20.

371 Pantev, who apparently could not resist to also make a pronouncement on Levski, wrote this in a rather affected piece, but apt for the occasion of the 165th anniversary of Levski’s birth (*Apostolit*, Izdava Obshtobilgarski komitet i fodnatsiia “Vasil Levski,” Mai 2002 g., 8). He obviously did not mean “idiots” in the ancient Greek sense. The possibly sole exception in this respect is the excellent book by Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva, *Levski: Bukvi ot imeto*, Sofia: Primaprint, 2001, as well as the present work.

372 For a brief summary of the school questionnaires, approaching them from a different angle, see Appendix VIII.

54 from the seventh grade, and 10 from the eleventh grade).<sup>373</sup> The Plovdiv responses—a total of 139—come from three different schools and include one respondent from the third grade, 40 from the fourth grade, 18 from the fifth grade, 26 from the sixth grade, 9 from the ninth grade, 21 from the tenth grade, 8 from the eleventh grade, and 16 from the twelfth grade.<sup>374</sup> The clusters are of quite different quality: the Sofia school is one of the top educational institutions with a focus on the Italian language, whereas the three particular Plovdiv schools are not ranked among the top. Accordingly, they are treated separately.

Two questions, offered independently of each other, so the answer would not be implicitly suggested by the question, were posed to the Sofia students. Three classes—23 sixth-graders, all 54 seventh-graders, and 10 eleventh-graders—were asked to write on “Who is the greatest Bulgarian hero?” Since there were no noticeable differences between the separate cohorts, the resultant figures are aggregate. Of the 87 respondents to the first question, 62 chose Levski, and in another 9 cases Levski figured in a cluster of other heroes, paired with Botev, Khan Asparukh, Tsar Simeon and Stefan Stambolov. Of the remaining 18 heroes, Botev was picked up four times, Stambolov, Raina Kniaginia,

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373 Some of the questionnaires I “administered” myself, others were collected by my niece Maria Ioveva, a graduate of this school, for which my warmest appreciation.

374 The three Plovdiv schools are “Simeon Veliki,” “Konstantin Preslavski,” and “N. I. Vaptsarov.” My heartfelt gratitude to my colleague and friend Penka Angelova, who spent time and effort on this, not always gratifying, undertaking. In a letter to me she explained that when she first ventured into the classroom of the eleventh-graders of the “N. I. Vaptsarov” school and distributed the questions, a majority of the students refused to respond, and some wrote back on completely different issues (regrettably, she did not send me these answers). Then she resorted to a different tactic, asking a teacher friend to use the mandatory school period for the questionnaire. Indeed, one can imagine the reaction of students longing to get out of class, when someone gets in and asks them to answer questions for a purpose that seems too remote for them: someone somewhere wants to write about their reactions to heroes. Is it a trick? How anonymous is it? Should they write what they know? The usual clichés, and be rid of it all? Or react as if they don’t care, when actually they might? And, in the end, why waste their time?

Simeon and Asparukh twice, and once each Petko Karavelov, and Ivan Vazov.<sup>375</sup>

What is interesting is that the answers are, in their majority, quite unemotional. An opening statement asserts Levski as the greatest hero, followed, almost without exception, by a factual (often lengthy and pretty correct) recitation of his biography and main achievements. It is the clichéd history-textbook version, as it is memorized and internalized by good and ambitious students in one of the leading high schools in the capital, but some of the answers also contain elements of Levski's adventures as they must have been remembered from previous exposure in their childhood or early school years to the stories of

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375 Khan Asparukh was the founder of the Bulgarian state in 680; during the rule of Tsar Simeon (893–927), Bulgaria reached its territorial apogee; Khristo Botev (1848–1876) is the poet and revolutionary who came closest to contesting Levski's premier position; Stefan Stambolov (1854–1884), a national revolutionary, became Bulgaria's prime minister. Referred to as Bulgaria's Bismarck, his historical popularity during communism was based on his decision to break off relations with Russia, which was meddling in Bulgarian affairs. His opponent Petko Karavelov (1843–1903), several times prime minister, led the Liberal, and later the Democratic Party. Raina Popgeorgieva, known as Raina Kniaginia (the Princess) was the young school teacher from Panaguirishte, who embroidered the revolutionary flag in 1876 and became a symbol of the April Uprising. It might be useful to add the possible repertoire that students could choose from. One study, based on the structural analysis of what is considered to be the matrix or, to use Lotman's phrase, the "invariant text" of history textbooks of the interwar period, concludes that there were 20 positive personalities of the independent periods of Bulgarian statehood that students were exposed to, and 22 of the periods of submission. Of the first, 18 were state rulers (Kubrat, Asparukh, Krum, Omurtag, Presiian, Boris I, Simeon, Samuil, Asen, Peter and Kaloian, Ivan Asen II, Ivan Alexander, Ivan Sratsimir), one a loyal boyar (Ivats), and 5 were religious and intellectuals figures (Cyril and Methodius, Kliment Okhridski, Ivan Rilski, Patriarkh Evtimii). Of the latter 22, eleven received extensive attention: 7 professional revolutionaries (Rakovski, Hadzhi Dimitir, Stefan Karadzha, Karavelov, Levski, Botev, Benkovski), and 4 figures of the church and educational revival (Paisii, Sofronii, and the brothers Miladinov). Even with a change of emphasis or interpretation, the above pantheon has hardly changed, except for the addition of a small number of revolutionary figures for the most recent period. See Boriana Panaiotova, *L'image de soi et de l'autre: Les Bulgares et leurs voisins dans les manuels d'histoire nationale (1878–1944)*, Les presses de l'université Laval, 2005, 42–6, 105–12.

Vazov. One response, after the dry biography, has added a color-pencil portrait of Levski with the Vazov-evoking inscription "His eyes are blue-grey, his hair ashen-blond, his features beautiful and complete." Even though Levski is chosen as the greatest hero, this seems to follow some kind of received wisdom, as he is not juxtaposed to the other Bulgarian heroes and nothing specific is singled out, beyond his sacrifice for liberty and the fatherland. The answers to the second question "What do you know about Vasil Levski?" asked of 28 sixth-graders, produced the same biographies, as if they had been asked the same question but without the option for choice.

The only exceptions to the above pattern are the responses of three eleventh-graders, the 17–18-year-olds. One refuses to commit to a single hero, since this would "in a way diminish the contributions of the rest." Still, this student names "Botev, Karavelov, Rakovski, and many others." Another, making the same argument, mentions "Levski, Benkovski, Rakovski and others." Still another one singles out Levski, but in a very reflective way: "According to me, we cannot determine the greatest Bulgarian national hero. For me personally, the preferred one is Vasil Levski."

This unemotional, factual approach is true also of the ones who dissent from the standard choice of Levski. The two girls who have opted for Raina Kniaginia never explain the reason for their choice. They simply start with the standard: "Bulgaria has had many heroes. One of the greatest is Raina Kniaginia," and then recite her biography. One suspects they were motivated by bringing a woman to the fore. The same is true for the unexpected choice of Vazov. One student's pretty flat *laudatio* doesn't oppose Vazov to the other heroes but seems to have been inspired by the idea of choosing a man of the pen. The same motivation leads a girl from the sixth grade to single out Botev and Levski as the greatest figures of the national revolution but with a preference for Botev because "he is linked not only with the liberation movement, but with poetry." Another girl, who chooses Botev, states: "For many the greatest hero is Levski. But there are also other Bulgarians," and then offers Botev's biography, very much on the pattern followed by the Levski responses. The champion of Petko Karavelov finishes his brief biography with a disarming: "There are so many heroes in Bulgarian history that it is difficult to choose one. This was simply the first who came to mind." The Khan Asparukh fan concedes she hesitated long:

“How can I say that one is better than the other? And, then, don’t people err?” She finally opted for Asparukh and is the only one who thoughtfully makes the case for her choice by arguing that if it were not for Asparukh and his tactful and civilized way of creating a state, later heroes like Levski, Botev and Stambolov would not be born.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from these responses is that issues about national heroes or national pride do not evoke strong feelings, let alone passions. The young people have internalized the textbooks and produce the answers expected of them, but are doing it in a matter-of-fact way, devoid of affect. It has to be added that these questionnaires were prepared at the end of the 1990s, when the “emigration virus” among young people was particularly active. This particular cohort of the Sofia high school subsequently had one of the largest proportion of students studying and attempting to stay abroad. One could interpret their reception of the Levski theme as the accumulation of useful knowledge, needed to get over the hurdle of the final high school exams and preparing for the university entry exams, rather than identity-building information.<sup>376</sup> One also has the uneasy, if maybe unwarranted, feeling that the responses were written always keeping in mind that their teacher may see them. Although it was explicitly stated in introducing the questionnaires that they were anonymous, would be immediately collected and sent for processing outside the school, practically all students wrote down their names.

The Plovdiv students’ responses don’t differ from the Sofia ones in terms of affect but strike one as more spontaneous. They are much shorter and, with few exceptions, unsigned. More than half of the Plovdiv cluster (85 students) covers fourth to sixth-graders. This batch is interesting mostly insofar as it reflects the shift of cognitive value allotted by adolescents to different pieces of information. Thus, a great number of the fourth-graders, in response to the question “Why is Levski a favorite national hero?” say this is so because he jumped like a lion, whence his name. It is something that they have been familiarized with already in the kindergarten or elementary school but it still

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<sup>376</sup> The stimulus can work on any level. In 2002 a regional competition in the Tutrakan District was held on “The personality and ideals of Levski in the twenty-first century.” Besides the special awards for the winners, all participants were offered a trip to the National Historical Museum in Sofia. I owe this information to Vania Stoianova of the Institute of History.

stands out in their minds as a meaningful characteristic. In the fifth and, especially in the sixth grade, there is a shift to more abstract and mature answers, and a majority points out that it is because Levski organized secret committees and fought for liberty. Given the debates which raged at the same time in the press about how to approach the Ottoman period in Bulgarian history in the classroom, it is interesting to see that the children have been exposed to and are reproducing all the variety of appellations: "Ottoman domination, Ottoman bondage, Turkish yoke."<sup>377</sup>

More interesting is the comparison of the Plovdiv high school cohort to the Sofia one. The 54 tenth to twelfth-grade students from Plovdiv responded, as already mentioned above, in a very informal way, producing brief, often hurried answers on tiny pieces of paper. One response to the question "What is your opinion about Vasil Levski?" by an unnamed student from the tenth grade of the "Konstantin Preslavski" school stands out:

According to me, the present generation rejects and renounces Vasil Levski. These questions are old-fashioned and *passé*. Only during the literature periods, because it is mandatory and because students aspire to get a better grade, they praise him and say what the teacher wants to hear. The new twentieth-century generation has other, completely different, idols. Levski valued and defended his homeland, and nowadays every Bulgarian is trying to run away abroad. Many change their beliefs easily and everything is radically different.

This is not shared by all. A two-sentence response says: "Levski for me is the ideal individual." An even briefer one offers a curt: "Levski is not a national hero, he is something much greater." Another student writes that today Levski, who had done so much to save Bulgaria, would do everything in his power to achieve a quiet and tranquil life for his people. It is an incredible role for a revolutionary hero in the mind of a teenager! Yet another student, using the same vocabulary as the skeptic, writes that Levski is "Bulgaria's idol." "I think," this student adds, "that today such individuals do not exist. Maybe I am proud to be a

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<sup>377</sup> It bears mention that the orthography is, indeed, dismal, a sad illustration of the deterioration of elementary education in Bulgaria, a problem that is being much debated today in the public sphere.

Bulgarian and have such a hero.” This is the most poignant “maybe” that I have ever encountered!

Bulgarian school kids are no different from school children in other European locales. Despite the assertion that the phenomenon of globalization makes “without any doubt Madonna more popular than Joan of Arc or Garibaldi,”<sup>378</sup> popularity is not tantamount to notions of heroism, and the concrete data corroborates our skepticism. Thus, French students in the 1990s spontaneously connected “the hero” to notions of sacrifice (34%), justice (31%) and courage (29%), all of which are closer to Joan of Arc and Garibaldi than to Madonna. Among the necessary attributes of a hero, “defending others” received 89%, followed by “defending a cause” (88%), and “risking one’s life” (45%), whereas becoming a celebrity or being rich brought only 22 and 5 per cent respectively. Political figures (34%) were most often associated with heroism, followed by anonymous and fictional figures (17% and 14%). The “heroes” of show business were allotted a mere 13%, and only scholars and artists, as well as athletes were assigned even less (5% and 3% respectively), a soothing reassurance for academics who are always ready to trail after athletes.<sup>379</sup>

If this evidence for the reception of Levski’s cult was generated with an external stimulus, other manifestations are, if not completely spontaneous, at least propelled by some internal urge. Several Levski websites are regularly visited and passionately commented on.<sup>380</sup> Levski came again in the focus of public attention when, on the eve of Bulgaria’s accession to the European Union in January, 2007, the National Television organized a contest about “Great Bulgarians.” In December 2006, Bulgarians were invited to vote through their cell phones for the foremost personalities throughout the ages. Levski was among the first ten, alongside Khan Asparukh (founder of the Bulgar-

378 Claudie Voisenat, “Avant-propos,” in Centilivres, Fabre and Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, xi. Similarly, in the same volume Berthold Unfried, “Montée et decline des héros,” 200–1 asserts that today the heroic figure has not disappeared but is manifest more in the public sphere rather than in the political sphere.

379 Anne Muxel, “Les héros des jeunes Français: vers un humanisme politique réconciliateur,” in Centilivres, Fabre and Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, 98–100.

380 [http://free.top.bg/vasil\\_levski/index2.htm](http://free.top.bg/vasil_levski/index2.htm); <http://levski.magde.info/index.html>; [http://www.crosswinds.net/~zone13/V\\_Levski](http://www.crosswinds.net/~zone13/V_Levski).

ian state in 680), Tsar Boris I (who converted the country to Christianity in 865), Tsar Simeon (when Bulgaria reached its territorial and cultural zenith), Sts. Cyril and Methodius (the creators of a Slavonic alphabet), Paisii Khilendarski (eighteenth-century author of an influential Slavo-Bulgarian history), Khristo Botev (the other great revolutionary figure of the nineteenth century), Stefan Stambolov (Bulgaria's strongest late nineteenth-century politician), Ivan Vazov (patriarch of modern Bulgarian literature), and Petir Dînov (leader of an esoteric spiritual movement of the mid-twentieth century).<sup>381</sup>

These figures did not defy any academic consensus,<sup>382</sup> but Bozhidar Dimitrov, director of the National Museum and popular TV star in different historical and nationalistic programs, protested that this was not an objective survey but a simple game: "The great Bulgarians are defined by history or the historians, not by such games."<sup>383</sup> Although Dimitrov himself had become a media star and willingly played the market game of popular history, his earlier academic formation shone through: "history" was an objective adjudicator (no patience here for the new breed of deconstructivists), and historians were its only legitimate lawyers. On February 17, 2007, in the year of Levski's 170th birthday and on the eve of the 134th anniversary of his hanging, the results of the contest were finally announced. Levski won the first place with nearly 60,000 entries. Much to everyone's surprise, Petir Dînov emerged second with close to 20,000 votes. While this was in no way a scientifically conducted opinion poll, it reflected the public's aversion to the present political scene, and elevated a relatively marginal though charismatic spiritual figure to the second position.<sup>384</sup> Levski may have

381 "Velikite bilgari," <http://store.starbros.com/fruit---nut-trees-cherries.html>. There had been altogether 527 candidates for the title.

382 The historians Andrei Pantev and Borislav Gavrilov had published *The 100 Most Influential Bulgarians in our History* (1997), and their first ten choices were: Asparukh, Boris, Cyril and Methodius, Levski, Paisii, Simeon, Aleko Konstantinov (the nineteenth-century writer and creator of Bai Ganio who became the negative symbol of the national psyche), Ferdinand (with his negative role in Bulgarian history), and Kliment Okhridki (a student of Cyril and Methodius and the likely author of the Cyrillic script) (Interview with Andrei Pantev in *Standart*, June 7, 2006: [www.standratnews.com/bg/article.php?d=2006-06-07&article=148770](http://www.standratnews.com/bg/article.php?d=2006-06-07&article=148770)).

383 "Velikite bilgari," op. cit.

384 There was practically no paper that did not reflect on the event, as well as the public ceremonies at Levski's monument on the day of his hang-

been a politician but he had the luck to have never been in power, and in the past years his proverbial honesty, modesty, frugality and scrupulous book-keeping have been constantly contrasted with the wholesale corruption of the political and economic elites.<sup>385</sup>

Another way to gauge people's reception is to look at a relatively untapped source: visitors' books to museums. One of the reasons they have been distrusted as evidence is that a disconcerting number of entries follows a bureaucratic pattern, and all of us have felt, at one time or another, the pressure to put down some uninspired but expected platitude. Surprisingly, however, the so-called "books for impressions" (*knigi za vpechatleniia*) at the Levski Museum yield more than commonplace remarks. There is a display of real emotion and, in fact, one of the books—for 1976—bears the highly unconventional title of "notebook for emotions (*tetradka za chuvstva*).” There is a regularly kept series of these "impression books" beginning in the 1970s.<sup>386</sup> True, a greater number of entries before 1989 are predictably more rigid than the ones written after this period, but there are enough that give the impression of authentic spontaneity, even as the articulation may seem trite.

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ing, although with some nuances: *Trud*, February 19, 2007, 1, 7, 17; *Sega*, February 19, 2007, 5; *Monitor*, February 19, 2007, 6; *Telegraf*, February 19, 2007, 11–2; *24 chasa*, February 17, 2007, 21; *24 chasa*, February 19, 2007, 16; *24 chasa*, February 20, 2007, 4; *Duma*, February 19, 2007, 1, 6, 10; *Ataka*, February 19, 2007, 16; *Ataka*, February 20, 2007, 1–2, 16.

385 Dimitrov's attempts to persuade his contemporaries that Levski's patriotism and honesty aside, his most significant trait is being "the most successful Bulgarian politician" seems to fall on deaf ears. It reproduces uncritically Genchev's old (and incorrect) thesis that Levski's political vision—the achievement of independence through a mass revolution without outside help—was vindicated (Bozhidar Dimitrov, *12 mita v bilgarskata istoriia*, Sofia: Fondatsiia "Kom," 2005, 143–6). See also interview with Dimitrov in *Standart*, No. 5067, February 16, 2007; Konstantin Sibchev, "Apostola nai-velik, Dinov otnese khana," *Standart*, No. 5070, February 19, 2007; Martin Karbovski, "Glasuvame za tova, koeto ni lipsva," *Standart*, No. 5070, February 19, 2007.

386 These books are all kept at the Levski Museum in Karlovo. I thank Dora Chausheva for allowing me to inspect them, and make extensive photocopies. There are books for each year beginning with 1974, although in a few instances a bigger formatted book may contain the entries of two consecutive years. They all are entitled "book for impressions" with the exception of the above-mentioned example of a "notebook for emotions" (1976) and a "book for veneration" (*pochetna kniga*) for 1987.

A majority of entries comes from groups, most often school groups. Many oscillate between cliché (“Today, a group of children visited the home-museum of the Apostle, and we are delighted with the excellent exposition. The young visitors from the kindergarten are coming away with a miniature love for the great compatriot in their hearts, which will grow when they get older into a big patriotic feeling”) and pathos (“Levski! His name is the milk and air of everything Bulgarian. Touching his shadow troubles and excites, not because he is perfect but because he is immortal. Levski, a name before which Mother Bulgaria has always kneeled choked with pride and tears”).<sup>387</sup> But there are some surprising ones. An entry from June 21, 1981, signed by “a group from Tolbukhin and Varna,” reads: “‘I would sacrifice my life for love; for liberty, I would sacrifice even love’—these are the words fitting the Great Levski.”

Quite a few entries elevate Levski on the highest pedestal. He is “the greatest and unrivalled among all Bulgarians,” “there is no Bulgarian greater than this Bulgarian,” “Vasil Levski is the only honest Bulgarian,” and there are appeals: “Let us bow to the only one!” and “Let us honor the memory of the greatest Bulgarian.”<sup>388</sup> Kirila Vizvîzova, the retired former head of the Historical Archive at the National Library, and one of the foremost researchers of Levski, shares her belief that “as long as there is Bulgaria and ‘genuine’ Bulgarians, his name will be at the highest peak of our thirteen-centuries-old history” (July 18, 1992). There is an unmistakably political entry of April 18, 1993: “We came to honor the only Bulgarian who is a democrat. What a pity he could not find followers among the builders of contemporary Bulgaria.” A group of socialists (members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the renamed former Communist Party), returning from the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the socialist movement in Bulgaria address Levski: “You, Deacon, are in our hearts with your immortal ideals for a pure and holy republic” (August 4, 1991). At the same time, Levski as a unifying symbol can be seen

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387 The first quote for February 10, 1974 comes from the kindergarten “Druzhba” in Plovdiv; the second from a company at the military school “Vasil Kîncev” for May 21, 1981. The generic entry is of the type: “Today... we visited the museum of our national hero Levski. Let us honor his memory and heroism!”

388 Entries for November 9, 1976; June 11, 1986; August 9, 1992; August 12, 1992; April 2, 1993.

in the record of the “representative group of different political groups and movements” from the municipality of Pazardzhik who had arrived for the celebrations dedicated to the 154th anniversary of the birth of the Apostle (July 18, 1991).

If one were to draw the geography of visitors to Levski’s museum, the whole of Bulgaria would be on the map: Sofia, Plovdiv, Ruse, Varna, Balchik, Kubrat, Rudozem, Pleven, Vratsa, Panagjurishte, Kiustendil, Tolbukhin (Dobrich), Novi Pazar, Isperikh, Krumovgrad, Shumen, Silistra, Ikhtiman, Troian, Blagoevgrad, Gabrovo, Karnobat, Lukovit, Lom, Pernik, Iambol, and a huge number of villages. There are entries in different languages: Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Russian, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, English (from Canada, Australia and the US), Arabic, Greek, Croatian, Hebrew, even a Laotian poem by the journalist Khampei Manivan (on June 2, 1982). A couple of these group entries are ideological and, at first glance, predictably in line with what is expected, but neither sycophantic nor, upon reflection, opportunistic, given the obscurity of a museum book entry. A group of Iraqi students write in halting Bulgarian on August 18, 1979:

We think here of Levski’s deed to sacrifice his life for a holy and pure republic, and the liberation of his country from oppressors. For us, his internal revolution tactics is of great importance, not only the resistance through armed bands. Today there are favorable conditions for the progressive movements all over the planet, because there is the Soviet Union leading the socialist camp, the workers’ movement in the capitalist countries, and also our national-liberation movement, so there would be progress on this earth.

There is also a very reserved two-line entry: “Today, September 29, 1988, 40 communists visited the home-museum of V. Levski. The guide took us in the epoch and activities of Levski, for which we are grateful.” Signed: “Communists from the PPO of the Dobri Kartalov District of Gabrovo.” The reason this is interesting is that by the end of the 1980s no one would emphatically emphasize one’s communist beliefs, even if one had them. A PPO (Primary Party Organization) at a towns’ district level would usually comprise pensioners, already outside the party organizations at the working place. Most often, these

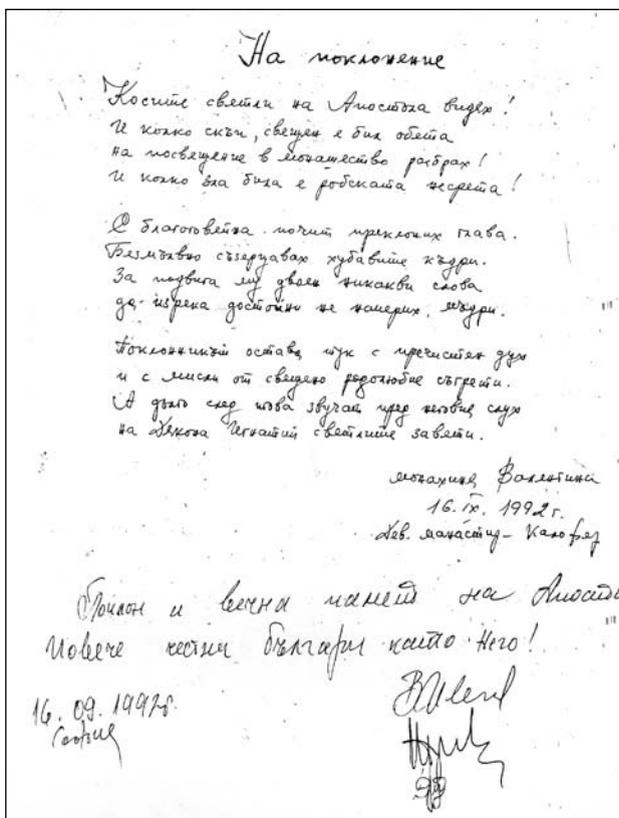
PPO's functioned as a sort of unpretentious club (tolerated and even, to a modest extent, supported), meeting places for the elderly sharing a certain ideology, much like the social function of Christian churches in Western Europe and the United States.

As usual, most interesting are the individual and personal entries. A few visitors have come, who are the offspring of grandparents that have known Levski or have been active in the nineteenth-century national revolution.<sup>389</sup> Others are moved by some kind of local patriotism. Donka Karastiovanova adds at the end of her thoughtful comment: "Blessed and happy is Karlovo for having given Levski to Bulgaria!" (October 6, 1992). An angry note from June, 1982 by a visitor who calls himself "a pure Bulgarian" challenges the inhabitants of Karlovo to rectify the part of the exposition that unduly emphasizes the contribution of the Lovech Revolutionary Committee. Disregarding the well-established historical fact that Lovech was indeed the center of Levski's revolutionary network, and playing on the shared belief of Pop Krîstiu's betrayal, the "pure Bulgarian" writes: "Isn't it high time that Karlovo's inhabitants stop the bragging of these insolent traitors... The way things are moving, in two or three decades they will say Levski was born in Lovech."

A self-critical note alludes to the fact that Bulgarians had participated in the trial against the Apostle and agreed to the death sentence, and had left his remains and his grave in oblivion (September 14, 1979). Another (from May 29, 1981) deplores the fact that the ideals that inspired Levski, and which are the only ones that could make the country great, do not exist any longer. This is as far as it gets in criticizing communist reality in the visitors' books. The post-1989 entries are more explicit, and a lapidary one, added on the Apostles birth-

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389 Such is the entry for June 12, 1976 by the grandson of Ivan Dudekov from Panagjurishte, who had allegedly hidden Levski in his house and helped him as a revolutionary. Someone else, describing himself as a poet and the grandson of a collaborator of Levski, shares at length the story of how his grandfather had seen Levski arrested, and then plotted with friends how they could liberate him. In the end, however, reason prevailed (entry for February 1, 1974). Unlikely stories like this had become quite numerous by the 1920 and 1930s, but the important thing is that they were cherished as family lore.



**Figure 18.** Poem dedicated to Levski by the nun Valentina from the Kalofer cloister, 16 September 1992.

Source: Visitor's books to the Karlovo museum.

day on July 18, 1992, reads: “Bulgaria! How much grief, impudence, shame, desolation. Oh, Deacon, bring them to their senses!”<sup>390</sup>

A number of post-1989 entries are written by believers, who unequivocally refer to Levski’s faith and image as saint and martyr. There is the beautiful melodic poem of a nun who has come on a pilgrimage from her monastery in the neighboring Kalofer.<sup>391</sup> There is an entry of 1999, written in the form of a slightly archaic prayer:

390 The Bulgarian text is lapidary: “Bilgariiii Kolko Pechal Bezlichie Sram Pustosh Diakone Vrazumi.”

391 The entry is from September 16, 1992. The poem is presented in Appendix IV.

Today, on the date October 28, I and my son visited this holy place of Bulgaria's beginnings and after we drank water to our heart's content, we express our deep felt gratitude for everything you did here on earth. Thank you!

From one Bulgarian woman<sup>392</sup>

Lord, Jesus Christ, you who are merciful and love mankind, for the good of all the Bulgarian people, do so that beginning in the year 2000, the date February 19 should become the national holiday of Bulgaria! Amen.

Another prayer by a citizen of Omurtag on September 14, 2003 pleads: "Lord Jesus Christ, discover the second Levski, so Bulgaria can be saved." One entry is signed by a young couple—Aglia and Angel—on June 8, 1996. They are inspired by the faith of the Apostle, by his ideals, and his life and death. According to them, today Bulgaria needs the Apostle's spirit in order to overcome the terrible sin which weighs upon her and suffocates her. Only then will the country be free and Jesus Christ will reign as its holy Lord. Angel adds that "together with Agi, who is my fiancée, we believe we shall meet him in heaven."

Some Christian entries display a more biblical wrath. Milhail Dimitrov Penushliev from Sofia writes on March 9, 1990, very soon after the fall of the regime: "Now we need Levski's light and fire in order to overcome the legacy of the slave-totalitarian regime. We know that the totalitarian censorship had encroached even on Levski's correspondence, but this has come to an end. Place candles in the home of the Deacon. He has not been an atheist."<sup>393</sup> But the atheists would not disagree. As the couple Vildanka and Dodio from Gabrovo expressed it already in April, 1987: "We are proud of and grieve for Levski. Why do we need God, when we have Levski!"

There are the odd and unexpected figures of speech, some moving, others funny. A young woman from Iambol—Velina Ivanova—

392 The phrase *edna bilgarka* ("A Bulgarian woman") reverberates in any Bulgarian mind, evoking Ivan Vazov's famous short story with the same title.

393 In fact, there has been no censorship whatsoever on Levski's oeuvre. As for the attempts to sever him from the Christian religion and the church, see Part I, Chapter 1, A "Social Drama" at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and Part III, Chapter 3, Levski and the Bulgarian Church: Memory and Narration.

shares her long-standing view that “death in the name of an idea is a very unreasonable act. But, having come here, I think I may change my mind” (she is putting the date the American way: 07.27.98). A group of eight illegible signatories have visited the museum on June 8, 1996. “Especially today,” they write, “when we are so desperate with everything that happens around us in our country, it is nice that there are such individuals who can raise one’s national self-esteem. Today, in particular, when we expect the victory of our national soccer team, we are going to think of Levski.” Someone has added the popular *Samo Levski!* (Only Levski!), that usually reverberates in the soccer stadium.

For me personally, the most moving among this rich parade of entries are two very brief ones from 1993. One (of June 30, 1993) is signed by Zekiye, Ali and Hasan and says: “I, a Turkish woman, deeply admire your courage, your intelligence, and your great deed. Let us bow before your purity and holy memory, Apostle!” The other one, entered on Levski’s birthday—July 18, 1993—reads: “My ethnic consciousness is Turkish, but the Bulgarian I respect is Levski, because he is the most noble Bulgarian figure!” In April, 2004, one Gülay has added “Thank you for everything you have done for us.” There is also the standard school entry signed by twelve-year olds from the fifth grade of the “Aleko Konstantinov” school in Khaskovo on December 11, 2004. The class is mixed and half the names are Turkish, half Bulgarian. On the other hand, one rebellious child has added a brief note (with orthographic mistakes): “Bulgaria is the dullest state.”

These are not isolated cases or exceptions. During her 1992 field work in Razgrad (a mixed Bulgarian-Turkish region in northeast Bulgaria), the ethnographer Ekaterina Anastasova came across the legend of a female Levski among the Turkish population. It was rumored, at the time of the renaming of the Turks and the subsequent exodus (1984–1989), that a woman from the village of Kaolinovo, Ruse District had been organizing protest actions by the Turks. “We have an organization and we have our Levski,” the Turks would say. “Only, he is not a man but a woman, and so you cannot catch him!” Some denied the existence of an organization and a leader, others said the woman was a secret police provocateur, and Anastasova could not establish more reliable facts.<sup>394</sup> The reality is besides the point, howev-

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394 Ekaterina Anastasova, “Az i drugiiat, mitologiiia i identichnost,” *Etnicheskata kartina v Bilgariia. Prouchvaniia 1992 g*, Sofia: Klub 90, 1993, 159.

er. Levski, by all measures the quintessence of a fierce and passionate national struggle, has acquired a definitely supranational appeal.<sup>395</sup> His figure, the gender change notwithstanding, has become the ethnically syncretic symbol of resistance.<sup>396</sup>

Levski also has a worshipper—the self-described psychoanalyst, Doctor Dimitir Sirakov—who regularly visits Karlovo on July 18, the Apostle’s birthday. The doctor signs as the chairman of the branch of the World Health Organization called BIOMAG-92-BALKANIA, and lives in Thessaloniki, Greece (he has even entered his address and telephone number). Interestingly, he announced the canonization of Levski as having occurred in 1992, and greeted Levski in his address of July 18, 1992 for the 155th anniversary of his birth and the first anniversary of his sainthood. One can only assume that it was Sirakov himself who officiated at this canonization. Sirakov is the discoverer of the “leptonic arms for the twenty-first century” and on the day of the Holy Apostle’s 160th birthday, he declared a “leptonic cosmo-planetary war on global imperialism, the cancer of the epoch we inhabit.”<sup>397</sup>

395 In a letter to Undzhiev of November 17, 1967, Khristo Firgov from Karlovo shares a story told by an old Turk. One day, walking on the street, Levski inadvertently stepped on a walnut that was part of a game of Turkish children. One of the kids started crying. Levski took him home, filled his pockets with walnuts and took him back to his companions (Undzhieva, *Ivan Undzhiev*, 226).

396 This should not be exaggerated. He can serve also as a divider. On the eve of the elections in 2005, an electoral poster of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF, known as the Turkish Party) with the image of its leader Ahmed Dogan was attached to Levski’s monument in Lovech. It was removed by the local leadership of the MRF who considered it a calculated provocation, since it was expected that many Bulgarians would vote for their list headed by a former world boxing champion (*Trud* LXX, No. 164, June 20, 2005, 4). Much earlier, in 1973, and in a much more delicate fashion, the Bulgarian-Muslim (Pomak) writer Vladimir Ardenski wrote about the difficulties of growing with an indeterminate identity. At home, he would listen to the heroic deeds of sultans and their victories over the infidels. At school, the teachers constantly spoke of Levski, Botev and Kableshkov and, although he found them inspiring images, it was difficult to synthesize the two sets of narratives (*Svoi, a ne chuzhdi*, Sofia: Partizdat, 1973, 56).

397 Sirakov does not clarify the notion “leptonic,” but the dictionary explains “lepton” as “any of a family of elementary particles that participate in the weak interaction, including the electron, the muon, and their associated neutrinos.” His war is thus not one of rockets, but of computer systems

Yet, while Levski's canonization did not occur in 1992, except in the fiery imagination of Sirakov, his prescience cannot be denied. The canonization did take place, although a few years later, and this is the subject of the following part.

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(July 18, 1997). The allusion to imperialism is very concrete: "Our nation is venal, Saint Vasil, but it is also resilient and dignified. There is no empire of pirates that has encroached on this holy land, and has survived. Now is the turn of the American half-wits, who until their fourth grade cannot read and write." His lengthy entries can be read under July 18, 1992, 1993, 1997 and 1999. There are no follow-ups in the subsequent years and neither the director of the museum nor anyone of the staff seems to know him personally.

# PART III

THE NATIONAL HERO AS  
SECULAR SAINT:  
THE CANONIZATION OF LEVSKI



On July 14, 2000 in the tiny and, as yet, empty interior of the newly-built chapel of “All Bulgarian Saints,” a part of the Vasil Levski Museum ensemble in Karlovo, a couple of men were leveling a marble and glass container. This was the only other object supposed to be installed in the chapel aside from the iconostasis with the icons. It is a pretty *objet d’art* made out of a green marble base, carrying a glass case flanked at the corners with four gilded lion heads, and crowned with a gilded cross. The glass case was supposed to house the hair of Vasil Levski. “This is a reliquary,” I exclaimed. Only instead of presenting what St. Hieronimus called *ossa veneranda* (venerated bones), or rather because of their absence, it displays *capilla veneranda* (venerated hair). “Far from it,” I was told, “It is simply an air-conditioned museum display box.” It didn’t matter that even the word employed—*khranitelnit-sa*—is that for reliquary. What was happening? Has the religious sanctuary acquired a primary function as a museum in our secular age? Or the reverse? Or are we in the presence of an intelligent ploy to impose the formal canonization of Levski on the Church’s agenda? The latter, in fact, had already partly happened (see Plates 10, 11, 12).

On July 1–4, 1996, a Church National Council (*tsirkovno-naroden sïbor*) was convened in Bulgaria by what some consider to be the “secessionist church” or the “schismatics” (*razkolnitsi*), and the conveners called the only legitimate administration of the one and only Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The council made two profound personnel changes which cemented its difference from the existing church administration of Patriarch Maxim, which they refer to as the “comrades of the red church.” It elevated the former Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop to the status of Patriarch. It also elevated Bulgaria’s most popular national hero Vasil Levski to the status of saint. The election of Pimen was widely reported in the press, and has received due attention by observers of the ecclesiastical split. The canonization of Levski, by contrast, remained unnoticed although it can easily be argued to have been the more momentous choice. Pimen, after all, is mortal, and died in the meantime, while Levski was propelled from one immortal hypostasis (that of the national hero) to another (that of the saint), a kind of immortality insurance policy which behooves this age of ephemeral values and abrupt changes in fortunes. The news of Levski’s canonization came out actually only a couple of weeks later, on his birth date on

July 18, when a service for him was held at the church “St. Paraskeva” in Sofia, the headquarters of the Pimen-led church. It was rebuffed by Patriarch Maxim as “an act of populism, in contradiction to the Orthodox tradition and canon.”<sup>1</sup> Still, it was considered so unworthy of attention at the time that when, in the summer of 1998, I spoke with members of the Church Historical and Archival Institute of the Bulgarian Patriarchate (CHAI), a scholarly institute affiliated with the Patriarchate of Maxim, they were under the impression that the canonization had taken place in February 1997.<sup>2</sup> Even more telling, priests of the Pimen-led church hierarchy (BOC-P)<sup>3</sup> believe to this day the

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1 The only mention I found was in the newspaper *24 chasa*, July 19, 1996, 14, where the news is communicated in a brief caption to a small photograph under the title “Schism,” showing the icon of Levski cleaned by a woman. It is symptomatic that Janice Broun, in her very informed and detailed series of articles dedicated to the history of the Bulgarian schism, never once mentions Levski’s canonization: “The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” *Religion, State and Society* 21.2 (1993); “The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Part 2: Under the Socialist Government, 1993–97,” *Religion, State and Society* 28.3 (2000); “The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Part 3: Under the Second Union of Democratic Forces Government, 1997–2001,” *Religion, State and Society* 30.4 (2002). She does mention Levski but only as the symbol of a tradition that is being betrayed nowadays: “Bulgaria’s remarkable national hero Deacon Vasil Levski, who was executed during the struggle for independence in 1872 [she has the date wrong, the correct being 1873] urged all communities—Orthodox, Muslims, Jews, Armenians, Catholics and Protestants—to continue to respect one another after freedom was won. This tolerant tradition of a tolerant multicultural society is rapidly evaporating” (*Religion, State and Society* 28.3 [2000], 275).

2 Professor Temelski, in particular, recalled that he first learned about this on February 19, 1997, the accepted anniversary of Levski’s hanging (which actually falls on February 18) when he was accompanying Patriarch Maxim on their way to lay a wreath at Levski’s monument, and they encountered Pimen with Levski’s icon (Interview at the CHAI—*Tsirkovnoistoricheski i arkhiven institut pri Bilgarskata patriarshia*—on July 15, 1998).

3 For the purposes of this text, and to avoid each other’s repudiatory, though colorful, designations, I will at times utilize two acronyms that would give, I hope, these bodies both a neutral name, and one with a modern sounding media-tailored twist: BOC-M (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Maxim) and BOC-P (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church under the late Patriarch Pimen). After the death of Pimen, at the age of 93 on April 10, 1999, the Holy Synod of the secessionist church has been led by Metropolitan Inokentii. While only the organization headed by Patriarch Maxim

year to have been 1997.<sup>4</sup> During the summer of 1997, I tried to interview some of the representatives of BOC-P, and managed to have a brief conversation with Father Kamen Barakov, a high-ranking priest and a leading activist of the split. He confirmed Levski's canonization but was not helpful with details about the act itself, and was more willing to discuss the general aspects of the confrontation.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to this early underestimation of the event, it is my contention that it had a momentous significance for the future of the church, as well as for the history and character of national symbols in Bulgaria. It became, according to me, the central differentiating sign of BOC-P, which gave it a cultural legitimation, quite apart from the exclusively political power rhetoric used up to this moment and later. At the same time, it triggered subdued debates within BOC-M, as well as a grassroots process that, despite the strong protestations and firm official opposition, is moving, according to me, in the direction of the general canonization of Levski sometime in the future. By looking in detail into the intricacies of the church split and the political implications of Levski's canonization, I hope to indicate my interest, as well as stake, in a project aptly described as "enchanted" politics with a richer

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has a long institutional history behind it, the "secessionist" one clearly had institutional ambitions, although they proved ephemeral in the long run. By using these acronyms, I am far from trying to emphasize their institutional character. Rather, I would want to avoid the over personification of institutional policies via their leaders but, at the same time, remind that it is a personal power struggle which is at the roots of the split. For a chart of the structure of the two churches and the individuals in each that are mentioned in this text, see Appendix VII.

4 Interview with Father Mikhail Milushev, priest of "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska," July 18, 2000. He thought the year was 1997 but when I asked for details, said he was not sure, and referred me to the Synod. Equally, the newly published orthodox calendar of the alternative church for 2005 explains on its back cover that Hierodeacon Ignatii (Vasil Levski) had been canonized in 1997.

5 My impression from this interview was not that he was trying to hold back information. On the contrary, he readily promised to send me (although never did) a copy of the icon of Levski that the Holy Synod was preparing for sale to the congregation in the church's little bookstore. I simply think that he did not consider the act an important one, and therefore had no ready memory to draw upon. When I asked about the protocols of the Synod, all I received was a look of disbelief.

sense of what it might consist of or, as Clifford Geertz would define it, “to elaborate a poetics of power, not a mechanics.”<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, as Sean Wilentz has pointed out, the interest in and the study of the links between symbolism and politics—political symbols and rituals—has had its forerunners and tradition in several branches of scholarship.<sup>7</sup> This came as a corrective to the general neglect of politics or reductionism in interpretations of the political in the traditions that dominated historiography in the period after the Second World War: the *Annales* paradigm, social science history, especially influenced by functionalist sociology, and orthodox Marxism.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the decisive

6 Clifford Geertz, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, 123. The phrase—enchanting politics—and its elaboration, belongs to Katherine Verdery, *The Political Life of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 24–6.

7 Wilentz singles out the works of the art historians Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (1961) and *Symbolic Images* (1972) and Erwin Panofski, *Meaning in the Visual Art* (1982) and *Studies in Iconology* (1972); the literary criticism of Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (1966) on rhetoric and symbolism; the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (1946); the medieval and early modern historians Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* (1924), Percy Ernst Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik* (1954–6), Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957). See Sean Wilentz, “Introduction: Teufelsdröckh’s Dilemma: On Symbolism, Politics, and History,” in Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power. Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, 3. One can add to this list the works of Natalie Zemon Davies, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975; as well as Nancy S. Kollmann, “Ritual and Social Drama at the Muscovite Court,” *Slavic Review* 45.3 (1986), 486–502; *Ibid.*, “Pilgrimage, Procession and Symbolic Space in Sixteenth-Century Russian Politics,” in Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland, eds., *Medieval Russian Culture*, vol. II, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994, 164–81; Michael S. Flier, “Breaking the Code: The Image of the Tsar in the Muscovite Palm Sunday Ritual,” in *Medieval Russian Culture*, vol. II, 213–42.

8 An early critique of this underestimation of the political, in fact an insistence on its fundamentally authoritative status, comes from Carl Schmitt (1932). Because it was framed within a powerful critique of liberal ideology as a whole and because of the controversial politics of its author, it did not receive the deserved attention. Schmitt argued that the political is not only not subordinate to other spheres, such as the economic, legal, moral, cultural, or religious, it is not even coeval to them but has its own independent and foundational status (Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, transl. by

influence came from contemporary cultural anthropologists—Mary Douglas, Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins—who gave historians

ways of seeing politics as a form of cultural interaction, a relationship (or a set of relationships) tied to broader moral and social systems. Political symbols and acts of persuasion, in this view, carry with them complex networks of social customs, aspirations, and fears. Whereas previous historians interpreted politics either as a narrative with a logic of its own, or as the conjectural outcome of economic and demographic indicators, those influenced by the anthropologists interpret political ceremonies and insignias as mini-dramas or as metaphors, upon which are inscribed the tacit assumptions that either legitimize a political order or hasten its disintegration. By reading these “metaphorical” acts, symbols, and pronouncements, much as an anthropologist reads everyday events and rituals, the historians hope to fuse our understanding of power, cultural expression, and political consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

It is, then, the interest in this “poetics of power” that informs the analysis of the recent canonization of Bulgaria’s national hero.<sup>10</sup> It is by

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George Schwab, with comments by Leo Strauss, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1976, esp. 25 ff.).

9 Ibid., 3–4. For more recent historical works, that take up the topic of political symbolism in the modern period, see Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into battle. Republican imagery and symbolism in France, 1789–1880*, Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Editions de la maison des sciences de l’homme, 1981; Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Canto, 1983; Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vols. 1–2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, 2000; as well as the already enormous and growing industry of memory studies. To mention but a few: John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994; Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997 (this three-volume edition comprises the 7 volumes published from 1984 to 1992). English translation: *Realms of Memory: the Construction of the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Matt Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, and others.

10 While I am aware of the distinction made between *politics* (*la politique*, *die Politik*, as the realm of agonistic partisanship) and *the political* (*le politique*,

looking into the mystique of politics that the logic of politics comes out most clearly because, to quote Geertz again, “[a] world wholly demystified is a world wholly depoliticized.”<sup>11</sup> The analysis of the poetics of power, moreover, should be applied not only to the present post-socialist period. It would be equally deficient to foreground it only against the socialist baseline. Instead, I am arguing that it should be analyzed in the *longue durée* framework of ecclesiastical and national history. For a decade we had in the church, as it were, a Janus-like Levski: one face already with a *nimbus*, the other a saint in the making. But Levski had already been conferred a non-canonical holy status as a martyr and a saint of the nation. Methodologically, therefore, the events of the recent years pose interesting additional problems: of the correlation between hero worship and sainthood in general but especially in the era of nationalism; of the narrative and different genres that effectuate this interplay; finally, of the symbolic repertoire of nationalism in the era of post-communism.

There is an additional methodological issue. How exactly can we write a poetics of power? Poetry, even at its most abstract, is most powerful in its metaphoric use of detail. This attention to detail and the veritable elevation of the concrete, flourishes first and foremost through the narrative. It might seem superfluous that narrative should need its special justification here, especially since this is being written by a historian, and after all the huge decades-long debates about overcoming the narrative, returning to the narrative, and the basic philo-

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*das Politische*, as the sphere where symbolic meaning is assigned), which is at the center of much political science debates, this text for practical purposes does not follow a pedantic distinction between the two concepts.

11 Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,” in Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power*, 30. (Geertz’s original essay is in Joseph Ben-David and T. N. Clark, ed., *Culture and Its Creators*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). Geertz notes that “the political theology” of the twentieth century may not have yet been written but it does exist: “or, more exactly, various forms of it exist—and until it is understood at least as well as that of the Tudors, the Majapahits, or the Alawites, a great deal of the public life of our times is going to remain obscure. The extraordinary has not gone out of modern politics, however much the banal may have entered; power not only still intoxicates, it still exults” (30).

sophical consensus that our understanding of the world is narrative, and that history is, essentially, a narrative project.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, this should not be a return to the essentially outdated division between descriptive and nomothetic scholarship. Historians, whether they admit it or not, and whether they are conscious of it or not, are, after all, providing narrative interpretations of often several orders of previous interpretations. And it is this interpretive character of the historian's project that necessitates what Gilbert Ryle introduced as a category, and Clifford Geertz made famous—"thick description"—arguing that how cogent our explications are, should be measured "not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions... but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers."<sup>13</sup> This latter imperative speaks directly and dearly to the heart of the historical profession, with the only distinction that there is an additional chronological distance about the historian's strangers: they are not only of another place but also of another time. It shows as well how close the disciplines of history and anthropology have come together in their philosophy and in their methods, at least the ones among its practitioners that are aware of each others' developments. Indeed, Geertz's reflections on anthropological interpretation are equally valid and perceptive about historical interpretation:

If [interpretation] is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens—from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them, from the whole vast business of the world—is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant. A good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us

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12 In the words of Paul Ricoeur: "My thesis is that history, the most removed of the narrative forms, continues to be bound to our narrative understanding by a line of derivation that we can reconstruct step by step and degree by degree with an appropriate method." (*Time and Narrative*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, vol. 1, 91). In this line of reasoning, see also Hayden White, "The Structure of Historical Narrative," *Clio* 1 (1972), 5–19, as well as his *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

13 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, 6, 16.

into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. When it does not do that, but leads us instead somewhere else—into an admiration of its own elegance, of its author’s cleverness, or of the beauties of Euclidean order—it may have intrinsic charms; but it is something else than what the task at hand—figuring out what all that rigamarole with the sheep is about—calls for.<sup>14</sup>

It is within such an approach that I would like to situate several narratives of what happened, and then construct a reading of them. The first of these narratives, most broadly defined, is about the recent split in the present Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and the contemporary political background within which the canonization has to be contextualized. Taking a very close look at a succession of events, it is based to a large extent on the contemporary press and, more often than not, approaches the journalistic genre. The second narrative is partly interpretive in that it attempts to provide a sociological explanation of the main protagonists’ position, but its main purpose is to give an idea of the dominant discourse in which the canonization was argued either by its adherents or by its opponents. Insofar as it approximates in its style an old-fashioned historiographical narrative, it will have succeeded in conveying the manner of argument advanced by all sides in the controversy. The third narrative provides an explanation of the equivocal position of Levski in the church. It is written within the genre of classical critical historiography. At the same time it provides a critical narrative about other narrative genres in which Levski’s case has been employed, be they memoiristic, biographical or historiographical. Finally, the fourth narrative—about the spontaneous but also often orchestrated grassroot *cultus* of Levski—is closest to the ethnographic approach with all its implications about the genre of writing. The point is to provide a set of rich and detailed narratives, so as to be able in the end: “to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the

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14 *Ibid.*, 18. The “rigamarole with the sheep” refers to a detailed excerpt from Geertz’s own field notes dealing with a narrative when sheep are used as indemnity in Morocco, and allowing him to reconstruct three very different frames of interpretation belonging to the Berber tribes, Jewish merchants, and the colonial French authorities (*ibid.*, 6–9).

construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics.”<sup>15</sup>

The last two chapters attempt to bring these four narratives together by subjecting them to an interpretive reading. To be sure, creating and situating narratives is itself a construction, and the subsequent “reading” is simply a consecutive self-conscious construction of a further order. If, however, the first four narratives suggest a number of theoretical interpretations in an implicit fashion, the last two chapters are a conscious attempt to provide an explicit theoretical framework. The fifth chapter engages with issues of ritual and commemoration, nationalism and religion, and links them directly to the socio-economic and cultural processes of post-communism. The sixth chapter probes into how the hero-creating process depends on the historical context, and whether there exist typological differences between the place of heroes in the theocratic state, the ancient city-state, imperial formations, the nation-state, or global communications settings, and specifically the link between sainthood and heroism. It finally locates Levski within the international “family” of national heroes or the genus of human heroes at large.

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15 *Ibid.*, 28. Geertz is adamant that “it is not in our interest to bleach human behavior of the very prospects that interests us before we begin to examine it” (17). He also provides a very useful description of how theory functions in an interpretive science by suggesting “that the distinction, relative in any case, that appears in the experimental or observational sciences between ‘description’ and ‘explanation’ appears here as one, even more relative, between ‘inscription’ (‘thick description’) and ‘specification’ (‘diagnosis’)—between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social life as such” (27).



# 1. The Split, or How a Bicephalous Organism Functions

The birthday of the split was May 25, 1992 when Metodi Spasov—the then director of the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), an agency directly under the cabinet of ministers—issued decree No. 92 declaring Patriarch Maxim and his Holy Synod illegitimate, and appointing in its place a new Holy Synod under Metropolitan Pimen as its *pro tempore* president. This act legitimized the internal secession of five metropolitans a week earlier, who had announced the formation of a new Synod headed by Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop. Spasov’s decision rested on the argument that Maxim’s election in 1971, in the climate of a totalitarian and atheist regime, was a violation of the Holy Canon and the Law of Confessions. He also contended that Maxim and the central leadership had not been registered properly, which rendered their election and appointment unlawful.<sup>16</sup>

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16 The best authority on the split, and one of its most detailed and astute observers is Spas Raikin, Professor Emeritus from East Stroudsburg University. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude for the materials he kindly gave at my disposal. Much of my factual narrative in this section is based on them, as well as additional items from the contemporary press. In English, see Spas Raikin, “Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” *Religion in Eastern Europe*, ed. Paul Mojzes, XIII, February 1, 1993, 19–25. His most extensive and updated treatment of the issue is the unpublished 82-page study *Decapitation of the Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Bulgaria* (August 1997) which he sent to over 50 individuals and institutions, among them the Bulgarian president, prime minister, and other political figures, the U.S. State Department, Pope John Paul II, the leaders of the different Orthodox churches, journals, newspapers, and broadcasting corporations. In Bulgarian, his flowery and often witty prose can be appreciated mostly in his journalistic contributions, among them: “Razkolit zad granitsa” (“The schism abroad”), *Tsirkoven vestnik* 34–7, August–September, 1995; open letter to President Stoianov, Prime Minister Kostov, and Speaker of the National Assembly Sokolov, published under the title “SDS iska sinia tsirkva” (“The UDF wants a blue church”) in *Duma* 122, June 1, 1998, 5; open letter to President Clinton whose Bulgarian translation ap-

This birthday, however, had been preceded by a two-year long gestation period. Almost immediately following the changes of November 10, 1989 with the fall of Todor Zhivkov, different institutions started to look for ways of reforming themselves by initiating changes of personnel, a kind of spontaneous lustration effort. In the ranks of the church, this happened by an unwieldy alliance of individuals propelled by very different motives. The intellectual force behind this group was the professor of the Theological Academy Radko Poptodorov, by all accounts a well-educated and cultivated scholar but embittered by feelings of underappreciation, who, in an article in *Otechestvo* already in January, 1990 had articulated the basic charges against the ecclesiastical leadership. The driving political force, however, was Father Khristofor Sibeve, a lapsed nuclear physicist in the 1970s turned monk in the 1980s whose only permanent quality in a flamboyant and unpredictable career was his erratic character.<sup>17</sup> Known to the public as “Fori the glow-

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peared in *Sofijski Novini* 61 (98), April 1, 1998, 6–7; and numerous shorter pieces in *168 chasa*, *Sega*, *Novinar*, *Duma*, *Sofijski Novini*, *Plovdivski Novini*. Only after I had written the account of the schism did I come across the above-mentioned excellent series of articles of Janice Broun in *Religion, State and Society*. For anyone interested in a detailed, almost day-by-day, account of the schism, these articles are indispensable.

17 Sibeve’s not yet completed earthly life is a boon for a biographer. After a spell as *pro forma* nuclear physicist, better known for his escapades at student brigades, as a guitarist and party boy, as well as for his alternative views, he spent a brief period as a monk, after which he was ordained as a priest. When dismissed from his parish duties for sloppy performance, he managed to resurface as an opposition leader in the late 1980s, and ended up briefly in jail. Emerging as one of UDF’s (Union of Democratic Forces) leaders, in 1991 he was elected to the National Assembly, and served as Chairman of the Assembly’s Committee for Religious Affairs. Rising to the rank of Bishop in the Pimen hierarchy, he was excommunicated by Maxim, unlike the rest of the “secessionist” prelates who were only defrocked. A year later, he was expelled from the Holy Synod of BOC-P, and proclaimed himself Archbishop of the non-existent Bulgarian Archbishopric, founding an Old Calendrist church and entering in full communion with the Russian Orthodox church in exile in 1994. When information leaked exposing him as a State Security agent before 1989, the UDF disassociated itself, although some monarchists and ultra-conservative UDF members still supported him. He moved to the United States where rumor had him earning his living from performing Russian songs in California. In 1998, his return to Bulgaria was announced in the press but his presence on the political

worm” for the candle-light night vigils he organized in the early days of democracy, this mercurial individual offered the single most non-religious and realpolitiker’s motivation for the split in an interview for *Demokratsiia*, the official organ of the UDF: “You have to understand, with the coming elections the MRF has its religion and temples, and *the UDF also needs its own church* [italics mine]. It needs religious support. This is not mixing up politics with religion. Just tell me who will Maxim’s lot vote for in the new elections? They will vote for the BSP, they are in a symbiosis [with it], let our people have no illusions.”<sup>18</sup> As MP since 1991, and Chairman of the Assembly’s Committee for Religious Affairs, Sibeve secured the directorship of the ORA under the UDF cabinet of Philip Dimitrov for his ally Metodi Spasov. Already in March, 1992, Spasov had sent a letter to the Holy Synod explaining the illegitimacy of the 1971 election, and ordering new elections for patriarch. In April he followed up with dismissals of high-ranking prelates in the country and abroad.<sup>19</sup> Then came the famous decree of May 25, 1992, poignantly flanked by the meteoric rise of Sibeve, apparently negotiated between the leaders of the UDF and the rebelling prelates, first to the rank of Arkhimandrit in the as yet unofficial Pimen hierarchy on May 21, 1992, and then to Bishop the day after Spasov’s decree (May 26, 1992). It was obvious that Sibeve had his eyes on the patriarchal post. The newly established Synod, however, immediately encountered serious difficulties as a number of early supporters backed off, and returned to Maxim. Of the ones who stayed, the most active were the Metropolitans Pimen of Nevrokop (*pro tempore* president), Pankratii of Stara Zagora, and Kalinik of Vratsa, themselves implicated no less than Maxim in the intricate relationship between church and state in the years of communist rule.<sup>20</sup>

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scene has not yet materialized. Janice Broun, “The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church” also follows his career only up to his US emigration.

18 “SDS se nuzhdae ot svoia tsirkva” (“The UDF needs its own church”), *Demokratsiia*, September 22, 1992, III. MRF stands for the Movement of Rights and Freedoms, otherwise known as the Turkish Party of Ahmed Dogan, and BSP is the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

19 In particular, this affected Metropolitan Joseph of the United States and Canada, and Metropolitan Arsenii of Plovdiv.

20 The team nominated by Pimen and consisting of his closest collaborators, included Bishop Inokentii (as general secretary), the leader of the Priests’ Union Radko Poptodorov, Archpriest Anatoli Balachev, the priests Kamen

The next few months witnessed a display of rocky relations punctuated by the accompanying turbulence of the political scene, which culminated in the fall of the UDF cabinet of Philip Dimitrov in the fall of 1992. There was first the thwarted attempt to take possession of the Synodal headquarters (May, 1992), and the Patriarchal Cathedral “Alexander Nevski” (June, 1992) where on Ascension Day (June 4, 1992) both Pimen and Maxim were trying to hold the divine liturgy, against the musical background of the magnificent church choir, and the less harmonious but equally audible shouting of the lay audience.<sup>21</sup>

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Barakov, Ivan Tomov, Stefan (from the St. Peter and Paul church in Sofia), Khristo Latinov and Emil Spanchev (Janice Broun, “The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Part 2: Under the Socialist Government, 1993–97,” *Religion, State and Society* 28.3 [2000], 269). The legal side of the Spasov decree is analyzed in detail by Raikin who calls the ensuing events “church schism by government decree.” Raikin, himself a theologian and an émigré in the USA since 1951 with a long anti-communist record, demonstrates meticulously and convincingly that the May 25 decree was unconstitutional insofar as it abrogated the principle of state–church division that does not allow the state to appoint or remove the ecclesiastical leadership; that it was anti-canonical because it stands in contradiction to the basic law of all orthodox churches (Apostolic Canon XXX); and that it was invalid because it was legally based on the Law of Confessions of 1949 and the By-Laws of 1951, adopted by the communists to enfeeble the church, that in its drive to “decommunize the church” the UDF government was using communist legislation that even the communists had passed but refrained from implementing in practice. Raikin concludes that “the schism in the post-communist Bulgarian Orthodox Church is a political, not a religious issue, that it is a confrontation between Church and State where the latter seeks to go around the constitutional separation between the two institutions and reimpose its authority over the Church” (Raikin, *Decapitation of the Orthodox Church*, 3–22, 41–2, 67; also his article in *Reporter* 7 III, No. 36, September 10, 1992, 6; a more succinct version is articulated in Raikin, “Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” 24–5, as well as in the open letters to the Bulgarian leadership and to President Clinton (*Duma* 122, June 1, 1998, p. 5; *Sofiiski Novini* 61 (98), April 1, 1998, 6–7). For an assessment of the Law of Confessions and the By-Laws, see Raikin, “Nationalism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” in Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke Press Policy Studies, 1984; idem, “The Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” in Pedro Ramet, ed., *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988.

<sup>21</sup> See the coverage in *Duma*, June 1, 1992, June 6, 1992; *Zemdel'sko zname*, June 5, 1992; *Demokratiia*, June 5, 1992.

Then came the dramatic occupation of the Theological Seminary on August 31, 1992 by BOC-P, and the promulgation of Prof. Radko Poptodorov as Rector. This was followed by the counter-storming of the premises on September 13 by seminarians, and the eviction of the occupiers.<sup>22</sup> The final unsuccessful attempt was the attack on the Diocesan Headquarters on Sunday, October 1, 1992. It failed after a four-hour-long fight with students from the Theological Academy and the Seminary. All throughout, the church bells of Sofia were tolling a funeral knell which prompted the following exchange. Emil Kapudaliev, a member of the National Assembly representing the governing UDF party complained to the clerics of the nearby "Alexander Nevski" cathedral: "Stop the bell, we simply cannot think," whereupon a clergyman allegedly murmured back: "Your mind is stunted anyway."<sup>23</sup> In addition to the Sofia events, there were attempts, with

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22 "Seminaristi s boi prevzekha sgradata si" ("Seminarians took their building by storm"), *24 chasa* 220 (438), September 14, 1992; "Seminaristi si prevzekha shkoloro i piakha 'Mnogaia leta'" ("Seminarians recaptured their school and sang 'For many years,'" *Otechestven Vestnik*, No. 14081, September 14, 1992; "V seminariata uchebnata godina zapochva bez kucheta i bodigardove" ("The school year in the seminary begins without dogs and bodyguards"), *Trud*, September 14, 1992; "Khorata na Sibev biakha progoneni ot Dukhovnata seminariia" ("Sibev's people were chased out of the theological seminary"), *Kontinent*, September 9, 1992; "Khorata na Maxim atakuvakha i prevzekha seminariata" ("Maxim's people attacked and seized the seminary"), *Demokratiia*, September 14, 1992; "Okupatorite iziali i kozleto na seminaristite" ("The occupiers have eaten even the little goat of the seminarians"), *168 chasa*, September 22, 1992.

23 Reported in "Kambani i sblisitsi pak razpnakha varvashtite" ("Bells and skirmishes again have crucified the believers"), *Demokratiia*, October 2, 1992. Other headlines of this momentous day include "Shturmovatsite na Sibev ne uspiakha da se nastaniat v Sofiiskata mitropoliia" ("Sibev's storm troops failed to take over the Sofia Diocese Headquarters"), *Duma*, October 2, 1992; "Khora na Sibev nakhluvat v mitropoliata s gazovi pistoleti, namesvat se presidentit i d-r Trenchev" ("Sibev's men invade the Diocese Headquarters with gas pistols. The President and Dr. Trenchev intervene"), *Kontinent*, October 2, 1992; "Desantchitsite na Fori prevzekha Sofiiskata mitropoliia, sled pet chasa biakha izkhvireni" (Fori's land troops captured the Sofia diocese headquarters, and were thrown out in five hours"), *Trud*, October 2, 1992.

varying success, to seize some monasteries and the dioceses in Lovech, Tŭrnovo, Varna, and Plovdiv.<sup>24</sup>

It has to be admitted, though, that while the UDF government gave BOC-P legal and moral backing, it did not provide them with physical support. Upon the issuing of Spasov's decree, Patriarch Maxim immediately appealed to President Zhelev who referred the appeal to the Constitutional Court. The latter ruled on June 11, 1992 that Spasov had acted in violation of the Constitution but left it to the Supreme Court to decide on the legitimacy of BOC-M. On July 2, 1992, the Supreme Court, headed by Dr. Tatarchev, refused to consider Maxim's appeal on the grounds that it had been submitted 24 hours beyond the stipulated seven days period. In addition, it ruled that since BOC-M had not been registered with the Directorate of Religious Affairs, it was illegitimate and illegal, and thus not entitled to petition the Court.<sup>25</sup> This Catch-22 decision encouraged the representatives of BOC-P to ask for armed support in acquiring the offices of the Sofia Diocese but this was not given either by the Attorney General, nor by the Mayor of Sofia who had otherwise obligingly registered the new Diocesan Council of BOC-P. By October, 1992, Khristofor Sŭbev bitterly complained that "the police sides with Maxim, and has interfered against us for the fourth time."<sup>26</sup>

The same month also saw the culmination of the political crisis and conflict between President Zhelev and the cabinet of Philip Dimitrov. Zhelev had accused the prime minister, among others, of having declared war on the church. On October 28, 1992, the government of Philip Dimitrov fell, and in January, 1993 Professor Liuben Berov formed a new cabinet with a mandate from the MRF. In March, 1993, Metodi Spasov was dismissed, the position of director of the ORA passing to Khristo Matanov, a Byzantinist and history professor from the University of Sofia. Matanov invalidated Spasov's decree No. 92, and the Attorney General's Office (headed by Dr. Ivan Tatarchev, an avid anti-communist and UDF supporter) advised Maxim to make the appropriate steps to legalize his position. Maxim did not follow up,

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24 Raikin, "Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church," 22.

25 Ibid., 21-2.

26 "Kambani i sblŭsŭtsi pak razpna kha viarvashtite," *Demokratiia*, October 2, 1992.

never having considered his position illegitimate. By 1995, the next cabinet under the BSP leader Zhan Videnov, took further steps to consolidate the Orthodox church under Maxim. In a letter of November 13, 1995, following the orders of socialist Vice Prime Minister Svetoslav Shivarov, Matanov formally restored to Patriarch Maxim the official juridical leadership of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. In a further step, when in June, 1996, the hierarchs around Pimen announced that they were convening a Church National Council, and approached Shivarov with the request for financial aid, the vice premier flatly responded that as far as the government was concerned, the Holy Synod of *pro tempore* President Pimen did not exist, that it supported the leadership of Patriarch Maxim, and that the convening of a council would amount to creating a second Orthodox church in the country.<sup>27</sup>

The UDF in opposition, in the meantime, actively supported Pimen. Metodi Spasov, the dismissed director of the ORA, published an accusatory article about the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as “a strategic link for Moscow’s politics,” significantly enough on May 9, 1994, the Red Army’s victory day in the Second World War against Germany.<sup>28</sup> The Church National Council was officially opened in the “Sv. Paraskeva” church in Sofia on July 1, 1996, in the presence of Attorney General Dr. Ivan Tatarchev, and the key leaders of the UDF. When it ended on July 4, it had a newly elected Patriarch Pimen, and a newly canonized saint, Vasil Levski.<sup>29</sup>

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27 This response was communicated in a letter from Shivarov to Maxim of June 5, 1996, a copy of which was given to Spas Raikin (Raikin, *Decapitation of the Orthodox Church*, 50–2).

28 Metodi Spasov, “Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsirkva e strategicheskoto zveno za moskovska politika,” *Demokratiia*, May 9, 1994.

29 Among the headlines, see “Polititsi otidokha na Pimenoviia sibor” (“Politicians went to Pimen’s council”), *24 chasa*, July 2, 1996; “Ivan Tatarchev i SDS deputati otkrikha sibora na razkolnitsite” (“Ivan Tatarchev and UDF deputies opened the schismatic council”), *Duma*, July 2, 1996; “Pimen e noviiat patriarkh” (“Pimen is the new patriarch”), *Demokratiia*, July 4, 1996; “Koroniasaha diado Pimen. Kambani bikha na umrialo za pravoslavieto. Pravitelstvoto niama da priznae resheniata na Tsirkovniia sibor, uveri v telegrama do Maxim premierit Videnov” (“Father Pimen was crowned. The bells tolled a funeral knell for orthodoxy. The government will not acknowledge the decisions of the council, Prime Minister Videnov assured Maxim in a telegram”), *Standard*, July 5, 1996.

Despite the socialist government's unambiguous pledge that it would not recognize and register the new Synod and its patriarch, the cabinet itself had problems in being recognized as a credible and legitimate leadership. As far as the church conflict was concerned, there was the obvious split between the BSP cabinet and the UDF controlled Supreme Court. In an atmosphere of heightened economic tensions, and a wildly running inflation, the UDF won the presidential elections in October with Peter Stoianov elected as president. There was increasing pressure on the cabinet to resign, and go for preliminary elections. On December 19 Zhan Videnov resigned but only six days earlier, on December 13, 1996, in a last-minute attempt to strengthen the position of BOC-M, the socialist government registered Patriarch Maxim and his Holy Synod despite its previous claims that registration was unwarranted.<sup>30</sup> When an interim government was appointed after Videnov's resignation, Pimen challenged Maxim's registration before the Supreme Court. At the hearings on March 5, 1997, the Court canceled BOC-M's registration, declared it illegal, and the Attorney General Dr. Tatarchev stated his belief that Pimen was the only legitimate patriarch, and that his legal proclamation would follow in a few weeks time. The stakes seemed favorable since the previous month, at his inauguration, President Peter Stoianov had invited Pimen to administer the oath despite his previous assurances that he would act as non-partisan president, and would work toward the reconciliation of the church. He did not, however, openly condone Tatarchev's moves, and the next couple of years behind-the-scenes pressure was exerted on Maxim to step down and open the road to reconciliation, but to no avail. In fact, the limbo situation was summarized in a statement by

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30 This was effected by Boncho Asenov, an official of the ORA who had assumed responsibility after the resignation of Khristo Matanov as director. Matanov had been threatening to resign already in August, 1996, but when on November 17 the government issued Order No. P63 compelling him to register the Holy Synod, Matanov refused on the grounds that this was paramount to breaking the law and that the state should not intervene in religious affairs. His successor—Boncho Asenov—had been a former lecturer in the Sixth Department of State Security, specialized in monitoring religious denominations. (Janice Broun, "The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Part 2: Under the Socialist Government, 1993–97," *Religion, State and Society* 28.3 [2000], 270–1).

Vice Premier Veselin Metodiev that neither of the two patriarchs were legitimate.<sup>31</sup>

And so the situation persisted. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Pimen), basing its claims on the May 25, 1992 decree, and the March 5, 1997 decision of the Supreme Court, maintained it represented the only legal leadership. It was baffled that the executive, controlled by the UDF, while giving it lip-service support, did not carry out these decisions. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Maxim), on the other hand, while feeling the pressure, was confident of its canonical status, and had time and tradition on its side. People, although cognizant of the ambivalent status of the church during the decades of communist rule, and often critical of Maxim, did not single him out as a sinister collaborator, anymore implicated than any of his contemporary prelates. The common sense attitude among the majority of the congregation was that, with the passing of this generation of the church leadership, a reconciliation would inevitably take place. In the meantime, preserving the institutional unity of the church has been considered far more important than what is widely perceived as a simple power struggle within the higher echelons of the church hierarchy. Of the circa 1,500 priests and monks, 1,267 priests and 80 monks sided with Maxim, and only 117 priests and 15 monks were part of the BOC-P.<sup>32</sup> A 1997 poll of 1,389 individuals gave 55% support for Maxim, 6% support for Pimen, and 39% disinterested respondents.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, BOC-M scored several important international and domestic victories. For one, the National Movement for Unification of the Church, founded in 1992, decided to back Maxim in 1997.<sup>34</sup> Pope John Paul II, invited by President Stoianov to visit the country in 1997, declined on account of the church split, something widely interpreted

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31 "Veselin Metodiev: Bilgariia niama patriarkh" ("Bulgaria has no patriarch"), *Duma*, June 11, 1997; "Metodiev: Maxim i Pimen sa ednakvo nelegitimni" (Metodiev: Maxim and Pimen are equally illegitimate"), *Duma*, June 28, 1997.

32 "Sveshtenitsi se zakhvanakha da opraviat tsirkvata predi Velikden" ("Priests are setting to fixing the church for Easter"), *168 chasa*, April 10–16, 1998, 7.

33 "Koi e istinskiiat patriarkh na Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsirkva?" ("Who is the real patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church?"), *Duma*, August 6, 1997.

34 Raikin, *Decapitation of the Orthodox Church*, 55.

as an indirect endorsement of Maxim.<sup>35</sup> When the Pope finally visited Bulgaria in May, 2002, he had an official meeting with Maxim and the members of the Holy Synod.<sup>36</sup>

The most spectacular endorsement, however, came from the heads of the other Orthodox churches, who gathered in Sofia on September 30, 1998. It was, as a journalist put it, a pan-Orthodox meeting that took place in Sofia 1,655 years after the Council of Serdica (Sofia's ancient name) convened in the year 343. The meeting was called together by the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to discuss the schism in Bulgaria. Present were the heads of twelve Orthodox churches, and other representatives: the Patriarchs—Bartholomew I himself, Antioch's Ignatius IV, Alexandria's Peter VII, Russia's Aleksii II, Romania's Theoctist, Serbia's Pavle, Albania's Anastasios, Bulgaria's Maxim; and the Archbishops—Cyprus' Chrisostomos, Athens' Christodoulos, Poland's Sava, and the Czechs' Simeon. It was a spectacular gathering. The prelates were accommodated in the government residence in Boiana. The head of the ORA, Liubomir Mladenov, an ardent critic of Maxim, who had denounced the council the previous day as a new Warsaw Pact, found it diplomatic to meet the Ecumenical patriarch at the airport.<sup>37</sup> The message of the council was unambiguous: a reconciliation had to take place, otherwise Bulgaria risked excommunication because the sin of a schism cannot be absolved even with martyrs' blood. Pimen's prelates could return to the church only by following the canon, that is penance and renunciation of their posts. On the other hand, it was expected that Maxim's Synod would demonstrate

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35 Of the numerous headlines, a couple are quite telling: "Ot sedem godini chakame Papata kato Godo. Pokanata na Prezidenta Stoianov do Yoan Pavel Vtori ne e distatichna, nuzhna e i dumata na Maxim" ("Seven years we have been waiting for the Pope like Godot. The invitation of President Stoianov to John Paul II is not enough, he also needs Maxim's word"), *168 chasa*, May 22, 1997; "Papata povdigna reitinga na Patriarkh Maxim" ("The Pope raised Patriarch Maxim's rating"), *24 chasa*, May 30, 1997.

36 This visit occurred during the presidency of the socialist Georgi Pirvanov and the government headed by Prime Minister Simeon Saksoburggotski. See <http://www.popeinbulgaria.com/programme.html>.

37 "S prezidentski samolet doletia vselenskiat patriarkh" ("The ecumenical patriarch flew in with the presidential aircraft"), *Duma* 220, September 30, 1998.

magnanimity, and would re-ordain the prelates within the month.<sup>38</sup> There were wide speculations that a solution had been reached, and that the church conflict was over; that Pimen's people had repented; that Maxim had promised to retire to a monastery.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, it never came to a resolution. By the summer of 2000, the situation was identical to the one in 1997. The public was waiting for biology or God to have their say. Pimen did oblige, and passed away in 1999; as people would jest, it was Maxim's turn. There were anemic attempts to keep the interest of the public alive with a war of words. In April, 2001, the alternative Synod headed by Metropolitan Inokentii convened a supreme ecclesiastical court, which was supposed to pronounce a final verdict on the legality of Maxim's 1971 patriarchal election. The chief prosecutor was Professor Radko Poptodorov who supported the claim that the election was rigged by the then ruling communist party, and that Maxim should be sent to a monastery after being delivered of his patriarchal status. Unsurprisingly, the ecclesiastical court gave a verdict, which effectively "retired" Maxim from his post. Maxim's Synod gave a brief dismissing answer that the event deserved comment only after Inokentii's Synod was recognized.<sup>40</sup>

Schism fatigue had set in, however. More importantly, the church question was no longer a trump card on the political scene. It had become an embarrassment. The ideological polarization of the early 1990s no longer commanded the political discourse. A new political class had emerged, still circumscribed within the inert structures of inherited party affiliations, but with a vested interest in preserving power,

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38 "Patriarsite kazakha—edinstvo ili otlichvane" ("The patriarchs said: unity or excommunication"), *168 chasa* 40, October 2–8, 1998; "Taen sibor na pravoslaviето spasiava tsirkvata ni" ("A secret Orthodox council is saving our church"), *Standart*, No. 2156, September 30, 1998.

39 "Patriarsite miriasakha. Krai na razkola, Pimen se pokaia" ("The Patriarchs calmed down. End of the schism, Pimen repented"), *24 chasa*, 2 October 1998; "Razkolit v tsirkvata svirshi" ("The church schisms ended"), *Sega*, 2 October 1998; "Maxim: Razkolit svirshi. Patriarhit otiva v manastir do tri mesetsa" ("Maxim: the schism is over. The patriarch is going to a monastery within three months"), *Monitor*, October 2, 1998.

40 *Trud* LIX, 93/16665, April 3, 2001, 4; *Demokratiia* XII, 78/13550, April 3, 2001, 4; *24 chasa* X, 93/3458, April 3, 2001, 4; *Demokratiia* XII, 81, April 6, 2001 (from the web).

and a tacit professional solidarity across party lines.<sup>41</sup> The latest elections of June 17, 2001 provided an additional twist. The new prime minister (and former king) Simeon Saksoburggotski firmly supported Maxim, and the patriarch was at the opening ceremony of the new parliament. For three years Simeon did not articulate any special policy toward the church conflict, although he strongly encouraged reconciliation, and did not shy away from taking sides.

Then, the summer of 2004 brought the unexpected closure. July and August—the “dead” hot vacation months—are preferred for taking dramatic decisions aimed at undramatic reactions.<sup>42</sup> According to the newly adopted Law of Confessions, Patriarch Maxim was appointed the sole legitimate leader of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. On July 21, 2004, following a prosecutor’s decision and backed by the police, Maxim’s Synod received back more than 250 items of church property (churches, restaurants, shops and other realty), which had been appropriated by the alternative Synod. Of these, some 28 are

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41 It is these developments that leave me skeptical of the reasons advanced about the political motivations for backing Pimen. Spas Raikin, as early as 1992 in numerous essays and open letters, saw in this a planned strategy to enfeeble the Orthodox Church in general as a Russian oriented and Slavophile institution. He pointed directly to the Catholic Church and the Bulgarian monarchy as its possible agent; to different protestant sects; and, finally, to the insinuations of western governments and politicians (see Raikin’s interview in *168 chasa*, September 22, 1992; his article in *24 chasa*, September 16, 1992). In his open letter to Ivan Sungarski, the chairman of the parliamentary commission for religious issues, he quotes Zbignev Brzezinski’s statement “We defeated communism! Now our biggest enemy is the Russian Orthodox Church.” Raikin adds: “It seems that this statement concerns also the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, at least for the ones who are pulling the strings, and you in Sofia are implementing their orders.” (Open letter of May 27, 1998, kindly given to me by the author). However, the Kostov government had all political and economic means at its disposal to curb Maxim had it really wanted to. While the UDF was vociferously backed Pimen’s church legally and morally, it did not, as already mentioned, give it physical support. The UDF government held all church properties, and it did not hand them over to BOC-P, but, instead, maintained the illegitimacy of both church administrations. Led into an uncompromising position by political zealots in the early 1990s, the Kostov government was caught in a highly embarrassing situation, and tried to buy time with inactivity.

42 For example, the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov was blown up in August, 1999, when Sofia is half empty and people are in a vacationing mood.

in Sofia.<sup>43</sup> Despite the lame protests of some politicians, and without much fanfare, Bulgaria seems to have again a unified church.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Standart*, July 22, 2004, "Popove se biha zaradi imoti." Protests were voiced by former president Petăr Stoianov and former prime minister Filip Dimitrov, as well as by some MPs, who called on the state not to meddle in church affairs (see *Standart*, July 22, 2004, "P.Stoianov: Viznuten sim," "DSB zove dirzhavata da ne se mesi"; *Standart*, July 23, 2004, "Progonenite se oplakakha v parlamenta"; *Standart*, July 24, 2005, "Popovete na Maxim zheniat bezplatno." The newspaper can be accessed at <http://www.standartnews.com/archive>.

<sup>44</sup> At the same time, some activities, if only at the private level, seem to be ongoing. For example, although "non-existent," in December 2004 the alternative church published an Orthodox calendar for 2005, for the first time with the icon of Levski on the cover. This seems to give credence to my belief that, in times of crisis Levski serves as the ultimate cultural capital. These calendars were not distributed openly, as the institutions of the alternative church are abolished, and I have no idea of how wide a public they have reached. I personally came across one of these calendars by chance, seeing it in the possession of an acquaintance who has a relative in the high echelons of the alternative hierarchy.



## 2. The Canonization and Its Implications

This, then, is the background against which the elevation of Levski to a sanctified status has to be understood. To reverse the popular definition of historical background as the limbo inhabited by people who do not really interest us, it is precisely the inhabitants of this limbo who capture the attention in this story. For the clergy of the alternative Synod, the canonization was a move that, for the first time, propelled their activities out of the heretofore exclusively political field, and into the cultural field. Was this a deliberately calculated and carefully staged act intended to exploit a powerful national symbol in order to deliver a much coveted national popularity? In hindsight, it seems to display an inordinate and unsuspected sense of acumen in acquiring some powerful symbolic capital. However, the way in which the activists at the Pimen Church National Council seem to have rather spontaneously and initially crudely gone into the act of canonization belies such a belief. In fact, the act can be better described and explained by resorting to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. The usefulness of this term lies in the fact that it provides both a unifying category that subsumes the protagonists of the canonization as well as their opponents in an explanatory matrix, and in addition emphasizes the intuitive over the premeditated aspects of their behavior. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which in the end becomes second nature.<sup>45</sup>

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45 Bourdieu's formal definition of *habitus* is worth recalling: "durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them." (Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 53). For a useful exegesis of Bourdieu, see the editor's introduction of Randal Johnson in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. Talal Asad has

It represents a set of structured and determined attitudes or dispositions, which generate structuring and determining practices and perceptions. Bourdieu specifically emphasizes the durability of these structures, because they act over a lifetime, as well as their characteristic of being “structured structures” insofar as they are the product of objective social relations and conditions. He also stresses their dynamic and organizing power which, in turn, makes them “structuring structures,” which accounts for the similarity in the *habitus* of agents from the same social class. This explains why, as I will later demonstrate, the most challenged addressees of the canonization act—the prelates of the Maxim-led church—despite their formal resistance to the “structuring structures” and the resulting practices, respond to the challenge in much the same way: they are passionately debating in private the pros and cons of canonization, some are carefully preparing the ground for a future canonization despite official protestations. Their “feel for the game,” their *sens pratique* inclines them to act and react in a manner that is not always calculated and is often unconscious. On the other hand, this theoretical framework helps appreciate the complexity of the agents’ (here Pimen’s adherents’) actions: they are both deeply rooted in and, at the same time, actively challenge the existing structures in which they are inculcated (and implicated). As already mentioned, Bourdieu’s definition also lays stress on the questionable mastery needed in order to attain the aims, which is another way of emphasizing the intuitiveness of the activity. And this resonates much with the clumsy way in which the actual canonization took place, and was undervalued by its own advocates. There were no fanfares about Levski’s canonization back in 1996. It was not publicly and widely advertised. None of the theological argumentation about his canonization was published in the press. A year later, one could not even buy a copy of his icon, although another one was already on

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drawn the attention to the fact that it was Marcel Mauss who actually originated the concept of *habitus* as the conglomerate of “habits” or “custom” or “acquired ability” which vary not just with individuals but also, and especially, between societies. While Bourdieu later popularized the notion, he did not credit Mauss with its invention (Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, 75).

display in the early modern<sup>46</sup> church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” in the center of Sofia, the place rumored to have been the reburial ground of Levski’s remains. The representatives of the Pimen-led hierarchs at that time did not deem it important to discuss Levski’s case with lay visitors.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, at first the cultural capital of the canonization proponents did not allow them to immediately and fully appreciate the symbolic capital of their act.<sup>48</sup> This occurred only very gradually, and only amongst some of the church leaders who recognized that “through ritual... those claiming power demonstrate how their interests are in the natural, real or fruitful order of things.”<sup>49</sup>

Things had changed considerably by the year 2000. In July of this year, I made four visits to the Synod of BOC-P, two of which were close to two-hour conversations. The most interesting and informative exchange was with Father Anatolii Balachev, at that time the secretary to the St. Synod. An intelligent and cultivated interlocutor, Balachev reminisced that in the 1960s, as bookkeeper to the Holy Synod of Patriarch Kiril, he was helping out Arkhimandrit Artemii, a great specialist in Byzantine and Slavic texts, in preparing the canonization of Father Paisii of Khilendar, as well as that of Sofronii Vrachanski. At that time he approached Bishop Partenii with the notion that the church should not stop with Paisii but that it needed also other saints.

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46 I am using this vague description because the age of the church is not definitively determined. The official dating is the late fourteenth century, and all descriptions insist that it belongs to the group of architectural monuments of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. In private conversations, however, several archeologists and art historians have expressed their belief that the church could not have been built before the end of the fifteenth century, well into the Ottoman period. That this belief has had no written form of expression is understandable within a paradigm which insists that Christian churches were not built under Ottoman rule. On the other hand, it has not yet produced a professional refutation of the official dating.

47 See above, n. 5.

48 For Bourdieu’s notions of symbolic and cultural capital, see his *In Other Words. Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 22, 111. Cultural capital is an internalized code or a form of knowledge that procures orientation in the cultural field, while symbolic capital refers to the degree of honor, prestige, celebrity, or renown achieved in the interplay of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*).

49 Catherine Bell, *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 129.

“Maybe you’d like Levski,” the Bishop countered, “but he is the assassin of an innocent youth.” Balachev’s argument that the already canonized Tsar Boris-Mikhail had also resorted to violence, as had all military saints, did not seem to impress the bishop.<sup>50</sup> Memory is a slippery and unverifiable notion but the least that can be said about this piece of reminiscence is that it indicates that there is (or there is an attempt at) continuity and perseverance in the efforts to elevate Levski to the status of a saint at least from the 1960s on.

In the 1990s, Balachev maintains, a special commission was formed whose task it was to establish the grounds for Levski’s canonization. These were then submitted to the Synod which ordered that a brief *vita* should be compiled, together with a service for the saint. The *vita*, Balachev assured me, was written but the service has not yet been completed. The act of canonization had been prepared by Radko Poptodorov, in consultation with Apostol Mikhailov, both professors at the Theological Academy.<sup>51</sup> The grounds for sainthood, according to their preliminary research, comprised the following four criteria: healing powers of the holy remains; holy life; service for the fatherland; martyrdom. Levski fulfilled all conditions, except the first (his remains being unknown), and was accordingly canonized as a *sveshthenomichenik* (holy martyr). Of course, Balachev added, Levski had already become a saint in people’s souls and hearts, and the church was simply following in the wake of something that had already been attained. Why was Maxim opposed to the canonization? “Comrade Maxim and Co. are against because they cannot stand someone higher, someone with qualities superior to theirs.” Could I see the written act of canonization as well as the brief *vita*? By all means, only I had

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50 Interview on July 24, 2000 at the headquarters of the Holy Synod of BOC-P, 58 Rakovski Street. Balachev had the title of *stavroforen ikonom*, which indicates a married priest. Born in 1938, he had taught for some time in the seminary at Cherepish but was fired, according to him, by the security forces. He was rescued by Patriarch Kiril who made him bookkeeper of the Holy Synod between 1965 and 1968. Kiril had advised him to keep low for the time being, and enjoy his protection: “Whoever sits under the pear tree, will eat the pears.” Balachev is full of admiration for Kiril as a scholar and human being, and contrasts him favorably to the non-intellectual and non-spiritual figure of Maxim.

51 Apostol Mihailov, “Za kanonizatsiata na svetiite v pravoslavnata tsirkva,” *Dukhovna kultura* 4, 1957.

to come another day.<sup>52</sup> And so I did, on several days during the following weeks but the documents never materialized.<sup>53</sup> This in itself requires a comment.

There can be no doubt that Levski was canonized by the Church National Council convened by Pimen, July 1–4, 1996. This was, however briefly, documented in the press at the time. The fact, though, that no documentation could be produced of such a crucial decision, leaves one skeptical of the existence of written testimony.<sup>54</sup> There is, however, a substantial difference between 1997, when Father Barakov did not even deem it necessary to assure me that such documentation existed, and the year 2000, when both Father Balachev and Petir Petrov said they were eager to place it at my disposal, and were extremely apologetic that they could not produce it. Petrov went even so far as to muse what might have happened to the document: “In those days everything was so tense, who knows where the document might have landed! And these, the reds, they used to steal!”<sup>55</sup> The latter already sounds like an alibi. Most likely, according to me, what happened in July, 1996 was a spontaneous oral act without a meticulous preparation, and no formalized procedure. This was quite enough for the years 1996 and 1997 when the priorities were high on institution building, and there was an acute political conflict at hand. By 2000, on

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52 Interview on July 21, 2000.

53 July 24, 28, 31. The first time the secretary was away; the second, she was in but the file with the 1996 documentation did not produce anything; the third time, Petir Petrov, with a managing job at the Synod promised to look into another storage but could not find anything either. All throughout, the officials at the Synod were extremely courteous, and ready to help.

54 The recent tradition in this respect is unequivocal. For example, the canonization of Bishop Sofronii Vrachanski occurred on December 1, 1964, and was immediately documented in protocol No. 23 of the meeting of the Holy Synod. This protocol was then published in *Tsirkoven vestnik* LXVI, No. 20, May 8, 1965, 1–5. Likewise, a *vita* and a liturgy for Sofronii Vrachanski were simultaneously produced. They were published later, together with other documents, speeches, poetry, and songs in honor of the saint in a collection commemorating the 170th anniversary of his death, and edited by one of the future leaders in Pimen’s Synod, Kalinik: Vrachanski mitropolit Kalinik, ed., *Bogosluzhebno posledovanie i zhitie na sv. Sofronii Vrachanski (1739–1813) s istoricheski ocherti za negovata ‘Vrachanska’ eparkhiia i za Cherepishkiia manastir. Iubileen sbornik po sluchai 170 godini or blazhenata konchina na svetitelia*, Sofia: Sinodalno izdatelstvo, 1983.

55 Interview with Petir Petrov, July 28, 2000.

the other hand, there was the need for cultural clout and a legitimate written record. This may actually appear, only it most probably will have been produced *post factum*.<sup>56</sup>

A visit to the “Sv. Paraskeva Samardzhiiska” church corroborated this indirectly. This small church, the place of Levski’s alleged reburial, was the first and for a period of time the only one which had an icon of Levski on permanent display for the past few years.<sup>57</sup> Painted and signed by Nikola Orozov in 1996, this depiction of a haloed Levski carries the inscription *Sv. Svshtmchk. Ierod. Ignatii* (St. Holy Martyr, Hierodeacon Ignatii). As explained to me by the local priest Father Mikhail Milushev, an energetic, well-educated and humorous man, the inscription is incorrect. The title *svshthenomichenik* can be used only for the secular clergy (the so called “white clergy”). Levski had been a monk and hierodeacon, part of the so-called “black clergy,” and the proper term for him should have been *prepodobnomichenik* (holy/reverend martyr).<sup>58</sup> Balachev con-

56 To my knowledge, this written record has not appeared, however, and the closing down of the secessionist church in the late summer of 2004 makes its “creation” redundant at this juncture.

57 In the main church of the alternative Synod—the twentieth-century “Sv. Paraskeva” or “Sv. Petka” on Rakovski street—Levski’s icon was exhibited only on his saint’s day. Since 2001 and until August, 2004, one could see a permanent and prominent icon of Levski also in the “Sveta Sofia” church, the oldest Christian basilica which gave the city its name, and which also was part of the alternative Synod.

58 *Sveshtenomichenik* and *prepodobnomichenik* corresponds to the Greek forms *agiomartis* and *osiomartis*. The second term for designating martyrs appeared later, since the monastic movement developed after the end of persecutions. Latin does not record the distinction, translating both *agios* and *osios* as *sanctus*, and using only the term *sanctus martyr*. V. M. Zhivov, *Sviatost’. Kratkii slovar’ agiograficheskikh terminov (Sainthood. A Brief Dictionary of Hagiographic Terms)*, Moscow: Gnosis, 1994, 80–5, 102–3. On martyrdom as a road to sainthood, and especially the significance of the so-called new martyrs, Orthodox Christians who underwent a martyred death for the faith, see Constantine Cavarinos, *The Significance of the New Martyrs in the Life of the Orthodox Church*, Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992. Cavarinos specifies the six categories of saints: apostles, prophets, martyrs, hierarchs, monastics, and the righteous (7), and analyzes the place of the new martyrs by following the argumentation of St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite. Among the multiple significance of new martyrs put forward by Nicodemos—effectuating a renewal of the Orthodox faith, missionary role among those of another faith, negation of heretics, being exemplars of patience—the fifth and last one can be relevant to Levski’s

curs.<sup>59</sup> Milushev, a priest of the Pimen affiliated hierarchy, and staunch believer that Levski had been buried in his church and ought to be canonized, opined about the canonization: “It was done in a slapdash fashion without preparation. Such an act should unite, not divide the congregation. They started where they should have ended.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, a canonization needs a careful preparatory period, and this was what Balachev was trying to convince me had taken place before the act of 1996 (see Plates 13, 14, 15 and 15A).

Preparation or not, the members of the Maxim-led hierarchy, without having given officially their formal reasons, had refuted Levski’s canonization. In 1998 and 2000, I had a number of interviews with members of the CHAI, priests, professors and students at the Theological Academy, all part of the mainstream church. All described Levski as their greatest Bulgarian national hero but a secular figure who had his place at the pinnacle of the secular pantheon, and not in the church. The reasoning was different but none resorted to a political argument. The argumentation was based exclusively on differing interpretations of the canon or Levski’s relationship to the church. Some pointed out that Levski had unfrocked himself, and thus had broken his vows to the church. Others objected that although he had left the church, he had remained deeply religious; they insisted, however, that in the absence of miracles, his canonization was illegal. Still others maintained that Levski was guilty of the murder of an innocent young

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case: “[new martyrs] constitute an encouragement and incitement for all Christians who are forced into martyrdom according to circumstances to imitate by deed their martyred death, especially all who reached the point of denying the Orthodox faith previously” (15). The logical stretch to be covered is to show that while Levski’s sacrifice is not *stricto sensu* in the name of religion, he did so with a religious zeal, and he had never, in fact, severed his ties to Christianity and the church. This, as I am arguing later in the text, is precisely what is being gradually done.

<sup>59</sup> Interview on July 24, 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Interview on July 18, 2000. Milushev has no great illusions about his congregation but he is good-humored. When I bought a book from his church, he laughed: “This is a rarity. In the years that I served as parish priest near Sofia, my church was plundered several times. They took church plates, chairs, a stove, even my sheets but it never happened that a book should be stolen...”

man, and therefore could not be pronounced a saint.<sup>61</sup> The counter-argument that many a Christian saint has committed more than one murder works with some but not with others. Only privately, and after some pushing, some would concur that Levski actually has all the credentials to become a saint, but that Pimen and company's precipitous act is now the major obstacle to a legal and consensual canonization.<sup>62</sup>

On the surface, what emerges from this exchange of opinion is that people differ, often incompatibly, not only over the specific arguments on Levski but, in general, over who can become a saint. More significantly, though, the argumentation pro and con is deeply grounded in historical reasoning. In a society in which political discourse in the past two centuries has often taken the form of disputes over archeological discoveries and historical rights, as is the case in practically all European societies, there still is an enormous premium set on the persuasive power of an erudite and seemingly abstruse academic argument. In the case of prelates or church scholars, the argumentation attempts also to acquire the guise of a legal argument, referring to the canon. Inevitably, the discussion of the canonization's legal aspects has

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61 This is an episode much commented on by Levski's biographers and interpreters. On August 14, 1872, Levski was at the head of an armed burglary against the house of Dencho Khalacha, a rich citizen of Lovech, who had refused to respond to Levski's extortion letters to contribute money to the revolutionary cause. Unexpectedly, during the robbery, the young 24-year-old servant came to the house and was silenced by Levski's knife. Levski himself immediately and regretfully reported on this to Karavelov, and Ivan Undzhiev, his first scholarly biographer, comments that "the murder in Lovech was the only assault on a Bulgarian carried out by Levski himself" (Ivan Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski. Biografiia*, Sofia: Direktsiia na izkustvata pri ministerstvo na informatsiata i izkustvata, 1947, 554–5). Most of the Levski scholars agree with this verdict. It is true that for a revolutionary who did not shy away from sending murder threats to rich Bulgarians, he rather remarkably controlled his wrath, and sparsely resorted to capital punishment, but recent attempts to depict him as a tolerant, anti-revolutionary, and humble Christ-like figure, are ridiculous. However, the debate about this event and its interpretation belongs to another circle of problems, namely the attempts to appropriate Levski for different causes and discourses.

62 Petir Petrov is harsher. "Maxim's entourage," he says, "explains its reluctance to canonize Levski on the account that he was a revolutionary and assassin but, in fact, is simply fulfilling the orders of the communists that Levski cannot be a religious symbol and figure of the church" (interview on July 28, 2000).

a political dimension and far reaching practical implications, and the parties concerned are aware of this. What is remarkable, is the complete domination of the traditional style of an objectivist and positivist academic rhetoric. The detailed survey of the history of Orthodox canonization, and especially among the Bulgarians, that follows in the next few pages, is not an end in itself, but attempts to give an immediate taste of the nature and density, but also of the style, of the actual discourse that is taking place among the parties involved.

The reason that different, often clashing, views are displayed is not due to any ignorance of the canon but to the fact that no strict canon exists in the Orthodox Church which regulates sainthood. The ancient church had not developed a formal process of canonization. For Christians in the first centuries, sanctity was something obvious, and the problem of proof, so significant in Christianity of the later period, was irrelevant. In both the western and eastern medieval worlds, popular veneration preceded and induced the official recognition of the church. As summarized by Alice-Mary Talbot, “usually a cult developed first at the local level (e.g., at a parish church or monastery): pilgrims would flock to the saint’s tomb in hope of receiving healing from his or her relics; there would be a special annual commemoration, usually on the anniversary of the saint’s death, which became the saint’s feastday; a *vita* might be written and an icon painted; eventually the saint might be recognized by the local church hierarchy and his or her name inscribed in a register of feastdays.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, when Balachev says that Levski had already been sanctified in people’s souls and hearts, and the church was simply following in the footsteps of tradition, he is actually expressing the ancient practice.

Canonization became formalized much later and only gradually. It began with decisions issued by the Patriarch or the Pope in the ninth and tenth centuries but, while in the Eastern Church saints could be added at the discretion of the local prelate without a formal patriarchal endorsement, by the twelfth century the Roman Church forbade the

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63 Alice-Mary Talbot, “General Introduction,” in Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium. Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996, vii. For a systematic survey of the procedure of designating saints, see Pierre Deloiz, *Sociologie et canonisation*, Liège: Faculté de droit, La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, 25–40.

worship of saints without papal sanction. The first historically attested papal canonization by Pope John XV was that of Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg in 993, twenty years after his death. This became a strictly regulated procedure for the Western Church in 1234 during the papacy of Gregory IX (1227–1241). No earlier than fifty years after his death, a threefold investigation in the life and miracles of the candidate for saint, initiated by the local clergy and bishop, was effectuated by a congregation of rites (*congregatio ritus*). Following this, the congregation voted to promulgate the dead to the status of blessed, beginning the process of beatification. Local veneration was then allowed for the beatified. If additional miracles happened, one could proceed with canonization. Some of the conditions for canonization included: belonging to the church; a proper age to distinguish good from evil; the state of being deceased; a holy life; a miracle; an already existing church tradition of veneration; petition for canonization; the existence of a *vita*.<sup>64</sup> It was during the pontificate of Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644) that the two-level beatification-canonization procedure found its final formulation, and a radical reform in the canonization process took place. The most elaborate theory of canonization was the work of Cardinal Prosper Lambertini, the future Pope Benedict XIV (1740–1758) who published a treatise in 1734 and a papal decree in 1741.<sup>65</sup>

64 The existence of relics was not a *sine qua non* for canonization, although it was observed in practice. As an unofficial rule but to which prelates did adhere, it was formally removed in 1982 when John Paul II canonized the Polish martyr Maximilian Kolbe who had perished in Auschwitz (Panaiot Karagiozov, *Slavianskite sveti michenitsi: Svetost i kanonizatsiia, khronologiia i tipologiia, kritika i apologiia na slavianskoto michenichestvo*, Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2006, 33).

65 Paul Molinari, “Canonization of Saints (History and Procedure)” and A. E. Green, “Canonization of Saints (Theological Aspects),” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, III, 55–61; *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 233; Arnold Angenendt, “Der Heilige: auf Erden—im Himmel,” in Jürgen Petersohn, *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*, Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1994, 46–8. Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium*, VII, maintains that canonization in the strict sense did not occur in the West until the tenth century, and in Byzantium until the thirteenth century. See also Karagiozov, *Slavianskite sveti michenitsi*, 37–8. The most authoritative scholarly synthesis of the problematique is considered to be André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, transl. by Jean Birrell, Cambridge:

Intricate as these rules are, the Western Church does not always strictly stand by its own rules, especially when it comes to the “waiting period,” as attested by the recent spree of beatifications and canonizations under Pope John Paul II.<sup>66</sup> In addition, while in principle following the rules for accepting a saint, the Catholic Church did not develop a canonical model for sainthood that was to be followed by all communities. Instead it relied on the saints themselves, and their followers and admirers to develop their own interpretation of holiness.<sup>67</sup>

The Orthodox Church does not have a worked out formalized canon, and even the term *canonisatio* was unknown in the Eastern Church until the seventeenth century when it was first mentioned by the Patriarch of Jerusalem Nectarius (Nektarios).<sup>68</sup> As already pointed out, in the early centuries sanctity was recognized by the consent and acclamation of a local community. From the 4th century A.D. on, the veneration of saints in the Byzantine church was more widespread and stronger than in the West. At the same time, this veneration was highly regionalized and there was only a limited number of common cults.<sup>69</sup> The late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries during the Palaiologan period saw a change in the recognition of sanctity toward a more formal procedure. There are several canonizations by decree during this period, and in the opinion of Ruth Macrides, this was brought about by contact with the Latin Church during the thirteenth century. With the fall of Byzantium under the Ottomans, however, this trend came to an end.<sup>70</sup>

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Cambridge University Press, 1997, especially 387–412, 479–534.

66 Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) canonized almost 300 saints and beatified more than 800 Christians during his pontificate (Karagiozov, *Slavianskite sveti michenitsi*, 45).

67 Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 39.

68 L. Mirkovich, “Uvrshthenije despota Stevana Lazarevicha u red svetitelja,” *Bogoslovlje* 3, 1927, cited in Dimo Cheshmedzhiev, “Kim vîprosa za kulta na kniaz Boris-Mikhail v Srednovkovna Bilgariia,” *Istoričeski pregled* 3–4, 1999, 172.

69 Karagiozov, *Slavianskite sveti michenitsi*, 46–7.

70 Ruth Macrides, “Saints and Sainthood in the Early Palaiologan Period,” in Sergei Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint. University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, London, Chester: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981, 83–7. There seems to be an exception,

Still, if one were to scrutinize the practice of the Eastern Church, it actually follows, in their main lines, the same rules that are accepted in the Western Church.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, while the conditions for canonization are more or less the same, they are treated in the Eastern Church less legalistically, emphasizing their sufficient rather than obligatory character. The differences between the Western and the Eastern churches are actually less ones of substance but rather ones of procedure. While canonization in the West is more formalized and exclusively effectuated from the center through the Papal authority, the one in the East seems to be stressing more the grassroots process, following tradition, that is the public opinion of the congregation. It still has an administrative character, insofar as the process of adding to the rank of local saints is effectuated at the local level by the diocesan prelate or the metropolitan, and in the case of a more generalized *cultus*, by the archbishop or the patriarch. Evelyne Patlagean, in particular, stresses that the public recognition of sanctity is effectuated by its entry into the liturgy.<sup>72</sup> In practice, this happens by appointing an annual celebration in memory of the saint, usually the anniversary of his/her death or another significant date as, for example, the finding or transfer of relics. It is punctuated by adding the name of the saint to the

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however, during the patriarchate of Cyril Loukaris (1621–1638), whose canonization decrees attest to the observation of pretty formal regulations: local Christians send a petition to their bishop or metropolitan who, on his part, sends it over to the Patriarch, accompanied by a vita of the aspiring saint as well as some information about miracles. The Patriarch, together with the Holy Synod, effectuates the canonization (Karagiozov, *Slavian-skite sveti michenitsi*, 48).

71 Zhivov, *Sviatost'*, 35–8; *Polnyi pravoslavnyi bogoslovskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, vol. II, St.Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo P.P.Soikina, 1913, 1179–80; Evgenii Golubinskii, *Istoriia kanonizatsii sviatykh v russkoi tserkvi*, Moskva, 1903; P. Peeters, “La canonization des saints dans l'église russe,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 33.4 (1914), 380–420. The best brief definition comes from an unpublished dissertation by Caren Calendine, *Theosis and the Recognition of Saints in Tenth Century Byzantium*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998, 36: “Sainthood is, then, a public recognition, with or without synodal proclamation, of persons who have charismatic followings, who have worked miracles, who have the gift of prophecy, who have impressed others with their virtue or asceticism, who have produced learned works on Orthodoxy, or who have been martyred or upheld the principles of the faith.”

72 Evelyne Patlagean, “Sainteté et Pouvoir,” in Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, 103.

menology (the monthly calendar) in the church.<sup>73</sup> Often, as pointed out by Elka Bakalova, the composition of a short *vita* of the saint for liturgical needs indicates the act of canonization.<sup>74</sup> Father Balachev, well aware of this, went to great lengths at insisting how well prepared the canonization was, and how the Synod, in anticipation of the canonization act, had ordered the writing of a short *vita*, and the composition of a liturgy. The *vita*, he said, had been prepared; there had been not enough time for the liturgy, and at this point there existed only an antiphon (*tropar*) for the saint.<sup>75</sup> As with the document for the canonization, neither the brief *vita* nor the *tropar* could be produced.

While all of this makes the procedures in the Eastern Church seem less cumbersome and informal, the absence of a body of formalized prescribed rules that are broadly accepted and can be strictly imposed opens, in fact, the ground for different readings and opposing opinions. A rare case, where an official opinion about canonizations in the Greek Orthodox Church has been articulated, comes from the 1930s.<sup>76</sup> In November 1930, the Romanian Patriarch Myron requested the opinion of the Ecumenical Patriarch on the issue of recognizing saints of the church. A special synodical committee on canonical questions was convened in Constantinople in February 1931, which drew a relevant report, and was transmitted to the Romanian Patriarchate together with a letter from the then Ecumenical Patriarch Photios. The committee's report was styled like a sermon, and it drew on several precedents. One was the statement of Nektarios of Jerusalem (1602–1676) who, in a refutation of the Friars of Jerusalem, articulated the essential elements of holiness: "There are three things which testify to true holiness in men; first blameless orthodoxy, second attainment of all virtues, amongst which is resistance on behalf of the faith unto death, and finally the manifestation on God's part of supernatural signs and miracles." The proclamation of saints was done by the church, understood either in a general or in a particular sense, in a word, either as a whole or by any particular local church. Equally, the ecclesiastical

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73 Cheshmedzhiev, "Kim vîprosa za kulta na kniaz Boris-Mikhail," 172.

74 Elka Bakalova, "Zhitiepisno povestvuvanie i izobrazitelna interpretatsiia," *Starobilgarska literatura* 25–26, 1991, 175.

75 Interview on July 24, 2000.

76 "The Canonization of Saints in the Orthodox Church," in *The Christian East* 12 (1931), 85–9.

authority sanctioning the canonization depended on the characteristics of the saint: “Each province, each city celebrates with special zeal its particular martyrs and saints, but the whole Church regarding those who are most distinguished amongst them as her own property, has honored and revered them as Catholic saints.” And, in the end, it was “the common consciousness of the shepherds and the flock [that] discerns and affirms those who are really saints.” One of the precedents cited was the opinion of Patriarch Philotheos, the great Hesychast scholar who was patriarch twice: 1353–1354 and 1363–1376. During his second patriarchate, he wrote a Panegyric of Gregory of Palama who had been canonized by the Synod. Philotheos points out that “we have proclaimed him a Saint, not waiting for the summoning of very great Synods and (the giving of common) votes, which are often intercepted by time and sluggishness and tardiness and many other human things, but being satisfied with the decree and proclamation from above and the sight of things which are manifest and cannot be called in question.”<sup>77</sup>

The final validation was clearly common custom. The canonization of Gerasimos the Younger (1579–1599) occurred in 1662, when a great Synod of Metropolitans, Archbishops, Bishops and clergy, with the participation of the Patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem, and under the presidency of the Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris, proclaimed him a saint: “The pious assembly (of the church Authorities) taking into consideration the good results of honoring those who lived according to the will of God, used to expose their deeds and achievements in pictures and sermons... following therefore the common custom of the Church we decree and define and prescribe the Holy Spirit... that the aforesaid Gerasimos should be honored by annual sacred festivals and ceremonies.”<sup>78</sup>

The accompanying letter of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople to Patriarch Myron of Romania was organized around what seemed to be a prescriptive structure, but it also left room for interpretation and adaptation to local custom. It bears citing *in toto* since it is a rare case where rules are spelled out:

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77 Ibid., 86.

78 Ibid., 87.

In accordance with our tradition the following general principles are followed in the recognition and placing amongst the Choir of Saints of the church, of persons glorified by God.

1. The verification of the elements of holiness must be made by a Synod, composed of all the Metropolitans, Archbishops, Bishops, and official clergy of the particular church.

2. This verification is superfluous in the case of those holy persons whom the general consciousness of the Church—of both shepherds and flock—has for long ages recognized and celebrated as such. Of such holy persons who have been tacitly recognized up till now as sanctified and glorified by God, a merely formal recognition is given by the Church in accordance as we have said above.

3. At the proclamation there is a proper ecclesiastical procedure of which the enclosed copy of the Procedure in the consecration of St. Gerasimos the Younger—which took place under the blessed Patriarch Cyril Lucaris at the beginning of the seventeenth century<sup>79</sup>—may serve as an example.

4. The Deed of Proclamation is solemnly signed in the church, the proper ecclesiastical ceremony being as follows: The whole Synod having come down into the Church and the Book of the Gospels being placed in the center, the following troparia are sung— “Blessed art thou, O Christ our God,” “When He (the Holy Spirit) descended,” then the Deed of proclamation is signed by all members of the General Synod who are present and immediately after are sung the troparia “Holy martyrs who fought well,” “The tortures of the saints which they suffered for Thee,” “The blood of Thy martyrs throughout the world.”

5. At a convenient time a special and suitable Office, within the framework of the hymnology and ceremonial of the Orthodox Churches, is naturally composed for the most noteworthy of the canonized saints, for use in the churches.

6. Of equal necessity is the translation of the relics, if such are preserved, and their anointing with Holy Chrism. At the translation of the relics it is customary to have vigil services and solemn liturgies.<sup>80</sup>

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79 Clearly a mistake. The canonization took place in 1662.

80 *Ibid.*, 88–9.

This is as close to an official set of rules as one can come across in the practice of the Eastern Church, and it demonstrates the leeway of maneuverability within a generally accepted framework. At the same time, this exchange of correspondence in the 1930s displays a growing desire and even a tendency to formalize the canonization process which had not been the case in the previous centuries. One can speculate that a contributing factor for the persistence of canonization in the Orthodox Church as an informal enterprise in the course of so many centuries was its delicate position in the Ottoman Empire. Martyrs are an especially beloved object of devotion, and the new martyrs—chiefly the ones from the Ottoman period who had perished as martyrs of the faith—have their special place in the Greek Orthodox Hagiologion.<sup>81</sup> In addition, saints whose *cultus* revolves around their relics have a special value because their number is comparatively small.<sup>82</sup> While the church tacitly approved of the veneration of the new martyrs, it is not difficult to see that even if there had been an elaborate system of canonization in place, it would have been impossible to sustain. The new martyrs of the Ottoman period were usually victims of official or tolerated acts on the part of the Ottoman authorities, and their authorized canonization would have been considered an open breach of loyalty, and an endorsement of disruptive and rebellious activities.

The example of George of Neapolis, a priest in Asia Minor, is a case in point. He was apparently compromised as a Russian supporter in the 1770 Orlov expedition during the Russo–Turkish war of 1768–1774, and was imprisoned and later beheaded by the Ottoman author-

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81 The term new martyr is used for martyrs after the iconoclastic period (eighth–ninth centuries), to distinguish them from the ancient martyrs. For the Ottoman period, there is no exact number for the new martyrs but for the period 1453–1867, at least 175 can be individually named. See Ioannis Theocharides, Dimitris Loules, “The Neomartyrs in Greek history (1453–1821),” *Etudes balkaniques* 25.3 (1989), 83–91; Konstantinos G. Nikhoritis, *Sveta Gora—Aton i bilgarskoto novomichenichestvo*, Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 2001, 17–8.

82 Otto Meinardus, “A Study of the Relics of Saints of the Greek Orthodox Church,” in *Oriens Christianus. Hefte für die Kunde des christlichen Orients*, Band 54, 1970, 130–278. In this study, Otto Meinardus concludes that of the approximately 3,800 saints listed in the Orthodox Hagiologion, only 475 (12.5 per cent) have specific *cultus* functions through their relics. Of this number, about 45% “died in peace,” and the rest are martyrs, one third of whom are new martyrs.

ities. Buried in Malakope, his body is said not to have decomposed. At the time of the population exchange in 1924, his relics were translated to Neapolis of Perissos, Nea Ionia. Today, the whole body reposes in the Church of St. Eusthatios, Neapolis, Nea Ionia, Athens, and is commemorated on November 3. An earlier case is that of Apostolus from the village of Hagias Laurentios who had accompanied his fellow villagers in 1684, when they went to Constantinople to petition for their rights. Arrested, he suffered martyrdom, and is commemorated today on August 16. Parts of his body are in the Zographou Monastery on Mount Athos, and others in the St. Agathon Monastery in Ipati, Lamia. A famous case is that of Patriarch Gregory V who at the time of the Greek Revolution was hanged over the gateway of the patriarchate on Easter Day 1821. His body was then thrown into the Bosphorus but found by a Greek captain six days later. His relics were transferred in 1871 to Athens and today repose in the Cathedral Evangelismos, Metropolis, Athens. There are dozens of similar cases.<sup>83</sup>

While all these men were venerated as martyrs, it is easy to understand why there was no official act of canonization. The church could afford to only quietly acquiesce and support the popular veneration. It treated these holy persons “as sanctified and glorified by God” because “the general consciousness of the Church—of both shepherds and flock—has for long ages recognized and celebrated” them as such.<sup>84</sup> It even adapted creatively to the problem by utilizing an “Anonymous service to any new martyr.” This service, composed by Nicephoras of Chios, is explicitly credited by Natalia Challis with circumventing the difficulty of an official proclamation during the centuries of Ottoman rule. The relevant passage from Nicephorus’s sermon reads: “As the majority of the new martyrs do not have a service—one to honor his fellow countryman, another to honor someone known to him personally, yet another to someone who has helped him in some need, I have therefore composed an anonymous general service for any new martyr. May he that so desires, sing such a service to that martyr whom he venerates.”<sup>85</sup>

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83 Otto Meinardus, “A Study of the Relics,” 132–3, 145, 184–5, 187.

84 See the above-cited 1930 letter of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople to Patriarch Myron of Romania.

85 Natalia Challis, “Glorification of Saints in the Orthodox Church,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 7 parts 1–2, 1980, 241. Unfortunately, Challis does not give the date of the service, but Nicephorus lived from 1750 to 1821.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which did not face similar constraints, developed over time a highly formalized ritual, stopping short of writing down and imposing a strict procedure. In the seventeenth century, a central part of the church reform was to standardize the rituals of the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches in view of the future unification of orthodoxy under the Russian crown.<sup>86</sup> Originally, the ecclesiastical authorities simply approved popular cults and introduced them into the formal liturgy. With the trend towards centralized control in the seventeenth century during the rule of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich and Patriarch Nikon, canonizations were carried out exclusively by the Holy Synod. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had turned into virtual state canonizations, although very few saints were canonized.<sup>87</sup>

Today, there is an unmistakable tendency throughout the whole orthodox world to go through the formal process, and this is a tendency that began to be followed in the past century by the orthodox churches of most independent nation states which seceded from the Ottoman Empire. Two examples from the above-mentioned list of relics of Greek Orthodox saints aptly illustrate this trend. Saras of Kalymnos was a monk in the Skete of St. Anne on Mount Athos. After many years in monasteries in Palestine, Aegina, and Patmos, he finally retired to Kalymnos where he died in 1948. He was officially canonized in 1958, and his whole body reposes in the monastery of Hagioi Pantas on Kalymnos. Another recent popularly venerated but not as yet officially canonized saint is Magdalene from Kalymnos. Born in 1847, she became a nun in 1867, and spent her long life in the monastery Evangelistria in Argos, Kalymnos which was built by her wealthy father. She died at the age of 105 in 1952, and her body reposes in the said monastery where it is venerated.<sup>88</sup> The phrasing of the entry for

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86 V. G. Chentsova, "Istochniki fonda 'Snosheniia Rossii s Gretsiei' Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo arkhiva drevnikh aktov po istorii mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii v Vostochnoi i Iugo-Vostovhnoi Evrope v 50-e gg. XVII v.," in L. E. Semenova, B. N. Florya, I. Schwarcz, eds., *Russksaia i urkainskaia diplomatiia v Evrazii: 50-e gody XVII beka*, Moskva: Institut slaviano-vedeniia, 2000, 170.

87 P. Peeters, "La canonisation des saints dans l'Eglise russe," *Analecta Bollandiana* 33 (1914), 380–420; 38 (1920), 172–176; Karagiozov, *Slavianskrite sveti michenitsi*, 55–67.

88 Meinardus, "A Study of the Relics," 210, 245.

this nun is significant, because it clearly indicates where the tendency and the expectations point to: “Magdalene has not been canonized *yet*” (italics mine).

The case of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is practically identical to the Greek, although on a smaller scale.<sup>89</sup> During the Ottoman period, it was an integral part of the Constantinople patriarchate—the centralized Orthodox Church institution under the Ottomans—until 1860 when it symbolically and unilaterally seceded, or until 1870 when this secession was recognized by the Sultan. Its inception effectively coincided with the formation of the independent nation state. The first attempt to compile a list of Bulgarian saints belongs to Father Paisii of Khilendar, widely accepted and celebrated as the precursor of modern Bulgarian historiography. The last chapter of his 1762 “Slavobulgarian history” contains a list of 29 saints, 23 of whom are of the pre-Ottoman period, and only 6 after the beginning of the fifteenth century. Paissii indicated that he had compiled his list according to written—printed or manuscript—sources. Bulgarian Orthodox calendars from the 1850s to the 1870s—at the height of the church conflict with the Constantinople Patriarchate—published lists of saints where, alongside a majority of commonly venerated Orthodox saints, they highlighted specifically Bulgarian ones, beginning with Sts. Cyril and Methodius. These calendars were compiled by writers, journalists or publishers, without explicit ecclesiastical sanction. Khristo Kîrpachev’s calendar of 1868, for example, identified over 100 Bulgarian saints, 40 from the Ottoman period. The calendar of Dragan Manchev of 1875 listed 26 saints from the “Turkish” period. The 1877 edition of the same calendar added “5,000 martyrs from Batak” in commemoration of the victims of the April Uprising in 1876 which precipitated the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, and eventually underwrote Bulgaria’s independence.<sup>90</sup> The Russian Archbishop of Chernigov Filaret in his description of the lives of the saints of the South Slavs, published in 1865, included the vitae of 51 Bulgarian saints, 30 Serbian ones, 15

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89 On Bulgarian Orthodox cults in general and on Bulgarian neo-martyrdom in particular, see Karagiozov, *Slavianskite sveti mîchenitsi*, 67–71, 232–54.

90 Maniu Stoianov, “Bilgarski svetii i mîchenitsi ot epokhata na turskoto vladichestvo,” in *Tsîrkvata i sîprotivata na bilgarskiia narod sreshtu osmanskoto igo. Iubileen sbornik po sluchai 100 godini ot Osvobozhdenieto*, Sofia: Sinodalno izdatelstvo, 1981, 166–7; Trendafil Kristanov, “Novi dannii za bilgarski novomîchenitsi ot XV do XIX v.,” *Dukhovna kultura* 2, 1995, 10–9.

early Christian saints from the South Slav territories of the Roman Empire, 7 general Slavic saints (Cyril and Methodius and their disciples), 5 unspecified ones, and one Czech saint.<sup>91</sup> The orthodox calendars from 1875 and 1876 published by Khristo Botev, that add revolutionary figures to the pantheon of martyrs for the faith and are analyzed further in the text, belong to the same genre. In the majority of cases, especially as far as the neo-martyrs from the Ottoman period are concerned, their entry into the calendars was based not on written sources but upon memory and oral tradition.

This was in line with the attitude of the Orthodox Church to respect popular veneration, and to acknowledge that some saints were more local while others were widely or generally recognized. There are numerous examples: the last Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Shishman, venerated in folk songs, whose memory was commemorated on September 11, appeared as a saint and defender of the Bulgarian state and of Christian faith in the calendars of Kirpachev, Manchev, and Slaveikov.<sup>92</sup> He is not, however, present in the modern-day Bulgarian Synaxarion—*Zhitiia na svetiite*.<sup>93</sup> Neither is he entered in the ecclesiastical calendars for 2000 and 2001. Another saint—Alexander from Thessaloniki (Aleksandir Solunski), killed by the Turks in 1794 in Smirna (Izmir)—who appeared in all three nineteenth-century calendars but was dropped from the twentieth-century ones and from the above-mentioned *Zhitiia*, had the exact same fate. Angel Bitolski from Florina was said to have been killed by the Turks because he refused to convert in 1750, and was mentioned as a saint by both Father Paisii and in the *Zograf* Bulgarian history.<sup>94</sup> He has entirely disappeared from the twentieth-century saints' lists. Some

91 *Sviatye iuzhnykh slavian. Opyt opisaniia zhizni ikh. Sochinenie Filareta, archiepiskopa chernigovskago*, Chernigov: V tipografii Il'inskago monastyrnia, 1865.

92 Stoianov, "Bilgarski svetii," 170.

93 *Zhitiia na svetiite*, Sofia: Sinodalno izdatelstvo, 1974 (second printing, 1991). This compilation of brief *vitae* of saints is arranged by month but is provided with a useful index.

94 The *Zograf* Bulgarian history was, according to Stoianov, compiled by an unknown author, a contemporary of Paisii but independently of him. It expands slightly on the saints: its list consists of 36 saints to whom 5 Byzantine Emperors "from among the Bulgarians" are added, against the 29 saints in Paisii. The *Zograf* history was first published by Iordan Ivanov in *Bilgarski starini iz Makedoniia*, Sofia, 1930 (Maniu Stoianov, "Bilgarski svetii i mîchenitsi," 166).

martyrs are more obscure, and have not even been recognized by the publishers of the nineteenth-century calendars. Instead, they appear in marginalia to clerical texts or in other manuscripts. The martyrdom of the Samokov Metropolitan Simeon, who was believed to have been tortured and murdered by the Turks in Sofia on August 21, 1737, was reported solely in a marginal note to a sixteenth-century panegyric preserved in the National Library in Sofia. The same holds for the Okhrid Archbishop Varlaam beheaded by the Turks on May 28, 1598, whose record comes from a marginal note to a fourteenth-century prologue preserved in the Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>95</sup> We do not know how long or how widely held their veneration was at the time: did it last only a generation, was it confined to a specific locale? Of the 55 entries for saints and martyrs from the Ottoman period that Maniu Stoianov published on the basis of different nineteenth and early twentieth-century calendars, manuscripts, and marginalia, only 30, slightly more than one half, appear in the 2000 and 2001 official Orthodox calendars.

The absence of strictly prescribed rules and approved lists occasions the episodic lack of correlation between different sources that are otherwise contemporaneous. Georgi Sofiiski Stari who was martyred on March 26, 1437 by being burnt on the stake for offending Islam, appears in the 2000 and 2001 calendars but is not allotted an entry in the *Zhitiia*.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, Anastasii Strumishki who was martyred by the Turks in 1794, has a brief *vita* in *Zhitiia* but is absent from the calendars altogether.<sup>97</sup> But this is a feature typical of orthodoxy in general. Eve Levin, commenting on the compilations of saints' lives in the medieval Slavic world, notes that far from aiming at comprehensive-

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95 For both these cases, see Stoianov, "Bilgarski svetii i mîchenitsi," 171.

96 *Pravoslaven kalendar 2000 godini ot rozhdestvo Khristovo*, Sofia: Bilgarska patriarshiiia—Sv.Sinod, Sinodalno izdatelstvo, s.d., 11; *Pravoslaven kalendar 2001*, Sofia: Bilgarska patriarshiiia—Sv.Sinod, Sinodalno izdatelstvo, s.d., 11.

97 *Zhitiia na svetiite*, 402. As the *vita* maintains, the real name of the martyr was Spas but the Greeks wrongly called him Anastas. He was the apprentice in an armorer's shop. When his master wanted to export some expensive Turkish clothes without paying the expected town taxes, he asked his apprentice to wear one of the garments. The tax officials stopped the youth and asked for a document that the taxes had been paid. Spas replied he was a Turk, and as proof was asked to say a popular Muslim prayer. The hoax was exposed, and when Spas/Anastas was taken to court he was asked to convert. His refusal brought about the martyrdom.

ness, the editors of different calendars chose materials that fitted central themes, and accorded some saints special honor by including their *vitae* and prayers in praise of them, while only briefly mentioning or altogether dropping others.<sup>98</sup>

After its resurrection as a Patriarchate in 1954, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church seemed to embark on a road of formal canonizations as its sister church, the Greek Orthodox one. The 1960s saw two major canonizations which seemed to point to a trend, although there was no follow up in the subsequent decades. The first was that of Father Paisii of Khilendar (b. 1722) which occurred on June 26, 1962.<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, the brief *vita* in *Zhitiia* defines him first and foremost as a national writer and educator: “When the Bulgarian nation was in its worse predicament under the double five-centuries-old Greek–Turkish yoke, God elevated the Reverend Paisii of Khilendar who wrote his remarkable *Slavobulgarian history*, and through it breathed national consciousness and resilience into the Bulgarian people, extracted it from its despair and set forth the Bulgarian revival.” The whole *vita* differs little from the hagiographic biographies in secular textbooks. At its very end, there are a couple of meager attempts to somehow fulfill the standard conditions for sainthood. Thus, it is emphasized that Paisii was characterized by a typical monastic humility and that he himself indicated his asceticism by drawing the reader’s attention to his stomach pains and headaches (to the compiler of the *vita* these were proofs of Paisii’s excessive fasting and lack of sleep). Paisii’s manner and time of death is unknown, let alone his body’s whereabouts, but the writer of the *vita* makes the conjecture that he “may have died in martyrdom: if not from a hostile hand, then broken by overexertion.”<sup>100</sup>

The second canonization followed some three years later: on December 31, 1965, the Bishop of Vratsa, Sofronii (1739–1813), was elevated to the status of saint.<sup>101</sup> As in the case of Paisii, Sofronii has been a widely respected figure in the pantheon of national men of letters. He is traditionally honored as the co-founder (alongside Paisii) of the Bulgarian Revival. An early copyist of Paisii’s history, his name

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98 Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989, 25.

99 *Tsirkoven vestnik* LXIII, No. 45, 1962.

100 *Zhitiia na svetiite*, 299–300.

101 *Tsirkoven vestnik* LXVI, No. 45, 1965.

was immortalized by the publication of the first printed text in modern Bulgaria in 1806, by the authorship of an autobiography hailed as a masterpiece of South Slavic literature, and by his political activities evaluated by some historians as the first political program of the Bulgarian emigration to solve the Bulgarian question.<sup>102</sup> These are clearly sufficient grounds to reserve him a prominent place in every history textbook and in that body of internalized historical knowledge which passes under the name of historical memory. Even less than in the case of Paisii, there are hardly any indications of the traditional criteria for sainthood: miracles, or possible martyrdom. Sofronii was even left out of the 1974 collection of *Zhitiia*, and this has not been corrected in the subsequent 1991 edition: a mere oversight maybe, but a telling oversight. Moreover, neither in Paisii's nor in Sofronii's case, do we have any evidence of local religious veneration. The canonizations of both Paisii and Sofronii can thus be interpreted as political acts on the part of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church which was looking for ways to bolster its image and, at the same time, elevate figures that were acceptable to the secular authorities, especially during the communist period.<sup>103</sup> From a legal point of view, these precedents also

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102 Sofronii's collection of sermons and instructions translated from the Greek, was published with the support of patriotic Bulgarians in 1806 under the name *Kiriakodromion, sirech Nedelnik* but was widely known among its readers as the *Sofroniie*. On Sofronii Vrachanski and his significance, see Vera Mutafchieva, *Kniga za Sofronii*, Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1978. Sofronii wrote his famous autobiographical *Zhitie i stradaniia greshnago Sofroniia* (The life and sufferings of the sinful Sofronii) in the last decade of his life, when he moved to Bucharest until his death in 1813. During this period, especially triggered by the Russian–Turkish war of 1806–1812, he took the lead among the Bulgarian emigration in Wallachia in organizing missions to the Russian army and court that would represent the Bulgarian question. In 1811 Sofroniia authored a petition which he handed to the Russian commander-in-chief, General Kutuzov. In it, he pleaded with the Russian authorities to assign the tens of thousands of Bulgarian refugees from the Ottoman Empire an autonomous district within the confines of the Russian empire where they could enjoy ecclesiastical and educational autonomy. The Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1812 that ended the war did not take into consideration the Bulgarian demands. (Plamen Mitev, *Bilgarskoto vizrazhdane. Lektsionen kurs*, Sofia: Polis, 1999, 34–6)

103 An analogous case is the canonization, by the Georgian Orthodox and Apostolic Church of Ilia Chavchavadze (1837–1907) known as Saint Ilia

seem to have cleared the way for the subsequent possible canonization of Vasil Levski, a towering national symbol and, at the same time, a figure intimately linked to the church.

Still, even though in Bulgaria, just like in Greece, we can discern a tendency toward growing formalization of the canonization process, the fact is that a rigid set of rules for all of orthodoxy is missing and, at the same time, there is considerable tolerance for local practice.<sup>104</sup> There exists broad consensus among specialists on the Bulgarian Orthodox church about a few obvious criteria: the saint has to have been a Christian; s/he has to be deceased; there have to be legends about miracles; and there should be some tradition of veneration, like chants.<sup>105</sup> If miracles at the grave are a *conditio sine qua non*, Levski clearly does not meet the criteria. But if the other criteria are met, and they comprise sufficient reasons, then the road to sanctification is open. In fact, in the Bulgarian pantheon of saints there are numerous precedents in this respect: the remains of Boian-Enravota, Tsar Boris/Mikhail, Tsar Peter, Patriarch Evtimii, Georgii Sofiiski Nai-Novi, Zlata Miglenska, Paisii Khilendarski and others are unknown, and there have been little or no legends of miracles, and in some cases no *vitae* or liturgies, connected to their early *cultus*.<sup>106</sup> In

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the Righteous. A towering figure of the national liberation movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, Chavchavadze is considered also a classic of the modern Georgian literature. Assassinated in 1907, he was sainted in 1987.

104 For Albania, see Robert Elsie, "The Christian Saints in Albania," *Balkanistika* 13, Special Millennial Issue 2000, 35–58 reports that "there do not seem to be any Albanian saints, in the purely ethnic sense of the term" (37). He attributes this to the fact that both Christianity and Islam "were imported goods," an argument that does not make sense given that this is the case in practically all other, not only Balkan, societies.

105 Interview with Prof. Trendafil Krıstanov from CHAI, July 26, 2000. Nikhoritis, *Sveta Gora—Aton*, op. cit., 68, n. 1, citing the appropriate literature, enumerates the following conditions: membership in the church; death through martyrdom or holy life; exceptional service to the church; acknowledged miracles during the life or after the death of the saint. Once the canonization has been accepted, the veneration can take different forms: belief in the power of the saint's prayers; veneration of the relics; painting of his/her icons; building of churches or chapels with his/her name; annual commemoration; special sermon.

106 *Zhitiia na svetiite*, 53–4, 74–5, 164, 225–7, 263, 299, 525–6. Bulgarian

fact, as Ivan Bozhilov notes, Bulgarian hagiography, while in general following Byzantine patristic models, has some unique characteristics, the absence of miracles standing out as one of the most remarkable already in the medieval period.<sup>107</sup> Other researchers have added that, while relics are the focus of the *cultus* of saints in the Western Church, the veneration of icons replaced to a great extent the centrality of relics in the Eastern Church.<sup>108</sup>

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saints with relics and/or miraculous legends attached are hardly more numerous. Among them are the most famous Bulgarian saints: Ivan Rilski, Lazar Bilgarski, Ignatii Starozagorski, Pimen Zografski, Grigorii Tsamblak (Cyprian) canonized by the Russian church, and a few others (*Zhitiia*, 209, 446–8, 499–500, 527–9, 554). In the case of Ivan Rilski, a tenth-century saint, the canonization was directly linked to the moving of his relics (Ivan Duichev, *Rilskiiat svetets i negovata obitel*, Sofia: Biblioteka “Zlatni zrna,” 1947, 197–8). The case of Boris-Mikhail seems more complicated, and the lively discussion is ably summarized by Cheshmedzhiev, “Kim viprosa za kulta na kniaz Boris-Mikhail,” 158–76, who offers the hypothesis that his was a short-lived and weak *cultus* of the tenth and eleventh century, later absorbed by the cultus of Archangel Michael.

107 Ivan Bozhilov, *Sedem etiuda po srednovekovna istoriia*, Sofia: Anubis, 1995, 312. Tsvetelin Stepanov also points to some peculiarities of Bulgarian sanctity, like the fact that the most obvious candidate for canonization, Boian-Enravota of the ruling dynasty, the first martyr for the Christian faith, was not canonized in the first round of canonizations before the eleventh century. Likewise, Bulgaria (alongside Poland) is among the few exceptions among medieval Christian states that do not elevate a king or prince as a patron-saint. Instead, in Bulgaria, this becomes Ivan Rilski, an ascetic tenth-century monk (“Planina i sviatost v Srednovekovna Bilgariia: natsionalni svetsi i sveti tsare,” in *Balkanit i moreto. Poslaniia kim vremena i pokoleniia*. Blagoevgrad: Mezhdunaroden universitetski seminar na Iugozapaden universitet “Neofit Rilski,” 1999, 320–3). The definitive study on Ivan Rilski and his veneration remains Ivan Duichev, *Rilskiiat svetets i negovata obitel*. Sofia: Biblioteka “Zlatni zrna,” 1947 (phototype edition Sofia: Interpres-67, 1990). For an interesting recent comparison between the roles of Ivan Rilski for Bulgaria, of St. Sava for Serbia, and Sv. Kliment Okhridski for Macedonia in a contemporary setting, see Stefan Rohdewald, “Sava, Ivan von Rila und Kliment von Ohrid. Heilige in nationalen Diensten Serbiens, Bulgariens und Makedoniens.” in Stefan Samerski, ed., *Die Renaissance der Nationalpatrone in Ostmitteleuropas im 20./21. Jahrhundert*, Köln, Weimar, Vienna, Böhlau: 2007, 182–217.

108 Zhivov, *Sviatost’*, 30; Stephen Wilson, “Introduction,” in Stephen Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 5.

Is it the case, then, that the difference in the stated attitudes of adherents to the BOC-P and the BOC-M (and even within these bodies) calling on the canonical tradition for support, is an attempt to obfuscate a simple power struggle behind arguments seeking canonical legitimation? This, to a great extent, seems to be true and, as argued below, a tacit movement is going on among supporters of the Maximized church, preparing the ground for the subsequent canonization of Levski, despite the firm official positions against his elevation to the rank of a saint. The precipitous canonization act by Pimen may have postponed what would have been a natural process; on the other hand, it may have stimulated it.<sup>109</sup> But, if indeed either option is the case, why wasn't Levski canonized sometime over the previous century?

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109 The two old ladies who were selling candles in the "Sv. Paraskeva" church, were convinced that Maxim would accept and sanction Levski's canonization as a prelude to the reconciliation with BOC-P (Interview on July 15, 2000).

### 3. Levski and the Bulgarian Church: Memory and Narration

A few comments about Levski's standing in the church while he was alive are in order. While there exists consensus between most biographers on the main stages of his career, there are differences in interpretation, and nuances of articulation that are important for the overall assessment of his relationship to the church. Vasil Kunchev entered in the service of the church at age 15, in 1852, as a novice of his uncle, a hieromonk of the Khilendar Monastery of Mt. Athos. This was an arrangement between his recently widowed mother and her brother, the monk Khadzhi Vasilii, who employed the young Vasil as his assistant in collecting the alms for the monastery and, in return, promised that he would secure his nephew's education and preparation for the priesthood. While residing in Karlovo, their hometown, for the first three years, Vasil took lessons in church singing from the celebrated teacher and Hellenist Raino Popovich, and his angelic voice was highly appreciated in the services of the "Sv. Bogoroditsa" ("Holy Virgin") church. In 1855, the couple moved to Stara Zagora where Vasil was enrolled in the local school. Again, he stood out with his voice in the church choir. In his third year at the school, a year's course was organized to prepare candidates for the priesthood of whom the country was in great need. Vasil completed the course as the best student in his class, and his uncle promised to send him for further education to Russia. However, he postponed his promise, preferring to utilize the free services of the young man who had already turned 21. Returning to Karlovo in 1858, he persuaded Vasil to enter the monastic order before pursuing his further education. Vasil Kunchev became a monk on December 7, 1858, and assumed the name Ignatii. He also continued to serve his uncle for free, and to sing in the church.

This is the first episode where different interpretations set in. In the absence of an extended autobiography or correspondence from Levski to explain his motives, it is only natural that his biographers would be seduced to supply their own reading of his decision. His first biographer

in 1883, Zakharii Stoianov, himself a revolutionary, and later Speaker of Parliament of the autonomous principality, produced a biography from which Levski emerged as a person of fiery temperament, a born revolutionary whom only circumstances and poor fortune had temporarily put in the church's captivity, before his revolutionary vocation won in "the struggle between the black cassock and the passionate soul."<sup>110</sup> In the words of Stoianov: "If Levski had not been 18, and his taking the vows had been postponed to the period 1862–1866 when the brighter and more progressive ideas of nineteenth-century skepticism had taken roots among the Bulgarians, we would not have had to describe the Bulgarian hero in a black cassock and long hair."<sup>111</sup> Levski was not 18 but 21 at the time, and Zakhari Stoianov is notoriously untrustworthy as a historian but he is equally powerful and influential as a writer, and his views shaped public perceptions very early and influentially.<sup>112</sup>

Levski's most authoritative biographer Ivan Undzhiev<sup>113</sup> remarks about this episode that while he had little choice, the thought of becoming a monk was alien to Levski. Undzhiev actually makes a special point already at the beginning of his close to 1,200-page biography to emphasize the sincerity of Levski's religious feelings: "We are going to

110 Zakhari Stoianov, *Vasil Levski. Chetite v Bilgariia. Khristo Botyov*, Sofia: Idatestvo na BZNS, 1990. This is, strictly speaking, Levski's second biography, the first being the brief 16-page biography by Georgi Kirkov, *Vasil Levski (Diakonit)*, Sredets (Sofia): Dirzhavna pechatnitsa, 1882 which, however, has more the character of an eulogy.

111 Stoianov, *Vasil Levski*, 26.

112 Specialists on the "Revival Period" (*Vizrazhdane*) (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries) are divided between adherents of Zakhari Stoianov and Stoian Zaimov, the two rival revolutionaries and rival biographers of Levski. Zaimov, *Vasil Levski—Diakonit*, Sofia: Khr. Olchev, 1895 is dismissed by Genchev as an untalented writer without historical intuition (Nikolai Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1987, 163). Plamen Mitev, on the other hand, who has worked with the Stoianov–Zaimov correspondence, kindly shared with me that, while working on his famous *Zapiski po bilgarskite vistaniia*, Stoianov asked Zaimov for factual information. When Zaimov sent him his memoir notes, Stoianov literally published whole excerpts under his own name. Moreover, in the episodes in which Zaimov appeared in a heroic situation, Stoianov substituted his name for that of Benkovski.

113 On Undzhiev, see the biography written by his daughter, with recollections by colleagues and excerpts from his personal archive: Tsveta Undzhieva, *Ivan Undzhiev: Izgrazhdaneto na choveka i ucheniia*, Sofia: Polis, 2002.

discover the religious spirit in all of the Apostle's subsequent activities which for him has always been a form of public worship. His faultless moral purity, the mysticism of his self-denial, as well as the puritanic earnestness of his life have to a great extent a religious base."<sup>114</sup> One may say that Undzhiev was actually making the point that nationalism is religion, a theoretical interpretation of nationalism that has reached its most elaborate articulation in the work of Carlton Hayes. Hayes had pointed out that there was an imminent human need to believe in transcendent reality, and that with the weakening of Christianity in the age of Enlightenment rationalism, the nation became a supplement to religion. Nationalism not only appropriated religious traditions and symbols; the nation became a substitute for God:

On his own national god the modern religious nationalist is conscious of dependence. Of His powerful help he feels the need. In Him he recognizes the source of his own perfection and happiness. To Him, in a strictly religious sense, he subjects himself. Moreover, the religious nationalist not only is disposed subjectively to acknowledge his dependence on the national god, but also he is ready to acknowledge such dependence objectively through acts of homage and adoration.<sup>115</sup>

That this can be easily demonstrated in the case of Levski is without question. The uniqueness of his story is precisely the point that he had already dedicated himself once to the Christian God. Is it then the case that there was a complete shift of religious feeling and fervent commitment from the God of traditional Christianity to the God of modernity,

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114 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 85, 88. The notion of "public worship" sounds even stronger in Bulgarian where "bogosluzhenie" already entails "public worship" or "public service" but Undzhiev insists on qualifying it as "obshchestveno bogosluzhenie." Undzhiev also quotes M. I. Kirchev, *Levski chovekî na deloto*, Sofia, 1923 in support of Levski's religiosity.

115 Carlton Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1966, 104–5. See also his *Nationalism: A Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1960. For a general review of the historiography on this particular interpretation of nationalism, see Lloyd Kramer, "Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.3 (July 1997), 532–4. For a concrete historical study in the framework of nationalism as secular religion, see George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1975.

that is the nation? This is a matter of interpretation in the existing literature. Undzhiev unequivocally insists that for Levski this was not substitution but complementarity: “One should not think, however, that Levski had feeble religious feelings, that he was wearing the monk’s cassock with insufficient sincerity, that he was alien to a deeper religious thought.” In making this point, Undzhiev entered an already ongoing debate about Levski’s equivocal position in the church that had been going on for several decades. It comes as no surprise that after the Second World War, the dominant preference was to downplay Levski’s religiosity, and stress his revolutionary final break from the church. Mercia MacDermott who, in her almost fictional biography, relies most heavily on Undzhiev, prefers in this instance to picture Levski as “not enthusiastic about the idea” but having no choice.<sup>116</sup>

One year after he took his vows, in 1859, monk Ignatii was ordained as a deacon, and among the many names under which he was known, *Deacon Ignatii* or simply *The Deacon* became one of the most popular alongside *The Apostle* and Levski.<sup>117</sup> Disappointed with his uncle’s unwillingness to follow up on his promise and send him to continue his

116 Mercia MacDermott, *The Apostle of Freedom. A Portrait of Vasil Levski Against the Background of Nineteenth Century Bulgaria*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1967, 39. The Bulgarian translation was published in 1970, and underwent two consecutive editions in 1973, and 1977: *Apostolit na svobodata (Biografichno izsledvane za Vasil Levski)*, Sofia: Narodna mladezh.

117 Other names by which Levski was known were his given name Vasil Ivanov, Diakon Ignatii, Diakon Levski, Diakoncheto, Keshish Pirvan, Dervishooglu Aslan, Khorugvonosets Livskii (“Lionine, the banner barer”), Ibriamaga Anadolu, Vasil Ivanov Karlovcheto. The three interchanging designations that survived, however, are *Levski*, *Diakonit* (The Deacon), and *Apostolit* (The Apostle). Interestingly, the designation “The Apostle” is a fairly late one. The meticulous research of Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva has shown that only *Levski* and *Diakonit* were current names during the lifetime of the hero. In the 1880s, memoirs of contemporaries abounded exclusively with these names. Neither his collaborators nor “the people” called Levski “The Apostle” during his lifetime. In a figurative sense, this was introduced by some of the revolutionary leaders (Karavelov, Botev) but received wide currency only after Vazov adopted it in his poetry and short stories. In a way, 1898—the 25th anniversary of Levski’s martyrdom—became the watershed after which the lexeme Apostle appeared, and there is also the intricate story of the evolution from “apostle” to “The Apostle.” (Liubka Lipcheva-Prandzheva, *Levski: Bukvi ot imeto*, Sofia: Primaprint, 2001, 22, 26–30, 37, 47–53)

education, in 1862 he secretly left Karlovo, and ended up in Belgrade, joining the military legion of Rakovski. He had cherished the idea for some time because in a later letter of 1872, Levski indicates 1861 as the year in which he had made his crucial decision: "I have dedicated myself to the fatherland already in 61 to serve it unto death and to work according to the will of the people."<sup>118</sup> It was during his stay in the legion, either at some of the training sessions or at one of the fights with the Ottoman garrison, that Vasil also received his nickname Levski (the Lion), most likely from Rakovski himself.<sup>119</sup> In many texts 1862 is given as the year in which Levski symbolically "threw away the cassock." Literally, of course, in Belgrade he had cut his hair, and had been dressed in a military uniform but after the disbanding of the legion, and his return to Karlovo in 1863, he again put on a cassock, and resumed his functions as a deacon.

It was in the spring of 1864, on Easter, that Levski carried through the symbolic act that attracted wide attention, and was interpreted by some as his final break with the church. He cut his long hair, entrusting it to his mother, and became a teacher in a nearby village. The episode of Levski's second defrocking has again been interpreted differently by his biographers. Zakhari Stoianov insists that the choice of Easter was a deliberately powerful blow against religion and the church, a symbolic act intended to shock public opinion out of its slumber. Undzhiev agrees with the latter but refuses to see in it a final break with the traditional faith.<sup>120</sup> This difference of opinion is no small matter because on it depends the whole evaluation of Levski's subsequent career: whether that of a layman and non-believer, or that of a devout individual and servant of the church who had simply prioritized his devotion to the fatherland during his temporal existence.<sup>121</sup>

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118 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 90.

119 *Ibid.*, 110–2.

120 *Ibid.*, 136–8.

121 A possible link (or, at the least, an interesting comparison) can be established between Levski's hair as relic, and the veneration of hair among Muslims. Ignac Goldziher draws the attention to the great popularity of the hairs of the Prophet as his most important relic. Hair from the Prophet Muhammad's head or beard became a cherished amulet, and there was a lucrative trade with the Prophet's hair in the "Turkish and Indian territories." (I. Gol'dtsier, *Kul't sviatykh v islame*, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe antireligioznoe izdatel'stvo, 1938, 92–4) Goldziher also reports on the pre-Islamic customs of sacrificing one's hair which were absorbed and further developed by Islam. Laying one's hair at the tomb of a venerated hero or saint is a richly

The third and decisive episode of Levski's biography that underlay the uneasy relationship of his image with the church, are the circumstances of his capture, alleged betrayal, and execution. Following the robbery of the Ottoman mail in the Arabakonak Pass in the fall of 1872, and the subsequent arrest of the attackers, the network of the revolutionary organization was in jeopardy. The attack had been organized by Dimitir Obshti, Levski's deputy, who was in conflict with Levski over organizational issues, and had not received his approval for the particular timing of the attack. Obshti made encompassing revelations about the revolutionary organization in the hope of attracting foreign attention to the maturity of the Bulgarian movement and, at the same time, of deflating severe punishments by reckoning that the government, faced with a broad conspiracy, would not risk international disapproval. Numerous arrests followed, Levski's physical description was circulated to police stations all over the country. On his way to Romania to discuss the situation with the members of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee in Bucharest, Levski tried to salvage the revolutionary archive of the Lovech Committee, and was caught by the Ottoman police in December 1872 at a nearby inn (at Kikrina, which has assumed the symbolic weight of Golgotha). Bulgarian historiography is almost unanimous in attributing Levski's capture to treason. For over a century it has also been almost unanimous in pointing to a local priest from Lovech—Pop Kristiu<sup>122</sup>—as the traitor. Rumors about Pop Kristiu's betrayal were circulating in the country already before its autonomy in 1878, and a few years later the priest committed suicide leaving behind a letter denying all accusations. There is to date a significant (and quite interesting) literature dealing with the problem of whether there was treason at all, and whether Levski was caught as a result of an accident, even his identity being established only after

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documented tradition. But there was also another ancient custom recorded among the pre-Islamic Arabs where soldiers leaving for a battle would cut their hair as a sign that they pledge their lives for their tribe. "The war in the name of the tribe," Goldziher adds, "was for the ancient Arab a sacred religious duty, and there is nothing surprising that, in preparing for war, he would resort to religious rituals" (Ibid., 143). Levski's cutting of his hair is very reminiscent of this pledge to fight and die for his nation.

122 *Pop* is the Bulgarian for priest, and usually precedes the cleric's given name. It can be also part of a family name—as in Poptodorov—indicating a priest among the predecessors.

the arrest. There is a no less numerous and detailed literature around the figure of Pop Krístiu, ranging from confident accusations to no less positive acquittals.<sup>123</sup> Quite apart from the factual interest, the signifi-

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123 The authors claiming there was betrayal, and in most cases accepting Pop Krístiu as the culprit, are by far more numerous, constituting the mainstream of Bulgarian historiography. The accusation was formalized in Zakhari Stoitianov's biography. It was powerfully argued in the 1927 work of Dimitír Strashimirov, *Levski pred kikirinskata golgota. Istoria i kritika* (Levski before the Golgotha of Kakrina), republished first in 1991, Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Khristo Botev," and then in the series "Bulgaria's eternal books," Sofia: Sibiia, 1995. Strashimirov, appointed in the 1920s to produce the first scholarly biography of Levski, was the publisher of the definitive documentary collection (*Vasil Levski. Zhivot, dela, izvori*, Sofia, 1929). After his death, Ivan Undzhiev continued his work with the publication of a massive biography in 1947. Even for his critics, this is the recognized standard work on Levski's life. Georgi Bakalov, in his influential *Vasil Levski*, Sofia, 1934, 58–61, also endorsed the betrayal thesis as "unquestionable," but went further than pinning it down on Pop Krístiu. Instead, he raised the issue of the attitude of the whole church, particularly its enmity toward the revolutionary movement. This thesis was followed, without or little new factological material, by later Levski or period specialists: Alexander Burmov, Dimitír Kosev, Nikola Kondarev, Doino Doinov, and is the standard factual narrative in all schoolbooks. The most recent addition to the thesis is the work of the late Krumka Sharova, *Pop Krístiu Nikiforov i Vasil Levski. Pítiat na edno predatelstvo*, Sofia: Izd.Gutenberg, 2007. Nikolai Genchev actually admitted that the accusatory material against Pop Krístiu was far from definitive, and in a careful analysis weighed the four exiting hypothesis: accepting Pop Krístiu's guilt; assigning the betrayal to the members of the Lovech Committee who subsequently blamed the priest; attributing the reasons for Levski's arrest to the information given by the arrested revolutionaries of the Arabakonak venture; finally, the idea that Levski's capture was the result of heightened police activities and that he had not been betrayed at all. Genchev justifiably judged all evidence brought to support these theories, with the exception of the protocols of the trial, as circumstantial and the result of later political and individual conflicts (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 158). The contrary assessment started with the work of Danail Katsev-Burski, *Istimata po predatelstvoto na Levski. Anketa, izvirshena v Lovech* (The Truth about Levski's Betrayal), Sofia, 1926. It questioned the accusations against Pop Krístiu, and triggered the above-mentioned rebuttal by Strashimirov. In the 1970s, a new reading of the Ottoman documentation (Maria Mikhailova-Mazhdra-kova, "Pop Krístiu i shifrovanata telegrama do Tírnovo," *Vekove* 3, 1973, 70–5) reopened the problem that was widely discussed in oral fora and the press in the 1980s, especially around the equally passionate discussions over the possible reburial of Levski's remains. For a vigorous although not necessarily compelling restatement of the betrayal thesis, see Nikola Gaidarov,



**Figure 19.** Leaders of the Bulgarian community in Lovech. The priest in the front row is Pop Krístiu Totev Nikiforov (1836–1881).

Source: Khristo Ionkov and Stoianka Ionkova, *Vasil Levski i bílgarskata nacionalna revoliutsiia*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1987, 77, n. 144.

*Protsešít sreshtu Vasil Levski i revoliutsionnata organizatsiia. Pravno-istoricheskó izsledvane*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1987. The breakthrough came with the publication of a manuscript completed in 1986 by a non-professional historian, the mechanics professor Dimitír Panchovski, *Poslednite dni na Vasil Levski* (The Last days of Vasil Levski), Sofia, 1990. It was followed up by a second book of Panchovski, *Predatelíte na Vasil Levski* (The traitors of Vasil Levski), Sofia: Litera Prima, 1996. Had it not been for the fact that Panchovski had completed his work in the 1980s, one would be tempted to interpret this renewed interest in the betrayal theory and the personality of Pop Krístiu in the 1990s in the framework of discussions about complicity, informing the secret police, and lustration policies. Quite apart from the fact that, in my opinion, Panchovski makes a very convincing case based on careful and logical reading, this episode in the development of Bulgarian historiography raises the important question of the relationship between professional and amateur historians, as well as the problem of professional inertia. In fact, he was not alone in this. Already in 1963, the medical doctor from Lovech and amateur historian Iliia Evrev published an article, establishing the identity of the chairman of the Lovech Revolutionary Committee, a fact with direct bearings on the betrayal problem (“Koi e bil predse-

cance of the obsession with this event and its interpretation should be understood in the framework of the evolution of Bulgarian national-

dateliat na vîtreshniia tsentralen revoliutsionen komitet,” *Istoricheski pregled* XIX, No. 6, 1963, 49–59). He also finished a manuscript that was deposited in the National Library in Sofia in 1984, but was not published. This very interesting and convincing manuscript, edited and updated by his son, was published recently: Iliia Evrev, Petko Evrev, *Vîprosit za zalavianeto na Apostola na svobodata Vasil Levski*, Sofia: ASKONI-IZDAT, 2003. Following Panchovski, other authors contributed additional arguments, reinforcing the case for reassessing the treason thesis: Velin Argatski, “Dumata ‘muhbir’ i Pop Krîstiu,” *Po pîtia na bezsmûrtieto ot Kîkrina do Sofia. Sbornik ot dokladi posveteni na 120-godishninata ot gibelta na Apostola*, Veliko Tîrnovo: VITAL, 1993, 60–76; Nikolai Khaitov, “Predateliat v sianka,” *Panteon na chernoto bezsmûrtie. Predатели i predatelstva v bilgarskata istoriia*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1993, 35–52; Ivan Lalov, “Niakoi sporni momenti v prouchvaniia za V. Levski,” *Po pîtia na bezsmûrtieto*, 77–86 (also in Lalov, *Vasil Levski, Lovech i Vîtreshnata revoliutsionna organizatsiia*, Veliko Tîrnovo, 1996, 7–17); Ivan Lalov, “Kim vîprosa za kasierstvoto na Bilgarsiiia revoliutsionen tsentralen komitet (1871–1872), in Lalov, *Vasil Levski*, 18–33; Nikolai Panaiotov, *Arabakonashkiiat obir i obesvaneto na Vasil Levski—drugata istina*, Shumen: Altos, 1998. The latter, aside from the idiosyncratic prose, is particularly interesting with its analysis of the Ottoman judicial system. In the face of these new interpretations, one of the major researchers of Levski, Nikola Kondarev, made a gesture in retracting from his belief that Levski was directly betrayed by Pop Krîstiu, although he still insists on the priest’s condemnation as an informer (Nikola Kondarev, “Pop Krîstiu ne e predal Levski, no e bil donosnik na turskite vlasti,” *Istoricheski pregled* 3–4, 1999, 197–207). For an excellent and convincing contribution to this discussion, as well as about the religiosity of Levski and his burial, see Ivan Petev, *Po-vazhni momenti ot zhivota i deloto na ierodiakon Ignatii—Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voennoizdatelski kompleks “Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets,” 1993. In 2001 a cultural society “Pop Krîstiu” with local branches was founded, headed by the poet Vîtio Rakovski, and counting prominent writers, philosophers, and public figures among its members. It published several volumes, among them Svetlana Koleva, Georgi Mishev, eds., *Rikopisite na pop Krîstiu*. Sofia: Chernat, 2002. It has been active, together with the NGO “Citizens against Violence” in rehabilitating the priest. For the public’s reaction, see the web forum of *Sega*, November 27, 2003 (<http://www.segabg.com/28112003/p0020004.asp>). In 2006, the society organized a national conference dedicated to the life and activities of Pop Krîstiu in Sofia, and commemorating the 125th anniversary of his tragic death. The ensuing volume, alongside the expected general political pronouncements by public figures, contains several serious contributions by Dimitîr Panchovki, Petko Evrev and Teodor Tonchev, summarizing the present state of affairs (Svetlana Koleva, Khristo Temelski, Gerogi Mishev, eds., *Pop Krîstiu: Zhivot i deinost*, Sofia: Chernat, 2007).

ism, and especially discussions over Bulgarian national character and/or collective identity. This, however, is the object of a separate analysis.

In this text, I am trying to trace how the betrayal thesis shaped the attitude of the church toward Levski. “Two individuals,” Balachev shared with me, “are to be blamed for Levski’s alienation from the church. One is Zakhari Stoianov, for he was an atheist; the other one is Vazov who was hostile to the church because the Holy Synod publicly criticized him for his debauchery.”<sup>124</sup> Stoianov was indeed a non-believer, though not a pronounced or active atheist, and he also painted a devastating Judas-like portrait of Pop Krístiu in his 1883 biography.<sup>125</sup> He did not, however, make the additional step to generalize what he described as the priest’s personal behavior on the whole clergy.

Ivan Vazov, on the other hand, made this step, although most probably for poetic rather than ideological reasons. In his 1881 poem *Levski*, which became part of Vazov’s poetic cycle *Epic of the Forgotten*, Pop Krístiu is never mentioned by name. Instead, there is the laconic verse that all subsequent generations of Bulgarian students have recited and know by heart:

But he was betrayed, and betrayed by a priest!  
This groveling worm, this despicable beast,  
This outrage to God, on the Church this foul blemish,  
Through whose vicious treason the deacon would perish!<sup>126</sup>

Nor was Vazov at the time at odds with the Holy Synod over his *joie de vivre*. His proverbial debauchery manifested itself, and triggered the reaction of the clergy, much later, at a more advanced age. None-

<sup>124</sup> Interview on July 24, 2000.

<sup>125</sup> Stoianov, *Vasil Levski*, 74–7.

<sup>126</sup> The translation belongs to Peter Tempest from his excellent *Anthology of Bulgarian Poetry*, Sofia: Sofia Press, 1980, also on <http://www.slovo.bg>. After a very powerful poetic harangue about the treason, Vazov added another laconic verse: “And still the man lives, in our midst he appears!” Still, Vazov cannot be considered the spiritual father to Pop Krístiu Totev Nikiforov’s suicide on September 21, 1881. While the poem was indeed printed in the course of 1881 in the poetic collection *Gusla*, during the last months of his life Pop Krístiu was very sick and could not read (Panchovski, *Predatelite*, 135). For details on the writing of *Epic of the Forgotten* and the place of “Levski” in it, see Part II.

theless, the openly anti-clerical and even anti-religious pathos of the poem (quite apart from the verdict against Pop Krīstiu) attracted its own critics.<sup>127</sup> Vazov himself appears to have harbored profound religious doubts, if not an openly stated position as a non-believer. In his conversations with Ivan Shishmanov, Vazov explains: “As a child I was very religious. But when I started living with the revolutionary exiles (*hīshove*), my faith began to waiver significantly. These people were mostly non-believers (*bezvernitsi*). My skepticism was reinforced because of the undeserved sufferings of my people. How often I have asked myself: ‘Where, where is the divine justice?’”<sup>128</sup>

This (rather than his debauchery), given Vazov’s exalted status on the literary scene, was a challenge the church could not afford. That the general alienation of the intelligentsia from the church and, often, from religion altogether, was considered a real and important problem by the church is evidenced by its painful attempts to prove the non-existence of the problem. Thus, a 1942 article asked the question “Are the Bulgarian poets and writers repudiators of religion?” Its predictable answer, based on an analysis of Khristo Botev, Ivan Vazov, Nikolai Rainov, Ivan Grozev, Konstantin Velichkov and others was that there was “no data for an affirmative answer” to the question.<sup>129</sup> Only Botev, according to the author, could be described as renouncing Christianity but even in his case this was ascribed to isolated moments of skepticism and despair, and his textual mentions of the word “God” were brought in as proof of a much more accommodating attitude. There is a clear attempt to domesticate Botev as well as other socialist and communist poets and writers.<sup>130</sup>

Since Vazov, with his direct accusation against Pop Krīstiu, and graphic descriptions of a corrupt and cynical clergy in other works,<sup>131</sup>

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127 Ivan Vizirev, “Levskii v stikhotvorenieto, ozaglaveno s imeto mu, ot Iv. Vazov,” *Bilgarski tsirkoven pregled* 4, No. 11–12, November–December 1898, 80–9.

128 Ivan Shishmanov, *Ivan Vazov. Spomeni i dokumenti*, Sofia, 1976 (1930), 141.

129 Arkhimandrit Evtimii, “Otritsateli na religiiata li sa bilgarskite poeti i pisateli?,” *Godishnik na Sofiiskiiia Universitet. Bogoslovski Fakultet/Annuaire de l’université de Sofia. Faculté de théologie* XIX, 1941–1942, Sofia: Universitetska pechatnitsa, 1942, 3.

130 *Ibid.*, 4.

131 Like, for example in “Nova zemia” and “Rina,” alongside the poems “Levski” and “1876.”

was considered to a great extent responsible for arousing the negative attitude toward the church, he was allotted some length in this article. It takes a real leap of the imagination to accommodate Vazov in the fold of traditional religiosity and Christianity, but his canonical status in literature was apparently a challenge, and the way the author of the article (himself a high-ranking prelate of the church, holding the title of arkhimandrit, one step below bishop) handled it, was by providing, and leaving without comment, a number of quotes with the mention of God, faith, and Christ. What emerges from these quotes is at best a deist. Vazov's God is "not the God of Moses, of Zoroaster, and of Buddha, but the God of pure Reason, of the great Truth, the God of progress"; it is in nature that he looks for providence and God; he even describes himself as "a bit of a pantheist."<sup>132</sup> Nor did Vazov harbor any doubts as to the views of Levski himself. In his story "*Chistiatiat păt,*" Vazov glorified Levski as the quintessence of moral purity, an example of Christian morality and yet, in Vazov's terms, "a skeptic." Here is the whole excerpt, as it is often quoted in parts so as to prove one of the opposing theses:

[Levski] is not only valorous, he is also virtuous: a victorious rebuttal of the theory that honesty is an element incompatible with revolutionary activity. Vasil Levski reminds one of the early Christians, the people called him "The Apostle." Never has a name been given more truly. As an apostle in his message and his fanatic faith in his God—Bulgaria's liberty—he reminds us of Christ's pupils, both in his life style, his abstinence, his moral purity, as well as his unimpeachable purely Christian morality, despite the fact that he was a skeptic. Levski did not drink, did not smoke, never stole, like Charles XII, did not know a woman; a timeless wanderer, vagabond, pauper, he managed to become the incarnation of ideal honesty.<sup>133</sup>

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132 Arkhimandrit Evtimii, "Otritsateli na religiinata li sa bilgarskite poeti i pisateli?" 5–7.

133 Remarkably, this excerpt, though without comment, was reprinted in the official paper of the Maxim led Orthodox Church: *Tsirkovna vestik* XCVII, No. 8, February 19–25, 1996, 5. Given the church's consistent efforts to prove the religiosity of Levski, one wonders whether this was an overlook, or a conscious message to warn against precipitous actions in favor of Levski's canonization.

Quite apart from the fact that Vazov's interpretation of Levski's "skepticism" can and has been challenged, there is little doubt that it was his poetic vision, and its subsequent broad public reception, of the betrayal as well as the emphasis on Levski's break with his holy orders, that made for the complicated and ambivalent attitude of the church toward the hero.<sup>134</sup>

The reasons to go into such detail about seemingly unimportant biographical instances are twofold. One is to show that the difference in interpretation about Levski's link to the church long predated the communist period. There is a tendency nowadays to ascribe the attempts to disassociate Levski from religion and the church to the "atheistic and anti-church propaganda of the [communist] state" that attempted to push Levski "into the swamp of atheism."<sup>135</sup> This propaganda did exist, of course, but it simply and fairly easily reinforced an interpretive trope that had appeared a century earlier, at the very beginning of the attempts to make sense of Levski and his legacy. This interpretive trope had its philosophical roots in the general crisis of traditional religion during the nineteenth century, and the different outcomes triggered by secularization and skepticism: deism, agnosticism, and atheism. It was complicated at the turn of the century with the reception of a variety of general European philosophical currents that

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134 For a very intelligent discussion of the power of Vazov's message in shaping public opinion, see Panchovski, *Predatelite*, 134–8.

135 Vladimir Bakirdzhiev, "Evangelie i kama," *Apostolit. Vizpomenatelen list po sluchai 160-godishnina ot rozhdenieto na Vasil Levski*, Karlovo, July 18, 1997, 1. Balachev in the interview on July 24, 2000 also insisted that it was the communists who found it expedient to concentrate the blame on the "treacherous clergy" forgetting that both the accusation against Pop Kristiu, as well as the very phrase generalizing the accusation against the clergy as a whole, unfair and unfounded as they are, originate already in the 1870s. Ivan Petev, in his otherwise convincing treatment of the religiosity of Levski, conveniently leaves out the century-long tradition of interpreting Levski as alien to the church, and attributes this only to "the last several decades" when "in the service of a controlled policy there were all kinds of attempts to push Levski into the swamp of atheism" ("Religioznostta na Ierodiakon Ignatii (Vasil Levski)," in Ogniana Mazhdra-kova-Chavdarova, ed., *Troyanskiat manastir v natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie. Po sluchai 120 godini ot osnovavaneto na revoliutsionniia komitet v manastira ot Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voennioizdatelski kompleks "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1992, 44–5.

came to define Bulgarian modernism,<sup>136</sup> and was reinforced during the interwar period with the radicalization of the political and ideological scene. Within this interpretation, it was tacitly assumed that Levski had outgrown his religious commitments as well as consciousness, and that the rupture with the church was final. Almost immediately, there was the development of a parallel interpretive trope insisting that Levski never did break with the church. For obvious reasons today, after decades of official atheism, this interpretive trope is vocal but it is neither new, nor any more intense than when it first appeared more than a hundred years ago.

This polarized interpretation has another, more concrete provenance. The heroicization of the national revolutionary movement and its main figures—Rakovski, Karavelov, Levski, Botev—has become so much the Whig interpretation of Bulgarian history, that one tends to forget that this interpretation needed several decades after 1878 to become the dominant one. It most easily and quickly entered the schoolbooks after the radical political outcome of the Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878, when the rise of yesterday’s revolutionaries to the political helm of the country vindicated their revolutionary vision. But this was neither an easily conceded nor unanimously accepted outcome. An editorial piece of 1898 published in the series “Religious stories” and entitled “Hierodeacon Ignatii or Vasil Levski, Was he an Atheist?”<sup>137</sup> argued strongly against the appropriation of Levski for anti-religious and anti-church propaganda. The article reacted, in particular, to the manifesto of the commission entrusted to organize the 25th anniversary of the death of Levski, in which Levski was said to have “thrown away the monk’s cassock and the begging in the name of the church, and stopped to raise his voice to a God who was deaf to the prayers of the slave.”<sup>138</sup> The argumentation, however, was not directed solely at proving Levski’s religiosity. There was a vicious polemical tenure against the whole revolutionary movement. There had been, the article maintained, two strategies of national struggle. One belonged to the

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136 See Galin Tikhanov, *Zhanrovoto siznanie na kriga “Misil.” Kim kulturnata biografija na bilgarskiiia modernizim*, Sofia: Akademiia, 1998.

137 “Ierodiakon Ignatii ili Vasil Levski bezbozhnik li e bil?” in D. Marinov, ed., *Religiozni razkazi*, III, 1–2, Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Prosveshlenie,” 1898, 52–71.

138 *Ibid.*, 52.

church and the schools, and had produced a restrained and enlightened literature; the other one, produced by and producing the revolutionary community, was overwhelming and immoderate, and “atheism and unbelief was the most popular idea of the revolutionary literature.” These rebels (*buntovnitsi*), as the author preferred to call them, “had elevated unbelief, atheism, hateful crimes like murder, theft, bank robberies and others to the level of virtue, if these crimes were seen as a means to the accomplishment of the idea: the liberation of the Bulgarian fatherland.” As a result, the author lamented, “thanks to this language, this style, and these thoughts, a whole generation has been raised amongst us which, among its other virtues, cherishes unbelief and atheism as the greatest virtue.”<sup>139</sup> The rest of the article was dedicated to proving the moral heights of Levski in stark contrast to the norms and activities of the other revolutionaries.<sup>140</sup> Levski emerges as a true son of the church who never broke his vows (with a special emphasis on his virginity), his last words at the confession under the gallows being “I am dying for faith and fatherland!”<sup>141</sup> So powerful was the polarization at the end of the nineteenth century that the article concluded in no uncertain terms: “If such an anniversary takes place, if there are proclamations, pamphlets and speeches offensive to faith and church, the church should be closed for this celebration, the clergy should not participate in such a celebration.” Nor was this attitude confined to written polemics. When in the 1880s, Zakhari Stoianov had collected materials for a biography of Botev and applied for a publication subsidy to the Ministry of Education, the response of the then minister Georgi Zhivkov was that he would not give money for the poetry of a “ne’er-do-well.” Stoianov allegedly stormed out of the minister’s office pledging to make Botev the idol of the Bulgarian people.<sup>142</sup>

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139 Ibid., 55.

140 Amazingly, these revolutionaries were contrasted to the former generation of *hayduts*, like Panayot Khitov and others, who were depicted as the spiritual fathers of Levski but not of the rest. The term *haydut* is the Turkish word for rebel, which in its usage in the Bulgarian language has shed off its pejorative connotation and had become the designation of freedom-fighters.

141 “Ierodiakon Ignatii ili Vasil Levski bezbozhnik li e bil?” 66.

142 Zdravko Dafinov, *Priiatelstva i sipernichestva mezhdu bulgarskite poeti, pisатели i krititsi: Dokumentalna khronika 1845–1945*, Sofia, Iztok-Zapad, 2006, 90.

Two aspects have to be emphasized here. One is that Levski had not yet become the one uncontested figure of the Bulgarian heroic pantheon who, while constantly appropriated by different groups and platforms, was yet by common consent the property of the whole nation. At the end of the nineteenth century we witness a fierce and uncompromising contest over who he belongs to. The other is that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's ambivalence *vis-à-vis* Levski stems not merely from the different possible interpretations of his own relationship to it but from a broader difficulty to accommodate the radical revolutionary period and its actors during the Bulgarian national struggle. The mutual hostility was great, the accusations on both sides devastating, and their roots were deep in the two revolutionary decades of the 1860s and 1870s. The accommodation on both sides happened only gradually, mostly after the first generation of contemporaries had passed from the scene. The present historiographical consensus of complementarity rather than conflict between the movements for church and political independence was achieved slowly and painfully over practically a whole century. By 1937, the 100th anniversary of Levski's birth, the sharply conflictual verdicts of contemporaries had been tempered, and the language adopted by the church did not differ from the tenor typical for the general national discourse. Nothing but the author or place of publication would reveal the following opening as the position of the church: "Great historical events which create epochs in the history of nations, have to be remembered not only by their contemporaries; they have to serve as an example to the next generations. A nation which knows how to esteem the individuals with special merits to the Motherland, to point to them as an example for the youth, such a nation deserves to live and enjoy the admiration of the community of nations."<sup>143</sup> Most writings from this period, stemming from the ranks of the church, stressed Levski's religiosity but without a hint at the earlier enmity toward the revolutionary movement.<sup>144</sup> On the contrary, the Whig interpretation had become so or-

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143 Traianopoloski episkop Antim, "Mitropolit Maxim i Vasil Levski," *Tsirkoven vestnik* XXXVIII, No. 9, February 27, 1937, 97.

144 "Levski e umrial kato diakon," *Tsirkoven vestnik* XXXIX, No. 10, March 4, 1938, 112–3; T. G. Vlaikov, "Diakonstvoto na Levski," *Vizpomenatelna niga "Vasil Levski,"* Plovdiv, 1937, 79–81; Khristo Ivanchev, "Viarata na Levski," *Tsirkoven vestnik* XLII No. 10, February 28, 1941; S. Kazandzhiev, "Edin spomen za Levski," *Zlatorog* XX, No. 4, 1939, 187–8.

ganic that the stress was on how much Levski relied on the clergy, and the latter's participation in the revolutionary struggle. Of course, there were exceptions, and in 1939 Stefan Tsankov, a *protopresviter* and author of a history of the Orthodox Church after 1878, still lamented that "one of the most unfavorable internal conditions for the activity of the Bulgarian Church in our age was the antireligious and antichurch spirit of our intelligentsia."<sup>145</sup>

It is only natural that in the first decade after the communist takeover the writings about Levski in the ecclesiastical press and publications followed closely the dominant formulae but they were not significantly different in style and tone from the ones during the interwar period. The focus was on Levski's devotion to "a pure and holy republic," to his ideas about the brotherhood of nations, even on his revolutionary democracy. There was no emphasis on his religious ideas and standing in the church, but absent at the same time was the insistence on any alleged atheism.<sup>146</sup> By the late 1950s the reconciliation had taken place. In the atmosphere of an ideological thaw, and the elevation of the Bulgarian Church to the Patriarchate in 1954, the compromise discourse was shared by all sides: on the one hand, the greatest figures of the national liberation struggle were posited to be the revolutionary democrats; on the other hand, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was accepted as the single most important institution which had preserved the nation throughout the 500 years of the yoke.

A perfect illustration is a lengthy study about the Orthodox religion and the Orthodox Church published in the Yearbook of the Theological Academy in 1970, and written by Radko Poptodorov, the future ideologue of the split and of the canonization. With the exception of the couple of pages in which Poptodorov essentially replicates

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145 Stefan Tsankov, "Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsirkva ot Osвобождението до nastoiashite vreme," *Godishnik na Sofiiskia universitet. Bogoslovski fakultet* XVI, No. 6, 1938–1939, Sofia: Pridvorna pechatnitsa, 1939, 7.

146 St. p. Vasilev, "Vasil Levski (1837–1873)," *Tsirkoven vestnik* XLIX, No. 7–8, February 21, 1948, 1–3; Ivan P. Ormandzhiev, "Levski za ratstvoto na narodite i svobodata," *Tsirkoven vestnik* XLIX, No. 7–8, February 21, 1948, 3; Agatonikiiskii episkop Iona, "Bezsmirnniat podvig na Levski," *Tsirkoven vestnik* LIV, No. 7–8, February 9, 1953, 1; Sveshtenik Georgi Popkrıstev, "Vasil Levski—Diakonit," *Tsirkoven vestnik* LIX, No. 9, February 27, 1958, 1; Georgi P. Bakalov, "Vasil Levski," *Tsirkoven vestnik* LXIV, No. 4, February 2, 1963, 2–4.

Undzhiev's arguments about Levski's attitude toward the church, and reaches the conclusion that "the Deacon decided to serve God by totally devoting his energies to the liberation of his people from the yoke,"<sup>147</sup> every other word or phrase could have been authored by any researcher from the Institute of History, the University of Sofia, or any other secular institution at the time. The kind of symbiosis between formerly struggling evaluations reached its culmination in the following conclusion about the April Uprising of 1876: "In it, the people's Bulgarian Church not only took part, but often in the person of its clergy and the monastic order, it even became the motor and leader of the people's revolutionary masses. In general, [the church] played a great role in the preparation and realization of the anti-feudal bourgeois-democratic and, at the same time, national-liberation revolution, and the revival of the Bulgarian state. This revival was finally completed in 1878 with the selfless help of the brotherly Russian people."<sup>148</sup> If Radko Poptodorov would claim today that he was under pressure to write this pro-Russian statement, he surely cannot claim that somebody forced him (or prevented him from) writing the following florid patriotic paragraph that had become the consensual position of the Church and the secular communist authorities alike: "The Orthodox-Christian faith has been in the course of the five-century long Turkish yoke a spiritual armor made of steel over the body of the Bulgarian people which saved it from Turkish assimilation... During the dreadful five-centuries long hardships of slavery, the Orthodox-Christian faith and the Bulgarian people's church were the pulse of the people's life, thanks to which our people survived, hardened, and will last forever."<sup>149</sup>

Within this new, completely consensual climate of reconciliation, when the revolutionaries were domesticated, it was perfectly natural to read that "the church never regretted the defrocking of Levski..., because it knows that to fight and sacrifice oneself for the good of one's

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147 Prof. Prot. Radko Poptodorov, "Pravoslavno-khristiianskata viara i bilgarskata narodna tsirkva kato faktori za zapazvaneto na bilgarskiia narod, za formirane na natsionalno-revoliutsionnoto mu siznanie i za kulturnoto mu razvitie prez vreme na petvekovnoto osmansko robstvo," *Godishnik na dukhovnata akademiia "Sv. Kliment Okhridski"* XX (XLI), 1970/1971, Sofia, 1970, 235–6.

148 Ibid., 256.

149 Ibid., 257.

fellowmen is a great and blessed deed.”<sup>150</sup> The strongest voice of reconciliation belonged to Professor Todor Sîbev, who wrote that the accusations of godlessness hurled by the party of the “old” against some revolutionaries, is not sufficient to condemn them as freethinkers and atheists. He also conceded that there had been some regrettable deviations, albeit only as exceptions, from the generally patriotic position of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.<sup>151</sup>

This section provided a review of the evolution of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church’s attitude toward Levski, and an analysis of the reasons for its ambivalent assessment of the hero. To a great extent, these reasons were shaped by the way in which Levski was emplotted in the two influential master-texts of the period immediately following independence: one, Zakhari Stoianov’s biography, but first and foremost, Vazov’s oeuvre. But Levski was emplotted in many more narratives and, while they are not mutually exclusive, they allow us to illustrate different ways of assembling and handling evidence, as well as different approaches to biography.

The nature of the biographical genre as a type of history writing poses general methodological problems about the nature of evidence, the problem of memoirs as historical sources, and the fibers of memory. Most of Levski’s biography was based on written and oral memoirs or, as we would say today, the writing of his biography was to a great extent a project in oral history. As a project, it was conceived by the newly founded National Committee “Vasil Levski” in 1923. This committee, established exactly half a century after the death of Vasil Levski, functioned for close to three decades (1923–1950).<sup>152</sup> Its first task was the publication of a commemorative volume of a “strictly scientific and critical” character that should contain a biography, docu-

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150 Iordan p. Iliev, “Vasil Levski—ime simbol na borba i rodoliubie,” *Tsîrkoven vestnik* LXXIV, No. 5, February 12, 1973, 10.

151 Todor Sîbev, “Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsîrkva i natsionalnoosvoboditelnoto dvizhenie,” in Todor Sîbev, ed., *Aprilskoto vîstanie i bilgarskata pravoslavna tsîrkva. Sbornik ot studii i materialy po sluchai iubileinata stogodishina (1876-1976)*, Sofia: Sinodalno izdatelstvo, 1977, 47–8, 53–4.

152 The three consecutive presidents of the committee were: Petîr Popov (1923–1928), Vasil Tantilov (1928–1936), and Dr. D. Kirov (1936–1950). The information on the committee comes from its protocol book preserved in the archival collection of the Central State Archive (*Tsentralen Dîrzhaven Arkhiv, Chastni Postîpleniia—TsDA, ChP 940*).

ments and memoirs of live contemporaries. The person in charge of this initiative was Dimitir Strashimirov, a member of the editorial board of the committee who at the time was the chief librarian of the National Library. He was entrusted with funds to tour the country, buy off existing manuscripts, copy documents.<sup>153</sup> He also was appointed from the outset to produce the official biography of Levski, a task over which he worked incessantly over the next 15 years until his death in 1939. Much of the deliberations of the committee concern the financing and the constantly postponed completion of this project.<sup>154</sup> The first volume of Strashimirov's great collection of materials on Levski was published in 1929.<sup>155</sup> The publication of the next volume was delayed because Strashimirov was waiting for the translation of the newly arrived Ottoman documents from Turkey, and he resisted producing a hasty dilettantish biography.<sup>156</sup> From the late 1920s on Strashimirov brought in his young assistant Ivan Undzhiev who, with Strashimirov's terminal disease, was commissioned to complete the work. This he did by the end of 1943 but, with the bombings over Sofia by the allied forces and the evacuation, the printing of the biography started in 1945, with the book coming out in 1947.<sup>157</sup> In the spring of 1943,

153 TsDA, ChP 940, Protocols 1 (April 24, 1923), 6 (March 18, 1924), 11 (October 6, 1926).

154 TsDA, ChP 940, Protocols 19 (May 5, 1928), 21 (December 19, 1928), 22 (December 27, 1928), 38 (November 14, 1934). It even came to tense exchanges when Strashimirov was threatened that he would be removed from the task, and would be ordered to hand in all the materials to the committee (Protocol 41, December 3, 1935) but negotiations were continued (Protocols 43, April 3, 1936, and 44, June 17, 1936). By 1938 Strashimirov was so ill that the committee could communicate only with his wife (Protocol 54, March 16, 1938).

155 *Vasil Levski. Zhivot, dela, izvori*, Sofia, 1929. Strashimirov was also the editor of another monumental collection which has not lost its value to date: *Arkhiv na Vizrazhdaneto*, as well as the author of several monographs on the Bulgarian national revolutionary movement: *Istoriia na Aprilskoto vîstanie, Komitetskoto desetiletie, Khristo Botev kato poet i zhurnalist*. He wrote *Levski pred kîkrinskata golgota. Istoriia i kritika* as response to Katsev-Bur-ski, but never managed to complete Levski's biography.

156 TsDA, ChP 940, Protocol 42 (December 12, 1935).

157 TsDA, ChP 940, Protocols 57 (November 11, 1938); 62 (December 24, 1941) specifying that the Ministry of Education freed Undzhiev of his duties as professor for a year so that he could entirely concentrate on the biography; 67 (July 26, 1945), 73 (September, 1946). The title page of

while reporting to the committee about the completion of the biography, Undzhiev emphasized the difficulties he and Strashimirov had encountered in their attempts to produce the first critical and scholarly biography. One was the absence of a Bulgarian biographical prototype to emulate; another was the lack of scholarly monographs on separate aspects of Levski's and the revolutionary movement's activities. The most serious one, however, was the "enormous burden of legends, arbitrary statements, and impossible hypothesis, dubious memoirs and unfounded communications."<sup>158</sup> Yet, in the absence of numerous and reliable documentary information Undzhiev was forced to work primarily with memoirs. Even the birthday of Levski was reconstructed on the basis of personal reminiscences, and not birth/baptismal registers or other personal documents. There had been no serious debate about the year of birth. The day, however, was disputed. Zakhari Stoianov in 1884 stated that Levski had been born around St. Peter's Day in 1837. Stoian Zaimov in 1895 defined the day as July 6/18, basing his reconstruction exclusively on recollections that he meticulously gathered. The decisive reminiscences came from a cousin of Levski who by the 1890s was an active member of the Levski family council. Vasil Karaivanov remembered the circumstances around one particular wedding at which Levski's father was present but his pregnant mother could not attend. Following an elaborate logical scheme taking into account the customs around St. Peter's Day, and the wedding traditions in this period, Zaimov concluded after numerous consultations with Levski's relatives that July 6/18 was the most probable date, and this has been accepted as Levski's authentic birthday. Clearly, the date is probable, possible, even very likely, but not unquestionable. The point here, however, is not to question the date. After all, what does it matter whether Levski was born on July 6, or 5 or 7? The issue at stake is how we communicate information stemming from memoirs, and how we interpret them.

Had Undzhiev been pedantically true to his requirements of a "strictly scientific and critical" work, he would have used much more often the conditional form. Instead, chapter 2 begins with a simple af-

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Ivan Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski. Biografija* has 1945 as the year of publication but the back page indicates that 4,000 copies were printed in 1947. Later editions were printed in 1967 and 1980, and a reprint in 2007.

158 TsDA, ChP 940, Protocol 64 (March 12, 1943).

firmative sentence: “Vasil Ivanov Levski, the apostle of freedom, saw the native skies (*rodno nebe*) on July 6, 1837.” True, this sentence is referenced by a lengthy note narrating the whole story of the dating but this note appears some 691 pages later, and few readers are steadfast note consumers.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, the biographical genre itself relegates methodological explanations to the notes. The body of the text is supposed to present a smooth (and instructive) narrative of the real life. It is like the reconstruction of an ancient vessel where the missing parts are filled out with modern substitutes but, on top of it, the vessel is given a fresh varnish to cover the patches. Again, this dating is a simple example without any momentous interpretive repercussions but because of its simplicity, it neatly fleshes out the tension between genre conventions and scholarly ethos.

There are more complicated examples that pose more difficult questions. The dramatic act of Levski’s second defrocking on Easter Day 1864, especially cutting his hair, was “vividly preserved in the minds of the contemporaries,” according to Undzhiev. It involved, after all, the visual memory of an act that had all the underpinnings of a carefully staged theatrical scene. Levski could have cut his hair himself as he had done in 1862 without any witness. Instead, he called his friends—Georgi Pop Khristov and Khristo Vasil Pulev—took them to the locality Altinchair, and asked them to cut his hair. Both were terrified, and refused to do it, so in the end he did it himself anyway. He then folded his hair carefully, and gave it to his mother to preserve. After that, already in civilian clothes, he appeared again at his usual place in the church, and produced the turmoil and “vividly preserved” memory.<sup>160</sup> This is the brief version of the event as told in the biog-

159 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 65, 756–8. Recently, a work was published contesting the birth year of Levski, instead suggesting 1846 as the correct one, based on Levski’s testimony before the Ottoman court in 1873, when he gave his age as 26–27, instead of as 36. The author, given the dearth of evidence, is doing his best in logical conjectures, but Levski’s testimony about his age at the time of his arrest and under trial in 1873 was in line with all the other completely misleading information he gave to the authorities: Georgi Turturikov, *Vizkresenieto na Apostola, 1846–1873, ili koga vsishtnost e roden Vasil Levski*, Sofia: IK “Vanio Nedkov,” 2006.

160 One may venture that the first time Levski initiated his own private rite of passage, while the second time he realized the enormity of the transition as well as its potential to instruct. His second defrocking, then, became a carefully self-staged rite of passage. As Barbara Myerhoff re-

raphy. The accompanying note specifies that the only source for this event was the story of one of the witnesses, Georgi Pop Khristov. The story itself was recorded only in 1903.<sup>161</sup> Other recollections of contemporaries, both ones considered as valuable by Undzhiev as well as others which are dismissed as untrustworthy, are, in the final analysis, based on this initial story.<sup>162</sup> How is all of this to be interpreted? How do we juxtapose the two following statements of Undzhiev: one, in the main text of his narrative, that “the act of the defrocking was vividly preserved in the minds of the contemporaries”; the other, in the accompanying note, that “the act of the second defrocking of the Apostle was made known to the generations by the witness to the event—khadzhi Georgi Pop Khristov. Many Karlovo inhabitants had heard from him the story about the episode at Altinchair.”

What do people remember decades after the event? The event itself or the story as it was delivered to them by the witness? What had become of Georgi Pop Khristov’s initial story once it was shared with the rest of the community? Did it/how did it differ from the version that was noted and published 40 years after the event? How reliable was it in the first place? Why was there no similar story by Khristo Vasil Pulev? What makes Undzhiev believe parts of the story, and consider others “not very convincing”? Was Levski a singularly intuitive and effective public relations manager who knew the value of a dramatically staged public event? Did he intentionally bring his two friends so as to assure the circulation of eyewitness accounts? Or is the “staging” of the story to be attributed to the witness himself, for a number of different and plausible motives? How conscious was Undzhiev of all

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marks in a somewhat different context: “The spontaneous ritual acts that we so often do alone—burning an unfaithful lover’s photograph or returning gifts from one no longer cherished, the cutting of hair or cleaning house to announce to oneself that a new phase of life is beginning—all these are nascent rites of passage that can be enlarged, formalized, made to include important people, memorialized with objects, notes, or records that are kept in recognition that the transition was successfully accomplished.” (Barbara Myerhoff, “Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox,” in Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration. Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982, 132)

161 *Sborniche “Vasil Levski” izdadenno po sluchai polagane na osnovniia kamik na pamiatnika na Levski v rodnii mu grad*, Plovdiv: Pechatnitsa “Stara Planina,” 1903.

162 *Idem.*, 133–5, 783.

these questions? Did he avoid them on purpose or was it the conventions of the biographical genre that dictated the rules of the narrative, making him oblivious to the conventions of the then dominant historiographical style? Should we hear in his lament about the absence of a Bulgarian biography that could serve as a prototype the tension of this methodological quandary? Finally, is there really a methodological quandary?

Here is one last example that goes back to the problem of the ambiguous relationship of Levski with/within the church. The person who in 1873 communicated the death of Levski to his mother was Archimandrite Konstantin, later Bishop of Vratsa. In his recollections, published in 1903, he described how the devastated mother shared with him the episode of Levski's defrocking, and the handing of his hair. The Archimandrite gave a verbatim rendition of Levski's words as they were communicated by his mother: "Mother, the people's voice has called on me to run to the assistance of my enslaved fatherland; therefore, I can no longer fulfill my ecclesiastical duty, and I resign from it. Take my hair and hide it in your wooden chest, for I am leaving you, and when you hear that I have perished, take it out so that a funeral service can be performed over it and that it can be buried, because I may have neither funeral service, nor a grave."<sup>163</sup> A few years later, Konstantin, already a Metropolitan, gave a speech where he again referred to the mother's recollection of Levski's words. Published in 1933, the speech had little in common with the first quote. This is how it sounded in the second version: "Mother, I take off the cassock but I will never and under no circumstance renounce the vows to serve God and his holy church. I am putting on civilian clothes only to be able to preach freely and unhindered among my compatriots. When I perish for the fatherland, hand my hair to the clergy which should perform over it the funeral service as it befits the deacon's rank."<sup>164</sup>

Undzhiev was understandably suspicious of the second version, and published it only in his footnotes, while giving the first version the scholarly imprimatur of authenticity. Also understandably, it is the second version from the footnotes that is nowadays put forward as the authen-

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163 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 135–6, following the publication in *Sborniche "Vasil Levski"* of 1903.

164 *Ibid.*, 783–4.

tic soliloquy of Levski.<sup>165</sup> What is surprising was that Undzhiev never voiced any questions about the first version. He took it at face value, and reproduced it as he would do a document or a letter. There can be no question about Undzhiev's meticulousness and his methodological sophistication within the framework of historiographical positivism. Had he written a scholarly monograph or article, he probably would have reached the same analytical conclusions about Levski's sincere religiosity, and that the act of defrocking was not an act of refuting his faith.<sup>166</sup> But he would have, no doubt, provided all the conditional interpretive paraphernalia to this recollection in the main body of the text, and would have most likely rephrased it, and refrained from rendering it in direct speech. That he chose to do otherwise was due, it seems, to the clear consciousness that he was working in another genre, about whose conventions he was not entirely certain but that he assumed to be much more flexible and able to accommodate a piece of fictional (though plausible) memory. As has been half-jokingly remarked, the *biographie romancée*, where facts are a little hazy and dialogues and private thoughts are freely invented, is usually shelved in libraries under "Biography." In contrast, more serious and scholarly biographies are placed under "History."<sup>167</sup> But is the distinction so obvious?

165 Vladimir Bakîrdzhiev, "Terodiakon Ignatii (Vasil Levski)—niakoi kanonicheski aspekti za polozhenieto mu v tsîrkvata," in Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, ed., *Troianskiiat manastir*, 28–9; Ibid., "Evangelie i kama," *Apostolit. Vizpomenatelen list po sluchai 160-godishninata ot rozhdenieto na Vasil Levski*, Karlovo, July 18, 1997, 6. Ecclesiastical scholars from the previous period were actually much more careful than Bakîrdzhiev, and stuck to the first version: Poptodorov, "Pravoslavno-khristiianskata viara," 235–6; Ivan Pančovski, "Apostolit na svobodata—diakon Vasil Levski," in Todor Sîbev, ed., *Aprîlskoto vîstanie i bîlgarskata pravoslavna tsîrkva*, 83.

166 Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 136.

167 P. N. Furbank, "A Royal Mystery," *The New York Review of Books* XLVIII, No. 2, February 8, 2001, 4. Historians themselves admit grudgingly the limitations of their professional conventions. Summing up the historiographical contradictions about Robespierre, Colin Haydon and William Doyle refer to Hillary Mantel's well-received historical novel, *A Place of Greater Safety*, and wonder whether "the time may have come when fiction contributes as much to our understanding of him as the disagreements of historians." (Colin Haydon and William Doyle, eds., *Robespierre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 16). I owe this piece of information to Jeremy D. Popkin.

Biography's genesis can be easily traced back to the tradition of exemplary lives, gospels and hagiography that sought to contribute to the public good.<sup>168</sup> As the "history of the lives of individual men," it has been treated essentially "as a branch of literature."<sup>169</sup> The "critical and scholarly" biography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not one trying to do away with this stated function but one trying to prioritize values such as objectivity and verifiability over the predominantly prescriptive and moralizing tenure of earlier writings. In this, it actually shared with the national historiographies of the time, as well as with the realistic novel of the nineteenth century,<sup>170</sup> the same vision of their functions and legitimation—the public good—as well as the same methodological predilections. All three genres were essentially informed by the belief still dominant today among practicing historians that the past is "another country" which can be reconstructed from traces left behind. There exists, of course, another view which is making its way only slowly and unevenly into the mainstream of the historical profession: "The past is myself, my own history, the seed of my present thoughts, the mold of my present disposition."<sup>171</sup> In this

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168 Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories. Making Selves*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, 170–1.

169 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 208.

170 As shown by Lydia Ginzburg, "nineteenth-century realism emerged during the rise of historiography, and it developed side by side with the development of the exact sciences." According to her, nineteenth-century literature clarified and realized the aesthetic potentialities of the documentary genres of the previous centuries. Ginzburg makes a distinction between fiction (the realistic historical novel included) and documentary literature (such as memoirs, diaries, letters, autobiographies) in that the special quality of the latter "lies in that *orientation toward authenticity* of which the reader never ceases to be aware but which is far from being the same thing as factual exactitude." This principle makes documentary literature documentary while its aesthetic organization makes it literature. She thus has carved an intermediary, and quite porous, space for documentary literature between the conventions of fiction and historiography, and while she does not explicitly mention biography, the analogy is obvious (Lydia Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose*, trans. Judson Rosenberg, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, 4–7).

171 The phrase belongs to L. S. Stevenson, cited in Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts. The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, 1.

second view, both biography and history can be essentially reduced to a kind of intellectual autobiography. Fundamentally opposed as these two understandings of historiography are, in both frameworks there is no intrinsic cognitive contradiction between the biographic and historiographic genres except *qua* genres.<sup>172</sup> What Jerome Bruner has to say about autobiography applies equally to biography and history:

[a]utobiography is life construction through “text” construction. To look at a life as if it were independent of the autobiographical text that constructs it is as futile a quest for reality as the physicist’s search for a Nature that is independent of the theories that lead him to measure one rather than another phenomenon... The principle instruments by which the culture [creates the paradigms that guide our construction] are its narrative forms, its genres, its modes of “packaging” forms of life.<sup>173</sup>

Undzhiev functioned comfortably within the first discourse, and the uneasiness he felt was not a methodological one: after all, the scholarly biography has been collapsed into the larger historiographical field. His anxiety stemmed rather from the trepidations of a pioneer in the genre of scholarly biography within the younger and smaller tradition of Bulgarian historiography where he could not hide behind a widely

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172 For a general treatment of the relationship between content and form as they pertain to history, see Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality, in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, 1–25; *Ibid.*, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 81–100. Bourdieu makes the same point but takes it one step further based on the observation that both biography or “life history” and the history of events are based on the same philosophy of history as an historical narrative, and therefore “an historian’s narrative is indiscernible from that of a novelist in this context, especially if the narration is biographical or autobiographical” (Pierre Bourdieu, “L’illusion biographique,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62-3 (June 1986), 69, translated as “The Biographical Illusion,” *Working Papers and Proceedings of the Center for Psychological Studies* No. 14, 1987, 1).

173 Jerome Bruner, “The Autobiographical Process,” in Robert Folkenflik, ed., *The Culture of Autobiography. Constructions of Self-Representation*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993, 55.

accepted model. Still, the biographical genre seems to have afforded some broader presumed license on both the manner of articulation as well as the treatment of sources. It was also a genre that gave Undzhiev an easier and maybe more effective venue to fulfill his self-described mission both as biographer and historiographer: "The Apostle Levski as a historical figure reveals himself in new and unsuspected depths, and emerges as the most majestic figure of our past. Now, when [future] generations will already know his life thoroughly and correctly, he will rise in everybody's mind as the most perfect expression of the Bulgarian genius."<sup>174</sup>

Symptomatically, 20 years later, in a completely different political context, and deeply involved in the project of Marxist historiography, the English historian Mercia MacDermott replicated the exact same strategy, drawn to and unconsciously guided by the conventions of the genre.<sup>175</sup> She also had a mission, and it was even more grandiose than Undzhiev's, in that it was appropriately international compared to Undzhiev's national claim: "Had Levski lived and worked in a larger, less unknown country, or had he written in a more widely understood language, he might already have had an honorable place in the international pantheon of revolutionaries and liberators." Writing for an English-reading audience, MacDermott made the appropriate analogy between Levski and the legends of Sir Galahad and Robin Hood. The documentary evidence, according to her, did not destroy this romantic figure; what it added, though, was incorporating him as the primogenitor in another romance, that of revolutionary Marxism. For MacDermott, Levski anticipated if he did not strictly speaking inaugurate the revolutionary practice of the twentieth century: "To an astonishing degree, the principles upon which Levski built his revolutionary organization foreshadowed those of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, but the familiarity of many of Levski's principles must not mislead us into overlooking the fact that when Levski formulated them in the late 1860's and early 1870's, they were original and had no parallel in other European movements."<sup>176</sup>

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174 TsDA, ChP 940, Protocol 64 (March 12, 1943).

175 MacDermott, *The Apostle of Freedom*, 86. My translation of the first version of Archimandrite Konstantin's memoirs differs slightly from MacDermott's but there are no conflicts of meaning.

176 *Ibid.*, 16.

There are, obviously, distinctions between Undzhiev's and MacDermott's interpretations, especially their overall ideological underpinnings, but they might be better understood in the framework of the dialogical principle rather than within the stark explanation of political and ideological exigencies. Elizabeth Tonkin has argued "that one cannot detach the oral representation of pastness from the relationship of teller and audience in which it was occasioned."<sup>177</sup> This may be equally valid for written representations. The relationship between teller and audience need not be direct and immediate. After all, as Lotman has argued, "not only communication but thinking itself is dialogical by nature."<sup>178</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, Undzhiev was in an internal dialogue with a projected audience within a sphere in which religion was a contested but dominant signifier. In the 1960s, MacDermott practiced this internal dialogue within a sphere in which religion had been relegated to the periphery but also, in the particular circumstances of Bulgaria, did not represent a viable challenge and a strong threat to the dominant Marxist discourse. She could, therefore, easily concede that "Vasil's rejection of the cloister was not intended as a conscious rejection of the Church" and that he "felt neither the compulsion nor the desire to cut the umbilical cord which bound him to the Church." Her projected audience, however, had or was supposed to have a different hierarchy of priorities, one that corresponded to her reading of the world and, consequently, of Levski: "he had felt an urge to lay his life upon an altar, to live morally and meaningfully, but it was in the revolutionary movement, not the Church, that he found complete spiritual satisfaction."<sup>179</sup> For all the posited contrasts between the pre- and postwar periods and their historiographies, they were functioning within the same semiosphere: that of nationalism.<sup>180</sup> Of course,

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177 Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts*, 2.

178 Iu. M. Lotman, ed., *Struktura dialoga kak printsip raboty semioticheskogo mekhanizma. Trudy po znakovym sistemam XVII*, Tartu: Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, vypusk 641, 1984, 4. Lotman adds: "This is why any consciousness models for itself 'another' interlocutor, included in the system of comprehension–incomprehension, communicative cooperation–struggle."

179 MacDermott, *The Apostle of Freedom*, 86–7.

180 The notion of semiosphere, as the field of the sign and the symbolic, has been developed by Iurii M. Lotman, "O semiosfere," in Lotman, ed., *Struktura dialoga*, 6–7, who juxtaposed it to another pair of categories: the biosphere and the noosphere (the mental field).

what in Undzhiev was carefully depicted as the transposition of religious ardor from the transcendental to the secular sphere, in MacDermott's brush turned into the somewhat pompous portrait of a harmoniously developed Renaissance man: "He was full of an almost pagan *joie-de-vivre*, and his delight in physical existence was closer to the spirit of Ancient Greece than that of Byzantium... Vasil was essentially an earthly person, and his asceticism was that of the athlete rather than the saint."<sup>181</sup> Levski's hypostasis as an athlete is well known, as well as his role as an athlete's "patron-saint,"<sup>182</sup> but MacDermott may have been too hasty in dismissing his hypostasis as a saint.

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181 MacDermott, *The Apostle of Freedom*, 87. Of course, in depicting Levski as a Renaissance figure, MacDermott was not alone. This was, in fact, the standard praise lavished on Levski. Nikolai Genchev, in a typically emotional, even grandiose, romantic prose, careful not to tarnish it with rigorously (or at least clearly) defined categories, writes that "in all his great and lasting dimensions, Levski is a Renaissance figure, a great, courageous, unlimited by the times romantic"; he is the "fruit of the Revival Period, and in general of the renaissance spiritual leanings and the immortality of the spirit which had taken over this individual." Levski, according to Genchev, is the emanation of a continuity of typically Bulgarian qualities: the reformist drive of Boris I, the historical decisiveness of Simeon, the self-denial of the Bogomils, the audacity of Ivailo, the pride of Rakovski. "These qualities of the best Bulgarians, that have long been hammered by the erratic historical fate, are inspired and ennobled in Levski by the humanism of the Renaissance, the light of the Enlightenment and the liberal free-thinking of the nineteenth century." (Genchev, *Vasil Levski*, 107, 110, 127)

182 "Levski" is the name of the popular football team, and its history as well as the appropriation of Levski in the discourse on sports is analyzed in a different section.

## 4. The Orchestration of a Grassroots *Cultus*

The church “Sveta Bogoroditsa” (“Holy Virgin”) in Karlovo cuts a handsome profile with its blue and white bell tower. The bell tower is relatively new, from 1897, but the church building, as the inscription above the western entrance tells us, dates from 1851. Before they began constructing this new building in 1847, there had been a rather insignificant structure erected in 1839 in the place of the older church of the Holy Virgin that had burnt down in 1813. This latter church, about which little is known, is believed by some to have been built already at the end of the fifteenth century, at the time of the founding of the little town of Karlî-ova, later Karlovo. In any case, the names of priests serving in the church have been preserved at least from the eighteenth century on. Although the construction was completed in 1851, the events of the Crimean war and lack of funds delayed the furnishing of the church, and its consecration did not take place until May 20, 1858. Levski’s biography is intimately linked with this church because it was here in 1859 that he was ordained as a deacon; here he sang at all the liturgies in the course of several years; and here again he reappeared after he had cut his hair on Easter 1864.<sup>183</sup>

As used to be the case with the majority of churches built in the Ottoman period, the exterior is simple and modest, the walls of unpolished stone, the joints unfilled, the decoration kept to a minimum.<sup>184</sup> A plain wooden arcade was added later, encircling the western part of the church with the main entrance, and bending to reach the north and south entrances. In 1997, a rather significant change occurred on the northern wall. A fresco of the Holy Virgin with Child was painted above the entrance. It had been commissioned by the church’s Board

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183 The information on the church comes from a local publication: Anka Racheva, *Khramit “Sveta Bogoroditsa” v Karlovo. Istoricheski ocherk*, Karlovo: Izdatelstvo “Helikon”–Kazanlik, 1998.

184 The exceptions are the richly decorated exteriors of monastery churches, like the ones in the Rila or Bachkovo monasteries.

of Trustees, and was the work of the local artist Anna Kozinarska. The more dramatic addition was a large fresco covering the northern wall under the arcade. It had been commissioned and financed by the Karlovo section of the Bulgarian (*Obshtobilgarski*) Committee “Vasil Levski,” in agreement with the ecclesiastical Board of Trustees. Again, it had been painted by a local artist—Dechko Todorov—and represents the taking of the holy orders by Vasil Levski. The accompanying inscription explains: “In Anno Domini 1859, in this temple Deacon Ignatii (Vasil Levski) was ordained in the rank of deacons by Metropolitan Paisii of Plovdiv.” This fresco was opened and consecrated on July 18, 1997 (Levski’s birthday) by the former Metropolitan of Plovdiv, Arsenii.<sup>185</sup> (See Plate 16.)

The main decoration of the interior of the church, which is a basilica with a nave and two aisles, is the iconostasis separating the nave from the sanctuary. Carved from walnut, it encloses icons from the celebrated nineteenth-century master Stanislav Dospevski, among them the Holy Trinity, the Holy Virgin, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Theologian, and Sts. Cyril and Methodius. The sanctuary, which is closed to persons not consecrated to the service as in all Orthodox churches, contains the altar of the Holy Virgin, as well as an additional one dedicated to Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the southern niche.<sup>186</sup> The latter we learn from Anka Racheva’s little guide. What the little guide does not say is that the sanctuary houses the portrait of Levski, hung on the wall above a wooden chest immediately opposite and to the right of the main door of the sanctuary.

Visiting Karlovo in July, 2000, a few days before Levski’s birthday, I received the program for the festivities on July 18. They were to open with a Holy Liturgy dedicated to the 2000 anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ and the 163th anniversary of Levski’s birth, and performed by Arsenii, the Metropolitan of Plovdiv. This was to be followed by laying flowers at the grave of Gina Kuncheva, Levski’s mother. After this, a poetry performance would take place, followed by a book opening. At the end, there would be the conclusion of the

185 Racheva, *Khramit* “*Sveta Bogoroditsa*,” 38. This was done, I was informed, over the objections of the National Institute for Cultural Monuments (*NIPK*) which wanted to preserve the authentic appearance of the church (Interview with Dora Chausheva, July 13, 2000).

186 *Ibid.*, 16. The Bulgarian word for sanctuary is *oltar*, whereas altar is *prestol*.

tourist initiative “In the steps of The Apostle,” and the awarding of the “Karlovo” prize. Later in the evening, the flag of the Karlovo Revolutionary Committee was to be solemnly taken out, and Patriarch Maxim was to deliver an official address at the monument of Levski. The festivities were to end with a concert by the pop-star Roberta.

Speaking with the young, energetic and dedicated director of the Levski Museum in Karlovo—Dora Chausheva—who was in charge of the festivities, I asked her of her opinion about Levski’s canonization. She was against it because “[t]his is a formality. He already is a saint for the nation. The act will only defile and formalize the authentic sanctity.”<sup>187</sup> She added some details on the program of the festivities. In the past few years, on July 18 and February 19, the days accepted for the birth and death of the hero, a procession starts from the Church “Sv. Bogoroditsa” and goes to the museum, then to the monument, and back to the church. The procession carries icons, prominent among them the icon of the Virgin who is the patron saint. Lately, among the icons a portrait of Levski is being carried. “Isn’t this an informal act of canonization?” I asked. “No,” Dora Chausheva replied, “this is not an icon, it is a lay portrait.” Where was it kept? She didn’t know.

Next morning I was at the “Sv. Bogoroditsa” church. It was part of the Maxim-led church. There were no representatives of Pimen’s hierarchy in Karlovo, and I had not heard of any adherents. The old lady selling candles was friendly and sociable. Is it true they carry Levski’s portrait with the icons? Yes. When did they start doing this? Maybe 1997. From where do they bring the portrait? They keep it in the sanctuary. If I wish, I can carefully lift the curtain over the royal gates leading to the sanctuary, and will see it. I did. The portrait of Levski, hung immediately to the right on an inner wall over a wooden chest, looked back at me. I knew I was not allowed to enter.<sup>188</sup> How about, if I didn’t

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187 Interview on July 13, 2000. On the museum, see Chausheva’s contributions: “Az, Vasil Levski, v Karlovo roden,” *Muzei “Vasil Levski” Karlovo*, Sofia: Fondatsiia “Vasil Levski,” Karlovo: Muzei Vasil Levski, second edition, s.a. [2005], 50–64, and “Skîpo i sviato miasto. Natsionalniiat muzei ‘Vasil Levski’ v Karlovo,” *Apostolit*, Izdava Obshtobilgarski komitet i fondatsiia “Vasil Levski,” May 2002, 6.

188 The revived, though not very strong, interest in Orthodoxy has obviously engendered a number of questions about the relevance of different taboos because the church newspaper has found it appropriate to publish an explanation, a translation from the Greek, about why women are not

enter, but took a photograph? After all, it wouldn't be even my direct gaze; and, besides, right now I was not unclean. The old lady appreciated the casuistry with a grin.<sup>189</sup> I took my photographs from the royal gates, and from the southern door (the "deacons' door") of the iconostasis (see Plates 17, 18, and 18A).

The portrait of Levski, perhaps two feet by one, is an oval shaped image of his bust in civilian attire. It seems to be an oil or watercolor version of one of his earliest portraits by Georgi Dančov, Levski's contemporary and friend, who painted several portraits from memory in the 1880s.<sup>190</sup> Although Dančov knew Levski personally, he clearly based his portrait on the most widespread of Levski's photographs at the time. Of the seven authenticated photographs of Levski, this was the one that the Ottoman police managed to take hold of, and that was circulated in circa 1,000 copies around the country.<sup>191</sup> It is an oval shaped portrait of Levski's bust in civilian attire. Interestingly, this did not become the most popular photograph in the popular imagination of the Bulgarians, and again Ivan Vazov may have to do with it because he did not like this particular image.<sup>192</sup> Instead, the image which has been mostly linked in popular consciousness with Levski's physical appearance is a 1870 photograph, of which only three original copies

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allowed to enter the sanctuary (Georgios Dorbaraki, "Zashto v sv.oaltar da ne vlizat zheni," *Tsirkoven vestnik* XCIX, No. 6, March 16–31, 1998).

189 "Uncleanliness" meant that one did not have recent sexual intercourse. At several fora in the US and Europe, at which I have given preliminary talks on this issue, the question has always been posed to me (usually with a knowing sneer) for how much I bribed the old lady. This has never been an issue, and it never even crossed my mind to do it. It bespeaks more the mentality and stereotypes of the inquirers.

190 Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia: Bilgarski khudozhnik, 1976, plate 2 of the Reproductions, following p. 46. This is the first of three oil paint portraits that Dančov painted and although unfinished, it is the best. All three portraits are in the Plovdiv Art Gallery.

191 Popov, *Vasil Levski*, 11, dates this photograph to 1872 in Bucharest, whereas R. Stoianova, "Portretite na Vasil Levski," *Narodna kultura*, VIII, 7, February 15, 1964, 6, thinks that this is an earlier portrait from the 1860s. See the definitive analysis of Khristo Ionkov, "I dusha oporna, i zhelezen nrav," *Muzei "Vasil Levski" Karlovo*, Sofia: Fondatsiia "Vasil Levski," Karlovo: Muzei Vasil Levski, second edition, s.a. [2005], 89–96, who considers this the last portrait of Levski, from 1872.

192 Popov, *Vasil Levski*, 11, n. 2.

have remained but which served as the model for Levski's bronze mask for his monument, and numerous other works of art.

True, it is indeed a portrait, and was not painted originally as an icon, but neither was the exact same image of Levski (except not in an oval shape) that had been venerated at the canonization ceremony in July, 1996 by the Pimen Church National Council.<sup>193</sup> Subsequently, the BOC-P produced several "real" icons of Levski. One was kept at BOC-P's metropolitan church "Sv. Paraskeva," and was carried out only during the liturgy or processions on July 18 and February 19. It was, however, for sale as a postcard or a poster, and was the only image of Levski completely consistent with the iconographic tradition. Another icon had been on display between 2001 and 2004 in "Sveta Sofia," the oldest church in Sofia, which had also been part of BOC-P, and was removed as a result of the disbanding of the alternative Synod. This icon, together with the icon on display in the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church since 1997, had all the iconographic accoutrements (the nimbus, the inscription, the attire) but both represent a very realistic portrait version of Levski's most popular image. Clearly, it is not the style or genre in which an image is produced but its relational positioning that confers on it the status of an icon, in this case its position within the sanctuary. Levski's portrait/icon is placed almost directly behind the image of Christ Enthroned in the iconostasis, the icon of the first tier—the "local saints"—to the right of the royal gates which is always occupied by the image of the Savior.<sup>194</sup> In any case, the iconography from photograph to portrait to icon has been effectively developed.<sup>195</sup> (See Plates 19, 20, and 21.)

193 *24 chasa*, July 19, 1996, 14. The photograph shows a woman cleaning the "icon" of Levski in the "Sv. Paraskeva" church, and this is clearly a framed poster of Levski, based on what has become known as his "police photograph."

194 On the arrangement and decorations of the sanctuary and the iconostasis, see Archpriest D. Sokolof, *A Manual of the Orthodox Church's Divine Services* (translated from the Russian), Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery, 1975, 10–9.

195 There is a striking visual parallel with the case of the Senegalese Sufi dervish Amadou Bamba (1853–1927), venerated by the Mourides as a saint. His only photograph, taken in 1913, has become the basis of an incredibly elaborate iconographic tradition, venturing into portraits, low reliefs, plaques, casts, murals, calligrams, etc., using an enormous variety of materials (Allan F. Roberts and Mary Nooter Roberts, *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal*, Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cul-

Both theologians and art historians of Orthodoxy have emphasized that Orthodox art has a primarily liturgical and, generally speaking, a worshipful purpose, rather than a decorative one. It is evaluated “not from the form, nor from the color, but from the service it renders.”<sup>196</sup> In fact, iconography renders perceptible that which is mystically performed in worship, and it seeks to speak to the faithful by means of symbols, shapes, and forms.<sup>197</sup> It also speaks through placement, and the specific positioning of the Levski icon next to the image of Christ and the Virgin has heroic implications.<sup>198</sup> As Victor Turner has remarked in an analysis of artifacts that constitute the phenomenon of celebration: “[a] celebratory object may also be interpreted on a third level, its positional meaning. The positional meaning of such an object derives from its relationship to other symbols in a configuration, a Gestalt, having properties that cannot be derived from its parts or be considered simply as their sum. The object may be part of a cluster of similar or different objects; it may also occupy a central or a marginal position. It may be strikingly contrasted with another object. Position has to do with time as well as space.”<sup>199</sup>

Compare this to the dispute over the consecration of the newly built chapel of “All Bulgarian Saints” (*Paraklis “Vsi bilgarski svetii”*). This is a small and pretty white structure adjacent to Levski’s museum in Karlovo. In mid-July, 2000, when I visited the place, hectic activities were in place to finish it for the July 18 celebrations. In the neighboring town of Sopot, a wooden iconostasis was being carved out of walnut, and received its finishing touches when we went to the carpenter’s shop to inspect its progress. The iconostasis was supposed to hold four icons: of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Virgin, of St. John the Baptist, and of “All Bulgarian Saints.” The latter is the chapel’s patron

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tural History, 2003, 43–68 and passim). I am grateful to Mahir Saul who drew my attention to the similarities in the process of iconization.

196 The quote is from St. John Chrysostom, and is cited in Constantine D. Kalokyris, “The Essence of Orthodox Iconography,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 14.1 (1969), 61.

197 *Ibid.*, 42.

198 This interpretation has been suggested to me by Kristi Groberg, and I am most grateful for this insight as well as for her generosity in sharing with me her unpublished dissertation “Petropolitan Reliquary: Temple of the Resurrection on the Blood, 1881–1998,” University of Minnesota, 1999.

199 Victor Turner, “Introduction,” in Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration*, 21.

icon. The icons had already been painted, and they were all kept in the Levski museum, waiting to be installed in the iconostasis. The icon “All Bulgarian Saints” has a fairly new history.<sup>200</sup> According to the artists—Jordan Dimitrov and Vladimir Dimitrov—there is only one similar icon in the Rila Monastery but it is not complete. The icon, eye-catching with its bright colors, represents the “Council of all Bulgarian saints” (*Sībor na vsi bīlgarski sveti*). There are more than 40 Bulgarian saints, and the artists were tempted to depict them all but in the limited space they had to deal with, they could portray only 28, the rest being only hinted at in the background. The icon is crowned by the figure of Christ in heaven held by two angels. The central figure of the composition is St. Evtimii Tīrnovski, flanked by St. Tsar Boris Mikhail and St. Ivan Rilski. The names of the saints are written in the golden nimbus crowning their heads. Behind this group of three, are the images of St. Teodosii Tīrnovski, St. Ilarion Mīglenski, St. Kiril Patriarkh Bīlgarski,<sup>201</sup> St. Ioan Patriarkh Bīlgarski, and Tsar Petīr. The group to

200 The *cultus* of All Bulgarian Saints dates back to 1956, when it was celebrated on July 8 (*Tsīrkoven vestnik*, July 14, 2000). In the year 2000, this day fell on July 2 (*Pravoslaven kalendar 2000 godini ot rozhdestvo Khristovo*, Sofia: Izdava Bīlgarska patriarshīia–Sv.Sinod, Sinodalno izdatelstvo, s.d., 18).

201 The story of this image deserves its own vignette. I was surprised to see a saint under the name of “St. Kiril, Bulgarian Patriarch” since, to my knowledge, the only Bulgarian Patriarch under this name was the late Patriarch Kiril who assumed this post after the restoration of the Bulgarian Patriarchate in 1954, and served in it until his death in 1971 when he was followed by the present Patriarch Maxim. Patriarch Kiril is one of the great and really interesting figures of Bulgarian public life in the twentieth century, and deserves an extensive biography but the likelihood of his canonization, at least in the recent future, is minimal. Still, when I returned to Sofia, I went to check at Maxim’s Holy Synod just in case: if anywhere, miracles happen in the church. Sure enough, nobody had heard of Kiril’s prospective canonization, and even the question produced only sideways sneers; and in one case I was severely scolded for even daring to ask the question. The theological encyclopedias, on the other hand, produced only three St. Cyrils: one of Alexandria, one of Jerusalem, and one—St. Constantine (Cyril)—of the pair Sts. Cyril and Methodius. When I tracked down the painters (telephone interview on July 18, 2000), they were unsure. One of them thought there must have been such a patriarch sometime before Evtimii but, on the other hand, he mused, “a mistake could have happened.” This story illustrates the charming grassroots and nonchalant innovative spirit of Orthodoxy (at least in its Bulgarian vari-

the left contains the figures of the seven saints of Bulgarian medieval literature and script: Sts. Cyril and Methodius, St. Kliment Okhridski, St. Naum Okhridski, St. Angelarii, St. Sava, and St. Gorazd. The group to the right is made up of later saints: St. Paisii Khilendarski, St. Pimen Zografski, St. Kozma Zografski, St. Ioanikii Osogovski, St. Gavril Lesnovski. One additional group in the back depicts St. Nikola Sofiiski-Novii, St. Georgi Novi Sofiiski, St. Ioakim Patriarkh Tîrnovski, St. Filoteia Tîrnovska. The other has St. Sofronii Vrachanski in the group of three female saints: St. Petka Tîrnovska, St. Zlata Mîglenska, and St. Anastasiia Tîrnovska. I asked one of the artists whether they were tempted to paint Vasil Levski. He laughed: "We can't."

It is in this chapel during my visit on July 14, 2000, that I encountered the artists and workers installing the glass case supposed to house Levski's hair. Levski's hair had been recently transferred to his museum in Karlovo after passionate debates whether it should be on display in Sofia or in his hometown. It was preserved in a tiny glass box within a glass case as part of the documentary exposition of the museum.<sup>202</sup>

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ety, at least in these times, and even if it is the result of ignorance) despite all accusations as to its congenital traditionalism and conservatism.

202 Levski's hair, entrusted to his mother in 1864, was kept by her until her death during the summer of 1878, and later by his sister Ana (Iana) Andreeva Nacheva. In 1907, there was a passionate discussion as to where and how the hair should be preserved: should it stay on as a family relic or should it become a public item. Eventually, it was handed over by the Committee of Levski's Relatives to the Ministry of Education, which gave it to the Ethnographic Museum (Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski*, 784). In 1942, it was transferred to the Military Museum, where it was on display after World War II. It was part of its exposition until August, 1988 when, together with all other artifacts, it was put in store, awaiting the construction of a new museum building. In the 1990s, part of it was transferred to the Karlovo museum (Nikolai Domuschiev, "Na krîsta mu viarno orižhie viseshe," *Muzei "Vasil Levski" Karlovo*, Sofia: Fondatsiia "Vasil Levski," Karlovo: Muzei Vasil Levski, Second edition, s.a. [2005], 79–82). Domuschiev points out that the veneration of bodily parts is untypical for Bulgarian museums, although there are a few exceptions: Ivan Rilski's hand, and the hearts of Petîr Beron, Aleko Konstantinov, and Ivan Vazov. There was a rumor, conferred to me by Father Balachev that some of Levski's hair was also kept at the oldest basilica of Sofia, the ancient "Sv. Sofia," that gave its name to the city and was part of the BOC-P. The local priest whom I visited, confirmed that the hair was kept in the church's treasury. He didn't know, however, when and how the church came into the possession of this relic. "Do you think it is authentic?" I asked. The

The refusal of the museum workers to recognize a reliquary in what they call themselves *khranitel'nitsa* (literally reliquary), and their insistence that this was merely a museum display box was understandable in the existing atmosphere of controversy over Levski's canonization. On the other hand, it is difficult to distinguish between disingenuousness and sincere, if somewhat unsophisticated, belief. Only a month before my visit, a group of visitors to the museum from Plovdiv and Asenovgrad had suggested that "the holy hair of Hierodeacon the Reverend Martyr Ignatii should be placed in the chapel and in front of them a chandelier should be set."<sup>203</sup> This was a clear reference to the canonized Levski, and it proposed the handling of his hair as a *par excellence* Christian reliquary, exactly what the museum officials were in fact implementing. Here, again, the notion of positional meaning is most helpful, as it was employed above in the analysis of Levski's portrait/icon in the sanctuary of the church. In fact, the chapel of "All Bulgarian Saints" is set to play the role of a classical *martyrium*, a church built over the tomb or relic of a martyr or in honor of a martyr.<sup>204</sup> And in the future it is bound to do that in competition with the Sofia church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska."

There had been hopes, Dora Chausheva explained, that Patriarch Maxim would consecrate the chapel but, in the end, he reneged, and the printed program of the festivities omitted the consecration of the chapel. These hopes had been neither abstract, nor private: they had an important institutional base. The initiative for the chapel belonged to the Bulgarian Committee "Vasil Levski" (*Obshtobilgarski komitet "Vasil Levski"*—OKVL) with headquarters in Sofia; Levski's museum

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wonderful answer was: "Who knows? And what does it matter?" In 2003, a DNA analysis made in the laboratory of the Criminology Institute in Sofia confirmed that the hair belonged to Levski. It compared samples from Levski's hair, and from the hair and saliva of the 82-year-old Bozhana Pachaurova from Plovdiv, his closest living relative on the maternal side (*168 chasa*, October 31–November 6, 2003, 3–5).

203 Visitors books, entry for June 14, 2000.

204 On *martyria*, see André Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le culte des reliques et d'art chrétien antique*, Paris: Collège de France. Fondation Schlumberger pour les Études byzantines, 2 vols., 1946. It is the broad interpretation of *martyrium* also as the site of the martyrdom that allows Kristi Groberg to define as such the Temple of Resurrection of Christ built on the site of Tsar Alexander II's mortal wounds in 1881, although he was neither buried there nor did he become a glorified saint (see note 198 above).

in Karlovo is the most important partner and member. The committee is an NGO with cultural functions, and was created on April 24, 1991. Its self-described goal in its statute is: “to create a broad Bulgarian movement for the study and popularization of the life, ideas and activity of Vasil Levski, of his associates, of the towns and villages and families, whose destiny has been linked to the struggles for the liberation and unification of the Bulgarians.”<sup>205</sup> Its four main spheres of activity include: aiding state institutions in their effort to preserve the legacy of Levski and other revival figures; popularizing Levski’s life through different celebrations; encouraging research; broadening contacts with Bulgarians abroad. In the fall of 1991, the Foundation “Vasil Levski” was established, whose main function is to fundraise and support the activities of the committee.<sup>206</sup>

205 *Ustav na obshtobilgarskiia komitet “Vasil Levski,”* article 2. I am rendering *obshtobilgarski* as simply Bulgarian in order to avoid a meaning of exclusively Bulgarian in “all-Bulgarian.” Two statutes have been adopted thus far: one at the founding conference in April, 1991, the second at the national conference on December 18, 1997. Most of the differences are editorial but there are some substantive ones concerning the more precise definition of the membership clauses, as well as a number of changes and a more elaborate description of the governing bodies. The statutes can be consulted at the OKVL headquarters: Sofia, bul. Vitosha 18 (tel.: 988-12-21, 988-35-83, or through the Foundation “Vasil Levski” 988-35-83). I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Doino Doinov, chairman of the committee, and to Stoian Dzhavezov, secretary of the committee, for kindly sharing the institution’s documentation with me.

206 The foundation has two statutes, of September 17, 1991, and an updated one of November 10, 1992 (*Ustav na fondatsiia “Vasil Levski”*). These documents can be consulted at the headquarters of the committee/foundation. Doino Doinov and Stoian Dzhavezov are respectively chairman and secretary of both bodies. While this, in theory, violates the principle of division of power and control, the rationale was that, if under separate leadership, the foundation would not cater exclusively to the needs of the committee. The Board of Trustees has been reduced to 9 from the previous 21, and at present they are only businessmen. Before Doino Doinov, the chairperson of the foundation was the actress Vancha Doicheva. The administrative board of the foundation (numbering between 7 and 17 members elected for 3 years) included, among others, Doicheva, the recently deceased sociology professor Marko Semov, the history professor Stefan Doinov, the literary critic and MP from the Union of Democratic Forces—SDS Mikhail Nedelchev, and Dimităr Popov, a lawyer and former prime minister. For a detailed account on the activities of the organi-

The OKLV report of April 25, 2000, covering the last three years, puts forward as its strategic goal “to work toward the formation of such a value system within Bulgarian society, especially its youth, which can uphold our national identity, preserve our cultural-historical legacy, so that Bulgaria can enter with dignity in the United Europe.”<sup>207</sup> This should not be read as an early sign of Euro-Angst comparable to many of the present members of the European Union, notably neighboring Greece. On the contrary, in the Bulgarian context membership in the EU was a desirable goal, and this phrasing was simply an expression of OKVL’s political acumen, in keeping pace with the dominant political rhetoric of the day.

To date, there are 95 local committees founded as members of the OKVL. These committees have introduced the practice of celebrating the birthday of Levski, and in the case of the Karlovo Committee, this has become already a widely popular ritual, of which the festivities of July 18, 2000 were the seventh such celebration. This is clearly a new initiative, and an attempt to move away from the somberness of the previous emphasis on February 19, the day Levski was hanged. In the past three years only, the OKVL has organized and sponsored over 10 scholarly conferences and workshops in Sliven, Veliko Tŭrnovo, Plevn, Panagurishte, Kalofer, Ruse, and Sofia around different anniversaries linked to the activities of Levski, Botev, the April Uprising, the Oborishte meeting, the role of the Bulgarian emigration, and so on. It sponsored different publications, among them the guide to the Karlovo museum, but its real pride is the publication of Levski’s documentary legacy, a two-volume sumptuous edition.<sup>208</sup>

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zation, see *10 godini Obshtobilgarski komitet i fondatsiia “Vasil Levski,”* Sofia: GoreksPres, 2002.

207 *Ochet za deimostta na obshtobilgarskiia komitet “Vasil Levski,”* April 25, 2000 (at the OKVL headquarters).

208 The first volume, with the facsimiles of the documents, came out for the anniversary of July 18: *Vasil Levski. Dokumenti. Avtografi, diktuvani tekstove, dokumenti, sistaveni s uchastieto na Levski, prepisi, fotokopiia, publikatsii i snimki. Tom I. Faksimilno izdanie na dokumentite,* Sofia: Obshtobilgarskiia komitet “Vasil Levski,” Narodna biblioteka “Sv.Sv.Kiril i Metodii,” 2000. The second, with the transcriptions, is in print. The edition was subsidized by Bulbank that, according to the report, gave 25,000 leva (ca. \$12,500).

The committee also initiates and supports the building of monuments to Levski and other figures of the Bulgarian revival all over the country and abroad “so as to make them a sacral location for sustaining the Bulgarian spirit.”<sup>209</sup> Levski’s busts have been erected in Razlog, Dzhebel, Blagoevgrad, Strelcha, Vratsa, and a bust of Stambolov in Samovodene. Abroad, Levski’s busts have been placed in Washington DC, Buenos Aires, and Bucharest. There are also memorial plaques in Bucharest, Turnu-Măgurele, Giurgiu (Romania), Tvârdița (Moldova), a monument of Rakovski in Bolhrad (today in the Ukraine). One of the main efforts of the OKVL revolved around the construction of the chapel of “All Bulgarian Saints” whose “upcoming consecration and opening will be carried out on July 18 for the 163rd anniversary of Levski’s birth.”<sup>210</sup>

In an interview with Professor Doino Doinov, a Levski specialist, former director of the State Archives, and present chairman of the OKVL, he explains that once the idea of the chapel crystallized, he and two of his collaborators visited the Metropolitan Arsenii of Plovdiv, within whose diocese Karlovo falls. They explained to him that, while the chapel would be constructed as part of the museum complex in Karlovo, they would like it to be thoroughly canonical and also serve the church. Arsenii told them that they had to install an iconostasis, and gave them advice which icons to commission. He was then asked whether it would be acceptable to put Levski’s hair in a reliquary (*khranitelnitsa*). He answered in the affirmative that it was permissible for relics to be placed but in the narthex, not in the sanctuary. In responding this way, Arsenii was representing one of the two current opinions held among prelates of the Maxim-led church which is also supported by the director of the CHAI, Khadzhiev. The opposing opinion considers the placing of the reliquary as anti-canonical because Levski’s hair is part of a human body not a saint’s relic.<sup>211</sup>

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209 *Otchet za deinostta*, 9.

210 *Ibid.*, 4. The consecration, as seen below, was postponed. The monument in Bucharest was pending, according to the report. In a message from Elena Siupiur, she informed me that the opening of the monument was scheduled for May 12, 2001 in Bucharest’s largest public park Herăstrău. This is already a fact, see: <http://www.mtc.government.bg/page.php?category=92&id=1788>

211 Interview with Prof. Doino Doinov on July 17, 2000. While this is not explicitly documented, it seems that Maxim shared the latter view.

Whatever the technical motivation that made Patriarch Maxim refrain from officiating in the chapel, his reserve is not surprising: the consecration of the chapel with Levski's hair in it could be interpreted as an indirect endorsement, as well as a significant step leading to his canonization. The official explanation was that the consecration had to be effectuated on the patron saints day or another ecclesiastical holiday, and not on Levski's birthday.<sup>212</sup> Accordingly, Maxim's address in front of Levski's monument on the evening of July 18, 2000 was highly adulatory but very carefully worded with formulae that invite a secular political rather than canonical analysis. He praised the "great Bulgarian son Vasil Levski, the chief apostle for the whole of Bulgaria, Thrace, and Macedonia" who sacrificed himself for his patriotic ideal, and toward whom Bulgaria feels the duty of unfulfilled legacy. He also emphasized Levski's intimate link to the church: "Levski's soul was turned toward God"; he worked for "the lofty Christian and universal moral values"; he was a "worthy son of the church and the nation." Yet, he made a point to use exclusively the name Vasil Levski, rather than Deacon Ignatii, and once mentioned the "People's Deacon." The only phrase that could be overinterpreted was the reference to the "godsent Apostle" (*bogopraten apostol*) but this can be easily explained away as a metaphor.

To summarize, despite the present firm stand of Maxim's Holy Synod against the canonization of Levski, there are a number of activities that point in this direction. Professor Doinov, always cautious, emphasizes that the OKVL "stands only for the national interests, and does not want to interfere in the affairs of the church." Yet, by linking the museum complex to the church, it directly involves the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and presses it to take a stand on the issue. Metropolitan Arsenii of Plovdiv, himself an active prelate of BOC-M, clearly offered the greatest support to what I have called the orchestration of a grassroots *cultus*. He supported the painting of the fresco on the northern wall of "Sv. Bogoroditsa," and he opened it; he gave his permission for the installment of the reliquary in the chapel; he, finally, was the one who has performed the ceremonial liturgies for Levski in the past few years, and it is most unlikely that he is unaware of the location of Levski's portrait/icon in the sanctu-

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212 Interview with Prof. Trendafil Krîstanov from CHAI, July 26, 2000.

ary of “Sv. Bogoroditsa.”<sup>213</sup> At the festivities for the 160th anniversary of Levski’s birth in Karlovo, at which the former President Petăr Stoianov was present, the construction of the chapel had made significant progress although it was not yet covered with a roof. After going through Levski’s museum, President Stoianov and his wife Antonina entered the chapel with candles in hand, as if this was an already consecrated temple.<sup>214</sup> In cutting a ritualized posture taken out of the Christian ritual, they added a symbolic religious sacrality to the already existing secular sacrality of the whole museum ensemble.

Within the Theological Academy, although it is part of BOC-M, dissident opinions are tolerated. Professor Petev, while careful to express simply his personal opinion, points out that Levski can and should be canonized because he has put in practice Christian ideals, especially altruism.<sup>215</sup> Petev summarizes the objections voiced against Levski’s canonization in two main rubrics. One asserts that he had broken his vows to the church. The other insists that he had killed (if only once)<sup>216</sup> a young servant during a raid of a wealthy man’s house. Petev shows numerous precedents where these objections are invalid. One can add to his that the Russian Orthodox Church did not think twice when canonizing Father John of Kronstadt in 1990, despite his

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213 The OKVL has a collection of over 30 video cassettes that have documented its activities. Most of them are the work of Andrei Altıparmkov, a director and producer, who also voluntarily heads the audio-visual documentation of the committee. My deepest appreciation for his willingness to spend most of a hot and sunny Saturday in July, 2000, closed in a smoky room, and showing me the videos. Cassette No. 25 has documented the festivities of July 18, 1997 with the opening of the fresco, and the procession led by Metropolitan Arsenii. Cassette No. 30 shows his liturgy of the same day performed in the church of “Sv. Nikolai Chudotvoretz.” The last, unnumbered cassette, has recorded the festivities of July 18, 2000, at which again Arsenii was the officiating priest.

214 Cassette No. 25 of the video collection of OKVL.

215 Interview with Prof. Petev, June 21, 1997. The word he uses to convey the act of accomplishment or putting in practice is not the usual modern Bulgarian *osıhtestviava* but the archaic *udovletvoriava*, thus stressing the moment of individual creativity and not simply the result, the materialization of intention. For a forceful objection, see Georgi Todorov, “Za Levski, svetostta i bılgarskiia Khristos,” *Kultura* 6, February 18, 2005.

216 Interestingly, whenever this objection is voiced, there is never mention of the Turks (soldiers or gendarmes), killed by Levski.

explicit calls for the killing of all revolutionaries.<sup>217</sup> Nor did the Russian church hesitate, despite the intense debates preceding the canonization, to confer in 2000 the holy status to Nicholas II and his family—his wife Alexandra, and the children Aleksei, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia. True, they were not proclaimed martyrs, but were declared “passion bearers,” a category identifying believers who endured suffering and death at the hands of political enemies, in imitation of Christ.<sup>218</sup> The Russian Orthodox church also proved, in the end, remarkably flexible, when it reCanonized, in 1908, a fourteenth-century Russian princess—Anna Kashinskaia—who had been canonized first in 1649 under Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, but then was decanonized in 1678, and her veneration was proscribed for over two centuries.<sup>219</sup>

In an otherwise somewhat forced passage where he wants to prove the direct influence of the ethos of Mt. Athos on Levski, Konstantinos Nikhoritis introduces his understanding of the distinction between

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217 Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, 3. Kizenko makes the case that Father John’s phenomenon “is neither strictly Russian nor strictly Orthodox, but a general manifestation of traditional religiosity facing modernity and mass culture (285).

218 It bears mentioning that the imperial family had been already canonized by the Church Abroad in 1981 (Wendy Slater, “A Modern-Day Saint? Metropolitan Ioann and the Postsoviet Russian Orthodox Church,” *Religion, State & Society* 28.4 (2000), 314). See also “Nicholas II and Family Canonized for ‘Passion,’” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2000. As for the alleged bones of the imperial family buried with pomp by Boris Yeltsin, they have definitively been pronounced not to be authentic, following careful DNA analysis in Japan and Stanford University (Elke Windish, “Darüber spricht ganz Russland,” *Der Tagesblatt* 61, No. 18854, June 5, 2005). In addition, the church canonized 680 other individuals killed by the Bolsheviks, among them priests and monks, as martyrs and “confessors of the faith.” There is another case on which the Russian Orthodox Church is still ambivalent, that of Father Alexander Men who was murdered in 1990 in what is still an unresolved case. A Jewish convert to Orthodoxy and a prolific writer, Men clearly was extremely charismatic and there are numerous websites dedicated to him (Janet M. Wehrle, “The Life of Aleksandr Men’: Hagiography in the Making,” *Religion in Eastern Europe* 19.3 [June 1999]).

219 Robert H. Greence, *Making Saints: Canonization and Community in Late Imperial Russia*, University of Pittsburgh: The Carl Beck Papers on Russian and East European Studies, No. 1801, October 2001, 7.

martyrdom for the faith and martyrdom for the nation. He calls Ignatii Starozagorski *prepodobnomîchenik* (holy/reverend martyr), and Levski a *narodnomîchenik* (people's/national martyr). He then muses, implicitly making the case for Levski's sanctification: "Martyrdom [for the faith] and national martyrdom are two terms that are often intertwined in history, and only God, who is cognizant of people's souls, knows who dies *first* for the faith, and *then* for the fatherland, and who does so *first* for the fatherland, and *then* for the faith. But faith and fatherland were so intertwined during the yoke that it is very difficult to distinguish between the two."<sup>220</sup>

Petev warns, however, against hastiness. People, according to him, do not know "the real Levski." What they do know is only the revolutionary, the strategist, the hero. But Levski as the Hierodeacon Ignatii remains unknown. It is this image with which the people should be prepared before the act is effectuated. And Petev works quietly and systematically to bring to the people this "clarified, real image."<sup>221</sup>

Judging from the visitors book at Levski's museum in Karlovo, such a shift is obviously taking place. Levski, as already pointed out in numerous contexts, had always been referred to as a "saint," but this was, from the outset, only with a metaphorical connotation. A group of visitors from Troian in June, 1982 quote Vazov's poem—"The sim-

220 Nikhoritis, *Sveta Gora—Aton*, 189.

221 Interview with Prof. Petev, June 21, 1997. His effort culminated in the publication *Po-vazhni momenti ot zhivota i deloto na ierodiakon Ignatii—Vasil Levski*, Sofia: Voennozdatelski kompleks "Sv.Georgi Pobedonosets," 1993. The work was published by the Ministry of Defense rather than the publishing house of the Holy Synod but on the title page (verso) the book carries the following acknowledgment: "This book has been published with the blessing of His Holiness Maxim, Metropolitan of Sofia and Patriarch of Bulgaria, and with the sponsorship of the Holy Bishopric of Sofia." In it, without openly arguing the case for Levski's canonization, Petev does so implicitly, and states in the introduction that his work should be seen as part of, and his moral response to, the running debate on whether Levski should be canonized as a saint (5). In a similar vein, his colleague Khristo Temelski published an article, arguing that Levski chose the name Ignatii when he entered the monastic order, inspired by the example of Ignatii Starozagorski, a neomartyr hanged in Istanbul in 1814, whose *cultus* was widespread, especially on Mt. Athos where two monasteries keep his relics ("Zashto Vasil Levski pri zamonashvaneto si priel imeto Ignatii?" *Literaturen forum* 37, December 24–30, 1998, 2).

ple peasants called him a saint”—and add: “Today, we the citizens of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria not only call him a saint, but we bow before his deed.” It is a very secular understanding of sainthood, which does not put it at the apex of achievement. Similar is another entry (of June 25, 1982), signed by a group of Active Fighters against Fascism and Capitalism<sup>222</sup> from Varna, who wrote: “We bow before the heroism of the saint of the Bulgarian national revolution Vasil Levski.” There are also comparable entries from the post-1989 period like, for example, the brief note of the eponymous popular athletic soccer club from Sofia “Levski-Spartak,” visiting Levski’s birthplace on his birthday and before the official canonization: “With reverence and esteem for the saint Vasil Levski!” (July 17, 1992)

In an undated entry from the summer of 1990, one Vilko Zheliazkov Vilev authored a “Petition from Hierodeacon Ignatii”: “The sacred relics should be placed—like the ones of St. Stefan the Serbian king in the “Sv. Nedelia” church in Sofia—in a big temple built on the place of the small church.” He was clearly referring to the small “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” This is an example of how the idea of Levski’s formal canonization was percolating in the public. On September 6, 1992, a family from Varna (Pancho, Dobrinka and their schoolchildren Ivanka and Dimitir) explicit-

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<sup>222</sup> This organization, with the Bulgarian acronym ABPFC, was founded in the 1950s, and still awaits its meticulous historian. It responded partly to a grassroots discontent among the genuine participants in the anti-fascist struggle that they had been sidetracked, and that party and society were too bureaucratized. The real purpose of instituting such an organization was to blunt the discontent and create hierarchies with differential loyalties within society. The most controversial aspect of the ABPFC was the privilege granted to the children of “active fighters” in university entry exams. The notion “active fighter” became one of the powerful denunciatory metaphors for the nepotism and corruption of the communist system. In a web-exchange of April 30, 2004 between two ideological opponents, the author of the message, signed “peasant,” summarized his views of the social structure of communist and post-communist Bulgaria: “I am happy because the rules of the game are normal again, we are divided into rich and poor, capable and unfit, and not in citizens of Sofia, party members, active fighters, etc. I know you don’t remember these things but it is no excuse for your ignorance. Actually why not, if you feel better with such convictions, have them. It doesn’t bother me, you proletarian!” ([clubs.dir.bg/showthreaded.php?Cat=7&Board=bulgaria&Number=1941510202&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5](http://clubs.dir.bg/showthreaded.php?Cat=7&Board=bulgaria&Number=1941510202&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5))

ly stated: “Our church should canonize as saint the one who proved with his life that he is closest to God, and serves as an example for us with his deeds.” A year after the official canonization, someone signed only with the acronym P.I.R. wrote in Church Slavonic, on July 23, 1997: “Lord, in Your grace, pardon and save your servant, the Hierodeacon Vasili, who died for the Orthodox faith. May his memory live forever!”

## 5. Commemoration, Ritual, and the Sacred

How do we begin to think about all of this? What is the proper framework of interpretation? One may be tempted to see the phenomenon of Levski's present veneration and canonization fall under the rubric of what Katherine Verdery calls "the political lives of dead bodies" in post-socialist Eastern Europe or, more aptly and wittily, in the first version of her manuscript, as "post-socialist necrophilia." Verdery tried to make sense of the hectic activity around dead bodies (reburials of famous persons returned from abroad, or of famous and anonymous ones at home, as well as the erection and tearing down of statues as icons of dead bodies), and argued that there was something specific to the post-socialist period in this activity: "although corpses can be effective political symbols anywhere, they are pressed into the service of political issues specific to a given polity."<sup>223</sup> For post-socialism, she identifies the main issues as property restitution, political pluralization, religious renewal, and national conflicts tied to building nation-states. Moreover, what makes the post-socialist context unique is that these issues occur simultaneously. Measured against these criteria, Levski's case does not really conform to any: the potential for a national conflict has been successfully contained, and Levski as a symbol has little to do with it; nor has he been used as a legitimizing pillar in the process of political pluralization; property restitution can be referred to only if the ecclesiastical split can be read primarily in terms of an intra-church quarrel over prospective property restitution; finally, religious renewal does indeed occur but even there it is not the primary motor behind Levski's case. But Verdery herself admits that this is not the strongest argument for the specificity of post-socialist dead bodies. She further points out that dead bodies "are especially useful and effective symbols for revising the past," or, as in the case of Eastern Europe for

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<sup>223</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Post-socialist Change*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 52.

“rejecting the immediate past.” That is indeed so, and Verdery draws on numerous illustrations to support her contention.

Yet, Levski’s example again does not conform to this explanation. If anything, it actually generates the link with the past and effectuates a strong continuity, even if with minor shifts. Lastly, Verdery stresses that “the specificity of post-socialist corpses lies in the magnitude of the change that has animated them. The *axis mundi* has shifted; whole fields of the past await the plowshare of revisionist pens, as well as the tears of those whose dead lie insufficiently mourned. A change so momentous and far-reaching requires especially heavy, effective symbols, symbols such as dead bodies.”<sup>224</sup>

In the case of Levski, quite apart from the formal difference that we have no body, there is the much more substantial one that the case points more at continuities rather than at discontinuities. Verdery is very careful to differentiate between sites where dead body politics is rampant (like Hungary), and where it is relatively mute (like Bulgaria). And yet, she does make a systemic claim about Eastern Europe, and attributes the less intensive reburial reflex in Bulgaria to the less extreme political transformation.<sup>225</sup> In the Bulgarian case, I see the continuities less in the preservation of immediate political structures and political players, than in deeper social structures and longer periods, in the type of nationalism that has evolved over the past century and its specific cultural underpinnings. Morbid symbolism has never played a central part in the Bulgarian symbolic repertoire (unlike, for example, the extreme case among Codreanu’s followers in Romania). Without going into greater detail on this, let me point out simply as an illustration that in 1990, in the first free democratic elections, votes from the opposition were diverted not so much because of “communist inertia” but because of widespread aversion over the “skeleton” posters of the

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224 *Ibid.*, 52–3.

225 *Ibid.*, 130, note 15. She compares Bulgaria to Romania in this respect, by insisting that the continuity of post-communist political structures led to a lack of dead body politics. It is worth remembering that the Bulgarian political scene was far less smooth than that. Already the 1990 vote brought in the non-communist presidential candidate; there was actually a non-socialist and anti-communist government in place in 1992; the socialists were *returned* to power through a popular vote in 1994 to be again thrown out in early 1997. All throughout, this has not reflected on the Levski phenomenon.

UDF (a miscalculation in election advertisement done at the counsel of western advisers, and never repeated henceforth).

Likewise, even though I share Verdery's belief that post-socialist change is much bigger than "shock therapy," writing constitutions, election-management consulting, and the like, I would shy away from the dramatic assertion that "[i]t is a problem of reorganization on a cosmic scale, and it involves the redefinition of virtually everything, including morality, social relations, and basic meanings. It means a reordering of people's entire meaningful worlds."<sup>226</sup> This may be simply a difference in optics but, especially as far as history writing goes, I am more inclined to look for continuities not only between the communist and the post-communist past, but also between the pre-communist and communist one where a much more radical and revolutionary transformation had allegedly taken place.<sup>227</sup> Dichotomies between continuity and rupture are artificial, but the view privileging rupture has been dominant in the literature thus far, although Katherine Verdery herself has written perceptively on existing continuities, especially in the realm of nationalism.<sup>228</sup> However, quite apart from the difference in assessment, as far as Levski's case goes, I do not think that his non-existing body (and the plenitude of existing monuments) fit in the parade of Verdery's dead bodies.

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226 Ibid., 35.

227 Maria Todorova, "Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Bulgaria," in *American Historical Review* 97.4 (1992), 1064–83. See also the other country treatments in the same issue of the *AHR*, especially Banac on Yugoslavia, and Hitchins on Romania. The volume edited by Vera Mutafchieva, et al., *Sîdit nad istoritsite. Bîlgarskata istoricheska nauka. Dokumenti i diskusii 1944–1950*, Sofia: Marin Drinov, 1995 failed, according to me, to make a convincing case for a dramatic caesura effectuated by the communist takeover, as far as the discipline of history goes. Apart from the stated and pursued ideological goals and drastic rhetorical changes, the sole preservation in personnel (the editors of the said volume and the character of their subsequent *vitae* included) illustrates a significant and subtle continuity. There is to date no systematic study of historiographical shifts in Southeastern Europe but the Center for the Study of Balkan Civilizations and Cultures in Graz, Austria is undertaking a collaborative project in this respect.

228 Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

On the other hand, I find extremely useful her brilliant treatment of politics, and am thoroughly persuaded by her analytical goal of trying to “animate the study of *politics in general*, energizing it with something more than the opinion polls, surveys, analyses of ‘democratization indices,’ and game-theoretic formulations that dominate so much of the field of comparative politics.” Because she treats politics as “a realm of continual struggles over meaning, over signification” which take place through complex symbolic processes, the “something more” for Verdery includes “meanings, feelings, the sacred, ideas of mortality, the nonrational—all ingredients of ‘legitimacy’ or ‘regime consolidation’ (that dry phrase), yet far broader than what analyses employing those terms usually provide.”<sup>229</sup> It is in this context that I view my own treatment of the Levski case as an attempt to “enchant,” “enliven,” “enrich,” or “animate” (all Verdery’s verbs) politics.

I also find convincing her insistence that “authority *always* had a ‘sacred’ component, even if it is reduced merely to holding ‘as sacred’ certain secular values.” Verdery rightly points out that socialist regimes sought assiduously to sacralize themselves as guardians of secular values. I do not agree that “because their language omitted notions of the sacred, both outsiders and their own populations tended to view them as lacking a sacred dimension.” Even a cursory look at the language of socialism can demonstrate the abundance of “sacred” referents: “sacred idea,” “sacred republic,” “sacred people,” “sacred truth,” “holy cause,” “saints of the revolution,” “martyrs for freedom,” “martyrs of the revolution,” and these at times, in some countries more than in others, were accepted by significant groups in the population. More to the point, however, I do agree that “[p]art of reordering meaningful worlds since 1989, then, is to sacralize authority and politics in new ways.”<sup>230</sup>

The sacralization of politics using the symbol of Levski is certainly not unprecedented. There are numerous canonized national figures, of which Joan of Arc is a particularly famous one. The utilization of the iconic genre is also not unprecedented, a striking example being a 1920s icon with the image of the recently deceased Lenin.<sup>231</sup> What is

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229 Verdery, *The Political Life*, 24–6.

230 *Ibid.*, 37.

231 See Miltiades Papanikolaou, ed., *Licht und Farbe in der russischen Avantgarde: die Sammlung Costakis aus dem Staatlichen Museum für Zeitgenös-*

interesting here is that unlike the Lenin case, where the religious form was appropriated by and subordinated to the secular content, in the Levski case it is precisely the reverse: the religious form appropriates and subordinates a secular object (see Plate 22).

The sacralization of politics by using the symbol of Levski was pioneered already back in the 1870s by the most unorthodox of political configurations—the radical revolutionary alternative—to which Levski himself belonged. This may have been one of the original stumbling blocks on which the resistance of the church to Levski's canonization rested. Botev, without any doubt the greatest revolutionary poet of the nineteenth century, and a gifted and sarcastic journalist, was himself a revolutionary activist, and became a martyr who perished in the April Uprising of 1876. Alongside his major newspapers *Duma*, *Budilnik*, *Zname*, *Nova Bilgariia*, that together with Karavelov's *Svoboda* and *Nezavisimost* were the peak of revolutionary journalism, he decided in 1875 to diffuse his message in a subtler though no less subversive way.

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*sische Kunst Thessaloniki (Light and colour in the Russian Avant-Garde: the Costakis Collection from the State Museum of Contemporary Art Thessaloniki)*, Cologne: DuMont, 2004. While this was arguably not the direct intention of the Lenin mausoleum, very often Lenin's mummified body was treated like a reliquary. Milovan Djilas reports how, when he visited the mausoleum in the 1940s, "simple women in shawls were crossing themselves as though approaching the reliquary of a saint" (*Conversations with Stalin*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962, 166). In fact, while there are no minutes preserved of the Soviet Politburo meeting of October, 1923, at which Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, Kalinin, Stalin and Rykov were present, it was there that Stalin first floated the idea of preserving the remains of Lenin who was expected to pass away any moment. Trotsky, Bukharin and Kamenev's reactions, coming from the memoirs of Bukharin, all pointedly accused Stalin of attempting to turn Lenin's remains into a Christian relic (Ilya Zbarsky and Samuel Hutchinson, *Lenin's Embalmers*, transl. from the French by Barbara Bray, London: The Harvill Press, 1997, 11–2). This treatment of revolutionary heroes was not an innovation of the Bolsheviks. The cult of the fallen freedom fighter was part of the culture of the Russian revolutionary underground throughout the nineteenth century, and histories, hagiographies, legends, and prints celebrated the revolts of Pugachev and Razin, the Decembrists, the nihilists and the SR terrorists. The February revolution added a particular Kerensky cult to the array, and the Lenin cult seems to have assumed a quasi-religious status already by 1917 (Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 74–5).

To this day, the Orthodox Church each year prints and sells religious calendars. They include the confession of faith, the commandments, the main holidays, the chief prayers, and detailed entries for the saints celebrated on each day. There is also a wall calendar version arranged around the icon of a saint.

Botev published such a wall calendar for the year 1875 which, instead of the icon of a Christian saint, figured the engraving of Khadzhi Dimitîr, the legendary leader of a *cheta* who was killed in battle by the Ottoman troops in the Balkan mountains in 1867.<sup>232</sup> Under the engraving, Botev published the text of his poem, or rather ballad, “Khadzhi Dimitîr.” It had been written in 1873, and published first in Karavelov’s newspaper *Nezavisimost*.<sup>233</sup> This was the second printing of what in time has arguably become the most recited poem in the Bulgarian language. Under August 5/17, the entry included *Velikomîchenik*<sup>234</sup> *Khadzhi Dimitîr Asenyov* together with the 15,000 Bulgarian soldiers of Tsar Samuil allegedly blinded by the Byzantine Emperor Basil II in 1014.<sup>235</sup> This was not the only innovation in the

232 The calendar was published in the 1907 edition of Botev’s works, edited by his daughter Ivanka, and the writer Ivan Klincharov (Khristo Botiov, *Sîchineniia*, Sofia, 1907), and was reproduced again in the phototype edition of his newspapers: Bozhidar Raikov, Lidia Dragolova, eds., *Vestnitsite na Khristo Botev. Duma, Budîlnik, Zname, Nova Bîlgariia*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976.

233 *Nezavisimost* III, No. 47, August 11, 1873. On the poem see Iliia Todorov, *Razlichniat Botev. Nov pogled vîrkhu tvorcestvoto na Khristo Botev*, Sofia: Prozorets, s.a. (ca. 1993), 118–25.

234 The rank of *velikomîchenik* (Gr.: *megalomartyr*, L.: *magnus martyr*) was conferred on martyrs that the church considered as having gone through particularly exacting tortures, and having displayed a particular resilience and firm faith. It includes the third-century saints Victor, Vicentius, Mina, Mercurius, Marina, the fourth-century saints Demetrius, George, Artemius, Theodore Stratilat, Barbara, Euthymia, Catherine, and others.

235 This is the only occurrence where the blinded soldiers have been included as martyrs of the faith. In the national historiography and textbooks, on the other hand, they serve as an illustration of martyrdom for the ethnic group and the nation. For an interesting treatment of the story, exposing it essentially as a myth created by Byzantine chroniclers, see Paul Stephenson, “The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 24 (2000), 102–2.

calendar. Under March 9/21, the entry read: “+ 40 *mich. i Vasil Levski mich.*” (SS. Forty Martyrs and Vasil Levski, martyr).<sup>236</sup>

Next year’s calendar for 1876 was conceived by Khristo Botev to commemorate Levski. An engraving of Levski was prepared using his photograph of 1867 as the standard bearer of Panayot Khitov’s *cheta*. It followed the exact same design as the 1875 calendar, with Botev’s poem dedicated to Levski printed under the portrait. The poem itself had been completed at the end of 1875, very likely for the purposes of the calendar, and it is Botev’s last poetic work. We do not know



**Figure 20.** Khristo Botev, 1848–1976.

how Levski was entered this time in the daily calendar, again simply as *michenik* (martyr) or as *velikomichenik* (magnus martyr) because this calendar has not been preserved or has not yet been discovered. We know, however, that it was printed because one of the books published by Botev—a translation of N. Kostomarov’s drama *Kremusii Kord*—announced that different publications, among them the wall calendar for 1876 with the portrait of Deacon Vasil Levski were on sale at the editorial office of *Zname*.<sup>237</sup> The poem itself was published again in August, 1876, and later in edited versions in the 1880s, until it reached its stabilized (but maybe not authentic) popular version of today. The engraved portrait, on the other hand, was preserved by having been re-

236 Maniu Stoianov, “Bilgarski svetii i michenitsi,” 168 attributes the inclusion of Khadzhi Dimitir, Vasil Levski and the 15,000 soldiers of Samuil to the excesses of Botev’s revolutionary zeal, although he points out that most of the calendar compilers were conflating martyrdom for the faith and for the nation. Stoianov himself includes Levski in the provisional list he has put together from different calendars while omitting Khadzhi Dimitir and the soldiers.

237 Iliia Todorov, “Diakon Vasil Levski,” in *Literaturna misil XXVI*, No. 7, 1982, 6. This essay was reprinted in Todorov, *Razlichniat Botev*, 81–117.

# КАЛЕНДАРЪ

ЗА ГОДИНА 1875.

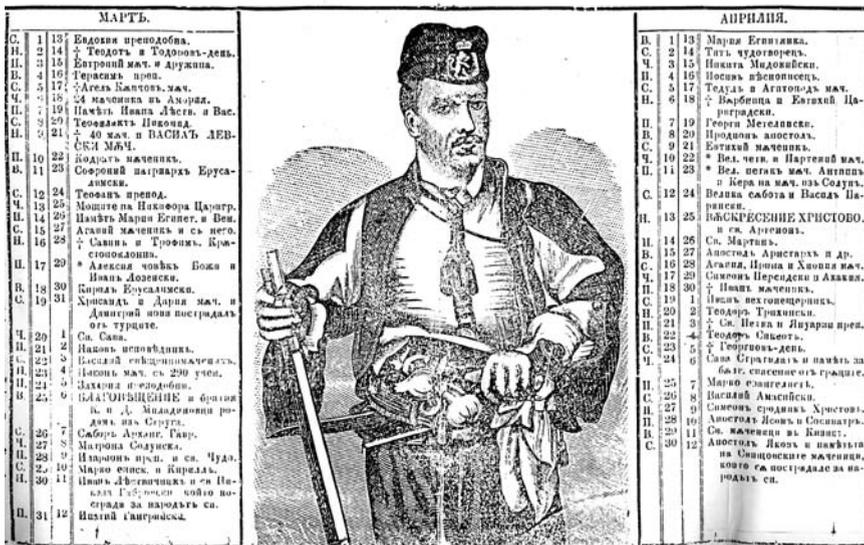


Figure 21. Botev's wall-calendar for 1875.

Source: Bozhidar Raikov, Lidia Dragolova, eds., *Vestnitsite na Khristo Botev. Duma, Budilnik, Zname, Nova Bilgariia*, Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976.

produced first in Stefan Stambolov's collection of "Songs and Poems" published in Giurgevo (Giurgiu, Romania) in 1877, and again, in Georgi Kirkov's biography of Levski in 1882.<sup>238</sup> Finally, a third and last such calendar was printed for the year 1877, this time dedicated to Khristo Botev himself, who had died a martyr's death the previous year.<sup>239</sup>

Martyrdom appears relatively late in history—around the fourth century BCE—and Samuel Klausner has elaborated some of the elements of a social theory of martyrdom.<sup>240</sup> A chief prerequisite for martyrdom has been the identification of ideology as an independent cultural reality which serves as a symbol of mobilization, and politi-

238 Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, 14.

239 Ibid., 11, note 4.

240 Samuel Z. Klausner, "Martyrdom," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 9, New York: MacMillan, 1995, 230–8.

cizes the relationship between groups. The social function of the martyr is, on the one hand, exemplary, in that he is a model to follow; on the other hand, the deceased martyr is a sacred symbol of an authority around which society rallies. At the same time, martyrdom is an unambiguous political act: “the potential martyr is a rival claimant to authority and this political claim may be religiously legitimated.”<sup>241</sup> Klausner further differentiates between three types of societies according to the level of their societal independence, and respectively three types of martyrs they produce. These are crecive societies to which early Christian martyrs belong; self-determining societies characterized by missionary martyrs; and, finally, decaying societies, exemplified by pogrom victims. Crecive societies are ones which are politically powerless but are beginning to stir, and “[m]artyrdom in crecive societies creates authority, escalates the struggle, unifies the minority, and legitimates the new culture by demonstrating its priority over nature. Furthermore, martyrs propel a politically crecive society toward self-determination, toward social and cultural freedom.”<sup>242</sup> The exemplar of Christian martyrdom at the crecive stage is the trial and crucifixion on Golgotha. It is clear that both nascent and fairly developed national-revolutionary movements before they have achieved political control fall under the category of crecive societies.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, both martyrdom and sainthood had achieved a wide reception as wholly secularized categories (or rather, sacral categories of a secular religion, like nationalism) but it was Botev’s distinct genius to create a symbiosis between their religious and secular use. His powerful last poem has attracted numerous literary critics, and they have all pointed out that the image he developed of the gallows, without explicitly articulating it, unfailingly evoked the power of the cross.<sup>243</sup> The explicit connection was made by Ivan Vazov in his later ode to “Levski”: “O, besilo slavno! Po sram i po blasik ti na krïsta si ravno!”<sup>244</sup> Botev, on the other hand, did not use direct forms of mythologization and hyperbole, but the biblical

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241 Ibid., 231.

242 Ibid., 233.

243 Svetlozar Igov, *Apostolët, geniïat, patriarkhët*, Sofia: Khristo Botev, 1996, 100–12.

244 The literal translation is: “Oh, glorious gallows! In disgrace and in splendor you match the cross!” rendered by Peter Tempest as “O glorious scaffold! You shine with the light of heroes who died here! Most holy sight!”

reminiscences are undeniable. This could be actually proven after the discovery of his pocketbook in 1940 where earlier, if less poetic, drafts of the poem make the explicit connection.<sup>245</sup> By using the Christ-like imagery in his poem, and by inserting Levski as a martyr in the pantheon of Christian saints, Botev, the radical and pronounced unbeliever, both subverted the traditional veneration of Christian saints and, at the same time, knowingly used the best medium to disseminate his views and reach the widest possible audience. In any case, there is no doubt that the sacralization of Levski in Bulgarian collective memory commenced with Botev.

It was already pointed out that the original resistance of the church to Levski's canonization may have rested on the circumstance that his unofficial canonization had been pioneered by what to the church were extreme revolutionaries and unbelievers, Botev certainly at the head of this group. This is no longer the case today. Father Balachev, for example, did not know about Botev's calendar when I spoke to him in the summer of 2000, and was actually happy with the information, ready to use it as further argumentation in favor of Levski's canonization. It takes a good century for even Botev to be accepted symbolically in the fold of the church. In purely formal, typographic terms, the great irony is that when BOC-P printed its religious calendar, and if/when BOC-M (or the by now unified church) does the same, they will have closed a circle, and achieved what the non-believer Botev had already done in 1875. Indeed, the alternative Synod, under the chairmanship of Metropolitan Inokentii, published its first synodal calendar for the year 2002, and included the veneration of *Sv. Svshtmchk. Ierod. Ignatii* (St. Holy Martyr, Hierodeacon) Ignatii on February 19. The calendar for 2005 was issued already after the official closure of the alternative church in the fall of 2004 and, for the first time, featured the icon of Levski on its front cover.<sup>246</sup>

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245 As pointed out in the detailed analysis by Radosvet Kolarov, "Obesvaneto na Vasil Levski i poetikata na Botev," in Encho Mutafov, ed., *Bilgarskata miara v literaturata. Broj 3. Tema na broia: Khristo Botev*, Sofia: Bilgarski pisatel, 1999, 73–5, the draft versions carry direct textual reminiscences to the scene of the taking down from the cross and the entombment, with an explicit referral to "the sacred body."

246 *Pravoslaven kalendar 2002 godini ot rozhdestvo Khristovo*, Sofia: Sv. Sinod na Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsirkva, s.d., 11. These calendars could be bought in the churches under the leadership of BOC-P: "Sv. Petka" on



ФЕВРУАРИ	
Денят в 11 часа, в неделя – 13	
1	* Митр. Трифон, (Патриарх на Сръбския Патриархат) (Београдски).
2	† Сръбския Патриарх, Владика на планината.
3	† Папа, Славянски богословски, в Лена пророкът.
4	† Преп. Максим Палеологски.
5	† Млад Атанас.
6	† 18-та Нед. след Нед. после Вълчанския – на Величката. Преп. Петко, св. Величката. Св. Димитр, св. Златоуст, св. Григорий. Гл. 5, 7, Екз. 24, 2 Кор. 6:12-18 (ср. 178), 1 Кор. 14:26 (ср. 179).
7	† Преп. Партений, св. Равенския. Преп. Лука Еладски.
8	† Велик Геродор Стратилат.
9	† Преп. Захария, Златоустски, Млад Максим.
10	† (Празник на Сръбския Патриархат) * Славянски Календарски.
11	† Млад Валентин.
12	† Свещенник Власий, св. Славянския. Млад Геродор Сабуровски Млад.
13	† Св. Шимон, епископ. Апостолиевски.
14	† 17-та Нед. след Нед. после Вълчанския – на Величката. Преп. Максим, Св. Балтийски, архиепископ Александрийски. Св. Лука. Св. св. Димитр, Гл. 5, 7, Екз. 24, 2 Кор. 6:12-18 (ср. 180), 1 Кор. 14:26 (ср. 181).

ФЕВРУАРИ	
Денят в 11 часа, в неделя – 13	
14	† Успение на Св. Кирил Сръбскобългарски. Преп. Александър.
15	† Св. св. Симеон.
16	† Млад Павлик и Тодорски. Св. Славянски Патриархат.
17	† Велик Геродор Стратилат.
18	† Преп. Равен Палеологски.
19	† Св. Лука, св. Григорий.
20	* Св. свещенник Инокентий, св. св. Кирил.
21	† 9 Неделя на Петра и Павла.
22	† Преп. Лука Еладски. Преп. Партений, св. Равенския. Преп. Лука Еладски.
23	† Велик Геродор Стратилат. Св. Симеон, св. Сабуровски (Славянски св.).
24	† 1-ва и 2-ра седмици на Светата Писма на Св. Велик Кирилски.
25	† Св. Терентий, архидиакон, Златоустски. (Славянски св.).
26	† Св. Парфений, св. Косма.
27	† 9 Неделя на Св. Кирил св. Преп. Партений, св. Равенския. Преп. Максим, Св. Балтийски, архиепископ Александрийски. Св. Лука. Св. св. Димитр, Гл. 5, 7, Екз. 24, 2 Кор. 6:12-18 (ср. 200), 1 Кор. 14:26 (ср. 181) (Гл. 418).
28	† Преп. Василий епископски. Млад Кирил Сопрунски.

Figure 22. Orthodox calendar for 2005 issued by the secessionist Bulgarian Orthodox church (BOC-P).

Rakovski Street, “Sv. Sofia” next to the “Alexander Nevski” church, and “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” With the exception of Levski’s inclusion, and some minor typographic differences, as well as the fact that one of the calendars is introduced by Inokentii’s address and the other one by Maxim’s, the calendars issued by the two Synods are identical. Maxim’s Synod actually issued two calendars in different format, one sold at the churches, the other specifically published and distributed by the newspaper *Standart* with its first New Year’s issue: *Pravoslaven kalendar 2002*, Sofia: Izdava Bilgarska patriarshia–Sv.Sinod, Sinodalno izdatelstvo, s.d. For the calendar with Levski’s image on the cover, see *Pravoslaven kalendar 2005*, Sofia: Sv. Sinod na Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsirkva, s.d. This last calendar cannot be bought anywhere, since the priesthood of the alternative Synod was expelled from their seats and all churches returned to

Among the numerous and standard journalistic pieces commemorating the 134th anniversary of Levski's hanging in February, 2007 (in the 170th year of his birth), one stood out with its explicit Christological message. Levski is posited to have always lived in two parallel worlds: the saint's world and the hero's world. The first belongs to "Christianity, the moral world of belief, hope and love (and, for him, this is love for the fatherland)." The other is the world of political and diplomatic struggles for national independence. Throughout, Levski is depicted as consciously playing the role of the Savior moved by Christian compassion. The most curious part of this article is the taming of Levski it offers with its interpretation of his behavior at the trial. It has been widely (and logically) believed that Levski's testimony at the trial was a masterful dissimulation intended to preserve as much of the secret organization intact. When asked about the thoughts and opinions of Bulgarians he visited, he responded that the educated ones preferred progress through enlightenment, and shunned armed action. Pressed whether he did not take these opinions into consideration, Levski said: "Yes, I too understood that we had been following the wrong road." He then told the prosecutors that he had been considering going to Istanbul, meeting the authorities and laying out the peasants' grief, in the hope of soliciting some remedy. Given Levski's actions and writings until his end, no one has taken (nor can take) these words literally. It is, however, the tenure of this article to do so, in order to make the point that at the end of his life Levski embraced Christian humility, and "wanted to be remembered as a preacher of Christ in redemption." Without openly preaching Levski's formal canonization, the article concludes that "Vasil Deacon Levski humbled himself in the face of crude reality, and in his great humility became saint and spiritual victor." The Apostle is depicted as a martyr of his own Christian charity and compassion, and this compassion and sacrifice elevate him as a saint of humanity.<sup>247</sup>

Martyrologies, Klausner points out, both narrative and cultic, offer a dichotomical moral story: they praise martyrs, and expose evil. By do-

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the mainstream institution. The copy I have (figure 22) was given to me by Sanka Nacheva who is related to one of the members of the trustees of the alternative Synod. My heartfelt gratitude for this piece of information.

247 Milko Krîstev, "Spasitel i osvoboditel," *Monitor* IX, No. 2841, February 19, 2007, 17.

ing so, they prepare martyrs by example. A case in point is the Christian cult of the martyr which exhibits relics (a bone, a lock of hair) on the anniversary of the martyrdom which is celebrated ritualistically as the new birth (*dies natalis*) of the saint. A more contemporary illustration comes from the “training of the kamikadze [which] included worship at a special shrine for those who had died in training or in combat. There the trainees sought spiritual ‘intoxication.’”<sup>248</sup> This is heroism induced by mimesis. Relics had become so important in early Christianity, that the VII Ecumenical Council even prohibited the building of churches in the absence of relics. In the Orthodox church they were usually kept in the altar, and were exhibited only on the saint’s day and the temple’s holidays.<sup>249</sup> Unlike ordinary people who celebrate the temporal birth in the manner of the pagan observance, the saint is celebrated on the anniversary day of the martyrdom “which was the day of a Christian’s heavenly birth; for this reason the celebrations have the character of a feast and not of a mourning.”<sup>250</sup> In Levski’s case, while instituting and performing the celebration as strictly secular and separate from the church, the ceremony on February 19 follows this practice of the saint’s cultus.

Can, then, the building of a chapel on the premises of the Levski museum in Karlovo, which houses his hair, be interpreted not merely in rationalist terms as looking for an additional sacral legitimation or as ecclesiastical policy making, but as knee-jerk ritualized behavior? In asking myself this question, I go back to my conversations with the director of the museum, Dora Chausheva, and her firm, even annoyed refusal to recognize that a sanctification is taking place, or that the hair of Levski is treated as a relic. I am struck by the comment that this evokes in my accompanying friend, an anthropologist: “She does it subconsciously or, rather, she does not consciously realize what is happening.” It is maybe what Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw refer to when they say that “[a]ction is ritualized if the acts of which it is composed are constituted not by the intentions which the actor has in performing them, but by prior stipulation” and further that “[p]eople are inevitably conscious of themselves at some basic level as they engage with the act as something in a sense outside themselves (as elemental

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248 Klausner, “Martyrdom,” 235.

249 Zhivov, *Sviatost*, 51–3.

250 Paul Molinari, *Saints. Their Place in the Church*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965, 112.

or archetypal).”<sup>251</sup> Indeed, the director of the museum has performed the secular commemorative ritual for years now.<sup>252</sup> But it is not only at the anniversaries of Levski at the time of his birth and death that she is doing this. She performs a sacred ritual every day, especially when she herself is seeing people through the exhibit halls of the small museum.

Victor Turner has lamented that “museums have, traditionally, been at a great disadvantage in terms of conveying to the public the meanings of the objects they exhibit.” But this certainly does not hold true for museums dedicated to an individual—a writer, composer, artist, revolutionary, political figure, pop star—where the collected objects are *not* “divorced from their operational and positional contexts.”<sup>253</sup> Such a museum, then, is a shrine, and the museum guide a cleric who officiates the ritual of commemoration. And it need not be necessarily an individual museum; it can be a room dedicated to an idea or a person, or even a display box that can take upon itself the role of a shrine. The relics, too, need not be *verbatim* relics: objects that have been in close physical contact with the saint are equally worshiped.<sup>254</sup> In Levski’s case, these are several objects, apart from the hair, shared by the Levski Museum in Karlovo and the Military Museum in Sofia: his revolver, his dagger, his tiny printing press, his personal copper bowl. Transferring the hair to the chapel, then, is only an external act. Chausheva is simply extending the space in which she is performing

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251 Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual. A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 97, 162. The authors further explain how intentional meaning defines non-ritualized behavior: “Ritualized action is not identified in this way, because we cannot link what the actor does with what his or her intentions might be. Instead of being guided and structured by the intentions of actors, ritualized action is constituted and structured by prescription, not just in the sense that people follow rules, but in the much deeper sense that a reclassification takes place so that only following the rules counts as action” (106).

252 I am using ritual in its broadest sense as defined by Kertzer, as “symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive.” He points out that what distinguishes ritual is the presence of symbolization. Repetitive action that lacks it is habit or custom (David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, 9).

253 Turner, “Introduction,” in Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration*, 23.

254 Zhivov, *Sviatost*, 56. The Holy Shroud of Turin is a particularly poignant example.

her habitual ritual, and her above quoted words about the futility of an ecclesiastical canonization now acquire truly a new meaning: "This is a formality. He already is a saint for the nation. The act will only defile and formalize the authentic sanctity."

Of the different ways of looking at ritual, I find most useful Renato Rosaldo's view of ritual as a "busy intersection... a place where a number of distinct social processes intersect. The crossroads simply provides a space for distinct trajectories to traverse, rather than containing them in complete encapsulated form."<sup>255</sup> In the case of the commemorative celebrations around Levski, there is the confluence between several processes. One is a continuing process of nation-building, effectuated by intellectual elites in conjunction with state bureaucracies. In time, they have elaborated different forms, of which the anniversary ceremonies at the time of Levski's death, and usually around his monument, have already a century-old tradition. From the very outset, these ceremonies actually introduced a ritual since, as Barbara Meyerhoff suggests, ritual is in part a form that confers certain meanings to its contents, and "once used in collective ceremony, whether performed for the first time or the thousandth, the circumstance of having been put in the ritual form and mode, has a tradition-like effect."<sup>256</sup> Nowadays, there is the attempt to actually broaden this tradition into a biannual ritual ceremony, adding an equal emphasis on Levski's birth date, and have the two rotate between Karlovo and Sofia. And, of course, this process of nation-building has both the function of socializing the public into a common symbolic language

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255 Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth. The Remaking of Social Analysis*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 17. For a comprehensive and very clear survey of theories of ritual, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. I owe also a lot to Bruce Lincoln who understands ritual "as an authoritative mode of symbolic discourse and a powerful instrument for the evocation of these sentiments (affinity and estrangement) out of which society is constructed." I find especially fruitful his comparison between mythic and ritual discourse, the first being primarily verbal and narrative, and the second, gestural and dramatic (Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society. Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 53).

256 Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Meyerhoff, "Introduction. Secular Ritual: Forms and Meaning," in Sally F. Moore, Barbara G. Meyerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual*, Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977, 8.

as well as legitimizing political and cultural institutions as bearers and keepers of the “nation’s flame.” The persistence of Levski as a primary symbol in this process is confirmation both of the power of its content which has survived different appropriations and modifications, and also, and maybe more appropriately, of the essential continuity of the *longue durée* of nationalism, despite the dramatic changes and discontinuities in politics.

Another process is the millennial effort of the church to spread its influence and enlarge its flock. In the Bulgarian case, the church since the nineteenth century has been an indelible part of the nation-building process, so it partakes in the celebrations as both national pillar as well as guardian of the faith. The church, in the pre-1989 period, has held liturgical services for Levski as a routine but these have not been a central element of its practice. In the post-communist space the church, at least in rhetoric, has been accorded a more prominent place, especially valued by the political class for legitimizing purposes. BOC-P’s abrupt canonization of Levski gave it a strong legitimization tool but that stopped short of delivering them the Orthodox flock and public support. Instead, it urged BOC-M to reconsider quietly its stand, and carefully move in a direction preparing the ground for Levski’s sanctification. No doubt, the symbiosis between political and church power in this respect produces public support (or at least broad participation). In both efforts, that of nation-building by the state and church institutions, and that of building a religious community by the church, we are witnessing the importance of ritual’s social role in securing and maintaining the unity of the group.

Finally, a third process may be identified, probably the most basic one of all, consisting of the human need to find meaning in individual and social life, invest the chaos of life with some structure, order it around unifying symbols and events. This is different from positing an ingrained “religious sense” in man which propels him to express “faith in some god, some mysterious and controlling power outside of himself, a faith accompanied by feelings of awe and reverence and usually attended by external rites and ceremonies.”<sup>257</sup> Rather, reli-

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257 Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion*, 11. Hayes maintains that “the religious sense is so ingrained in man that normally he must give expression to it in one way or another. He may lose faith in a particular religion and cease to participate in its cult, but if so he is apt to dedicate himself consciously

gion would be seen as a historical epiphenomenon of this urge toward meaningful structure in which ritualized behavior is a prime agent, because it confers stability: "In reproducing ritual acts celebrants are no longer engaged in the constantly renewed compromise of everyday life whereby people endlessly adapt to new circumstances and attempt to turn them into familiar habits."<sup>258</sup> As Moore and Meyerhoff have shown, if being "unquestionable" and traditionalizing are the essential attributes of the sacred, then something can be sacred, yet not religious.<sup>259</sup> Such a reading, it seems to me, would also overcome the assumed profound difference between Mircea Eliade's *homo religiosus* and modern man.<sup>260</sup>

Anthropologists have been lamenting "the virtual absence of reliable data in anthropologists' accounts of the subjective experiences of those undergoing passage" and that this "failure of anthropology to deal with the experiences of ritual participants—private, subjective, psychological, conscious, and unconscious—is an enormous barrier to our understanding of the subject."<sup>261</sup> At first glance, I may be stretching the capacity of anthropological categories in trying to cover commemorative ceremonies or simple museum visits under the rubric of "rites of passage," but there are sufficient accounts that indicate that people in these circumstances feel that they are participating in a sa-

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or unconsciously to another object of reverence or worship. It may be the worship of Christ or Buddha. It may be the worship of totem or fetish. Or it may be worship of science or humanity, of abstract 'truth' or some particular ideology—provided these concepts are written in his mind with capital letters. In any case it involves an experience, a reverential emotion, which is primordially religious." (11–2).

258 Humphrey and Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions*, 260. The authors add that "there can be another, direct psychological response to the act, an identification with certain archetypal actions, in which repetitive motility generates culturally patterned emotions." (261)

259 Moore and Meyerhoff, "Introduction. Secular Ritual," 20.

260 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961, 211. Eliade stresses that a purely rational man is an abstraction, and that, in his deeper being, even the most avowedly nonreligious man shares in a religiously oriented behavior. However, modern man's "private mythologies," as Eliade calls them, "do not, as in *homo religiosus*, make part of a *Weltanschauung*, and provide the basis for a system of behavior."

261 Turner, "Introduction," in Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration*, 25; Meyerhoff, "Rites of Passage," in Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration*, 118.

cred activity. In addition, since Durkheim, social anthropologists have paid increasing attention to the social parameters of ceremony and ritual, and have long since expanded their sphere of relevance from the religious and magical to the secular, notably the political.<sup>262</sup>

The visitors books to the Karlovo museum—the so-called “books for impressions” (*knigi za vpechatleniia*)—were already discussed at length in the previous part of the book. In particular the individual entries display genuine and deep-felt emotion, and are equally testaments to the power of the Levski myth as well as commentaries on their writers’ worldview and everyday predicament. Indeed, as Michael Taussig has noted, “[m]onuments create public dream-space in which, through informal and often private rituals, the particularities of one’s life make patterns of meaning.”<sup>263</sup>

Irena on April 30, 1974 writes that “when I enter the yard, my heart beats as if it is going to fly away. My whole body is excited. I look at everything, and I regret that it is so rarely that one can meet people even with a tiny little bit of His character. I love Levski, and in my most difficult moments he is my guiding star, from him I get strength to overcome difficulties.” Nor is it only adulatory statements that have been entered. On May 29, 1981 a curly and illegible signature ends the following entry: “I am filled with admiration for Levski’s ideals. Bulgaria will be great only if we accept these ideals and make them living. But alas! They do not exist any longer, and we shall be forever slaves of our cowardice.” Some six years later, in April, 1987 an unpunctuated sentence by Vildanka and Dodio from Gabrovo states: “We are proud and we are sorry for Levski. Why do we need God when we have Levski!” On April 4, 1990, the Stoianov family from the town of Karnobat adds: “Today our family for the first time visited the home-museum Vasil Levski. Already at the entrance door we felt in another atmosphere, in another time. Our spirit as Bulgarians and humans was lifted. For us Vasil Levski is a symbol of a real Bulgarian and human being. We are leaving with heads high that we have had

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262 See, for example, the contributions in Sally F. Moore, Barbara G. Meyerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual*; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*; Michael Taussig, “Maleficium: State Fetishism,” in *The Nervous System*, New York, London: Routledge, 1992.

263 Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*, New York, London: Routledge, 1992, 46.

such a titan, such a great Bulgarian.” T. Khubenov from Burgas exclaims on September 5, 1992 that “now Bulgaria is in need of exactly the type of individuals as Levski,” and someone from Lom has added in April 1993 that Levski desired “liberty with discipline and humanity, and not the anarchy we Bulgarians have to live in.” Under April 19, 1993, immediately following the signature of George and Claudia Wilson from Raleigh, North Carolina, another unreadable signature has contributed the following: “It’s nice, after all, that we have Levski; otherwise we wouldn’t be proud of being Bulgarians, especially not in the present confused and misconstrued ‘democracy.’” A woman from Pernik addresses The Apostle: “I wish you were still alive and could help Bulgaria again” (July 25, 1997). These are widely spread feelings, and Dora Chausheva herself attests that for the inhabitants of Karlovo, in particular, Levski is a special item of pride, “especially now, in these critical times.”<sup>264</sup>

And critical times for Karlovo they are, indeed. This small town with a population of ca. 25,000, used to be relatively prosperous thanks to an array of industrial enterprises around. The textile factory produced the famous Karlovo silk chiefly for export, and people would drive specially to Karlovo to buy some of the leftovers in the factory shop. Of the 5,000 workers in the factory, 500 had remained in 1999, but next year there was no production, and it was expected that the factory would close. It was still lingering on in the summer of 2005, but financially ruined after its privatization. The lady who sells tickets at the Levski Museum in Karlovo, used to work as an economist in the silk plant and bemoans the crime of destroying a thriving export industry.<sup>265</sup>

The tractor plant has cut its work force from 6,000 to 600, and seems also to be doomed. Most unexpectedly, the industry which had always been profitable, and did bring hard currency in the previous decades, was being artificially suffocated. Bulgaria has always been famous for its attar of roses, the preferred base for French perfumes, and the Rose Valley spans from Kazanlık to Karlovo, the chief producers of rose oil. Of the formerly 3,700 acres, only 675 were under crop in 2000;<sup>266</sup> of the 2,500 workers, only 500 were employed. In the sum-

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264 Interview with Dora Chausheva, July 13, 2000.

265 Interview, June 12, 2005.

266 The figures and measures in Bulgarian are 15,000 decares, and 2,700 decares. The decare is one tenth of the hectare (1 hectare = 2.5 acres).

mer of 2000, only one department at the rose oil plant was open, with 50 workers employed three times a week for four hours. This is unconscionable, the locals were saying, given that the French have to buy their attar of roses from Turkey now, and it is clearly of inferior quality. In the summer of 2005, when I visited Karlovo for a follow-up, the situation was still more or less the same, but the fields had been privatized, and it was expected that the industry would rebound soon.

The biggest employer for Karlovo, however, used to be the military plant in Sopot (*VMZ-Sopot*),<sup>267</sup> just a few miles from Karlovo. This, too, had been a booming industry but now, with the advent of the unipolar world, there seems to be pressure also for a unipolar arms exporter.<sup>268</sup> The history of the post-communist privatization of Eastern

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267 *VMZ* is the acronym for *Voenno-Mashinostroitelnen Zavod* (Military Machine-building Plant).

268 Or so go some of the explanations seeking to make sense of the bankruptcy of this profitable industry venture. But perhaps this is merely in the realm of conspiracy theory. Recently, a former prime minister of Bulgaria, herself an economist—Reneta Indzhova—wrote that “neither the world, nor the West, nor NATO have asked for the dismantling of the Bulgarian industry. And specifically not of the military industrial complex. There is hardly a country in the world that would want to wipe out the most profitable branch of its industry. If any government took such a step, this only means that some competitor has already paid well for that.” (Reneta Indzhova, “Niakoi e platil, za da niamame orizheina industriia,” (Somebody has paid so that we would have no arms industry), <http://www.standart-news.mtel.net/archive/2001/02/23/thecountry/story9.htm>, *Standart*, February 23, 2001). I personally have no inside knowledge of the dealings of Bulgaria’s democratic government but I have been trained in what is known as elementary logic. If “some competitor” does not mean NATO or the West, whose institutional systems Bulgaria as an ardent applicant to both NATO and the European Union was gradually adopting, and whose politics the country has been uncritically following with a degree of sycophantic enthusiasm reminiscent of the communists’ dealings with Russia; if it also doesn’t mean “the world” (and in the global world dominated by the West, one can hardly imagine that the Bulgarian government as an aspirant to join it would offer the plant to China, to Saddam, or, impossibly, to Russia which, at that time, had no money anyway); then what is left for “some competitor” is only the Bulgarian government itself, and specifically its privatizing agency. Indzhova herself, after having distanced herself from improper conspiracy insinuations about the West, intimates as much: “If the ones who have sold out national interests and are about to privatize *VMZ-Sopot* have already been paid, they should know that 7,000 workers have not been given their salaries for six months already.”

Europe is yet to be written.<sup>269</sup> For now it is simply history in the making. Transitologists, in the meantime, are focused on significant issues like constitutionalism, civil society and private/public spheres. Problems like the mafia's, a.k.a. new entrepreneurial class's links and/or symbiosis with the state institutions and the organizations of global capital are only beginning to be addressed. And, of course, putting the blame on "the West" is a demagogic maneuver because there is no such thing as "the West" as an agent of individual or collective will. The questions that those historians of the future will ask is to what extent was the privatization model imposed from the outside? By whom: organizations, names? To what extent was the process controlled, and how was it correlated to government loans and political support? To what extent was the widely known corruption tolerated or initiated? And for how much? Who were the native agents of the privatization process and how exactly did they fit in the network of international capital?<sup>270</sup>

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269 For the Bulgarian case, the most systematic coverage to date is the devastating account of the journalist Georgi Tambuev, who describes the concrete mechanisms of the financial speculations, the uncontrolled flow of capital out of the country, the shady privatization dealings, the symbiosis between political elites and mafia. In his *Vlast, oblechena v koruptsiia* (Power, dressed in corruption), Sofia: Knigoizdatelska kishta "Trud," 2001, Reneta Indzhova herself is singled out in an unfavorable light for her role in the privatization process (320–1).

270 The model for analyzing Bulgaria's transition has been the work of Gerald Creed, *Domesticating Revolution: From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998; "Rural–Urban Oppositions in the Bulgarian Political Transition," *Südosteuropa* 42.6, 369–82; "Economic crisis and ritual decline in Eastern Europe," in C. M. Hann, *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practicies in Eurasia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 57–73. Other important analyses of different aspects of the transition are (in chronological order), Christian Giordano and Dobrinka Kostova, "Bulgarie, une réforme agraire sans paysans," in Edouard Conte and Christian Giordano, eds., "Paysans au delà du mur," *Études Rurales*, 1995, 138/39/40, 157–71; Deema Kaneff, "Responses to 'democratic' land reforms in a Bulgarian village," in Ray Abrahams, ed., *After Socialism: Land Reform and Social Change in Eastern Europe*, Oxford: Berghahn, 1996, 85–114; Timothy Pilbrow, "The Nation and Its Margins: Negotiating a National Identity in Post-1989 Bulgaria," *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 15.2 (1997), 43–50; Christian Giordano and Dobrinka Kostova, "The social production of mistrust," in C. M. Hann, *Postsocialism*, op.

In the meantime, in the summer of 2000, 2,500 workers from *VMZ-Sopot* had been laid off, and more were expecting to be discharged. They had all been promised a one-time compensation of 1,000 leva (less than \$500 at the exchange rate at the time). Bleak as the outlook was, there was still dim hope that things could not get from bad to worse. By February 2001, the situation had become explosive. Since October 2000, the 7,000 strong work force had not received their salaries.<sup>271</sup> So, the economic and political globalization is having its very immediate impact on this small provincial Bulgarian town, and people there are quite alert to the challenge. How do they react? In February 2001, the workers of *VMZ-Sopot* went on strike. Nor were they the only ones in Bulgaria. Another six big enterprises as well as a thousand medical workers in Stara Zagora were also on strike.<sup>272</sup> The workers of the arms industry in Sopot refused to be placated by half-promises and half-measures, and on February 22, 2001, a representative group of 560 workers mounted 8 buses and arrived in Sofia to protest their plight. Their protest march in the afternoon of February 23, 2001 was under the slogan “The Karlovo region wants to live.”<sup>273</sup>

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cit., 74–91; Deema Kaneff, *Who Owns the Past? The Politics of Time in a ‘Model’ Bulgarian Village*. Oxford: Berghahn, 2002; Donna Buchanan, *Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006; Venelin Ganey, *Preying on the State: The Transformation of Bulgaria after 1989*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

271 Other sources insist that the salaries had not been paid for 14 months: “Vilna ot protesti zaliva stranata” (A wave of protests sweeps the country), *Standart*, February 23, 2001 (<http://www.standartnews.mtel.net/archive/2001/02/23/thecountry/story6.htm>).

272 *Ibidem*. According to the information of the Labor Union “Podkrepa,” 1,400 privatized enterprises are expected to announce bankruptcy any moment. The government is postponing the move for after the elections but a new drastic wave of unemployment is on the horizon. See also “600 rabotnitsi ot Plama blokirat Sofia dnes” (600 workers from Plama are blockading Sofia today), *Standart*, February 21, 2001 (<http://www.standartnews.mtel.net/archive/2001/02/21/theday/story6.htm>).

273 “Stachnitsite ot VMZ trıgvat kım Sofia” (The strikers from VMZ start for Sofia), *Standart*, February 22, 2001 (<http://www.standartnews.mtel.net/archive/2001/02/22/theday/index.htm>), “Infarkt ubi dvama stachnitsi v Sopot” (Two strikers in Sopot died of heart attacks), *Standart*, February 23, 2001 (<http://www.standartnews.mtel.net/archive/2001/02/22/thecountry/story7.htm>). It is symptomatic that the government paper *Demokratiia* was not saying a word about the strike and the protest march.

Four years later, in the summer of 2005, one small section of the plant was still functioning but with diminished capacity. Another had been privatized and bought by an Austrian enterprise for the production of bearings. In the meantime, two new activities were somewhat alleviating the economic frustration in Karlovo. One was the entry of small, mostly Greek-owned tailoring companies, employing female labor. The other was the newly built barracks for the reformed Bulgarian army, which was transformed from an army of universal male recruitment into a voluntary salaried army. There are significant numbers of local young people, both men and women, from Karlovo and the adjacent villages, who have joined the units of the professional army. But there is an enormous number of young people (around a thousand, I am told in the stylish café by the charming waitress) who have little chance to get some employment, and who have opted to go abroad. Most have ended up in England, of all places. One of them is the son of Gicho Mitov, a descendant of Levski, and former chairman of the Committee of Relatives. The son now lives in London but it was unclear where and how he was employed. His father obviously did not want to pursue this line of the conversation.<sup>274</sup>

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274 The Committee of Levski's Relatives is active but a subsidiary to the Bulgarian Committee "Vasil Levski," following and participating in its initiatives, rather than an organization with an independent influence. Part of this is that it has limited finances; part because there are internal frictions between separate branches of the family. A committee had already been founded in 1885, and Nacho (1852–1895), Levski's nephew, participated in the original efforts to find his grave. The present one dates from 1988, and elected Khristo Ikononov (one of Levski's great-grandsons) as chairman. Its immediate tasks, as set in its first protocols, was to publish a genealogical tree of the family, to find and publish an album with photographs. It also created a commission from among its members "for proving the historical truth about the life and activities of the Apostle." It was to be vigilant, to check and alert about inaccuracies published about Levski, and to get in touch with historians and other leading public figures (Protokol No. 1, July 12, 1988; Protokol of January, 1989, in the possession of Mitov, who shared the documentation with me). In 1995, a meeting was organized in Karlovo for all relatives, and it was decided that the central leadership of the whole organization should be in Karlovo. The central chairman was Gicho Mitov, and the leader of the Sofia branch Iankul Ivanov (Doklad na Sofiiskiiia komitet, October 5, 1999). There are, at present, 22 living descendants of Levski. A detailed description of the family (Nadezhda Petrova, "Treto stoletie křivta na Apostola

This is not the only link to Levski. February 19, the day of Levski's hanging, is, as already mentioned, a traditional commemorative day. On February 19, 2001, as usual, there were memorial ceremonies all over the country in honor of the 128th anniversary of Levski's death. The government paper *Demokratiia* reported that on that day the President Petăr Stoianov, the Prime Minister Ivan Kostov, the Speaker of Parliament Yordan Sokolov, the Mayor Stefan Sofianski as well as cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and representatives of the clergy laid flowers at the Levski monument in the center of Sofia. The paper also reported that visitors to the Levski Museum in Karlovo would see for the first time Levski's hair in the reliquary of the "All Bulgarian Saints" chapel. It also added that "over 5,000 workers of the arms industry (*orizheinitsi*) marched on foot from Sopot to Karlovo in memory of Levski."<sup>275</sup> What this paper did not mention was that the workers were carrying big slogans with the following statements: "The portrait of the Apostle has no place in your offices," "Give us back our work," "The Karlovo region wants to live." An elderly worker who was interviewed could barely keep his tears: "We are desperate. We don't believe anybody anymore. If Levski had been canonized, we would have prayed to him as a saint for our salvation." The workers paid their respect to Levski but once the mayor of the town Zheliazko Domuschiev began his speech, they distanced themselves from the official ceremony and left.<sup>276</sup> Three days later they mounted the buses to Sofia.

It seemed, though, as if the gathering for the ceremony of Levski, his honoring with the 10-kilometer march on foot from Sopot to Karlovo, was like a ceremonial ablution for the workers, a pause at a sacral spot before getting back to the struggle. Alf Lütke has re-

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pulsira") and a genealogical tree are published in *Apostolët, Vîzpomenatelen list po sluchai 70-godishininata ot vîzstanoviavaneto rodnata kîshta na Vasil Levski v Karlovo*, 2003, 3–6.

275 "Rodinata se pokloni pred pametta na Apostola" (The motherland bowed in memory of the Apostle), *Demokratiia*, 42, February 20, 2001 (<http://www.eunet.bg/bgnews>).

276 "4000 stanchnitsi pochetokha Apostola v Karlovo" (4000 strikers honored the Apostle in Karlovo), *Standart*, February 20, 2001. An interesting detail in the same article mentions that the only big order the plant has at the moment comes from India. (<http://www.standartnews.mtel.net/archive/2001/02/20/thecountry/index.htm>)

marked that “demonstrations, parades, riots, and other forms of popular ‘rough’ politics appear, in the academic view, mainly as nonpolitical events;” and he draws the attention particularly to strikes which have been treated as a field of activity in which workers make the gradual transition to the “political.” In contrast, his approach is “to examine the articulation and expression of both individual and collective needs as forms of political behavior.”<sup>277</sup> The *VMZ-Sopot* workers’ strike and their march to Levski’s monument in Karlovo should be seen as a political act with a carefully chosen symbolic significance.

Looking back at the visitors’ entries in the Levski Museum in Karlovo, what is interesting in the earlier-mentioned quote of the family from Karnobat is the feeling that they have entered “another atmosphere, another time.” This is not only the feeling of the museum as temple, but a veritable collapsing of the historical time, a return to and partaking in the time of the hero. Eliade describes this as the human desire to periodically return to “the sacred and strong time [which] is the *time of origins*, the stupendous instant in which reality was created” and which he calls the *illud tempus*. Commenting on the meaning and significance of religious festivals, and this can be extended equally to national celebrations, Eliade says: “[H]owever complex a religious festival may be, it always involves a sacred event that took place *ab origine* and that is ritually made present. The participants in the festival become contemporaries of the mythical event. In other words, they emerge from their historical time—that is, from the time constituted by the sum total of profane personal and intrapersonal events—and recover primordial time, which is always the same, which belongs to eternity.”<sup>278</sup>

Johannes Fabian uses the notion of allochronism in a different context to describe the original epistemological basis of the discipline of anthropology as a science of *other* men in *another* time. In a beau-

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277 Alf Lüdtke, “Organizational Order or *Eigensinn*? Workers’ Privacy and Workers’ Politics in Imperial Germany,” in Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power*, 304, 326, n. 2.

278 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 81, 88. For Eliade, this is based on the old idea that perfection is at the beginning and, therefore, by returning to these beginnings by means of myth and ritual, which serve as a time machine, humanity comes closer to god. See also Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Ritual*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968, in Robert A. Segal, ed., *The Myth and Ritual Theory. An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, 180–9.

tifully argued argument he has demonstrated that “*geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*.” Anthropology as a scholarly discipline expunges the Other from our Time although ontologically the subject and the object are synchronous. At the same time, “[t]he absence of the Other from our Time has been his mode of presence in our discourse—as an object and victim.”<sup>279</sup>

Allochronism is, of course, at the center of the historical endeavor, a basic principle of historicism, approaching the historical other as inhabiting a foreign country: the past.<sup>280</sup> In the case of Levski, there is in practice a complete reversal of this central principle of dealing with the past; it stands allochronism on its head. What we have is an anthropological experience in which the object (Levski), while ontologically preceding by over a century the present-day individuals who are also the authors of the discourse on Levski, is extracted from his time and is treated as coeval precisely because he is not perceived as an *other*. It is as if the space of the nation state has collapsed time so that the present-day nation has left time with only one vector—the present—which could be taken to mean that the temporal dimension is altogether removed. The intellectual framework which allows this is the treatment of the nation not as a fluid and transient process but as a structural entity (no matter whether contingent and finite or else, deterministic and teleological). The psychological framework is also rather simple. Present day individuals who feel inextricably trapped in the geographic and political grid of the nation can freely choose to inhabit a timeless dimension in which they can cohabit with personalities they admire, values they approve of, an atmosphere they feel comfortable in. This redemptive chronopolitics results in the obverse of allochronism, a kind of isochronism which is, of course, quite different from the principle of coevalness recommended by Fabian. This is not the processual and materialist presentism which Fabian calls on to counteract the hegemony of taxonomic and representational approaches. It is rather a reversal to mythopoetic time. With a no less metaphysical but less transcendental vocabulary than Eliade, Reinhart Koselleck (following Ernst Bloch) speaks about the contemporaneity of the noncon-

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279 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 144, 154.

280 This is, of course, a paraphrase of the title of David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

temporaneous (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*).<sup>281</sup> This notion expresses the diversity of temporal strata of varying duration. However, it implies not only the collapse in the present, and subsequent coexistence and comparability, of different strands of time or temporal structures contained in mythical, political, social, or everyday life. It also creates the structural foundations which link the “space of experience” with the “horizon of expectations.” Koselleck explains that during the modern period the difference between experience and expectation has increasingly expanded: expectations distanced themselves from all previous experience. Where, in the pre-modern period, expectations went beyond previous experience, they were usually related to the Otherworld. Henceforth, they began serving the idea of improvement on earth, and liberated the future from the constraints of the Final Days. At the same time, the introduction of the concept of “progress” reduced the temporal difference between experience and expectation to a single concept. Not only is time in the modern period, or modern time, according to Koselleck, distinct from earlier times. There is a definite asymmetry between experience and expectation:

All concepts of movement share a compensatory effect, which they produce. The lesser the experiential substance, the greater the expectations joined to it. The lesser the experience, the greater the expectation: this is a formula for the temporal structure of the modern, to the degree that it is rendered a concept by “progress.” This was plausible for as long as all previous experience was inadequate to the establishment of expectations derivable from the process of a world reforming itself technologically. If corresponding political designs were realized, then, once generated by a revolution, the old expectations worked themselves out on the basis of the new experiences. This is true for republicanism, democracy, and liberalism, to the extent that history permits us to judge. Presumably this will also be true for socialism and also for communism, if its arrival is ever announced.<sup>282</sup>

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281 Reinhart Koselleck, “History, Histories, and Formal Structures of Time,” in *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1985, 94–8.

282 Reinhart Koselleck, “‘Space of Experience’ and ‘Horizon of Expectation’: Two Historical Categories,” in *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1985,

This, written barely ten years before the collapse of communism has a particularly pungent ring, and tallies with the obverse asymmetry: “the greater the experience, the lesser the expectation.” In fact, Koselleck says as much: “the greater the experience, the more cautious one is, but also the more open is the future. If this were the case, then the end of *Neuzeit* as optimizing progress would have arrived.”<sup>283</sup> It seems to have arrived in Karlovo. In the case of Bulgaria in general, there is a profound feeling of disappointment, frustration, demoralization, even anomie among the populace occasioned by the economic stagnation and ongoing pauperization, the collapse of state authority and the rise of a political class without any credibility, the breakdown of educational and cultural institutions and the complete marginalization of the intelligentsia. With the exception of the several major cities, and especially the capital, where one can cautiously speak of a relative take off, this has not changed much in the past years although, if this is any reason for optimism, things are not deteriorating further. In this atmosphere, “ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy.”<sup>284</sup> It is, as Moore and Meyerhoff explain, the culturally determinate, the regulated, the manmade, the named and explained which is celebrated through form and formality. In a similar vein, and emphasizing the psychological basis of myth and ritual, Clyde Kluckhohn shows how they “promote social solidarity, enhance the integration of society by providing a formalized statement of its ultimate value-attitudes, afford

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288. The original German edition of Koselleck’s work—*Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag)—was published in 1979.

283 Ibid., 288.

284 Moore and Meyerhoff, “Introduction. Secular Ritual,” 16. The authors posit this dimension of ritual as “culture versus chaos,” where collective ceremonies are statements about cultural order against a cultural void. Coming from the perspective of philosophy and linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson also stress the ordering potential of ritual as a kind of experiential gestalt: “Each ritual is a repeated, coherently structured, and unified aspect of our experience. In performing them, we give structure and significance to our activities, minimizing chaos and disparity in our actions.” (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 233–4)

a means for the transmission of much of culture with little loss of content—thus protecting cultural continuity and stabilizing society.”<sup>285</sup>

In her study of the making of a twelfth and thirteenth-century Byzantine saint, Catia Galatariotou argues that at a time when Orthodox Cypriots were dispossessed of most of the material aspects of their society, they clung to the “treasures of its symbolic universe.” The need to revitalize their society, the efforts “to keep it alive by infusing it with new life, came by way of creating a new cult,” centered around their holy man: the figure of Neophytos. The intricate process of sanctification reveals the equally intricate interrelationship between material and symbolic goods as encompassed in Bourdieu’s notion of the economic.<sup>286</sup>

There is a special emotional force, a unique poignancy that characterizes all these processes (the nation-building project, the missionary project, and the grassroots social need for meaning and order) when they traverse the “busy intersection” of the Levski commemorations and worship, especially at this particular intersection of time. In the present circumstances the Levski myth and ritual has the function, in the words of Durkheim, to “perpetually give back to the great ideals a little of the strength that the egoistic passions and daily personal preoccupations tend to take away from them.”<sup>287</sup> It thus serves not only as a rallying point, a unifying symbol and activity driven by social actors with their distinct perspective and goals, but becomes “a process for social transformation, for catharsis, for embodying social values, for defining the nature of the real.”<sup>288</sup> Catherine Bell specially emphasizes that ritual is not about unchanging tradition but should be seen as “a particularly effective means of mediating tradition and change, that is, as a medium for appropriating some changes while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity.”<sup>289</sup>

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285 Clyde Kluckhohn, “Myths and Rituals: A General Theory,” *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942), 45–79, in Robert A. Segal, ed., *The Myth and Ritual Theory*, op. cit., 329.

286 Catia Galatariotou, *The Making of a Saint: The Life, Times and Sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 4, 259.

287 Cited in Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 74.

288 Bell, *Ritual*, 89.

289 Bell, *Ritual*, 251.



## 6. Heroes and Saints: The Dialectics of Reincarnation

Of the different theorists of heroic myth, it is Lord Raglan who insisted most adamantly on the link between myth and ritual and became, as it were, the father and chief exponent of myth-ritualism.<sup>290</sup> While one does not have to adopt his rejection of the historicity of heroes (particularly his insistence that historical heroes are fundamentally different from mythical heroes), and not even accept the particular way in which he established the connection between myth and ritual, it has been clearly demonstrated that, in the case of Levski, the link is there. What characterized all hero myth theorists in general, despite methodological or other differences, is that they all base their analysis almost exclusively on examples from antiquity.<sup>291</sup> Yet, hero worship in different forms is central to many historical periods and sites, and it would be useful to try to understand how (or whether) heroes change over time. More specifically, is there anything specific about national heroes, the heroes of the age of nationalism, of whom Levski is a prominent example?

This last section provides a brief survey of the enormous literature on heroes in general, specifically the link between ancient hero worship and medieval sainthood, and the smaller literature on the relationship between medieval saints and national heroes. Placing the Levski case within this context and comparing it to other cases of national heroes will allow Levski to “rest” naturally not only within his narrow Bulgarian pantheon but, more broadly, within the international “family” of national heroes or the genus of human heroes at large.

Heroes can be defined as individuals “real or mythic, whose deeds and sacrifices have come to represent, in the course of time and through narration, the values, ideals and aspirations of a social group,

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290 Robert A. Segal, *The Myth and Ritual Theory*, Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998, 1–13; Robert A. Segal, ed., *Hero Myths: A Reader*, Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000, 23–6.

291 For a brief review of theories of hero myth, see Part II, Chapter 1.

as well as the protection and legitimacy of this group's political and/or territorial position."<sup>292</sup> There is agreement that they are first and foremost social symbols whose main function is the example they set within the group,<sup>293</sup> and while most authors emphasize the different attributes and roles heroes play in different historical periods, as a whole the consensus is that "the essential message is the same; as a mythic figure, the hero is perennial."<sup>294</sup> We saw in Part II the extent to which hero worship was at the center of the national project. It is indeed the period between the middle of the eighteenth century and the end of the First World War, the high age of nationalism that saw "an unprecedented effort at defining the hero in general, his taxonomy, and the archeology of his preceding incarnations."<sup>295</sup> After that, however, and especially after the Second World War, heroes were rarely, if at all, objects of theoretical concern in history or anthropology. This was not

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292 I am borrowing this definition from Dominic Bryan, "En souvenir de Guillaume: les parades en Irlande du Nord," in Pierre Centlivres, Daniel Fabre and Françoise Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1998, 35. A similar but much less elegant definition comes from Theodor H. Gaster, "Heroes" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed., vols. 5 & 6, New York: Simon & Schuster, MacMillan, 1995, 302: "A hero may be defined as a person who possesses powers superior to those of ordinary men and who displays them courageously, at the risk of his own life but to the advantage and benefit of others." Another refined definition, almost identical, within a Durkheimian tradition, belongs to Stefan Czarnowski: "The hero is a man who, through the achievements of his life or death, has captured ritually the effective force inherent in a group or a thing that he represents and whose fundamental social value he personifies." (*Le culte des héros et ses conditions sociales. Saint Patrick, héros national de l'Irlande*, Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1919; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975, 27.)

293 To give an example from the recent past, in 1943 a young Russian soldier, Aleksandr Matrosov, died a heroic death by jumping into a German machine-gun nest and covering the embrasure with his body. A few months later, he was posthumously conferred the title "Hero of the Soviet Union," and his deed was widely propagated. It was emulated nearly three hundred times during the rest of the war (Rosalinde Sartorti, "On the Making of Heroes, Heroines, and Saints," in Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, 181, 187).

294 Theodor H. Gaster, "Heroes," 305.

295 Pierre Centlivres, Daniel Fabre et Françoise Zonabend, "Introduction," in Centlivres, Fabre et Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, 7.

necessarily because the topic was neglected but because it was treated in a traditional way. It is only in the past decade or so that the problematic has been again receiving some attention, and this is accompanied by new methods and approaches.<sup>296</sup> It is only these latest works that explicitly posit that heroes are constructed, both socially and culturally, and explore how their significance and meanings vary according to historical periods and political contexts.<sup>297</sup>

In a sweeping recent overview of the genealogy and history of the hero, Dean Miller identifies the origins of the hero cult in ancient Greece, more specifically in the eighth century B.C., referred to as the Greek Middle Ages.<sup>298</sup> Heroism to the Greeks, he contends, was a multifold concept. In Homer it was used in a generic sense for a free man or more specifically for a significant man, a man of status; to Hesiod the hero was a faraway figure of the remote and magnified past set firmly in the mythic Heroic Age; Pindar depicted him as a semi-god, hovering between the human and the divine, a beneficial or malignant mediator between the living world and the Otherworld. There are two chief recognizable modes of the ancient hero: one, the warlike mode, in an earlier version expresses the heroic ideal through the figure of the exceptional human being, the young, physically perfect, valorous individual who attains early death and fame, and is ultimately lonely, solipsistic, extrasocietal and even asocial. Its typical protagonist is Akhilleus. To this version of heroism, a later period added also the glorious death that is not only individual but is attained for the sake and defense of the *polis*; thus heroism is dying in battle for the mother-city. One of its earliest examples is the veneration of the fallen at the Battle of Marathon.

The other mode—the mediating mode—confers to the hero an essentially social function where he “even anonymously, acts from his postmortem place (the *hêrôon*) to fertilize and protect human society,

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296 Ibid., 3.

297 Claudie Voisenat, “Avant-propos,” in Centlivres, Fabre et Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, x.

298 Dean A. Miller, *The Epic Hero*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 4, and his reference to A. M. Snodgrass, “Les origines du culte des héros dans la Grèce antique,” in G. Gnoli and J.-P. Vernant, eds., *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1982.

and especially that important new formation, the city-state.”<sup>299</sup> Yet, what unified this concept in all its modes was the focus upon death, and the subsequent immortality which conferred glory on both the individual and the group he represented (the city-state). Greek society not only invented the word hero—*hērōs*—but transmitted its own and influenced later perceptions of this extraordinary human image and type. More specifically, its heroic model remained practically unchanged with the expansion of Rome and throughout the Roman world.

It is in late antiquity that a serious challenge and accompanying revision of the warrior hero occurred. This had to do mostly with the new Christian perception of the warrior class as the paid servants of the persecuting imperial state. In this configuration, “the original warrior ethic and a new heroism would only be discovered in barbarian Europe beyond the *limes*, in the pullulating impatient Germanic tribes and on the far, equally impatient, Celtic edges of an imploding imperial world.” However, two very concrete historical developments colored the metamorphosis of the European hero in the heartlands. Miller identifies one of them as the long term technological innovations which gave birth to the heavy cavalry and with it the horsed, armored and noble heroic figure of the *chevalier*, *cabellero*, *Ritter*, *ritsar*, and produced figures such as King Arthur, Lancelot, and Galaad. The other development was the expansion of and encounter with Islam which laid the “groundwork for the creation of a whole genus of ‘border’ epics in which the Christian hero confronted his Moslem counterpart.” In this latter category Miller covers the French *Chanson de Roland*, the Byzantine *Digenes Akrites*, the Spanish *El Cid*, and the Balkan epic songs.<sup>300</sup>

While he speaks of the tension and even open confrontation between the classical and the Christian-chivalric heroic traditions, it is surprising that Miller is never tempted to review another medieval type that serves as a social model and has entirely assumed the mediating

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299 Miller, *The Epic Hero*, 5–6, 161–2. The *hērōon* memorializes the place of mediation of the hero between the worlds of the living and the dead. It could be but usually wasn’t his burial place, and was signified by a mound, stone, tree or spring where the mediating status and force of the hero was known to operate.

300 *Ibid.*, 10–1.

function of the hero: the figure of the saint. For Miller the saint is totally different from the hero, a different genus in fact. This is an unexpected and curious omission, since clearly the two can be productively subsumed as variations of one type. Granted, Miller is not alone in refusing the focus on the continuity between heroes and saints. Peter Brown, in particular, has been adamant that “to explain the Christian cult of the martyrs as a continuation of the pagan cult of heroes helps as little as to reconstruct the form and function of a late-antique Christian basilica from the few columns and capitals taken from the classical buildings that are occasionally incorporated in the arcades.”<sup>301</sup> Brown specifically insists on the unique intimacy saints enjoyed with God, which allowed them to intercede for and protect their fellow mortals. The saint was an intercessor “in a way which the hero could never have been.”<sup>302</sup> One need not take Brown’s objection too pedantically. His task was different: he wanted to highlight the specificity and uniqueness of the period of late antiquity, while, simultaneously, demonstrating the originality and dynamics of “popular religion” in late antiquity and the early middle ages. At the same time, he faithfully documented the lively controversies on the topic.<sup>303</sup> It also bears stressing that Brown was writing about Latin Christianity. In his study

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301 Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981, 6. Stephen Wilson offers a similar argument by emphasizing that “the Christian cult of saints, far from originating in paganism, arose rather from the veneration for those who had died precisely because they refused any compromise with the established Roman religion” (Wilson, “Introduction,” in Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults*, 3). His argument is somewhat naïve, as it conflates contents and form. No one suggests that the motives of veneration were the same, they could be antagonistic, but the structural place and manifestations of venerating the representative of an ideal could be analogous.

302 *Ibidem*.

303 *Ibid.*, 133–4. It is curious, in light of the contrasts between eastern and western Christendom that Peter Brown highlights in an earlier article, especially the practical interpretation of the holy and its more immediate role in law and politics in the west, whether he would persist in emphasizing the rupture between heroes and saints also for East Roman late antiquity. See Peter Brown, “Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways” (1976), in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982, 166–95.

of the *Panēgiris* of the Byzantine saints, Speros Vryonis, Jr. emphasizes the strong and organic continuities from antiquity:

Despite the fact that the Byzantine saints as literary heroes were opposites to the literary heroes of pagan antiquity, they were celebrated in a manner which was, partly, of pagan origin. The *panēgiris*, against which the church fathers declaimed because of its concern with commerce, frivolity, and sin, early became attached to the annual celebration of the saint's cult. Though it included Christian religious ceremony, the *panēgiris* offered Byzantine society that which it has also offered pagan society: recreation and relief from cares; commerce and sex. Thus the Byzantine *panēgiris* represents what anthropologists call cultural adaptation, for it involved the acceptance of a pagan institution re-oriented to the scene of Christian localism; and thus it was passed down into modern times.<sup>304</sup>

In fact, most other authors treat sainthood as a variant of heroicness.<sup>305</sup> Czarnowski, in particular, for whom saints are a special subcategory of heroes, establishes the link by means of the function of the hero and the saint as witness. It is his role or, rather, quintessence as a witness that makes the hero the incarnation of a social ideal.<sup>306</sup> Just as the ancient hero is the representative, witness and, as a consequence, the champion of the group or things whose essence he incarnates, so the Christian martyr is the witness (*μάρτυρ*) of the faith: "He is venerated not solely as the model of virtues required from the perfect believer. He is glorified above all as a human being who has proven his attachment to the Christian religion and through this has become a shining witness of the faith that inspires his community."<sup>307</sup> The quali-

304 Speros Vryonis, Jr., "The *Panēgiris* of the Byzantine Saint: A Study on the Nature of a Medieval Institution, Its Origins and Fate," in Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, 226.

305 Wolfgang Speyer, "Die Verehrung des Heroen, des göttlichen Menschen und des christlichen Heiligen," in Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer, *Heiligenverehrung in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1990, 48, 52–4, 60–1 points out the parallel veneration of heroes and saints as well as the mutual influences of their cult practice, without overlooking specific distinctions and discontinuities (62–3).

306 Czarnowski, *Le culte des héros et ses conditions sociales*, 12–3.

307 Ibid., 6–7, 27.

fication Czarnowki introduces is that the notion of sainthood is subordinated to a moral and religious ideal fixed in theology. Believing in the correlation between types of heroes and hero worship, and the characteristics of particular historical social groups, he also insists that sainthood was typical for societies constituted around churches or sects, "because these are the essential conditions in which a theology can be elaborated."<sup>308</sup> This assertion offers a productive opening to the modern period, insofar as any ideological institution or institutions of states dominated by ideologies can be structurally seen as identical or analogous to societies organized by churches. The jump from saint to secular hero is, in this understanding, easy to grasp; indeed, it is mandatory.

The models of sanctity, as they developed around the cult of saints, heavily influenced the types of modern heroism. It is widely accepted that the first and mostly highly valued model of medieval sainthood was martyrdom, although Wolfgang Speyer rightly draws the attention to the fact that during the first centuries martyrs were preceded by the apostolic and missionary types.<sup>309</sup> Martyrdom is to be understood both in its grand sacrificial variety, the so-called red martyrdom, as well as in its other forms, especially asceticism which became assimilated into martyrdom.<sup>310</sup> Modern heroism employs a strikingly similar, often indistinguishable from the medieval, vocabulary, and follows very much the same models: the sacrifice for the collectivity, the voluntary renouncing of the gift of life for the life of the nation, as well as the

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308 Ibid., 28, 329.

309 Speyer, "Die Verehrung des Heroen, des göttlichen Menschen und des christlichen Heiligen," 54.

310 Delooz, *Sociologie et canonisation*, 24; Wilson, "Introduction" in Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults*, 3. While martyrdom is usually understood as a sacrifice of one's life in the name of faith, the theology of martyrdom points out that this—the so-called red martyrdom—is only one form, if the most visible and highly venerated, of a larger phenomenon. There are also the martyrs of conscience, the "confessors"—monastic, married or single, pilgrims, hermits and healer saints—less spectacular, individuals not of one great sacrifice but of a multitude of smaller ones. See Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, "What is a martyr?" *Sobornost* 5, No. 1, 1983, 7–18. Also, Edward Eugene Malone. *The Monk and the Martyr; the Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1950.

renunciation of personal happiness, the control of one's body and passions, very much in line with, if not identical to, medieval askesis.

One of the most important types of saints in the middle ages was the figure of the saint king, patron saint of the state or, as they are often called "national saints." Numerically they were never predominant, but their relative proportion was clearly on the rise in the last centuries of the second Christian millennium.<sup>311</sup> These political saints had a disproportional influence, and were very easily transformed in a later period into saints/heroes of the nation. We have among this illustrious royal lineage, to mention but a few, the fourth-century Roman Emperor St. Constantine the Great (venerated as an apostolic saint only by the Eastern Church), his mother empress St. Helen (venerated by both churches), the Catholic saints St. Louis, King of France in the thirteenth century; St. Stephen, the tenth–eleventh-century Hungarian King (who in 2000 was canonized also by the Orthodox Church); Edward the Confessor, the eleventh-century English King; St. Ferdinand III, the thirteenth-century King of Castille and Leon; St. Isabel (Elizabeth), the thirteenth-century Queen of Portugal; the eleventh-century King of Norway St. Olaf; the eleventh-century King and Protomartyr of Denmark Canute IV; St. Ludmilla and St. Wenceslas of Bohemia (tenth century); the Orthodox St. Vladimir, the Prince of Kiev (tenth–eleventh century) and his grandmother St. Olga; the Russian princely saints of the eleventh century Boris and Gleb; the thirteenth-century Grand Prince of Novgorod, Vladimir and Kiev, Alexander Nevskii; the Serbian Prince Lazar (fourteenth century); the Bulgarian Tsars Boris-Mikhail and Peter, and many others.<sup>312</sup> It is the

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311 In his sociological study of sainthood, Delooz puts the relative share of lay saints, of whom kings and princes were the major contingent, at around 11% for the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries; at around 18% for the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, and, finally, registers a significant rise to about 33% for the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries (Delooz, *Sociologie et canonisation*, 323–74). See also Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 263–70.

312 For numerous reference works on saints, see the literature quoted in the useful but not comprehensive Donald Attwater with Catherine Rachel John, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, London: Penguin Books, 1995 (third edition). See the important contributions of Peter Schreiner, "Aspekte der politischen Heiligenverehrung in Byzanz," 365–83; Joachim Ehlers, "Politik und Heiligenverehrung in Frankreich," 149–75; Erich Hoffmann, "Politische Heilige in Skandinavien und die Entwicklung der drei

explicit link of these saints with the domain of the political, the state, and the focus on ethnic ties and allegiances, that makes them precursors (and in some opinions pioneers) of early nation-building.<sup>313</sup>

In the meantime, to follow Miller's reconstruction of the "hero from on high," the Renaissance and the Reformation brought about a revival of and fascination with the archaic heroic type, while at the same time subverting the heroic model. During the same period, Europe's colonial expansion and conquests provided a theater for en-

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nordischen Reiche und Völker," 277–324; Aleksander Gieysztor, "Politische Heilige im hochmittelalterlichen Polen und Böhmen," 325–41; Gábor Klaniczay, "Königliche und dynastische Heiligkeit in Ungarn," 343–63; Andrzej Poppe, "Politik und Heiligenverehrung in der Kiewan Rus. Der apostelgleiche Herrscher und seine Märtyrersöhne," 403–22; Frank Kämpfer, "Herrscher, Stifter, Heiliger. Politische Heiligenkulte bei den orthodoxen Südslaven," 423–55, all in Petersohn, *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*, op. cit.; Ilona Sz. Jonas, "Saints patron et patriotisme en Hongrie," in *Histoire et société. Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby. Vol. I. Le couple, l'ami et le prochain*, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'université de Provence, 1992, 189–95; Alexander Nevskii, in particular has had an equally illustrious career as a ruler, saint and national hero, and has been the subject of an excellent recent monograph: Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Alexandr Nevskij. Heiliger–Fürst–Nationalheld. Eine Erinnerungsfigur im russischen kulturellen Gedächtnis (1263–2000)*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2004.

- 313 On the links between the veneration of saints and nation-building, see in particular the celebrated article of Kantorowicz, "Mourir pour la patrie," in Ernst Kantorowicz, *Mourir pour la patrie et autres textes*, trad. De L. Mayali et A. Schütz, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984 (English translation, Ernst Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought," *American Historical Review* 56.3 [1951], 472–92). See also Jürgen Petersohn, "Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter. Ergebnisse und Desiderate," 603–4; Klaus Herbers, "Politik and Heiligenverehrung auf der iberischen Halbinsel. Die Entwicklung des politischen Jakobus," 177–275; Alfons Zettler, "Die politischen Dimensionen des Markuskults im hochmittelalterlichen Venedig," 541–71; Jürgen Petersohn, "Kaisertum und Kultakt in der Stauferzeit," 101–47, all in Petersohn, *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*, op. cit.; Norman Ingham, "The Sovereign as Martyr, East and West," *Slavic and East European Journal* 17.1 (1973), 1–17; David B. Miller, "The Cult of Saint Sergius of Radonezh and Its Political Uses," *Slavic Review* 52.4 (Winter 1993), 681–99. See also Andrei Pippidi, *About Graves as Landmarks of National Identity*, Discussion Paper No. 13., Budapest: Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study, 1995.

acting a new heroism: “The Europeans of the Conquest could thus assume and imitate a heroic role, although they might or might not extend the comparable heroic honor to their opponents—opponents whose thought world was often more truly congruent with that ancient warrior ethos the Europeans merely thought to imitate.”<sup>314</sup> It is in this period that Michael Naumann locates the shift from sacral to secular heroism, and specifically the origins of revolutionary heroism in the baroque veneration of Herculean individualism.<sup>315</sup>

There are, however, a couple of telling details that refine what in Miller’s version looks like a seamless continuity of hero worship. Until the seventeenth century, the word “hero” was sparingly used and exclusively confined to the pagan demi-gods of antiquity, whereas a number of other notions were employed to denote exemplary individuals: “Held” in German, “personnage illustre” in French, “uomo illustre” in Italian. It seems that the semantic broadening of the category “hero” came about with the celebratory initiatives of the absolute monarchies which identified with ancient heroism.<sup>316</sup> Even more interesting is the other element introduced with the ecclesiastical reforms from the late sixteenth century onward, and finalized in 1742 with the decrees of Pope Benedict XIV on the rules of canonization and beatification. As Daniel Fabre stipulates, the heroes with a cult, the saints, are no longer determined through tradition—local, general or corporate—but by means of a minutely detailed and regulated process. Heroic virtues are stipulated by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and heroism is no longer imposed as a whole, but is decomposed in series of virtues that are scrutinized by means of judicial rationality, and “heroic charisma enters the era of suspicion.”<sup>317</sup>

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314 Ibid., 17.

315 Michael Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus. Vom sakralen zum revolutionären Heldentum*, Königstein/Ts., Athenäum, 1984, ix–x.

316 Daniel Fabre, “L’atelier des héros,” in Centlivres, Fabre et Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, 236–7. On the etymology and use of the concept, see also Czarnowski, *Le culte des héros et ses conditions sociales*, 2–4; S. M. Botteri, “Per un discorso sull’eroe moderno. Quattro schede e una premessa,” in Cesare Mozzarelli, ed., *L’eroe. Carriera e metamorfosi nel mondo moderno*, special issue of *Cheiron, materiali e strumenti di aggiornamento storiografico* III, No. 6. Milan, 1986, 9.

317 Fabre, “L’atelier des héros,” 238.

The eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century introduced additional shifts and reappraisals of the heroic image that still shape today's perceptions. The romantic enterprise first recovered a host of "authentic" folk heroes, and encouraged the exalted group identity located in the nation; it next underwrote the romantic political vision of the powerful and passionate individual, the voluntaristic leader, the glorious sculptor of human destinies, the Great Man of history. Comparative anthropology allowed for "the construction of patterns of thought and action defining the hero as a cross-cultural, cross-societal, eternally human phenomenon."<sup>318</sup> For our purposes, Miller's attention to a region "where imagination and history flowed together" is of particular importance. He draws the attention to the nineteenth-century struggle for Greek independence that was nourished, at least in the Philhellenic project, by the prevailing view of the archaic heroic spirit. At the same time, there was the parallel and locally more widespread popular heroic tradition of the Balkan version of Eric Hobsbawm's social bandit: the Greek *klepht*, the Bulgarian *haidut*, the Serbian *haiduk*. Miller rightly compares these often semi-criminal types generated from social injustices and confrontations, but reinterpreted and heroicized in the popular imagination, with analogous figures in Central and South American rebellions against colonial Spain.<sup>319</sup>

Again, he precludes the possibility of going into a very fertile realm of inquiry by excluding the figure of the revolutionary hero, from the heroes of the national revolution to the heroes of the social revolution. Admitting the existence of a special aspect of the hero in relation to the idea of revolution—from the several French revolutions to the practice of the Marxist intellectual legacy—he sidetracks this field of analysis with the facile argument that "in theory, we should not be looking for heroes there."<sup>320</sup> In a rather mechanistic and abrupt fashion, Miller posits that the national hero is the romantic love child of

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318 Miller, *The Epic Hero*, 19.

319 *Ibid.*, 22–3.

320 *Ibid.*, 24. Miller's omission could be partly explained by his focus on the epic literary genre where the saint's *vita*, for example, probably does not fit that well. On the other hand, the revolutionary tradition has provided a rich panoply of heroes that can be readily inserted in the epic tradition. Besides, Miller's first chapter's claim is more than a simple overview of the epic hero: it seeks to ascertain the history and aetiology of the hero in general.

nineteenth-century nationalism fertilized by the generic heroic cult: “The European nineteenth century saw the simultaneous rise and fluorescence, if by no means the original invention, of a cult of heroism and of the wider notion of a reborn ‘people’ or nation; when these two combine, we suddenly have the image of the national hero, in which various and even conflicting currents may run.”<sup>321</sup> This makes a neat theory, but neatness is the least validating of arguments. As far as the theoretical framing of the Levski phenomenon goes, Miller’s two omissions—saints and revolutionary heroes—provide the most stable vectors for the understanding of Levski’s heroicization.

These omissions are all the more strange, since there is a remarkably sophisticated literature on the link between heroes’ and saints’ worship, as shown above, as well as on the revolutionary hero. Michael Naumann in particular has convincingly argued that the revolutionary hero is the central literary and visual *topos* of the modern political myth: “He is in a mythical abstraction the real revolutionary.”<sup>322</sup> Naumann follows up the emergence of the modern revolutionary hero in the course of a structural evolution from sacral to secular heroism. What remains the common basis for heroism at every age and stage is, according to him, the psychological impulse for heroic existence, the impulse for self-deification. The qualitatively new feature that he sees in modern heroism is the shift of the justification for political violence from the archaic-mythological past or precedent (for example, the *theogony*) to the *holy future*.<sup>323</sup>

This distinction is evocative but it is not much different from the apocalyptic, sotirollogical and millenarian visions of the Second Coming. This is also the place where one can easily see the fusion between the sacrifice of saints and modern heroes, revolutionary in general, and national in particular. This is the vision of the cherished and holy future. Consciously or subconsciously, the *Imitatio Christi* is without any doubt one of the principal inspirations for many a heroic gesture of the modern hero.<sup>324</sup> It is certainly traceable, as we could see, in

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321 Ibid., 372.

322 Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus*, ix.

323 Ibid., ix–x, 95–6.

324 Jean-Pierre Albert, “Du martyr à la star. Les métamorphoses des héros nationaux,” in Centlivres, Fabre and Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, 21; Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus*, 87.

the history of the Levski cult, both in the immediate perception and representation and, judging from the scarce evidence, while not explicit, also in the self-perception and motivation of the hero.

There is a strange and unimaginative insistence, in a great part of the literature, on a rupture in the sacred character of the hero with the advent of modernity: "In modern times, the hero has become desacralized... No longer an object of cult worship, he is simply a historical man of mettle, such as George Washington, Horatio Nelson, George Armstrong Custer, Simon Bolivar, Ho Chi Minh, and the like."<sup>325</sup> This, certainly, stems from a very narrow understanding of the sacred as tantamount to organized religion. Stephen Wilson rightly calls this a very narrow view of sanctity, and points in the direction of secular martyrs, from the ones of the French Revolution to Che Guevara.<sup>326</sup> Philosophers have been aware of the ambiguity of the secular, and Richard Day formulates aptly the paradox: "If men found that, because there was nothing to die for, life was not worth living, they might choose to die for the continued reign of secularism. That would tend to make it *sacer*. Very likely it would appear sacred in the eyes of those willing to die for it."<sup>327</sup> He documents well not only "the similarity of Christianity to the whole enterprise of the rational ordering of interest, which is the ideal of modern secularism" but also the similarity between heroic paganism and Christianity.<sup>328</sup>

Carlyle can be excused for having exclaimed that "the atheistic logic runs off from [the hero] like water," since he was born too early to witness the canonization of atheistic revolutionary figures in the twentieth century.<sup>329</sup> No man, however, not even a great man who appreciates great men, should be excused for saying "never" in a grandiloquent manner. When Carlyle pompously pronounced that with the second hypostasis of heroes—the hero as prophet—his divinity had vanished forever, that "in the history of the world there will not again be any man, never so great, whom his fellowmen will take for god"<sup>330</sup> he obviously consciously (and cautiously) overlooked Jesus Christ. But

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325 Gaster, "Heroes" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 304.

326 Wilson, "Introduction," in Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults*, 6.

327 Richard W. Day, *Heroic Death: A Study from a Christian Point of View*, Unpublished dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 1954, 344.

328 *Ibid.*, 511.

329 Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 205.

330 *Ibid.*, 37.

he could not foresee that a century and a half later an atheistic writer in an overwhelmingly atheistic country would pronounce that “Levski is the Bulgarians’ God.”<sup>331</sup>

Carlton Hayes was wise and convincing when he insisted that only approaching nationalism as religion can we take account of its enormous emotive power, of the missionary zeal of its apostles, and the unparalleled readiness to sacrifice one’s life. He outlined its commonalities with other great religious systems of the past, primarily with Christianity, as nationalism first appeared among peoples that were traditionally Christian and it would be thus naturally influenced by its symbolism. While he was careful to emphasize that nationalism as religion was a reaction against the universalism of early historic Christianity, the two main similarities he saw were that the modern nation state, like the medieval church, had an ideal and a mission, the mission of salvation and the ideal of immortality, the eternal nation.<sup>332</sup>

If I am going back to Hayes, despite the questionable work following in his footsteps that equated nationalism with religion in order to stress its irrationality and treat it as false consciousness, it is because first, he was not guilty of the reductionism of his epigones and secondly, his approach allowed him best to highlight the enormous emotive power of nationalism. I stress emphatically that this “return” in no

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331 Nikolai Khaitov in *Standart*, February 18, 2001. It is difficult to put exact numbers behind the religiosity of Bulgarians, but already in the nineteenth century, and especially during the interwar period there were constant complaints on the part of the church authorities that the intelligentsia was too secularized and the population indifferent to or not properly Christianized. A sociological study conducted by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1962 showed that 35.51% of Bulgarians (27.7% Orthodox, 6.5% Muslim, the rest Catholic, Armenians, and Jews) defined themselves as religious, and among these only 5.6% said they were convinced believers. Several later surveys during the 1970s and 1980s dropped this percentage to 25. While I am not aware of academic surveys during the post-communist period, polls published in the newspapers suggest that the majority of the Bulgarian population defines itself as non-believers. The relative revival of religious life after 1989 is political, ritual and “demonstrative” rather than a real resurrection of religious feeling (Boncho Stanoev, *Pravoslaviето v Bilgariia*, Sofia: Izdatelska kishta “Pravoslavie,” 1992, 140–2, 155–7).

332 Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1966 (first edition 1954), especially 93–125. See also his *Nationalism: A Religion*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960, 164 ff.

way signals a renewed equivalence between nationalism and religion. The functionalist-evolutionist approach that linked the rise of nationalism in a causal way to secularization, and saw nationalism as a substitute for religion in modernity, has been convincingly criticized. Liah Greenfeld recognizes that the temptation to treat nationalism as religion stems from the fact that as a form of consciousness it sacralizes the secular, but she warns: "The fact that nationalism replaced religion as the order-creating system... implies nothing at all about the historical connection between them and lends no justification to the kind of sociological teleology that is the essence of such reasoning."<sup>333</sup> Moreover, the correlation between the rise of nationalism and religious decline has been questioned. Quite to the contrary, a number of scholars have highlighted the roots of nationalism in periods of religious fervor.<sup>334</sup> Recent studies demonstrate how variously interrelated the nation and religion are, and how this dynamic relationship "cannot be reduced to linear, evolutionist or simplistic functionalist terms, but is instead contingent on the form of the state."<sup>335</sup>

Quite apart from considerations of primacy, causality and correlation, the stress here is on the enormous emotional force of nationalism that is reminiscent only of the power of religion. Few, if any, contest this. As Josep Llobera, a sociologist, puts it, "the nation, as a culturally defined community, is the highest symbolic value of modernity; it has been endowed with a quasi-sacred character equaled only by religion."<sup>336</sup> Benedict Anderson, even as he claimed that nationalism was born both out of and against religious systems, likewise insisted that as a phenomenon it belongs more to "kinship" and "religion"

333 Liah Greenfeld, "Is Nationalism the Modern Religion?," *Critical Review* 10.2 (1996), 176.

334 Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993), 211–39; Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation: Origins of Nationalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

335 Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, 218. See also Martin Schulze Wessel, ed., *Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa. Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa*, No. 27. Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2006.

336 Josep R. Llobera, *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe*, Oxford: Berg, 1994, ix.

rather than to “liberalism” or “fascism.”<sup>337</sup> And Katherine Verdery, stepping on a number of previous anthropologists—Edmund Leach, David Schneider, Meyer Fortes, and Benedict Anderson—treats national identities as part of a larger category of social relations, kinship: “Nationalism is thus a kind of ancestor worship, a system of patrilineal kinship, in which national heroes occupy the place of clan elders in defining a nation as a noble lineage.”<sup>338</sup>

In what may, at first glance, look like a leap of imagination, one can compare the rise and function of holy men in Late Antiquity with the rise and function of national heroes in Late Modernity. In the description of Han Drijvers, the holy men in Syrian towns and villages were following the “ideal of *Imitatio Christi* which strives for the transcendence of human existence by controlling the most fragile part of it, the body.”<sup>339</sup> Nationalism’s heroes strove for the transcendence of human existence, which they saw in achieving the national ideal by not only controlling and pledging their own bodies but by controlling and protecting the cherished body politic—the *natio*.

The same can be said of the revolutionary hero: “imitatio heroica, readiness for sacrifice, courage, moral outrage and enthusiasm are the affective characteristics of the revolutionary.”<sup>340</sup> The revolution itself is a heroic enterprise whose aim is, in the words of Kropotkin, “to break violently the thread of history.”<sup>341</sup> For Naumann, revolutionary heroism is a phenomenon that appears at the end of the structural transformation of sacral into secular heroism but precisely because of the dialectical process in which it is involved, one can trace the original religious undertones. Thus, “the fantastic idea of the exemplary heroic death as revolutionary sacrifice for the regeneration of the whole of humanity in line with the revolutionary understanding of the great nineteenth-century philosophers of history, becomes the residue of initiation rites.”<sup>342</sup> Naumann ingeniously and convincingly argues that the interpretation of the Paris Commune in the theoretical revolutionary tradition may

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337 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983, 5.

338 Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 41.

339 Han J. W. Drijvers, “Hellenistic and Oriental Origins,” in Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, 33.

340 Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus*, 42.

341 Cited in Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus*, 42.

342 Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus*, 52.

provide a turning point in the history of revolutionary heroism itself. Where for Marx, the workers of 1871 were heroes because they became the precursors of a new society through their sacrifice, fulfilling the laws and direction of history, for Lenin their heroism consisted in trying to fulfill Marx's teaching and prophecy.<sup>343</sup> We have a new round from the sacral to the secular and again to the quasi-religious.

Albert Mathiez and after him Albert Soboul have demonstrated the specifically religious nature of the revolutionary cults of the French Revolution: "The cult of the 'patriot saints' illustrates one aspect of the transition from the Catholic religion to the revolutionary cults: it brings together the old religious context and new political elements which are fitted in top traditional forms of worship."<sup>344</sup> And Reinhart Koselleck, writing about the political death cult, adds that irrespective of whether it occurs on a polytheist, monotheist, deist, pantheist or atheist foundation, the violent death always contains a self-constituting religious element for the community.<sup>345</sup> We have to add here the whole gallery of totalitarian heroes, both on the left and on the right.<sup>346</sup>

343 Naumann, *Strukturwandel des Heroismus*, 50–1.

344 Albert Soboul, "Religious feeling and popular cults during the French Revolution: 'patriot saint' and martyrs for liberty," in Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults*, 220. Albert Mathiez. *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires (1789–92)*, Paris, 1904.

345 Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in Reinhart Koselleck, Michale Jeismann, eds., *Der politische Totenkult: Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994, 9.

346 Daniel Fabre, "L'atelier des héros," in Centlivres, Fabre and Zonabend, *La fabrique des héros*, 300–18; Georges Dumézil, *Les dieux des Germains*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1938; Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth." Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975; Eric Michaud, *Culture of Art in Nazi Germany*, transl. Janet Lloyd, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004; Luisa Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario, storia di una biografia, 1915–1939*, Bari: Laterza, 1991; Benno Ennker, *Die Anfänge des Leninkults in der Sowjetunion*, Cologne: Böhlau, 1997; D. Khapaeva and N. Kopoosov, "Le demi-dieux de la mythologie soviétique. Étude sur les représentations collectives de l'histoire," *Annales: Économie, sociétés, civilisations* 4–5, July–October 1992), 963–87; Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic dictatorship, and Beyond*, transl. Charles Rougle, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992; Boris Groys, Max Hollein, eds., *Traumfabrik Kommunismus: die visuelle Kultur der Stalinzeit*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz;

There is also askesis as a central common attribute of both medieval sainthood and revolutionary heroism. In her study of the ascetic figure in Russian literature, Marcia Morris draws a direct line between the religious strain of apocalypticism and revolutionary apocalypticism, whose adherents also adopted askesis as a way of life.<sup>347</sup> Both Michael Walzer and Barrington Moore have drawn general attention to the psychological and sociological links of asceticism and revolution.<sup>348</sup> In a detailed historical study of the ideology of political activists in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, Dave Pretty has compellingly demonstrated that “the heroic ascetic saint was the role in the Russian cultural vocabulary that best fit the demands of a revolutionary situation.”<sup>349</sup> Moreover, by pointing out the great number of future Bolsheviks who conceded a youthful fascination with sainthood, he concludes that “worldviews anchored in schismatic religion facilitated conversion to social democratic activism and eased adaptation to underground and conspiratorial work.”<sup>350</sup>

Lawrence Cunningham, in analyzing modern saintliness, draws attention to the biblical imagery and language of sanctity with which modern novels are replete. Exploring specifically the theme of “human transcendence for the greater good of humanity in a culture in which the traditional forms and language of religious faith do not seem capable of bearing up under the weight either of religious doubt or the might of powerful anti-religious political movements of both Left and Right,” he accepts the way the literary critic Theodore Ziolkowski dubbed these consumed, saintly figures of twentieth-century culture: “Comrade Jesus” figures.<sup>351</sup>

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Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2003; Geremie Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*, Arwonk, NJ: M. E. Sharpe, 1996.

347 Marcia A. Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993, 23.

348 Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, New York: Atheneum, 1965; Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, White Plains: M. E. Sharpe, 1978.

349 Dave Pretty, “The Saints of the Revolution: Political Activists in 1890s Ivanovo-Voznesensk and the Path of Most Resistance,” *Slavic Review* 54.2 (Summer 1995), 296.

350 *Ibid.*, 291, 303.

351 Theodore Ziolkowski, *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972, cited in Lawrence S. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 109.

There is another circumstance in which modern sanctity and modern heroism parallel each other. While they are still a minority and will remain a minority, an increasing number of saints and heroes of more modest or even humble origins begin to enter the respective pantheons, and this has to do obviously with the processes of democratization and mass politics in the past couple of centuries.<sup>352</sup> Sociological studies on sainthood show that, with the exception of the very first centuries when a number of saints were lowly-born, the overwhelming majority of saints in the Western Church (of whom data has been assembled) came from aristocratic or upper class origins.<sup>353</sup> The Eastern Church, where similar quantitative synthetic studies do not exist, still seems to follow the same pattern. Angeliki Laiou-Thomakides comments on the “surprising number of saints [that] come from highly placed families.”<sup>354</sup> The “low level” saint in early Byzantium, described

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352 The personal role of Pope John Paul II ought to be emphasized here. He has beatified and canonized more saints during his tenure than all popes combined since the Catholic Reformation of the sixteenth century—around 900—and was instrumental in simplifying the process, for example reducing the miracles for canonization from four to two, and doing away with the *advocatus diaboli* with the issuing of an apostolic constitution, the *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* in 1983 (Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 120–1).

353 Wilson, “Introduction,” in Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults*, 37 stresses that “hagiographers placed great emphasis on this, if only by pointing out to their subject’s renunciation of the privileges of high status.” See also Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 279–84. The most comprehensive study to date belongs to Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie et canonisation*. Op. cit. Of the some 8,000 registered saints in several studies, the social origins of 5,000 are unknown, but of the rest, 78% belong to the upper classes, 17% to the middle classes, and 5% to the lower class (419). This tripartite division is social, rather than economic, with the upper class covering the aristocracy, the middle class the liberal professions, and the lower class the representatives of manual labor, but an attempt to define saints in terms of rich, middle or poor circumstances, shows an even more skewed representation (413–7). Equally overwhelming is the number of ecclesiastic saints, as against a fairly low representation of seculars.

354 Angeliki Laiou-Thomakides, “Saints and Society in the Late Byzantine Empire,” in Angeliki Laiou-Thomakides, ed., *Charanis Studies. Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980, 87. See also Rosemary Morris, “The Political Saint in Byzantium in the tenth and eleventh centuries,” in Petersohn, *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*, 392 ff.

so well by Robert Browning as “the counter-hero of the dispossessed and of those to whom the high urban culture of Late Antiquity had nothing to offer” is clearly the exception rather than the rule.<sup>355</sup>

The *cause célèbre* in this respect is the history of Joan of Arc who was convicted and burnt at the stake for heresy in 1431. This was understood from the outset as a political process, and by 1456 a special commission was appointed by Pope Callistus III, rehabilitating the memory of the Maid of Orléans. Yet, the trial that condemned her has to be understood first and foremost as “the first process undertaken by the ‘great minds’ from the universities in order to prevent a popular cult from being born and developing. Sure that they knew what true Christianity was, the judges of Rouen aimed to brand with the mark of Satan the religion of Joan of Arc. The Fairy Tree, the fountain and the voices of SS Catherine and Margaret, the marks of veneration which had surrounded the Maid in the hour of her success, were all held against her as a result, essentially, of the same rejection: that of a sainthood lived and recognized by simple people.”<sup>356</sup> The greatest irony is that Joan of Arc was finally canonized only in 1920, after almost five centuries in which she was an unofficial saint of the nation but not an official saint of the church. This happened during the high age of nationalism with all the cultural capital it was conferring on its chosen representatives, and the low age of religion. The parallel to the Levski case needs no comment.

It is within this modestly growing egalitarian framework that Levski finds a particularly welcome fit. There is, of course, the circumstance that he is the hero of a structurally relatively egalitarian soci-

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355 Robert Browning, “The ‘Low Level’ Saint’s Life in the Early Byzantine World,” in Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, 127. “Low level” saints for Browning are those saints whose activity was largely among humble people, who had few connections with persons of power and influence, and who were, as a rule, not members of the hierarchy of the Church. None were connected to Constantinople but belonged to the provincial, and largely to the rural, environment.

356 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 539. The literature on Joan of Arc is enormous. For a comprehensive synthesis, see Michel Winock, “Joan of Arc,” in Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence B. Kritzman, transl. Arthur Goldhammer, Vol. 3, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 433–80. See also Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood, *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

ety but it is also the growing general intellectual acceptance of, and sometimes preference for, heroes of humble origins that is at play; in a word, the “democratization” of hero-worship. As we already saw from Part II, Levski’s *vita* conforms (in a tongue-in-cheek comparison) to the main incidents in the (ancient) hero pattern.<sup>357</sup> His accordance with the Christian saint, especially as a martyr, but also, in many ways, as an ascetic, as well as increasingly as intercessor, is quite amazing. It was demonstrated also that his perception followed closely the Christological ideal. And there is no question of Levski as an archetypal revolutionary hero. We are dealing with a fairly typical hero, in line with numerous others all over the world. He is closer typologically to some heroes than to others, but he belongs to a distinctive universal human genus—the heroic one—and specifically to one of its sub-categories: national revolutionary heroes. In the pantheon of this group, he would probably feel most comfortable in the company of Giuseppe Garibaldi, José Martí and Abraham Lincoln, alongside his Bulgarian friends.<sup>358</sup>

So, what does the Levski story tell us in the end? As already said, he is a very attractive and interesting, but not necessarily extraordinary, figure in the general human heroic pantheon. One can say, paraphrasing Campbell, that Levski is one in the gallery of “the hero with a thousand faces.”<sup>359</sup> It is not so much what his story tells us, as how we

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357 The only author I have encountered who flatly (and I think prematurely) discounts the link between national heroes and their ancient counterparts, is Linas Eriksonas in his study on Scottish national heroes, “The National Hero: A Scottish Contribution,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 30.1–2 (2003), 84.

358 See, in particular Ottmar Ette, *José Martí. Apostle-Dichter-Revolutionär. Eine Geschichte seiner Rezeption*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991 (also Spanish translation *José Martí. Apóstol, poeta, revolucionario: una historia de sua recepción*, México: Universidad nacional autónoma de México, 1995); Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; Gabor Boritt, ed., *Lincoln Enigma: The Challenging Faces of an American Icon*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; Romano Ugolini, *Garibaldi: genesi di un mito*, Roma: Edizioni dell’Ateneo; Max Gallo, *Garibaldi: la force d’un destin*, Paris: Fayard, 1982; Peter de Polnay, *Garibaldi: the Legend and the Man*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976.

359 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949.

choose to tell his story. Let me end with another “hero of our times” whose life and veneration of Levski encapsulates all the reincarnations of our historical hero.

Dimitîr Chatalbashev is a retired officer from the Bulgarian People’s Army in his mid-fifties from the southern Bulgarian town of Smolian, high up in the Rhodope Mountains. He retired after an incident during a military exercise when a shell hit him in the head, and he had to undergo several severe operations. Honest, boisterous, outspoken, a natural contrarian, he was, by all accounts, tremendously popular as a military leader. His grandfather, he says, had been opposed to the forceful cooperation of the land by the communists in the 1950s, but this did not get in the way of his career in the army. He contrasts this with what he sees as the present absolute party cliquishness, corruption and lawlessness. His memories of his tenure as an officer in one of the most sensitive border regions shed interesting light on episodes from Cold War history. He remembers how, during the Zhivkov era, huge loads of lamb meat were being exported through the checkpoint under his control. They were sold to Arab merchants, and the latter told him that the meat would go directly to the kitchens of the Sixth American Fleet in the Mediterranean, something that was clearly well known to his superiors. He also had to supervise the export of automatic rifles to Arab countries. The usual practice would be that Soviet made automatic rifles would be used in the Bulgarian army for a year or so. Then, they would be expedited to the military plant near Karlovo (Levski’s birth town), where they would be newly oxidized. Their label *Sdelano v SSSR* (Made in the USSR) would be changed to *Napraveno v Bilgariia* (Made in Bulgaria), and then they would be off to their new destinations.

After 1989, Dimitîr (Mitko) or Chatala, as he is fondly known among friends, was at first happy with the prospect of economic and democratic changes. With the economic stagnation setting in, however, and concerned about his children (students at the time), he and his wife Annie thought of leaving the country but in the end got cold feet. Smolian was a town of about 60,000–70,000 inhabitants during the socialist period which nowadays has dwindled to about 25,000. It used to be a mixed town of Christian and Muslim Bulgarians (*Pomaks*) with practically no Turks. The ratio between the two groups was 50:50,

but now with so many of the Bulgarians leaving for other places in the country and abroad, the percentage of the Pomaks has risen to perhaps 70%. The employment situation is pretty desperate like in most provincial Bulgarian towns.

In the past five years, Chatala decided to transform himself into an entrepreneur. Curious and widely read, he had heard that cholesterol-conscious Europeans tended to avoid pork and veal, and preferred organic farming. He had also found out that among poultry, the bird with the best nutritional characteristics was the ostrich. Its meat is practically cholesterol-free, it is low-calorie and has a high protein content. An ostrich weighs up to 120 kilograms at the age of one year, and it yields up to 45 kilograms of meat. The female lays 60 to 80 eggs annually, and young ones hatch and service from 30 to 50 of these.

“Our chance for Europe are the feathered ones,” Chatala says, believing that pig-breeding or cow-breeding farms have no chance to withstand competition from the European Union, once the country enters the alliance. He accordingly transformed the fifty family decares (a little over one acre), which are on hills above Smolian near the village of Chokmanovo, into an ostrich farm sometime in 2000. He and his wife are now caring for about 15 adult ostriches (male and female) utilized exclusively for breeding purposes. He leaves them to roam freely on the hills during the day, and at night takes the “herd” to its “stable.” The ostriches are extremely territorial and one doesn’t need dogs to guard the property. The group of fierce male ostriches—Kiro, Mikhal, Iliia, Boniu, Misho—can scare any trespasser away.

Chatala was trying to inspire a lot of the local farmers to start breeding ostriches but by now he has despaired of the lack of entrepreneurship. His hope to be able to export meat for the big restaurant chains in Europe have been dimmed, because he alone and the few other farms in Bulgaria cannot meet the huge demands for regular supply. The local Bulgarian market, on the other hand, is not yet interested in this product. Besides, where one adult ostrich cost around \$1,200 a few years ago, now (i.e. in 2005 during our visit) it brings no more than 1,000 lev (a little more than \$600 at the time). The Chatalbashev farm is, accordingly, specializing exclusively in ostrich breeding. There is a small incubator that Chatala and his son Nikolai have built themselves in the family house in Smolian. Once the young

ones hatch, they are taken to the farm in the hills, and when they grow a little, they are sold. Chatala says he sells a young one every three months for around \$200.

In the summer of 2005, the Chatalbashev farm became the place for a pilot project. Ten young unemployed people were to be sent to the farm for two months to help out with the daily work, and learn the art of ostrich-breeding. The project is financed by the social ministry according to the European PHARE program for enhancing local communities. The unemployed receive a little over the minimal wage, and are supposed to help clean up a road (rather a mountain track) from Smolian to the farm. In an interview Chatala gave to the newspaper *Trud* in June, 2005, he said that his greatest satisfaction would be to pass his knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit to the young people.<sup>360</sup>

Privately, he voices his skepticism. The money, ostensibly supposed to promote business initiatives, is usually funneled into supporting the administrative machine. The wages paid to the unemployed are so small that they have no incentive to work. Privately, I am also wondering what exactly Chatala is going to teach these young people. He doesn't hide his opinions on practically anything, politics in particular. When we visited and stayed with him for a few days in June, 2005, the first thing I noticed on the wall of his modest one-room hut up in the mountain was a portrait of Levski. "Listen" he told me, "let's organize a clandestine National Movement Vasil Levski (*Natsionalno dvizhenie Vasil Levski—NSVL*)." This was, of course, a spoof on the then still reigning National Movement Simeon the Second (*Natsionalno dvizhenie Simeon Vtori—NSVD*), the party of the former king and (already former) Prime Minister Simeon Saksokoburgkotski. Our movement, Chatala said, would be strictly conspiratorial, and its main ethos would be "Death to the traitors." We discussed some of the details of its political program over dinner, which consisted of a wonderfully rich omelet prepared for eight people from one single ostrich egg that had to

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360 Petia Gaidarova, "S shtrausi kîm Evrosiiuza," *Trud*, June 20, 2005, 22–4. For an early information of his activities, see *Maritsa Dnes* 313, No. 3632, November 13, 2002 ([http://www.digsys.bg/bgnews/show\\_story.html?issue=287907904&media=3669536&class=238670336&story=287909280](http://www.digsys.bg/bgnews/show_story.html?issue=287907904&media=3669536&class=238670336&story=287909280)), and about one of his followers (<http://journey.bg/news/?&ntype=1&year=2004&news=4544>).

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be broken with a drilling machine. The conspiracy is on hold for the moment, but in December, 2005, when we spoke to Chatala on the phone from the United States, he told me he had just commissioned a large woodcarving of Levski, and intends to venerate it with a perpetually burning candle like an icon.



# Conclusion

This book has been an argument for the relevance of microhistory, an attempt to demonstrate the significance of local knowledge in approaching the big issues of the profession and of life in general. It is taken for granted that a narrative, written in a few big languages and using examples of a few big countries, has universal connotations. Other examples in other languages (even large languages as Mandarin, Arabic or Hindi) are, at most, allowed to be footnotes in this universal sweep. It is this book's attempt to demonstrate the general meaning and worth of examples from very small places, even as the language of expression cannot afford challenging the rule of the big.

From this general argument, a number of more specific conclusions may be drawn. Most of these have been made in the course of the analysis, and they are just briefly enumerated here. It is one of this book's larger ambitions to question the posited discontinuities that have dominated Eastern European historiography—especially the bracketing of the communist period—and demonstrate the powerful continuities over the *longue durée*. This was attempted by following the practices and understandings of nationalism during different political regimes, from the newly acquired political independence in the late nineteenth century to the post-communist adjustments in the early twenty first century. Insofar as the study focuses on symbols, its aim was to highlight the role of cultural processes and artifacts in the formation of national identity and contribute to a “poetic” understanding of power.

The unusual concentration on one heroic figure—a distinctly Bulgarian particularity—allowed for the diachronic look at the workings of cultural nationalism focused on the same historical personality and its historical peregrinations. The fact that Levski's figure was embroiled in two public scandals—the reburial controversy during the communist period, and his canonization during the post-communist period—permitted to fashion a distinct narrative and to experiment with the style

of writing by providing multiple inter-texts, whence the metaphorical use of “archive” in the title.

It also allowed to contribute to the debate about the existence and character of civil society and the public sphere under communism, and to challenge deeply ingrained periodizations and the notions of rupture. The detailed look at the workings of academia in 1980s Bulgaria is not simply a “thick description” of what was happening in one corner behind the Iron Curtain. It is in general about the sites of creation and consumption of historical knowledge, an illustration of the great fight over “who owns history” that is relevant (and pressing) anywhere in the world. Similarly, the canonization of Levski is not only an idiosyncratic glimpse into an exotic space of post-communist Eastern Europe, but provides a theoretical opening to the workings of and relationship between nationalism and religion in general, and during the present regime of globalization in particular. Establishing the link between ancient hero worship and medieval sainthood, and between medieval saints and national heroes, places Levski within a context that compares him to other cases of national heroes and allows him to “rest” naturally not only within his narrow Bulgarian pantheon but, more broadly, within the international “family” of national heroes or the genus of human heroes at large.

Situating Levski’s case within the literature on heroism and hero worship, and tracing the genealogy of his worship, allowed to reconstruct in detail how heroes are made, the main receptacles of their cult, the chief mechanisms of transmission, and why and how they become such hot commodities of cultural capital. Throughout, the common waters that provide the space and continuity where all these different ideas are floating, is the sea of nationalism, understood in its most general meaning as a dominant organizational principle and ideology in the past few centuries. Still, what does the Bulgarian case contribute typologically, aside from its (undoubted) narrative value and deepening the knowledge about a region and one of its lesser known aspects?

It was already suggested that Levski is in many ways a typical figure in the general human heroic pantheon, one in Campbell’s gallery of “the hero with a thousand faces.” Of course, for many Bulgarians he stands out as the purest and holiest but in this he is typical of all national heroes. Even his “bones of contention” are not unique. Although it was shown that his bones are quite distinct from the parade of dead

bodies in post-socialist Eastern Europe, obsession with bones and dead bodies is far from an East European particularity.<sup>1</sup> One does not need to go back to the Middle Ages to count the amount of West European saints' bones, additional body parts, pieces of the Holy Cross, and other holy paraphernalia. In 2001, two groups pledged a total of \$5 million on an extensive search for the aircraft of Amelia Earhart who disappeared on July 2, 1937. President Roosevelt had authorized \$4 million for her search in 1937. Already in the late 1930s, there had been rumors of an aircraft wreckage on the island of Nikumaroro, 2,000 miles southwest of Hawaii. In 1941 bones from an exhumed grave said to be her remains were taken to Fiji. A local doctor pronounced them to be those of a European male. The bones were since lost but experts, studying the doctor's notes, insist that they could have been the remains of a woman.<sup>2</sup> In 1961, it was thought that Earhart's and Noonan's bones had been found on Saipan but it turned out to be bones of a native islander. Now, human folly takes different shapes. It may look funny to the world that a number of people (though decidedly a small number) in a small nation, may be obsessed with the bones of someone revered as the national hero of this small nation. But this costs the world decidedly less than the obsession of (an also decidedly small number of) Americans with their heroine.

American interest in bones is not solely nationalistic. Mozart's remains that, as is well known, were buried in an unmarked grave in St. Marx cemetery in Vienna, have taxed the imagination of several generations. In 2005, the University of Innsbruck together with the U.S. Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab in Rockville, Maryland, tested a skull from an Austrian museum, allegedly Mozart's, by using samples from the marked graves of his grandmother and niece. The results were

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1 When giving talks on the Levski theme, I have been asked (usually by political scientists in American universities) whether one can come up with a typology of a specific East European obsession with bones. The recent controversy over Che's remains might tempt these intrepid system builders to expand the generalization to the communist world. For three decades Che Guevara was believed to have been cremated and his dust dispersed after he was murdered by the Bolivian army. Then, in 1997, his bones were "discovered" and they are at present in a mausoleum in Cuba. However, doubt has been shed on their authenticity by the Mexican journal *Letras libres* (*Sega X*, No. 40 (2635), February 17–8, 2007, 8; *Standart*, February 17, 2007, 39).

2 *The International Herald Tribune*, August 7, 2001, 3.

inconclusive.<sup>3</sup> Conclusive or not, this is an excellent alternative way to use the sophisticated facilities of the American armed forces.

Money can afford even quirkier interests than bones. Among the barrage of news getting daily (and nightly) into the newsroom of *The New York Times*, the paper found it worthy to single out one (even if with the proper dosage of tongue-in-cheek) for its op-ed section on May 17, 2007. It concerned the death in Englewood, New Jersey, of John K. Lattimer, a urologist and retired Columbia University professor and collector of military relics, who was the owner of Napoleon's penis. Before him, the relic was owned by the Philadelphia bookseller and collector A. S. W. Rosenbach who had it on display at the Museum of French Art in New York.<sup>4</sup> And recently *The New York Times* (April 5, 2007) reported that the rib bone supposedly found at the site where Joan of Arc had been burnt at the stake in 1431, and revered as her relic after she was beatified in 1909 and canonized in 1920, turned out to be a fake, coming from an Egyptian mummy dated between the seventh and third centuries B.C.

Still, while there is nothing exceptional about the veneration of Levski—it is typical for any nationalism—there is something unprecedented in his solitary elevation. The preceding analysis demonstrated that his exclusive march to the top was neither an ontological given, nor a foregone conclusion. Instead, it was the result of a gradual historical process that secured his place at the pinnacle of the Bulgarian heroic pantheon only after the First World War, and continues to the present day. What accounts for this unique configuration? Is there something peculiarly Bulgarian about it? It is here that I would like to finally elaborate on the notion of weak nationalism, something promised already in the introduction. It is a melodic suggestion, not a developed musical phrase, as the overall narrative has not been conceived as a four-part piece.

“Weak nationalism” is a syntagm that is part and parcel of the vocabulary of any but especially of strong nationalists. It is usually an accusation or lament for insufficient patriotic feeling, absence of readiness for self-sacrifice or even for banal material sacrifice. As we saw in the preceding text, the absence or weakness of a strong national feeling

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3 Online *Wikipedia*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

4 Judith Pascoe, “Collect-Me-Nots,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2007 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/17/opinion/17pascoe.html>).

among the Bulgarians was lamented by writers, scholars, and politicians alike, at different moments of Bulgaria's national development in the past two centuries. Yet, this is a trivial lament: it is typical of any nationalism, at some time or other, in every corner of the earth. The way I would like to approach it here is from a different angle, as an analytical category, complementing the notion of strong, exclusive or messianic nationalism, and thus qualifying the category nationalism in general.

Arguably, weak nationalism is a category more recognizable in a common sense approach than in a strictly analytical and quantifiable one, but I would like to suggest that it can be defined and even measured by the mobilizing ability of an extreme nationalist message in the public sphere. It has received relatively little attention as, naturally, most research concentrates on the cases of powerful and persistent nationalisms, especially the mission of "chosen peoples." It is these "strong" cases that have determined and defined the study of nationalism.<sup>5</sup> The general literature on nationalism has rightly emphasized its emotive power, intensity, passion and conviction. Jewish, German, and Irish nationalism provide much of the focus for such studies. For Eastern Europe this has meant a concentration on Poland, Serbia, Greece, and Russia.<sup>6</sup>

5 Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; *Ibid.*, *National Identity*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991; *Ibid.*, "Chosen peoples: why ethnic groups survive," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15.3 (1992), 436–56; *Ibid.*, "Ethnic election and cultural identity," *Ethnic Studies* 10 (1993), 9–25; *Ibid.*, "Ethnic election and national destiny: some religious origins of nationalist ideals," *Nations and Nationalism* 5.3 (1999), 331–55; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; *Ibid.*, "Special peoples," *Nations and Nationalism* 5.3 (1999), 381–96; Donald Akenson, *God's Peoples*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

6 Among the enormous literature, see Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More*, op. cit.; Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy*, Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum Press, 1994; Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, op. cit.; Gerasimos Augustinos, *Consciousness and History: Nationalist Critics and Greek society, 1897–1914*, Boulder, CO: East European Monographs 32, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977; Robert Shennan Peckham, *National Histories, Natural States: Nationalism and the Politics of Place in Greece*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001; Ioannis Zepelos, *Ethnisierung griechischer Identität, 1870–1912: Staat und private Akteure vor dem Hintergrund der "Me-*

I have explored the course and characteristics of Bulgarian nationalism, and have engaged in discussions about the persistent dichotomy in the interpretation of Western and Eastern European, civic versus organic, rational versus irrational models of nationalism that I deem heuristically unproductive, although obviously useful for moralizing purposes.<sup>7</sup> A more interesting question for me is what accounts for the different degrees of intensity in separate nationalisms? To go even further, how is it that occasional displays of messianic, exclusive and aggressive nationalism are not even deemed to be characterized

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*gali Idea*," München: R. Oldenbourg, 2002; Vucinich and Emmert, *Kosovo*, op. cit.; Bojislav Djurić, *Kosovski boj u srpskoj književnosti*, Beograd, 1990; Dejan Medaković, *Kosovoski boj u likovnim umetnostima*, Beograd, 1990; Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; Andrzej Walicki, *Poland between East and West: The Controversies over Self-Definition and Modernization in Partitioned Poland*, Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, 1994; Timothy Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, 1569–1999*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Harlow: Longman, 2001; Chris J. Chulos and Johannes Remy, eds., *Imperial and National Identity in Pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, *Studia historica* 66, Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuunden Seura, 2002; Daniel Rancour-Laferrriere, "Russian nationalism from an interdisciplinary perspective: imagining Russia," *Slavic Studies* 5, Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2000; Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, Vols. 1–2, Princeton University Press, 1995–2000; W. Raymond Duncan and Paul Holman, Jr., *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict: The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, as well as the numerous titles that were published in the 1990s on the disintegration of Yugoslavia. See also Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen: Ein europäisches Panorama*, München/Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 2001; Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen. 1945: Arena der Erinnerungen*, Vols. 1–2. Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Todorova, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Communist Legacy in Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 7.1 (1993), 135–54; *Ibid.*, "The Course and Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism," in Peter Sugar, ed., *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Washington, DC: American University Press, 1995, 55–102; *Ibid.*, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; "The trap of backwardness: modernity, temporality and the study of Eastern European nationalism," *Slavic Review* 64.1 (Spring 2005), 140–64.

as nationalism, as is the present case with the United States?<sup>8</sup> And, on the contrary, how come instances of nationalisms that, even if harshly articulated (as most nationalisms are), have neither become ruling nor mainstream (like, for example, Czech, Slovene, Lithuanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Moldavian, and several others) but are still neatly and uncritically subsumed in a model of the virulent, irrational, organic “East European” kind. Focusing on a relatively “weak” case, as in the preceding analysis, helps provide a historical explanation for its causes and manifestations.

Why is Bulgaria—the Balkan country *par excellence*—displaying symptoms of what I call weak nationalism? The chronologically later (by at least a generation) development of Bulgarian nationalism (with a peak on the 1840s–1870s) compared to Greece or Serbia, or to the semi-independent status of the Romanian principalities, complicated its articulation and practical program not only by functioning in an already hotly contested space but also by developing a number of sophisticated and ideologically differentiated alternatives. As a result, at the time of independence, there were contesting visions of the national idea that could not be harmonized, nor did one emerge as an exclusive hegemon.

The lack of a messianic claim was coupled by the absence of a strong international patron or movement comparable to philhellenism for the Greeks, the appeal of the Piedmontese analogy for Serbia, the imperial aura of the Turks despite the decline of the Ottoman Empire, or the “Latin” kinship of the Romanians. The proverbial Bulgarian link to Russia has been exaggerated: in reality, the political relationship has been rather ambivalent, while preserving indeed a strong popular cultural affinity.

Above all, and this is the main point, this was a nationalism whose irredentist program was humiliated very early in the attempts at realization, and its consecutive defeats sealed the character of its genuinely *status quo* nationalism. The effects of humiliation were discernible already after the Balkan Wars and the First World War but the Macedo-

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8 For an exception that proves the rule, see Anthony Giddens, *Europe in the Global Age*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007, 206. Far from touting the end of nations and nationalism, Giddens sees even something of a return to the nation-state in the world at large, even if in a different shape, and he partly holds the United States responsible for that.

nian irredenta (and emigration) continued to fuel passions and actions that resulted in an additional catastrophic revisionist spurt during the Second World War. It is true that, as a rule, practically all European nationalisms after the Second World War have been nationalisms of the *status quo* kind. But there is a psychological difference between, in the end, victorious and humiliated projects, as some postwar comparisons demonstrate: completely devastated Poland versus an also (but less so) devastated Germany; Romania and Hungary; Serbia and Croatia; Italy and Yugoslavia.

In the Bulgarian case, “the two national catastrophes” within the time-span of a single generation secured first, a gloomy and introspective mood in the interwar period, and after the Second World War, a scale of self-mockery and the employment of humor, in what is usually a tradition of solemnity in the articulation of the nationalist discourse, that is quite unique in the Balkan space, and awaits its explorer.

Small wonder that Levski was elevated in the 1920s after the series of humiliating defeats that served as a sobering shock to the jingoistic irredentist nationalism. It was shown that this was the result of a confluence of factors, of which the political impasse was only one, but there is little doubt about the correlation. The principle “victims,” as far as the shaping of the heroic pantheon was concerned, were the medieval kings who, up until then, symbolically led the drift toward territorial expansion during the phase of rising and optimistic irredentist nationalism. Now they had to share the lofty position with and even yield to the critical nineteenth-century national revolutionaries, who were perceived as opponents to the regimes in power. This was reinforced, after the Second World War, both by the political fiasco during the war, as well as by the imposition of an official anti-nationalist rhetoric.

All of this coincided with a general “democratization” of hero-worship, when heroes of humble origins not only began to be increasingly accepted but even started to be preferred. That Levski’s cult grew in a relatively egalitarian and relatively anti-intellectual society additionally propelled him to the top. What makes him stand out from among comparable “commoners” in the heroic pantheon of other nations, is his truly broad national appeal (in terms of all citizens, not only of the majority ethnic nation). For someone who gave his life for a specific ethnic cause, he is remarkably popular also among the non-Bulgarian minorities, ethnic Turks inclusive. His unflinching appeal today is not

simply a matter of inertia. The Levski myth is at the heart of the political covenant, and in a country that is suffering the syndrome of a “weak society in a weak state,”<sup>9</sup> he is both the legitimizing armor of the ones in power, and the protest banner of the powerless.

Aggressive nationalism has been posited to stem from a lack of healthy national self-confidence.<sup>10</sup> The qualifier of “healthy” notwithstanding, historical practice hardly supports this view. Where is the line between healthy and excessive? In the Bulgarian case, one can posit that a lack of self-confidence after the two world wars guaranteed what has been described here as non-aggressive, status quo or weak nationalism. This does not mean that the verbal expressions of Bulgarian nationalists have been weaker, or more measured. Quite to the contrary, a list of the harshest and most poisonous invectives can be assembled, that can compete (and probably surpass) the verbal expressions of many a strong nationalism.<sup>11</sup> The point, however, is that the extreme message never managed to effectively mobilize the majority of the population after the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

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9 This is a self-mocking paraphrase of Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

10 Expressed, for example, by the famous cosmopolitan Bohemian aristocrat Karl Anton Prince Rohan in the interwar period (Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists. The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, 113).

11 The obvious contemporary case for Bulgaria is Volen Siderov and his National Union *Ataka* (Attack), whose ideology and articulation easily harks back to the fascist and other extreme nationalist groups of the interwar period. Siderov, however, despite the fact that he made it in the National Assembly, is not a Bulgarian Frankenstein, but the younger (and probably less dangerous) counterpart of Le Pen, Jörg Haider, Filip Dewinter, Gianfranco Fini, Istvan Czurka, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Vladimir Zhirinovski, Dimitrios Zaphiropoulos, etc. Yet, Levski again is the foremost authority for the arch-nationalist *Ataka*. In contrast, Tudor's *România Mare* listed twelve apostles of the nation headed by the princely figures of Decebal and Vlad Țepeș (Tony Judt, “Romania: Bottom of the Heap,” *NY Review of Books*, November 1, 2001, 41).

12 The brief outburst over Macedonia during the Second World War, when Bulgaria served as an occupation force and annexed it, has to be seen in the context of an interwar policy that was trying to avoid foreign policy commitments but, in the end, caved in to German pressure. In an unpopular war, the Macedonian venture was the only popular move that can be compared, more properly, to any national unification or reunification, something that can be scrutinized and criticized from a variety of viewpoints,

While I do think that, in the Bulgarian case, there exists a correlation between national humiliation, the type of hero worship, and weak nationalism (as previously defined), I do not believe that this correlation can be generalized, or that it lends itself to typological conjectures. I propose neither that whenever a singular, non-aristocratic hero is elevated, weak nationalism takes hold, nor that, wherever we notice symptoms of weak nationalism, this would result in a steep heroic pyramid with an exclusive commoner at the top. Nor do I believe that in all cases of national humiliation, sobriety and weak nationalism is the effect, although I wish this were so. All I am saying is that, in the particular case of Bulgaria, there is a conflation of factors that explains the specific phenomenon. However, I would go further with typological disclaimers. While there is now a nearly century-long tradition of what I call weak nationalism, I would stay far away from the now fashionable, in political science circles, category of path dependence. Weak nationalism is not an imminent characteristic of any polity, and there is no guarantee that the most aggressive form would not burgeon in its womb, although I see little structural prerequisites for this in Europe in the near future.

Strong nationalists even in weak states with weak societies characterized by weak nationalism are impatient with nuances: they know the “truth” and the truth can only be one. Bulgarian strong nationalists, in addition, are impatient with knowledge: it adds distorting shades on their one-colored (or colorless) truth. In what for Bulgaria acquired the typical shape of a charade, a recent controversy over a projected scholarly conference centered around a sacred *lieu de mémoire*, unleashed a passionate discussion over the meaning of myth and history.<sup>13</sup> The

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but is not usually attributed to extreme nationalism. The other nationalistic episode—the renaming of the Bulgarian Turks in the 1980s—never had popular support.

13 This public scandal, which awaits a detailed anthropological analysis, erupted in April–May 2007, and concerned a German scholarly project meant to explore the mechanisms of creating the sacred narrative around the infamous Batak massacre in 1876. While one can debate some of the scholarly tenets and question particular tactless formulations of this project, its use of the notion “myth” certainly did not entail the denial of the real massacre. This was asserted, however, in a conscious distortion, and fed a hysterical journalistic wave that caught on large segments of the public, and was fuelled additionally by the pronouncements of president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament. Given the unexpected dimensions of the scandal,

notion of “myth” provoked and offended nationalist sensibilities: they saw in its use a surreptitious denial of reality. What a pity musical education has so little place in pupils’ formation nowadays! Even diehard nationalists would have acquired a different appreciation of myth had they listened in their youth to this diehard nationalist Richard Wagner. For Wagner, myth was “timeless, intuitive, profound, and concerned not with the particular but with the universal,” and he made it the subject of his greatest operas. As they make their way to the temple of the Holy Grail in the First Act of “Parsifal,” Gurnemanz turns to Parsifal with the words “Do siehst, mein Sohn, zum Raum wird hier die Zeit” (*You see, my son, here time becomes space*). This line Claude Levi-Strauss declared the most profound definition of myth, and pronounced Wagner the father of the structural analysis of myth.<sup>14</sup>

It is this process of time becoming space that was the object of this book. For the rest, let me borrow from Flavius Josephus who wrote 2,000 years ago:

And here we shall put an end to this our history, wherein we formerly promised to deliver the same with all accuracy, to such as should be desirous of understanding... Of which history, how good the style is, must be left to the determination of the readers, but as for its agreement with the facts, I shall not scruple to say, and that boldly, that truth hath been what I have alone aimed at through its entire composition.<sup>15</sup>

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one might think that this taxes the assertion of weak nationalism for Bulgaria. Aside from the extremely unpleasant atmosphere and harassment of the people involved, however, this is, in my reading, an ideal illustration of the phenomenon. A couple of months later, the noise subsided, and it is no longer a newsworthy item. The involvement of the political elite was a calculated move aiming at easy and painless popularity and nationalistic posturing. After all, strong nationalisms firmly stand by nationalist principles (even if they may verge on the lunatic as in the case of Poland under the twins’ rule). Weak nationalisms loudly choose to engage the (weak) state against “provocative projects” of beginning graduate students while complying with all kinds of anti-national pressures and corruption.

14 M. Owen Lee, *Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art. The 1998 Larkin-Stuart Lectures*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 55–6.

15 *The War of the Jews*. By Flavius Josephus, translated by William Whinston, London and Toronto: J. M. Dent; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1928, Book VII, Ch. 11, 5, p. 481.



# APPENDIX



## Appendix I

# The Scholarly Consensus on the 1956 Excavations until the 1980s, Exemplified by the Writings of Stamen Mikhailov: A Critical Analysis

After the excavations in 1956, only two works were published summarizing the results of the research on the church ““Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” They were both authored by Stamen Mikhailov, the leader of the excavations. Throughout the next decades they represented the unchallenged scholarly consensus on the church. For this reason I think it is necessary to have a closer look at them. It is the purpose of this appendix to present briefly Mikhailov’s arguments and, at the same time, provide a critical reading of his texts.

Mikhailov first published his investigations on the frescoes in 1959.<sup>1</sup> The article is self-described as a preliminary one, dedicated exclusively to the frescoes. These are posited to represent the church’s chief value because the earliest among them are the only ones preserved in Sofia from the early Ottoman period. It is promised that a subsequent article will summarize the final architectural and archeological results from the excavations. The article is structured in the following way: state of the frescoes and their chronology; distribution of the frescoes; very detailed narrative description of the subject matter of each fresco; iconography; landscapes; ornamentation; style and techniques; coloration. The church was plastered and painted several times. Mikhailov has identified five layers, of which the first is dated from the 15th century, the second from the 17th century, the third from the 19th century, and the last two from the 20th century. All in all, the 1959 publication seems a thoroughly professional one and, to my knowledge, has not been challenged by any art historian.<sup>2</sup>

The second publication dedicated to the architectural characteristics of the church and to the archaeological results of the 1956 excavations appeared in 1961.<sup>3</sup> What is amazing is that this publication is a meager 12 pages, one

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1 Stamen Mikhailov, “Stenopisite na tsirkvata Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska v Sofia,” *Izvestiya na arkhelogicheskiya institut* 22 (1959), 291–327.

2 The collection of 10 postcards of frescoes which is now out of print was prefaced by a brief 3-page introduction by Teofana Matakieva-Lilova, and follows Mikhailov’s article (*Tsirkvata Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska*, Sofia: Septemvri, 1987).

3 Stamen Mikhailov, “Tsirkvata “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” v Sofia,” in *Izsledvaniya v chest na Karel Shkorpil*, Otdelen otpechatik, Sofia: Arkheologicheski institut i muzei, BAN, 1961, 167–78; also in *BAN volume*, 103–18.

third of the “preliminary” one on the frescoes. It is this publication that came to be challenged by a number of individuals, most notably by Khaitov, who exposed it in several of his writings. An attempt is made here to read the piece afresh, trying to stay clear of the polemics of the subsequent debates.

At first glance this is an altogether typical piece of scholarship describing an archeological object. The article begins with a general architectural description, illustrated by a plan and two sketches, prepared by Sava Bobchev. Following is a description of the excavations first outside of the church, and then inside. The article closes with a discussion of the architectural style and the dating of the church. The narrative voice is very matter-of-fact, entirely descriptive, secure in its assertions. There are a few aspects in which some hesitancy transpires, based on insufficient or insufficiently defining materials. But only the end result of the scholarly reflection is given; there is no room made for hypothetical deliberations. The two aspects where there is a discretely discernible but never explicitly spelled out alternative argument concern: a) the dating and building of the church (176–7); b) the positioning and the age of skeleton No. 95 (174–5). According to Stamen Mikhailov, the church was built “immediately after the fall of the country under the Turkish yoke—most likely at the end of the 14th or early 15th century.” Let us follow the author’s reasoning in reaching this conclusion. He openly and honestly states that “there are no explicit written or archeological data for the dating of the church.” The first written source we have comes from the traveler’s account of Stefan Gerlach, who mentioned “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” alongside another eleven churches when he passed through Sofia in 1578. Therefore, the one certain thing we know from historical sources is that the church existed in the second half of the 16th century. It is then the circumstantial architectural evidence that allows Stamen Mikhailov to make his conclusion, and he enumerates eight elements he finds evocative. The first is the shape of some of the niches, especially the ones in the northeast corner of the church whose arches are pointed, “evidence for some influence of the Turkish [read Ottoman] secular and religious architecture.” This is a good observation, and it clearly serves as a corrective to the imaginary opponents who would have the church built no later than the fall of the independent Bulgarian kingdom, all on the premise that Ottoman rule was unpropitious for the construction of Christian churches. In fact, A. Ishirkov in 1912 did exactly that—dating the church from the pre-Ottoman period—without offering any serious proof, as Mikhailov is right to point out.<sup>4</sup>

The second element is the shape and size of the bricks used for the vault of the church which are typical for the late Bulgarian medieval period but especially for the Ottoman period, although Mikhailov concedes that they could be found occasionally also earlier. This, then, is a rather soft argument. The third element is more convincing. It concerns the contents of the mortar, which contains neither a high admixture of crushed brick nor is as solid as the mortar used in Bulgarian constructions before the 15th century. The fourth el-

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4 A. Ishirkov, *Grad Sofia prez XVII vek*, Sofia, 1912, 26–7. Mikhailov’s comment is on p. 177 of his article.

ement is the use of mud plaster with an admixture of chaff for the outer walls, an element typical for the late medieval Bulgarian period, and especially for the Ottoman one. The fifth and sixth elements indicating a “later period” of construction according to Mikhailov, are the pieces of roof-tiles in the walls, as well as the small windows in the vault instead of in the walls. Mikhailov, however, hesitates to exactly date the phrase “later period.” Such elements, he insists, have been encountered in other churches around the country which stem from the end of the 14th century and the “first centuries of the Turkish yoke.” The same is true of the seventh and eighth elements, describing the existence of flat niches and apertures in the roofs, which are untypical for the church architecture of the 12–14th centuries but are encountered later.

It is after enumerating these elements that Mikhailov makes his overall conclusion: “If we were to add to all these elements indicating the same period also the circumstance that inside and around the church we have not found materials from before the 14th century (with the exception of the tombs), we can conclude that the church was built immediately after the fall of the country under the Turkish yoke—most likely the end of the 14th or the early 15th century.” (176)

Mikhailov uses this dating as an additional argument to solve a problem that he posits at the outset of his article. He indicates that the excavations outside and around the church were undertaken in order to see: a) whether an additional aisle or building existed to the west and south of the church, and b) whether the church had been dug into the earth from the outset, or whether its present sunken position much below the street level was a later characteristic due to the rising of the adjacent terrain during the following centuries (168). Probes were made which showed that the foundations of the northern and southern walls began immediately below the brick covering of the floor. This, according to Mikhailov, proved that the church had not been dug into the ground, as had been posited before the beginning of the excavations. And on this point Mikhailov agreed with the above-mentioned Ishirkov who also believed that the terrain around the church had been raised with time, which made the church figuratively “sink” into the ground. Mikhailov concluded: “The fact that the church is not dug into the ground, even while being built in a central location of the town, is important because it demonstrates on the one hand the great tolerance that the Turkish authorities still displayed toward the Christian population in the first centuries after the conquest and, on the other hand, that the Bulgarian physiognomy of the town had not yet been obliterated.” (177)

It is clear, then, that in the lack of an explicit dating, and in the presence of a dominant romantic national discourse, especially concerning the “dark centuries” of Ottoman rule, Mikhailov was feeling some psychological pressure to err on the side of an earlier dating. He therefore correctly summoned all scholarly arguments to demonstrate that the church was, in fact, from the Ottoman period. What does not follow from his argument, though, and what clearly seems to be a leap of faith is his categorical conclusion that the church can be dated at the turn of the 15th century, *immediately* after the Ottoman conquest. There is nothing that prevents the dating based on the elements he

evokes to be extended anywhere between the end of the 14th/early 15th century and the middle of the 16th century, after which the church was documented by Stefan Gerlach. Mikhailov himself, though unconsciously, implies as much, when he makes the equation between "later period." and the period "from the end of the 14th century and the first centuries of the Turkish yoke." The first centuries of Ottoman rule can easily reach to the 16th century.

In addition, Mikhailov was clearly hasty in his conclusion that the church had not been dug into the ground. Nikola Mushanov, the architect who led the conservation works in the 1970s, convincingly refuted this belief. He showed, instead, that the level of the terrain on the outside was higher than the brick covering of the inside by some 93 cm. In addition, the manner of construction on the outside and on the inside differed substantially. The outside, with its irregular masonry, was clearly not built as a façade but into the adjacent soil, while the corresponding inside was of the frontal type. All of this was, according to Mushanov, an indication that the church could be dated after the Ottoman conquest. Careful scholar that he was, Mushanov hastened to add: "This is a possible argument. Maybe not an absolute one, but a plausible one."<sup>5</sup> And he never pronounced himself on the exact century when the building may have taken place. In contrast, the subjunctive clause is not at all typical for Mikhailov's scholarly prose.

All of this does not necessarily bear directly on the dispute about Levski's grave *per se*. It also explains why, in the course of the prolonged and bitter discussions, the particular question of the church's dating was never picked upon, and Stamen Mikhailov never saw it necessary to stick by his previous opinion and refute Mushanov's. The impression today actually is of a general consensus around Mushanov's opinion about the dug-in character of the church. What, however, this long deliberation does do is to contextualize Mikhailov's piece of scholarship in the overall intellectual atmosphere of the time, and also to indicate the precariousness of scholarly arguments, and how futile it is to bury oneself behind the stature of objective and definitive scholarly conclusions.

The second aspect, however, about the positioning and age of the skeleton known as No. 95, does have a direct bearing on the dispute. There were remains of three regular funerals in the apsis, the article informs us. "They come from an old necropolis, which existed at the site of the church before the latter was erected, most likely from the period immediately before the fall of the country under the Turks." (174) The syntax of this sentence is particularly vexing. As it reads, the dating immediately before the Ottoman conquest refers grammatically to the church. But since Mikhailov had dated the church explicitly after the conquest (although a couple of pages later), we have to conclude that it refers to the burials in the apsis. No more is said about their dating, but in an equally vexing later phrase referring to the funerals in and around the church, Mikhailov makes the following statement: "Judging from the construction and the shape and size of the bricks, as well as from the ceramic fragments found in grave No. 4, and the glass vessel in grave No. 3, we

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<sup>5</sup> *BAN volume*, 365.

may date the stone tombs, and respectively the rest of the funerals to the early Byzantine period... The graveyard seems to have been used also later by the Bulgarians." (175)

Khaitov has made much of this unclear phrasing and of Mikhailov's later explanations, by trying to insinuate that his contradictions have been deliberate. Khaitov even summarizes this as an "archeological balancing act."<sup>6</sup> It is doubtful, in my opinion, that Mikhailov can be accused of being an archeological equilibrist as far as the dating is concerned. A verbal equilibrist he certainly is not, a gift Khaitov, on the other hand, has brilliantly brought to perfection. Mikhailov can be easily accused, however, of careless wording, if not sloppy scholarship.

On the other hand, when it comes to the description of the skeleton No. 95's position, things look more serious. Today, rereading Mikhailov's 1961 text, it is very difficult if not impossible, to avoid one's judgment to be influenced by the subsequent debate. Much as one is trying to watch oneself for excessive and unfounded suspicions, and especially not to give in to Khaitov's masterful conspiracy reconstructions, one cannot help the feeling that in this particular instance Mikhailov's tone departs from the usual matter-of-fact exposition, the objectivist narrative voice becomes more defensive, and the phrasing reveals an implicit layer of unresolved previous controversies. Let us take the paragraph in which he describes the position of the bones:

The best preserved skeleton is from the northern part of the altar. Interesting here is the position of the bones vis-à-vis the apsis. The latter's base passes through the bones. At this exact place two holes from the foundation pilots are preserved. The holes are intact. They are a decisive argument in favor of the supposition, which now can be considered to be an established fact, that the church is younger than the burials in the altar space. The skeleton in question was not affected by the foundations of the wall because the funeral is deeper than the walls. The skeleton, however, is affected by the pilots, and when they were drawn [into the soil] the bone of the right leg below the knee was broken. (174)

This paragraph begs for closer analysis. The adding of the adjective *decisive* to the argument clearly indicates a lively oral exchange at the time of the excavations which in 1959 was followed also by Professor Gyaurov's written opinion about Levski's grave.<sup>7</sup> But Mikhailov gives no detail about this controversy: it is only suggested. The next phrase, however, is truly a leap of faith. How the supposition has turned to be an established fact is not logically argued; it is merely stated. The real problem comes with Mikhailov's categorical reconstruction of how the skeleton's bone was broken. Any unprejudiced reader of

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<sup>6</sup> See the title of Khaitov's rebuttal of Mikhailov: "The dating of skeleton No. 95 as 'early Byzantine'. An example of an archeological balancing act," *BAN volume*, 226–32.

<sup>7</sup> Khristo Gyaurov, "Grobîta na V. Levski," *Dukhovna kultura* 39.2 (1959), N.2.

Mikhailov's paragraph is bound to conclude that he actually saw the broken bone. There are two problems with this.

They both come from the Diary of the excavations.<sup>8</sup> The entry of 13 June reads: "another two holes from the foundation posts have been found, which pass exactly through the limbs: the left through the knee, the right one a little above the knee." Note that Dzhingov who was writing the Diary, speaks of the location of the hole *above*, not *below* the knee as in Mikhailov's text. Dzhingov never says that any bones were broken; moreover he speaks of the holes, not the poles, passing through the limbs. The logical visual reconstruction of Dzhingov's textual entry is that the bones were lying *on* the holes which had been left by the poles that would have been drawn into the soil and rotted with time, leaving their marks with the remaining holes. There are three types of logical conclusions that can be made, based upon this entry and in the absence of other evidence, and all were made by different participants in the controversy.

Khaitov and his team reasoned that intact bones lying over holes indicated that the body had been buried after the posts had rotted. Otherwise, the drawing in of the poles, which were circa 10cm in diameter, would have inevitably destroyed the bones. Both Mikhailov and Dzhingov realized that the broken bones were a decisive argument in favor of the thesis that the church had been built after the funeral, and they insisted on this, although in different ways. Finally Ovcharov, also a defender of an older funeral, came up with a hypothesis of how the poles could have been drawn in, without breaking the bones. Let us follow up the three versions in some more detail, especially as they were voiced in the February 1986 BAN discussion.

At the time of the discussion Dzhingov maintained that the legs of the skeleton below the knees were under the apsidal wall, and were never excavated.<sup>9</sup> It did not make sense to excavate them, because that would have meant digging under the basement of the church. Dzhingov was quite insistent on this point and, in fact, entered in a dispute with Mikhailov when the latter confirmed that the bones of the lower limbs were not found but conceded that it may have been his weakness or even mistake for not having persevered with further digging and cleaning the lower limbs. Dzhingov vehemently protested; according to him, there had been no weakness and no mistake. The reason for not digging further was not to ruin the monument. If further excavations had been undertaken, this would have jeopardized the construction and they would have had to specially buttress it.<sup>10</sup> As for Mikhailov's assertion that the pilot hole passed *below* the knee, Dzhingov was adamant that this was Mikhailov's error: "I defined where the holes passed: one through the left

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8 Let us just remind that the diary had been kept by Dzhingov, and has been referred to as Dzhingov's diary. Mikhailov himself often protested against this naming of the diary, and insisted that he considered it also *his* diary. He sometimes would dictate but would always approve entries, and, in any case, stands by every word of the diary (*BAN volume*, 250, 256, 257, 374 and passim).

9 *BAN volume*, 281, 286.

10 *BAN volume*, 312.

knee, the other above the knee. Not as Mikhailov writes in the publication of 1961. There he makes a mistake. How he made the mistake, I don't know. He worked with the Diary."<sup>11</sup> Mikhailov himself never denied his mistake but also never explained it satisfactorily. Dzgingov also insisted that it was superfluous to explicitly mention that the bones of the lower limbs had been broken, since this would have been the implicit logical conclusion. The fact that the holes were passing *through* the limbs could only mean, according to Dzgingov, that the wooden pillars had passed through the limbs, and, consequently, could not but have broken them.<sup>12</sup> Very clearly, in his oral explication of his 1956 entry, Dzgingov implied that both limbs were broken, one at the knee, the other above the knee. It is obvious that Dzgingov makes a *par excellence* circular argument: if he had written down in the diary that the holes went through the bones, then they must have been logically broken. If they were broken, then the poles would have gone through them, and then the thesis about the later building of the church would be proven.

Commenting on Mikhailov's assertion that the right leg under the knee had been broken, Khaitov pointed out that this clearly indicated that the skeleton possessed not only visible thighbones (as the archeologists maintained) but also bones under the knees that Mikhailov would have seen.<sup>13</sup> Khaitov further wondered why, if there were indeed no remnants of the lower limbs, this was not entered in the diary at the time, since it really would have been the best argument for the older burial thesis. He logically concluded that the absence of an entry meant that there was either an attempt at disinformation or that the lower limbs were not excavated at all. In fact, comparing the photographs from 1956 and 1974, Khaitov concluded that the lower limbs were most likely never cleaned up.<sup>14</sup> This was, in fact, also the assertion of the archeologists. But Khaitov was totally unconvinced by Dzgingov's attempts to explain the lack of a diary entry about the existence or the non-existence of the bones below the knees, as well as his insistence that one should logically accept that they were broken even in the absence of an explicit mention in the diary.<sup>15</sup> He rightly stated that in the lack of either a photograph or a verbal entry in the diary, and in the face of the otherwise pedantic sticking to the word of the Diary by the archeologists, Dzgingov's 1986 explanation that a mention of the broken limbs was superfluous, was rather lame.

One could at this point dispel Mikhailov's 1961 publication about the broken limb below the knee as an error, and a consensus developed on this score during the 1986 debates. More seriously, however, Khaitov and his team engaged Dzgingov in a discussion about his assertion that the pole had broken the knee above the knee cap. Doctor Spas Razboinikov, in particular, referred to the official 1956 photographs of skeleton No. 95 by Khlebarov, which showed the bones almost to the knees with no trace of a broken part. In re-

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11 Ibid, 371.

12 Ibid., 281.

13 Ibid., 293.

14 Ibid., 294.

15 Ibid., 294-5.

sponse, Dzhingov said that the broken place had been very close to the knee, and he had seen it only while bending, therefore it did not show on the photographs. Apart from the legitimate remark that Dzhingov should have reflected this observation in the diary, and not just “remembered” it 30 years later, Dr. Razboinikov made a medical observation, basing himself on the anatomy of the leg. He demonstrated convincingly that had the leg been really broken above the knee, this would have inevitably at least displaced the upper part, and would have been reflected in the photograph, which reaches to about 7–8 cm above the knee.<sup>16</sup>

Both Mikhailov’s and Dzhingov’s assertions about the broken bones were so unconvincing that even the members of their team did not insist on them. Dimitîr Ovcharov, the head of the medieval department at the archaeological institute, who throughout the discussion stands out with his careful judgments and strikes one as among the few thoughtful and logical participants amidst the archeologists, decided instead to put forward another possible hypothesis which would not contradict the photographic evidence. Ovcharov gave a possible reconstruction of the events trying to understand the reasoning of the archeologists in 1956. Once the skeleton had been cleaned enough, the lower limbs emerged to be caught between the ancient and medieval wall. The archeologists did not dare go farther, either because they were afraid to weaken the base or because they were totally convinced that this was an early Byzantine or late medieval skeleton, and it was not worth digging on. He further focused on the character of the soil which in this part of the town is very loose and posited that for this reason the pilot may have been driven in, without touching but simply gliding by the bones without breaking them. Naturally, had the pilots been driven some short period after the funeral, with the body not having yet decomposed, they would have touched the corpse. And were this hypothesis true, it would prove that the funeral must have taken place much earlier.<sup>17</sup>

It follows from this more detailed overview of the three versions, that we are left in fact with only two possible logical hypotheses based on the existing documentary material: Khaitov’s and Ovcharov’s. Khaitov’s is much better developed, but, given the desire and time, one could theoretically expect Ovcharov to also spell out his thesis in greater detail. Yet, no matter which one is better argued, none of the two hypotheses can be actually proven, given that the archeological site no longer exists. What is definitively proven, though, is that Mikhailov’s work is vulnerable and there is little wonder that Khaitov used its numerous weaknesses in order to question Mikhailov’s scholarly credentials and integrity.

At this point, when it has been firmly established that the lower limbs were never actually excavated (practically everybody accepts that, and Mikhailov and Dzhingov insist on it because, as they assert, they were totally convinced there was nothing to look for), one begins to wonder whether Mikhailov’s “small” error of writing *below* instead of *above* the knee was, af-

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16 *Ibid.*, 373.

17 *Ibid.*, 360–1.

ter all, such an innocent mistake. When he wrote his article in 1961, he had photographs at his disposal which would have questioned the assertion that the bones were broken *above* the knee; and in any case, he could not assert this based on the verbal entry of the Diary because the Diary did not say the bone was *broken* above the knee, but that the hole passed through it. Still, the temptation to write about a broken leg may have been too great, because this was, in the end, the decisive argument in favor of his thesis. Conversely, writing about the broken part *below* the knee could not be contradicted by the photographs, and there was no explicit entry in the Diary saying that they had not dug and cleaned further into the wall. Granted, I am making here a big assumption (bordering on an accusation), which cannot be proven. Couldn't it be, after all, Mikhailov's proven sloppiness or even a typo? What feeds and raises my suspicion even further, however, is Mikhailov's reasoning about the dating of skeleton No. 95, a couple of paragraphs after the passage analyzed above: "All skeletons in the altar belong to elderly<sup>18</sup> individuals. This can be best seen from the worn teeth and the closed alveoli in some of the loose molars, as well as from the complete erasure of the sutures, especially on the inside of the skull. The skeleton in the northern part of the altar seems to be that of a female." And it is at this point and to this sentence that Mikhailov supplies a small note, mentioning for the first and last time the controversy over Levski. This is the text of the footnote: "According to the preliminary examination by Doctor P. Boev. The expressed supposition, that one of these skeletons could belong to V. Levski, contradicts the archeological data and is not based on any scholarly foundation." (175)

Boev's credentials and expertise are not discussed in this appendix, although they are given due attention when analyzing the specific discourse of the period in Part I. Suffice it to say here that from a scholarly viewpoint his assertions were so ludicrous and embarrassing that the archeologists themselves decided to drop any mention of them although they were trying to corroborate their thesis. In addition, these assertions were oral and not documented in any official protocol at the time when Boev visited the excavations in 1956. What should be mentioned, however, is the medical expertise of Doctor Spas Razboinikov of 9 February 1986, based on the written documentation and the photographs.<sup>19</sup> This extremely carefully worded statement concluded that the existing documentation allows in no way to make pronouncements about the racial type of the skeleton, since the skull had been destroyed. As for the age of the skeleton, Razboinikov pointed out that it was possible to establish the age with some approximation only until the completion of the growing period, i.e. until age 25. After that age the sutures would be closed, and there are no definitive characteristics from the skull that allow one to distinguish between ages 30, 40, 50, and 60. X-rays of the long bones

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18 The word used is *vizrastni* which can be translated as both elderly or adult. In this context, however, Mikhailov clearly wants to emphasize the advanced age of the skeletons, as he refers to Boev who maintained that all skeletons he had inspected were over the age of 60, or at least 50 (see the quotes from his estimates in *BAN volume*, 235).

19 *BAN volume*, 217-3.

would reveal some information only until around age 25. It is extremely difficult and unreliable to judge about the age from the teeth, because they can be worn out at a different pace on an individual basis. One could make judgments about the age based on the study of the spinal cord and some joints, but there is no such documentation about skeleton No. 95, and the not very clear photographs show, if anything, a quite regular spinal line. Razboinikov's conclusion was that "there are no certain medical data to assert that skeleton No. 95 belongs to an individual older than 30–40, and thus, that it cannot belong to Levski."<sup>20</sup> He was, however, careful enough not to assert that the skeleton did belong to Levski.

On the gender of the skeleton, Razboinikov notes that this can be asserted only after careful inspection of the pelvic bones, particularly the pubis. The existing photographs cannot provide any information since they show the pelvis at a time when it is not even entirely cleaned. The only data the photographs provide is of a relatively tall (for a woman) and average (for a man) human skeleton (172 cm), with a well developed sternum and breast bones. This, Razboinikov notes, could be interpreted in favor of a male skeleton but is never a definitive proof, unlike the pelvis.<sup>21</sup> In general, however, while in the absence of the bones this is impossible to prove, there are no reasons to doubt that the skeleton belongs to a man. Boev himself in all his subsequent oral interviews maintained that all the skeletons he had inspected in 1956 from the altar belonged to men.

In light of all of this, not having a definitive written anthropological expertise about skeleton No. 95, but faced with the persistence of rumors about Levski's grave,<sup>22</sup> Mikhailov's insertion of the information about a possible fe-

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>22</sup> There is no question that Mikhailov had been fully aware of the rising passions already at the time of the excavations. All participants concur that Giaurov was there on the day of the discovery of the skeleton and warned about the possibility. Mikhailov's associate Dzhingov made an interesting comment during the debate on 10 February 1986 when he was trying to fend off accusations that they lightheartedly had dismissed Giaurov's warning. He reminisced about this day: "I first learned that Levski's grave might be in this church from the newspaper *Trud*. During our meeting with comrade Khaitov in Kavarna he did not know about this. I told him that on the first page *Trud*, in May, there was a report that excavations had begun at the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church and that they are looking for Levski's grave, whether they would find it, etc. This was my first information. The interest was great. Here is one of the photographs in my possession, you will see the fence, I'll show it to you later. People were crowding at the fence to watch the excavations when we discovered the skeletons. Professor Giaurov was showing keen interest. When we discovered the skeleton on May 30, Giaurov saw it... Everyone was talking, everyone was talking. And even more. Sava Ganovski came, I think, in his capacity as vice-president of the Academy, and he saw the church and specifically said we should be careful. Therefore, we made the photographs, therefore we called the museum artist to make a sketch. And Petir Boev arrived, didn't he? I am jumping over that. I have not reflected it in the Diary." (*BAN volume*, 287)

male skeleton, even with the proleptic *seems*, looks more like a rather astute rhetorical device which further and effectively undermines what he has anyway characterized as an unscholarly position. One cannot escape suspecting that he is trying to put forward an argument (about the gender of the skeleton) of which he is not sure (hence the *seems*) but about which he is perfectly aware that it would logically exclude or discourage any further investigation. I am not implying that Mikhailov was in a conspiracy to hide the truth about Levski or to willfully destroy artifacts. In fact, I am convinced that he sincerely believed, both at the time of the excavations as well as later, that skeleton No. 95 was older than the church. He also believed that the Levski reburial thesis was a naive myth. To be perfectly sincere, given the proliferation of fantastic stories and the annoying propensity in almost any society of the lay public to pronounce itself competently on a number of historical, especially archaeological questions, one cannot but feel some sympathy for Mikhailov's skepticism.

At the same time, in the face of the clear interest by the public, and by intellectual and political figures, Mikhailov's nonchalance at preserving the materials from the excavations is staggering. The mildest verdict that can be passed on him is that he was not a perfectionist in his work. The 1961 work demonstrates sloppiness, and more. One can make some allowance for the more than imperfect excavations by referring to the time pressure and their rescue character. One can even explain, though not excuse, the fact that the materials were not subsequently inventoried and preserved with the general disarray at the institute, the dearth of storage space, the frequent moves, etc. There can be, however, absolutely no excuse for the quality of his 1961 publication. There Mikhailov has to bear the full personal responsibility. And it is this sloppiness (to use the least accusing word for the occasion) that opens Mikhailov up to criticism and attacks. This was done by so called dilettantes, and instead of taking them seriously, and responding to their arguments in a logical fashion, which would have meant conceding a number of errors, he assumed the posture of the offended and unjustly accosted wise man who did not deem it necessary to deal with contemptible insults.

## *Appendix II*

# The Discussion at the Academy of Sciences on 10, 12, and 27 February 1986

This appendix tries to convey both the atmosphere during the three-day discussions, as well as provide a more succinct account of the debates. In doing so, I have obviously used my discretion as a historian, and have chosen to present what to me were the significant and informative items. As with the choices any historian makes, this one obviously bears the imprint of the presenter. Luckily, for anyone interested in the verbatim reports, they are not merely archival, but have been published and can be easily consulted by everyone. The records of the discussions were kept on tape, as well as through shorthand notes. The full shorthand report, controlled by and amended where necessary by the tapes, can be found in the *BAN volume*, 277–379. All pagination in brackets follows the *BAN volume*. In order not to complicate and strain the flow of the account, as well as not to add an additional voice to the original ones from the debate, I have inserted my own brief comments, where appropriate, only in footnotes.

There were 18 participants in the discussions, including the convener of the meeting Nikolai Todorov. Following is a brief introduction to the main actors, so that they can be more easily identified during the subsequent narrative.

### Representatives of the Archeological Institute:

1. Stamen Mikhailov, leader of the excavations of 1956, senior research fellow at the AIM.
2. Georgi Dzhingov, senior research fellow at the AIM, kept the diary of the excavations.
3. Magdalina Stancheva from the Museum of Sofia.
4. Architect Stefan Boiadzhiev, engaged in conservation works since 1956.
5. Dimitîr Angelov, director of the AIM.
6. Velizar Velkov, senior research fellow at the AIM and internal reviewer of Khaitov's book.
7. Dimitîr Ovcharov, head of the Medieval Section at the AIM.
8. Ivan Sotirov, research fellow at the AIM.
9. Diana Gergova, research fellow at the AIM and party secretary.

### Khaitov's team:

1. Nikolai Khaitov.
2. Architect Georgi Kolev.
3. Architect Nikola Mushanov from the Institute for Preservation of Cultural Monuments and leader of conservation works in the 1970s.

4. Mikhail Benchev, artist.
5. Dr. Spas Razboinikov.

Finally, there were three representatives of the Ministry of Culture: Rumen Katincharov, Simeon Yanev, and Marko Semov. In addition, several other names should be mentioned that often come up during the discussions:

1. Stefan Bobchev, research associate at the AIM, deputy of Stamen Mikhailov at the excavations, commissioned to deal with the architectural sketches, died in 1982.
2. Dimitir Buchinski, participant in the excavations, research associate at the AI.
3. Petir Khlebarov, photographer in 1956.
4. Petir Boev, anthropologist, inspected skeleton 95 in 1956.
5. Sava Ganovski, vice-president of BAN in 1956.
6. Kristiu Miyatev, director of AI in 1956

#### A. WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE TWO SIDES DURING THE MEETINGS

##### *1. Statement on the documentation of the excavations by the AI, doc.187/ 7 Feb. 1986 (199–201)*

This statement, signed by the director of the AI, academician Dimitir Angelov, explains what the AI considers to be the authentic and reliable documentation of the excavations. These are the Diary of the excavations, kept by Dzhingov, at present in the AI archives, inventory number 2683; Bobchev's sketches published in Mikhailov's 1961 publication; and the 1956 photographs of Petir Khlebarov, also in the AI archives. The statement mentions 142 archeological finds, which have been inventoried. A recent inspection of the depot of the AI "established that a great part was in place."<sup>1</sup> The statement disqualifies Bobchev's sketchbook and diary, on the charge that these not been handed to the AI after its explicit order that all documents from excavations before 1972 should be given to the archive. It concludes that Bobchev "did not consider these sketches and notes as official documentation."<sup>2</sup> Most interesting is the evaluation of the excavation methods and the tacit indictment of the quality of Mikhailov's work: "The excavations are of the so-called rescue type which imposed a hurried work tempo, and that inescapably reflects on the work methods. Despite the difficulties, the leader of the excavations and his collaborators

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1 During the discussions on the third day it turned out that only 60 of the inventoried objects were found in a wooden chest. They had been placed in marked envelopes, 40 of which were intact. The other 20 had been damaged by the humidity and the mice and the materials were scattered (Statement of Dzhingov, 372–3).

2 The statement does not specify that this order came in 1980, and that Mikhailov himself, who had kept Dzhingov's diary for the past almost 25 years at home, gave it to the archive of the AI only at the end of 1980. See Khaitov's rebuttal.

made sufficient efforts to accurately establish and document the archeological facts. But the leader focused mostly on the scholarly conclusions and underestimated his duties for the further preservation of the described and collected finds. A great number among them, beyond the research, did not have a museum value. The ones that had to be inventoried, were not entered in the inventory books of the museum. Materials from these excavations have not been given to the Museum of Sofia. The architectural sketches of architect Bobchev have not been deposited in the archive of the AI.”

## *2. Response by Khaitov to Document 187, 20 Feb. 1986 (202–205)*

Khaitov points out the inconsistency of accepting the three Bobchev sketches included in Mikhailov’s 1961 publication but not the rest of his diary. If the AI bases its exclusion of Bobchev’s sketches on some inexactitudes, then one could argue the same about both Mikhailov and Dzhingov, who cannot agree on where the limbs had been broken. The claim that Bobchev’s sketches should not be included because they were not handed to the AI archive is ludicrous. Similarly, Dzhingov’s diary, after having been in the possession of Mikhailov at his home, was handed in only in Dec. 1980. As to the charge that Bobchev did not consider his sketches official:

this is verbal gymnastics. Neither St. Mikhailov, nor St. Boiadzhiev have given their materials to the archive of the AI after the order of the director of the institute (Prof. Mikhailov did so in December 1980). Does this mean that they too considered the documentation they kept as unofficial? And how is it possible to evaluate the quality of a documentation based on the fact where it is kept or what the one keeping it thinks about it? The truth is that architect Sava Bobchev was keeping his documentation in his personal archive because he was totally convinced that if he delivered it to the AI, it could have been “lost” or simply disappear, just as a large number of the artifacts did, maybe the most significant ones; just as a huge number of the photographs have disappeared; just as Vera Nedkova’s sketches disappeared; also the passports with which all finds have to be supplied; also the “service report” of the excavations from 1956 of the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska”; and just as even the Diary of the excavations had temporarily gone underground. Architect S. Bobchev wisely preserved both his Diary and is Sketchbook in his hands, and thus has been able to present us with an authentic, accurate and precise document about the burial of skeleton No. 95, which also passed successfully the examination of the commission of experts (See Protocol from 25 October 1985). (205)

Further, Khaitov accuses the AI of consciously not offering the full documentation for discussion. In February of the previous year, responding to Khaitov’s query, Angelov (Letter No. 111, 11 February 1985) had written back that there was no photo documentation in the archive of the institute. For the BAN debate, AI had offered 17 photographs. Khaitov learned from the archeologists’ statement of 10 February 1986 about the existence of 37 photographs. His visit

to the AI on 17 Feb. 1986 uncovered actually 94 negatives, 25 of which are dedicated to No. 95 alone.

*3. Statement of the working group of the AI, 7 Feb. 1986 (206–214)*

This statement, prepared by Dzhingov, Stancheva, Boiadzhiev, Stanilov, and Ovcharov is the experts' opinion, on which Angelov's briefer statement was based. It essentially reiterates the archeologists' position, when they entered the discussion. The existence of a niche in 1956 is adamantly denied. The hole, according to them, appeared only during the restoration works in 1972. The statement accuses Khaitov of verbal manipulation when he interprets the holes from the pilots as having passed "under" the bones, instead of "through" the bones, as written in Dzhingov's Diary. Their most significant objection to Khaitov's thesis is the absurdity of digging into the wall when the corpse could have been laid altogether under the altar by digging further to the west. The rest deals with Khaitov's lack of professional qualifications.

*4. Response of Khaitov to the statement of the working group,  
12 Feb. 1986 (214–216)*

This is essentially a repetition of Khaitov's earlier arguments to the specific points of the archeologists. He adds: "Yesterday, during the discussion on 10 February, Dzhingov conceded that the niche which was holding the legs of skeleton No. 95 below the knees, had never been excavated on 13 June 1956 so as to prevent the collapse of the apsidal foundation. What I had articulated as a supposition turns out to be true: the niche in which the legs of skeleton No. 95 below the knees were placed, had never been excavated. They were left there! The archeologists now can assert that there were no legs but how can they insist that these legs were destroyed during the construction if they had never dug them out, and have not seen whether they are there or not?"

*5. Medical expertise of Dr. Spas Razboinikov, 9 Feb. 1986 (217–222)*

The arguments are grouped in 10 points:

1. On the racial type: there is no way to make pronouncements about the racial type of the skeleton, since the skull had been destroyed.

2. On Levski's special features: he had a wound around the ear after his arrest, and was known to have had a broken front tooth. The ear wound would not show, it must have been fairly superficial. The broken front tooth would, but the skull was not preserved.

3. On the general state of the skeleton: well preserved.

4. On the gender, size and age of the skeleton:

On the gender of the skeleton, Razboinikov notes that this can be asserted only after careful inspection of the pelvic bones, particularly the pubis. The existing photographs cannot provide any information since they show the pelvis even not entirely cleaned. The only data the photographs provide is of a rela-

tively tall (for a woman) and average (for a man) human skeleton (172 cm), with well developed sternum and breast bones. This, Razboinikov notes, can be interpreted in favor of a male skeleton but is never a definitive proof, unlike the pelvis. In general, while in the absence of the bones this is impossible to prove, there are no reasons to doubt that the skeleton is male. Boev himself in all his subsequent oral interviews maintained that all the skeletons he had inspected in 1956 from the altar belonged to men.

As for the age of the skeleton, Razboinokv pointed out that it was possible to establish the age with some approximation only until the completion of the growing period, i.e. until age 25. After that age the sutures would be closed, and there are no definitive characteristics from the skull that allow one to distinguish between ages 30, 40, 50, and 60. X-rays of the long bones would reveal some information only until around age 25. It is extremely difficult and unreliable to judge about the age from the teeth, because they can be worn out at a different pace on an individual basis. One could make judgements about the age based on the study of the spinal cord and some joints, but there is no such documentation about skeleton No. 95, and the not very clear photographs show, if anything, a quite regular spinal line. Razboinikov's conclusion is that "there are no certain medical data to assert that skeleton No. 95 belongs to an individual older than 30-40, and thus, that it cannot belong to Levski."<sup>3</sup>

5. On the upper limbs and the stiffening of the corpse:

The stiffening begins usually 2-3 hours after death. After 4-6 hours, sometimes up to the tenth hour the whole body has stiffened, beginning from the facial muscles and going down. After 1-2 days, the stiffening begins to decrease and disappears. Levski was hanged on 18 February in the morning. Taken down around noon, i.e. after circa 6-8 hours, i.e. in a stiffened position, and this is how he must have been buried. If it had been dug out the same night and transferred to the church, the corpse would have still been stuff. But skeleton No. 95 has its hands crossed although not symmetrically: the right hand on the lower part of the chest, the left hand on the belly. The experience of forensic medicine shows that the position of the limbs can be changed without breaking the bones even in a state of stiffening by applying some force. For bending the elbows, it would be circa 50 kg strength. To distance the thighbones, strength of about 100 kg is needed. Only from the fact of the corpse's stiffening one cannot conclude that this excludes No. 95 to belong to Levski.

6. On the argument about the repercussions from hanging: the neck vertebra should not be necessarily broken in hanging, actually this would be the exception if a particularly heavy individual is hanged and falls.

7. On the broken lower limbs, as affirmed by some of the participants. There is no photograph showing a broken thighbone or bones below the knees. Razboinikov analyzes the controversy over whether the broken bone was below or above the knee. If there had been broken bones, they would have been documented as an especially important proof for the earlier burial. The fact that the existing data do not confirm any broken bones is proof of a late burial.

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<sup>3</sup> Note, however, that he was careful not to assert that it does belong to Levski.

8. On the regularity of the burial: he does not accept the hypothesis of an earlier necropolis under the church since no remains of a graveyard were found, with stones, inscriptions, etc. but only the foundations of a large, most likely public, building from the Roman period. This part of the city lies also within the walls of the ancient and medieval town, and graveyards cannot be placed within the city walls. There were smaller necropolises only around churches, where they would bury clergymen, patrons or famous civilians. The several graves excavated close to the western and southern walls of the church and the finds in them (lost but described in the diary) allow to date at least some of them as later than the construction of the church, esp. judging from the coins—Turkish, German and only two unidentified “old ones.”

The altar burials are different. The skeleton in the northern part is too shallow, i.e. too close to the surface—75 cm. The corpse was buried without a coffin which, according to Razboinikov contradicts a normal funeral.<sup>4</sup> Skeleton No. 79 in the southern part of the apsis, ‘the beheaded’, has no displacement of the bones, no traces of coffin, clothing or ritual objects, with skull fragments on the left shoulder. “This has given ground to some of the participants in the debate to assume that this was a freedom fighter-revolutionary, executed by the Ottomans, and his chopped off head laid by his shoulder, thus the altar being a place where martyrs of freedom were buried during the Ottoman yoke. For such an interpretation, as has been seen, there are grounds although there is no categorical proof.”

9. On the position of the legs of No. 95 under the wall: argues there are two reasons for that. “First, while altar burials are not allowed, if the clergymen decided to do it, it can be done in the eastern, northeastern and southeastern part of the altar but never to dig and bury in the part west of the altar space. This place is sacred and inviolable, only the priest can step there at the time of the service. Everybody else should go around the altar only from the eastern side.” The second reason, according to Razboinikov, is that Levski as a former cleric, would have been buried outside close to the walls as other clerics during the Ottoman period were (citing the professor from the Theological academy Vasil Nikolov). But since this was a secret, they did it inside.<sup>5</sup>

10. Additional arguments about the dating of the burial: according to Mikhailov the bones of skeleton No. 95 were the best preserved. This, according to R. attests to a recent burial, and thus possibly Levski. Points out to the different fragments from the other burials—coins, porcelain, etc., that point to later burials.

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4 Razboinikov was wrong on this count; numerous funerals, as many archeologists convincingly pointed out, were without coffins.

5 In general, this point in Razboinikov’s statement is rather rambling, and has not been corroborated by any specialist or cleric I have spoken to. The argument about not stepping on a grave does not make sense. Quite to the contrary, in churches both east and west, bodies are placed in the church, usually beginning at the very doors, and are clearly meant to be stepped on. Altar burials are forbidden but then there would be no explicit ban on stepping on them. Finally, not stepping on graves is a widespread rule, but not when they are laid in the church. Significantly, Khaitov retreated from using this argument in his later deliberations (see here, Document 11, Khaitov’s response of 1 September 1986).

Razboinikov concludes: “We Bulgarians owe much to archeology, and we have always respected the people working in this discipline and the specialists archeologists. Yet, at the excavations in the church ‘Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska’ some obvious mistakes have been committed: the bones and the rest of the finds have not been preserved, despite the knowledge that they have been linked to the dispute about the grave of a great Bulgarian son.”

6. *Addition to the medical expertise, 26 Feb. 1986 (223–225)*

This statement deals at some length with the other burials in the altar space: skeletons No. 79 (without a skull) and No. 102 (under the altar stone). It points out the discrepancies between the diary entries and the photographic evidence. Until 31 May, the entries correspond to the photographs, but after this date there are several obvious inconsistencies. In particular, the entry about the discovery of bones under the altar has not been corroborated. Bobchev was there on 9 June doing the architectural sketch but never mentions, and actually later denied, any burial under the altar. It was not documented otherwise, except by the diary entry. Not a single photograph was taken. The existence of this burial is therefore doubtful.<sup>6</sup>

7. *Khaitov’s statements (226–238) from 6 February 1986:*

a) On the dating of the skeleton as “early Byzantine”: basically exposes Mikhailov’s pitiful sloppiness, supplied with a table of the artifacts found and documented in the diary, but not recorded in the 1961 publication, which would have helped the dating.

b) On Dr. Boev’s anthropological assessment: exposing definitively how pathetic it is.

8. *Declaration of Buchinski, 10 Feb. 1986 (238–239)*

testifies about the structure of the church, describes the niche and maintains that a metallic hook and eye was found around the limbs of skeleton No. 95.

9. *Declaration of Vera Nedkova (239)*

Vera Nedkova, a famous artist, was at that time head of the department of conservation and restoration at the AI. Her written report maintains that the skeleton was in good shape and that only the legs beneath the ankles were under the wall. She prepared a drawing and gave it to the director of the AI Krístyu Miyatev.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In March 2002, I consulted my colleague Florin Curta of the University of Florida, an archeologist and medieval historian of Eastern Europe. Without being familiarized with the argumentation of the two sides in detail but simply looking at the documentary evidence, he exclaimed: “At this point I believe only the photographs.”

<sup>7</sup> This drawing was never found.

## 10. St. Mikhailov's statement (deposited on 26 Feb. 1986) (240–269)

This voluminous and rather loosely structured written statement begins, ends and is interspersed with accusations about Khaitov's lack of "scientific method." A few times, Mikhasilov brings in examples of improper or, rather, inaccurate citing on the part of Khaitov. He goes into a very long deliberation on the historical evidence about Levski, especially the different rumors/versions of Levski's burial and endorses the one, which states that Levski was buried not in the criminals' graveyard in the eastern outskirts of Sofia, next to the gallows, but in the western cemetery.

On the archeological evidence, Mikhailov articulates verbatim his previous statements. His new argumentation centers on a detailed analysis of the other altar burials, particularly the one under the altar stone: "But all his [Khaitov's] considerations, lyrical deviations, ironic insinuations, and even implicit accusations of professional incompetence taken together, cannot measure up to a single fact, firmly established by the excavations. This remarkable fact is the burial under the altar stone." (261)

He then goes on to date the burial and, linking it to skeleton No. 95, concludes that these were early burials.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on Bobchev's denial that the altar stone had been lifted at all, he writes: "Architect Bobchev, who was well read and knowledgeable in architectural archaeology understood well the significance of the burial under the altar stone. He knew that if this was true, there would be no need for other proofs about the early character of the funerals in the altar space. Therefore, having decided to defend at all costs the improbable story of Anastasia Bokova, he categorically and 'most responsibly,' according to his own words, yet actually most irresponsibly, denied this fact." (262)<sup>9</sup>

His final note: "One is amazed at the courage of a writer, a specialist in forestry, to oppose a whole scholarly institute, to question its competence, to teach the archaeologists lessons, and instruct them in dating and digging. ... Following his method, I should teach him, say, about the vegetation of the Vitosha mountain... No, I am not allowed to do this, just as Khaitov is not allowed to pronounce himself on my archaeological excavations, because each discipline has its fine points which are not always accessible to the non-specialist." (268)

<sup>8</sup> There are serious problems with this thesis, which hinges on the very fact of this burial. First and foremost is the absence of the artifacts; secondly, the lack of even a single photograph documenting the lifting of the altar stone and the position of the skeleton; and thirdly, Bobchev's accounts who flatly denies the event. The only information comes from the diary, but Khaitov later (274, as well as *Grobii na Vasil Levski*, Sofia, 2002, 80 ff.) convincingly demonstrates that the diary was not taken on the spot, but was a much later manipulated copy.

<sup>9</sup> This selfsame argument, only inverse, could be applied to Mikhailov. Just as Bobchev knew it, so did Mikhailov have a stake in this decisive argument. We have only one information about it: the diary from 9 June, at the time when the debate was at its hottest and when the discovery of such a burial was incredibly welcome to Mikhailov. However, there is not a single photo to corroborate this claim, and with the subsequent exposure of the diary (see previous note), this can be questioned.

*11. Khaitov's response to St. Mikhailov's statement,  
1 September 1986 (270–276)*

Khaitov maintains that the newly found photographs alone prove the later burial:

- a) the existence of niche/hole in, not under, the apsidal wall;
- b) the pilot holes under the bones, i.e. the burial was not simply after the construction of the church but also after the rotting of the pilots;
- c) the position of the skull and the right shoulder over the altar stone foundation. Khaitov further reviews the historical data, especially the memoirs about the possible cemetery, and favors the eastern or “criminal” cemetery close to the gallows, as based on more reliable evidence.<sup>10</sup>

He questions Dzhigov's assertion that the Diary was written, as it were, ad hoc, at the time of the excavations, and contends that today's Diary is a later copy with selected passages, and gives appropriate examples (274).<sup>11</sup>

For the first time, Khaitov also offers a more convincing hypothesis about the silence of the priest of “Sv. Petka Smardzhiiska” Pop Krístyu Stoilov after 1878. Again he supports his previous thoughts of the priest's possible fear at having broken a church law and thus the danger of being deposed. But he adds a different plausible argument, which has to do with the possible objection of the priest to the decision to bury Levski's remains in the foundations of his projected monument. From our point of view, this may be a laudable act: “Today we think that there is nothing more honorable for Levski's bones than to rest in the foundations of his monument but why are we sure that this was pop Krístyu Stoilov's conviction? Quite to the contrary: for him, as a priest, there would be no more honorable and desirable place where the bones of the deceased to rest than the holy church altar. And from this point of view he had all grounds to resist disturbing their ‘eternal peace’ by digging them out and handing them to be laid under a secular monument.” (276)

Khaitov also introduces a new argument about the symbolism of the legs in the wall. This time he downplays his previous assertion about why the body had to be buried in this way, so as not to step on the head and agrees that this may be of secondary importance. But the “immuring of at least part of the body of the deacon Levski in the altar foundations was a sublime manifestation of esteem toward his personality and his deeds.” (276)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In this instance Khaitov demonstrates enviable and detailed knowledge both of the sources, as well as 19th-century historical realities, specifically Ottoman law, and easily and convincingly refutes Mikhailov.

<sup>11</sup> This allegation turned out to be absolutely correct as Khaitov managed to prove after the BAN debates.

<sup>12</sup> In my March 2002 conversation with Florin Curta, he came to the following conclusions after examining the archeological evidence and the narrative and deciding that the only authentic evidence are the photographs, both the ones from the excavations in 1956 and the ones from 1972–74, showing the stratigraphic profile: 1. It is impossible that this was an old necropolis; the skeleton would have been destroyed or

Finally, Khaitov raises the all-important questions about the remains of skeleton No. 95: "Mikhailov finds a variety of issues to discuss in his statement but he stubbornly, persistently and relentlessly remains silent about the fate of the bones of skeleton No. 95. Since 1959, when the dispute about Levski's grave started with the publication of Prof. Khristo Giaurov's article, the question of the whereabouts of the bones has been constantly raised but St. Mikhailov constantly remains silent. He remained silent during the whole duration of the dispute from 1979 till 1983. He kept silent when I asked this with my book. He was silent during the discussions at the Section for medieval archaeology and later in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences as well, although the question about the fate of the bones was posed to him twice point-blank. His coy colleagues, who participated in both discussions about the grave, did not dare raise this question either. Neither did the leadership of the Archaeological institute summon the courage to find out the truth, and shed light on this important and sensitive problem." (274)

## B. THE ORAL DEBATES

### *DAY 1: 10 Feb. 1986 (277–312)*

In his opening remarks to the meeting NIKOLAI TODOROV stressed that his goal was to "to create the necessary prerequisites for a scholarly approach and debate, in order to analyze the decisive elements leading to the establishment

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damaged. 2. The architectural reading of the positioning of the skeleton shows that it is done with a specific goal to convey some symbolism. Positioning of the burial next to the wall will transfer the force of the person to the structure of the church, if the person is important enough. Then the legs in the niche could be interpreted as supporting the wall. 3. The burial was either contemporary with the construction or later.

If it was at the time of the construction, it could indicate the tradition of building the altar above the remains of a saint. If one were to believe the diary entry about finding a skull and part of the upper chest bones of a skeleton exactly beneath the altar, this could be the case. But the evidence for this is flimsy, given the lack of photographs. The other option could be the tradition of immuring, so well described in folklore. These could be the remains of saints, martyrs, clergy or lay patrons. However, if they were saints or martyrs, it is somewhat unlikely that this would not be reflected somewhere or to be forgotten entirely. But they could be patrons (maybe remains of the leaders of the saddlers' guild which built the church). Then, the niche could be explained as having been built over a coffin (like what Boiadzhiev suggests at one point but trying to prove the case for an early burial). It also would tally with the information of nails being found at the spot.

If, on the other hand, the burial is later, then it could be Levski. But then the question remains why necessarily in the altar when this is a sacrilege, and there are no precedents (although this cannot be a final and decisive arguments against), and why they had to dig into the wall, unless they themselves wanted to reenact the symbolism of immuring.

I am tremendously indebted to Florin Curta for the time he devoted to examining the evidence and would like to express my warmest gratitude.

of concrete facts and conclusions.” He had therefore asked the Archeological Institute (AI) to place the whole existing documentation at the disposal of the debating parties, and expressed his amazement that it had not done so in the previous years, which displayed an unscholarly attitude on its part.

Setting the concrete aim for the debate, he added: “Our task is not to give a final answer to the question whether Levski’s grave was in the church or not. This requires many additional factors and arguments, which can enforce or weaken the conclusions based on the archeological data. We are not going to discuss different theses but are going to deal with facts... The goal is to analyze and discuss the assembled documentation, and in an open discussion to decide whether these materials allow us to reach any conclusion.” (277–8)

Thus, two major questions were on the agenda:

1. What was the state of skeleton No. 95? Was it whole, with or without lower limbs, with or without a preserved skull, etc.?
2. What is the correct dating of the funeral? Was there a niche in the wall, what was the position of the foundation pilots, etc.?

STAMEN MIKHAILOV (278–80, 299) corroborated all his previous statements. Three skeletons and a skull had been discovered in the altar. S. M. was completely flabbergasted with No. 95: “This has not existed anywhere... Neither patriarchs, nor kings or boyars, nobody has been buried in an altar. There are no burials in altars.”<sup>13</sup> Since only circa 100 cm were excavated in the apsis space, and the rest were beneath the apsis wall, he concluded that this could not have been an altar burial but, instead, an early necropolis before the construction of the church. He also maintained that the upper part of the skeleton had been ruined by the altar stone basement, an additional argument against a later burial. Already in this first statement, S. M. evoked the status of dilettantes versus professionals: “I really wonder how we reached today’s situation. Comrade Khaitov published a book, three quarters of this book was printed in the newspapers. Comrade Khaitov is not an archeologists but he was allowed to do that. I, the specialist in archeology, was not allowed to publish.” He further denigrated the sketches of Bobchev as “unserious.” Finally he was adamant that there had been no niche in the wall where the lower limbs were placed: “There is no niche. This is the uneven base of the apsidal wall.” Also (299): “First, I am telling you: this is no hole, no hole! This is the irregularly leveled based of the apsidal wall and therefore there is no hole neither in the apsidal wall, nor in the churches wall, nor in the ancient wall. There is no hole! None!”

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13 This is a kind of circular argument: because there can be no burials in the altar, and because only 100 cm of the skeleton was excavated and the rest of the bones *beyond* the altar wall, Mikhailov assumed they were *beneath* the altar wall, and concluded that the church must have been built on top of an older grave. In addition, altar burials are not altogether unprecedented, although very rare. For example, the remains of Beata Ana of Los Angeles Monteagudo (1606–1686) are resting in the altar of the Catholic church of the Monasterio de Santa Catalina in Arequipa, Peru. Ana was beatified by John Paul II in 1985, in recognition of her curing of cancer as a miracle.

GEORGI DZHINGOV (281–5) addresses the question of skeleton No. 95 and some of the photographs, showing the holes which were plugged up with paper, and which are not the ones passing through the leg bones but are next to the thigh-bones. Maintains the skull was broken, and the legs from the knees down were never excavated. It did not make sense to excavate them, because that would have meant digging under the basement of the church. The upper part of the body showed a normal burial. He explains why he never mentioned in the Diary that the bones of the lower limbs had been broken. Says this was superfluous since the fact that the holes were passing *through* the limbs (as written down in the entry for June 13) meant, according to him, that the wooden pillars had passed through the limbs, and, consequently, could not but have broken them.

Dzhingov questions Bobchev's information that a metal hook and eye had been found at the side of the skeleton on May 31. In Dzhingov's Diary, the entry is unequivocal: "During the cleaning, no objects were found around the skeleton." The only metal hook and eye was found on June 14, at a different site, in the nave, not in the altar. He gives examples of omissions in Bobchev's diary, questioning his reliability. There is even a transparent insinuation that Bobchev may have used Dzhingov's diary and "updated" his own, which could have been possible only in the period between the end of 1980, when Mikhailov had deposited the diary at the AI, and the end of 1982 when Bobchev died. Dzhingov's opinion was that Bobchev's diary may be included in the publication as an illustration but not as part of the basic documentation.<sup>14</sup> He maintains that the part of the skeleton below the knees was under the apsidal wall, and he denies the existence of a niche.<sup>15</sup>

STEFAN BOIADZHIEV (288) summarizes the archeologists' position that when the church was built (in the 14th or 15th centuries), the lower part of the skeleton was destroyed and thrown away during the construction, the upper part remaining.

MAGDALIN STANCHEVA's belief in an early burial is based on three arguments:

- a) there is no reason to dig into the wall when there would have been enough room to lay the whole body in the altar;
- b) there had been an old necropolis at the site;
- c) accepts that there were no metal hook and eye around the skeleton, but that such materials abound after the 14th century.

She accepts Nikolai Todorov's reproach that the AI did not show the necessary interest and did not try to receive Bobchev's diary and other documentation from his heirs.

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<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, Bobchev's diary was included as item 2 of the main documentation.

The documentary part consists of 6 items: Dzhingov's diary; Bobchev's diary; Bobchev's sketchbook; Photographs by Khlebarov, Boiadzhiev, Daskalov, and Mushanov; Benchev's graphics; and Mikhailov's 1961 study of the church.

<sup>15</sup> At this point Benchev observes that this is anatomically absurd. Dzhingov's diary states that 100 cm of the skeleton were outside, and the rest 72 cm under the wall. Anatomically, the part below the knees is around 1/4 of the body's height. This would result in a skeleton of 2.80. He concludes that when they reached the wall, the diggers needed a smaller hole of circa 45 cm.

NIKOLAI KHAITOV (291–9) calls on concentrating on the concrete questions:

1. was there a hole or niche in which the lower limbs of the corpse were laid?
2. were the bones broken when the foundational pilots were driven into the ground? He analyzes Boiadziev's sketches and the photographs, and demonstrates that a hole actually existed, quite apart from the question how deep it was.<sup>16</sup>

He then comments on Mikhailov's statement that the right leg under the knee had been broken (from the 1961 publication), and logically concludes that, clearly, the skeleton must have had not only thighbones (as the archeologists maintain) but also bones under the knees. If, indeed, there were no remnants of lower limbs, how come this had not been entered into the diary, when this would have been really the best argument for the earlier burial thesis? Khaitov then compares photographs from 1956 and 1974, and concludes that maybe the lower limbs were actually never cleaned up. He is also amazed that Dzhingov's entry of 13 June mentions two holes from the posts, but never has any mention of the bones: are there or are there none? Likewise, the archeologists state that the right lower limb was broken, but there is no photograph, even no verbal entry in the diary.

Khaitov then argues that if the bones had been broken by the 10cm wide wooden foundation post, the rest of the skeleton would have been at least shifted; instead, the photographs show the skeleton in a perfect position of repose, and on some photos the right thigh bone can be seen intact down to the knee.

He also comments on the position of the right shoulder bone which is seen lying over the basement wall for the column of the altar stone. This would have been impossible had the funeral been earlier.

Finally, like Razboinikov, Khaitov maintains that it is a widespread custom not to step on the head of a buried person, and not to step nor sit even on the whole grave.<sup>17</sup> He asserts also that it was technically easier to dig a hole in the wall rather than dig more space in the sanctuary base.

NIKOLA MUSHANOV (296–302) is challenged by Ovcharov to explain why he had signed the conclusions of the Kosev commission, whereas now he sides with the contrary opinion. Mushanov explains that at the time of the Kosev commission, the only documentation consisted of the two publications of Mikhailov of 1959 and 1961, and a xerox copy of Bobchev's diary (with even some missing pages; it was deemed inadequate by the archeologists on the commission). There was no mention either of Bobchev's sketches or of Dzhingov's diary. Thus, in its archeological part, the commission trusted completely Mikhailov's conclusions. "I signed it with a clear conscience because there was no ground on which to dispute the then existing scholarly interpretation."

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Boiadziev does not deny this argumentation against his previous assertions. He insists, however, that there were no bones in the hole. Khaitov's long statement is often interrupted and there are interesting exchanges on separate items. For the sake of clarity, I have rendered them as separate interventions.

<sup>17</sup> He later retreated from this assertion. See his written statement of 1 September 1986.

Mushanov believes that Mikhailov never cleaned up (i.e. excavated) the hole with the lower limbs. Using his experience during the conservation works and the knowledge of the terrain, he then suggests a possible technical reconstruction of how the burial may have occurred: the digging, reaching the wall and then digging a hole underneath where they placed the lower limbs.

For Mushanov, the two holes from the pilotss are not decisive, and he suggests several ways how to interpret whether they were higher or lower than the level of the skeleton; the decisive element is the big hole or niche (that the archeologists deny) which, according to N. M., is in the medieval construction.

Much of the following debate is around this construction. According to Mushanov, this part of the wall had been built as an additional support and foundation under the basement level, and the hole may have been already there as a construction feature..

A rather technical but fiery debate follows between the architects BOIADZHIEV, MUSHANOV and the artist BENCHEV (302–9). In the end, Boiadzhiev denies his own sketches as erroneous, says he did them in an evening and they should not be taken unto account, and that he would provide new ones (311).

MIKHAIL BENCHEV's very detailed technical statement (305–11) comments on Bobchev's sketches and concludes that while his drawing is approximate, the numerical measures he took are absolutely exact. The gist of his complicated technical argument is that there is a step of ca 30 cm above the ancient wall, which was a medieval construction and the hole was dug into this part. If the burial had been ancient (i.e. earlier than the construction of the church), the thighbones would have been totally damaged.

In his closing closing remarks for the first day (310–1) NIKOLAI TODOROV admonishes the participants because of the intolerant spirit and mutual incriminations. He stresses the urgency to find an acceptable conclusion based on facts, because there is pressure from the public for an answer: "The newspaper *Mir* writes, and some time later there are excavations and the skeleton is found. Here is one type of logic, establishing the truth. And this is what the ordinary citizen will accept, and you cannot say anything about it, if you don't counter it with facts. I am telling you. Five million Bulgarians will believe precisely this. It is written in 1937 and then a skeleton comes out. How will you counter it? You understand what is happening? In some way, this logic has to be either corroborated or rejected by the data. So, please, stick to the available data..." He is angry at Boiadzhiev's admission of substandard quality of his sketches; "I really will, without your permission, publish the protocols *tel quel*. It is inadmissible to organize a debate and that you would come unprepared. Comrade Boiadzhiev, you bear the responsibility!"

Finally, he summarizes the undecided questions:

a) was there a niche?

b) what part of the limbs was outside the apsidal space?

311: "The goal is not to accuse someone, understand this once and for all. The goal is not to state that the archeological institute has committed a crime.

The archeological institute, by giving now access [to the whole documentation], has effectively countered some of the most serious accusations that could be heard about its consciously destroying documents. There is no such thing. Quite to the contrary. There had been a very conscientious assembling of materials, a scrupulous attempt to analyze them and to preserve them... The whole point is to reach some clear interpretations on which part of the documentation is reliable, which is not, and where we can go from there.”

*DAY 2: 12 Feb. 1986 (312–340)*

NIKOLAI TODOROV shares his satisfaction with the preceding debate, despite the fact that no resolution has been reached. Suggests the exclusion of Boev’s expertise as unserious and detrimental to the AI. Pleads that this be accepted.<sup>18</sup> (312)

STAMEN MIKHAILOV says that the bones of the lower limbs were not found. He admits this may have been his weakness not to have persevered with the excavation. (312)

GEORGI DZHINGOV protests energetically. The only reason for not digging further was not to ruin the monument. If they had excavated further, they would have had to buttress the construction. Dzhingov then goes on the offensive and asks Mushanov whether in 1974 he had cleaned up the hole that he, Dzhingov and Mikhailov, had not noticed in 1956, and preserved the bones. (312–3)

MUSHANOV defends himself from the potential accusation by saying that when he started his conservation work in 1974, he had no idea of the archeological debate, and was totally unaware that there was anything of archeological value in the conservation site. When Bobchev visited him in 1976 on the site, Mushanov was high up on the scaffold, and Bobchev only shouted that there is a possibility that this church is the grave of the Apostle. Mushanov was in a hurry to finish the conservation for the opening of the party congress in 10 days, but he had sent a letter to Stancheva, asking for archeologists to come to the site. Had he known of the existence of a solid counterthesis to Mikhailov’s, he could have easily left a mobile entry in the concrete plates with which the church was reinforced. (207, 313–4).

TODOROV asks Dzhingov whether at the time they were convinced there would be no further bones underneath, because this is unclear from the Diary. DZHINGOV says he was convinced. Maintains the bones reached a only few cm (1–2 or 5) to the wall (not 20–30 cm as Mikhailov maintains). (313)

SPAS RAZBOINIKOV raises again the question of controversies among the archeologists. At what exact place were the lower limbs broken: *under* the knee, as in Mikhailov’s publication and Stanilov’s in *Vekove*, or *above* the knee, as in Dzhingov’s *Diary*? He also asks whether the limbs were 20–30 cm off the wall (Mikhailov) or much less (DzHINGOV)?

<sup>18</sup> Clearly no one is against.

DIMITĀR OVCHAROV (317–21) comments on the available documentation. He deems Dzhangov's diary to be a first-rate document. As for the recently found photos, he admits the archeologists' guilt that they were missing until now.

He reverses his preliminary opinion of the quality of Bobchev's diary and accepts that the measurements and the archeological details were exact, but he questions Bobchev's drawing of the skeleton's position, in particular, the extending the skeleton farther from the wall. While carefully avoiding the term falsification he, instead, speaks of Bobchev's error: "Why was this extension necessary? Sava Bobchev is not a stupid man; he is quite intelligent. He had one goal: to prove that this was Levski... But this desire made him overzealous. He clearly saw that the hole was too small for this positioning of the skeleton and he, therefore, pulled him back. Here... he pulled him back around 45 cm."

Ovcharov also speaks about the hole: there is information only from the photographs. "If Dzhangov, whom we believe, has not accounted for a hole, there is no hole. But the photographs do show a hole." The photograph is Mushanov's, from 1972, with approximate size: breadth 38 cm, height 25 cm, depth circa 20 cm. Ovcharov concludes that there can be three logical scenarios. Either a stone, producing the hole, was taken out during the reburial (Khaitov's thesis); the stone could have been taken out by the archeologists (and they have forgotten); or the stone was taken out during the conservation works in the 1970s.<sup>19</sup>

DIANA GERGOVA insists that if an archeological situation is not drawn on an exact scale at the time, any subsequent reconstruction based on photographs and architectural sketches would be imprecise (324).

MIKHAIL BENCHEV, convinced that the archeologists cannot correctly read sketches, has prepared a 1:1 model in order to experiment with possible positions of the skeleton. He provides technical commentaries about the measures and where were they taken from—the apsidal wall, the so-called bench (the widening of the apsidal wall), the brick wall, etc. He also comments on when the measures were taken: before or after the raising of the bench (not indicated in the Dzhangov's Diary); on the anatomical ratios; on the unreliability of the photographs because of perspective shortening. He ends with a long analysis of the characteristics of the zone in which the skeleton was found, and which, according to geodesical measurements, is located above and aside from the ancient wall (325–37).

NIKOLA MUSHANOV complains of the bad atmosphere in which he is made to feel accused. He speaks about the zone described by Benchev, and posits that this was a construction zone made in order to stabilize the soil in the northern part of the apsis, which was not built over the ancient wall, as the southern part. It was, actually, a kind of filling (337, 339).

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<sup>19</sup> In my opinion as a reader, Ovcharov emerged as the only logical and thinking member of the archeological team (aside from Velkov, who prefers to keep silent).

*DAY 3: 27 Feb. 1986 (340–379)*

NIKOLAI TODOROV (340–4) recapitulates the goal: “To ascertain whether it is possible, based on archeological material and with primary material having been lost, to reach any definitive conclusions (but not necessarily by us) about Vasil Levski’s grave. Our aim is not to provide this definitive answer—whether the church houses the grave of Vasil Levski.” (340) He further summarizes which materials are considered as a valid documentary base. The previous two meetings were positive in the sense that for the first time there was direct contact between the representatives of both theses, in the course of which both sides, without changing their basic premises, still introduced important correctives in their argumentation.

At the same time, he criticizes the defensive and passive attitude of the AI. “It would have been proper, since the AI pretends to have the last word on the excavations, that it also should provide the first interpretation and the first presentation of the facts. Regrettably, the AI puts itself in a defensive position, and it is being confronted with interpretations based on its own data, which challenge its own thesis... I am surprised by this passive attitude.” (342) Later he adds: “I say it with distress, for the sake of the Academy’s honor: the ‘dilettantes’ as you call them, have proven to be no dilettantes at all. They come out with arguments based on your materials, and you are always in a position to counter their arguments. It should have been reverse, if you yourselves had analyzed this photographic material, if you had avoided your internal contradictions, and had signed a statement, not so easily, without having gone through the assembled documentation. If you do not clean things up, I will be forced to publish all materials that have reached me. Let it become generally known. The broad public does not believe in word.” (358) And again: “You have to understand, all Bulgaria is waiting for your response. You have to start working. Stop only defending yourselves. The others offer their analysis of the photographs. Why don’t you have yours? This angers me. You behave like spectators. You have to understand, the public will judge you if you do not come out with your own scholarly, well founded and critical analysis, based on the whole documentation that is kept by you, not by me.” (367)

This last meeting will be devoted mostly to the dating. Todorov points out that it is inconceivable that the architects’ word on the dating should have lesser weight than the archeologists.’ An artificial professional rivalry and dichotomy is posited. On the other hand, he opposes Kahitov’s allegations and does not believe that part of the documentation had disappeared deliberately, but is amazed at the cavalier handling of some of the photos (some were cut off, there were lies about the negatives not leaving the premises of the AI, etc.) (342–3).

Comments on Stamen Mikhailov’s statement, deposited the previous day: “There is in the statement a critical note, namely whether writers, foresters, engineers, geodesists, doctors, artists, etc. can claim that they have more accurate data than the archeologists. It does not seem to me that they insist on having

more accurate data. They based their theories on the archeological data but interpreted them in a different way. It is a matter of interpretation. There are a number of cases, where a scholar or an archeologist has not been able to assess his discovery, and somebody else explains it. After all, Schliemann was not a professional archeologist.” As for Mikhailov’s complaint that his publications were not allowed to appear, this is unacceptable. He will insist and see to it that the situation is rectified. (344–5)

The main question is not whether this is Levski but whether a late burial is possible. Nobody can give a final answer about Levski based on these materials. At the end of the debates, we are still with the two theses: a) that the skeleton belongs to an ancient necropolis; b) that this is an additional late burial.

A telling side remark gives a glimpse into the atmosphere of the discussion which, in the absence of video tapes can be reconstructed only from words. At one point Todorov addresses the archeologists: “Listen with attention, and not with sneers and unsubstantiated denial. After all, these are photographs you have made.” (352)

MILHAIL BENCHEV (346–54) makes a detailed review of the photographic documentation. At first, there were only two photographs: the bad copy from Mikhailov’s 1961 publication and a photo of the restoration works of the 1970s. Only recently, for the debates at BAN, the AI produced 26–27 negatives, some severely damaged negatives. Benchev accuses the archeologists (in particular Boiadzhiev who had made the copies) of not offering copies from the negatives but from the photographs that are substandard. At the second meeting of February 12, this circumstance was exposed by Benchev, and he was charged, together with Rumiana Radeva, secretary of the Academy, two make an additional inquiry at the photolab of the AI. The visit at the photolab on 14 February 1986 “discovered” an additional new and good 94 negatives of the excavations (among them 15–16 with frontal photographs of skeleton No. 95). Some of the photos testify that the excavations were led in very careful manner, layer by layer, but this was not reflected in detail in the Diary.

Benchev offers a very detailed exposition about the position of the upper part of skeleton No. 95 *vis-à-vis* the base of the altar stone. Looking at the shape of the altar stone, he posits it was not a naked stone but was covered with masonry, and the foundations on which the altar stone was laid consisted of brick, flint and stone work. The photographs show that the right shoulder lies partly on/in the masonry, and the upper body on top of the foundations for the altar stone, where, among the other materials, Dzhingov speaks of “Turkish bricks.” Therefore, it is clear that the skeleton has been laid *after* the building of the altar base. He also supports Bobchev’s sketches that the pilot holes could not be placed at a distance smaller than 20 cm (citing geological, engineering literature). Finally, he comments on skeleton No. 79, the so-called “headless,” especially a photograph in which he appears to have a skull.

In a brief exchange between TODOROV and STANCHEVA (358) she is asked to comment on Buchinski’s statement (from the protocols of the round table of

*Rabotnichesko delo*) that, when asked in 1956 about the fate of the bones she had said she would tell about the bones only if asked from “above.” She flatly denies: “How can I say such a thing. This is a ridiculous response.”<sup>20</sup>

DIMITĪR OVCHAROV (358–61) recapitulates how the “affair” started with Khaitov’s accusations and how he continues, as in his latest memorandum of 22 February 1986, to blame the archeologists who had allegedly been in touch with the secret of Levski’s grave but deserted it at the climatic moment. This “sinister” deed, according to Khaitov, had been effectuated by Mikhailov and Dzhingov. Ovcharov decisively rejects the insinuations about deliberate liquidation of photographic materials by the institute. He also denies that the altar stone could have masonry (in response to Benchev’s analysis). As a comment to Benchev, he differs in the characterizations of the character of the soil and the supporting pilots. He considers the soil very loose, therefore the pilots could have been drawn in at closer distances without the danger of “explosions”.<sup>21</sup> He tries to reconstruct the actual excavations. The lower limbs were between the ancient and medieval wall. The archeologists did not dare go farther (maybe afraid to weaken the base; or because they were totally convinced that this was an early Byzantine or late medieval skeleton and was not worth digging on).

STEFAN BOIAZHIEV (364–7) comes up with a hypothesis, explaining the existence of a hole and the upper edge, namely that at the time of the building, the workers might have come upon a coffin which they did not destroy but built on top of it. Insists that the lower limbs were broken and thrown away. “There are no limbs, whatever you say, there are none and there could be none. I am categorical.” (367)

NIKOLA MUSHANOV (365–6) speaks about why, according to him, the church had been built during the Ottoman period. He also comments on the precariousness of using the photographs, since they are made at different times, by different people and from different angles. There are special difficulties in establishing the distances; a definitive opinion is possible only through photogrammetry.

GEORGI DZHINGOV (368–70) explains the difficulty in dating from fragments. The difference between ancient and Turkish bricks is only in the width, not the contents: the ancient bricks are thicker. Whenever a brick was thinner, he called it “Turkish.” “And therein lies my capital mistake. Because thin bricks come

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20 This is important, insofar as it is the serious and definitive answer of a respected professional. Khaitov apparently gave credence to Buchinski’s information and continued to make much of this information until his death, flatly accusing Stancheva of participating in a cabal to “disappear” the bones (*Grobŭ na Vasil Levski*, Sofia, 2002, 231–6).

21 Khaitov’s team counters this proposition by pointing out that Mikhailov in his 1961 publication explicitly refers to the soil as “compact humus soil.” (383)

not only from the Ottoman period, after the 15th century, but you encounter them also in the Second Bulgarian kingdom. And you cannot distinguish one from the other.”<sup>22</sup> He fends off Khaitov’s accusations about a sinister plot to silence the noise around the grave by saying he was totally convinced that this was an early burial after he saw the holes from the supporting pilots. Therefore they did not dig further, since they believed they would find no bones anyway. He maintains that the 1956 photographs show no hole. Only in 1974, when Mushanov was restoring, a hole appeared when a stone fell or was taken out, it was cleaned up, and cemented.

He then goes on the offensive and tries to put the blame on Mushanov and the restoration works in the 1970s: “They dig up the altar apsis at a depth of three and a half meters. Mushanov said it. Nobody called me in, and I didn’t go to meddle around. And when Mushanov says he didn’t know [about the rumors], he should have known. Just as an archeologist, the conservationist’s duty, when beginning work on an object, is to get familiarized with all existing data about this object, to be clear about his project... Didn’t he know about Mikhailov’s publication of 1961? He did.”

NIKOLAI TODOROV (369–70) interjects: “I would like to ask Dzhingov to throw light on one aspect. It is not the concrete fact any longer but an interesting circumstance. It is totally possible that one is convinced about a thesis. Another thesis, however, exists alongside. In any case, a scholar—no matter whether a simple research fellow, a senior research fellow or a professor—always places the materials, the primary sources at the disposal of others, for possible verification. You archeologists, in particular, know how often you yourselves change dates, establish periods, phases, etc., based on additionally discovered elements in a later period. All kinds of things can happen. Therefore, my question is posed to the archeologists, not to the architects. The architects, after all, turn to you with a letter, and an archeologist is sent [Rogova]. Did you instruct this archeologist, did you tell her the details, did you draw her attention, or did you keep quiet? I am turning the question around, so that it would be clear that the accusation falls on you. ... Why were you disinterested? Why did you not cooperate, when you maintain that you did care? You knew that there had been some hesitation. You knew that Bobchev was supporting the other thesis. Here was an opportunity to decide and prove once and for all your own thesis. Did you run away? ... Why did Stamen Mikhailov keep silent, instead of telling the archeologist who was sent there: “Why don’t you just check there, there is an opportunity to see whether there are bones or not.” Why did you forsake your most solid argument? Because you blindly believed [in your own thesis] and neglected [the other]. You know, as a scholar, I deem this unacceptable.”

DZHINGOV (371–3) says that Mikhailov’s assertion that the pilot hole passed *below* the knee is Mikhailov’s error. The diary is unambiguous: the hole passed

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<sup>22</sup> Dzhingov is quite professional here and is certainly right about the ambiguities, but it is disingenuous to claim “a capital mistake” in one case, and stick pedantically to the word of the Diary in other cases.

*above* the knee. As far as the excavation artifacts are concerned, 2–3 weeks ago, i.e. January 1986, he had been called to inspect a cellar on Latinka Street, which serves as a warehouse for archeological materials. They discovered one wooden box/chest from the 1956 excavation. On inspecting the contents (together with Mikhailov) they found 60 numbers (or envelopes) of the 140 existing numbers (from the inventory list) in which artefacts from the excavation had been preserved (ceramic pieces, bone fragments, coins, etc.). Some envelopes had spilled out, destroyed by mice.

SPAS RAZBOINIKOV and DZHINGOV (373) argue about the broken thighbone (above the knee) that Dzhingov asserts. Razboinikov bases himself on the photos, which show the bones almost to the knees, and no trace of a broken part. Dzhingov says it is close to the knee, i.e. he had seen it when bending, but it is not clear in the photographs. Razboinikov counters that this would have been reflected on the bones above, basing himself on anatomy. Dzhingov's logic is the following: if he has written down in the diary that the holes go through the bones, then they must have been logically broken. Razboinikov counters that if this is not explicitly written down in the diary, there is no way that this is true. Rather, the holes mentioned are the traces of the rotten pilots.

STAMEN MIKHAILOV (376–7) continues to insist that there was no hole but rather an irregular line of the foundation wall which, in a natural way, formed something that he, Mikhailov, at the time called a niche. Concedes that the documentation was not carried out in the proper way. Makes an emotional statement: “Let’s face it. It would have been mostly in my interest [to discover Levski’s grave]. You would, I hope, all agree with it, and many acquaintances told me so directly: hey, why didn’t you agree to that from the outset, you would have been in peace, and would have become famous. Indeed. I have not achieved something exclusive as a scholar. I am an average scholar. But my name would have been for ever linked to Vasil Levski. It is more in my interest, comrade Khaitov, because I would have been the discoverer.”

His final words at the debate: “In conclusion, I do not renounce anything I have written, neither that the Protobulgarians have not changed the course of history, as I have written and continue to hold, nor that they have changed the Slavic culture and legacy. You accuse me of Byzantinophilia. And where would we be, comrade Khaitov, without the Byzantines? Our alphabet is Greek. Let’s take what we have that is Greek. Our names are Greek. You cannot accuse me of Byzantinophilia because I bow before the ancient cultures—Rome, Byzantium, the East. In the end, we are internationalists, not chauvinists. We emphasize our own more than is needed. It is correct, of course, that we leave aside some of the negative things. How much treason there is in our history! It is horrible! If we were to waive this, it would be politically incorrect. We should emphasize the positive. I do not renounce anything I have written.”

DIMITĀR ANGELOV (377–8) is relieved that a serious accusation against the institute has been lifted, namely that materials have been hidden or destroyed. People began searching and found most. He supports Todorov that everything

should be published: "This, after all, is what scholarship is about: to hear out different opinions."

NIKOLAI TODOROV (379) closes the meeting: "We have not reached the stage where we can say that one of theses is able to entirely displace the other. There still are arguments in favor of the one or of the other. We cannot come up with a categorical statement from this meeting. This is the first conclusion." His second conclusion concerned the opportunity of a free exchange of ideas: "From 1961 until 1980 the thesis by Stamen Mikhailov was the dominant one. It was imposed. There is a prehistory, which shows that the public had been acquainted only with one of the existing theses. Nobody dared doubt it. It was defended at the round table, on TV, etc. But a second thesis emerged. It also seeks to come forth. In the second thesis, the different [archeological] layers begin to make sense. And I repeat this again, if archeology, the AI institute had intervened at this stage, this could have been stopped much earlier. We would not have come to such an exchange of severe accusations."

### C. CONCLUDING DOCUMENTATION

#### *1. Statement of the leadership of AI, 25 Feb. 1986 (380–381)*

1. They recognize as basic documentation only Dzhingov's diary of the excavations and the negatives at the AIM.

2. The three skeletons—No. 95 in the northern part of the altar, No. 79 without a skull in the southern part, and No. 102 under the altar stone—as well as the other bones come from a necropolis before the building of the church, i.e. end of 14th-beginning of 15th century; therefore the Levski thesis is impossible. The opponents' insistence on No. 95 being Levski is ascribed to their "wrong interpretation of some data from the diary." The only concrete mention is the erroneous, according to them, statement of Bobchev and Buchinski about two hooks and eye.

3. Totally deny the existence of a hole in which the legs were entered. This is not reflected in the diary and, according to them, is not visible on any of the photographs. The opponents build their hypothesis around Bobchev's sketch of 12 June 1956, as well as on a 1974 photograph by Mushanov from the conservation works. However, during the conservation works no bones were found at this place, although they should have been there since they were not dug out in 1956.

4. "The attack against the archaeological arguments about the dating of grave No. 95 is based not on the existing scholarly documentation but on the basis of the mistakes or contradictions in Mikhailov's publications... The manifested negligence and the insufficient care to preserve [the archaeological materials and the negatives, which was due to objective and subjective reasons, is intentionally misrepresented as an attempt to hide facts linked to the possible grave of Vasil Levski. The recently discovered materials and negatives show that there never has been such an intention."

5. There has not been a written anthropological expertise. This is an omission of the leadership of AI. But there was a preliminary evaluation by Dr. Boev which was reflected in Mikhailov's publication.

2. *Statement of the opponents, 1 March 1986 (381–385)*

Before stating their opinion, the members of Khaitov's team draw attention to several interim results of the debates: 1. The fact that Boiadzhiev, who had offered sketches to counter the ones of Bobchev, withdrew them himself as defective; 2. The fact that during the experimental checking of the two opposing versions of the burial on a 1:1 scale, the archeologists' one proved technically impossible and thus it was established that part of the lower limbs had to be placed in a hole in the apsidal wall; 3. The existence of the so-called bench (the widening of the apsidal wall of circa 30 cm as a reinforcing structure) was incontestably established during the debates. Further, the opinion of Khaitov's group was based on the following six circumstances:

1. The position of No. 95 *vis-à-vis* the altar base. Since the altar stone was covered by masonry (from the analysis of the photographs and the evidence from both diaries), and the skull of No. 95 touched upon this masonry, there is no way the skull would not have been damaged during the construction of the church had the burial been an early one.

2. The photographs show that the right upper part of the skeleton lies over the construction foundation, which served as the base for the altar stone. Dzhingov's diary explicitly specifies that this construction foundation contained "pieces of Turkish bricks" and "one piece of ancient brick." Dzhingov's response that he was inexperienced at the time and may have erred in describing these bricks as Turkish is not acceptable; otherwise any uncomfortable fact can be ascribed to inexperience.

3. Dzhingov's diary (entries 11 and 13 June 1956) documents the existence of a construction heap consisting of stone and construction debris along the whole base of the altar space, explicitly positioning skeletons No. 95 and 79 above this heap. The remains could not have survived intact if they had been from earlier burials.

4. The so-called "bench" was an additional widening of the apsidal base (by circa 30 cm) for the sake of reinforcing the soil, by placing wooden pilots and covering them on top with stone slabs. The analysis of this construction juxtaposed to the depth of the burial of skeleton No. 95 makes it impossible that the bones would not have been ruined. During the debates Boiadzhiev and Ovcharov voiced the opinion that this reinforcement was much later, not during the initial construction of the church. Evenso, this would not have preserved the integrity of the bones.

5. Does the niche or hole exist? This is something that, according to this statement, is obvious from both the photographs and Bobchev's sketches. Boiadzhiev and Ovcharov both recognized its existence and even proposed their measurements for its size, respectively 25 and 38 cm. The archeologists' statement, which denies the existence of a hole, offers the following formula:

“the lower limbs of the deceased were located partly on top of the ancient wall and were put in place by digging or crafting of a bed for the limbs.” However one calls it, “hole” or “bed,” it was not in the ancient wall but above it by 20 cm, and thus after the construction of the church.

6. On the pilot holes the archeologists came up with three theses: a) Mikhailov’s that the right limb under the knee had been broken by the pilots; this thesis was not supported by any other archeologist, because it would have meant recognizing the existence of lower limbs in the the hole; b) Dzhingov’s theory that there were two pilot holes which had broken the lower limbs, the left exactly in the area of the knee, the right a little above the knee; this theory was resoundingly dismissed by the photographs in which the right bones are visible as whole and intact down to the knee; c) the opinion of the five archeologists’ statement (12 February 1986) in which the integrity of the bones is confirmed but the existence of the holes suggests, according to the archeologists, that the burial is early, because a late burial would have damaged the holes. The response to the third opinion is in the analysis of the photographs. In the earliest photographs of the skeleton the holes are not discernible precisely because they had been blocked or tapped during the late burial. It is symptomatic that the arguments based on the pilot holes were never even mentioned in the final statement of the AI of 25 February.

Khaitov’s team also counters the otherwise logical hypothesis of Ovcharov (358–61) that the explanation why the bones may have survived intact was in the character of the soil. Ovcharov claimed it was so soft and loose, that the pilots could have slid easily in without damaging the bones. Khaitov’s team points to Mikhailov’s publication which explicitly describes the soil as “compact humus soil.”

7. An additional point is added, which was raised only at the very last meeting. It concerns the so-called headless skeleton No. 79. One of the newly discovered photographs shows this skeleton with a skull and well preserved bones, whereas in the remaining ones it is without one and some bones are missing or broken. Dzhingov maintains that the first photograph belongs to a different burial but his argumentation is refuted based on the position of the bones. The theory of an earlier burial of No. 79 was defended by the archeologists based on the existence of broken bones. The group suspects that the bones were broken only subsequently by the workers but that the first photograph proves a late burial. They, however, do not pursue their suspicion with allegations of foul play on the part of the archeologists until a criminological expertise confirms or refutes that the photographs concern the identical skeleton.

The conclusion of the group is unequivocal: “Based on the stated facts in light of the existing documentation the truth should not be sacrificed any longer because of several wounded egos. This does not concern just someone, it concerns THE GRAVE OF VASIL LEVSKI, the honor of the whole Bulgarian people who has to live with the accusation that it has left its Apostle of freedom buried in the criminal graveyard.”

*3. Protocol No.68 of the expert opinion of the Research Institute of Criminology at the Ministry of Interior, 30 March 1986 (386–410) and album with the developed photographs (395–410)*

The expert opinion was the result of an official request of N. Todorov asking them to pronounce themselves on: 1. Whether skeleton No. 79 from one particular photograph (where the skeleton has a skull) is identical to the remains in several other photographs (without a skull); 2. How No. 79 and 95 were buried; 3. Is it possible to date the bones based on the fragment of rotten wood covering the funeral pit; 4. Have the bones from photo No. 10 (of No. 79) been dislocated? 5. Any other conclusions.

The expert opinion summarizes the information it was basing its opinion on. It describes the specific techniques for processing the negatives. Their conclusions are:

1. Judging by the hip bones, the photographs most likely show the same individual. The opinion is also based on the similarity of the terrain, analyzed by a tracing expertise.

2. They conclude that most likely these burials were irregular (because they are without coffins).

3. the description of the bones and the soil leads them to believe that they date from no more than several decades ago. On the other hand they add: “In such a case it is difficult to determine the exact time for the preservation of the bones in the soil, because often they can be preserved from several decades to several centuries.” (394)

4. the response to the possible dislocation of the bones is that yes, they have been somewhat dislocated, and it could have happened from the weight of the adjacent soil or when the wooden cover fell on them.

5. One of the holes close to the right lower limb is partly under the bone. The niches on fig. 5 and fig. 6 are identical. The terrain around both skeletons can be considered to be similar.

*4. Concluding report of Nikolai Todorov, 7 April 1986 (411–417)*

The report consists of 5 parts:

1. It begins with a brief prehistory of the convening of the debates. Having familiarized himself with the preliminary materials from the discussion at the Archeological museum, Todorov concluded that the request of the AI to publish only the protocols of the discussion at the Medieval Section was premature, since this discussion had not made any meaningful effort to analyze the existing documentation. He was surprised that the AI had stood aside from the existing debate until the publication of Khaitov’s book, and had not even supplied the Kosev commission in 1983 with the existing documentation. He therefore asked the AI to organize this documentation—excavation diaries, photographs and sketches—and pronounce itself on the archeological facts. In addition, he

decided to organize an open discussion between the two sides with the explicit aim to analyze critically only the archeological data, with supplementary arguments from architecture, geodesy, and medicine. All materials and statements of both sides were offered for the perusal of all participants a week before the debates started, and they were at their disposal all throughout the three-week duration of the debates.

2. The main goal of the debate was to pronounce itself on two questions:
  - a) the condition of the skeletons in the altar area and their positioning;
  - b) the most probable dating of the finds, especially the question of a hole or niche in the wall, the pilot holes, etc.

Todorov appealed to concentrate exclusively on these two questions. It was not the task of this debate to give a final answer to the question about whether Levski was buried in the church. He also “asked the participants to speak only for themselves, regardless of the fact that their position might be shared with others.” (412)

The debates were taped and are at the disposal of everyone interested in them.

3. After the conclusion of the debates, it became clear that the two sides firmly persist in supporting their initial theses. Still, the discussion “had an indubitably positive role in establishing the scientific facts and removing a whole range of hypotheses that had been arbitrarily built on them. It also contributed to overcoming the bare negation of the possibility for later burials in the church.” (412)

Positive was also the finding of new photographic documentation. At the beginning of the debates, the AI insisted on a very limited number of photographs (first 10, then raised to 37). During the discussions, an additional 94 negatives were “discovered” that shed important light on the debates. Also, 60 artifacts, almost half of the inventoried excavation objects, were found in the depositories. “Thus, the accusation against the archeologists leading the excavations, that they had consciously destroyed or hidden materials, in order to support their thesis, was removed. This, however, does not free individual archeologists, as well as the leadership of the AI, from the responsibility of having demonstrated carelessness in gathering and preserving the materials and documentation of the excavations.” (412)

As an unquestionable success of the discussion, Todorov emphasized “the dialogue between the specialists representing the two theses, whose conflicting positions had already been broadly popularized among the public.” (412)

Since there was no sign of compromise and a consensual solution was impossible, Todorov concluded that the sole way to proceed was “to publish a serious and responsible scholarly publication, which would convincingly present to all specialists and interested individuals the whole scientific documentation, as well as the two opposing theses with their argumentation.” (413)

The projected volume was to include: I. A documentary part, comprising the documentation of the excavations (diaries, sketches); the photographs from the excavations and the restorations, and the 1961 publication of Stamen

Mikhailov. II. The discussion materials from the roundtable of “Rabotnicheko delo” in 1981; the report of the Kosev commission of 1982; the materials of the 1985 discussion at the Medieval Section of the AI; excerpt from the latest discussion; the protocol of the expertise of the criminological institute; the final report of Nikolai Todorov.<sup>23</sup>

4. Before stating his own position, Nikolai Todorov briefly summarized the two opposing versions on a number of concrete issues.

4.1 On the dating of the remains, the statement of the AI reflects the unanimous belief of the archeologists that the bones in the altar space came from an ancient necropolis before the building of the church, and thus dated from a period before the end of the 14th or early 15th century. Equally unanimously, Khatov’s group insisted that skeleton No. 95 belongs to a burial after the building of the church. At the same time, despite the unanimity, some of the arguments advanced by individuals of the same team were mutually exclusive.

4.2 On the issue of a hole in the apsidal wall, this was flatly denied in the concluding statement of the archeologists. During the discussions, however, its existence was admitted by both Ovcharov and Boiadzhiev who even came up with figures for its size. After careful consideration of the different arguments about its exact place and size, the report concludes that the suggested size calculated by the experts from Khaitov’s team corresponds to the photographs.

4.3 Summarizing the analysis of both sides about the state of skeleton No. 95 and particularly the fate of the lower limbs, the report concludes that the position of the archeologists about the existing holes, about whether the bones were broken or intact, and whether they had not been excavated versus having been destroyed and therefore non-existent, is full of inner contradictions. The archeologists never come up with a convincing explanation about how the bones could remain intact if they belonged to an early burial before the construction of the church.

4.4 The statement of the working group of the AI maintained that when the holes were discovered, they were not filled with soil and the excavators “tapped” them with paper. This was used as an argument for the early burial.

The opponents’ argument maintained that in the case of an early burial, there is no way to preserve the bones intact. It also countered the suggestion of Ovcharov about the looseness of the soil with the evidence for its compactness and density from Mikhailov himself.

4.5 While the statement of the AI stands behind Dzhingov’s assertion that the lower limbs at and beneath the knees were broken, it never addresses the question that was posed numerous times why, if that was the case, do the

<sup>23</sup> As can be seen, at this point the full taped coverage of the debates was not foreseen.

It was the obdurate position of the archeologists who in the following months tried to suppress the publication and “silence” the issue that finally led to the decision to publish the debates themselves *in extenso*.

photographs show the limbs down to the knee intact and not displaced. These are precisely the arguments the opponents use for a later dating.

- 4.6 On the question of the so-called bench, the archeologists at first (with the exception of Mikhailov) denied its existence. In the course of the debates, Boiadzhiev and Ovcharov accepted it, calling it a “reinforcement wall;” so did Dzhingov. The debates between the two architects Mushanov and Boiadzhiev led to a consensus that the construction terrain of the apsidal space had been opened down to the level of the Roman wall and the active construction site of the church was 10–20 cm under the depth at which skeleton No. 95 was found. In these circumstances the survival of an early burial is impossible.
- 4.7 The mention of “Turkish bricks” in the foundations of the altar stone by both Dzhingov’s diary and Mikhailov’s publication is important for the dating. The only explanation the AI gave for this was that Dzhingov as inexperienced at the time, must have made some mistake. But the diary, as was constantly insisted upon by the perfectly experienced Mikhailov himself, had been written under his—Mikhailov’s—personal control and he would have rectified such a mistake.
- 4.8 This point summarizes the debates about skeleton No. 79 under the altar stone. The newly discovered photograph of this find, juxtaposed with the others, points to a late burial. It all hinges upon the criminological expertise.

5. This expertise based on the newly discovered negatives confirmed that they referred to No. 79, and it also supported the existence of the niche and the position of the hole under the limb of No. 95.

6. Conclusions: The debate was positive, insofar as it juxtaposed two mutually exclusive theses in an atmosphere of free and critical discussion. The existence of a hole in the apsidal wall under the bench was proven without any doubt. What could not be proven was that the lower limbs had really been there. “At this point I am leaving aside the question of the fate of the lower limbs, which can be prone to different conjunctures.” (417)

Both the argument about the level of the construction site, as well as the fact that the remains were not displaced, are in favor of the late burial thesis. One can accept as proven the existence of two burials in the altar space. “Unfortunately, the bones have not been preserved, and the appropriate anthropological research, which could definitively determine whether or not, and which of the two burials could belong to Vasil Levski, can not be made.” (417) The report pointed out that after the excavations, the participants had not taken the appropriate measure to preserve all finds and especially the bones.

“Thus, the main conclusion that can be made is that in the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” irregular burials have taken place after the construction of the church. Given the evidence which pointed to this church from before 9 September 1944, there is the great possibility that one of the skeletons might have belonged to Levski.” (417) Todorov therefore appeals to once again critically sift through the historical evidence.

He also proposes the publication of all documents, materials and excerpts from the taped debates before the end of the year, on the eve of the 150th anniversary of Levski's birth.

5. *Statement of D. Boiadzhiev, 15 March 1986 (418–445)*

This late statement of the architect from the archeologists' team concludes that the church dated from a much later period than previously believed. As the earliest date he accepts the second half of the 15th or early 16th century. He thinks the church was built on top of an older necropolis from the 13th or 14th century, and further maintains that at the time of the construction, the builders consciously, and following religious tradition, preserved some of the old Christian burials by reinforcing them. His recalculations of the proportions of the pilot holes and the depth of the burials, as well as his analysis of the photographs, leads him to endorse again the thesis that the burial preceded the church although he tried to move them to a much later period.

6. *Response of Khaitov to Boiadzhiev, 10 November 1986 (446–448)*

This is a sardonic and, from a logical point of view, magisterial rebuttal of the previous statement.

7. *Statement of N. Mushanov (undated response to Boiadzhiev, 449–465)*

This is one of the most important documents from the debates: an extremely detailed report from an expert, summarizing the architectural point of view. The report addresses the two major questions of the debates:

1. The positioning of the skeletons vis-à-vis the different architectural elements in the altar space.

On this issue Mushanov points out that no conclusions can be made directly, i.e. from direct observations of the monument, because during the restoration works of the 1970s, the apsis base was reinforced with ferroconcrete. Instead, all conclusions are based on a comparative-differential analysis of the documentary and photographic material. He then assesses the value of Dzhingov's diary from the point of view of information on the architectural details and deems it very scant. Bobchev's diary, on the other hand, abounds with architectural detail. In what is a *tour de force* analysis of the architect's profession, Mushanov convincingly refutes allegations that Bobchev's diary was falsified. After numerous discussions, the archeologists had finally accepted the quality of Bobchev's architectural measurements, but they questioned the sketch with the representation of skeleton 95 and the inscription "Here rests Levski" as a later interpolation, insofar as the skeleton did not correspond to proper measures and was obviously entered some time after the preliminary sketch had been prepared. Mushanov concluded that this indeed had been the case, but this was so because Bobchev's task had been at first only to take down the architectural environment, and only after the significance of the excavation of skeleton 95 had sunk in, did he also reflect it in his sketch:

The graphic representation of an architectural object is not a mechanical activity, like the photographic documentation, but a creative mental process that established a “professional” contact between the ancient builder and the contemporary researcher, who aims at “uncovering” the complex circle of questions around the specifics of a past architectural and construction tradition. The sketches thus are the adequate representation of this creative process, which poses questions and looks for answers. The sketches in the diary represent, besides an objective graphic fixation of a certain situation, also a certain subjective interpretation of some difficult to clarify moments, which the researcher “hints about” as moment for further elaboration. From this point of view the diary of the architect cannot be approached within the normative framework of technical draftsmanship and it is not ruled by it. It reflects the intimate creative world of the researcher who marks the concrete data and his deliberations on them in a code, which is different and individual for each researcher. Therefore it is not meant to be decoded by anyone else, but the original researcher, and it is certainly not to be subjected to arbitrary and insinuating interpretations... Keeping in mind this element of subjective interpretation, I think that the appearance of the skeletal sketch and the accompanying inscription “Here rests Levski” is to be explained by the fact that [Bobchev] added it at the point when Prof. Giaurov’s thesis about the possible reburial of Levski in the church’s altar space was registered by his [Bobchev’s] consciousness. As a participant in the excavations he could not remain neutral and so made an attempt to reconstruct the situation around the burial of skeleton 95. Therefore when evaluating the graphic documentation of arch. Bobchev we should stress not skeleton 95, but assess its quality from the point of view of the sketching of the concrete architectural data. (450–1)

On several pages (452–5) of very elaborate but clearly technical analysis, Mushanov conclusively illustrates, on the one hand, the complete correspondence between Bobchev’s sketches and the photographs, and on the other, the hypothetical character of Boiadzhiev’s assertions, which contradict the photographic evidence. Next, Mushanov demonstrates suspicious “absences” in the description of Dzhingov’s diary when it comes to skeleton No. 95, when compared to the newly “discovered” photographs from the excavations. Remarkably, Dzhingov never even mentions the existence of a photograph documenting the successive stages of the excavation of skeleton No. 95, something that he pedantically enters in other cases.<sup>24</sup> Further, Mushanov gives a close critical analysis of Boiadzhiev’s reconstruction, demonstrating that the version of a consciously constructed niche to preserve an old Christian burial contradicts all existing documentary data.

2. The dating of the skeletons; the existence of a hole or niche; the pilots and their holes.

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24 This part of Mushanov’s analysis is remarkable in its perspicacity, given that it was proven several years later that the text of Dzhingov’s diary which was offered as authentic, was a later copy, omitting undesired information.

Mushanov is extremely cautious on this issue. He points out that definitive conclusions about the dating could have been made only at the time, when it would have been possible to juxtapose a number of finds from the excavations, and offer a valid stratigraphic analysis. This was not done in the 1950s, and the finds were not properly dated, which makes all present efforts sufficiently speculative. All dating at this point would be only relative, linked to the question of whether skeletons No. 95 and 79 predated or postdated the construction of the church. Mushanov's analysis is based on an expert's reconstruction of the construction site, in which he demonstrates that the apsis, which did not step on the ancient wall, had been reinforced with pilots and wooden beams in a particular chess-shaped order, and covered with construction materials, sand and free stones. Given the character of this structure, he makes the obvious conclusion that, if the skeleton had predated the building of the church, it would not have survived intact, and that the alternative hypothesis of consciously preserving a Christian burial is impossible.

His further analysis of the construction site shows that the building of the apsis started directly over the previously cleaned ancient wall and that the medieval builders had clearly in mind using as much as possible of the ancient construction. He convincingly demonstrates that during the construction of the church and its altar space, the active construction site was at a level 90 to 100 cm lower than the altar base. This leads to the logical conclusion that the construction heap, discovered at the time of the excavations at the same level, is a cultural layer linked to the initial building of the church. All altar burials have been found above this layer. It is thus obvious that they are secondary to the construction of the church

In his final words, Mushanov shares his amazement at the behavior of the archeologists who confronted all arguments of Khaitov's group that the altar area of the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church could have been a possible secret burial space for Bulgarian revolutionaries with the opinion that this "defied all common sense." They particularly pointed out that it would be superfluous to dig into the wall to place the legs when the grave could have been dug up in its whole length in the altar space. They also refused to consider the possible explanation of the Khaitov team that this may have been so because the conspirators wanted to "hide" the head of skeleton 95 very close to the altar stone, so that it would not be stepped upon during service.<sup>25</sup>

He is particularly peaked by their not responding to any arguments but with a categorical declaration "This cannot be!" Why not, concludes Mushanov, find the explanation precisely in the lack of obvious logic? "Let us just imagine that some patriotic priest, dedicated to the common cause and extremely courageous, decides to bury "his saints" in the altar space of "Sv. Petka" in defiance of the church canon, in the name of his veneration for their holy self-sacrifice."

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<sup>25</sup> I have not found a confirmation of this point, namely that one should avoid stepping on the head of buried corpses, especially within a church.

8. *Memorandum of the AI, 6 June 1986, signed by the director Angelov and the party secretary Gergova (466–469)*

This important document for the first time directly addresses some of the opponents' argumentation. It points out that it is a question of principle to accept additional argumentation based on architectural, medical or geodesical evidence, which is what most of Khaitov's thesis rests on. For example, commenting on the conclusion of Khaitov's team that the skeletons have been measured to be 10–20 cm above the construction site, they point out that these measurements have been obtained "by juxtaposing measurements taken at different times with different techniques and appropriate only for a more precise description of the existing architectural monument. To establish the precise depth of the skeletons after the excavations is impossible, because the nature of the research process changes and distorts the archeological situation already at the time of the research. The seeming differences, based on purely mathematical calculations, do not have any value in characterizing the archeological situation, which is always concrete" (466). This situation is only the one described in the diary and it points out that the skeleton was under the church's foundations.

The rest of the memorandum reiterates the archeologists' position by characterizing their opponents' arguments as purely theoretical and speculative. Specifically, it questions the conclusions of the criminological expertise about the identity of the skeleton in the debated photographs. It also questions the conclusion of the burials as irregular and gives examples from other excavations. Finally, it stresses that altar burials are banned with the exception of canonized saints, which are usually laid at the foundations of the altar at the time of the construction.

The real issue of the archeologists was, however, summarized in a lengthy litany against the manner of Khaitov and the negative repercussions of his campaign:

The popularization of the thesis about Levski's reburial in the church inflamed public opinion without being able to offer a convincing answer. In addition, let us remind that the argumentation of Khaitov's thesis in the book was done in defiance of a number of scholarly, ethical and moral norms of our society, by publicly slandering a whole discipline... This slandering of the archeological discipline and the Archeological Institute Khaitov turned into a literary device, on whose background his uncertain arguments would seem more plausible.

Thus far the archeologists stay within the realm of archeological proofs. But at this point, and for the first time in the discussion, they end their memorandum on an ideological note as the final culmination and without any obvious link to the debate:

A number of important questions linked to the revival process are about to receive scholarly support, as are also a number of other questions of a decisive political and ideological nature. From this point of view the widely cre-

ated general distrust towards the discipline fomented by Khaitov's book on the question of localizing Levski's grave cannot be quietly overcome... The launching of the least plausible "church" thesis, unsupported either scholarly or ideologically, continues, as well as the accusations against the institute in nihilism and lack of patriotism. Is it not strange that in deciding the most important scientific questions the incompetents are becoming the most competent? Doesn't all this enfeeble the foundations of science, and its rights to play its ideological role, especially in deciding the national questions? (469)

The last sentence of the memorandum defends the AI rights "as an institute with ideological character" to state its opinion on the eve of the XIII Congress of the BCP, that the question of the Apostle's grave does not have to be turned into a fetish.

*9. Response of Khaitov to the memo of the AI, 6 July 1986 (469–475)*

Detailed rebuttal, point by point, of the archeologists memorandum. Khaitov exposes particularly their not having taken into account the architectural arguments. He denies the insinuations that he is accusing the whole archeological discipline: "Why is it necessary to personify archeology with St. Mikhailov?" He concludes that the memorandum of Angelov and Gergova "lacks analysis, and a single convincing argument. It is full of declarative phrases, and imperative evaluations offered in a quasi-scientific style." (475)

*10. Statement of Todorov on the memo of AI, 26 June 1986 (475–478)*

This statement in its tone is much angrier than the final report of Todorov (C4). He points out that the leadership of the AI was invited to come up with a final statement (C1) and had agreed that all documentation be published in a collective volume. Despite this, it produced yet another statement (C8) which it sent to a number of institutions, thus attempting to impose its own vision. He characterizes this new attempt of the AI as "emotional, and not scholarly." He accuses the AI of never seriously sticking to the main criterion during the debates, namely, to produce a realistic and methodologically sound interpretation of the facts. Instead, the leadership of the AI did not attempt even to find all the existing documentation of the excavations, which was "discovered" in the Institute thanks to his persistence and that of Khaitov's team.

It is strange that the leadership of the AI never put in question, neither at the time, nor at present, the scholarly and moral responsibility of the participants in the excavations: why they did not preserve the bones found in the altar space, even if they were convinced that they did not belong to Vasil Levski, when the thesis of Levski's burial already existed. If the bones had been preserved, and not hastily or consciously disposed of, they could have been subjected to the existing exact scientific methods." (476) And further: "Who gives the leadership of the AI the right to jeopardize the authority of the whole Bulgarian field of archeology by supporting the assertions of two young specialists who, in

addition, had been working under the stress of salvation excavations and who have made, according to everyone, a number of mistakes, typical for the level of the archeological science at the time, but intensified by unfounded hubris and lack of self-control of the leader? To date, the AIM has not organized a serious discussion of this problem at the institute. Is it by chance, that the deputy director of the institute, Prof. Velizar Velkov, gave a positive review of Khaitov's book precisely in view of its archeological aspects? (477)

However, Todorov reserves his wrath for the ideological insinuations in the Angelov–Gergova statement:

What is the goal of the authors of the memorandum when they stress that the AIM has an “ideological character”? Which institute in the humanities and social sciences does not, in a larger or smaller degree, have an ideological character? ... How can public opinion be reassured, until we don't explain the exact fate of the bones, about which the participants in the excavations had been warned that they might belong to Levski? It is unbecoming for an institute like the AIM, one with an ideological character, to behave as if these questions do not exist. They have been raised not by Khaitov, but already in 1959 and nowadays they cannot be silently passed by or ignored.

I do not think that there is a general distrust toward archeology, as the authors of the memorandum assert. However, the existing partial distrust, addressed against certain specialists, cannot be lifted by the bare denial of obvious facts and the repetition of old stereotypes without any argumentation, as in the memorandum. This can be achieved only in one way: through a complex, honest and objective laying out of the problems around the debates over the Apostle's grave. Looking for the truth around this grave is not “fetishizing the memory of Levski” as the leadership of the AI asserts, but the duty of our archeological and historical disciplines.

This was the reason I objected to the debate spilling out in the press, because it would have seriously jeopardized the reputation of the whole Archeological Institute. This was the reason to organize the debates at BAN as the only correct means for a scholarly solution to the problems, followed by the decision to publish the whole documentation, together with the arguments of the two opposing versions in a collective volume. A scholarly debate should take place, and it should not be silenced through administrative pressure. In this particular case, the representatives of one of these theses have dominated over public opinion in the course of more than 30 years. Now we have a different situation, and the other theses has achieved a relative predominance over public opinion. The publication of the BAN volume will allow the continuation of the debates on a scholarly basis. (478)

### *Appendix III*

## Letter of 20 Bulgarian Historians to Todor Zhivkov<sup>1</sup>

To Comrade Todor Zhivkov,  
General Secretary of the Central  
Committee of the Bulgarian  
Communist Party and Chairman  
of the State Council of the People's  
Republic of Bulgaria

Dear Comrade Zhivkov,

§1 We are addressing you in connection with the question about the grave and the bones of the Apostle of Bulgarian Freedom Vasil Levski, that was widely discussed lately, more specifically in relation to the proposal to place a plaque at the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” stating that he had been reburied there. We are addressing you because, in our opinion, the discussion on this question is carried out in an unusual, abnormal atmosphere, in which professional historians – specialists are consciously eliminated from participation, scientific truth is compromised, unfounded opinions are formed and enforced which lead to hasty decisions that, if implemented, can have unfavorable ideological and political consequences.

§2 Our society, our whole nation is justifiably excited by the question over the whereabouts of Levski's grave and his remains. One can hardly find a normal Bulgarian who would not harbor sacred feelings of deep homage, admiration, and gratitude toward the charming personality and the great achievement of the Apostle. It is therefore completely natural that the Bulgarian actively participates in everything concerning Levski, that he jealously treasures even the tiniest artifacts that have survived him, that he is sensitive against any attempt to besmear in any way his sacred memory.

§3 In the last few years, with the advent of Levski's 150th birthday, we are witnessing the renewed spread of one of the many well known versions of a mysterious reburial of the Apostle, more particularly the version of his reburial in the altar of the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” In connection with

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this letter with the original signatures of the historians can be seen in the Central State Archive (*Tsentralen Dirzhaven Arkhiv, Chastni Postipleniya—TsDA, ChP 130, papka 21*). *ChP 130* is the collection from the private archive of Doino Doinov. File 21 contains materials around the 150th anniversary of Levski's birth as well as the controversies around the grave. Alongside the May letter to Zhivkov, it also has the first version of the letter, dated 27 April 1987 with corrections in the hand of Prof. Doinov.

this, already in 1984 a special commission was convened with an order by the Vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers and Chairman of the Committee of Culture, Comrade Georgi Iordanov as well as by the Chairman of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Academician Angel Balevski. This commission, comprising the most authoritative historians-specialists, had the task to study the existing documentation on the problem and come out with a definitive opinion. The said commission carefully and conscientiously analyzed all materials in the course of three months, and in the end presented a detailed report, concluding that there were no definitive data about the reburial of Levski's remains in the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." At the same time, the commission recommended that, if technical and financial means were at disposal, a probing dig should be made to check whether the bones of the Apostle had not been buried in the foundation of the existing monument. As is well known, the initiating committee for the building of the monument had had similar intentions, and this is clearly indicated in its protocols. The commission also recommended that research about Levski's bones should continue, and that new documents from ours as well as foreign archives and libraries should be gathered.

§4 For unclear reasons, the report of the commission went into complete oblivion, and never became known to the public. The reasons soon became obvious. It turned out that our well-known writer Nikolai Khaitov had monopolized the right to be the sole connoisseur on the problem of Levski's grave. It also turned out that he wholeheartedly accepted the reburial version, and had dedicated all his writer's talent to prove it by all means and at any cost. Regrettably, this was happening in a strange way: by skillful manipulation of people, facts, and documents. In the name of his goal, he most rationally took advantage of his reputation as a talented writer. It is clear that, in order to popularize and affirm his opinion, Khaitov concentrates his propaganda mostly on influential persons at different levels and from different spheres of the intelligentsia as well as on the public at large, betting on their comparatively limited knowledge of the question and the general desire to discover Levski's grave as soon as possible, as well as on his undoubted masterly ability to present his opinion in a plausible manner. The only deterrent against the enforcement of his opinion is the counter argumentation of the historians-specialists, who form their opinions on the basis of objective facts. Consequently, Khaitov is taking efficient measures to stop the spread of their opinion. This is the real reason why the commission's report was not publicized. Against this, on the very eve of the anniversary, a series of Khaitov's articles about Levski's grave were published in the central press, and very soon his first book on the topic came out in a mass edition of 50,000 copies. This is how the "scholarly" discussion took off, but it occurred one-sidedly, without the participation of the opponents: the historians.

§5 Naturally, Khaitov's book achieved the desired sensational effect among the broad public, and the news that the Apostle's grave had been "discovered" at long last was received with due delight. From the point of view of the objective historical truth, however, the author's argumentation is totally irrelevant and extremely tendentious. What, in fact, did Khaitov prove in his

book? Only that, at the time of the 1956 rescue excavations in the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska,” the archeologists have demonstrated gross negligence in allowing the disappearance of the three skeletons that had been found there, one believed to belong to Levski. This is, indeed, unpardonable carelessness, an irreparable error, that should obviously be condemned.

§6 But can the fatal error during the excavations of the church be considered as serious proof that this is exactly Levski’s grave? And what right does Khaitov have to ascribe an error committed by separate archeologists 30 years ago to the whole contemporary archeological discipline, indeed to the whole historical discipline? Khaitov’s numerous public lectures and meetings throughout the whole country on the topic of Levski’s grave are turning, in fact, in fanatical denunciations of the historians and the historical discipline. We are deeply convinced that such public insults of the historical discipline aim at discrediting it, and this can only please our ill-wishers in Ankara, Skopye, Belgrade and elsewhere. After all, it has always been the historians who have been in the front rows of upholding our cultural-historical legacy from all kinds of falsifying encroachments.

§7 Very often lately, worried citizens ask us: why do you historians keep silent, why don’t you take a stand on the burning issue of Levski’s grave and Khaitov’s accusations against yourselves? We have to state in this regard that several times our colleagues have tried to express their opinions on the discussed topics. The editorial staffs of a number of publications, however, made it unequivocally clear that they were afraid to publish anything against Khaitov because he enjoyed the patronage of influential figures. Khaitov himself acts in a way to affirm such impressions and consciously engages persons in responsible positions in order to prevent the appearance of antagonistic opinions in the press.

§8 In such circumstances, we were forced to resort to the assistance of the department “Ideological politics” at the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party asking that at least a part of the commission’s report be published. We were told that a decision has been taken to stop the public dispute over Levski’s grave because of the existing danger of diverting public attention from the main issues of his legacy in the very year of his anniversary. This was, indeed, a reasonable political consideration which deterred us from further polemic with Khaitov. At the same time, we were reassured that he, too, would stop his publications on the topic. To our great surprise, however, it was precisely during the anniversary year that a second edition, twice the size and with a circulation of 80,000 was published. This is, to be sure, a coveted circulation that a historian can only dream of. It turned out, that the directives and recommendations of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party did not apply to Nikolai Khaitov. He is allowed everything. The fact that, indeed, there was the real danger of compromising the program for the festivities around Levski had little effect upon him.

§9 At the numerous scholarly conferences and symposia dedicated to the Apostle’s anniversary, whenever someone from the audience would ask for the floor in order to pose a question to the lecturer something, in the majority of cases it related to the grave. The problems of Levski’s ideology, his strategy

and tactics as the creator and leader of the unique internal revolutionary organization, all the issues around his great legacy were left behind. In the end, this is the real effect of the so-called "discussion," which in practice turned into a pure manipulation of the sacred feelings of the Bulgarian people toward the legacy and personality of Vasil Levski.

§10 It seems the most important thing for Khaitov is to place a commemorative plaque on the said church at any price. If this, in order to put an administrative closure to the problem, was motivated by some political considerations, our opinion would have clearly been irrelevant. But [Khaitov] is using scholarly arguments, and we consider it our duty to pronounce ourselves on the question. From a scholarly point of view, there are, according to us, no reasons whatsoever to place such a plaque. Quite to the contrary, the hasty placement of a plaque may bring about new complications. Apart from neglecting the historical facts, we accept the risk to split the people's devotion. The traditional pilgrimages to the Apostle's only monument in Sofia, which is the unquestionable and widely known place of his execution, would be diverted to a questionable object, such as the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." And who, by the way, would want such a diversion toward the church? By linking Levski to the church, are we not going to pay a high price that would denigrate our efforts at atheist education? Let us remind, in this regard, that this particular version about Levski's grave had been launched at the time precisely by members of the church with a definite goal, that now seems close to realization with the help of new supporters.

Finally, a last thought. Why would we divert Levski's admirers toward paying tribute at a highly dubious grave? It is not out of the question that the skeletons found there can belong to indecent people. Can we make our people hold a worshiping ritual for Levski at the grave of unknown people? Are we not going to slander his sacred memory in this way? And what if some day his grave and remains were to be discovered, for example beneath the monument? Are we not taking upon ourselves too large a risk in front of future generations?

Dear Comrade Zhivkov,

By expressing all these considerations with concern and a sense of responsibility, we would like to suggest that the competent authorities look once again into the question of whether it is appropriate to place a plaque at the said church.

We are convinced that in You personally we shall find, as always, complete understanding.

4 May 1987

Sofia    Respectfully,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The original signatures follow the name. They are reproduced as facsimile in Figure 10, p. 147. The abbreviation Acad. stands for Academician; Corr. Memb. for Corresponding Member of the Academy; Sen. Res. Fel. I Deg. for Senior Research Fellow I Degree, a title used exclusively at the Academy of Sciences and corresponding to professor; simply Senior Research Fellow corresponds to Associate Professor.

Acad. Dimitŕ Kosev	Sen. Res. Fel. I Dg. Dr. Veselin Traikov
Acad. Khristo Khristov	Prof. Dr. Konstantin Kosev Acad.
Dimitŕ Angelov	Prof. Dr. Vera Mutafchieva
Acad. Veselin Khadzhinikolov	Prof. Dr. Dobrin Michev
Corr. Memb. Mito Isusov	Sen. Res. Fellow I Dg. Dr. Doino Doinov
Prof. Dr. Alexander Fol	Sen. Res. Fellow Stefan Doinov
Prof. Krumka Sharova	Sen. Res. Fellow. Nikolai Zhechev
Prof. Evlogi Buzhashki	Sen. Res. Fellow Ogniana Mazhdrakova
Prof. Dr. Nikolai Genchev	Sen. Res. Fellow Kirila Vizvŕzova
Prof. Dr. Virzhiniya Paskaleva	Sen. Res. Fellow I Dg. Dr. Romyana Radkova

## *Appendix IV*

# Poems Written by Citizens on the Topic of Levski's Grave

1. Poem by Dora Nikolova, 12 February 1986
2. Poem by Kamen Rilski, 30 November 1985
3. Poem by Liubomir Nilolov, 10 January 1988
4. Poem by the nun Valentina, 16 September 1992

The first two poems are preserved in a file in the personal archive of Academician Nikolai Todorov, now at the Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The third and fourth are from the visitors' books at the Karlovo museum of Vasil Levski.

### 1. ПРИТЧА НА НИКОЛАЙ ХАЙТОВ

Апостоле, намерихме ний гроба  
след лутане, след люти препирни.  
Надмогнахме вековната тегоба –  
и срамното озъртане на роба  
отхвърлихме най-сетне настрани.

Преборвахме се с роеве злини,  
препъвахме се в човеци нищи.  
Таман прозрение ума ни осени –  
и някой Ненко нейде покълни  
народното ни дело да различи.

Но ето ни пред нашия олтар  
преклонно коленичали в мълчание.  
„Достойно ест!“ – изпълва храма стар,  
подето от свещеник и клисар –  
срещу душици дребни заклинание.

„Народ запявал подир глад и сеч,  
въздигнал дух след горест и страдание,  
умеещ чест да отбранява с меч  
отива много, много надалеч!“ –  
така гласи народното предание.

Заяквал в робства, в преговори, в бран,  
гасил със писменост духовната си жажда,  
престолнини променял – не и стан,  
родът на Аспарух отдава своята дан:  
и днес апостоли за свято дело ражда.

14. II. 1968 г.

гр. Варна

Дора Николова

## 2. ДРУГАРИ!

Пиша днес до Вас  
без грам от колебание,  
защото е във Ваша власт  
да бъдете избраните  
сред равнодушния поток  
от учени и недоучени,  
които със стогодишен срок  
въпроса не проучиха.

Касае се за онзи гроб,  
за който сто години пита  
забравилния робство роб,  
но не забравил вдъхновителя  
на свобода и правдини...  
Въпросът е: къде е Левски  
погребан през ония дни  
и спотаен до днеска?

Другари! Има верен знак  
и източник непреднамерен,  
че в полунощ с един ятак  
от комитета верен  
Апостола довлечен бил –  
На риск, - и наша сметка! –  
опял, заровен и изгнил  
под църквичката “Св.Петка”!

Полупогъналият храм  
укрил е неговите мощи  
и гроба му за нас е там!  
Защо се колебаем още?  
Защо да не е бил приет  
под тая пазва древна?  
/... И днес Държавния съвет  
да гледа ежедневно.../

Не ни е нужен пантеон,  
- та Левски е в сърцата ни! –  
но гроба Му за тих поклон  
ще търсят и децата ни,  
а Вам се пада тази чест,  
признанието Ваша власт е  
и затова изпращам днес  
молба за съучастие.

30. 11. 1985 г.

София

Камен Рилски

### 3. ПРОШКА НА ХАЙТОВ

В деня на твоето рождение  
възкръсвайки за нас,  
роди се пошлостта,  
която с титла, с подлостта  
остави гроба ти в забвение!

Дяконе, прости, прости  
защото в детските очи  
Истината свята се таи.

Поколениято наше ще дойде  
да се поклони,  
на това място,  
което със сълзи  
от нас ще е избрано.

Преклонението и Поклона,  
приеми на тези,  
които в сърцата си те съхраниха.

Прости, че с нашите души  
и с нашите дела, поне засега  
не можахме да се извисим,  
над това което ти ни завеща.

10.01.1988 г.

Карлово

Любомир Николов

## 4. НА ПОКЛОНЕНИЕ

Косите светли на Апостола видях!  
И колко скъп, свещен е бил обета  
На посвещение в монашество разбрах!  
И колко зла била е робската несрета!

С благоговейна почит преклоних глава.  
Безмълвно съзерцавах хубавите къдри.  
За подвига му двоен никакви слова  
Да изрека достойни не намерих, мъдри.

Поклонникът остава тук с пречистен дух  
И с мисли от свещено родолюбие съгрети.  
А дълго след това звучат пред неговия слух  
На Дякона Игнатий светлите завети.

Монахиня Валентина

16. IX. 1992

Дев. манастир - Калофер

## *Appendix V*

# Letter of Radka Poptomova, April 1987<sup>1</sup>

To the editorial board of *Otechestven Front*  
Cc: Academician Nikolai Todorov  
Nikolai Khaitov, writer and journalist

Dear comrades from the editorial board of the newspaper *Otechestven Front*,

I like your paper and read it with interest at every opportunity. A month ago I spotted a copy from 24 March on the desk of my sixteen-year old son. My eyes fell on the engaging title “The truth has to be pursued in a scholarly fashion” or “An opinion about the grave of Vasil Levski.” I would add another subtitle: “Such a long pursued truth...” This problem has been discussed in my family, not because we are archeologists and historians, but simply because we are Bulgarians.

I would not write this letter, if Levski’s memory was not so dear to us. I will spare you the superlatives and the emotions. However, I cannot overlook the feeling that seized me upon reading this piece which turned out to be part of a publication by the research fellow Ivan Sotirov, PhD. I was amazed by the fact that the opinion he represented needed to be so explicitly backed by the editorial board of your newspaper. On the other hand, according to me and to my family, his “opinion” really needs some backing. But since I have respect for journalists, I will henceforth keep off the editorial board and will focus on what I think about the arguments of Sotirov.

Making a plea for truth, the author jumps into the labyrinth of evidentiary material and I in no way discount this material. However, I have the feeling that I am being entangled in facts and confused by them, that this person is not this one but that one, that this church is actually that other one, and that other one is still another one, that the memoirs of the heirs are being discounted, etc., etc. In this mayhem of facts the clear thing is the goal: to

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the letter in the personal archive of Nikolai Todorov, now at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The purpose of this appendix is not to add anything to the technical side of the dispute or to elevate this letter, replete with orthographic mistakes and some conspiratorial turns of thought, to some kind of authoritative opinion. Instead, it seeks to give an idea of the very comprehensive knowledge of the ordinary public which was following the dispute in its most minutest details as well as the sincerity of emotions that the dispute unleashed as well as, finally, of the effectiveness of Khaitov’s message.

refute the research and proofs of a book, which would be to the credit of any scholar-archeologist, namely "The grave of Vasil Levski" by N. Khaitov. We understand from I. Sotirov that on no account could Levski have been buried in "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." Not a word about skeleton No. 95. Because he is absent. I leave aside the issue that the way Prof. Giaurov's achievement is being questioned, now that he can no longer defend himself, is, mildly put, unethical and uncollegial. In the search for truth it is entirely possible to question convincingly higher authorities. On the other hand, Sotirov's piece is not only unconvincing, it is tendentious. With the haughtiness of a mentor he even does not mention Khaitov's book on the question. You see, Khaitov is not an archeologist or a historian, and therefore not allowed to be competent. In fact, his books on Levski are his brilliant defense and one could hardly add anything to that.

Everything there is formulated clearly and to the point. The professional aspect included. After all, Chekhov had a doctor's diploma but left his name as a world literary classic!

Deftly entangling the reader in the task of identifying pop Kristiu Stoilov's workplace in the history of the Sofioter shoe guilds of the end of the nineteenth century, I. Sotirov quotes from the archives of the Sofia metropolitan church: "The names of the two priests are entered next to each other... and there is no base, either in documents or memoirs, to maintain that in this period of time, 1879 to 1890, they have changed their positions in the two churches." But Levski was hanged in 1873. The author clearly wants to get hold of a document saying: "This night Pop Kristiu reburied the deacon Ignatii aka Vasil Ivanov Kunchev, called the Apostle by the people." And saying exactly where. And exactly at what time. And exactly in whose presence. Now, this would have been really "the truth"! And maybe one can get hold even of a protocol. He does not seem to see that this is grotesque. On the one hand, the author discounts the memoirs of the heirs, on the other hand he finds support in them, as for example, in the rumors about Levski's brother being hidden among the Sofia population or the opinion of Varvara Grozdanova, the cleaning lady of "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" after the Liberation who said she did not remember any reports [about Levski's reburial] and categorically denied that Levski could have been reburied in this church. The commentary is superfluous: how much more convincing is the opinion of aunt Varvara to the exclusive argumentation of Khaitov! In his conclusion Sotirov pleads for a calm and sensible scholarly discourse, but he has a priori discounted all other versions, opinions, and proofs. It follows that the discourse has to go only along the lines of Sotirov's position. Then we can safely speak about scholarship!

Something is not in order. You see: we are supposed first to wait and learn where Pop Kristiu really served and only then are we going to decide about Levski's grave. And how about skeleton No. 95? Where is it? Focus on this, respectable comrades from the editorial board, and don't allow the question to be additionally befuddled. A feeling is emanating from Sotirov's article that, God forbid, someone might go and light a candle for the Apostle's memory at the church "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska." The author seems to be articu-

lating the fear of some circles, who do not want the Apostle's grave to be there and consequently, to be discovered. This is why both Pop Kristiu and Khristo Khambarkov were keeping their mouth shut. People have intuition and they were wary of the prospect that the grave might be wiped out, for there were surely many groups who feared the dead Apostle of Freedom! These latter were afraid that no one would bow their head and shed a tear in silence in front of their graves as the ordinary Bulgarian would do for Levski.

Let first skeleton No. 95 be found, also the hidden photographs etc., etc., and then, comrade journalists, you can back someone's opinion. Otherwise it is dishonest and unconvincing!

Clearly, the way things are, the situation is much more complex and shameful: flagrant irresponsibility, personal ambitions, the feeling of personal unpopularity, the fear before the lack of popular respect, false professionalism etc. All of this has been mixed in a muddy cocktail and the editorial board has decided, through Sotirov, to "freshen up the documentary evidence." The situation in this awful winter night was so tragic—hours, minutes and seconds of tension and great courage, I would add desperate courage—to save at least the dead body of the great Bulgarian, and some want proofs in black and white. Why don't you question also the modest monument of Vasil Levski? After all, there was no post there bearing an inscription saying "Levski was hanged here."

I have a strong feeling that behind the evidentiary material, I. Sotirov seeks to hide someone's unclean conscience and obfuscate the facts. If this were not the case, he should have at least mentioned the problem with the disappearance (or scattering) of skeleton 95, and the issue of punishing the guilty ones, no matter what their titles. Or is no one at fault? Or is the issue of Levski's grave taboo, and the discipline of archeology in Bulgaria unassailable? *But Levski belongs to the Bulgarian people, not to the archeologists!* Keeping silent about the truth around this clearly documented fact—skeleton 95—I. Sotirov manipulates public opinion (this being allegedly Levski's "third" skeleton). Everything is acceptable if only there is no grave for the Apostle in Sofia, where he was hanged. Why all this noise around a monument in Karlovo: what has remained there of Levski? Even his birth home is not the real one. Or everything is done for the sake of getting honoraria. Isn't it shameful to fight against a grave for Levski in Sofia? Isn't it shameful that even the theoretical possibility to ascertain the truth through laboratory expertise on the bones of skeleton 95 has been squandered? Let the scholars continue their research and debates but don't allow them to make scientific business and receive honoraria for their efforts. *Let them do it henceforth for free*, just as Levski worked for free for the just cause of the Bulgarian people. Let them approach their thoughts and debates around the grave without any material interest. Or are you afraid that then all research will subside? Try it out, comrades from the editorial board of *Otechestven front*, support my suggestion, challenge the scholars-archeologists, maybe then you will sooner reach the truth.

According to my modest opinion, things are pretty clear. Why do I permit myself this intervention? Because so many facts, memoirs, evidentiary material has come into the open, that any unbiased person can make the logical conclusions:

1. If it has been proven that Pop Krístiu Stoilov read the burial service over Levski and buried him, this should have happened in the Old “Sv. Petka” mentioned by Sotirov. Was a skeleton found there “left of the altar,” as in Anastasia Bokova’s memoirs, articulated before “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” was threatened? Clearly not. Otherwise the archeologists will look like these scholars who quarreled a long time over how many legs the fly had, and no one thought of catching a fly and counting its legs. Therefore, there is no skeleton in the Old “Sv. Petka” (of the shoemakers’ guild).

2. A skeleton was discovered “to the left” in “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” It has been proven that this was the result of an irregular burial in the sanctuary of this church.

3. If two values equal a third, they are equal among themselves. This, of course, is mathematics, but the point is that if we have a priest in one of the churches who read a burial service over Levski, and a skeleton (No. 95) to the left of the altar in the other one, this skeleton should belong only to Levski.

4. Why is Pop Krístiu silent until his death? Khristo Khambarkov, too. Here is another motivation: they had clearly violated the church rules. Pop Krístiu may have “betrayed” God, but remained faithful to the cause of the Apostle. And God would surely forgive him for that. The important thing was to quickly hide Levski burial in this cold and fateful night! How? By reading a burial service over the corpse and burying it in the other church, to which he was not “wedded.” Besides, the church archives from this period could also be less reliable.

The feeling of guilt for the Apostle must have been great among his associates. Nobody could free him from jail: there were not enough arms, not enough people. But there were a couple of desperate dare-devils who, in defiance of everything and with no consideration for our future archeological science, ventured to do the impossible: to unbury the abandoned martyr and bury him according to the Christian ritual.

The materials from the archeological digs are worthy of the attention of a prosecutor. The ones who are responsible for the loss of much of the evidence, ought to be tried. Nothing else can rehabilitate us in front of Levski’s memory.

My heart is in pain: the Turkish oppressors hanged Levski. He was a deadly enemy of tyranny. And what did the Bulgarians do? The honest and unknown ones buried him secretly and for complex reasons hid their traces. What did the scholars-archeologists do? They badly want to step on former Byzantine soil! They really badly desire to discover Roman and Byzantine culture! Nobody denies their other achievements. I think that our society has given them their due: there are museums at every step. But they remain indebted to Levski.

The Apostle has to have a grave. Even if only with part of his bodily remains: his hair. We should be in a hurry, before the hair may “disappear.” And there should be there a guard in the uniform of the *cheti* with a lion on his forehead.

I wonder how scholarly research would be hindered, if the suggestion to place a memorial plaque at the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” were to be

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implemented, according to the letter of the leadership of BAN No. 03-08-53 of 12 April 1986 to the Council of Spiritual development at the Council of Ministers. I quote the suggestion for the inscription: "According to a number of data here in 1873 the Apostle of freedom Vasil Levski was reburied."

Signed by Academician Balevski. Signed by every patriotic Bulgarian Levski is not only ours. He belongs to world history.

Respectfully: Radka Ivanova Poptomova  
Varna, bul. Vasil Kolarov 31

P.S. If you wish, comrade journalists, you can publish my dilettantish letter. You are an objective press, are you not? As for me, I write as I think. If you do it, I will not expect a honorarium.

Don't be angry that I am sending a copy to academician Nikolai Todorov and to the writer Nikolai Khaitov. I trust them. I don't want my anger to end up in the wastepaper basket. Let there be also another trace. I don't dare send it to the archaeologists: they might lose it...

Poptomova

## *Appendix VI*

# Letter of the Mediavel Archeology Section at AI, June 2001<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s the writer Nikolai Khaitov provoked a public discussion about the identification of Vasil Levski's grave. Not only archeologists—the diggers of monuments of the historical legacy of the capital, most of whom are no longer among the living—were involved, but the whole body of researchers of the monuments of Bulgarian medieval culture. The professional motives of the researchers of the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” were discussed at a session of the section for medieval archeology in the presence of Nikolai Khaitov himself. In the course of the discussion, it became clear that from the point of view of contemporary archeological scholarship the writer did not have any real arguments and proofs that the Apostle of Freedom had been reburied in the altar of the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” The whole body of archeologists-medievalists stood by the opinion that the said grave belonged to a necropolis used continuously before the construction of the church. Nikolai Khaitov transferred the discussion to the presidium of BAN [the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences] where pressure was exerted on the archeologists by the then vice-president of the academy, academician Nikolai Todorov. The writer himself, using his popularity and his authority with party and state institutions, attempted to shape public opinion in his favor. At numerous meetings organized by him, an attempt was made, through the channels of the mass media, to caricature and slander the Bulgarian archeological science as a whole. The materials of the discussion were used by Khaitov to enforce the publication of a luxurious volume that had been manipulated in advance, as proof for his correctness. Despite that, not a single one of his scholarly opponents agreed to falsify indubitable facts.

Now Nikolai Khaitov attempts to revive the scandal fomented by him nearly 15 years ago, in order to recognize his contrived “thesis.” It is in this connection that the memorial plaque has been placed at “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” But this plaque is unnecessary and socially harmful because it leads Bulgarians into a morally intolerable fallacy in the contemporary reading of history.

Head of section: [signed]  
(Senior research fellow Dr. Stanislav Stanilov)

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<sup>1</sup> Opinion of the scholars from the medieval archeology section at the archeological institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences on the question of the identification of Vasil Levski's grave in the altar of the church “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska.” Approved in an open vote at a regular session of the scholarly department with an existing quorum of habilitated persons. Published in *Stolichen 24 chasa*, 27 June 2001, 4 under the title “Khaitov opita da obrugae naukata” (Khaitov attempted to slander science).

## *Appendix VII*

# The Double-headed Hierarchy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (1996–2004)

This chart aims at ordering all the individuals mentioned in Part III, especially the introductory section and chapters 1 and 2, so as to facilitate the reader, especially someone not familiar with the mechanism of the split, and the personalities involved in the conflict. It is by no means exhaustive nor is it meant to be. Thus, influential names in the hierarchy (for example, as members of the Holy Synod) may be omitted and, conversely, relatively low-standing clergymen may be included. The chart serves essentially as an illustrative index to the respective text.

<b>Bulgarian Orthodox Church BOC-M</b>	<b>BOC-P (since 1996)</b>
(Bulgarian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Maksim)	(Bulgarian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Pimen)
Exarchate since 1870 Patriarchate since 1954	
<i>Holy Synod</i>	<i>Holy Synod</i>
Patriarch Kiril (1954–1971)	Patriarch Pimen, formerly Metropolitan of Nevrokop, d. 1999
Patriarch Maksim (1971–)	
Arhimandrit Artemii	Metropolitan Inokentii (present head of BOC-P)
Bishop Partenii	Metropolitan Pankratii of Stara Zagora
Metropolitan Arsenii of Plovdiv	Metropolitan Kalinik of Vratsa
<i>Theological Academy</i>	Father Khristofor Sibev, 1996 bishop, 1997 expelled from the Holy Synod, self-proclaimed Archbishop
Professor Radko Poptodorov (moved to BOC-P)	Professor Radko Poptodorov, ideologue of the split
Professor Apostol Mikhailov	Father Anatolii Balachev, secretary to the Holy Synod
Professor Todor Sibev	Father Kamen Barakov

Professor Ivan Petev

Petir Petrov, manager at the Holy Synod

*Church Historical and Archival  
Institute of the Bulgarian Patriarchate  
(CHAI)*

Father Mikhail Milushev, priest of  
“Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” church

Professor Khristo Temelski

Professor Trendafil Krîstanov

**Office of Religious Affairs (ORA)**

Metodi Spasov, director, 1992–1993

Khristo Matanov, director, 1993–1996

Boncho Asenov, interim head, 1996–1997

Liubomir Mladenov, director, 1997– ?

## *Appendix VIII*

# School Questionnaires on Levski<sup>1</sup>

### DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIMENT

The initial purpose was to see whether there was some kind of uniformity in the use of clichés that would correspond to different grade levels, in a word to illustrate and prove the notion of the centrality of education in fostering and articulating nationalism.

The questions asked were aimed at showing how different school levels reacted to the same question but mostly it was hoped that they would elicit more complex verbal answers that would help identify rhetorical and other patterns, and would also be touching on other issues.

### PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Students in the two largest cities—Sofia and Plovdiv—were asked to respond. The three Plovdiv schools are rank-and-file, while the Sofia school is one of the most elite ones. It is a state school, but entry, already at the first grade is through rigorous competition. It had been inaugurated during the life of Luidmilla Zhivkova as a school for talented kids, and at the high-school level it evolved to what is known today as the Italian college (a foreign language school, in this case Italian, with the standardized Bulgarian state curriculum, alongside similar ones in English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, and the classical languages).

1. Responses from “Simeon Veliki” school in Plovdiv: 3rd grade (1), 4th grade (40), 5th grade (18), 6th grade (26), 9th grade (10), 12th grade (16);
2. Responses from “Konstantin Preslavski” school in Plovdiv: 10th grade (21);
3. Responses from “Nikola Vaptsarov” school in Plovdiv: 11th grade (6);
4. Responses from the secondary school for talented pupils, and the Italian College in Sofia (Bulgarian foreign language state high school with a standardized curriculum; altogether one of the schools at the top of the educational food-chain): 6th grade (51), 7th grade (54), 11th grade (10).

The responses were gathered during 1998 and 1999 (May and November 1998, and June 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> My deepest gratitude for the help I received in conducting these questionnaires goes to my friend Penka Angelova from Plovdiv, and to my niece Maria Ioveva in Sofia.

## QUESTIONS

The initially shaped question was: *Who do you consider to be the greatest Bulgarian national hero and why?* In the course of the school visits, some teachers reformulated the question from the more general to a more focused one, since the students, according to them, were reluctant to take the pen. Below, see the answers to the differently asked questions.

1. *What does a national hero mean?*

*Why is Levski considered to be the greatest national hero?*

These couple of questions were already based on the presumption that Levski would have been identified as the greatest national hero, and thus focused rather on the question of what makes him distinct within the national pantheon.

ANSWERS BY 4TH GRADERS FROM THE PLOVDIV "SIMEON VELIKI" SCHOOL (40 STUDENTS):

The wording of the answers shows very clearly that they have been shaped by textbook and teacher's definitions. In the responses to Question 1, the most frequently encountered word is "liberty" or "freedom." A national hero is someone who fights (or defends) "liberty" in general (*svobodata*), thus, the most often encountered definition is freedom-fighter. In many cases and more specifically, it is someone who fights for the freedom of his nation or country; very often, this person is qualified as courageous. In a few cases, the emphasis is on the sacrifice, the martyrdom: someone who is ready to sacrifice himself for his fatherland, who is prepared to die.

The most often formulated response to Question 2 is that Levski is the greatest national hero because he was a freedom-fighter and was courageous and clever. These answers clearly do not distinguish his activities from the ones of the other revolutionaries. In the cases where the specifics are emphasized, it is the fact that he had organized secret committees. In many of the answers, the fact of Levski's athletic jump, which earned him his sobriquet, is stressed alongside the more general qualities. In quite a few cases, it is only the "lion's jump" which is provided as an answer for Levski's preeminence. It is clearly a quality which stands out, and for some of the 4th-graders seems to be the most individual and memorable.

An interesting observation is how the adversary is articulated. This does not occur often: altogether in a half dozen cases. In a few cases, there is talk of "the Turks," against whom the struggle is being organized. In most instances, however, the students speak of "Ottoman rule," and even when they specify that it is "yoke," it is more often "Ottoman yoke" rather than "Turkish yoke." In one case—a completely illiterate response from the point of view of orthography and grammar—the student manages to misspell even Levski's name (it is phonetically rendered as *Lefski*) but it is specified that if it weren't for him,

“we still would be under Ottoman yoke.” The tendency to substitute Turkish for Ottoman had started sometime in the 1960s as an academic historiographical initiative to differentiate between an imperial (supranational), and national (or ethnic) designation. Even at the time, it had encountered criticism of the anti-political correctness variety, but apparently it has taken root, and has been subconsciously internalized even by children who have difficulties spelling out the (far from difficult) name of the hero.

ANSWERS BY 5TH AND 6TH GRADERS FROM THE PLOVDIV “SIMEON VELIKI” SCHOOL (44 STUDENTS):

Same as among 4th graders but several new elements:

First, the use of the category “state.” Among 4th graders, a national hero is one who serves and sacrifices himself for “the motherland,” for “Bulgaria,” for his “people,” for his “country,” but the term “state” is not used. For the 5th and 6th graders, “state” is the preferred category, alongside and used synonymously with “motherland” (*dırzhava* and *rodina*).

Secondly, two new terms are introduced to describe Levski’s characteristics and motivation: “honor” and “dignity,” alongside the usual ones as courage, valor, honesty, sincerity, self-sacrifice, pride. This could be, of course, individual, since it was encountered only in two cases but it is nonetheless worth mentioning.

Finally, and this is typical for the 5th graders, many of them quote Levski’s famous words: “If I win, a whole nation wins; if I lose, I lose only myself.” It has been introduced recently and apparently at this level of education.

ANSWERS BY 9TH GRADERS OF THE PLOVDIV “SIMEON VELIKI” SCHOOL (10 STUDENTS): practically in the same vein.

ANSWERS BY 12TH GRADERS OF THE PLOVDIV “SIMEON VELIKI” SCHOOL (16 STUDENTS):

Practically all of them define the national hero in terms of his/her contributions to the motherland, the struggle for liberty and the readiness for self-sacrifice. For the first time (in two responses) one encounters the term “nation” (*natsiya*), alongside the preferred “people,” “country,” “motherland,” etc. One student responded positively to the notion of Levski being a national hero but specified that he did not succeed in his efforts and perished, although leaving his collaborators to continue the effort. For this student, the greatest figures in Bulgarian history are: Simeon Veliki, Kaloian and Ivan Asen II, all great conquerors of the medieval Bulgarian kingdom whom he characterizes as “great strategists, prescient and talented statesmen.” This added answer is entirely voluntary and, while a single one, it is still quite indicative of the displacement of value from revolutionaries to statesmen.

## 2. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT VASIL LEVSKI? IS HE A NATIONAL HERO AND WHY?

ANSWERS BY 10TH GRADERS FROM THE PLOVDIV "KONSTANTIN PRES LAVSKI" SCHOOL (21 STUDENTS):

The majority of the answers reproduce the same patterns like in the lower grades, with an emphasis on notions such as "liberty," "the people," "the state," "the motherland." The struggle is waged usually against "the yoke" (*robtvo, igo*), and the "yoke" itself, when specifically characterized, is Ottoman and less frequently Turkish. The heated discussion that was waged in the 1990s in the press on whether one should speak of Ottoman "yoke" or Ottoman "presence" in the historical textbooks, was decided in favor of the former. Rather surprisingly, no one pointed out that this was not the only possible stark dichotomy. One could have used neutral terms like "rule" or "domination" as was the continuous practice in the scholarly literature. From that point of view, the current practice on insisting about the existence of a "yoke", even with the official qualifier Ottoman, instead of Turkish, is a lamentable return to a more nationalistic articulation.

What is remarkable about the answers at this level (i.e. high school) is that alongside the internalized clichés and the reproduction of schoolbook's and teachers' definitions, personal opinions are offered. The articulation of the answers in a personalized way was invited already by the way the question was advanced to those students, i.e. "What is your opinion about Vasil Levski?" However, the personal answers go beyond phrases like "in my opinion," "I believe," "in my eyes," "according to me," "I respect Levski," etc. Even when the conventional clichés are repeated, they are articulated in such a way that points to a genuine internalization, not merely reproduction of the school material. Thus, one reads: "Levski is not merely a national hero, he is something much more" or "Levski is, according to me, the ideal human being." Another student writes: "I think that in our times such a person like him does not exist. I may be even proud to be a Bulgarian, and that we have such a hero." Several others also muse on the historical specificity of the notion of the national hero. Thus, according to one response, "Levski is a national hero because he defended the interests of Bulgaria, but for his epoch. In the 20th century he would not be considered such a hero, may be because the national interests are different from the ones during his times." Another student even defines Levski's ideas as "crazy," "wild," or "quixotic" (*naludnichavi*) but allows for the fact that this was the way to foment patriotism and fight for national independence. The most interesting reaction, although clearly a loner, entirely defies the notion of national heroes, and their appropriateness in today's world: "According to me, the new generation of the 20th century disavows and rejects Vasil Levski. These questions are old-fashioned and passé. Only in literature classes, because this is expected of them and they want to get a better grade, [students] praise him and say what the teacher wants to hear. The new generation of the 20th century has other, completely different idols. Levski valued and defended his

motherland. Today, every Bulgarian is trying to run away abroad. Many people very easily change their faith (beliefs), and everything is utterly different.”

### 3. WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE NATIONAL HERO? WHY?

ANSWERS BY 11TH GRADERS OF THE PLOVDIV “NIKOLA VAPTZAROV” SCHOOL (6 STUDENTS)

These few answers do not differ from the above. One interesting addition is the response of one student who specifies that Levski’s contribution is not only to the political emancipation of the state but also to its cultural development. One could suspect a conflation with Khristo Botev but, judging from the articulateness of the response, the orthography and handwriting, this does not seem to be the case. Most likely it bears the imprint of the teacher. Levski indeed had tried his hand at poetry in an autobiographical poem but, as is well known, he did not possess a verbal genius. In the century and a half after his death, no one (with the exception of the novel by Iana Iazova which was published only in the late 1980s and has not been widely popular) has tried to pass Levski for an intellectual. In fact, it is precisely his non-intellectual personality, his closeness to the uneducated peasants, his quality of a “man-of-the-people” that has been emphasized as a positive trait. It is interesting and unexpected, therefore, to find a situation in which a teacher tries to “round up” Levski’s portrait by adding an intellectual dimension. In the lack of more responses from different parts of the country, and without having interviewed the teacher, it is impossible to speculate on whether this is a personal idiosyncrasy of the teacher, or she did it because she felt that an intellectual dimension would add to the appeal of the hero for her students.

Very interesting is also the projection of Levski in the present. After having enumerated all the popular qualities of Levski and quoted his well-known thought, one student adds that “he would have done everything so that we would live a calm life. According to me, if there was an individual such as Levski today, we really would have a peaceful life.” Calmness and peacefulness were certainly not on Levski’s revolutionary agenda but having accepted him as the national idol, he is becoming the agent for everything desirable. In exactly the same vein, another student adds that a national hero is “someone who defends our country and inspires the young generation so that life would be more calm and quiet.” The revolutionary hero has been domesticated indeed! Moreover, he has become the icon, responding to all actual prayers!

### 4. WHO DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE GREATEST BULGARIAN HERO AND WHY?

This is how the question was put to the students of the secondary level of the school for talented pupils in Sofia. The responses comprise 23 students from the 6th grade, and 54 students from the 7th grade. To these should be

added the 10 responses of 11th graders. Altogether, as was to be expected, these responses are incomparably more articulate than the ones coming out of the Plovdiv school.

Not surprisingly, a majority of the students identified Levski as the greatest Bulgarian hero: altogether 62 students out of a total of 87. A few students (eight in all) enumerate several heroes. Levski figures in all of these combinations: Asparukh, Simeon, Levski, and Stambolov; Levski and Botev (twice); Simeon, Levski, and Botev; Botev, Levski, and Asparukh; Levski, Botev, Karavelov, Rakovki; Levski, Benkovski, Rakovski.<sup>2</sup> Most responses represent the well-known biographical facts of Levski's life. These are principally the ones taken from the textbooks, although a considerable number of students like to add an episode or two of the legendary exploits of Levski highlighting his ingenuity and courage, which come from the short stories of Ivan Vazov or other writers, and have been long internalized by children as authentic. While all of these students identify Levski as the greatest hero, practically no one attempts to prove that by specifying some exceptional trait that puts him apart and above the rest of the national pantheon. The general argument is that he has sacrificed himself for the freedom of the fatherland and for liberty in general, not distinguishing him from others who have done the same (like Khristo Botev, Benkovski and many more). The one exception is a student who asks rhetorically: "Why precisely Levski?" and answers: "Because his name remains unstained and pure until today."

The one above-mentioned student (an 11th grader, a 17-year old girl) who has chosen not to commit herself to a single name, has given a sophisticated answer which bears full mention. In addition, she also chooses to respond to the question of what she knows about Levski, and in the course of a self-reflexive answer, makes the case for Levski's canonization:

"If we have a national history, we would also have many heroes. I do not believe I am able to give a concrete response to that question. According to me, a lot of Bulgarian individuals are worthy of the definition or designation of national hero.

Levski: 'If I win, a whole nation wins; if I lose, I lose only myself.' This is one of our great national heroes. He laid the foundations of our national liberation from Turkish yoke. His image has been shaped in my mind from my early childhood, under the influence of my family upbringing. Later in school, during literature and history classes, I learned details about his life. Quite apart from the contemporary political situation in the country, both before and after November 10th [1989], I believe that Levski deserves to be canonized by our church. His image should never be tainted by any regime, in any epoch."

Of the other historical figures that are put forward by students, Khristo Botev, the fiery revolutionary and poet, is preferred by four students. One of them actually identifies both Levski and Botev but prefers slightly Botev because of his great poetry. Another specifies somewhat defensively: "For many

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<sup>2</sup> Only one student refuses to name a single hero but speaks in an abstract way of the contributions of all.

people Levski is the greatest hero. But there are other Bulgarians who have not only contributed to the liberation of Bulgaria but have also left a rich literary treasure. A typical case is that of Botev." Khan Asparukh, the founder of the Bulgarian state in the 680s is mentioned thrice, with the eminently sensible argument that he was the first to create the state, and that "without a state, there would have been no national heroes." Significantly, all the answers that put Asparikh forward, mention also Levski. For one of the students, the two rank as the foremost figures; another asks rhetorically: "Had Asparukh not accepted the challenge to fight the mighty Byzantium would great men like Vasil Levski, Khristo Botev and Stambolov have been born?" Tsar Simeon the Great, the king presiding over Bulgaria's largest territorial expansion and cultural flourishing in the 10th century gets a couple of mentions, emphasizing his statesmanship. So does Raina Kniagina, the young school-teacher and embroiderer of the revolutionary banner of the April Uprising of 1876. Both responses identifying Raina are written by girls who are inspired by her strong will and the fact that she is a woman but one of them does not omit mentioning also Levski. Stefan Stambolov, the controversial but able statesmen of the 1880s and 1890s, also gets two mentions but in a very matter-of-fact, non-committal prose. Petko Karavelov is mentioned once, clearly by someone who has just studied about him (the end of the essay specifies: "He was the first hero I thought of. But there are many others, beginning with the first ruler Asparukh and on to great statesmen like Stambolov.") Ivan Vazov also gets one honorary mention, as the patriarch of Bulgarian literature thanks to whom "the name of Bulgaria is known in the whole world." A few students (four in all) enumerate several heroes. Levski figures in all four combinations: Asparukh, Simeon, Levski, and Stambolov; Levski and Botev; Simeon, Levski, and Botev; Botev, Levski, and Asparukh.

Several students, before making their choice, are wavering: "This is a very difficult question. Bulgaria, unlike other countries, was founded 1300 years ago. It is quite natural that it should have many heroes," "I do not believe in the existence of a single greatest hero, because heroes are all Bulgarians who have participated in revolutions or wars, and who have sacrificed their lives to save our state," "I thought long, I don't know whom to choose. How can I say that someone is better than the others? And doesn't everyone err?"

## 5. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT VASIL LEVSKI?

This was the question that was offered one of the 6th grade classes in order to obtain a more meaningful set of answers from which one could judge the character and sources of the internalized knowledge. There were altogether 28 responses. The one-page essays are typical students' answers, not emotional but rather prosaic, reproducing the cliches from the textbooks. Altogether, the students have remembered well the biographical facts, and the few mistakes (about dates or toponymy are insubstantial). Practically without exception, the biographical essays begin with Levski's family background, giving his parents and sometimes his siblings' names, and emphasizing his poverty, especial-

ly after his father's economic ruin and death. With one exception, all students identify his social background, or rather that of his father, as artisan. The one "presentists" exception is rather ironic: it speaks of Levski's "poverty stricken childhood in the family of a minor official or clerk (*chinovnik*). The essays then move to his schooling and his religious career. All write about Levski's participation in the two Rakovski legions, and there is hardly a student who resists not describing the athletic episode of how Levski earned his sobriquet. Some of the students, though hardly all, like to reproduce some of the legendary adventures of Levski that they have learned about from belletristic sources, most likely out of school and when they were younger. One student, in describing Levski's unwillingness to become a priest and his alleged flight from the monastery, obviously has lifted that from Vazov's poem. Further, students stress Levski's contribution as a special strategist of the Bulgarian revolution, his organizational genius, and his struggle for his country's liberty and against the enemies. "Turkish rule" and "Ottoman yoke" are equally spread. The essays end with the betrayal of Levski and his execution. The story of the betrayal is the conventionally known one of pop Krístyu; the teachers either do not know or do not care to share the ongoing disputes and doubts over the betrayal of the priest. What clearly shows a teacher's or parents' imprint, though, is the statement of a couple of student that "one of the greatest Bulgarian revolutionaries found his death by a Bulgarian" and "he was betrayed by Bulgarians for money." The general verdict of Levski is the standardized "he was one of the most important/significant/great of the Bulgarian revolutionaries" and occasionally that he is the greatest, in one wording: "He was one of the greatest Bulgarians, if not the greatest."

As already said, these essays are quite bland, with practically no individual signature. One of the few exceptions is the ending of one essay which laments the fact of the manner of Levski's death: "He did not deserve to die in this mean way. He should have been able to live calmly down to an advanced age in the independent Bulgaria for whom he contributed so much." The interesting and significant element here is, of course, the emphasis on the *calmness* of life, which is the dream and ideal of most of today's Bulgarians. Another student errs when stating that Levski's grave is at his monument but finds it expedient to add also that both the stadium and one of the soccer teams carry the name of Vasil Levski.

# Index

- 11th Party Congress 43  
*168 chasa* 287
- Aegina 390  
Akhilleus 479  
Alabin, P.V. 21, 230n  
Albanians x, 170, 227  
Aleksii II 368  
Alexander from Thessaloniki 392  
allochronism 471, 472  
Altınchair 420, 421  
Anastasios 368  
Andrić, Ivo 289  
Angelov, Dimitir 123, 124, 126, 147,  
528, 529, 530, 531, 548, 559,  
560, 561, 566  
Angelushev, Boris 300  
Apostolus 389  
Aprilov, Vasil 226  
Archeological Institute 3, 11, 12, 34,  
36, 39, 40, 44, 49, 56, 57, 58, 59,  
61, 63, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72,  
80, 85, 86, 87, 88, 94, 110, 114,  
115, 116, 117, 123, 129, 130,  
132, 140, 149, 152, 153, 155,  
161, 528, 538, 541, 542, 559,  
561  
archeology, *see* historical profession  
archive ix, x, xx, 3, 129, 130, 241,  
270, 285, 292, 295, 404, 504,  
529, 530, 563, 567, 572, 574  
Arendt, Hanna 98  
Aristotle 97n  
Arnaudov, N. 277  
Artemii, Arkhimandrit 375, 577  
Asen I 227  
Asparukh 76, 227, 238, 331, 332,  
333, 334, 336, 337, 584, 585
- Bagriana, Elisaveta 295  
Bakalov, Georgi 253, 258, 260, 261,  
262, 263, 264, 265n, 275, 281,  
282, 284, 328n, 405n  
Bakalova, Elka 385  
Bakirdzhiev, Vasil 49n, 246  
Balachev, Anatolii 361n, 375, 376,  
377, 378, 379, 381, 385, 408,  
411n, 436n, 456, 577  
Balchik 340  
Balevski 10, 11, 52, 56, 59, 62, 64n,  
85, 86n, 91, 92, 93n, 94, 96n,  
106n, 116n, 117n, 118n, 140,  
142, 145, 563, 575  
Balkan nationalism x, xiv, 182  
Balkan Wars 36n, 75, 77, 237, 257,  
509  
*Balkani* 166n, 291  
Baltadzhian, Eduard 44  
BAN, *see* Bulgarian Academy of  
Sciences  
Barakov, Kamen 351, 362, 377, 577  
Bartholomew I 368  
Bauer, Adolf 190  
Baum, Paul Franklin 190  
Bebel, August 258  
Beissinger, Mark 105  
Belgrade Legion 191  
Benchev, Mikhail 12, 129, 144, 529,  
539n, 541, 543, 545, 546  
Benedict XIV 382, 486  
Benhabib, Seyla 98  
Benjamin, Walter 206  
Berlin Treaty 76  
Bernstein, Eduard 258  
Beron, Petir 302, 436n  
Berov, Liuben 328n, 364  
Beshevliev, Veselin 75

- biography 8n, 13n, 15, 18n, 157,  
 186, 192, 194, 195, 203, 204,  
 232, 240, 241, 242, 243, 272,  
 289, 309, 311, 329n, 332, 333,  
 400, 402, 404, 405n, 408, 413,  
 417, 418, 419, 422, 423, 424,  
 425, 429, 435n, 454  
 Biolchev, Boian 168  
 Bitolski, Angel 392  
 Bizet, Georges xx  
 Blagoev, Dimitîr 253, 254, 255, 256,  
 257, 258, 259, 260, 262, 265, 267  
 Blagoevgrad 340, 440  
 Bobchev, Sava 7n, 39, 40, 41, 42,  
 43, 44, 45, 48, 49, 51, 53, 68,  
 83, 130, 131, 518, 529, 530, 534,  
 535, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542,  
 543, 545, 575, 549, 550, 556,  
 557  
 Bobchev, Stefan 204, 223, 224, 225,  
 265  
 Boev, Petîr 37n, 38, 41, 42n, 49, 50,  
 52, 59, 60n, 69, 70, 121, 525,  
 526, 529, 532, 534, 542, 550  
 Bogoev, Damian 14  
 Boiadzhiev, Stefan 12, 39n, 42n,  
 58n, 59, 60n, 115, 129, 528, 530,  
 531, 537n, 539, 540n, 541, 545,  
 550, 554, 555, 556, 557  
 Boian-Enravota 396, 397n  
 Bokova, Anastasiia Ilieva (*also*  
 Anastasiia Bokova) 25, 27n, 36,  
 37n, 126, 128, 535, 574  
 Bolhrad 440  
 Borina, Khristo 246  
 Boris III 57n, 244  
 Botev, Hristo 76, 95, 178, 195, 196,  
 198, 199, 204n, 205, 211n, 212n,  
 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218,  
 221, 230, 241n, 246, 247, 250,  
 251, 252, 254, 255, 256, 257,  
 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 264,  
 265, 270, 285, 294, 296, 297n,  
 301n, 303n, 307, 308, 309, 320,  
 323, 326n, 329n, 330n, 331,  
 332n, 333, 334, 337, 345n, 392,  
 402n, 409, 412, 413, 439, 451,  
 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 583,  
 584, 585  
 “Botev-Levski” Institute 36  
 Bourdieu, Pierre 8, 373, 374, 375n,  
 425n, 475  
 Bozhilov, Vasil 28, 397  
 Bozveliev, Kosta 285  
 Brown, Peter 481  
 Buchinski, Dimitîr 49, 66n, 67, 68,  
 69n, 131, 529, 534, 545, 546n,  
 549  
 Bulgaria xi, xiii, xvi, 12, 18, 47, 57,  
 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 99, 113n,  
 145n, 146n, 155n, 158, 164n,  
 166, 168, 170, 171, 173, 177n,  
 180, 181, 182, 191, 193, 194,  
 195n, 197, 199, 200, 203n, 209,  
 212, 213, 215n, 217, 222, 225n,  
 226, 227, 232, 233n, 238, 244,  
 247, 248, 249n, 251, 258, 259,  
 262, 265, 267, 268n, 274, 276,  
 279, 280, 281, 285, 287, 296,  
 297, 308, 311, 312, 315, 316, 318,  
 319, 332n, 333, 335, 337, 339,  
 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 349,  
 351, 360n, 368, 371, 395, 396,  
 397n, 427, 439, 441, 444n, 445,  
 448, 464, 465, 466n, 468, 474,  
 498, 499, 504, 509, 511n, 512,  
 513n, 544, 573, 581, 582, 585  
 Bulgarian Academy of Sciences  
 (BAN) 3, 19n, 56, 73, 86, 91, 93,  
 114n, 118, 141n, 153, 393, 490,  
 537, 563, 567, 571, 576  
 1986 debate 10  
 Bulgarian Committee “Vasil Levski”  
 302, 437  
 Bulgarian National Television 49  
 Bulgarian Orthodox Church 151,  
 391, 394, 395, 396, 415, 417  
 split xrv, 151n, 156, 349, 356, 362n,  
 457  
 BOC under Maxim 350n, 365, 367,  
 370, 577  
 BOC under Pimen 350n, 367, 577

- Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC) 194, 270, 302, 404
- Bulgarian Turks 4, 512n
- Bulgarians 392n, 395n, 400, 428n, 432, 438, 458, 464, 465, 490, 498, 499, 504, 507, 521, 534, 541, 571, 574, 576, 585, 586
- Burnaski, Evstati 295
- Buzhashki, Evlogi 96n, 147, 566
- Callistus III 496
- Campbell, Joseph 497
- canonization xiv, xvii, xxi, 94, 96, 199, 219n, 239, 345, 346, 349, 350, 351, 353, 356, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377n, 379, 380, 381, 382, 384, 385, 386, 387n, 388, 389, 394, 395n, 396, 397n, 398, 398n, 410n, 415, 431, 433, 435n, 437, 441, 442, 443, 444n, 445, 446, 447, 451, 456, 458, 461, 462, 486, 489, 495n, 503, 504, 584
- Canute IV 484
- Carlyle, Thomas 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 489
- Central Committee (also Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party) 37, 48, 50, 64n, 80, 106, 117n, 119n, 120n, 122, 123, 124, 129, 140, 141n, 142, 145, 146, 194, 204n, 242n, 268n, 270, 278, 297n, 302, 311, 313, 316, 321, 404, 562, 564
- Central Department Store (TSUM) 127
- Central Historical-Archeological Museum of the St. Synod 69
- Challis, Natalia 389
- Chanev, Rusi 299
- Chatalbashev, Dimitir 498, 499, 500
- Chatarjee, Partha xvii
- Chausheva, Dora 338n, 430n, 431, 437, 459, 460, 465
- Cherkelov, Georgi 299
- Chervenkov, Vilko 8081n, 166
- Chorbadzhiiski, Dimitir Khristov (Chudomir) 285
- Christodoulos 368
- Church Historical and Archival Institute of the Bulgarian Patriarchate (CHAI) 350, 578
- Church Museum 41n, 49
- Church of St. Eusthatios 389
- civil society, *see* communism
- Codreanu, Corneliu Zelea 249, 448
- Colocotronis, Vassilis xii
- Comforti, Leo 299
- Commission of the Committee of Art and Culture 45
- Committee for Art and Culture 43, 48
- Committee for Cultural Development 64n, 106n
- Committee for Friendship and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries 48
- Committee for State and People's Control 64n, 69, 130
- communism x, xvi, 3n, 5, 83, 98, 99, 101, 103, 105, 110, 165n, 169n, 177, 291, 332n, 370n, 473, 474, 504
- Cosquin, Emmanuel 190
- Council of Serdica 368
- Dalchev, Liubomir 300
- Damianov, Simeon 52n, 70n
- Danov, Ivan 232n
- Danov, Khristo 223
- Daskalov, Kolio 122
- Davis, Natalie Zemon xvii, 6
- Delchev, Gotse 76, 77n, 78, 79, 166, 303n
- Demokratiia* 361, 468n, 470
- Department of History (University of Sofia) 18n, 311
- Department of Military Museums, Monuments and Graves 23n
- Department of Museums and Monuments 22
- Deutsche Welle* 287

- Dichev, Stefan 289, 290, 291, 293, 298, 299
- DiARBekir 279n
- Dimitir, Khadzhi 452, 453n
- Dimitrov, Angel 107n
- Dimitrov, Borislav 135, 136, 137
- Dimitrov, Bozhidar 300n, 337, 338n
- Dimitrov, Georgi 159, 308, 323, 324, 370n
- Dimitrov, Ilcho 125n, 145, 146n, 311, 312, 313, 322n
- Dimitrov, Iordan 435
- Dimitrov, Khristov 37n
- Dimitrov, Krum 149n
- Dimitrov, Mikhail 309, 343
- Dimitrov, Philip 361, 362, 364, 371n
- Dimitrova, Blaga 292, 328n
- Dimitrov-Maistora, Vladimir 302
- Dimkov, Petir 28, 30n
- Dimovski, Boris 106, 107n
- Dinekov, Petir 246, 320n
- Dobrev, Ivan 299
- Dochev, Ivan 251
- Doinov, Doino 43, 44, 45, 52n, 70n, 90n, 124n, 141, 142, 146n, 147, 298n, 320n, 328n, 405n, 438n, 440, 441, 562n, 566
- Doinov, Stefan 107n, 147, 566
- Donchev, Anton 289
- Dospevski, Stanislav 430
- Douglas, Mary 353
- Drinov, Marin 226
- Dufev, Konstantin 295
- Dundes, Alan 190, 192
- Dzhebel 440
- DzHINGOV, Georgi 522, 523, 524, 526n, 528, 529, 530, 531, 539, 540, 542, 543, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 554, 555, 556, 557
- Dzhinot, Iordan Hadzhi Konstantinov 247
- Eastern Europe xvi, 97, 98n, 99n, 100, 101, 110, 447, 448, 504, 505, 507, 534n
- Eastern European communism xvi
- Eco, Umberto 292, 293
- Edward the Confessor 484
- Eliade, Mircea 463n, 471, 472
- Engels, Friedrich 258
- Evangelistria 390
- Evtimov, Evtim 92
- Fabre, Daniel 486
- Father Paisii, *see* Paisii of Khilander
- Fehér, Géza 74, 75
- Feierman, Steven 7
- Ferdinand 229n, 238, 337n
- Feuchtwanger, Lion 289
- Ficheto, Nikola 302
- Filaret, Cherinigov 391
- Filaretov, Sava 274
- Filaretova, Iordanka 274
- Filov, Bogdan 74, 75, 145n
- First World War xi, 12n, 36n, 75, 77, 194, 199, 200, 206, 235, 237, 238, 257, 478, 506, 509
- Fol, Alexander 147, 316, 566
- Foucault, Michel 98
- Fraser, Nancy 98, 103, 104
- Free Europe* 287
- Gabrovo 149n, 340, 343, 464
- Gabrovski, Nikola 258
- Galatariotou, Catia 475
- Ganev, Ivan 137
- Ganovski, Sava 38, 81n, 526n, 529
- Garibaldi, Guiseppe XIII, 336, 497
- Geertz, Clifford xvii, 352, 353, 354, 355, 357n
- Gellner, Ernest 104, 200
- Genchev, Nikolai 203n, 206, 237, 238, 242n, 252, 253, 254, 257, 260, 261, 264, 265, 266, 276, 284, 296, 298, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 325, 326, 328n, 400n, 405n, 428n, 566
- Genovich, Nikola 195n, 275
- Genovski, Mikhail 30n, 252n
- George of Neapolis 388

- Georgiev, Evlogi 273, 274  
 Georgiev, Gavril 258  
 Georgiev, Khristo 267, 268, 269, 270, 274n  
 Georgiev, Vladimir 81  
 Gerasimos the Younger 386, 387  
 Gergova, Diana 3, 12, 65, 87, 89, 107n, 117, 118n, 122, 126, 528, 543, 559, 560, 561  
 Gerov, Alexander 295  
 Gerov, Naiden 268, 269, 273, 274, 275  
 Geshov, Ivan Evstatiev 258  
 Giaurov, Khristo 36n, 37n, 38, 40, 41, 42n, 52n, 67, 68, 70, 72, 96, 126, 128, 526n  
 Gindeva, Violeta 299  
 Ginzburg, Carlo xvi, 7  
 Ginzburg, Lydia 424n  
 Giorova, V. 140  
 Giudzhenov, Dimitîr 301  
 Giurgiu 440, 454  
 globalization xvii, 7, 83, 336, 468, 504  
 Gorchev, Anton 299  
 Goshev, Ivan 67  
 Gramsci, Antonio 98  
 Greeks x, xi, 77, 122, 227, 240n, 393n, 479, 509  
 Gregory IX 382  
  
 Habermas, Jürgen 98, 104  
 Hagias Laurentios 389  
 Hagioi Pantes 390  
 haidouts xi  
 hajduks xi  
 Haraszti, Miklós 108  
 Hayes, Carlton 401, 462n, 490  
 Hegel 97, 98, 186n, 187  
 Helsinki Watch 74  
 heroes xi, xii, xiii, xiv, xxi, 76, 77, 78, 79, 178, 183, 185, 186, 187, 188, 190, 192, 193, 200, 201, 213, 232n, 233n, 238, 253, 254, 257, 265n, 272, 281, 287, 303n, 307, 318, 323, 324, 325, 331, 333, 334, 336, 357, 451n, 455n, 477, 478, 479, 481, 482, 483, 484, 486, 487, 488, 489, 492, 493, 495, 497, 504, 510, 582, 584, 585  
 historical profession ix, xviii, 8n, 52, 355, 424  
 Hugo, Victor 212, 216  
 Humphrey, Caroline 459, 460n, 463n  
 Huxley, T.H. 186  
  
 Iambol 340, 343  
 Ianev, Georgi 66n  
 Ianev, Marin 299  
 Ianev, Simeon 12  
 Ianeva, Atanasa 33  
 Iazova, Iana 166, 291, 292, 293, 294, 583  
 iconography 433, 434, 517  
 Ignatieff, Nikolai Pavlovich 274  
 Ignatius IV 368  
 Ikhtiman 340  
 Iliev, Iordan 33  
 Ilinden Uprising 77  
 IMRO 76  
 Institute for Balkan Studies 19  
 Institute for History 19n, 44  
 Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments 42, 43  
 Institute of Culture 43n  
 Interior Ministry 63  
 Ionkov, Khristo 50, 52n, 70n, 90n  
 Iordanov, Georgi 52, 55, 64n, 116n, 145, 162n, 563  
 Iordanov, Veliko 143n  
 Iordanova, Ekaterina V. 143n  
 Iordanova, Petia 295  
 Iotov, Iordan 50, 51, 64n, 65, 106n, 125n, 141, 142  
 Ipati 389  
 Iribadzhakov, Nikolai 314  
 Isperikh 340  
 Isusov, Mito 140, 141, 142, 147, 566  
 Italian 331, 340, 486  
 Ivanov, Ivan Aleksandrovich 248, 274, 275

- Ivanov, Khristo 196, 206, 270, 279, 280  
 Ivanov, Vicho 246, 256  
 Ivoilov, Sergei 300
- Jamestown 47  
 Joan of Arc XIII, 336, 450, 496, 506  
 John XV 382  
 Juhász, Péter 50
- Kalinik (of Vratsa) 361, 577  
 Kalofer 178, 342, 439  
 Kaloian 71, 227, 303, 332, 581  
 Kaloianchev, Georgi 299  
 Kalymnos 390  
 Kapudaliev, Emil 363  
 Karamanchev, Valentin 106n  
 Karan Virbovka 94  
 Karavelov, Lyuben 76, 119, 180, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 204, 224, 225, 227, 232n, 254, 255, 256, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263n, 270, 271, 275, 277, 278, 279, 280, 283, 294, 297, 329n, 380n, 402n, 412, 451, 452, 584  
 Karavelov, Petko 258, 332, 333, 585  
 Karlovo 465, 466, 468, 469, 470, 471, 474, 498, 567, 573  
 Karnobat 340, 464, 471  
 Katincharov, Rumen 12, 529  
 Kautski, Karl 258  
 Kazanlik 48n, 285, 465  
 Kekhlibareva, Nadia 295  
 Khaitov, Nikolai xv, 3, 4, 5, 7n, 11, 12, 18, 19, 23n, 24n, 25, 27n, 28n, 29, 30n, 31, 32, 39n, 42, 45n, 50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 67, 69n, 70n, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 79, 80, 81n, 82, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 109, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135n, 139, 141, 142, 143, 144n, 146, 147, 149, 150, 151n, 153n, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 173, 178n, 329n, 490n, 518, 521, 522, 523, 524, 526n, 528, 529, 530, 531, 533n, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 540, 543, 546, 547, 548, 550, 551, 552, 554, 556, 558, 559, 560, 561, 563, 564, 565, 571, 572, 575, 576
- Khalacha, Dencho 277, 380n  
 Khambarkov, Khristo 26, 128, 573, 574  
 Khambarkov-Gîskata, Khristo 25  
 Khitov, Panaiot 182n, 193, 195, 196, 206, 224, 226, 413n  
 Khristov, Georgi Pop 420, 421,  
 Khristov, Dimitir 302  
 Khristov, Khristo 67n, 90, 90n, 91n, 124n, 147, 181, 566  
 Khristov, Kiril 289n, 295  
 Kikrina 158n, 404  
 Kirkov, Georgi 258, 454  
 Kirova, Zlatka 45  
 Kirshovski, Ivan 196, 203n  
 Kiuliavkov, Krum 295  
 Kiustendil 149n, 230, 232n, 340  
 klefts xi  
 Kluckhohn, Clyde 474  
 Kolarov, Ivan 106  
 Koledarov, St.N. 32, 33n  
 Kolev, Georgi 12, 528  
 Komitata, Georgiev Pop Toshe 24  
 Kondov, Ivan 299  
 Konstantin, Archimandrite 422, 426n  
 Koselleck, Reinhart 98, 472, 473, 474n, 493  
 Kosev Commission 23n, 37n, 40n, 52n, 53, 54, 66, 67n, 69, 70, 90, 540, 552, 554  
 Kosev, Dimitir 7n, 11, 52, 53n, 69, 70, 86n, 90n, 124n, 125n, 132, 142, 144, 145, 145n, 147, 405n, 566  
 Kosev, Konstantin 145, 147, 309, 316, 320n, 566

- Kozhukharov, Nikola 300  
 Kozinarska, Anna 430  
 Kozlev, V. 271, 277  
 Krappe, Alexander 190  
 Kretschmer, Ernst 246  
 Kristev, Bogdan 86n, 156  
 Kristev, Kristiu 216, 217, 218, 265  
 Kristev, T. 52n, 70n  
 Kristiu, Pop 12, 17, 19, 26, 28n, 32, 198, 241n, 280, 281, 290, 341, 404, 405, 406, 407n, 408, 409, 411n, 572, 573, 574  
 Krum (Khan) 215n, 227, 247, 287, 332n  
 Krumovgrad 340  
 Kubrat 332, 340  
 Kuncheva, Gina 430
- Laidlaw, James 459, 460n, 463n  
 Lamar (penname of Laliu Marinov Ponchev) 295  
 Lamia 389  
 Lasal, Ferdinand 258  
 Lazarov, Iliia 24, 25  
 Lazarov, Ivan 27n, 300  
*Le Monde* 315  
 Legion of Archangel Michael 249  
 Lessmann, Heinrich 190  
 Levin, Eve 393  
 Levski, Vasil  
   betrayal controversy 12, 18, 20, 33, 404–7  
   biography 196–9, 203, 213, 399–405  
   and Botev 178, 195–6, 199–200, 215–6, 218–21, 222, 247–8, 252–68, 270, 287, 295, 297, 307–9, 320, 324, 332–5, 338, 392, 409, 413–2, 453–5  
   burial versions 12, 20–39  
   canonization 350–1, 375–9, 397, 443–5, 448, 453–5, 457  
   commemoration 205–6, 230–6, 244–48  
   and contemporary assessments 195–200, 203–4, 206, 269–83  
   and fascists 249–53  
   and the Orthodox church 399–401  
   political appropriations 178–82, 237–67, 283–90  
   reception of 331–347, 464–5  
   religiosity 402–3, 409–13  
   and socialists 254–67, 283  
   in historiography 284–86, 309–324, 327–30  
   in textbooks 222–30, 323–30  
   in literature 208–21, 286–7, 291–305  
   visual representations 178, 301–7
- Lewin, Moshe 101, 102  
 Liebknecht, Karl 258  
 Liebknecht, Wilhelm 258  
 Lincoln, Abraham xiii, 192, 497  
 Lincoln, Bruce 239, 240, 461n  
 Lipcheva-Prandzheva, Liubka 212, 289n, 330n, 402n  
 Lisichevo 72  
*Literaturen front* 28n, 91, 150n, 162  
 Lokorsko 26  
 Lom 340, 465  
 Lord Raglan (FitzRoy Richard Somerset, 4th Baron Raglan) 190, 191, 474  
 Lovech 12, 21n, 119n, 194, 205n, 241, 271, 277, 280, 281, 197, 341, 345n, 364, 380n, 404, 405n, 406  
 Lucaris, Cyril 386, 387  
 Luhmann, Niklas 98  
 Lukovit 340  
 Luxemburg, Rosa 258
- Macaulay, Thomas 186  
 MacDermott, Mercia 402, 426, 428, 428n  
 Madara horseman 71  
 Magdalene 390, 391  
 Malakope 389  
 Manchev, Atanas 295  
 Manchev, Dragan 391, 392  
 Manchov, Dragan 211, 223, 224  
 Mann, Heinrich 289

- Mann, Thomas 289  
 Marinova, Ruska 300  
*Marisa* 280, 281n  
 Markovski, Venko 295  
 martyrdom 162, 210, 225, 376,  
     378n, 379n, 389, 393, 394, 395,  
     396n, 402n, 437n, 444, 452n,  
     453n, 454, 455, 459, 483, 580  
 Marx, Karl 98, 250n, 258, 260n,  
     493, 505  
 Matanov, Khristo 364, 365, 36n, 578  
 Mavrodinov, Nikola 75  
 Mazdrakova, Ogniana 144  
 Mazhar Pasha 20  
 McCartney, Eugene 190  
 Medieval Section (of the  
     Archaeological Institute) 11, 4,  
     45n, 56, 61, 80, 86n, 94, 114,  
     115, 116, 121, 132, 149, 161, 528,  
     552, 554  
 memoirs *xxi*, 13, 14, 15, 16n, 17, 20,  
     22, 23n, 24, 25, 34, 36, 68n, 72n,  
     95, 96, 123, 124, 139n, 142n,  
     151n, 158n, 195, 206, 232n, 240,  
     242n, 251, 254, 270, 284, 298,  
     310, 311, 313, 313n, 317, 320,  
     321, 402n, 417, 418, 419, 424n,  
     426n, 451n, 536, 571, 572, 573,  
     574  
 memory *ixn*, *xiv*, *xv*, *xvii*, *xviii*, *xix*,  
     *xx*, 15, 16, 28, 29, 30, 49, 78,  
     79n, 90, 96, 107, 114n, 144, 149,  
     154, 159, 183, 198, 206, 230,  
     233, 237, 239, 240n, 261, 287,  
     313n, 321n, 339, 344, 351n,  
     353n, 376, 384, 392, 395, 417,  
     420, 423, 432, 446, 456, 470,  
     496, 561, 562, 565, 571, 572, 574  
 Metaxas, Ioannis 244  
 Metodiev, Veselin 367  
 Meyerhoff, Barbara 461, 463, 474  
 Michev, Dobrin 147, 566  
 microhistory 7, 503  
 Midhat Pasha 277, 290, 299  
 Miglenska, Zlata 396, 436  
 Mihov, Nikola 74n  
 Miiatev, Krtistiu 64, 67, 69, 71, 72,  
     73, 81  
 Miiatev, Petir 246  
 Mikhailov, Andrei 152, 153,  
 Mikhailov, Apostol 376, 577  
 Mikhailov, Mikhail 299  
 Mikhailov, Stamen 7n, 11, 23n, 27n,  
     30, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 50,  
     53, 60, 61, 66, 67, 68, 9, 70n, 71,  
     72, 73, 75, 85, 94, 95, 115, 116,  
     117, 121, 125n, 128, 131, 131n,  
     133, 135, 141, 143, 150n, 152,  
     517-527, 528, 529, 530, 533,  
     535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540,  
     541, 542, 544, 545, 546, 547,  
     548, 549, 550, 551, 554, 555,  
     560  
 Mikhailov, Stoian 64n, 106n, 140,  
     142, 145, 154n  
 Miladinov brothers (Dimitir and  
     Konstantin) 226, 332n  
 Milev, Gancho 181, 271, 292  
 Miller, Dean 479, 480, 481, 485,  
     486, 487, 488  
 Milushev, Mikhail 152, 351n, 378,  
     379, 578  
*Mir* 13n, 34, 126, 541  
 Mirchev, Nikola 300  
*Misil* 216, 217  
 Mitev, Georgi 149n  
 Mitev, Plamen 203n, 283, 284, 400n  
 Mitov, Borislav 135n  
 Mitov, Danko 37n  
 Mitov, Gicho 469  
 Mladenov, Liubomir 368, 578  
 Mladenov, Petir 162, 327n  
*Mladexh* 314, 315, 316  
 Mostich, Chirgubil 71  
 Mount Athos 389, 390  
 Municipal Party Council 37n  
 Museum of the City of Sofia 12, 66,  
     67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73  
 Mushanov, Nikola 7, 12, 39, 43, 44,  
     45, 46, 52n, 53n, 70n, 90n, 520,  
     528, 539n, 540, 541, 542, 543,  
     546, 547, 549, 555, 556, 557, 558

- Mutafchieva, Vera 52n, 70n, 147, 201, 220, 295n, 566
- Myron 385, 386, 389n
- myth 184, 188–9, 192, 219, 224, 230, 255–7, 271, 475–81, 513, 515–6
- Nabokov, Vladimir xviii
- Nai-Novii, Georgi Sofiiski 396
- Napoleon 188, 189, 506
- “Narodna kultura” (publishing house) 106, 292
- National Humanities Center xxi
- National Library 20, 13n, 143n, 241n, 250n, 265n, 339, 393, 407n, 418
- nationalism vi–viii, 112, 160, 356, 358, 479–80, 510–5, 500, 508–15
- Balkan x, xiv, 182
- Bulgarian xii, xiii, v, 95, 182, 508, 509
- and religion 357, 491, 504
- symbols vi, 159–60
- weak xxi, 29, 161, 182, 506, 507, 509, 511, 512, 513n
- Nedkova, Vera 72, 530, 534
- Neikov, Khristo 301
- Nektarios of Jerusalem 383, 385
- Nevrokop 96, 349, 359, 361, 577
- Nevskii, Alexander 484, 485n
- Neznakomov, Petăr 137
- Nicephoras of Chios 389
- Nikolov, Khristo 14, 139n
- Nikolov, Vasil 155, 533
- Nikolova, Dora 92, 93n, 567
- Nikolova, Neli 125n
- Nordic 49
- Novi Pazar 71, 340
- Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) 359, 361, 364, 365, 366n, 368, 578
- Okhridski, Kliment 227, 332n, 397n, 436
- Open Society Institute 165
- Orăkhovo 230
- Orozov, Nikola 378
- Otechestvo* 360
- Ovcharov, Dimităr 12, 52n, 53n, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 66, 70, 90n, 92, 117n, 125n, 130n, 133n, 150n, 522, 524, 528, 531, 540, 543, 546, 550, 551, 554, 555
- Ovcharov, Nikolai 154
- Ovcharova, Maria 177
- Paisii of Khilander 214, 226, 247, 251, 277, 281, 302, 303n, 332n, 337, 375, 391, 392, 394, 395, 396, 430, 436
- Palauzov, Mitko 324
- Palauzov, Nikolai 226
- Panagiurishte 340, 341n, 439
- Panaiotov, Filip 106n
- Panaiotov, Todor 301, 328n
- Pankratii of Stara Zagora 361, 577
- Paskaleva, Virzhiniia 147, 566
- Patlagean, Evelyne 384
- Patmos 390
- Patriarch Evtimii 227, 247, 332n, 396, 435n
- Patriarch Gregory V 389
- Patriarch Kiril 19n, 375, 376n, 435, 577
- Patriarch Maxim 151n, 156, 327n, 349, 350, 359, 360n, 361, 362, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 374, 376, 379, 398n, 410n, 431, 435n, 437, 440, 441, 444n
- Patriarch Nikon 390
- Patriarch Pavle 368
- Patriarch Philotheos 386
- Patriarch Pimen (Metropolitan of Nevrokop) 366, 367, 368, 369, 370n, 373, 374, 375, 377, 379, 380, 398, 431, 577
- Pavlov, Todor 71, 73, 74, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81n, 314
- Pavlovska, Tsvetana 118, 119n, 120
- Pazardzhik 230, 340
- Peev, Todor 279
- Pelin, Elin 76

- Penchovich, Ivancho 277  
 Pernik 340, 465  
 Peter VII 368  
 Petev, Ivan 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22,  
     23, 24, 25, 29, 31, 32, 411n, 442,  
     444, 578  
 Petkov, Naiden 301  
 Petrov, Ivan 301  
 Petrov, Petîr 4n, 377, 380n, 577  
 Petrov, Valeri 295  
 Pirdop 230  
 Plekhanov, Georgi 258, 260n  
 Pleven 230, 279n, 301n, 340, 439  
 Pliska 71  
 Plovdiv 82n, 210, 211, 223, 232, 245,  
     249, 268, 275, 280, 330, 331,  
     334, 335, 339, 340, 361n, 364,  
     430, 432n, 437, 440, 441, 577,  
     579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584  
*Pogled* 135, 136, 137, 143  
 Polianov, Dimitîr 295  
 Popkhinov, Anastas 278, 279, 282  
 Popkhinov, Danail, *see* Popov, Danail  
 Poplukanov, Marin 119n, 279n, 281n  
 Popov, Danail 196, 278, 279  
 Popov, Dimitîr 437  
 Popov, Petîr 240, 417  
 Popov, Zhechko 50, 301  
 Popova-Mutafova, Fani 289, 291  
 Popovich, Raino 399  
 Poppavlova, Maria 24, 25, 28, 34,  
     126, 128  
 Poptodorov, Radko 360, 361n, 363,  
     369, 376, 404n, 415, 416, 577  
 Pravets 150, 166  
*Prelom* 250  
 Prince Cyril 74n  
 Prince Lazar 484  
 Prodev, Stefan 106n  
 Propp, Vladimir 190  
*Puls* 39, 54n, 143  
  
*Rabotnichesko delo* 23n, 37n, 40, 41n,  
     44, 50, 65, 130, 143, 150n, 546  
*Rabotnik* 213  
 Racheva, Anka 430  
 Radeva, Rumiana 140, 545  
 Radevski, Khristo 284, 285  
 Radichkov, Iordan 54, 95n, 165  
 Radio Sofia 39n  
 Radkov, Radko 294  
 Raiko-Daskalova, Svetla 30n  
 Rainov, Theofan 268, 269, 409  
 Rakovski, Georgi Sava 250n, 251,  
     256, 260, 268n, 290, 332n, 333,  
     403, 412, 428n, 440, 584, 586  
 Ralin, Radoi 106, 165, 166n, 300n  
 Rancière, Jacques 180  
 Randeria, Shalini 104  
 Rank, Otto 190, 191  
 Razboinikov, Spas 12, 523, 524, 525,  
     526, 529, 531, 532, 533, 534,  
     540, 542, 548  
 Razgrad 230, 344  
 Razlog 440  
*Real Life of Sebastian Knight, The* xviii  
 relics 47, 82n, 381, 382n, 384, 387,  
     388, 389, 390, 396n, 390, 440,  
     444n, 445, 459, 460, 506  
 Research Institute of Criminology  
     63, 552  
 Revel, Jacques 7  
 Revival Period 39, 43, 44, 45, 251,  
     283, 302, 317, 325, 400n, 428n  
 Rila Monastery 435  
 Rilski, Kamen 93, 567  
 ritual xvii, xxi, 10, 22n, 190, 205,  
     238, 352, 353, 356, 357, 375,  
     390, 421n, 439, 442, 460, 461,  
     462, 463, 464, 471n, 474, 475,  
     477, 490n, 533, 565, 574  
 Rizov, Dimitîr 41n, 49, 67  
 Roberta 431  
 Romanians x, 227, 509  
 Rosich, Dzhoko 299  
 Rudozem 340  
 Ruse 149n, 159, 230, 231n, 232n,  
     271, 275n, 277, 280, 340, 439  
 Ruse District 94, 344  
 Russo-Turkish (Liberation) War 36n,  
     75, 203, 223, 233, 237, 388, 391  
 Ryle, Gilbert 355

- Sahlins, Marshall 353  
 Sakizov, Ianko 258  
 Samokov 230, 293  
 San Stefano Treaty 76  
 Sandanski, Iane 308  
 Santa Cecilia Musical Academy 95  
 Saras of Kalymnos 390  
 Sava (Polish Archbishop) 368  
 Schmeing, Karl 190  
 Schmitt, Carl 98, 133, 352  
 Second Bulgarian Legion 193  
 Second World War 8, 77, 78, 112,  
     145n, 190, 200, 205, 219, 253,  
     262, 285, 300, 307, 311, 319,  
     352, 365, 402, 478, 510, 511n  
 Semov, Marko 12, 94, 328n, 438n,  
     529  
 Sendov, Blagovest 116  
 Serbs x, xi, 77, 170, 227, 276  
 Serdica Fortress 72  
 Sevlievo 230  
 Shakespeare 4, 188, 308  
 Sharova, Krumka 52n, 120n, 147,  
     276, 277, 278, 283, 310n, 328n,  
     329n, 405n, 566  
 Shishman, Ivan 227, 303, 392  
 Shivarov, Svetoslav 365  
 Shopov, Naum 299  
 Shumen 340  
 Sibeve, Khristofer 360, 361, 364, 577  
 Sibeve, Todor 417, 577  
 Silistra 340  
 Simeon (Czech Archbishop) 368  
 Simeon I 76, 215n, 227n, 238, 247,  
     303n, 331, 332, 337, 428n, 584,  
     585  
 Simeon II, *see* Simeon  
     Sakskoburgotski  
 Simeon Sakskoburgotski 368n, 370,  
     500  
 Simeonov, Bogomil 299  
 Skanderbeg, Georgi Kastrioti 303  
 Skete of St. Anne 390  
 Slaveikov, Pencho 216n, 217, 289n,  
     295, 392  
 Slaveikov, Petko 231n, 277  
 Sliven 211, 230, 439  
 social drama xv, 9, 10, 12, 32, 34, 39,  
     53, 84, 109n, 135, 139n, 151  
 Sofia 4, 12, 13n, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25,  
     26, 27, 30n, 31n, 37n, 42n, 45,  
     49, 66, 67, 68, 72, 74, 80, 81,  
     85n, 119n, 147, 160, 163n, 171,  
     194, 195n, 199, 200, 205, 224,  
     228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233n,  
     234, 240, 241, 243, 245, 248,  
     274, 300, 311, 321, 324, 327, 330,  
     331, 334, 335, 343, 350, 363,  
     364, 365, 368, 370n, 371, 375,  
     379n, 393, 407n, 418, 433, 435n,  
     436, 437, 439, 444n, 445, 461,  
     468, 469n, 470, 517, 518, 535,  
     565, 572, 573, 579, 583  
*Sofia* 13n, 42, 48, 57, 66  
 Sopot 269n, 434, 466, 468, 470  
 Soros, George 165, 168  
 Sotirov, Ivan 12, 124n, 125n, 528,  
     571, 572, 573, 574  
 South Slavs x, 391  
 Spasov, Metodi 359, 361, 362n, 364,  
     365, 578  
 Spencer, Herbert 186  
 St. Agathon Monastery 389  
 St. Anastasiia Tirnovska 436  
 “St. Archangel Michael” foundation  
     156  
 St. Angelarii 436  
 St. Cecilia 95  
 St. Constantine the Great 484  
 St. Ferdinand 484  
 St. Filoteia Tirnovska 436  
 St. Gavril Lesnovski 436  
 St. Georgi Novi Sofiiski 436  
 St. Gorazd 436  
 St. Helen 484  
 St. Hieronimus 349  
 St. Ilarion Miglenski 435  
 St. Ioakim Patriarkh Tirnovski 436  
 St. Ioan Patriarkh Bilgarski 435  
 St. Ioanikii Osogovski 436  
 St. Isabel (Elizabeth) 484  
 St. John of Rila 308

- St. Kiril Patriarkh Bîlgarski 435  
 St. Kliment Okhridski 436  
 St. Kozma Zografski 436  
 St. Louis 484  
 St. Ludmilla 484  
 St. Naum Okhridski 436  
 St. Nikola Sofiiski-Novi 436  
 “St. Paraskeva” church (*also* “Sv. Parashkeva”) 25, 350  
 St. Petersburg Slavic Committee 21  
 St. Petka Tîrnovska 436  
 St. Pimen Zografski 436  
 St. Sava 397n, 436  
 St. Sofronii Vrachanski 436  
 St. Stephen 484  
 St. Teodosii Tîrnovski 435  
 St. Vladimir 484  
 St. Wenceslas 484  
 St. Zlata Mîglenska 436  
 Stambolov, Stefan 212n, 231n, 245n, 258, 331, 332n, 334, 337, 440, 454, 584, 585  
 Stanchev, Ivan 24, 158  
 Stancheva, Magdalina 12, 40n, 43, 45, 46, 52n, 57n, 61, 66n, 68, 69, 70n, 71, 75, 86, 90n, 112n, 118n, 128, 528, 531, 539, 542, 545, 546n  
 Stanev, Emilian 289  
 Stanilov, Stanislav 94, 95, 116, 117n, 118, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 531, 542, 576  
 Stara Zagora 66n, 230, 361, 399, 468, 577  
 Stari, Georgi Sofiiski 393  
 Stefanova, Liliana 107n, 295  
 Stoev, Gencho 289  
 Stoianov, Maniu 392n, 393, 453n  
 Stoianov, Petîr 359n, 366, 367, 371n, 442, 470  
 Stoianov, Prodan 64n  
 Stoianov, Zakhari 13n, 139n, 187, 195, 203, 204, 212, 213, 214, 217, 254, 255, 256, 260n, 262, 265, 270, 289, 292, 302, 400, 403, 405, 408, 413, 417, 419  
 Stoianova, Mitra 94  
 Stoianova, Vania 334n  
 Stoianovich, Zhana 299  
 Stoilov, Pop Krîstiu 21n, 28n, 536, 572, 574  
 Strashimirov, Dimitîr 106, 206, 241, 242, 246, 279n, 309, 405n, 418, 419  
 Strelcha 440  
 Strumishki, Anastasii 393  
 “Sv. Parashkeva” church, *see* “St. Paraskeva” church  
 “Sv. Petka” church, *see* “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” church  
 “Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska” church (*also* “Sv. Petka”) 24, 30n, 34, 43, 46, 52, 54n, 55, 67, 80, 94, 115, 125n, 127, 139, 144, 145, 151, 156, 167, 375, 378, 433, 456n, 518, 526, 530, 555, 558, 562, 574, 576, 578  
 Svoboda 180, 195, 197, 451  
 Takhov, Georgi 54n  
 Takiia, Nikolov Pop Khristo 14, 21n, 24, 33  
 Talbot, Alice-Mary 381  
 Talev, Dimitîr 289, 292  
 Tanev, Liubomir 143  
 Taseva, Kalina 300  
 Teteven 120n, 279  
 “The Grey Horse” pub 26  
 Theoctist 368  
 Theological Academy 17, 19n, 26, 28n, 36, 37n, 67, 72, 360, 363, 376, 379, 415, 442, 533, 577  
 Thracian 49, 155, 246  
 Tîrnovo 47, 226n, 279, 280, 311, 364  
 Tito 77, 78  
 Todev, Nikola 299  
 Todorov, Dechko 430  
 Todorov, Nikolai 7n, 10, 11, 62, 63, 67n, 80n, 81n, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 91n, 93, 94n, 96, 106n, 114n, 116n, 125n, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145, 146n, 149, 150, 154n, 528,

- 537, 539, 541, 542, 544, 545,  
547, 548, 549, 552, 553, 554,  
555, 560, 561, 567, 571, 575,  
576
- Todorov, Petko 213n, 217
- Todorov-Khindalov, Vladimir 241
- Tolbukhin (Dobrich) 339, 340
- Topencharov, Vladimir 125n, 158,  
159
- Totiu, Filip 196
- Totiu, Philip 226
- Traianov, Teodor 295
- Traikov, Veselin 147, 566
- Trifonov, Slavi 162
- Troian 231, 340, 444
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph 6, 134
- Trud* 34, 35, 37, 72, 126, 149, 500,  
526n
- Tsamblak, Grigorii 227, 397n
- Tsanev, Stefan 107, 296, 297, 298
- Tsaneva, Milena 210, 215n
- Tsankov, Vili 222, 245, 299
- Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich 390, 443
- Tsar Boris 76, 337
- Tsar Boris-Mikhail 247, 376, 396,  
435
- Tsar Ivan Asen II 238
- Tsar Peter 396
- Tsar Samuil 452
- Tsar Simeon 76, 238, 331, 332n,  
337, 585
- Tsarevets 47
- Tsonev, Kosta 299
- Tsonev, Plamen 295
- Tsonev, Todor 177, 178
- Tsviatkov, Nikola 52n
- Tsviatkov, Nikolcho 158n
- Tuleshkov, Kiro 120, 198, 206
- Turks x, 119, 124, 139, 146n, 181,  
182, 209, 223, 224, 269, 290,  
293, 299, 304, 344, 392, 393,  
442n, 498, 509, 510, 520, 580
- Turner, Victor xv, 9, 10, 40n, 55,  
109, 139, 156, 434, 460
- Turnu-Măgurele 440
- Turtsia* 195, 275, 276
- Ulrich (Bishop of Augsburg) 382
- Undzhiev, Ivan 15, 16, 18, 21n, 22n,  
24n, 29, 36, 119n, 136, 157, 161,  
242, 246, 270, 271, 273n, 275,  
290, 299, 300n, 309, 329n, 345n,  
380n, 400, 401, 402, 403, 405n,  
416, 418, 419, 421, 422, 423,  
425, 426, 427, 428
- University of Sofia 3, 267, 311, 364,  
416
- Urban VIII 382
- Utley, Francis Lee 192
- Uzunov, Dechko 301
- Varlaam (Archbishop of Okhrid) 393
- Varna 92, 93, 96, 149n, 230, 250,  
299n, 339, 340, 364, 445
- “Vasil Levski” People’s Committee  
240
- Vasilev, Iordan 292, 294
- Vasilev, Marin 300
- Vasilev, Mikhail 143
- Vasilii, Khadzhi 399
- Vazov, Ivan 76, 166, 187, 218, 209,  
210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216,  
217, 219, 220, 221, 229, 231, 239,  
246, 270n, 286, 289, 294, 300,  
302, 332, 333, 337, 343n, 402n,  
408, 409, 410, 411, 417, 432,  
436n, 444, 455, 584, 585, 586
- Velichkov, Konstantin 211, 212, 409
- Velkov, Velizar 7n, 12, 89, 114, 115,  
528, 543n, 561
- Venev, Stoian 300
- Videnov, Zhan 365, 366
- Vienna xxv, 115, 171, 173, 268, 505
- Vizvizova, Kirila 147, 300n, 339, 566
- Vlaikov, Todor 221, 246, 258
- Vodenicharov, Todor 94, 95, 96
- von Hahn, Johann Georg 190
- Vrachanski, Sofronii 226, 227, 375,  
377n, 395n, 436
- Vrana 314
- Vratsa 68, 230, 232n, 280, 340, 361,  
394, 422, 440, 577
- Vryonis, Jr., Speros 482

- Weber, Claudia 230n, 231, 232, 233  
White, Hayden 9, 94, 180, 355, 425n  
Wilentz, Sean 352  
Williamsburg 47  
  
Young, Iris Marion 98  
  
Zafirova, Ilka 299  
Zagorchinov, Stoian 289  
Zaimov, Stoian 217, 227, 265, 270,  
400n, 419  
Zhechev, Nikolai 52n, 70n, 147,  
328n, 566  
Zhelev, Zheliu 43n, 107n, 162, 163,  
164, 187, 201, 205, 319n, 322,  
326, 328n, 364  
  
Zhendov, Alexander 300  
Zhirov, Iuri 49  
Zhivanovich, Vase 119  
Zhivkov, Georgi 413  
Zhivkov, Todor 47, 80, 105, 106,  
123, 124, 146, 147, 148, 150,  
162n, 166, 167, 177, 287, 299,  
308n, 313, 314, 316, 498, 562,  
565  
Zhivkova, Liudmila 5n, 7n, 39n,  
44, 45, 47, 48n, 52, 54n, 55,  
83, 143, 167, 316, 360, 579  
Zidarov, Kamen 295  
Zograf, Zakharii 302  
Zographou Monastery 389



▲ **Plate 1** Levski monument in Karlovo. Bronze statue by Marin Vasilev (1905)  
Source: author's photograph



▲ **Plate 2** Photograph of Levski from 1870, probably made in Bulgaria during his third organizational visit. This is arguably Levski's most popular image today



▲ **Plate 3** Photograph of Levski in Bucharest from 1872. This is the image distributed to the Ottoman police



▲ **Plate 4** Vasil Levski as a standard bearer in the *cheta* of Panaiot Khitov, 1867

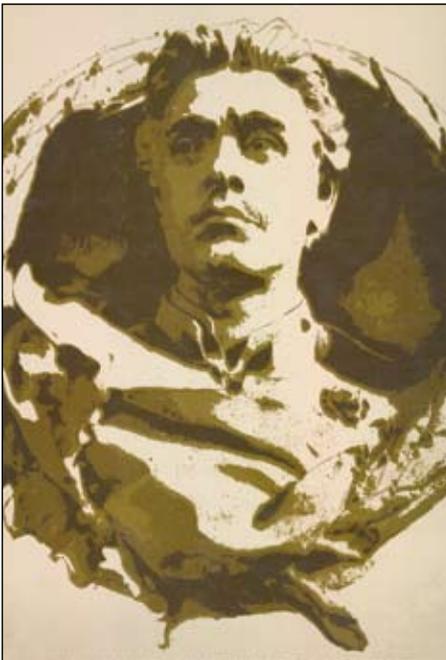


▲ **Plate 5** Levski in the uniform of the First Bulgarian Legion, Belgrade  
Source for Plates 2–5: These images of Levski are ubiquitous, but the best reproductions are in Khristo Ionkov and Stoianka Ionkova. *Vasil Levski i bilgarskata natsionalna revoliutsiia*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1987, p. 21: plate 1, p. 20: plate 5, p. 56, plate 10, p. 168, plate 19.



◀ **Plate 6** Levski's portrait by Georgi Danchev, 1880s  
Source: Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia: Bilgarski khudozhnik, 1976, Reproduction 2.

▶ **Plate 8** Nikola Kozhukharov. The capture of Levski, 1952  
Source: Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Reproduction 42.



▶ **Plate 9** Levski Street, Sofia  
Source: author's photograph

◀ **Plate 7** Levski's bronze high relief at the Sofia monument by Rudolf Weir (1895)  
Source: Zhechko Popov, *Vasil Levski v bilgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia: Bilgarski khudozhnik, 1976, Reproduction 4.

Plates





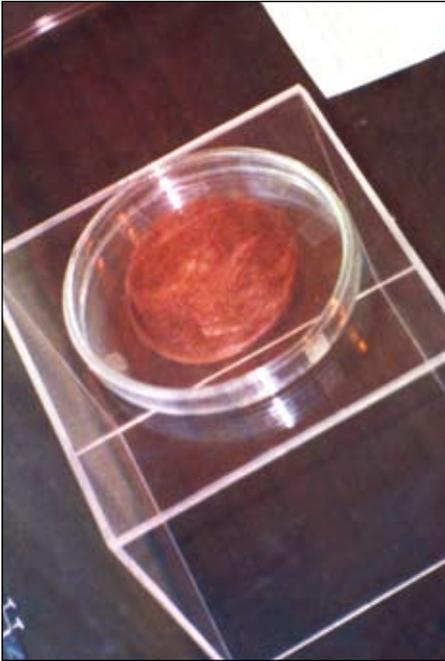
▲ **Plate 10** The chapel "All Bulgarian Saints" as part of the Levski museum ensemble in Karlovo  
Source: author's photograph



◀ **Plate 11** Mounting the reliquary  
Source: author's photograph

## Plates

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◀ **Plate 12** Levski's hair, kept at the chapel "All Bulgarian Saints"  
Source: author's photograph

▼ **Plate 13** Commemorative plaque exhibited on the exterior of the "Sv. Petka Samardzhiiska" church, 1999.  
Source: author's photograph





## Plates

◀ **Plate 14** Plaque: close-up.  
Source: author's photograph

▶ **Plate 15A** Levski's icon: blow-up  
Source: author's photograph

▶ **Plate 15** Levski's icon in the interior of the "Sv. Petka" church  
Source: author's photograph

▼ **Plate 16** Fresco on northern wall of the Holy Virgin church in Karlovo, 1997  
Source: author's photograph





▲ **Plate 17** Iconostasis of the Holy Virgin church in Karlovo  
Source: author's photograph



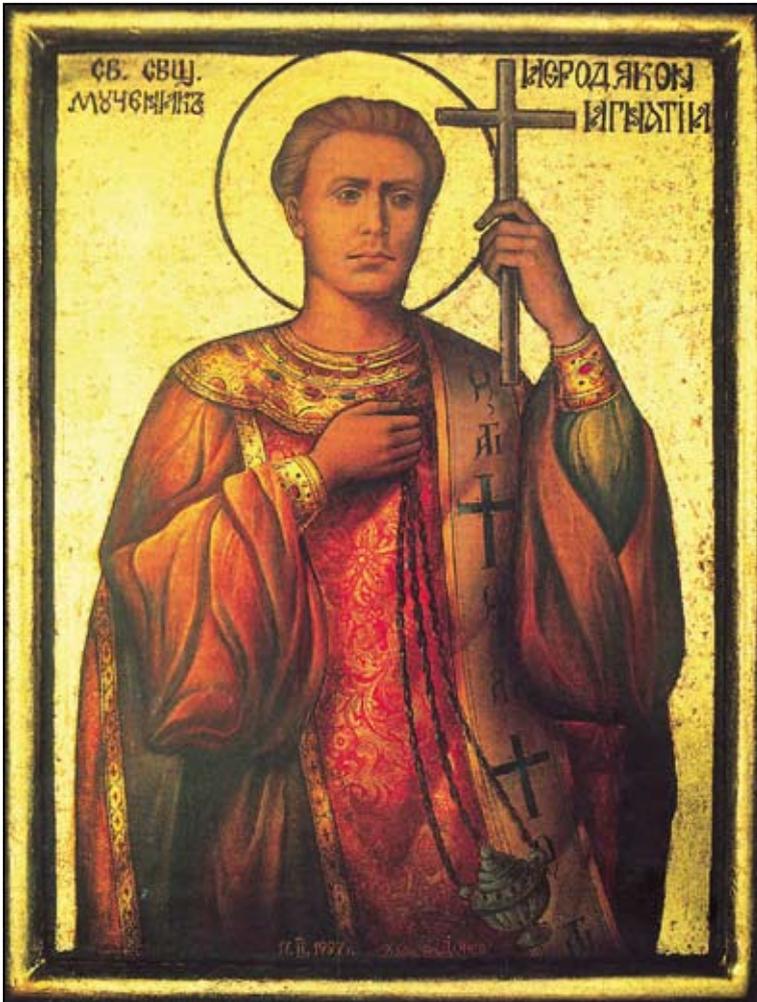
▲ **Plate 18** Levski's portrait-icon in the altar space  
Source: author's photograph



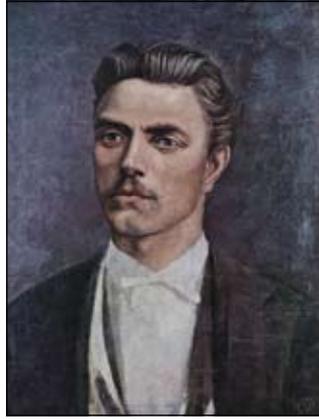
▲ **Plate 18A** Levski's portrait-icon: blow-up  
Source: author's photograph



▲ **Plate 19** Levski's icon in the "Sv. Sofia" church  
Source: author's photograph



▲ **Plate 20** A poster of Levski's icon  
Source: author's photograph



▲ Plate 21 From photograph to icon



▲ **Plate 22** Icon of Lenin, 1920s

Source: Miltiades Papanikolaou, ed., *Licht und Farbe in der russischen Avantgarde: die Sammlung Costakis aus dem Staatlichen Museum für Zeitgenössische Kunst Thessaloniki* Köln: DuMont, 2004.