



CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDY SOFIA

CAS WORKING PAPER SERIES

Issue 1

Sofia 2007

This publication presents part of the research outcome of a project carried out at the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia under the title

Sofia Academic NEXUS

How to Think about the Balkans: Culture, Region, Identity

*Available in electronic form at
www.cas.bg*



CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDY SOFIA

70 Neofit Rilski Str., floor 3-4
phone: +359 2 9803704, fax: +359 2 9803662
cas@cas.bg, www.cas.bg

Copyright © 2007 by the CAS contributors/CAS.
All rights reserved. Copyright remains with the individual authors/CAS.
No part of this publication can be reproduced, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission of the individual authors/CAS.

IVAN ELENKOV

**THE SCIENCE OF HISTORY IN BULGARIA
IN THE AGE OF SOCIALISM:
THE PROBLEMATIC MAPPING
OF ITS INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES**

**1. Institutions Producing Historical Knowledge in Bulgaria:
General Development Until the End of the 20th Century**

Before the communist takeover of power on 9 September 1944, scientific research and training in history were concentrated in Sofia University's degree program in History. Once in power, the Bulgarian communists imposed radical changes in the system and structure of producing knowledge about the past. With increasing student enrollments, especially following the introduction of part-time degree program in 1949, by the late 1940s Sofia University's Faculty of History and Philology had become a "hothouse of teacher cadres."¹ In 1951 the degree program in History was separated from the "philologies." A new Faculty of Philosophy and History – with degree courses in philosophy, history and pedagogy – was established.

Following the Soviet attempt to separate scientific research from university teaching, the leading role in historical research shifted from Sofia University to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS).² A new law on the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, adopted on 11 February 1947, allowed the BAS's Executive Council to create only a month later an Institute for Bulgarian History at the Academy's branch for History and Philology.³

From the early 1950s onwards, the Institute for Bulgarian History became a centre integrating other historical research units. These research units were

- 1 R. Donkov. "Sto godini spetsialnost istoriya v Sofiyskiya universitet 'Sv. Kliment Ohridski'." In: *GSU "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," Istoricheski fakultet*. Vol. 80, 1987, Sofia, 1992, p. 27.
- 2 M. Todorova. "Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Bulgaria." In: *American Historical Review*, October 1992, p. 1113.
- 3 G. Markov. "50 godini Institut po istoriya pri BAN." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1998, No. 1-2, p. 3.

created on an *ad hoc* basis and were eventually closed down once they had “played their role” (Institute of Hebrew Studies; Botev-Levski Institute, etc.). This process and the overall change in the political context in the mid-1950s necessitated major structural transformations. In the early 1960s, the Institute acquired a new administration and a new name (Institute of History), and underwent major organizational changes.

In accordance with the resolutions of the 10th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and the programme for “building a developed socialist society” in Bulgaria, the October 1971 Plenum of the BCP’s Central Committee (CC) launched an initiative concerning the broad integration of scientific research and training of personnel with higher education.⁴ According to the Plenum’s resolutions, in April 1972 the Council of Ministers of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria adopted a regulation concerning the restructuring of the Academy of Sciences and Sofia University. The existing scientific structures were integrated into super-organizations, which included BAS research institutes and laboratories employed in similar areas and the corresponding faculties and degree programs at Sofia University. Nine integrated centres of science and training of personnel with higher education were established under the jurisdiction of the Academy.

The Integrated Centre of Science and Personnel Training in History incorporated the five academic research institutes concerned mainly with the past – the Institute of History, the Institute of Balkan Studies, the Institute of Archaeology with Museum, the Institute of Ethnography, and the Institute of Thracology – as well as the Faculty of History at Sofia University, which through a directive of the Council of Ministers in April 1972 became an autonomous body. Between 1970 and 1972, three projects dealing with the future structure of the Faculty of History were considered. The Council of Ministers April 1972 regulation awarded an autonomous status to historians at the University of Sofia.

The directive of the Council of Ministers also called for a reorganization of the internal structure of the institutes producing historical knowledge under the Centre’s jurisdiction. This directive determined the structures of Bulgaria’s institutions for producing historical knowledge, which they would maintain, more or less unchanged, until the end of the 20th century. The break-up of the Integrated Centre in 1990 and its official closure in 1992⁵ did not lead to any practical changes in the institutes that were a part of this all-encompassing bureaucratic structure.

In addition to those mentioned above, Bulgaria had several other institutes

4 B. Mateev. “*Edinniyat tsentur po istoriya pri BAN prez 1972 g.*” In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1973, No. 3, p. 144.

5 *Istoricheski Pregled*. 1999, No. 3-4, p. 277.

and higher education organizations devoted to the study of history that were part of the Integrated Centre: the Institute of BCP History at the BCP's CC, the Academy of Social Sciences and Social Management (known by its Bulgarian acronym AONSU), the Ivan Bashev Institute of Foreign Policy, the Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo, the Defence Ministry's Department of Military History, and the network of archives and museums in Bulgaria.

2. Projects on Rewriting Bulgarian History and their Impact on Institutions Producing Historical Knowledge

A "Commission on the Publication of Bulgarian History Sources," set up at the BAS in 1938, was arguably the institutional precursor to the Institute of History. The Commission remained in place after the Second World War and often employed historians who were regarded by the communist regime as unsuitable for university teaching but as irreplaceable in primary source studies (e.g. Vesselin Beshevliev, Ivan Dujčev). The Institute of History was originally designed as a centre of primary source studies, and this design determined its early organizational structure, the appointment of the Academician Ivan Snegarov as its first director, and the work of its first four sections.

In 1948, the fifth Congress of the BCP assigned "the historical front" the important task of writing a history that would elucidate "scientifically" Bulgaria's past and project Bulgaria's future development. This task was assigned to the Institute for Bulgarian History, in effect changing its original research agenda. As work on the history proceeded, the number of full-time staff increased considerably, the Institute's organizational structure expanded, and Prof. Dimitur Kossev became Director of the Institute.

The two volumes of the first comprehensive Marxist-Leninist history of Bulgaria were published in 1954 and 1955. The history of Bulgaria went through many revisions in conceptualization and content. Before publication, there were consultations with Soviet historians and loud public propaganda debates and the initial publication was in the form of a "trial copy" for "official use only". Despite these measures, this book did not remain the definitive history of Bulgaria for long. In the wake of the denunciation of Stalin's personality cult, the book was almost immediately subject to radical revision. This process also had a direct bearing on the Institute itself, which underwent a series of changes – in the late 1950s its scope of research was extended, and there was an increase in the number of its sections, as well as its academic and administrative staff. In 1962, Prof. Hristo Hristov was appointed director of the Institute, a position he held right until 1989. In the early 1960s a revised history of Bulgaria was published in a longer, three volume version (vol. 1, 1961; vol. 2, 1962; and vol. 3, 1964).

In 1965, the Institute's administration began a new scientific multi-volume history of Bulgaria. The original project envisaged 10, and the final one, 14 volumes. By 1966, the writing of a "Complete History" was identified as a task set by the 9th Congress of the BCP.⁶ A special session of the CC Politburo, designed to set the concrete conceptual guidelines and to ensure the appropriate material conditions, was held on 21 May 1968 and adopted a resolution in two parts: theoretical and practical.

The theoretical section set 1978 as the deadline for the completion of the text, so it could be a part of the celebrations of the centenary of Bulgaria's Liberation. It also determined "the theoretical and scientific basis on which the history should be created": "The ten-volume history of Bulgaria should be written from and consistent with the principles of Marxist-Leninist methodology, on the basis of all scientific studies to date and of considerable new primary sources and documentary material."⁷

In the practical section of the resolution, the Politburo named the BAS Institute of History as the "organizational and leading centre of all Bulgarian historians," and noted extensive measures facilitating access to archives, providing additional funds in the BAS budget in the 1968-1972 period, collecting data from archives abroad and, most importantly, adding additional full-time positions for academic, support staff, and administrative personnel.⁸

In his statement on the need of a programme for the future development of social sciences in Bulgaria at the July 1968 Plenum of the CC of the BCP, CC member Venelin Kotsev cited historians as a role model and defined the writing of a multi-volume history of Bulgaria as a programme for the development of the science of history in Bulgaria. His statement made a connection for the first time between the multi-volume history and the 1,300th anniversary of the creation of the Bulgarian State.⁹

The preparatory four-year stage of the writing of the multi-volume history presupposed "mobilization" of the entire "historical front," i.e. a transformation and enlargement of the existing structures producing historical knowledge in Bulgaria.

Assessing progress in the first four-year preparatory stage following the Politburo's 1968 resolution, on 12 July 1972 the Secretariat of the CC of the BCP likewise adopted a resolution, which provided concrete support for the writing of the multi-volume history.¹⁰ In this connection, the administration of the

6 "Reshenie na Politburo na CK na BKP za mnogotomna istoriya na Bulgaria." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1968, No. 5, pp. 3-6.

7 Ibid., p. 3.

8 Ibid., p. 6.

9 *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 26 July 1968, No. 208, p. 7.

10 V.A. Vassilev. "Rabotata po istoriya na Bulgaria na nov etap." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1973, No. 2, p. 130.

Academy and the Integrated Centre convened on 25 January 1973 a special conference whose purpose was to report on progress to date and to particularize the resolutions of the BCP leadership.

As the actual writing of the multi-volume history proceeded, the latter's Editorial Board was transformed into a specialized body of the BAS Presidium, which was empowered to coordinate and guide the activities of the project. The BAS Institute of History was named as the leading unit and, along with the team of authors, as chief executive organ of the scientific tasks. In the four years of the preparatory stage of the multi-volume history the Institute staff almost doubled, reaching "more than 90 persons" by 1972;¹¹ a number which would hardly change over the next decades. In 1997, the Institute's academic staff numbered 108 people.¹² The governing bodies of the Bulgarian Historical Society, including the Committee of Art and Culture's Department of Museums and Monuments of Culture, and the Defence Ministry's Department of Military History, launched their own initiatives to support the project.

The Secretariat's 1972 resolution provided for the elaboration of concrete curricula to train specialists in little researched areas of Bulgarian history. The separation of the Faculty of History at Sofia University may be viewed in this context. The Faculty began the 1972/73 academic year with tangible increases in its teaching staff and student enrollments. In the 1970s the number of faculty lecturers and students doubled, reaching levels, which remained more or less unchanged until the end of communism and subsequent closure of the Department of BCP History.¹³ From 102 people on the eve of 1989, the teaching staff currently "approximates 80 people" (2002).

In 1972, the team of authors and editors of the complete history project reached 126 people. Ultimately, 26 research institutes and units, eight of which were not in the Integrated Centre, were recruited to complete the project.¹⁴

The original design of the project on the history of Bulgaria would be revised repeatedly over the coming decades. Although it became a relic of the past after the collapse of communism, publication of the History proceeded. The administration of the BAS Institute of History has continued to regard it as a main research task right down to the present day. As of 2003, the Institute is working on volumes 9 and 10.

11 Ibid., p. 133.

12 A. Zapryanova, P. Peykovska. "Institutut po istoriya v yubileyната 1997 godina: strouktoura i naouchen sustav." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1998, No. 1-2, p. 11.

13 R. Donkov. Op. Cit., p. 35.

14 V.A. Vassilev. "Rabotata po istoriya na Bulgaria na nov etap." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1973, No. 2, p. 134.

3. Institutional Boundaries and the Effects of the Political Context

In addition to the firmly established institutional organization for the production of historical knowledge, a number of situations which, *prima facie*, are totally unrelated to the former must also be described and analyzed. These are situations that emerged in a particular – mainly political – context, but had a long-term effect on the formalized structures for acquiring knowledge about the past and on the science of history in the age of socialism as a whole. In brief, they may be defined as follows:

1. National conferences of historians in Bulgaria: 1948, 1964, 1975 (1981 and 1990).
2. Public debates and discussions. The problem of the “collective method of work.”
3. The long campaign against old academic authorities. Why was it impossible to comply with the communist party directive on writing a history of the science of history in Bulgaria? The unrealized Marxist historiographical canon.
4. The “new discourse” on Bulgarian history from the early 1960s and its impact on the established institutionalization of the science of history.
5. Anniversaries, congresses, conferences.
6. The Bulgarian Historical Society.

3.1. National Conferences of Historians

3.1.1. *First National Conference: 29 March, 5, 9 and 26 April 1948*

In his opening speech, Vulko Chervenkov, Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee (CC) of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), said that the convening of historians had been necessitated by the need to review the science of history and purge it of the dominant bourgeois concepts. The keynote report at the conference, titled “State and Tasks of Bulgarian Science of History,” was entrusted to Tóushé Vlahov, then assistant professor at the University.

The report was based on the presumption that the work of academicians from the bourgeois past was not a sound basis for the development of the science of history, because “...at best they reflect within themselves the ideology of the former ruling classes.”¹⁵

15 “*Stenograma ot suveshtaniето na istoritsite, organizirano ot Komiteta za naouka, izkoustvo i kultura za obsuzhdane sustoyaniето na istoricheskakata naouka,*

The report formulated the tasks of the science of history in Bulgaria as follows:

1. To liquidate all fascist-chauvinistic influences that could still be found in historical literature and that continue to burden the minds of historians.
2. To denounce all distortions, fabrications and anti-scientific theses of bourgeois historians.
3. To build historical investigation on the basis of historical materialism, the only scientific method.
4. To organize the study of a series of problems ignored by bourgeois historians, mainly in the field of social and economic relations.
5. To research in detail the relations between the Slavic peoples in the past, especially with the USSR and Yugoslavia, with an emphasis on the moments that facilitated and will facilitate their partnership.¹⁶

3.1.2. Second National Conference of Bulgarian Historians: 13 and 14 January 1964

The “wind of change” brought about by the April 1956 plenum of the CC of the BCP reached historians late. Things changed significantly only after the 22nd congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1961 and, with regard to the historical community, especially after the December 1962 All-Union Conference of Historians in the USSR.

On 31 January and 7 February 1963 – and, notably, on the initiative of the theoretical workshops at the Institute for History and Sofia University’s Faculty of History and Philology – extended joint meetings were held on the subject of “The Damage from the Personality Cult in Bulgarian Science of History and the Tasks of Surmounting It.”¹⁷ The discussion at these meetings is very important because it demonstrates the conflict between the institutional projects on the rewriting of Bulgarian history as false knowledge about the past and the claims to “historical truth” as expert, apolitical and anti-ideological knowledge. The ideological narrative was called into doubt, and the discussion reveals a “new discourse” on history, which – as we can see in the approaches discussed below – was not ideologically driven.

In content, the subsequent Second National Conference of Historians (13 and

*mart-april 1948.” In: V. Moutafchieva et al. (Comp.). *Sudut nad istoritsite. Bulgarskata istoricheska naouka – dokumenti i diskussii 1944-1950*. Vol. 1, Sofia, 1995, p. 205.*

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 280-281.

¹⁷ V.A. Vassilev. “*Obsuzhdane na porazheniyata, naneseni ot culta kum lichnostta v istoricheskata naouka.*” In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1963, No. 2, pp 142-153.

14 January 1964) was hardly distinguishable from that of 1963. The main difference was that the conference was convened by a resolution of the CC of the BCP, which provided legitimacy to the theoretical workshops. Academician Dimitur Kossev's report, entitled "On the State and Tasks of Bulgarian Science of History", was ambiguous. Using hackneyed anti-personality-cult rhetoric, Kossev abandoned the claim to "historical truth" as expert knowledge – a claim which he seems to have supported at the meeting on the damage from the personality cult in Bulgarian historiography only a year earlier. And in different rhetorical register, the 1964 report reproduced main theses of its eponymous precursor from 1948 by accusing Ivan Dujčev and M. Voynov of consciously upholding the positions of bourgeois objectivism. But, after all, the times had changed and the debates that followed the report reveal an entirely different atmosphere from that of 1948.

After a series of statements that had obviously been prepared in advance, Goran Todorov, then senior research fellow at the Institute for History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), took the floor. His statement turned the tide at the national conference. Goran Todorov started by identifying the implications in Academician Kossev's report, which referred to the 1948 conference Todorov then declared openly: "Any attempts at identifying the tasks of this conference with the tasks of the 1948 conference will seriously impair our science of history."¹⁸ His statement identified two important terms that seem to have initiated an internal anti-ideological critical discourse: "national psychology"¹⁹ and the sharper "national nihilism"²⁰ (a term also used by Todorov at the discussion in early 1963). Goran Todorov spoke in defence of the deceased bourgeois historians and, moreover, in defence of the vilified Dujčev and Voynov.²¹ He used their case as an occasion to appeal for "creative discussions" (i.e. discussions conducted only among professional experts and not associated with their political duties).

One of the important parts of the keynote report was devoted to "Improvement of the Organization of Scientific Work and Personnel Training in History." D. Kossev announced that from almost 300 professional historians (including historians, archaeologists, ethnographers, archivists, etc.), 161 had exclusively devoted themselves to the history of the BCP. Of all 300 historians, only 103 were "candidates of historical sciences" (roughly the equivalent of Masters), and there was not even a single Doctor.²² Neither the report nor the statements commented on the obvious disproportion between commu-

18 *Vtoro natsionalno suveshtanie na istoritsite v Bulgaria. Stenografski protokol.* Scientific Archives of the BAS, holding 88, inventory 2, archive unit 74, sheet 65.

19 *Ibid.*, sheet 66.

20 *Ibid.*, sheet 68.

21 *Ibid.*, sheets 68, 69 and 70.

22 D. Kossev. "Za sustoyanieto i zadachite na bulgarskata istoricheska nauka." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1964, No. 4, p. 35.

nist party and all other historians. The conclusion was that “the scientific organization and guidance of the historical front” was not good and that it was necessary to take measures on coordinating and cooperating the work of Bulgarian historians.

To the demand for “historical truth” the keynote report responded by proposing writing “a multi-volume scientific history of Bulgaria from primeval times to the present” – “a responsible task the fulfillment of which requires that all our historians devote their scientific research to it.”²³ Although we could hardly attribute such subtle guile to the initiators of the multi-volume history, the organizational structure of the multi-volume history would prove to be – at least until the early 1980s – the broadest and most effective structure in the recruitment, coordination and supervision of the research of the leading names in the Bulgarian science of history.

3.1.3 Third National Conference of Bulgarian Historians: 18 June 1975

The keynote report at the third conference was entitled – predictably – “State and Tasks of Bulgarian Science of History.” According to the established tradition of proclaiming the truth in an authoritarian way, the report was delivered by the highest-ranking official in the hierarchy of production of historical knowledge in Bulgaria – in this case, Correspondent Member, Professor Nikolai Todorov, Director of the Integrated Centre of Science and Personnel Training in History. The report employed rhetoric that was somewhat different from the type already familiar to us, but it is not rhetoric that is important in this particular case. The report actually shows a new reality in Bulgarian science of history.

Albeit indirectly, Todorov called into doubt the justifiability of the national conference and similar initiatives.²⁴ This statement marks the end of such practices and, indeed, the third national conference of historians was the last of its kind. In turn, this also proves something else. It highlights the real professionalization of the community of historians within the limits possible during socialism, the established stability of the community’s internal structure, its steady growth rates, its guaranteed reproduction and, last but not least, the effectiveness of its mechanisms for supervision and control.

The data on the historical community presented by Prof. Todorov are organized around another principle and are less revealing, but they are certainly not incomparable with the data from 1964.

23 Central State Archives of the Republic of Bulgaria, holding 1b, inventory 36, archive unit 150, sheet 2.

24 N. Todorov. “Sustoyanie i zadachi na bulgarskata istoricheska naouka.” In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1975, No. 5, p. 16.

The first thing that strikes one is the drastic growth in the share of scholars dealing with archaeology, ancient and mediaeval history, among the total number of historians: the professionals concerned with this zone of the past had reached 27.8% of the total, 25.7% of the so-called “habilitated” staff and 20.2% of the historians with academic degrees.²⁵ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the government launched national archaeological programmes on complex research, conservation and restoration of the old Bulgarian capitals of Pliska, Preslav and Veliko Turnovo.

For some unknown reason, N. Todorov classified researchers in Bulgarian history from the 15th to the 20th century as a single group within the larger profession of historical studies. They thus made up 40.7% of the total number of all historians, 45.7% of the habilitated staff and 42.5% of the historians with academic degrees. Within this group alone, 50% studied the Ottoman period and the National Revival, 35.3% Bulgarian capitalism, and 14.7% socialist construction. The ratio of Bulgarian history scholars covering the period from the Liberation to the present, however, remained definitely in favour of communist party historians: 27.4% studied civil history and 72.6% BCP history. Prof. Todorov’s data do not offer insight into the total number of historians and the share of communist party historians among them, nor into the post-1964 changes in the group of the latter, which obviously decreased somewhat in the general context of steady growth of the historical community.

Todorov classified in the same group scholars of modern and contemporary history, history of the USSR, the international working-class and communist movement, and Balkan Studies. They were 18.6% of the total, 18.7% of the habilitated staff and 27.2% of the historians with academic degrees. Within this group the majority were experts in Balkan Studies, 43.2%, followed by scholars of the international communist and working-class movement and the CPSU, 33.4%, and, finally, researchers of modern and contemporary general history and history of the USSR, 23.4%.

The smallest group at that time was that of ethnographers, who accounted for 7.5% of the total number of historians, 6% of the habilitated staff and 6.4% of historians with academic degrees.²⁶

The community of historians had obviously acquired a large critical mass and internal energy, which consistently led to its professionalization – meaning elaboration of a concept of science in the approach to the past and establishment of the principles of a professional canon in research on history parallel with, and often in opposition to, the grand institutional projects. Interestingly, although Todorov’s report identified the multi-volume history as “the task of tasks,” his vision for the future of the science of history hampered the

25 Ibid., p. 18.

26 Ibid., p. 19.

prospects for its development: a change of proportion, in which the Bulgarian ‘problem’ totally dominates historical studies; encouragement of the tendency towards “breaking the boundary that separates [communist] party and civil history”; promotion of strictly monographic studies and rejection of the archaic principles of collective work by means of public discussions, etc.

3.1.4. Two Further Reports in the “State and its Tasks” Genre

I will now turn to a discussion of two further reports in the “state and its Tasks” genre, which were both written by Prof. Mito Issousov. The first report is from 7 May 1981 and has the classical title, “State and Tasks of the Science of History in Bulgaria.” The report was delivered at a meeting of the Scientific Council of the Integrated Centre of History, which was headed at that time by Prof. Issousov after Prof. N. Todorov, its former director, had embarked on a diplomatic career. The 33 resolutions of the Scientific Council, and a long-term programme on the development of the science of history up to the year 2000 provide insight into the prevailing visions for the future development of the institutions producing historical knowledge in Bulgaria in the early 1980s.²⁷

Noting “the state” of the science of history, the long-term programme outlines four directions for institutional transformation, starting with the Institute of History at the BAS and, thereupon, continuing to influence the entire science of history: 1) intensive research on the history of the socialist period; 2) development of research in the field of modern and contemporary general history; 3) change in the existing state of research in the field of methodology and theory of historical knowledge, and 4) change in the state of historiographical research and scientific information.²⁸ The plans on Point 2 are the most radical: the Section on Modern and Contemporary General History is to be transformed into an autonomous institute that will be separated from the Institute of History.

The documents note in passing only that in fulfillment of the theses of the BCP’s 12th congress on the development of the Eighth Five-Year Plan Period, the Institute is participating in the national programmes on Strandja-Sakar, Rhodopi and Dobroudja, and the Programme on the Development of Blagoevgrad District.²⁹ Regrettably, it was not the general historians but their colleagues who were involved in the programmes that would become important in the next decade. I am saying all this to express my conviction that, emanci-

27 Scientific Archives of the BAS, holding 88, inventory 4, archive unit 107, sheets 1-39.

28 *Otgovori na vuprosnika “Komplexna programa za razvitiето na BAN do 2000 g.”* 19 June 1981, Scientific Archives of the BAS, holding 88, inventory 4, archive unit 107, sheet 13.

29 *Ibid.*, sheet 12.

pated as it might have been in its professionalization, the community of historians was incapable of constructing its institutional future independently.

Prof. Issousov's second report is from October 1990. Although titled "The Science of History and Our Times," the report belongs to the "State and Tasks" genre and will be discussed in greater detail below.

3.2. Public Debates and Discussions

Public debates and discussions had a normative function, and that is why they are treated here in the general context of the history of institutions producing historical knowledge. Here we will begin with the end of the 1940s, when the public debates were an obvious political instrument used to force the reformulation of research paradigms and assert historical materialism as the method of historical scholarship. We will also see how by the 1970s the debates became gradually normalized and started fulfilling their natural purpose as a forum for the professional exchange of ideas.

At the First National Conference of Historians in 1948, Prof. Hristo Gandev made an interesting statement, in which he maintained that the debates and discussions serve as a public forum where historians and people in positions of power can reach a general agreement about the past so as to protect historians from unpredictable changes in the official positions of the BCP. Referring to the task of completing a "scientific history" of the Bulgarian people, Prof. Gandev, benevolently characterized as one of the "visibly self-reforming bourgeois historians," said: "It will face many major obstacles, but they must be surmounted. Nevertheless, this history will be provisional and temporary in character. It is imperative that the history is produced in accordance with a pre-developed plan, and that each chapter is subsequently reviewed in discussion and debate. If we do not proceed in this fashion, we will exhaust the authors by constantly reviling them verbally and in written reviews, and thus undermining confidence even in some of their real achievements. As a consequence, the scientific workers themselves will start shunning work and responsibilities."³⁰ Prof. Gandev's warnings would prove prophetic. This history, the first product of Bulgarian historiography completed by "the collective method of work," would be published in two volumes (1954 and 1955), each one of which would be subjected to two open discussions along with numerous others. The initial discussion on the "dummy" (model) of the first volume took place in the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow on 22 October 1953.³¹ The same "dummy" version was then debated in Sofia at six meetings from 13 to 23 November 1953.³² In

30 V. Moutafchieva et al. (Comp.). *Sudut...*, p. 368.

31 N. Todorov. "Obsuzhdane na maketa na t. I ot 'Istoriya na Bulgaria' v Suvetskiya suyuz." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1954, No. 1, pp. 116-126.

32 V. Tupkova-Zaimova. "Obsuzhdane na maketa na t. I ot 'Istoriya na Bulgaria'."

March of 1955, at the request of Institute of History Director D. Kossev, the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute of Slavic Studies organized a discussion of the second volume of the *History*, with the participation of a Bulgarian delegation of top-ranking historians.³³ Two months later, the volume was also discussed in public in Sofia.³⁴ The last example of this kind of review took place on 25 January 1973, when a gathering public discussed the Editorial Board's report on the multi-volume history of Bulgaria presented by D. Kossev.³⁵ This so-called "collective method of work," as the above-mentioned fact suggest, provoked some of the liveliest debates of the period: the "collective" or team here was not formed by historians themselves, *but vertically, between historians and those in positions of political power.*

During this period of initial efforts to reform the science of history according to Marxist principles, it is important to note that the themes remained almost unchanged throughout the period of socialism; in fact, the majority of themes have not changed to the present day. Historians would argue, reject or assert, but they would seldom overstep the admissible limits of debate about the Bulgarian past. We find those themes in the 1950 and 1951 plans of the Institute of History: 1) Periodization of Bulgarian history; 2) Classes and class relations in the National Revival period; 3) the ideology of the Bulgarian national revolutionaries; 4) Main stages in the development of capitalism in Bulgaria; 5) Essence and character of fascism in Bulgaria; 6) The Macedonian question and the Bulgarian science of history.³⁶ Arguably, the professional canon of work and the concept of science were formed mainly within the limits of this set of problems, even though the latter itself has not been put to question to date.

3.3. The Long Campaign against Old Academic Authorities. The Unrealized Marxist Historiographical Canon

Up until the end of the 1960s almost all authors invariably included in the introduction to their respective study denunciations of bourgeois historiography and references to the fledgling Marxist tradition in thinking about the past. This practice dates from the second half of the 1940s. Without giving it special consideration, I initially assumed it was a concrete application of the compulsory ideological ritual formulas dictated by conferences, discussions,

In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1954, No. 1, pp. 108-116.

33 *Reshenie na PB na CK na BKP*. 18 March 1955, Central State Archives of the Republic of Bulgaria, holding 1b, inventory 6, archive unit 2492, sheet 1.

34 Goran D. Todorov. "Obsuzhdane na maketa na t. I ot 'Istoriya na Bulgaria'." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1955, No. 4, pp. 116-125.

35 V.A. Vassilev. "Rabotata po istoriya na Bulgaria na nov etap." In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1973, No. 2, p. 130ff.

36 V. Hadjinikolov. "Naouchnite diskousii v Institouta za bulgarska istoriya pri BAN." In: *Izvestiya na Institouta za bulgarska istoriya*, vol. 1-2, 1951, p. 359.

debates, etc. The communist party directive on surmounting the bourgeois legacy in historiography remained generally unclear to me until I chanced upon a statement made at the Second National Conference in 1964 by Evlogi Bouzhashki, a scholar of post-Liberation history well-known to the community of historians. Countering Goran Todorov, who had knowingly pointed out that pre-revolution Russian historians were being republished in the Soviet Union, Bouzhashki noted, “the task of the correct, critical assimilation of the legacy of our science has not been solved.”³⁷ If reassessment of bourgeois historiography was until then the prime concern, Bouzhashki was the first historian to call for a reassessment of the Marxist tradition in the period before 9 September 1944 with “other, different motives” – namely, “in order to defend its contribution and to uphold the continuity in the development of our science of history.”³⁸ In other words, this statement helped me understand the conscious efforts *to establish an historiographical canon* in accordance with the Marxist view of the Bulgarian past – a line of interpretation designed to assert, after D. Blagoev, the names of G. Bakalov, H. Kabakchiev, Dr. S. Maksimov, J. Nathan, M. Dimitrov, P. Zarev (Ivan Hadjiiski would also be included here in the late 1960s).

A historiographical Marxist canon, however, ultimately failed to materialize, and this for two reasons. First, because of the absolute incomparability of the old academic authorities and those who had written before 9 September 1944 about the Bulgarian past from the positions of historical materialism. Second, because with the growth of the community of historians and assertion of the concept of science as apolitical and anti-ideological historical knowledge, the works of the old academic authorities would remain definitive. They would remain a source of arguments against the ideological projects on complete or partial rewriting of Bulgarian history throughout the socialist age.

3.4. The “New Discourse” on Bulgarian History

The main claim of the “new discourse” on Bulgarian history was the discovery of the truth or the so-called “historical truth.” The early 1960s saw a definite change in the regime of sharing and publicly articulating the truth that had been valid over the previous 15 years.

In the “new discourse”, the past is all-Bulgarian. The early 1960s saw the gradual relegation of the class- and party-based approach to the past. The remnants of that approach would of course remain until the end of the socialist period. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the next decade this process would make impossible constructions such as those of “the two developments

37 *Vtoro natsionalno suveshtanie...* Scientific Archives of the BAS, holding 88, inventory 2, archive unit 74, sheet 125.

38 *Ibid.*, sheet 126.

in the Bulgarian National Revival, bourgeois and popular” and of the peasant character of the national revolution. From the beginning of this decade Bulgarian historians would become responsible for “the entire past.”

The “new discourse” was expert, i.e. different from the ideological discourse. The expert discourse on the past developed from the early 1960s in several directions. One of the earliest, most widely propagated and most stridently supported directions would be the fight against fabrications of and encroachments on Bulgarian national history – a topic requiring separate study. The Politburo would interfere as a specific co-author in this subject matter – initially in every single attempt in this direction and, eventually, less and less frequently, but it would never distance itself completely. Especially noteworthy is a strictly confidential letter of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP from 25 August 1962 to the CC of the CPSU, in which pursuant to notes of Bulgaria’s “most eminent historians,” the BCP leadership calls on its Soviet comrades to intervene to prevent publication of the two-volume *History of Yugoslavia (Istoriya Yugoslavii)* prepared by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and to ensure the revision of the passages concerning questions related to the past of the “Macedonian population.”³⁹

In the course of debate about the damage caused by the personality cult to the science of history, Goran Todorov would speak of “national nihilism.” In the denunciations of the BCP policy on the national question this term formed an important point of reference in the professional anti-ideological discourse from the mid-1960s onwards. Through a resolution of the Integrated Centre of History, dated 9 January 1975, this subject matter acquired an institutional form: a study group on “National Liberation Movements during Capitalism” headed by Prof. L. Panayotov was created at the Section on History of Bulgaria during Capitalism. In 1980, twelve tenured staff positions were established, and the group acquired the status of a separate section called “National Liberation Movement after the Congress of Berlin.” In the mid-1980s, the section’s staff increased to 21 members, covering all aspects of the Bulgarian national question in Macedonia, Thrace, Dobroudja, Moravia and the Western Outlands. During the first half of the 1990s, the staff was reduced to 12 members and the section was renamed “Bulgarian Ethnic Territories and Communities after 1878.” Beginning in 1998, the section is called “History of the Bulgarian National Question.”⁴⁰ Individual researchers and small groups dealing with this subject emerged in all structures producing historical knowledge; the subject has remained extremely central in the community of

39 *Protokol ot zasedanie na PB na CK na BKP. 23 August 1962.* Central State Archives of the Republic of Bulgaria, holding 1b, inventory 6, archive unit 4898, sheets 1-5.

40 L. Stoyanov. “Sektisiya ‘Istoriya na bulgarskiya natsionalen vupros’.” In: *Petdeset godini institut po istoriya pri BAN 1947-1997*. Editorial Board: Valeri Stoyanov (Editor-in-Chief), Antoaneta Zapryanova. Sofia, 1999, pp. 84-90.

historians to this very day.

In the early 1960s Prof. N. Todorov elaborated a concept of Balkan Studies, which was operationalized with the establishment of an Institute of Balkan Studies at the BAS in 1964. According to this concept, Balkan Studies make up a complex science studying the Balkan community in its socioeconomic, political and cultural relations and the mutual influence of these relations on one another; this is the first well-reasoned concept of interdisciplinary studies in Bulgarian historiography. However, the operational context for this concept closely associated Balkan Studies with topical issues in Bulgarian foreign policy.

The concept of Thracian Studies, born in the 60s, acquired institutional form with the creation of an eponymous institute at the BAS in 1972. Prof. Alexander Fol, author of the concept and founder of the Institute, regarded Thracian Studies as a higher level of Bulgarian ancient studies guided by the idea of “complex research of antiquity and of the slave system in the Southern Danubian lands and their neighboring territories. This research is centered on Thracian Studies as an autonomous discipline of the type of Etruscan Studies and will cover the history, material culture, arts and language of the Thracian tribes.”⁴¹

3.5. Anniversaries, Congresses, Conferences.

To the end of the 1960s, the Institute of History at the BAS was invariably expected to submit proposals for celebrating anniversaries approved by the Politburo of the CC of the BCP. Historical knowledge had an ideological function, and the institutions producing historical knowledge were required to provide it, with anniversaries serving as occasions to use history for ideological purposes.

The early 1960s witnessed the gradual concentration on the professional aspect of anniversary celebrations. I believe that the turning point here came with the 200th anniversary of Paissii of Hilendar’s *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya (Slav-Bulgarian History)*, the scientific conference held to mark the occasion, and the publication of the papers from the conference in a book that remained in use among students and historians for at least two decades. From then onwards professional discourse during anniversary celebrations increasingly emancipated itself from ideological discourse, culminating in the 1980s with the prestigious Annual Scientific Workshop of Young Historians in Primorsko organized by the Institute of History, and conferences in Pamporovo, Smolyan and Petrich organized by the University of Sofia’s Faculty of History

41 In: *Problemi na bulgarskata istoriografiya sled Vtorata svetovna vojna*. Sofia, 1972, pp. 64-65.

– forums for professional proclamations about “historical truth.”

4. Rewriting Bulgarian History and Institutions for the Acquisition of Knowledge of the Past

The Orwellian rewriting of Bulgarian history was at the core of the structuring of institutions producing historical knowledge. Directly accountable to the country’s political leadership, the history of the hierarchical structure of these institutions, their areas of work, internal organization, reorganizations and general development under communism should be seen in the context of the several “mobilizations” for rewriting Bulgarian history. The experience of these “mobilizations” served as a basis for and impacted on the institutions in question into the 1990s. Intuiting the political connection between the rewriting of history and the survival of the institutions producing historical knowledge in Bulgaria, in 1990 the BAS Institute of History’s newly appointed Director, Correspondent Member Prof. Dr. Mito Issousov, considered the future of his Institute in a report titled “The Science of History and Our Times”.⁴² Although a highly personal text, Issousov’s report may be regarded as the last institutional project on rewriting Bulgarian history and reorganizing the structures producing historical knowledge. The next years would rule out the possibility of launching another project of this kind, at least to the extent and in the way proposed by Prof. Issousov. Bulgarian history stopped emanating utopian energies, and the crisis in the post-WWII structure of institutions producing historical knowledge was inevitable.

5. Institutions Producing Historical Knowledge and Bulgarian Historiography

Between the main trends in the post-WWII development of institutions for the acquisition of knowledge of the past and the development of Bulgarian historiography there is a distinct tension. The main tendency in the development of Bulgarian historiography during this period was the elaboration of a concept of science in the approach to the past and establishment of the principles of professional conduct in research on history – mainly on Bulgarian history. After the mid-1960s the development of this process is best seen in the consistent challenge and invalidation of the claims of ideological postulates to exclusive rights to the truth.⁴³

42 M. Issousov. “*Istoricheskata naouka i nashata suvremennost.*” In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1991, No. 1, pp. 3-12. Report of Correspondent Member Prof. M. Issousov, Director of the Institute of History at the BAS, to the Institute staff, delivered on 2 October 1990. p. 8.

43 D. Koleva, I. Elenkov. “Historiography in Bulgaria after the Fall of Communism: Did ‘The Change’ Happen.” Unpublished report under the research project on “Historiography in Southeastern Europe after the Fall of Communism,” funded

The problem of “historical truth” is crucial in the elaboration of a concept of science in Bulgarian historiography. In most cases, this means challenging the monumentality of ideological “truth” by advancing fragmented “historical truths” achieved through the “means and methods of scientific research.” The latter implies above all an individually conducted, detailed study based on authoritative documentary sources, which is strictly empirical and focuses on concrete subjects within unambiguous time frames. Such a concept of science and the principles of professional work gradually assumed the function of legitimating “true” historical knowledge as apolitical and anti-ideological, while being a marker of the individual identity and professional morality of Bulgarian historians.

The institutional projects on a history of Bulgaria, which after World War II usurped the main function of historical knowledge in Bulgarian culture, namely providing constituents of identity and formation of a national identity along with communist education, are not based upon the concept of science and norms of professional conduct outlined above. They are invariably ideological projects connected with the political – a situation which expert, individually produced historical knowledge is bound to resist.

This situation lent a special status to particular individuals in the professional community. The personality and works of prominent Bulgarian historians during the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s combined human charisma, “true science,” universally recognized powers of proclaiming “historical truth” and, not infrequently, the highest of institutional positions. The influence of the “new” historians and their “new rhetoric” on Bulgaria’s past often became a corrective to official ideological and institutional postulates and practices. It can be seen not only in the attempts to arrange hierarchically and deploy in a new way official decision-making mechanisms that assert “historical truth” within the community of historians; it is also present in the activities of the new historians in positions of power, integrating into power and of successfully mediating in relations with power, even “semi-officially” imposing this “truth” through its studies. The new historians were capable of changing key ideological constructs of particular situations in Bulgarian history. At the same time, however, I think that this situation also imposed authoritarian limits on “the true science of history” and its professional community by determining in an authoritarian way the rules, possibilities and figures who were entitled to articulate “the historical truth.”

Based on this gradually imposed concept of science after the late 1960s, individual professional norms and institutional mechanisms for the assertion of “historical truth” have largely remained the same, even after the end of com-

munism. In a text written in dedication to the 50th anniversary of the Institute of History (1997), Institute Director Prof. Dr. Georgi Markov wrote the following about the prospects of the multi-volume history: “The Institute of History will continue to regard this as its main research theme, uniting the efforts of many historians. Of course, the complicated and contentious character of events since the First World War will necessitate a new periodization, new structure, and new teams of authors and editors. We do not need methodology but, rather, [professional] integrity and objectivity to stop changing the past for the purposes of the present. Historians should not serve politics but convey the lessons [of history] to the latter.”⁴⁴

The established concept of science and the principles of the professional conduct continue to produce the only “historical truth” about Bulgaria’s past. Furthermore, every ideological or “methological” paradigm was vehemently denounced as an expression of unscientific bias. This led to the total isolation of the community of historians.

It is very difficult to challenge the “scientific truth” produced by the community of historians, because this “scientific truth” is never only abstract— in most cases, behind it one can discern personifications of authority, hierarchies in the community and active human relationships giving substance to the formally established institutional mechanisms. The views of the past, acquired independently of those mechanisms and in another way, are easy to denounce as “non-scientific” and nonsensical, and the professional community of historians is very critical, aggressive and intolerant of such attempts, which make a scientific career within this community difficult.

Conclusion: Blurred Boundaries

Prof. N. Todorov, Director of the Integrated Centre of Science and Personnel Training in History, began his report to the Third National Conference of Historians by declaring, “The Bulgarian historian is an active political worker.” Having arrived at the end of this paper I suddenly realized that the above quote is absolutely true: Bulgarian historians were indeed active political workers, and the rhetorical figure was a perfectly accurate reflection of the function assigned to historical knowledge in the culture of Bulgarian totalitarian society. This makes it difficult to identify the boundaries between politics and science and, hence, makes difficult the mapping of institutional boundaries or limits of historical knowledge from the age of socialism. “Upwards” those limits stretch often right up to the Politburo of the CC of the BCP and, as we have seen in one case, to the CC of the CPSU. “Downwards” they are blurred in the individual professional morality of the historian who resides at

44 G. Markov. “50 godini Institut po istoriya pri BAN.” In: *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1998, No. 1-2, p. 8.

the core of the concept of science and the principles of professional conduct, which were elaborated from the mid-1960s onwards to the present date. In this sense, I would like to revise something in the tone of one of the propositions suggested above: the quotes from the Director of the Institute of History Prof. Georgi Markov, referring to the Institute's 50th anniversary, that "...we do not need methodology but, rather, [professional] integrity and objectivity to stop changing the past for the purposes of the present," and that "historians should not serve politics but convey the lessons [of history] to the latter," ought to be viewed not with irony but with deep and sincere compassion.