

## Historein

Vol 4 (2003)

Public Histories



### Historiography in Bulgaria After the Fall of Communism: Did "The Change" Happen?

*Ivan Elenkov, Daniela Koleva*

doi: [10.12681/historein.87](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.87)

Copyright © 2012, Ivan Elenkov, Daniela Koleva



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Elenkov, I., & Koleva, D. (2004). Historiography in Bulgaria After the Fall of Communism: Did "The Change" Happen?. *Historein*, 4, 183–198. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.87>

# *Historiography in Bulgaria After the Fall of Communism: Did “The Change” Happen?*

**Ivan Elenkov**

**Daniela Koleva**

Historiography in Bulgaria – very much as in other southeast European countries – was constituted within the context of a broad national agenda. Its ideological and political functions of fostering national identity were indispensable for its development as an academic discipline and research field. In general, communist historiography diverged from this agenda less than it might seem. True, in the first two decades after 1944 the “grand narrative” of history was ideologically straightened and brought into line with the main principles of historical materialism to become a narrative of class struggle. But from the nineteen-sixties on, Bulgarian ethnicity, the Bulgarian nation, and other aspects of “Bulgarianness” began to gradually reappear in historiography, bringing back its national focus and nationalist bias (if it had ever disappeared). The reason was not only a search for “safer” topics, but also an attempt to emancipate historiography from communist ideology and politics by re-introducing a national instead of class narrative and pursuing greater professionalism. The conditions, however, that made this attempt possible were again to be found in ideology – in the post-Stalinist postulate that class struggle in the socialist countries was over and a new unity had been established. The concept of the nation was a suitable way to express and promote that unity.

Concerned to avoid both “sociologism” and “creeping empiricism,” Bulgarian historiography relied mostly on positivistic methods. The standards of expertise in historiography implied loyalty to the facts (i.e. their discovery and description) rather than to interpretive frameworks – probably also because the latter were set by Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Since our aim here is not to give a detailed assessment of Bulgarian historiography until 1989 but only to provide a backdrop against which to measure change since then, we can stop at this point and turn to the change itself. The most conspicuous thing about it is that it occurred (or at least, started) *under the pressure of circumstances outside historiography and not as a result of a logic of its own*. The present re-writing of Bulgarian history began with street demonstrations and parliamentary debates; it followed the re-writing of biographies and the re-naming of streets; it occurred first in the newspapers and on TV. The pressure of conflicting memories challenged the position of history as “the only and mandatory memory” (Assmann) and urged new readings and new debates.

In the following, we shall first give an overview of the present situation in Bulgarian historiography, mapping out what we perceive to be new themes and perspectives as well as new institutional arrangements for their development. Second, we shall attempt a “case study” of the debate on fascism in order to enable a better understanding of the starting point, circumstances, perspectives, and possible scope of change after 1989.

### ***1. The Present Situation: Methods, Sources, Themes, and Paradigms***

Positivism and historical materialism have been the two major paradigms dominant in Bulgarian historiography. Theoretical and methodological innovations since 1989 have amounted at best to a *critique of historical materialism* and a search for alternatives. Ivan Božilov attempted a critique of the principles of historical materialism through a history of the “longue durée” in a major paper on the processes of building the medieval Bulgarian state.<sup>1</sup> As an alternative, the author introduced a comparative perspective to bring forth those features of the Bulgarian state that could facilitate an understanding of its nature against the backdrop of medieval Europe.

Obviously, questions of theory and method are not of concern to contemporary Bulgarian historians. Not a single article on these issues has been published in scholarly periodicals during the 1990s. In addition, the principles of the professional canon, established at the end of the 1960s, have remained intact: the pursuit of objective historical truth with methods and means of historiographic research conforming to academic standards. There are changes in the subjects (some of which, previously, would have been unimaginable) and in reassessments (questioning previously established evaluations), generally with no methodological reflection.

The *introduction of Western historiography* has been a way of overcoming parochialism and acquainting researchers with new approaches and methods. Although a historical anthology edited by Maria Todorova<sup>2</sup> marked the beginning in the 1980s, the democratization and privatization of publishing during the last twelve years has opened new opportunities for Western work in history and the social sciences to be translated into Bulgarian. A number of publishers have made major authors accessible to Bulgarian readers, in particular from the Annales School – F. Braudel and J. Le Goff. Serious authors on nations, national identity, and nationalism, such as Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith, also have become available in Bulgarian. Classics on ancient history are

quite numerous: Jean-Pierre Vernant, Edward Gibbon, Peter Brown, and others. Western thought on the Middle Ages is also worth mentioning.<sup>3</sup> Other works related to historiography, such as those by M. Weber, N. Elias, and M. Halbwachs, also have been translated. Another direction of interest relating to Western historiography is the history of the region: Western works on Bulgarian history and the history of the Balkans have begun to appear in Bulgarian in recent years.<sup>4</sup> Authors from the region appear only occasionally in Bulgarian.<sup>5</sup> Such publications are still rare and do not seem to be the result of any strategy or lasting collaboration (with the notable exception of journals with a regional focus, such as *Balkanistic Forum*). Very few are reflections on Western ideas by Bulgarian authors.<sup>6</sup> Although one can sometimes detect the influence of Weber's ideas, or of Braudel's and Le Goff's topics and research style, *the work of Bulgarian historians in general remains little influenced by Western thought*. Most publications do not seem to have benefited from the availability of Western literature in Bulgarian; there are almost no references to or mention of Western publications in periodicals published over the past ten years. This probably will continue, for most of the more recently translated works are not included in the reading lists for university courses and remain marginal for history students. The influence of Western authors, references to their books and a critical rethinking of their ideas, are present in the work of a few contemporary Bulgarian historians, but most of these historians are members of the younger generation who have done research at Western universities.

The *rediscovery of Bulgarian historians and intellectuals from the interwar period* is a noteworthy phenomenon. A number of largely forgotten texts have been brought to wider attention by being included in anthologies<sup>7</sup> or studied in contemporary works. The one-dimensional picture of interwar Bulgarian culture has been corrected by recalling the names of even marginal authors, such as N. Sheytanov, B. Yotsov, and A. Iliev.

Since 1989, like all other Central and East European societies, Bulgarian society has been engaged in what has been called a "feast of remembering." *Memoirs* have appeared not only from the interwar period (such as Ivan Ev. Gešov, Konstantin Stoilov, Atanas Burov, Konstantin Muraviev, Alexandăr Tsankov, Bogdan Filov) but also from after World War II. The people writing are both individuals who suffered communist repression and those who imposed it.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most important changes after 1989 has been the new regime of *the accessibility of archives*, particularly those of the Communist Party and the Ministry of the Interior. The most serious publication resulting from the opening of the archives is a series of thematically focussed collections of documents published by the Central Archives Administration (Glavno Upravenie na Arhivite) entitled, *The Archives Talk*. Nineteen volumes have been published to date, including one on the Macedonian question, Comintern<sup>9</sup> documents, and three volumes of archival material from the Bulgarian National Bank.

As far as methods and approaches are concerned, the appearance of "Braudelian" problems, the utilization of "mass" data (registers, financial documents), the attempts to view the Ottoman period in other than its political dimensions<sup>10</sup> the withdrawal from a "pure" history of events towards

a history of institutions,<sup>11</sup> and the utilization of sociological approaches<sup>12</sup> seem to mark the limits of change in Bulgarian mainstream historiography thus far.

The political ranking of research priorities in history and the social sciences before 1989 led to a peculiar “*hierarchy*” of research fields and related disciplines. History primarily came to be regarded as political history, social history was reduced to history of the class struggle, history of culture became the separate disciplines of history of art and folklore and was assigned to different institutions. What could have developed into economic history outside political economy was allocated to ethnography as “material culture.” An important thematic field related to the broader Balkan context and calling for a comparative perspective was separated into Balkan studies and developed outside historiography by an independent institution – the Institute for Balkan Studies at the Academy of Sciences. This institutional differentiation continued after 1989, preserving the previously established “division of labor” and in its turn imposing a narrow concept of history.

New paradigms, such as cultural history, historical anthropology, oral history, and feminist history, as far as they can be found in the production of knowledge about the past, are mostly linked with the appearance of new structures, most often NGOs, some of which are affiliated with academic institutions. The most important change, as we see it, is the formation of *alternative perspectives and alternative levels of handling the past*, which significantly contribute to overcoming the previously prevailing one-dimensionality. It is on these levels, rather than in mainstream historiography, that the greatest potential for change is probably to be found. Anthropological and historical perspectives have been combined in a few projects focussing on regions and specific places<sup>13</sup> as well as on everyday life,<sup>14</sup> women’s history, and family life (see the section on women’s history, below). Oral history has attracted some attention with its potential for the study of contemporary history as well as of repressed and marginal groups. Dismissed or criticized by “mainstream” historians, it has been developed by interdisciplinary teams, with linguists and sociologists working together with historians.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the *new subjects and debates* have entered (or re-entered) academic circles through wider public discussion. Another set of historical subjects has been triggered by the curiosity of the broader reading public for secrets, conspiracies, plots, and treason. Numerous historical and quasi-historical publications meet the demand for such reading. Dealing with precisely these previously forbidden aspects has, for the broader public, become a criterion for good up-to-date history writing.

One of the important new themes in contemporary Bulgarian historiography is, of course, related to *communist repression*. Memoirs, still little used by researchers, occupy a prominent place here. In addition, there is a growing number of publications dealing with events and people not studied previously because of the silence imposed and/or the inaccessibility of the archives.<sup>16</sup>

Research on totalitarian repression includes a *reflection on historiography itself*, criticism of inadequate methods, the enumeration of forbidden subjects, and inaccessible sources. In his programmatic paper from 1991, Mito Isusov, then director of the Institute for History at the Acad-

emy of Sciences, stressed that the restrictions imposed upon the professional activities of intellectuals by the communist regime gave them an apologetic character and changed their nature and their goals. Among those restrictions he enumerated the so-called “social commissions” (research subjects imposed upon historians as very important for society as a whole), censorship, repressive measures against dissident intellectuals, the inaccessibility of archives, for example, those belonging to the Communist Party and the Ministries of the Interior, Defense, and Foreign Affairs. In addition, he outlined the major “zones of silence”: Bulgarian-Russian and Bulgarian-Soviet relations, relations with neighboring countries, and ambivalent personalities in political life.<sup>17</sup> Isusov’s paper showed the direction for further reflection by historians on the state of their discipline. Repressive measures in the field of historiography have largely been stressed. The methods and standards, however, of the profession remain unquestioned.

A new field actively developed during the past decade is *women’s history*. Research before 1989 emphasized women’s contributions to art and literature, but also to “national tasks” and the “building of socialism.”

The revival of interest about women in the past that occurred in the 1990s has stimulated deeper reflection about women’s history and posed the question of its relationship to history in general. Among the research subjects are the position of women in medieval Bulgaria, the marital status of Christian (Bulgarian) and Muslim women, family life during the period of Ottoman rule, the status and activities of Bulgarian women during the so-called period of national revival (19<sup>th</sup> cent. until 1878), etc.<sup>18</sup> Other subjects include identity politics, nationalism, citizenship,<sup>19</sup> women artists and architects before 1944,<sup>20</sup> etc.

A genuine and significant change over the last decade is the “visibility” of *minorities* – more so in the social sciences but in history as well.<sup>21</sup> The process of discovering minorities for academic research has been triggered by international programs and topical issues in the contemporary social sciences.<sup>22</sup> Minorities have turned out to be of interest for historians,<sup>23</sup> sociologists<sup>24</sup> and ethnologists<sup>25</sup> alike.

The most important center of minority studies in the last ten years has been an NGO – the International Center for the Problems of Minorities and Intercultural Relations. Initially established as an academic institution, it has combined research with activities directed at improving the plight of ethnic groups in different locations. The center has prepared and/or supported more than fifty books (this number does not include fiction, textbooks, and dictionaries). Many of these books have been written by teams of authors from different academic backgrounds. An interdisciplinary approach and a comparative perspective are the results of a conscious strategy by the center. A typical example of its research is the series on *The Fate of Muslim Communities on the Balkans* (7 vols. till now).<sup>26</sup>

Religion is another previously neglected topic that has recently attracted research attention. In recent studies the *history of religion* has no longer been regarded as a supplement to political



history. Instead of incorporating the history of religion in Bulgaria into the “grand narrative” of the struggle for national independence, as was formerly the case, researchers now try to consider the history of religious communities with its own inherent logic, with the various historical and cultural circumstances involved in establishing these communities and forming their own community traditions.<sup>27</sup> Popular religion has become a subject of interest, sometimes with intensive study employing anthropological methods, notably field research.<sup>28</sup>

Such research projects have brought to the fore the failure to integrate regional features into the “national” paradigm, with this, in turn, leading to a critical research stance as far as national history and national identity are concerned.

Nevertheless, the *nation still seems to be the dominant discursive frame* of historical analysis. It has been admitted more than once in historical writing that aspirations to modernization after 1878 were conscious and purposeful, but not shared by state and society.<sup>29</sup> Gellner’s influential idea of nationalism as modernization does not yet seem to have exerted much influence on Bulgarian historiography. Critical historiographic studies, drawing on Gellner and Hobsbawm and uncovering the constructed character of Bulgarian national identity, are only beginning to appear.<sup>30</sup> Such studies are too few to exert significant influence, as opposed to the dominant nation-centered trends that often see themselves as carrying a “message” for the present, i.e. as being in the service of “the nation” rather than critical of it.

Unlike critical historiography, the issue of the origin of the Bulgarian people and the Bulgarian nation seems to have become a subject widely discussed – even by authors who have not previously done research on this topic. Indeed, *ethnogenesis* has repeatedly attracted the attention of historians, more often than not in association with specific political circumstances. Now new attempts at rewriting and rethinking Bulgarian ancestry have begun to appear.

Some interpretations of the emergence of the medieval Bulgarian state, such as I. Božilov’s paper (1992) mentioned above, are based on new methodology and add to the understanding of the early medieval period and the process of ethnogenesis with no specific message for the present. Many others, however, seem to be closer to what might be called “myths of origin” in Bulgarian historiography. They are not a phenomenon exclusively related to the post-1989 years. Such studies existed before and – depending on changing political and intellectual circumstances – tried to foster national identity by proving the “respectable” origin of contemporary Bulgarians. Thus, at different times, each of the three progenitors of the Bulgarian nation has come to the fore: Proto-Bulgarians in the interwar period, Slavs after World War II, and Thracians since the 1970s. The new situation after 1989, naturally, required a new genealogy – one that would symbolically break with the socialist past. So Proto-Bulgarians have come back into contemporary Bulgarian historiography, often within the framework of nationalist or fundamentalist programs.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. *The Debate About Fascism: a Case study of the Condition and Perspectives of Bulgarian Historiography*

The debate about fascism will be considered at some length because, in our opinion, it provides a very useful paradigm for understanding the present situation and dynamics of Bulgarian historiography. The choice is reasonable, for the debate was at the core of a continuing discussion (implicit or explicit) throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Its reappearance in recent years illustrates how post-communist historiography responds to broader changes in public life and how these changes stimulate historical debate. The debate among historians about fascism is a scholarly response to a political debate. As such, it shows the special responsibility historians have for using empirical and positivistic methods in reconstructing the past set against ideological conceptions. The debate about fascism, then, is a discussion about the condition and responsibilities of contemporary Bulgarian historiography.

The constantly simmering debate has flared up in several direct disputes. The first was held on the initiative and within the institutional framework of the Bulgarian Historical Society between 17 November 1965 and 1 February 1966. Thirteen papers by participants in this discussion were published in the journal *Istoričeski Pregled* (from No. 6 of 1966 to No. 1 of 1969). The second discussion took place from 8 to 11 October 1968. Its subject was “The Nature of the 19 May 1934 *Coup d’État*,” but fascism in Bulgaria served as the common framework for all commentaries.<sup>32</sup> This debate was initiated by the Institute for the History of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) at the party’s Central Committee, i.e. at a privileged institutional level. In fact, the start of the debate in the second half of the 1960s was formally related to successive re-writings of Bulgarian history from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.

The third discussion, organized by the Institute for Balkan Studies, took place in a calmer and definitely academic environment. It was held on 25 and 26 April 1983 and was designed to cover a broader research area than the preceding debates; fascism as a subject of analysis was not confined to Bulgaria alone and the discussion covered its forms of development and manifestations in a Balkan context.<sup>33</sup> Several articles on the subject, not related to any particular initiative, were published at the end of the 1980s.<sup>34</sup>

Immediately after the fall of communism at the beginning of 1990, the subject exploded into public life in arguments of irreconcilable political confrontation. A negative answer seemed to be taken for granted to the impassioned question, “Was there fascism in Bulgaria?” and the question, in fact, was less concerned with fascism than being a categorical denunciation of the Bulgarian Communist Party’s past, present, and future.<sup>35</sup> The opposite position was upheld by those who had fallen from power to justify their deeds after World War II.<sup>36</sup> There appeared only one polemical scholarly article, which may be regarded as a remote echo of the extreme positions in the public sphere.<sup>37</sup> A reply published several months later pointed out that the achievements of Bulgarian historiography in the twenty-five years since the first discussion needed to be reconsidered.<sup>38</sup> The core, however, of the nascent discus-



sion that emerged among professional historians in 1989 and 1990 remained confined to the above-mentioned publications.

In 1996, the journal *Demokratičeski Pregled* launched a discussion entitled “Fascisms in Bulgaria and Across the World.”<sup>39</sup> Researchers from different generations and with different political orientations were invited to participate by replying to ten questions on the subject. Four of the participants contributed separate papers.<sup>40</sup>

In brief, these are the main facts about the history of the discussions about fascism in Bulgaria in the second half of the twentieth century.

The systematization of studies on the subject, i.e. their historiographic description and analysis, dates from the early 1980s and is entirely associated with the work of one of the leading historians of fascism in Bulgaria, Nikolai Poppetrov. From 1982 to 1993 Poppetrov published four papers devoted to various aspects of research on the subject.<sup>41</sup> The most detailed of them, published in 1986, identifies three stages of research until the mid-1980s.

The first stage covers the period from the end of World War II to the end of the 1940s. Most of the studies on fascism from that period must be examined within the context of political propaganda. This stage saw the first constructs based on Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist methodology and a proliferation of major ideological clichés in the definition of fascism – clichés that persisted even after the fall of communism.<sup>42</sup>

The appearance in the late 1940s and early 1950s of the first systematic studies based on methods of historical research marks the beginning of the second stage. Poppetrov associates the end of this stage with the discussions in the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s, which he regards as indicative of the level of the study of history in general.

The third stage spans the period from the 1970s to the early 1980s. Poppetrov defines this as very different from the previous two stages in both quantitative and qualitative terms. This is the period in which research into fascism in Bulgaria built an impressive database; the first fundamental studies outlining the forms of specific fascist organizations and movements dates from this period. The author draws the important conclusion that during the third stage the achievements of civil history helped free the subject of fascism from the dominant perspective of viewing the interwar period and World War II as a privileged domain of the history of the Communist Party, the workers’ movement, and antifascist resistance. Poppetrov writes that during this period the tendencies were theoretical generalization and placing Bulgarian fascism within a Balkan and European context, and he correctly describes the achievements during the 1970s and early 1980s as a bridgehead, “a preparatory stage towards new conceptual generalization and a new picture of Bulgarian fascism that corresponds to historical development.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1986 when N. Poppetrov wrote about this bridgehead, this was a daring thesis, a clear statement of the main direction of modern Bulgarian history – a tendency to overcome the ideologi-

cal norm according to which fascism was the major determining factor of the interwar period. At the research level this meant surmounting the notorious definition formulated at the thirteenth plenum of the Communist International's Executive Committee in 1933, extended at the Comintern's seventh congress in 1935, and adopted as the base for the political orientation of communist parties in the second half of the decade: "Fascism in power... is open terrorist dictatorship by the most reactionary, the most chauvinistic and the most imperialist elements of finance capital... Fascism is the most brutal offensive of capitalism against the working masses..."<sup>44</sup> The oppressive weight of this definition in Bulgaria was increased by the propaganda machine associating it with Georgi Dimitrov and promoting it as a rare Bulgarian contribution to the theory and practice of the international communist movement.

The challenge of ideological concepts is the main issue in the observations about the development of research into fascism in Poppetrov's excellent historiographic studies. The denouement came in 1993. "The end of the 'classical' theory of Bulgarian fascism is an unquestionable fact," Poppetrov wrote. "The studies by a series of researchers from the early 1980s led deliberately or involuntarily towards invalidating this theory. In the field of civil history, Bulgarian historical research has accumulated a vast amount of facts, whose processing and analysis show clearly that the contradiction between the dogmatically upheld general scheme of Bulgarian fascism as a main current in bourgeois reaction after the end of World War I, and academic achievements on specific themes, has entered a crucial stage in its denouement."<sup>45</sup>

Now we will explain why we consider the debate about fascism in Bulgaria particularly revealing in analyzing post-communist historiography. The debate about fascism clearly shows the main trend in Bulgarian historiography in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *elaborating a concept of scholarly approach to the recent past and establishing the principles of a professional research canon for contemporary Bulgarian history*. This process is best seen in the consistent challenge and relativization of the claims of ideological postulates to exclusive rights to the truth. The debate was, in fact, a specific case in the process of formulating a *concept of academic standards* and legitimizing the *professional, non-political status of the study of history*. Even though the 1990s saw the end of the dispute with the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideological dogma about fascism, the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not, nor could it have been a watershed in regard to academic standards and the professional principles of historical research formed in the preceding period.

The problem of "historical truth" is crucial in elaborating a concept of scholarly standards in Bulgarian historiography. The debate about fascism consistently *challenged the monumentality of the ideological "truth" by advancing fragmented "historical truths" attained by the "means and methods of academic research"*. The latter implies detailed, strictly empirical studies on narrow, specific subjects confined within clear time frames and based on authoritative, mainly documentary, sources. In developing the concept of scholarly standards, this immensely increased the value of documentary, particularly empirical, factual, and descriptive studies. The positive

effect was that these studies gradually provided the interwar past with subjects of Bulgarian history: institutional order functioning according to an established logic, a structured political system transformed dynamically under the pressure of varying circumstances, responsible individuals, etc. During the debate about fascism, claims to scholarly standards and professionalism were declared by announcing long lists of absent studies, i.e., studies that should have been conducted but were not. This forensic technique both limited the validity and restricted the range of ideological qualifications and paved the way for future studies in line with gradually asserted academic standards.

The most detailed list of absent studies in research about fascism in Bulgaria is provided by N. Poppetrov in his 1986 paper, in which he wrote that, in spite of major achievements, the “blanks” identified in 1965-1966 not only remained but “the range of questions has even deepened.”<sup>46</sup> V. Migeв’s response in 1990 also started with the typical conviction of the expert historian about the absence of research in important areas for the period and of in-depth empirical reconstructions that could serve as a basis for the “truth.”<sup>47</sup> Notwithstanding acknowledgement of certain major achievements, the invariable complaint about the persistent lack of research was openly stated in the discussion launched by *Demokratičeski Pregled* in 1996. Regardless of their generation based and political differences, the deep dissatisfaction with the progress of research expressed by all participants did not hide their *consensus about approaches to the study of fascism in Bulgaria*. In other words, differing opinions about fascism were uniformly based on a *consensus about the principles of professional work and academic standards established in the 1970s and effectively applied in the following decades*.<sup>48</sup> This consensus about the definition of historical research is evident in that the number of absent studies has not decreased since the end of the 1960s.

Why are historians studying fascism in Bulgaria continually dissatisfied, why are they never content with progress in this field?

The line of academic inquiry established in the late 1960s and early 1970s consistently limited the scope of the ideologized concept of “fascism”; studies along this line gradually filled the interwar period with concrete facts that invariably disproved the ideological premises. At the beginning of the debate, the fascist “nature” of particular regimes were called into question, as were such concepts as “fascism” and “monarcho-fascist dictatorship” as designations of the interwar period as a whole. From the 1980s on the term “fascism” was particularized and came to be associated with specific movements, organizations, even individuals, and studies focussed on the extent to which a particular formation or regime could be identified as fascist. Some detailed studies that conformed to this concept of academic research – which were no doubt valuable *per se* – did not offer a solution, i.e. did not exhaust the debate, but shifted its focus from the general concept to specific manifestations of the phenomenon.

Here we come back to the point mentioned above, that although the dispute with ideological dogma ended in the 1990s, the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not a watershed in regard to

the academic standards and professional principles of historical investigation. This explains our preoccupation with the pre-1989 debate – *what happened in the 1990s actually was the result of much earlier research trends concerning modern and contemporary Bulgarian history*. The long list of absent studies did not herald a change in the chosen direction of work in the short run; furthermore, the victory over ideology confirmed the triumph of “scientific truth.” Nor should we forget that in the context of post-1989 passions in the public sphere, precisely such a concept of “scientific” standards and professionalism again had many reasons to uphold its claims to carrying out solid and sober observation. The debate about fascism in the 1990s did not lose its role of once again legitimizing the non-political status of professional study of history.

The concept of academic standards described above does not have a viable alternative, and it still produces the “only” “scientific truth” about Bulgaria’s past. Disintegration of the totalizing ideologized perspective on history through the historiographic fragmentation of narratives does not mean there are many approaches to the past. Instead, there is uni-dimensionality. Neither do the established concept of academic standards and the principles of the professional canon presuppose any plurality of historical perspectives. The dispute with totalitarian truth was the common line of fragmented narratives that determined their common meaning. The end of totalitarian truth was also the end of the common meaning of those fragmented narratives, after which they started dispersing without a meaning of their own. The lofty claim to academic standards has come to acquire a status similar to that of “art for art’s sake.”

### 3. Conclusions

The debate about fascism allows for an in-depth look not only at the changes in Bulgarian historiography since 1989 but also at the mechanisms through which these changes have been made.

The change in Bulgarian historiography was induced by and developed in accordance with the changes in society at large. Democratization of the social environment in which historical knowledge is produced, communicated, and appropriated is the most important change after 1989. This has triggered a widespread and lively interest in the history, mostly the recent history, of Bulgaria, and this has influenced researchers. The number of publications of both Bulgarian works and translations have increased in number enormously, covering an unprecedented variety of topics in a variety of genres. In addition, market demands and the almost total lack of control over quality have encouraged a proliferation of quasi-historiographic writing.

Against this backdrop, the changes in professional historiography do not seem to be profound. The authority of the profession has remained unchallenged. The criteria of professionalism worked out in opposition to the “method” of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism continued after the dogma collapsed. The search for “historical truth” presented in a positivistic framework continues, although there no longer is an ideological Truth to be opposed and qualified.

The main institutions producing historical knowledge have remained largely intact. Institutional continuity prolongs the paradigm and research style, impeding pluralism. It is difficult to question

the unvarying “historical truth” in the institutions, with their self-preserved internal structure. When everyone takes an identical view of history, there are no opportunities to cultivate sensitivity to the plurality of views across the infinite realm of history. The right of other approaches to conceptualize the past and develop other systems of reproducing the past becomes impossible to acknowledge.

Within the same paradigm, a reassessment of ideas, events, and personalities has taken place that has countered the previously dominant ideologically biased evaluations. New subjects have emerged, both subjects previously forbidden and new areas of interest, often resulting from contacts with Western research. International contacts have contributed enormously to stimulating and accelerating change.

Innovations seem to occur more often on the margins of historiography, as a result of fruitful contacts with neighboring disciplines. New trends sometimes are associated with new institutions/organizations; in other cases they are the result of individual efforts and ambition rather than institutional arrangements.

<sup>1</sup> I. Božilov, "Raždaneto na srednovekovna Bulgaria (nova interpretacia)," *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1992, no 1-2, pp. 3-34.

<sup>2</sup> M. Todorova (ed.), *Istorici za istoryata*, Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1988.

<sup>3</sup> G. Kazakov (ed.), *Čovekāt i Srednovekovieto*, Sofia: Anubis, 1995-96, 2 vols.

<sup>4</sup> E. Hoesch, *Istoria na Balkanskite strani*, Sofia: LIK, 1998; N. Malcolm, *Kratka istoria na Kosovo*, Sofia: LIK, 2000; H. Hepner, "Istoriata kato meždukulturno tǎrsene: slučaiat Yugoiztočna Evropa," *Minalo*, 1994, no 3, pp. 68-78.

<sup>5</sup> F. Iliu, "Učebnata knižnina i natsionalizmat (podhodat na Dimitris Glinos)," *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1994-95, no 3.

<sup>6</sup> O. Russev, "Kontseptsii za natsionalizma i natsionalnia vapros v Iztočna Evropa v amerikanskata istoriografia prez 70-te i 80-te godini na XX vek," *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1994-95, no 6, pp. 69-100 (symptomatic as a first problematization of nationalism); G. Lenkova, "Istoričeskoto nasledstvo na Mark Blok," *Istoričeski Pregled* 1997, no 4, pp. 108-117.

<sup>7</sup> One of the first and most influential is: I. Elenkov and R. Daskalov (eds.), *Zašto sme takiva? (V tǎrsene na bulgarskata kulturna identičnost)*, Sofia: Prosveta, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Ekaterina Bončeva et al. (eds.), *Bulgarskiat Gulag: svideteli. Sbornik dokumentalni razkazi za konclagerite v Bulgaria*, Sofia, 1991; Stefan Bočev, *Belene*, Sofia, 1999; Petār Mladenov, *Životat, Plusove i minusi*, Sofia, Peteks, 1992; Lačezar Avramov, *50 osporvani godini, Spomeni*, Sofia, Teximreklama, 1993; Stanko Todorov, *Do vǎrhovete na vlastta, Poliitičeski memoari*, Sofia, Hristo Botev, 1995; Todor Živkov, *Memoari*, Sofia: SIV-AD, 1997; Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, Sofia, Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1997; Georgi Čankov, *Ravnosmetkata. Spomeni i razmisli za revoliucionnata borba i stroitelstvoto na socializma*, Sofia, Hristo Botev, 2000; Vǎlko Červenkov, *Za sebe si i svoeto vreme*, Sofia, LIK, 2000; Ilčo Dimitrov, *Vsičko teče*, Sofia, Tilia, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> BKP, Kominternāt i Makedonskiat vǎpros (1917-1946). Vol. 1 (vol. 4 of the series), Sofia, 1998; vol. 2 (vol. 5 of the series) Sofia, 1999; Rusko-turskata voina. (vol. 2 of the series), Sofia, 1998; Turski izvori za bǎlgarskata istoria (vol. 13 of the series), Sofia, 2001; Svidetelstva za Stalinskite represii (vol. 14 of the series), Sofia, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. T. Georgieva, *Prostranstvo i prostranstva na bulgarite XV-XVII vek*, Sofia: LIK, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Most notably these are historians of the Middle Ages such as G. Bakalov, Ts. Stepanov, G. Kazakov, but also see Lubomir Ognianov's work on Bulgarian institutions in the mid-1940s.

<sup>12</sup> The beginning is to be traced back to the 1980s with the seminal work of Nikolai Genčev and his team on Bulgarian Revival intelligentsia.

<sup>13</sup> G. Valčinova, *Znepolski pohvali. Lokalna religia i identičnost v Zapadna Bǎlgaria*, Sofia, Marin Drinov publ., 1999; G. Valčinova and R. Genova, "Melnik meždū 'bǎlgarina-orač' i 'sredizenmomoreca-lozar' (za trainos-tta na edna etnokulturna karakteristika)," *Istoričeski Pregled* 1997, no 2, pp. 142-159. A different approach in: N. Manolova and P. Želeva, *Letopisni beležki ot sredna zapadna Bǎlgaria*, Sofia, LIK, 1999, where an attempt is made to reconstruct various aspects of the life in the region to the west of Sofia on the basis of notes in the margins of clerical books.

<sup>14</sup> R. Gavrilova, *Koleloto na života*, Sofia: Sofia University Press, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> P. Vodeničarov, K. Popova, A. Pašova (eds.), *Iskam čovekat da e vinagi priaten i da si pravim moabet. Rečevo povedenie i žizneni svetove na bǎlgari mohamedani v Goce-Delčevsko i Razložko*, Blagoevgrad,



1998; P. Vodeničarov, K. Popova, A. Pašova (eds.), *Moeto dosie, pardon, biografia. Bălgarskite modernizacii (30-te i 60-te godini) – ideologii i identičnosti*, Blagoevgrad, 1999; D. Koleva, R. Gavrilova, V. Elenkova (eds.), *Slanceto na zalez pak sreštu men*, Sofia: LIK, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> E.g.: N. Poppetrov, P. Meškova, D. Šarlanov, *Bălgarskata gilotina. Tainite mehanizmi na narodnia săd*, Sofia, 1994; S. Milanova, "Političeskiat proces srestu žurnalista Tsveti Ivanov prez 1946 g." *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1994-95, no 2, pp. 155-177; M. Ivanov, "Gorianskoto dviženie v Kuistendilsko i Gornodjumaiko (po sădebnii dokumenti ot Arhiva na MVR)," *Minalo*, 1995, no 1, pp. 74-80; V. Angelov "Razrušitelni udari protiv Nevrokopska eparhia i narodnata ni tsarkva (1944-1948). Neizvestni fakti za likvidatorskoto otnočenje na komunističeskata uprava kăm nai-mladata bălgarska eparhia," *Minalo*, 1996, no 1, pp. 46-58; V. Angelov, "Malko izvestni i neizvestni protestni dokumenti za denacionalizatorskata politika na BRP (k) v Pirinska Makedonia (1946-1948)," *Minalo*, 1997, no 1, pp. 59-76.

<sup>17</sup> M. Isusov, "Istoričeskata nauka i našata săvremennost," *Istoričeski pregled*, 1991, no 1, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> The most representative publication so far is: K. Daskalova, R. Gavrilova (eds.), *Granici na graždanstvoto: evropeiskite ženi meždii tradiciata i modernostta*, Sofia: LIK, 2001, with contributions by Bulgarian and foreign researchers. On women's movements see: M. Čolakova, *Bălgarskoto žensko dviženie (1857-1878)*, Sofia, 1994 and K. Daskalova (ed.), *Ot siankata na istoriata: Bălgarskite ženi meždii tradiciata i modernostta*, Sofia, LIK, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> K. Daskalova, "Ženskata Identičnost: Normi, predstavi, obrazi v Bălgarskata kultura (19-načaloto na 20 vek)," *Balkanski identičnosti v Bălgarskata kultura ot modernata epoha (19-20 vek)*, Vol. 2. Sofia, 2002. Id., "Ženskoto dviženie v Bălgaria prez prizmata na edin život: Dimitrana Ivanova," *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1998, no 5-6, pp. 204-217; Id., "Feminism i ravnopravie v bălgarskia 20 vek," Ralitsa Muharska (ed.), *Maiki i dušteri. Pokolenia i posoki v bălgarskia feminism*, Sofia, Polis, 1999, 80-105; Id., "Bulgarian Women in Movements, Laws and Discourses (1840s-1940s)," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1999, No. 1-2, pp. 180-196; Id. "The Women's Movement in Bulgaria After Communism," Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, Debra Keats (eds.), *Transition, Environments, Translations. Feminisms in International Politics*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 162-175.

<sup>20</sup> I. Genova, "Hudožničkite v Bălgaria prez purvata polovina na 20 vek. Obrazovanie i učastie v hudožestvenia život" and L. Stoiłova, "Bălgarskite arhitekti meždii dvete svetovni voini: Obrazovanie i socialen statut na pionerkite," K. Daskalova and R. Gavrilova (eds.), *Granitsi na graždanstvoto*, pp. 265-279, 280-301.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the pioneering work of I. Georgieva (ed.), *Etničeskata kartina v Bălgaria (proučvania 1992 g.)*, Sofia, Klub 90, 1993, an attempt at an oral history of the "vazroditelen proces" (the forced change of Turkish names) and funded by Friedrich-Naumann Stiftung.

<sup>22</sup> A. Krăsteva (ed.), *Obštnosti i Identičnosti*, Sofia, Petexton, 1998, is a theoretical work on community and identity while the companion volume A. Krăsteva (ed.), *Obštnosti i Identičnosti v Bălgaria*, Sofia, Petexton, 1998 is an attempt to represent ethnic diversity in Bulgaria.

<sup>23</sup> For example B. Vassileva, *Evreite v Bălgaria 1944-1952*, Sofia 1992; I. Kiskinov, "Politikata na pravitelstvata na Otečestvenia Front v Zapadnite pokrainini," *Minalo* 1999, No. 1, pp. 64-72.

<sup>24</sup> G. Fotev, *Drugiat etnos*, Sofia: Marin Drinov, 1994; I. Tomova, *Ciganite v prehodnia period*, Sofia: IMIR, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> E. Marušiakova and V. Popov, *Ciganite v Bălgaria*, Sofia, 1992 – a pioneering work on the Roma minority.

<sup>26</sup> A. Želiazkova, B. Aleksiev, Z. Nazarska, *Musulmanskite obštnosti na Balkanite i v Bălgaria*, Sofia, 1997 (vol. 1 of the series); R. Gradeva, S. Ivanova, *Musulmanskata kultura po Bălgarskite zemi*, Sofia 1998 (vol.

2); A. Želiazkova, *Meždu adaptaciata i nostalgjata (bălgarskite turci v Turcia)*, Sofia 1998 (vol. 3); G. Lozano-va and L. Mikov, *Islam i kultura*, Sofia 1999 (vol. 4); A. Želiazkova (ed.), *Albania i Albanskite identičnosti*, Sofia 2000 (vol. 5, in Bulgarian and English); A. Želiazkova (ed.), *“Osobeniat slučai” Bosna*, Sofia 2001 (vol. 6); R. Gradeva (ed.), *Istoria na musulmanskata kultura po bălgarskite zemi*, Sofia 2001 (vol. 7).

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. D. Kalkandjieva, *Katoličeskata duhovna kultura i neinoto prisăstvие i vlianie v Bălgaria*, Sofia 1992; I. Elenkov, *Katoličeskata carkva ot iztočen obriad v Bălgaria ot vremeto na neinoto učrediavane s prisăedi-nenieto na čast ot bălgarskia narod kam Rim prez 1860 do sredata na XX vek*, Sofia, LIK, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> B. Petrunova, V. Grozdanov, N. Manolova-Nikolova, *Sveti mesta v Godečko, Dragomansko i Trănsko*, Sofia, 2000; G. Valčinova, *Znepolski pohvali*.

<sup>29</sup> S. Grančarov, “Bălgaria 1878-1918 g. Istoričeska sădba i nacionalna pamet,” *Minalo*, 1994, no 2, pp. 77-86.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. R. Daskalov, *Kak se misli Bălgarskoto Văzraždane (istoriografsko izsledvane)*, Sofia, LIK 2002 – an analysis of the myths, meanings and uses of the “National Revival” in Bulgarian historiography.

<sup>31</sup> See the memorandum of the Tangra-TanNakRa foundation at: <http://tangra.bitex.com/bul/spisakmemorandum.htm>. For a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon see: I. Iliev, “On the History of Inventing Bulgarian History” IWM Working Paper No 5/2000, Vienna ([www.iwm.at](http://www.iwm.at)).

<sup>32</sup> *Izvestiya na Instituta po Istoriya na BKP*, 21 (1969), pp. 219-272.

<sup>33</sup> Y. Geševa, “Naoučna discussiya za fašizma na Balkanite,” *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1983, No. 4, pp. 152-156.

<sup>34</sup> B. Baikov. “Političeskata sistema na bouržoaznoto obštestvo v Bălgaria v processa na neynata fašizaciya (1934-1939 g.),” *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1987, No. 6, pp. 11-25; R. Părvanova, “Programata na Demokratičeskaya sgovor,” *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1987, No. 6, pp. 26-38; N. Nedev, “Prekăsnatost ili neprekăsnatost na fašistkata diktatura v Bălgaria 1923-1944 g.,” *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1989, No. 8, pp. 76-83; S. Radulov, “Osnovni tendencii v bălgarskiya fašizăm,” *Izvestiya na Instituta po Istoriya na BKP*, 63, 1989, pp. 5-64; P. Tsvetkov, “Originalnost i imitaciya v bălgarskite totalitarni doktrini i organizacii (1919-1939),” *Vtori kongress po bălgaristika*, vol. 23, Sofia, 1989, pp. 582-601.

<sup>35</sup> M. Spassov, “Imalo li e fašizăm v Bălgaria?,” *Demokraciya*, No. 13, 28 February 1990, etc.

<sup>36</sup> D. Šarlanov, “Imalo li e fašizăm v Bălgaria,” *Săvremenen Pokazatel*, 29 March 1990, etc.

<sup>37</sup> P. Tsvetkov and N. Poppetrov, “Kum tipologiyata na političeskoto razvitie na Bălgaria prez 30-te godini,” *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1990, No. 2, pp. 63-78.

<sup>38</sup> V. Migevev, “Političeskata sistema na Bălgaria ot 9 juni 1923 do 9 septemvri 1944 g.,” *Istoričeski Pregled*, 1990, No. 9, pp. 77-88.

<sup>39</sup> *Demokratičeski Pregled*, Summer 1996, No. 4-5, p. 369.

<sup>40</sup> N. Poppetrov, “Vuzmožnostta za dialog ili ‘diskusiite’ za bălgarskiya fašizăm,” *Demokratičeski Pregled*, Summer 1996, No. 4-5, pp. 382-388; M. Semkov, “Fašizăm-fašizmi: mitove i istoričeska istina,” *ibid.*, pp. 389-397; V. Migevev, “Po nyakoi problemi na bălgarskiya fašizăm (1919-1944 g.),” *ibid.*, pp. 398-408; P. S. Tsvetkov, “Bălgaria i totalitarnoto predizvikelstvo,” *ibid.*, pp. 409-418.

<sup>41</sup> N. Poppetrov, “Faschismus in Bulgarien. Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung,” *Südost-Forschungen*, 41, (1982), pp. 199-218; *Id.* “Die bulgarische Geschichtswissenschaft über die Probleme des bulgarischen Faschismus,” *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1986, no 3, pp. 78-93; *Id.* “Die Geschichtsschreibung in der BRD über den Faschismus auf der Balkanhalbinsel,” *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1988, No. 3, pp. 91-101; *Id.* “Bolgarskiy fašizm v balkanskom i evropeyskom kontekste (Kratkoye istoriografičeskoye obozrenie i opyt postroeniya modeli),” *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1993, No. 1, pp. 146-174.

<sup>42</sup> N. Poppetrov, "Die bulgarische Geschichtswissenschaft...", p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 79; 85, passim.

<sup>44</sup> G. Dimitrov, "Nastāplenieto na fašizma i zadačite na Komunističeskiya internacional v borbata za edinstvoto na rabotničeskata klasa protiv fašizma. Report at the 7<sup>th</sup> congress of the Communist International". 2 August 1935. In: G. Dimitrov, *Sučineniya*, vol. 10, Sofia, 1954, p. 36; p. 54.

<sup>45</sup> N. Poppetrov, "Bolgarskiy fašizm v balkanskom i evropeyskom kontekste ...," p. 174.

<sup>46</sup> N. Poppetrov, "Die bulgarische Geschichtswissenschaft...", p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> V. Migeu, "Političeskata sistema na Bulgaria...", p. 78.

<sup>48</sup> *Demokratičeski Pregled*, Summer 1996, No. 4-5, pp. 368-371.