

## Directions of the Recent Historiography of Skopje

*By Spyridon Sfetas*

If each generation has a duty to rewrite history, as per Karl Popper's famous saying, then the post-communist generation of historians from the former communist Balkan countries has several reasons to re-evaluate the historical past. The commanded and ideologically charged historiography of the Balkan communist countries had as its interpretative starting point the "principle of the class-struggle", which was the driving force in historical materialism, and saw socialist society more as a result of internal social struggles than as a product of the Cold War and the imposition of the Soviet model. Thus, events were interpreted through refractive prisms with the main characteristics being: the emergence of the progressive role of the Communist Party, the demonisation of bourgeois class enemies, and the axiom of the dialectical relationship of "material basis and ideological superstructure", which in most cases was applied mechanistically rather than in a constructive and productive way.<sup>1</sup>

After the collapse of the Communist regimes, the "de-communisation" of history was a natural consequence of the painful transition of the former Balkan Communist countries to political pluralism, democratisation, the information society, the market economy, etc. Archives were made accessible to researchers, and many taboo issues during the communist era were brought to light. The ideological gap left by the bankruptcy of communist ideology was filled by the dynamics of nationalism. The shift to national issues has become commonplace in historians' research. For the historians of the post-communist period, it was a fundamental pursuit to rehabilitate parties, organisations or personalities and victims of Communist atrocities, who had been marginalised by the stigma of fascism and co-operation with the conquerors. A key parameter for their rehabilitation became their contribution to the nation or democracy. For example, in Albania the "Balli Kombëtar" movement was rehabilitated,

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<sup>1</sup> See Wolfgang Höpken, "'Zwischen' 'Klasse' und 'Nation'. Historiographie und 'Meistererzählungen' in Südosteuropa in der Zeit des Sozialismus (1944–1990)", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 2 (2000) 15–60.

in Romania Ion Antonescu and the “Garda de Fier”, in Serbia “Dražia Mihajlović” and the “Četnici” movement, in Croatia the “Ustaše”, in Bulgaria the Bulgarian-Macedonian organisation “VMRO”, the Agrarian Party of Nikola Petkov and the Democratic Party of Nikola Mušanov, who had resisted imposing a communist regime in the country (1946–1947). In this project of Balkan historians, maintaining balance and avoiding exaggerations is not always a successful task.

FYROM is a special case. The Slavic-Macedonian nation-state was formed after 1944 in a socialist society, under the conditions of the Cold War and the peculiar position of Yugoslavia within the socialist camp. Slavic-Macedonianism was cultivated in direct connection with the ideology of “Yugoslavism”. There were no pre-war Slavic-Macedonian political parties, there was no civil war during the Second World War, as was the case in Serbia and Albania. What were the Slavic-Macedonian democratic political forces that resisted the imposition of Communism? Who could seriously challenge the role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Communist Party of Macedonia in the rooting of the national ideology of Slavic-Macedonianism? Would it have been possible to create the state of Skopje and the Slavic-Macedonian nation, if Tito had not prevailed in Yugoslavia? Were there inherent Slavic-Macedonian forces capable of creating a nation-state, irrespective of the policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia? Thus, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the independence of FYROM and the transition of the country to democracy and the market economy, the “de-communisation” of historiography was not necessarily understandable, as in the other Balkan states, because the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and “Macedonia” made a great contribution to the Slavic-Macedonian nation-building process. However, the new generation of historians, in order to be in line with the new spirit, had to prove the existence and actions of Slavic-Macedonian nationalist organisations that fought for an independent and democratic Macedonia, something achieved for the first time in 1991, after the collapse of Communism and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, it had to be proved that the Communists could not monopolise the national Slavic-Macedonian ideology. Thus, the first parameter of modern Slavic-Macedonian historiography is the distance from “Yugoslavism and Communism”.

The second parameter is to broaden the limits of the history of the Slavic-Macedonian nation. The conflict between Greece and FYROM over the historical heritage of Macedonia has led the neighbouring country’s historians to a desperate search for “evidence” to challenge the “Greekness” of the Ancient Macedonians and “to prove” the merger of Ancient Macedonians and Slavs, something that came close to a hysterical fetishism. The dynamic re-emergence of Bulgaria in the Macedonian scene after 1989, the prodigious production of the Macedonian Science Institute in Sofia, and the general tendency of Bulgarian historians to stigmatise the ideology of Slavic-Macedonianism as a “Serbian-Communist” artificial construction forced historians in Skopje to claim as “Macedonian in core and Macedonians

in consciousness” organisations and individuals who in the past were stigmatised with the label of Bulgarian. Thus, a new myth was created about the terms “Macedonia” and “Slav-Macedonians”. In the present study, we will attempt a critical approach to these new trends in Skopje Historiography.<sup>2</sup>

The main element of Skopje historiography on antiquity is to draw a line between Ancient Macedonians and Greeks.<sup>3</sup> The Greek origin of the Ancient Macedonians is disputed, their differences with the Greeks (language, cultural elements, military and political organisation, barbarity) are emphasised. The international literature is ignored, sources are not analysed, and there is no question whatsoever that more weight should be given to the politicised positions of Demosthenes against Philip than to the efforts of the Macedonians themselves to emphasise their Greek origin, to unite the Greeks in order to eliminate the threat of Persia and to widespread the Greek culture. These dogmatic positions of the new generation of Skopje’s historians, apart from not being able to convince the international scientific community, pose another risk — an over-emphasis on the controversial ancient Macedonian heritage at the expense of the self-evident South Slavic ethno-cultural group to which the inhabitants of FYROM belong. Blaze Ristovski, a historian of the old generation, pointed out the danger: the Slavic ethnic-cultural profile of modern Macedonians should not create inferiority complexes, Ancient Macedonia was not a closed space, there were affiliations and assimilations, the Greek language and culture penetrated Macedonia and was used by the Ancient Macedonians, as the Latin language was used in the West; but he himself basically accepts this Ancient Macedonian heritage as a component of “ethnogenetic development of Slav-Macedonians”.

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<sup>2</sup> For a first rebuttal of the positions of the Skopje historians, as expressed in the publication of the Academy of Sciences and Arts, *Macedonia and its relations with Greece*, Skopje 1993, see Spyridon Sfetas, *Aspects of the Macedonian Question in the 20th Century*, [in Greek], Vanias, Thessaloniki 2001, pp. 10–54.

<sup>3</sup> See the new publications by Vasil Tupurkovski, *Istorija na Makedonija od drevnosta do smrta na Alekdandar Makedonski [History of Macedonia from Antiquity until the death of Alexander the Great]* Skopje 1993; from the same author see *Istorija na Makedonija od smrta na Aleksandar Makedonski do makedonsko-rimskite vojni [History of Macedonia from the death of Alexander of Macedon until the macedonian-roman wars]*, Skopje 1994, Nade Proeva, *Studii za antičkite Makedonci [Studies for the Ancient Macedonians]*, Skopje-Ohrid 1997, Branko Panov (ed.), *Istorija na makedonskiot narod, Tom. 1: Makedonija od praisroriskoto vreme do potpagjaneto pod turska vlast (1371 godina), [History of the Macedonian people, Volume I. Macedonia from prehistory to the subjugation to the Turks in 1371]*, Institute of National History, Skopje 2000. In this issue the references to antiquity encompasses approximately 200 pages, whereas the old version in 1969 dedicated only 20 pages. Alexander the Great has become a fetish. And the hero of the Albanians, Georgios Kastriotis-Skenerberis, is claimed to be “Macedonian” with an ancient Macedonian and Slavic origin, because the Sultan symbolically awarded him for his bravery the title Iskender. See Petar Popovski, *Georgija Kastriot Iskender, Kral na Epir i Makedonija i vtor Aleksandar Makedonski [George Kastriotis-Iskenderun. King of Epirus and Macedonia, and Second Alexander Macedonian]*, Skopje 2005. Recently, the work of Arrian “Alexandrou Anavasis” and Kourtios Roufos’ biography of Alexander the Great were translated into Slavic.

We must not and cannot ignore in our history the ancient period of Macedonia and the Macedonians. For a long time, it is clear that these Macedonians were in fact not Greeks, that Macedonia was not Greece and that the Macedonian language was not Greek, but Greece penetrated Macedonia, Greek language and culture were used by Ancient Macedonians, as all Western Europe, used Latin for centuries as the official language and benefited from rich Roman culture. However, it must be emphasised here that precisely this Ancient Macedonia has given us the name, laid down our place, gave us its cultural heritage and conquered us with some of its blood.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose is obvious: although there was a Greek influence on Ancient Macedonia, this country was different from Greece, the non-Greek Ancient Macedonians were assimilated by the Slavs who inherited the name “Macedonians” as an identifier of a Slavic ethnological group. In the dispute with Greece on the names Macedonia and Macedonians, Skopje’s historians believe they have found the argument with which they can claim the names “Macedonia” and “Macedonians”. The extent of Macedonia’s borders in antiquity or the lack of any reference to Macedonians as Slavs in medieval sources is not considered as a matter of research. If the role of historians in the 21st century is to be the deconstruction of national myths of the 19th century, in the case of Skopje, where a belated and more dynamic nationalism exists, the opposite is true. Historians create national myths in exaggerated disproportion to historically documented facts. Anthony Smith correctly describes the role of intellectuals in the creation of myths of genealogical pedigree.

‘The intellectual is the interpreter’, par excellence, of historical memories and ethnic myths. By tracing a distinguished pedigree for his nation, he also enhances the position of his circle and activity, he is no longer an ambiguous ‘marginal’ on the fringes of society, but a leader in the advancing column of the reawakened nation, the movement of national regeneration.<sup>5</sup>

It is no coincidence that historians in Skopje are considered the nation’s vanguard, that the writing of national history is the exclusive privilege of the Institute of National History and the Academy of Sciences and Arts.

If the dividing line between Greeks and Ancient Macedonians is used as a doctrine for ancient times, for the middle ages the gap between the Macedonian Slavs and the Bulgarians is noted. The former came from the mixing of Ancient Macedonians and Slavs, the latter from the involvement of Turkish-Tatars and Slavs of Mysia and Thracians.<sup>6</sup> From an ethnological point of view, no meaning is given to the inclusion of today’s FYROM within the medieval Bulgarian state that took place in the second half of the 9th century. Skopje’s historians argue that with Tsar Samuel (969–1018) the first “Macedonian” medieval state was founded. That the Byzantine sources refer to Bulgarians and that Samuel identified himself

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<sup>4</sup> See Blaze Ristovski, *Stoletoja na makedonskata svet [Ages of the Macedonian World]*, Skopje 2001, pp. 47.

<sup>5</sup> See Anthony D. Smyth, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 84.

<sup>6</sup> See Ristovski, *op. cit.*, pp. 48.

as a Bulgarian (although being probably of Armenian origin) are considered to be minor events — the Byzantine writers did not have a clear picture of the area and identified the Bulgarian conquerors with the native Macedonian Slavs, who within the framework of the proto-Bulgarian state cultivated the Early Slavic culture in Ohrid.<sup>7</sup> The term “Bulgar”, used by Samuel, was simply a political label to invoke awe in the rival Byzantines.<sup>8</sup> With Samuel, the “ethnogenesis of the Macedonian people” was completed and he himself created a dynasty.<sup>9</sup> Samuel passed into the realm of the legend, with an epic novel written for him. The language into which Cyril and Methodius translated the ecclesiastical texts was “Paleo-Macedonian”, the language of the Macedonian Slavs, but since nothing was preserved, except for copies with influences from Moravia and the rest of the Byzantine-Slavic world, it could also be called Paleo-Slavic.<sup>10</sup> Thus, “Macedonia” is the country with the earliest written Slavic language, the centre of the widespread Slavic culture. After the subjugation of the state of Samuel to the Byzantine emperor (1018), the Macedonian Slavs retained their identity through the Ohrid Archbishopric, in whose jurisdiction the Greek language was used only by the upper clergy and not by the simple people.<sup>11</sup>

These are not new findings, but old recycled opinions that are stereotypes in Skopje’s historiography and constitute blatant historical falsehoods. If Macedonian Slavs in the Middle Ages had self-consciousness and clear awareness of their geographical location, how did they express their uniqueness and differentiate themselves from their neighbours? If the data of the Byzantine sources do not matter, then Slavic sources must be presented to document how the Macedonian Slavs themselves were self-defining. There is no mention of “Macedonians” and “Macedonian medieval states”. The proto-Bulgarian state had already been Slavicized in the middle of the 9th century; when it expanded to the West, the Slavic languages were still at the stage of “Common Slav” and had not been significantly differentiated, the Slavs of Macedonia did not have the inherent potential to establish a state structure and would have been assimilated by the Byzantines if they did not integrate into the proto-Bulgarian state. It is an anachronism to approach the medieval world with modern national concepts in order to meet present political needs. At that time an imperial ideology was dominant, and the ethnic origin of citizens was not important, since they were Christians and remained loyal to the Emperor. With the logic of the Skopje historians, the French and the Germans should now claim the French or German origin of Charlemagne. The term “Macedonia” from the 9th century was an

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<sup>7</sup> See Slavko Milosevski, *Sociologija na makedonskata nacionalna svest (Sociology of Macedonian National Consciousness)*, Skopje 1992, pp. 63.

<sup>8</sup> See Branko Panov, *Makedonija niz istorijata (Macedonia through History)*, Skopje 1999, pp. 15.

<sup>9</sup> See Dragan Taškovski, *Car Samuil (Tsar Samuel)*, Skopje 2005.

<sup>10</sup> See Ristovski, *op. cit.*, pp. 49.

<sup>11</sup> See Milosavlevski, *op. cit.*, pp. 64.

administrative term, “Thema”, and included Thrace, while the term “Macedonians” as an exclusive Slavic ethnonym did not exist.

During the period of the Ottoman period, the Archbishopric of Ohrid is considered to be the main factor in preserving the “Slavic-Macedonian” identity. During the Ottoman domination, the Ohrid Archbishopric played a very positive role in preserving the religious, national and cultural identity of the Macedonian and other Balkan peoples, as well as in spreading the Slavic culture in Macedonia and the Balkans in general.”<sup>12</sup> But the Archbishopric of Ohrid cannot be described as a national church of the Macedonian Slavs. Apart from the fact that the Archdiocese of Ohrid was called “First Justinian and of All Bulgaria”, its jurisdiction included not only Slavs but also Greeks, Vlachs and Albanians. It was a Greek-Slavic symbiosis at a time when the main mission of the Archbishopric of Ohrid was the curb of Islamism. The term “Macedonia” as an administrative term was not used by the Ottomans, which means that the Ottomans did not have a clear picture of the place. The term “Sancak i Arvanit, Sancak-i Arnaut” has been used since the 14th century, meaning that the Arnaoutes (Albanians) existed as an ethno-cultural group for the Ottomans. During Ottoman domination, many travel guides and other texts refer to “Macedonians” without clarifying what they mean. Undoubtedly, it is a geographical term that generally means an inhabitant of the undefined administrative region of Macedonia.

However, the great difficulties for Skopje historians arise in the interpretation of the national awakening and mobilisation of the Slavs of Macedonia since the middle of the 19th century. Slav intellectuals from Macedonia, such as the brothers Dimitri and Konstantin Miladinov, Grigor Pärličev, Kuzman Šapkarev, and others, all identified themselves as Bulgarians in their own works. They shared a common struggle with Bulgarian intellectuals from the more advanced, from an economic and intellectual point of view, north-eastern Bulgaria to reduce Greek cultural influence and establish a Bulgarian church. Their main disagreement focused on the linguistic question of whether the codified Neo-Bulgarian language should reflect multiple dialects or be based solely on the dialect of north-eastern Bulgaria and exclude the dialect of “Southwest Bulgaria”, which they called Macedonia. Slav intellectuals from the Macedonian region sought to form a multi-dialectal Neo-Bulgarian language and called the “Macedonian language” that they spoke a Bulgarian dialect. Skopje’s historians downplay the term “Bulgarian” as a national name. According to their interpretation, Macedonian Slavs conducted a joint struggle with the Bulgarians against the Ecumenical Patriarchate and only superficially appeared to be Bulgarians due to their attendance of Bulgarian schools or due to Bulgarian influence; it is important that as actors they were consciously fighting for Macedonia and that this was the main object of their

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<sup>12</sup> Stojan Kiselinovski (ed.), *Makedonski istoriski rečnik (Macedonian historical dictionary)*, Institute of National History, Skopje 2000, pp. 352–353.

struggles.<sup>13</sup> A new generation of historians politically affiliated with VMRO-DPMNE have highlighted the need to overcome the stigma associated with the term “Bulgarian” during the Communist years. Although the “Macedonian” national-liberation movement had autonomous action, Bulgarian influence was not irrelevant — either due to the education of “Macedonians” in Bulgarian schools or due to Bulgarian policy in Macedonia. Thus, for the first time in 2002, a collection of Bulgarian folk songs by the brothers Miladinovci was published in Skopje.<sup>14</sup> In the previous editions, the term “Bulgarian” was omitted. This effort of the Skopje’s historians to attribute the substance of a (Slavic) “Macedonian”, non-Bulgarian national consciousness to the Slav intellectuals of the Macedonian space in the 19th century is a deliberate distortion of the objective data. In the 19th century, local particularities and cultural elements were not sufficient factors for the formation of a national ideology. Rather sufficient factors were historical memories, the proof of a glorious historical past, the identification with a homeland and the prospect of liberation and state-building.<sup>15</sup> The identification of the Slavs with the Bulgarian national idea opened many prospects — it provided the glorious historical past and preached a bright future with the help of the Russians. The myth of the Slavic origin of Alexander the Great, dating back to the 17th-century poet from Ragusa Ivan Gundulić, widespread amongst the Slavs of Macedonia, offered nothing more than the “legitimacy” of the indigenous historical presence of the Slavs in Macedonia in their confrontation with the Greeks. Such myths were directly related to the fact that the Macedonian Slavs were an “amorphous mass” and were therefore susceptible to both Bulgarian and Serbian propaganda. Myths were mainly cultivated by Serbian propaganda to undermine Bulgarian penetration in Macedonia. Gorgija Pulevski, an illiterate mouthpiece for Serbian propaganda who recorded such myths and stressed the uniqueness of the Macedonians, is still regarded in Skopje as the first “Macedonist” to the extent that his action had anti-Bulgarian character<sup>16</sup>.

This “flexible” scheme of distinction between the “Bulgarian outward form” and the “Macedonian inner core” was proclaimed to be a safety valve for circumventing the embarrassment

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<sup>13</sup> See Milosavljević, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–90.

<sup>14</sup> See *Bâlgarski Narodni Pesni, sobrani by Bratja Miladinovci Dimitrija i Konstantina i izdani od Konstantina (Bulgarian folk songs, collected by the brothers Miladinovci, Dimitrija and Konstantin, and published by Konstantin)*, Zagreb 1861.

<sup>15</sup> For the distinction between the 19th century national speech and the ethnic discourse of the modern age, see Angeliki Konstantakopoulou, “National and Ethnic Speech: Theory of the Modern Greek Contemporary History” P. Kitromilidis, T. Sklavenitis (editors), *Historiography of Modern and Contemporary Greece*, Proceedings of the Second Congress, Volume B, Center of Neohellenic Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens, 2004, pp. 273–313.

<sup>16</sup> See Georgi Stalev, “Vlogot na Gorgija Pulevski v razvojt na makedonskata nacionalna svest” (The Contribution of Gorgija Pulevski to the Development of Macedonian National Consciousness), in the collective work Bl. Ristovki, G. Stedelov, Cv. Grozdanov (ed.), *Makedonija. Prašanja by Istorijata i Kultura [Macedonia. Issues of History and Culture]*, Skopje 1999, pp. 227–243. For Pulevski’s case, see Spyridon Sfetas, *The formation of the Slav-Macedonian identity. A painful process*, [in Greek], Vantias, Thessaloniki, 2003, pp. 39–45.

of the term Bulgarians. Thus, the VMRO, created in Thessaloniki in 1893, is claimed to be an indigenous “Macedonian organisation”.<sup>17</sup> The fact that its founders and key executives, such as Hristo Tatarčev, Dame Gruev, Goce Delčev, Jane Sandanski, and others called themselves Bulgarians, that the official language of the organisation was Bulgarian and that Bulgaria’s assistance was necessary, are not considered to be issues worth discussing and are attributed to Bulgarian influences. It is important, according to Skopje’s historians, that the organisation was internal, claimed the autonomy of Macedonia, spoke for the “Macedonian people”<sup>18</sup> and gradually tried to develop into a trans-Balkan supranational Christian organisation. It was the counterpart of the Varhovists, the Supreme Macedonian Committee of Sofia (1895) which expressed the interests of Bulgarian governments and general Bulgarian policy for the annexation of Macedonia. The contradictions between Thessaloniki’s “Centralists” and the “Varhovists” of Sofia, which were mainly due to tactics of the Bulgarian-Macedonian movement, are instead interpreted as a confrontation of “native Macedonians” and Bulgarian oppressors.

Based on this starting point of Skopje’s historians, the Ilinden uprising (1903) can be disconnected from Bulgarian influence. It is presented as an internal saga of “Macedonians” and is mythologised as an uprising for statehood and the ephemeral “Republic of Kruševo”, which had previously been interpreted as the embodiment of the ideas of the French revolution and socialist internationalism, and today is interpreted in the context of multiculturalism, universality and civil society<sup>19</sup>, principles that supposedly embody the current state of Skopje. During their academic meeting on the centennial anniversary of Ilinden uprising, Skopje’s historians avoided addressing a number of issues — the VMRO’s reluctance to rise up, the role of promises of Bulgarian assistance by Bulgaria’s Minister of War Stefan Paprikov as a catalyst to dispel hesitations for the uprising, the Bulgarian policy that aimed at the internationalisation of the Macedonian Question via uprising, and that diplomats and foreign press recorded the Ilinden uprising as a Bulgarian movement<sup>20</sup>. Deliberately ignored is rich, accessible Bulgarian archival material and instead there is a focus on trivial matters or an idealisation of Ilinden as a “metaphysical” event that embodied the ideals of the “Macedonians” and inspired the national liberation struggle of 1941–1944.

Skopje’s historiography attaches great importance to Krste Misirkov and other actors of Slavic-Macedonian separatism. His book “*Za makedonckite raboti*” (On Macedonian matters)

<sup>17</sup> See Dragan Arsov, Mihajlo Georgievski, Cvetko Martinovski, Aleksandar Hristovski (ed.), *Zlatna Kniga 100 Godini VMRO (The Golden Bible, 100 years VMRO)*, Skopje 1993, pp. 31–62.

<sup>18</sup> See Milosavljević, op., pp. 104–105.

<sup>19</sup> See Svetomir Škarik, “Ilinden i makedonskata država (1903–2003)” (The Ilinden and the Macedonian State [1903–2003]), in the collective work G. Todorovski, Bl. Ristovski, T. Čepreganov (ed.), *100 godini Ilinden 1903–2003*. Tom I (100 years Ilinden 1903–2003. Proceedings of the Scientific Meeting 6–8 May 2003, First Volume), Skopje 2005, pp. 69–90.

<sup>20</sup> See the Proceedings of the aforementioned conference in two volumes.



was reissued in Skopje with an English translation.<sup>21</sup> As it is known, after the failure of the Iliden uprising the idle stance of the Bulgarian state, Misirkov propagated the ideology of Slav-Macedonian separatism — Slavs of Macedonia were to alienate themselves from Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek national ideas, and be recognised as a separate Slavic-Macedonian Millet by the Ottoman state. He was of a view that Bulgaria was unable to liberate Macedonia, which was in danger of being divided between the Balkan states. Misirkov admitted that his work was a political treatise, a product of the impasse that arose after the failure of the Iliden uprising.

On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Misirkov's book, a two-day conference, dedicated to his work, was organised in Skopje. Of interest was the paper presented by Rastislav Terzioski, a historian who brought to light memos from Russian archives sent by Misirkov to the Russian government on the eve and during the First World War. The memos clearly stated Bulgarian positions, and Misirkov now identified himself as a Bulgarian — the Slavs of Macedonia are Bulgarians, the Treaty of Bucharest was unjust for Bulgaria, the Bulgarians are under the Serbian yoke, Russia must understand the importance of the unification of all Bulgarians and to have Bulgaria in the future as an ally.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, Terzioski, in danger of being described as a “heretic”, avoided commenting on these positions of Misirkov, which contradicted the content of Misirkov's book “On Macedonian matters”, and suggested that until the creation of People's Republic of Macedonia in 1944, Slav-Macedonian intellectuals possessed a crisis of conscience and hesitated about their national self-determination. It was a ground-breaking position that did not cause a fruitful reflection. In the discussion that followed, at least according to the Proceedings, there appears an inability by historians to interpret Misirkov's transformation so as not to diminish the idol that was the father of Slav-Macedonian separatism. Skopje's historians are unable to admit that Misirkov acted primarily as a political person and that the constructed ideology of Slav-Macedonianism was a political compact, a stance of convenience that followed the failure of the Iliden uprising. As Macedonia was still under Ottoman domination and the competition of Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks was intense, Slav-Macedonian separatism with recognition of the Ottoman Slav Macedonian millet would be a balancing factor. During the First World War, Bulgaria, an ally of the Central Powers, had basically achieved its national goals by annexing a large part of Macedonia. Slav-Macedonian separatism had lost its meaning, and

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<sup>21</sup> Krste Misirkov, *On Macedonian Matters. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the publication of the book*, arranged by Blaze Ristovski, translated by Alan McConnell, Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Skopje 2003.

<sup>22</sup> See Rastislav Terzioski, “Za Nekoi Stavovi na Krste Misirkov za makedonskoto prašanje” (For some views of Krste Misirkov on the Macedonian Question), in the collective work B. Ristovski (ed.), *Deloto na Krste Misirkov, Tom I (The work of Krste Misirkov. Proceedings of an international scientific meeting held in Skopje on 27–29 November 2003, First Volume)*, Skopje 2005, pp. 269–283.

for Misirkov only a single goal retained importance – for Bulgaria to maintain the war gains. Addressing Russia, which was in a state of war with Bulgaria, Misirkov apparently wanted to contrast Bulgaria's stance in the war against its own national rights.

The armed conflicts in Macedonia in 1904–1908, the Balkan Wars and the Treaty of Bucharest (1913) are interpreted according to the established position — the “Macedonian” people have been defeated by the conquering plans of the Balkan governments, and Macedonia has been dismembered.

A new assessment of the role of the VMRO during the Interwar period was attempted by a generation of historians sympathetic to VMRO-DPMNE who sought to find an ideological embryo from within this organisation. By 1990, the official socialist historiography of Skopje considered the organisation of Todor Aleksandrov, Aleksander Protogerov and Ivan Mihajlov as fascist, Bulgarian, with the main aim to annex Macedonia to Bulgaria. In all the notices and memoranda of the organisation, there is indeed talk of a Bulgarian population of Macedonia, the just struggle of the Bulgarians to overthrow the Serbian and Greek yoke is stressed. But the new generation of historians downplay the importance of the organisation's links to Bulgaria — these are attributed to the usual Bulgarian influence and education within Bulgarian schools — and instead emphasise the fact that VMRO promoted a single and independent Macedonia and did not consider the union of Macedonia with Bulgaria as the only option, but also the integration of a Macedonia into a Yugoslav or Balkan federation.<sup>23</sup> The organisation set out Macedonian interests against Bulgarian-state interests, disagreed with Bulgarian governments, played the Soviet card to internationalise the Macedonian Question and, most importantly, had an anti-communist character. It is essentially the political rehabilitation of Todor Alexandrov. The publication of documents for his activity from the Bulgarian archives with a translation into Slavic Macedonian aims at “clearing the name” of the VMRO leader, who was stigmatised as a Bulgarian fascist and naturalises him as a “Macedonian”.<sup>24</sup> It is no coincidence that documents of the Communist International for the Macedonian Question began to be published (a Russian original and a translation into Slavic Macedonian) at the initiative of the historians sympathetic to VMRO-DPMNE. The Communist International documents show the importance that the Soviet policy attributed to the VMRO as a potential actor in the “socialist revolution” in Bulgaria in 1923–24 if the organisation was emancipated from the influence of the Bulgarian nationalist circles.<sup>25</sup> Essentially, the VMRO, including the later leader Ivan Mihailov

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<sup>23</sup> See Zoran Todorovski, *Vnatrešnata Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija 1924–1934 The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization 1924–1934*, Skopje 1997.

<sup>24</sup> See Zoran Todorovski (ed.), *Todor Aleksandrov. Se za Makedonija. Dokumenti 1919–1924. (Todor Alexandrov. All about Macedonia. Documents 1919–1924)*, Skopje 2005.

<sup>25</sup> See Lina I. Žila-Vlado Popov (ed.), *Makedonskij Vopros v Dokumentov Kominterni, Tom I. Part 1. 1923–1925gg (The Macedonian Question in the Documents of the Communist International, First Volume, Part I 1923–1925)*, Skopje 1999.

(1925–1934), has been rehabilitated as a Macedonian organisation within its core. With its armed struggle, its conspiratorial character and the punishment of traitors, it internationalised the Macedonian Question and hampered the Serbianization of the population.<sup>26</sup> These views of historians, sympathetic to VMRO-DPMNE, are not accepted by the old Communist generation of historians who are now politically part of the Social Democratic Union. The new generation blames the old for “Serbophilia”, and the old one blames the new for “Bulgarophilia”. However, it is undeniable that historians, who favour VMRO-DPMNE, irrespective of their interpretative approach, at least publish primary sources and do not possess the anti-Bulgarian stereotypes of the past.

The VMRO (United), which emerged as the ideological and political counterpart of the VMRO of Mihailov, has for several years been rehabilitated as a native Macedonian organisation, despite its organisational weaknesses, its lack of influence in Macedonia and its reference to the Macedonian people as a political concept which included all the ethnicities of Macedonia. The Communist International’s decision of 1934 on the existence of a Macedonian nation with exclusive reference to the Slavs is still interpreted as the first official recognition of the Macedonian nation by an international organisation.<sup>27</sup> The drafts of the relevant decision, which are radically different from the final text that Slav-Macedonian historians deliberately ignore, confirm that the particular identity of the Macedonian Slavs was not taken for granted and that the new political circumstances, after the rise of Nazism, required recognition of the “Macedonians” as a particular nation.<sup>28</sup> This position was adopted from 1934 onwards by the Balkan Communist Parties, and their role in promoting this thesis is stressed by all Macedonian historians, regardless of their political beliefs.

The Second World War, the national liberation movement, the creation of the Skopje state and the subsequent developments have a central position in the historiography. The main bottom line in dealing with these events is to demonstrate a “strong” resistance movement against the German-Bulgarian occupation as early as 1941, to play down the role of the Communist Party of “Macedonia” and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in organising the resistance and, above all, to stress the Macedonian people’s will and struggle for a democratic, unified and independent Macedonia rather than a Yugoslav solution to the Macedonian Question.<sup>29</sup> The anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav spearhead in the works of historians sympathetic to VMRO-DPMNE are evident. The Bulgarian occupation

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<sup>26</sup> For the aspect of this VMRO action of the interwar period, Bioleta Ačkoska-Nikola Žežov, *Predavstvata i Atentati vo Makedonskata Istorija (Treacheries and Assassination Attempts in Macedonian History)*, Skopje 2004, pp. 197–314.

<sup>27</sup> See Blaže Ristovski, *Istorija na makedonskata nacija (History of the Macedonian nation)*, Skopje 1999, pp. 579–593.

<sup>28</sup> On this issue Sfetis, *The formation of the Slav-Macedonian identity ...*, pp. 91–103.

<sup>29</sup> See Vera Aceva, *Pismo do Tempo (Letter to Tempo)*, Culture Publishing, Skopje 1991.

was studied more thoroughly<sup>30</sup>, and the establishment of the General Headquarters was dated back to the first year of the occupation.<sup>31</sup> British sources concerning British military missions in Yugoslav Macedonia were published to prove, alongside other sources, that the Slavophon battalions, serving with ELAS, were fighting for an independent Macedonia and not for equality with the Greek people within the pre-war borders of the Greek state.<sup>32</sup> The marginalisation of the role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and in particular the role of Tito's envoy, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, in the development of the resistance movement in Yugoslavia, is a falsification of history. Until the beginning of 1943, when the Communist Party of Macedonia and the General Staff were established, the situation in Yugoslav Macedonia remained confused and organised resistance did not exist. Resistance began in 1943 due to developments in the Second World War (German losses, Italian capitulation and bankruptcy of the Bulgarian administration). The resistance movement in Yugoslavia did not have a narrow communist character, since the Communist Party of Macedonia was a newcomer under the control of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The resistance movement included in its ranks previous affiliates of VMRO, of VMRO (United) and others who up to that point held vague national views. This is downplayed by historians of the post-Communist era. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the emergence of an indigenous resistance movement with a distinct national Slav Macedonian identity that opposed Belgrade's centralism, outlined the national ideology of Slav-Macedonianism over the vague ideology of Yugoslavia, promoted Slav-Macedonian national and state interests (a unified and independent Macedonia or a unified Macedonia in a loose union of the emancipated peoples of Yugoslavia), was against the reinstatement of Yugoslavia and supported a democratic political system (political pluralism, respect for private property) against the communist dictatorship. Thus, the creation of "People's Republic of Macedonia" at the first session of ASNOM (Anti-fascist Council of People's Liberation of Macedonia) on 2 August 1944 is presented as an organic development, as a continuation of the tradition of Ilinden.<sup>33</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that the Presidency of ASNOM consisted of non-Communists: Metodija Antonov-Čento was a merchant, Emanuil Čučkov was a member of the VMRO-youth during the Interwar period and Panko Brašnarov, a member of VMRO (United). The anniversary volumes published for ASNOM highlight

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<sup>30</sup> See Vanche Stojchev, *Bugarskiot okupacijski sistem vo Makedonija 1941–1944 (The Bulgarian Occupation System in Macedonia 1941–1944)*, Skopje 1996.

<sup>31</sup> See Gorgi Cakarjanevski, *Glavniot Stab i Državnosta na Makedonija (1941–1945) (The General Staff and the statehood of Macedonia 1941–1945)*, Skopje 2001.

<sup>32</sup> See Todor Čepreganov (ed.), *Britanski Voeni Misii vo Makedonija 1942–1945 (British Military Missions in Macedonia 1942–1945)*, Issue of State Archives, Skopje 2000.

<sup>33</sup> See Mihajlo Minoski, *Avnojska Jugoslavija i Makedonskoto Nacionalno Prašanje (1943–1946) (Yugoslavia of the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia and the Macedonian Question [1943–1946])*, Skopje 2000, pp. 13–184.

the aspirations of the “Macedonians” for an independent and democratic European state, which they achieved for the first time in 1991.<sup>34</sup>

The circumvention of ASNOM’s goals by Belgrade’s Communist leadership, the defeat of the leaders of the resistance movement that fought for an independent and democratic Macedonia by the Koliševski-Tempo communist clique, and the vicious persecution of VMRO individuals and branches, agitating for a unified and independent Macedonia, is a popular subject for the historians sympathetic to VMRO-DPMNE. According to these historians, since political parties did not exist, the “bourgeois” democratic anti-communist opposition was expressed through the movement for an independent Macedonia. As a matter of morality, they have rehabilitated President Cento (Čento) who was sentenced to imprisonment in 1946 for promoting the secession of Yugoslav Macedonia from the Yugoslav Federation and the establishment of an independent state under the auspices of the Great Powers.<sup>35</sup> Others who agitated for a unified and independent Macedonia were politically marginalised in Skopje or exiled as Vasil Ivanovski, Petar Šandanov, Venko Markovski, Dimitar Vlahov, Kiro Gligorov. They were blamed for separatism, suspected of anti-Yugoslavism or “Bulgarophilia”, since their support for a “unified and independent Macedonia” easily coincided with the line of the Bulgarian VMRO of Ivan Mihailov<sup>36</sup>, even if they identified themselves as “Macedonians” in the new circumstances. After the downfall of Communism and Yugoslavia’s dissolution, they have been rehabilitated. Priority for the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was the forcible Macedonization of the Slav population in the “People’s Republic of Macedonia” under Belgrade’s terms, the elimination of any Bulgarian influence and the inclusion of the region into the Yugoslav Federation. The Slav-Macedonian nationalists, irrespective of their previous national affiliation, agitated for a conclusive solution of the Macedonian Question, not necessarily within the framework of Tito’s Communist Yugoslavia.

Following Tito’s rupture with Stalin in 1948, Belgrade’s wave of persecution was extended to those who accepted Cominform’s position or who were suspected of complying with the

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<sup>34</sup> See Evgeni Dimitrov, Gorgi Caca, Vladimir Ivanovski (ed.), ASNOM. *Pedeset godini macedonska država 1944–1994 (ASNOM. 50 years Macedonian state 1944–1994. Proceedings of a scientific conference held on 17–18 November 1994)*, Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts — Institute of National History, Skopje 1995. Cvetan Grozdanov, Blaže Ristovski, Ivan Katardzhiev, Petre Andreevski, Todor Čepreganov (ed.), *Republika Makedonija 60 godini po ASNOM (The Republic of Macedonia 60 years after ASNOM. Proceedings of a scientific conference on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of ASNOM, held in Skopje on 15–16 December 2004)*, Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Skopje 2005.

<sup>35</sup> See Marian Dimitrievski, Zoran Todorovski, Risto Buntevski-Bunte (editors), *Metodija Andonov-Čento. Dokumenti i Materiali (Metodija Antonov-Čento. Documents and Material)*, State Archives of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje 2002.

<sup>36</sup> See Bioleta Ačkova- Nikolaj Žežov, *Represijata i represirani v najnovata makedonska istorija (Repression and Repressed in Modern Macedonian History)*, Publisher Makevej, Skopje 2005, pp. 143–218, where the previous bibliography.

Soviet stance on Yugoslavia. As a rule, they were people who had already been stigmatised as supporters of an independent Macedonia, who sought the secession of Yugoslav Macedonia from Yugoslavia, and fell now into disgrace for supporting Cominform. The place of their exile was the Adriatic island of Goli Otok, “the island of death”, according to Venko Markovski who has been exiled there with Panko Brašnarov due to a suspected anti-Yugoslavian stance. These people have subsequently been historically restored as “supporters of independent Macedonia”.<sup>37</sup>

The historians, sympathetic to VMRO-DPMNE, naturally characterise those who generally advocated for an independent Macedonia as “Macedonians anti-communists”. They ignore the fact that some preserved a Bulgarian consciousness, including members of various organisations, such as *the Democratic Front of Macedonia-Ilinden*, which, in its memo to the Great Powers in 1945, condemned the terrorist regime in Yugoslavia and its violent enforcement of Slav-Macedonianism. But for the young historians, it is more important to prove Communist atrocities, to rehabilitate the “democratic opposition” and to justify the political role of VMRO-DPMNE as a democratic, centre-right party with roots in the past.

The civil war in Greece (1946–1949) is presented as an effort by the Greek Communists to seize power and by “Macedonians” to achieve their national affirmation. But after the defeat in 1949, the Greeks lost their national unity, while the Macedonians lost themselves.<sup>38</sup> Age-old stereotypes of the Greek civil war are reproduced in historiography: that the civil war supposedly was in fact a conflict between Greek monarcho-fascists and Macedonians, that Greece could avert civil war if it recognised the Macedonians as a national minority, that the participation of the “Macedonians” in the Democratic Army was massive since the Greek Communist Party recognised them as an equal minority, and that the Greek Communist Party also violated the right of self-determination of the Macedonians and after the Fifth Plenum (January 1949) took an anti-Yugoslav path. Such views, of course, can easily be contradicted. In 1945–46, no party other than the Communist Party recognised the Slav-Macedonians as a delete nationality, the Greek Communist Party itself in 1945 had turned against the NOF. After deciding to engage in civil war in 1946, it was forced to change its attitude, since it was dependent on Yugoslav aid. However, relations between the Greek Communist Party and NOF remained problematic during the civil war. Under no circumstances was the Greek Communist Party dragged into the civil war due to the Macedonian issue, nor did the majority of Democratic Army fighters consist of Slav-Macedonians.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 218–283. See also Eftim Gašev, *Našata Kauza [Our case]*, Skopje 1995 and Vera Veskovik-Vangeli, *Dosie Brašnarov (The Brosnarov file)*, Skopje 2003.

<sup>38</sup> See Liljana Panovska, *Krajot na edna iluzija. Graganskata Vojna vo Grcija i Makedoncite 1946–1949 (The end of an illusion. The Civil War in Greece and the Macedonians 1946–1949)*, Institute of National History, Skopje 2003.

Regarding the Bulgarian part of Macedonia, it is argued that the “Macedonians”, despite the narrow-sighted policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party, were self-defined nationally and they enjoyed an ephemeral cultural autonomy.<sup>39</sup>

Historians generally criticise the attitude of the Greek Communist Party and the Bulgarian Communist Party on the Macedonian issue, because they treated the Macedonian Question as a matter of tactics than of principle in contrast to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Macedonia. The explanation of the attitude of the Greek Communist Party and the Bulgarian Communist Party is simple and can be found in the different conditions prevailing in Greek and Bulgarian part of Macedonia. In Yugoslav Macedonia, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had no choice but to recognise the Slav-Macedonians as a nation (to fight Bulgarian and Serb claims) and to establish a state within the Yugoslav Federation. Thus, the question arises whether it was feasible to establish a “united and independent Macedonia” after 1944. It was not realistic. It was simply utopian idealism, in the wake of the belated Slav-Macedonian national awakening. And if Yugoslav Macedonia had become independent in 1944–45, when the Slav-Macedonian nation was embryonic, not only would it have failed to play the role of the “Piedmont” of Macedonian unification, but it would have faced serious problems of survival. Even the referendum of 8 September 1991 was not a popular verdict for full independence.

The history of the Slavic-Macedonian state within the Yugoslav Federation is seen as a dependency of Skopje on Belgrade after the group of Lazar Koliševski was imposed, and Macedonian interests were subsumed into the wider interests of the Yugoslav state. Consequently, the failure to establish a supranational Yugoslav identity, the bankruptcy of the Yugoslav system of self-management of workers and the emergence of national problems in the form of “political liberalism and decentralisation” in 1966–1971, after the fall of Ranković, have been the subject of particular attention in recent years.<sup>40</sup> The Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian Federal Republics sought to transform the Yugoslav Federation into a Confederation and set up a “national-liberal” alliance against Serbia. The then President of the Federative Republic of Macedonia, Krste Cervenkovski, introduced the theory of the “Belated Macedonian Nation”, which, in his opinion, needed further development with Skopje’s emancipation from Serbian tutelage. The fruit of this policy was the establishment of the “Autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church” in 1967, in violation of ecclesiastical rules, and the foundation of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Although Cervenkovski as a leader did not show an anti-Yugoslav sentiment as intense as the Croatian leadership did (Croatia’s separate seat in the UN, the establishment of a Croatian army), in

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<sup>39</sup> Vasil Jotevski, *Nacionalnata afirmacija na Makedoncite vo Pirinskiot del na Makedonia 1944–1948 (National affirmation of Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia 1944–1948)*, Institute of National History, Skopje 1996.

<sup>40</sup> See Novica Veljanovski, *Makedonija 1945–1991. Državnost i Nezavisnost (Macedonia. Statehood and Independence 1945–1991)*, Institute of National History, Skopje 2002, pp. 44–285.

his writings after 1991, he attacked Koliševski<sup>41</sup> as a “tool” of Serbian hegemony, so that he can claim in advance a contribution to the struggle for Independent Macedonia. He stressed his own initiative to raise the issue of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, following the hardening of the Bulgarian Communist Party’s stance towards the Macedonian Issue in 1963 (there is no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria<sup>42</sup>, it is unacceptable to found the Macedonian nation on an anti-Bulgarian basis, etc.).

It is clear that Skopje’s historiography is still directly dependent on the way that political events came to be shaped. Although it has changed in terms of assessing and evaluating political events relative to the past, it does not in any way dispute the “history of the Macedonian nation”. Those who favoured a critical approach, such as Terzioski, did not follow up on their efforts. Thus, we can talk more about continuity rather than about a break with the past. A modernised view of the “Macedonian nation” was presented by Jovan Donev. He referred to national myths in general and their role in the formation of a national ideology which in the Slav Macedonian case has become dominant, and in order to avoid conflicts, he proposed the de-nationalisation of history and the adoption of the American model for the nation. In the Slav-Macedonian case, this means a cultural synthesis of the values of the Orthodox and the Islamic world, in other words, the notion of the “Macedonian nation” as a political concept to include Albanians and Slav-Macedonians as well. The consolidation of this new identity is directly related to democratisation and the market economy.<sup>43</sup> It is obvious that such notions can in no case be accepted — at least under present circumstances — neither by the Slav-Macedonians nor by the Albanians in FYROM, who — after the events of 2001 and the signing of the Ohrid Agreement — write the history of Albanians as a collective entity.<sup>44</sup> The issue is not to create a new identity in FYROM, but to set the dividing line between the national myth and historical data concerning Slav-Macedonians. Hobsbawm spoke about the invention of the tradition, about the threat of history, which he described as the main means of triggering off a political explosion. This view is not unfounded when overproduction of history is disproportionate to consumption when myths outweigh historical reality that can be proven through sources. At the beginning of the 21st century, the historical nations do not need to be fed with myths — that was a feature of the 19th century — nor do they need

<sup>41</sup> See Krste Cervenkovski-Slavko Milosavljević, *Našiot pogled za vremeto na Koliševski (Our view of the Koliševski's time)*, Skopje 1996.

<sup>42</sup> See Krste Cervenkovski, *Na braniot na makedonskata samobitnost (In defense of Macedonian self-existence)*, Institute of National History, Skopje 1999.

<sup>43</sup> See Jovan Donev, “Nekoi teoresko-metodološki razmisli za procesite na gradenje sovremena makedonska nacija”, *Glasnik*, No. 1 (1996), 127–145 (*Some theoretical and methodological considerations for the creation of the modern Macedonian nation*).

<sup>44</sup> See Razim Abdyli, *Albanskoto Osvoboditelno Dviženje 1908–1910 Tom 1 (The Albanian Liberation Movement 1908–1910, Volume A)*, Institute of National History, Skopje 2002 and *Albanskoto Osvoboditelno Dviženje 1911–12 Tom II*, Institute of National History, Skopje 2003.



to invent a tradition, they experienced a tradition that formed their national identity in the 19th century. The current dispute between Greece, Bulgaria and FYROM is essentially a conflict between two historical nations (Greeks and Bulgarians) with a new political nation that originated in the Interwar period, was created after 1944, claimed territories of Greece and Bulgaria in the name of “Macedonianism” (1944–49) and still raises minority issues. It claims the identity of a historical nation in order to obtain legitimacy. The threat faced by Greece and Bulgaria from FYROM is cultural, and the issue is the demarcation of identities. The solution is expected to be found within the European Union.



“Saints Cyril and Methodius holding the Cyrillic alphabet,” a mural by Bulgarian iconographer Z. Zograf, 1848, Troyan Monastery  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saints\\_Cyril\\_and\\_Methodius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saints_Cyril_and_Methodius)