

VASIL LEVKY'S PERSONALITY AND IDEOLOGY: HISTORICAL RESTROSPECTIONS AND CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS

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Abstract

The text analyzes Levski's personality and ideas from a historical and contemporary viewpoint. The focus is on the Apostle's special place and indisputable role in the national liberation movement. It can firmly be stated that the most important contemporaries recognized him as the main actor in the Bulgarian revolution, a great personality with undeniable qualities, in the space of the Bulgarian Revival. The pillars in Levski's ideology reveal him as a non-standard, Renaissance personality, for whom the individual and societal success are possible only on the basis of adequate innovation and the creative practical approach, taking into consideration the specifics of the native being. Therefore, studying the Apostle's deed, comparing it to the other peoples' achievements, the Bulgarian has always had the chance and today can proudly and with dignity compare themselves with the other peoples – moreover on equal footing! As any respected member of the civilizational world can. After all, what the Apostle said and did is richness not only for the Bulgarian but for the European political civilization.

Keywords: Levski, revolution, ideology, society, the Bulgarian National Revival, Ottoman rule, democracy, republic, print media

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Introduction

For almost a century and a half the lasting interest in Vasil Levski's deed has not declined. With the strength of his ideas, with his wide scope as an organizer and politician, he makes everyone respect him: both from the left wing and right wing parties, from the intellectual peaks and among the uneducated social strata. In the Bulgarian national consciousness Levski is *Bulgaria's saint*, a fertilizing basis and sacrament for every Bulgarian. The Apostle's personality combines the most attractive features of the National Revival figure: revolutionary resolve and spiritual tender-heartedness; courage and nobleness; democratic values and exigence; moral strength and commitment to the deed. Therefore, the problem concerning the overall assessment of Vasil Levski's ideology is a key problem for clarifying what is forever significant in his deed that should be present (today

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and in the future) in the Bulgarians' historical memory. Because for a people such as the Bulgarian that is deprived of a thousand-year-old, great dynasty, worthy of glory aristocracy and world-famous patrons, it is namely the great personalities' life, deeds and ideas, the ones that have originated from the milieu of the people itself – such as Levski – that should be the basis for developing and enriching the national character matrix and for building the modern Bulgarian statehood.

Political interpretations of Levski after the national liberation

A couple of basic notions about Vasil Levski's personality and ideas were formed after the liberation. The initial vision of the Apostle in the 1880's is in the sphere of journalism and biographies. It was conditioned by the political debates related to his role in and contribution to the development of the national-liberation movement and the opposition between the different party formations that had already been formed. Vasil Levski's first biography was written by Georgi Kirkov. It was published in 1882.² Written by Levski's relative, mainly on the basis of family memories – without the search for any documentary material, this short biography, rather an essay, “resembles more a zealous eulogy than an objective biographical story (Todorova, 2009, p. 183). Zachary Stoyanov's book *Vasil Levski (the Deacon). Features of his life*, which was published the following year, provided a powerful impetus to the rationalization of the Apostle's deed and personality. Basically Levski is the first major figure in the National Revival, which specially and fully draws the annalist's attention. This shows that he was well aware of the Apostle's place and importance in the revolutionary struggle and Bulgarian history. The writing of this book was preceded by a purposeful and active research. Zachary Stoyanov searched for and collected documentary material and oral stories of people who knew Levski personally. This is how the biography starts: “Among the chanting about the generals' epaulettes, among the frenetic hurra and the shedding of hot tears at other people's graves and for great figures, it would not be bad if something about our internal affairs and our people appears here and there. Finally, we have also become a people, good gracious, we also have a national egoism, a human dignity which should triumph over foreign authorities and should characterize us as a people, not as an unconscious self-destructive mob.” (Stoyanov, 1983, p. 21).

It is namely for this reason that Zachary Stoyanov starts writing Levski's and Botev's biographies, later memoirs, essays and *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings*, which were intended to sound as an appeal to the young generation, which will have the opportunity to highlight the greatness and tragedy of the Revival era. In this respect what is important for Zachary Stoyanov is not so much the accuracy

² Kirkov, G. (1882). *Vasil Levski (the Deacon)*, Sredets.

of the facts from the Apostle's life but his character and individuality. In Zachary Stoyanov's biography, Levski was naturally proclaimed a "hero" and "a great organizer of the national revolution". He is presented as a person with immaculate personal qualities, who rose from "a military teacher to a great historical personality". Zachary Stoyanov adds to his name all possible titles related to the great personality's immortality – "champion", "patriot", "a fearless rebel, who carried the whole of Bulgaria on his back", etc. In this case his author's thesis is logical because Zachary Stoyanov takes as a basis a routine image of Levski, existing in advance among the masses. Of course, in Zachary Stoyanov's biography, myth-making tendencies are also strongly expressed, which dominate the legendary aspects in the Apostle's image. What the book aims to inspire is to depict Levski as a Bulgarian model! As a political saint, martyr and hero in Bulgarian history, whose name cannot and should not be forgotten in the people's minds.

The next biographies of Levski were published by Stoyan Zaimov, Filip Simidov and Ivan Karshovski. They follow Zachary Stoyanov's impetus for idealization and romantic worship for the Apostle. However, these first attempts to portray Levski trigger a series of polemical debates in the assessment of his personality and deed. The first debate started immediately after Zachary Stoyanov's biography of Levski was published. Stefan Bobchev declares himself against it. Then he is editor of the *Maritza* daily – the official paper of the party in power in Eastern Rumelia. On its pages Bobchev published an overall criticism against Zachary Stoyanov's work. According to the post-liberation journalist, Levski was depicted by Zachary Stoyanov in a "cynical light"! He is presented as "an immoral and characterless hero", and "a lot of false facts" are consciously brought in. What he provides as an example is Zachary Stoyanov's claim that the Apostle sets the beginning of the committee activity in the country etc. Stefan Bobchev blames Zachary Stoyanov for inaccuracy and party affiliations, questions the negative portrayal of the clergy and he Khristo and Evlogi Georgiev brothers circle.

"If, however, we consider this book from a literary viewpoint – Bobchev writes – I would be forced to say that it does not deserve to be called a literary work". In reply, Zachary Stoyanov wrote two letters to the editorial office of the *Maritza* daily. There he questions not only Stefan Bobchev's authority, but also the decency of his critical remarks: "During its five-year-old existence, the *Maritza* daily, which has done its best to maintain good relations also with the dead, has hardly had an example of acting so unscrupulously as it did with me and my book and what all this proves is that there is somebody from its secret staff who feels pain. Unscrupulousness, malice and personal enmity have no boundaries".

At the basis of this first conflict in the sphere of the emerging Levski studies, undoubtedly lies personal motivation. It is evoked not only by the different social origin of Zachary Stoyanov and Stefan Bobchev, but also by Zachary Stoyanov's

political aspirations. The not long ago Apostle of the April uprising is an ardent supporter of the liberal ideas (even at that time he manifests himself as a radical), while Stefan Bobchev has moderate conservative views. Apart from everything else, the memoirist maintained the revolutionary line that had gained momentum, that of indignation against the “rich” and “scholarly” people, he exposes the hypocritical devotion of the clergy, demonstrates republican beliefs, attributing to Levski his own words as well. Zachary Stoyanov gravitates toward the future real supporters of the Bulgarian unification in Eastern Rumelia, while Stefan Bobchev is an adherent of the governor general power in the autonomous area. At the same time the debate between Zachary Stoyanov and Stefan Bobchev is evidence of the first attempts to consider Levski not so much from the viewpoint of the historical contour in which he acted, but in relation to topical political addresses related to the emerging new (different) political trends in the post-liberation society, to which the authors belong. In the respective case, it has to do with the support of the conservative party during the first half of the 1880s and questioning radicalism as the only way to create an independent state on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.

An interesting dispute opposes Zachary Stoyanov and Stoyan Zaimov. In 1884 two prominent novels were simultaneously published: Stoyan Zaimov’s *The Past*, book I and Zachary Stoyanov’s *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings*. “They treat one and the same era, they are written by active participants (an Apostle and sub-Apostle) in the national-liberation struggles” (Stamatov, 2005, p. 10). The first edition of *The Past* provoked heated commentaries, reviews and assessment in the print media. One of our first literary critics Petar Peshev even says that *The Past* and *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings* are equal in terms of literary significance. Thus he “underestimates the great cognitive value of Zachary Stoyanov’s epic, the peculiarities of his genre syncretism. At the same time, some of the characteristic shortcomings of *The Past* are not noted: the free attitude to the historical facts, to some extent the fictionalization and psychological rendition as an end in itself, negligence and others”. However, the debate is not only on the artistic merits of the two works. The basic point is to be found elsewhere. Zachary Stoyanov attacks Stoyan Zaimov for “having destroyed the great era of the national revolution” and thus from a literary polemics the debate between the two turns into a collision of the basic trends in the post-liberation Bulgarian society. The images of the revolutionaries, and above all those of Vasil Levski, Lyuben Karavelov, Khristo Botev, are taken as an argument of the value of one or another political doctrine, now within the borders of post-Berlin Bulgaria. Gradually, in the construction of the Apostle’s post-liberation image, the tendency is observed of his name being appropriated by some ideological trend with respect to its own, greater importance in public

life. Because the mismatches between Zachary Stoyanov and Stoyan Zaimov are already based on the differences that germinate in the view of the future of the Bulgarians on the basis of the “Russophile” and “Russophobe” interpretation of the facts of the current political process. Stoyan Zaimov is a Russophile, while Zachary Stoyanov will gradually become a Russophobe!

This is the plane on which the socialists also interfere in the emerging disputes on Vasil Levski's life and deed. In response to Zachary Stoyanov, in 1886 Dimitar Blagoev wrote his brochure *Our Apostles*. It sets the beginning of the most leftist, socially committed discourse in commenting Levski's media image. Dimitar Blagoev's basic theses that exert a strong influence on the formation of the later ideas about the Apostle's image are the following. The founder of the Bulgarian social-democratic party highlights as great revolutionaries Khristo Botev, Angel Kanchev, Panayot Volov, while Levski, in Blagoev's view, although being “a talented character, has had no clear idea about the ratio of forces in the revolution.” Moreover, in Blagoev's view, Botev and Karavelov, “profess the great ideas that currently mankind embraces”. In this case Blagoev has in mind the socialist ideas, while Levski was a man of immediate, practical action. He had a modest personal education, while his deed was “inspired by the convictions that Lyuben Karavelov and Khristo Botev professed”. Dimitar Blagoev unambiguously argues: “It is well-known to everybody that V. Levski and Benkovski, to which due to a very clear liking for them [Zachary Stoyanov] particularly is attracted by and frequently repeats them, are apostles and organizers of the revolution under the plan devised by the Central Revolutionary Committee, headed by L. Karavelov and Kh. Botev”. These assessments prove that Blagoev underestimates Levski's ideological contribution to the national-liberation revolution. He considers Levski above all as a revolutionary-practitioner, not as an ideologist and a national leader. Hence the circumstance that the socialists raise to the forefront in their historical assessments are Khristo Botev's ideas and deeds, not those of Levski and in a sense even contrast them.

Nevertheless, Dimitar Blagoev does not fail to mention Levski's personal charm – a motif that is one of the most powerful parts of the emerging cult to him. In his work *Contribution to the History of Socialism in Bulgaria*, Dimitar Blagoev later more clearly highlighted the Apostle's place among the leaders in the national-liberation deed: “The revolutionary party had its *apostles* of the revolution, remarkable agitators and organizers. The most remarkable of them was undoubtedly Vasil Levski,” Blagoev writes already at the beginning of the 20th C. For Blagoev, Levski is an embodiment of the pure ideals and aspirations and belongs to “Those rare social activists, whose image cannot be tarnished by people's malice and slander.” (Blagoev, 1957, pp. 547, 549).

It is in literature and art that we find an important aspect in the public images of Vasil Levski after the liberation. It emerged as a tendency in the spiritual life of the free Bulgarian society in Ivan Vazov's works. The formation of Levski's media image in the Bulgarian national consciousness is impossible without the texts left by the patriarch of the Bulgarian national literature. For him Levski is a long-lasting creative addiction and he goes back to it off and on. His image is present in the poems *The rebellion*, *At mount Kom*, *Thrace*, *Slivnitsa*, *To Damyan Gruev*, and also in the stories *The Apostle in Misfortune*, *the Clean Road*, *Along the Curves*, and, of course, in the famous novel *Outcasts* (1883). It is namely there that the author of *Under the Yoke* makes the physical portrayal of Levski, which most Bulgarians know by heart: "Levski was of average height, thin and slender; grey, almost blue eyes; reddish moustache, blond hair, white face, round and sallow from constantly thinking and being vigilant, which however became lively by a constant and natural mirth! Strange! This lad, who professed the dangerous idea about freedom, death, who was exposed to dangers every day; this son of night; of the desert, of the misadventures had a happy temperament! (Vazov, 1996, p. 82). Levski's presence in *Outcasts* is short, yet emblematic for the Bulgarian historical memory. Vazov presents an image of Levski, emphasizing two of his basic qualities – resolve and persistence. Compared to the other revolutionaries, he possesses an "unwavering patience" and "perseverance". According to Vazov, Levski is "an expression of a strength, coming from centuries of suffering, from a whole ocean of humiliations... sent by fate to be the head of a whole hive of preachers and martyrs for freedom to shake the masses, to provoke the events, to create the future!" In 1881 Vazov wrote the poem *Levski*, which is part of the collection of poems *Epic of the Forgotten* (1884). Objectivity makes us admit that despite the numerous attempts – historical, literary, journalistic, there is not a more successful probe into what comprises the "spiritual world of the person Vasil Levski"! Moreover, Vazov did not have at his disposal any particular facts about Levski's life and deed. We should recall that Zachary Stoyanov's biography was published in 1884, that is three years after the first part of the *Epic of the Forgotten*. In his poem *Levski*, and also in his other works, recreating this topic, Vazov creates an image that is identical with the Bulgarians' image of the Apostle! Compared to the journalistic assessment of Levski, which stresses the social and political dimensions of his personality, Ivan Vazov emphasizes the Apostle's moral image. He depicts the dimension of his human greatness and spiritual purity. He is a "symbol of suffering", "our saint", who sowed "the great seed", "a small Hus, who failed to become a giant, because he had no space to grow". Bringing to the fore the opposition between the great past of the National Revival and the petty, egoistic present of the post-liberation decades, (which is the conceptual sub-text of *Outcasts* and *Epic of the forgotten*),

Ivan Vazov presents Levski as an even more impressive sublime ideal, making his image the basis for devoted faith, an intransient figure and a possible bridge between the generations.

Two completely opposite assessments exist on Vazov's interpretation of Levski in our critical literature. One of them is positive and it belongs to Mikhail Arnaudov. He was the first to justify the opinion that Ivan Vazov in *Epic of the forgotten* has managed to reveal the Apostle's real spiritual dimensions to the greatest extent. Since "no one of the heroic men of the Revival era reaches in the poet's idea the overall totality, the purity of character and the faith to the ideal, typical of the Deacon from Karlovo." According to Mikhail Arnaudov, Levski and Botev are yet to increase their value in the Bulgarian national mindset, because they are "an expression of people's strength, spiritual power and are sublime examples for the generations (Arnaudov, 1940, p. 3)

The second assessment of Vazov's contribution to the spiritual rationalization of Levski's life and deed belongs to Dr. Krastev. It is negative. The critic thinks that Vazov has deluded the public and has failed to resurrect the real Levski, his spiritual world: "The impression he makes on the reader is such that his internal world has not existed at all. Not only no attempt has been made to interpret this world, but there is not even a hint about it... We see how the hero acts; we feel the whole spontaneity of his nature, but we cannot interpret his feelings and his mindset" (Krastev, 1888, pp. 106-107). In this case the assessments about Levski are made through the prism of the specifics of the intelligentsia-like, abstract value mode of thinking that is characteristic of Dr. Krastev's "Thought" circle. These harsh and ungrounded words do not cast a shadow over Vazov's portrait of Levski. It survives through time and continues to live in the Bulgarians' national consciousness as a first-class spiritual food. This is due not only to the poet's poetic mastery, but also to the fact that he also finds in the Apostle's deed the universal problems – the eternal yearning for freedom, the hate for slavery, the human being's life choice, the peoples' fate.

The Apostle's deed in the alternative thinking of the left-wing and right-wing parties between the two world wars

After the Balkan wars and WWI a turning point is observed in the whole Bulgarian debate on Vasil Levski's life and deed. It was conditioned by the new historical situation of the people and country. The catastrophe in 1919 puts an end to the idea of national unity. The negative aspects of the monarch's uncontrolled power, ignoring the alternative thinking among the Bulgarian political class, coupled with Ferdinand's extreme ambition and vanity, produce their results. In five years (1913 – 1918) Bulgaria experienced two national catastrophes, the result

of which are 200 000 killed and 300 000 wounded, 70 000 of which were permanently crippled. 90 000 Bulgarian women become widows and 280 000 children – orphans. 65 000 square km of the Bulgarian territory were forever lost and more than 2 million Bulgarians remained outside Bulgaria's borders. Tens of thousands of peaceful Bulgarians were wiped out in Macedonia and Thrace by the allied troops and the Turkish army, and more than 150 000 fled from their birth places, leaving properties for tens of billions of leva and settled down in Bulgaria. More than 2000 schools were closed down and three Bulgarian printing houses were liquidated – in Thessaloniki, Edirne and Skopje. Bulgaria, from a first economic and military force up to 1912, became a weak state in 1919. The people was devastated. In the country there was not a single family that was not ruined.

In this situation Vasil Levski's personality shines in a new light. The aureole around his name becomes even more undisputable, because history, as Nikolay Genchev argues, has unambiguously confirmed the rightness of his views: "The political opponents of the Apostle proved to be shameful not only in front of the people, but also in front of history. To solve the Bulgarian issue, relying on one great power, even on a coalition of great powers, what Vasil Levski most strongly objected to, proved to be fatal for Bulgarian history. Already not only in a written form, not only through quarrels, but through the historical balance of a development crucial for Bulgaria, it was proved that only an independent, an uncommitted development, that only a society of guaranteed political rights and social freedoms, only a complete spiritual uplifting may take the Bulgarians out of the slavish chaos of their history and psychology" (Genchev, 1987, p. 176). The humiliating defeat in the wars compromised the monarchy institution and proved the rightness of Levski's and the other national revolutionaries' of the 19th C. republican and democratic ideas.

In the period between the two world wars the positions of the political left-wing and right-wing parties in the debate about Vasil Levski's personality and historical legacy were finally formed. The catastrophic turmoil that the world experienced in WWI, the collapse of "yesterday's world" and the bourgeois "bel epoch", and also the hopes for creating a new, fairer and more humane society, results in the masses embracing left ideas and the strengthening of the rebellious attitudes. A public expression of this trend are the leaders and members of the newly-founded communist party in the country.

This newly-emerged trend in the Bulgarian political daily life is characterized by the following peculiarities. In the first place the communists totally reject the existing political and economic system, based on the principles of private property, proclaimed in the texts of the Turnovo constitution. Property is declared "a gravedigger" of all values and the source of all kinds of evils in society. Secondly, a strong bolshevism-wise trend begins in the BCP, following the example set by

Soviet Russia, the doctrine for establishing a proletarian dictatorship after an armed uprising in Bulgaria as well, was imposed. Lenin's thesis is adopted that the revolution may take place before the bourgeoisie builds capitalism, moreover only in one country, from the poorly developed at that. The communists already consider the peasants as the proletariat's ally because only the victory of the proletarian party can ensure them prosperity.

The objective environment of this third structural layer of the Bulgarian character after the wars presupposes shaping the appearance of "the socialist type of person", free from the relapses of the "bourgeois mindset", characteristic of the capitalist era. The ascent and domination of the socially-colored system of values is observed, which embraced the ideas of internationalism and the labor movement. "Basically what we are speaking about in this case is the Bulgarians' first attempt to suggest a process of an absolutely conscious, total replacement of all traditional virtues, inherited from their own past, in the Bulgarian national character. They are discarded and replaced by a brought in from outside foreign model of character. Although at the beginning of the 1920's it does not really exist anywhere in the world" (Mitev, 2015, p. 382). A similar trend in the Bulgarian characterology launches a new, radical value alternative for our nation, which finds expression in books at the beginning, but in the course of time its impact becomes stronger.

Where is Levski's place in this fundamental political and spiritual-value transformation? In the 1920's and 1930's the communist print media in Bulgaria consistently constructs an updated notion about Levski's life, ideas and deeds. Although some of Blagoev's theses from the end of the 19 C. are found in it, there are also new aspects. The focus is above all placed on the Apostle's revolutionary potential and the class characteristics of his ideological views. And more particularly on the question: which social forces is Vasil Levski a representative and expression of? The beginning was set by Vulko Chervenkov's article *Levski is alive! Hands down, blasphemists!* The author expressly emphasizes that the Apostle has risen to "the greatest, the most favorite, most consistent and complete Bulgarian revolutionary", who hates from the bottom of his heart "the people's tyrants". It is not accidental that Dimitar Polyakov's poem *Levski is ours* gains great popularity at this time. It is through this poem that the left-wing parties' attitude to the Apostle's personality and deed is expressed.

The essence of this interpretation of Levski's life and deeds is present above all in the texts written by Georgi Bakalov between the two world wars. In the course of two decades he practically builds the Bulgarian left-wing's new vision of the Apostle's life and merits. Its basis was laid as early as 1924 in the paper *Our revolutionaries*. There Bakalov launches the thesis that "the proletariat honors in Levski the indomitable soldier of freedom, its forerunner". (Bakalov,

1924, p. 22). In his texts from the 1930's³ Georgi Bakalov further develops this viewpoint from the positions of the class and social analysis. According to him: "Levski is the apostle of the democratic revolution together with the smallholders' [peasant] contingent of the revolution's warriors". Noting the controversy between the Apostle's wish that there should be a crown over the lion's head on the revolutionary seal, together with the slogan "Death or republic", Georgi Bakalov sharply objects to the fact that "our contemporary bourgeoisie" appropriates Levski. He answers the rhetorical question "On whose side would the contemporary bourgeoisie be, if it lived in Levski's time" that it would definitely be in the ranks of the *chorbadjii* (gaffers), in the ranks of Levski's killers. In Georgi Bakalov's words, Levski is "an ingenious member of the proletariat" and "only a hopeless idiot can argue that the Apostle would hesitate to find his worthy place among his people and the people today is the proletariat".

In his assessment of Levski, Bakalov touches upon the motif that has already become topical among the left wing, namely the comparison between Levski and Botev. Georgi Bakalov devotes an individual essay to the relationships between the two. In the introduction he says: "The hearts beat in the same sweet fashion of those descendants of theirs who long for their deed when they remember either the one or the other. The two have no rivals in terms of charm, enthusiastic rapture over their personalities and love for them in the memory of the generations coming after them – they have been assigned first place in the Bulgarian pantheon of immortality". The author then analyses how the two revolutionaries reached the idea of the revolution as the only way to liberate Bulgaria: "Botev reaches the idea in a speculative, theoretical way, the idea being formed under the influence of the ideology of the Russian revolutionary democracy; Levski reaches the idea in the hard way of personal experience, of self-teaching practice. However, the different roads of the two merge the moment they meet". Although the left intellectuals between the two world wars had already made a visible step towards Levski, the idea of the Apostle mainly as a "practical genius", not a "theoretician" of the national revolution dominates among them. Yet Georgi Bakalov acknowledges his novel idea for preparing the uprising through a broad system of committees encompassing the whole country: "This seemingly so simple idea, as all ingenious ideas are, raised the struggle for liberation to a new stage, placed it on the only possible track that could lead to a victory". In this context Georgi Bakalov summarizes: "No one considered Levski, whose education was far from perfect, a theoretician. However, this

³ In the period 1932 – 1938 in "Znanie" the following texts were published by Georgi Bakalov, dedicated to the national-liberation struggles: The Bulgarian national-liberation movement, The messages of the Revival era, Riot against Levski, Khristo Botev, Vasil Levski etc. The quotation is taken from Bakalov (2007, pp. 61-130).

does not mean that he did not have his own, original ideas whereby he enriched the treasury of the revolutionary ideology". Yet, as a whole the thesis about the "equality" between "the two greatest Bulgarians before the liberation – Levski and Botev", is present in the essay. For Georgi Bakalov Botev is a "revolutionary-democrat", imbued with the ideas of utopian socialism and if we consider him its forerunner, this would be in a symbolical and conditional meaning. Ultimately Georgi Bakalov defines Levski and Botev as "leaders of the agrarian/bourgeois democratic revolution in Bulgaria". A thesis that places Levski under the flag of a specific class and party ideology for the first time.

The opposition Levski-Botev between the two world wars follows the impetus given by Zachary Stoyanov, Dimitar Blagoev and Dr. Krastev. In 1929 it assumes caricature forms in Macduff's brochure *Whose is Botev. The moral character of this sinister personality*. In it the author opposes "the great courageous, strong, religious and humane Vasil Levski" with the squanderer, adventurer, atheist Khristo Botev". Not feeling ashamed to use most malicious words, slander and fabrications, he defines Botev as a figure that has written the darkest pages in Bulgarian history. For Macduff, there is not even a grain of patriotism in Botev. He was a person with criminal inclinations, who was interested above all in money, took bribes, married the granddaughter of the bishop Panaret, only to "lay hands on" her dowry worth 60 000 francs.

He wrote a poem about Levski, but not because he felt pain for him, but out of commercial incentives etc. Later the scandalous author Macduff, who lacks the courage to participate with his true name in the debate in Bulgaria related to the Apostle's life and deed, attacks Botev that he had crossed the Danube because he thought the uprising was successful. What remained to be done was that "Botev should lead the uprising, so that he could accept Europe's recognition on behalf of the whole nation". As a result of these ambitions Botev destroys his band at the Vola mount, led by his "infinite egoism". "What is pitiful is only that", the respective odious Macduff continues, "the Bulgarian people has allowed a theatrical producer, which translated in simple language means professional liar par excellence, to take the place of the greatest national hero".

Petar Dinekov, who was then a young scholar and lecturer at Sofia University, published in the *Zarya* daily (22 March 1930) a crushing review of Macduff's disgraceful text – *An insult to Khristo Botev's personality (A book about malice and hypocrisy)*. He defines it as the "most stupid and contemptible book that has ever been published in Bulgarian", to conclude: "The language of this presumptuous "Christian" best sheds light on his "virtuous" personality. From the beginning to the end it is full of street profanity and blasphemy, gossip coupled with challenge and slander, which strongly disgust the honest person and make him ask himself: isn't there anyone to slap this malicious man in the face, something

which he deserves? Yet...our contempt is enough. We should regret only one thing: that Botev used his arrows in vain in the past. The Macduff-like people, who do not even have the valor to show their name, are incorrigible”.

Although the authorship of the respective lampoon remains secret for the public opinion, beyond doubt this is a persona that gravitates around the extreme right and retrograde circles in Bulgaria, which also formed their new image between the two world wars. The case is clear: Botev's personality and deed had to be demythologized, because of his pronounced left social and political ideological orientation. Thus the road was open for the more violent exploitation of Levski's deed, to serve the cause of the right-wing forces. Because the attitude of the political right wing to Levski between the two world wars was to a great extent determined by the adoption of the authoritarian and nationalistic policies, characteristic of the 1930's and 1940's. Compared to the print media of the left wing, the newspapers and authors gravitating to the right wing highlight the national and religious element in the Apostle's ideological legacy and practical activity. The characteristic features of his personality and his political views are read through the prism of nationalism. This is characteristic above all of the print media that had leanings to the extreme nationalistic right wing, represented by “the Union of the Bulgarian national legions” (1931) and “Warfare to the progress of the Bulgarian National Spirit” (1936). For instance, the oath of the legionnaires says: “We, the Bulgarian legionnaires, call on you to wake up, to fight, to do deeds, to espouse the ideas of Georgi Sava Rakovski, Levski, Botev. Let us wave our national flags, on which the sacred message is written: Fatherland! Bread! Freedom! God and Bulgaria call on us to make an oath, and to take this oath here, we live for it, we will die for it! (Simeonov, 1992, p. 33). A lot of publications on the pages of the *Nation and politics* journal actively attract Revival ideals and Levski's name. In 1937 a couple of editions of this periodical journal are devoted to the Apostle, where his name is used with the aim of clearly supporting the nationalist program. No matter how the interpretation is assessed, it distorts the Apostle's ideology, who embraces the doctrine of patriotism, and its most sincere and bright dimensions, characteristic of the mindset of each civilized person.

The analysis of the mode of thinking expressed in the debate in Bulgaria in the 1920's and 1930's, related to Levski's life and deed makes it possible to bring to the fore the following highlights:

First – in the period between the wars the Apostle's personality and high prestige acquires a huge and doubtless legitimizing force. Hence the struggle to appropriate his name as an “authentic representative” of a given class, party or movement. Frequently they belong to diametrically opposite poles that were formed in the structure of the Bulgarian society between the wars.

Second – Bulgaria's humiliating defeat in the Balkan wars and WWI due to the Monarch Tsar Ferdinand's omnipotence proves the trueness of the Apostle's republican and democratic ideas as a basis for the structure of a society deprived of its hereditary dynasty and prestigious ancestral aristocracy. Although in the 19 C. the monarchy has as no serious alternative the republican idea, whose great adherent is Levski, it runs through the Bulgarian national movement, becoming a sold pillar for raising the Apostle to leader of our heroic pantheon. Therefore the anti-monarchist attitudes between the wars logically seek their trust in the Apostle's ideological legacy as well.

Third – the socialist print media, compared to that of the right wing, provided a much more detailed and nuanced analysis of the essence and specific characteristics, typical of Levski's ideology. For the left wing he is an example of dedication to the revolutionary program and tactics. The assessment of it are inspired by the contemporary criteria and by the fact that namely the Apostle was the leader of a professional revolutionary organization.

Fourth – since the 1920's onwards the Apostle is the object of a nationwide worship. He is an image accepted by everybody – both by the left-wing and right-wing forces in society, which seek in his deed various arguments to motivate the topicality of their own views and practical ambitions. Therefore, in the collection of articles published on the occasion of his 100th anniversary the authors justifiably argue: "A lot has been spoken about and written about Levski. However, his portrait is not hung anywhere! His name is a legend today". The big problem of this stage of the overall evolution of the debate in Bulgaria on the Apostle's life and deed is that in the attempt to find "their own", "our" – that is the "class" foci, an underestimation of the main issue starts: the significance of the Apostle's ideas for the whole of Bulgaria! Namely, what has been said by him and is related to the eternal desires of every normal Bulgarian. Without him being necessarily "right" or "left" in his ideology. And a tendency of this sort starts limiting in a different way the picture related to the Apostle's real dimension of his image, as a great historical figure. To a certain extent, from a unifier of the national consciousness, his media-text image is purposefully used as a dividing spiritual line between the Bulgarians. This is one drawback of the national character matrix, against which the Apostle fought so that it could be to overcome during his lifetime. However, the dead, no matter how great they were, cannot impact how the people alive will explain or exploit their deed!

The attitude of the official Bulgarian ideology to Levski during the socialist era

Two leading trends dominate in the Bulgarian social studies in the course of about a decade and a half after 9 September 1944. One of them is related to the strongly negative attitude to the past related to the “bourgeois era”, and the second is an attempt to impose a system of values based on the cult of personality and on copying Soviet models in political practice and ideological thinking.

Given this global, newly-emerged ideological and political situation within Bulgaria’s borders, it is not surprising that immediately after 9 September Vasil Levski’s personality was analyzed in rather dogmatic and strongly politicized journalistic assessments rather than in worthy research texts. Todor Pavlov publishes a collection of speeches and articles *Kh. Botev, V. Levski, Sv. Markovich* in 1946. In it academician Pavlov defines Levski as an “egregious legend” of a “revolutionary romantic nature”, which, however, does not presuppose “a far-reaching career”. Declaring the Apostle “a supreme leader of the people’s revolutionary movement”, Todor Pavlov does not miss to note that Levski had no solid education, due to which he “had no theoretical knowledge”. According to this ideologist of the BCP, Levski’s friendship with Karavelov and Botev was related to the fact that the latter were “more educated, had a higher culture and were more experienced” than him. Later on Todor Pavlov emphasizes that Levski fails to reach the utopian socialism views. However, he makes up for this “shortcoming” with his pathos, resolve and consistency. Later, in other articles, Todor Pavlov once again treats Levski’s life and ideological legacy reiterating that “Levski is not a theoretician – philosopher, neither a real journalist. However, he acknowledges that he possesses “a great analytical mind, ingenuity and inspiration”, he was a “bright human character”, even a personality with “an incredible smile”. All these features “provided him the opportunity to express in a folklore style, that is to a great extent figuratively, in simple words and convincingly the idea of the unity of the objective and subjective factor in the revolutionary movement” (Pavlov, 1977, pp. 33-34). In this ideological and value vein is also Vulko Chervenkov’s article *To Vasil Levski’s 80th anniversary*, where he categorically emphasizes that the Bulgarian national revolution is “typically carried out by the peasantry” and Botev and Levski are “convinced opponents of any form of exploitation”, “fighters for a social republic”. He finds the greatness of the two in the fact that “they are the predecessors of the working class, of its struggle for liberation”. Here Vulko Chervenkov also imposes the thesis, which dominated quite some time in science and journalism, that “the Bulgarian bourgeoisie was a traitorous class from the beginning to the end”.

Thus in the second half of the 1940’s and 1950’s the public debate in Bulgaria on the Apostle’s life and deed, held in the literature published, a new type of mis-

conceptions are accumulated, distorting in a new way the image about the great Bulgarian. Levski is already shown as “an ordinary organizer and practitioner of the national revolution” imposing foreign ideas and suggestions. Of course, the fact that he is agile, brave, courageous, “an unusual personality” etc. is not denied. However, the emphasis lies on the fact that because of the lack of a solid education, he did not possess “a full ideological maturity”, which could allow him to propose an independent political doctrine. One that could become the engine of the liberation movement. The Apostle's epistolary legacy categorically refutes the idea that stresses only Levski's organizational talent and presents him as not more than an ordinary functionary of the revolutionary organization. “If all of this was true, history would not deal with Levski since it yet does not show interest in the life of “the great clerks”. And seemingly in defiance of these lovers of Vasil Levski, history still shows an interest in the Apostle, in his deed and ideas” (Genchev, 1987, p. 185).

The second manipulation regarding Vasil Levski in this period is related to the social characteristics of his views. The interest of which social forces does Levski express. From today's viewpoint this question is clear: the interests of the most constructive internal forces – “the middle class”, the intelligentsia, even part of the “chorbadjii” (the gaffers) (Pavlov, 2017, p. 261). However, for these dogmatic years, this was a problem. We should admit that this question existed way back in the literature before 1944. After 9 September the Apostle was considered “a representative of the people” that was fighting for freedom. Without clarifying the content of the “people” concept, nor its social components. For instance, Ivan Klincharov notes that what we mean is the “labor people!” Other authors note that Levski is a representative of the peasantry, the poor and middle-class craftsmen or where appropriate of the labor people's intelligentsia. The aim of this scenario is to prove that Levski is against the bourgeoisie, that he is “a peasants' leader and revolutionary”, and to suggest that the bourgeois-democratic revolution from the end of the 19th C. was conducted almost without the participation of the well-off layers of the Bulgarian population. Practically this thesis repeats what was written by Georgi Bakalov, for whom “Levski failed to reach a higher ideological level and remained a petty-bourgeois revolutionary, who even dismissed the past by swearing the revolutionaries before the gospel, before God, and he wanted there to be a lion with a crown on the seal of the organization” (Bakalov, 1960, p. 73). Another variant of this opinion is the version that insists that “Vasil Levski dreamed of such a republic, in which there will neither be a feudal, nor a chorbadjii's (that is, a bourgeois) exploitation, where the people would be the ruler of its own destiny”.

As a result of the said so far, we can summarize that since 9 September 1944 until the end of the 1950'a, the logics of the ongoing debate in Bulgaria, found

in the publications on Levski in the print media and historiography, is directed to proving a strongly politicized and consciously presupposed thesis. According to its extreme adherents, Levski overcame the bourgeois-democratic ideas and reached (or at least touched upon) the ideas of socialism.

Despite the existence of manifestations of dogmatism in the sphere of the public-political thinking after 9 September 1944, the serious representatives of the historical science continue the Bulgarian debate on Vasil Levski's life and deed. In 1947 the Apostle's scientific bibliography was published, written by Ivan Undzhiev. This work was started as early as the 1930's as a continuation of the works published by Dimitar Strashimirov before that. In the next decade the valuable scientific works of Khristo Gandev, Nikola Kondarev, Alexander Burmov, Mihail Dimtrev were published. They summarize their pre-war research. Dimitar Kosev also publishes his *Lectures on contemporary Bulgarian history*, which for some time were the official university course on the problems of the Bulgarian Revival – including on the questions related to the Levski studies. The research dedicated to Vasil Levski as a personality and a unique phenomenon in Bulgarian society, are based only on a wide historical context. In the works of Khristo Khristov, Mercia MacDermot, Tsvetana Pavlovska, Krumka Sharova, Nikolay Genchev, Nikolay Zhechev, Stefan Doynov, Doyno Doynov, the Apostle's contribution to the development of the national-liberation ideology are fully assessed, whereby the view about him from the preceding decades as only the practitioner-organizer of the revolution were overcome.⁴

During the studied period (1956 – 1989) together with the development of the public debate on the Apostle's life and deed with the means of the academic science, the power holders in the face of the BCP naturally continue to put efforts in adding Levski within their politics and propaganda. They continue to “acquire” Levski's legacy for the cause of socialism! The ambition to impose “their own Levski” is visible – that is one belonging to the power holders. Yet sometimes he is quite far away from the authentic historical image. This tendency is strongly observed not only in party documents, but also on the pages of the print media. The concrete steps for its implementation boil down to distorting some aspects of

⁴ These fundamental works are a successful addition to a lot of smaller or bigger research in the 1970's and 1980's, which shed valuable light on Levski's deed: Great and immortal. Materials from a scientific session held on 16 February 1963. Plovdiv, 1963; Sacred and pure republic: reports and scientific papers from the session on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Vasil Levski's death, Yambol, 1973; Zhechko, P., Without sleep. Without rest. A book about Vasil Levski, S., 1986; Yonkov, Kh. and Yonkova, S., Vasil Levski and the Bulgarian national revolution; Vuzvuzova-Karateodorova, K., Nonewa, Z., Tileva, V., Vasil Levski. A documentary chronicle, S., 1987; Tsanev, D., Prodev, S., Time is in us and we are in time, S., 1986; Karaivanov, P., Vasil Levski in the memories of Vasil Karaivanov.

Vasil Levski's personality, ideas and revolutionary deed. What does this specifically involve?

First, the socialist ideal is represented as a continuation and triumph of Levski's political ideal for a "sacred and pure republic". The principles Levski thinks the future republic should be built on, the future people's rule, are recognized as the fundamental pillars for building the socialist state. The equality of the nations and the national minorities, the historical implementation of the Bulgarian interests, the freedom of the personality, the tolerance to different religions, etc. are interpreted as points of departure for social reformism, exceeding the ordinary ideas of the bourgeois ideologists. The party mentors draw particular attention to the word "people's", which is overused in all possible collocations: "people's republic", "people's health", "people's culture", "people's education", "people's sport", etc.

In the party documents, in speeches and statements etc. Levski's republicanism is defined as an analogue of the ideological achievements of the socialist societies: "Having forgotten the great truth who the great revolutionary, politician and organizer of the revolution belongs to, the Bulgarian bourgeoisie tried to hang his bright face on the shabby flag of its doomed system. However, the working class, its party and all progressive forces in the Bulgarian society assessed in the most precise and complete way the greatness of the immortal revolutionary" (Zhivkov, 1987, p. 3). Hence the passing over in silence of the bourgeois nature of the Revival era, and also the petty-bourgeois, liberal character of Levski's views.

Secondly, the view that Levski's ideas are practically implemented by the communists during the socialist era, is advocated through the media. They are interpreted as the source of a new patriotism and an indestructible impulse for struggle against any violence over the human spirit. It is highlighted more than once that during the turning point that socialism is, a skill is needed that is the same as Levski's, namely to probe deeply into the realities of the historical moment, to reconsider and reevaluate the gained experience, to derive the public's long-lasting strategic tasks. Back in the years Georgi Dimitrov emphasized: "The Bulgarian labor intelligentsia, despite everything, remained loyal to the legacy of its teachers Levski, Botev and others and there is not a single force in the world that can make it betray its people and class". One of the basic instruments to promote this position are the questionnaires and the anniversary rubrics with readers' letters in the central dailies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Third, the power holders' aspirations in the second half of the 20th century are traditionally related to attempts to "dress up" Levski in accordance with the political environment by not highlighting some of his views. For instance, the anti-imperial ideas of the Apostle regarding Russia (in his letters he

makes harsh statements against the mythical “grandfather Ivan”), and also the persistent imposition of the thesis that Bulgaria cannot continue to exist, to liberate itself and to develop etc. Why? Because of the sensitivity of the Bulgarian power holders to this topic, since most of them have the clear idea that they owe their place in power to the support by the Soviet leadership and the CPSU. It is namely due to this reason that Vasil Kolarov creates a formula that was for a long time an axiom for those interpreting the relations between Bulgaria and Russia. It states: despite the aggressive goals of the Russian tsarism, Russia has always defended the Bulgarian interests. It is our liberator and patron and Russian politics has always been in harmony with the Bulgarian interests unlike the pro-Turkish policy of the western capitalist countries (Kolarov, 2005, p. 245).

The tendency considered here proves that just like the political parties from the preceding decades, which were in power, the BCP could not resist the temptation to “take advantage” of the Apostle’s deed to stabilize its positions in power. This element, related to the bureaucratic attempts to construct Levski’s public image in the socialist era, proves that in the 1960’s the communist ideology slowly yet visibly started to lose its previous infecting and attractive force. Hence the ambition of the power holders to expand the social basis of power, including by touching upon the example set by the ideas of an indisputable hero from the national pantheon, such as Vasil Levski.

The Apostle of Freedom as a dissident symbol

Since the mid-1970s in the whole evolution of the debate in Bulgaria on the Apostle a new tendency has been observed in the reasoning about what Levski has left as his political legacy. It is related above all to Nikolay Genchev’s creative work. In 1973 he published his book *Levski, the revolution and the future world*. In it the author interprets in a new untraditional way the Apostle’s deed and ideas. Basically it is a development of a new ideological and evaluative doctrine, with a strong critical store against the realities of the socialist political reality. What expression does this tendency find?

First, prof. Nikolay Genchev destroys the traditional idea that after Zachary Stoyanov, Dimitar Strashimirov, Alexander Burmov, Ivan Undzhiev, nothing really essential, can be added to the overall evaluation of Vasil Levski’s life and deed.

Secondly, the romantic-glorifying vision of Levski, imposed by Ivan Vazov in the Bulgarian conscience with the means of fiction, has been broken up. In Levski, Nikolay Genchev sees not only the legendary hero, but also one of the greatest politicians and strategists of new Bulgaria and the Balkans in the second half of the 19th C. “A political genius who had seen the western European hypocrisy concerning Bulgaria and the Russian self-interest regarding

the Bulgarian interests, and also the Balkan political tricks and had guessed with a rare historical intuition the correct road to the Bulgarian liberation, passing through an independent and victorious national revolution, through political reforming of the Balkans under the form of a Balkan democratic republic, opposing both nationalism and the Great Powers' interests, which compete for the Turkish legacy in the Orient”.

In this sense, Nikolay Genchev shows the tragedy of the Apostle's personality and deed. Moreover not only as a personal drama, but also as a collapse of the ideal for an independent national liberation and unification of the Bulgarian people. Nikolay Genchev openly praises Levski's patriotism and his view for a free and unified people “where the Bulgarian lives in Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia”. An alternative which is discarded from Bulgaria's foreign policy agenda after WWII.

Third, as a prominent public figure in the debate in Bulgaria on the Apostle's life and deed, Nikolay Genchev makes a couple of unambiguous suggestions that the communist nomenclature finds hard to accept. One of them is related to the author's thesis that Levski is Bulgaria's greatest son, an insightful politician, an ingenious ideologist and strategist of the national revolution. The leadership of the BCP found it difficult to accept such a historical assessment since it basically debunks the aureole of those who had established and been leaders of the communist party in the past century. A tendency that became stronger when they came to power in 1944 when the idea that the only great people are the classics of Marxism-Leninism. While the merits of the other revolutionary and political activists are acknowledged only reluctantly. The challenge in this case is so great, since Vasil Levski is not a communist, he is not even a utopian socialist as Botev.

Not less irritating is prof. Genchev's thesis that a century after the Apostle was hanged, no one in Bulgaria dared to question the greatness of Vasil Levski. And everyone is quick to place his picture and his messages under the flag of their party. Including the organizations with totalitarian biases in their ideology and their political practice. And finally the silent position against the BCP's attempt to combine the incompatibles: its totalitarian ideology with Levski's democratic views. More particularly – why is the question not approached about implementing Levski's ideas in the period after the imposition and realization of the so-called “April line”, developed under Todor Zhivkov's leadership after 1956,

For the party ruling elite, which is most closely related to the respective political course, it is not acceptable that Nikolay Genchev considers Levski as a bearer of liberal ideas and values, based on the principles of representative democracy, of lawfulness, on the person's development and freedom. Moreover, they are assessed as indisputable political achievements of the modern world

in the modern times. Thus the nomenclature mode of thinking apparently sees some kind of “neglect” and visible “underestimation” of those values that the BCP’s April line presumably carries. “Similar to his Renaissance predecessors”, Nikolay Genchev concludes, “Levski thinks that for the natural, divine rights of the personality to be exercised, what is above all necessary is freedom, “full freedom”, conditions which will guarantee free human expression. The freedom of personality, not limited by any power, apart from life’s laws, this is Levski’s ideal about the conditions in which the human being must live. And if Levski is called the Apostle of freedom, this is not only because he fought for Bulgaria’s political liberation, so that new power holders, with hats and in tailcoats could rule the Bulgarians, but because he fought for a society of free people, because he suffered and was hanged on the gallows for the person’s natural rights” (Genchev, 1987, p. 101).

Fourth, professor Nikolay Genchev’s work is a key moment in the overall history of the debate in Bulgaria, related to the Apostle’s life and deed, since the author also develops the thesis that Vasil Levski’s political ideal is a republican one, but in the variant – a bourgeois democratic republic! In comparison to the party-affiliated writings, Nikolay Genchev highlights the strong focus Levski places on the representative democracy. This tendency also finds expression in his ideas about the people’s rule, about guaranteeing with all means the people’s and the public’s control over the government’s bodies – especially over the executive and the legislative branches of power. The author expressly emphasizes that in the *The next*, the Apostle envisages death for everyone who rejects the predestined state system – “democratic republic” and replaces it by authoritarian rule. Following this logic, prof. Genchev suggests the understanding that Vasil Levski’s ideals have indisputable value advantages over the reality that has been created in Bulgaria after Todor Zhivkov’s April line was advanced. And that the Apostle’s brightest ideals were not implemented in real life and the era of socialism. That they are still a political dream, formulated by the great Bulgarian, without it being evaluated and reproduced in a beneficial for all practice. Because starting from the natural egalitarian instinct of our people, for a civil and political equality, Levski tries to project a new society, built on the principles of democracy and democratic order: “The historical development, Nikolay Genchev concludes, proves clearly enough the greatness of Vasil Levski’s ideas – Vasil Levski being the most complete democrat and humanist in Bulgarian history. Didn’t history confirm that only democracy and the democratic regimes could satisfy to the greatest extent the biological, social and psychological needs of the human personality” (Genchev, 1987, p. 99).

Fifth, apart from the Apostle’s revolutionary deed and his ideological views, Nikolay Genchev’s attention is also directed towards Vasil Levski’s personality, his mentality. A tendency that started with Ivan Vazov and Zachary

Stoyanov, and continued in Mercia Macdermot's, Nikolay Haitov's and Radoi Ralin's documentary texts. However, this is a tendency containing the potential to draw new conclusions, as far as there is someone to make them innovative. This is what Nikolay Genchev precisely does: he is seeking to find the truth about Levski and his essence as a human being (as a personality) – in the greatness of his spirit, so that his practical achievements in the Bulgarian People's national-liberation movement be fully understood.

Which are the major traits in Vasil Levski's character that prof. Genchev points out as values that are of an intransient nature in the Bulgarian national psychology?

Above all in all his big and sustainable dimensions the Apostle is a Renaissance figure, a great, courageous and unlimited in time Romancisist. It is from these qualities that stem the ebullience and love of life so typical of him. They express the optimism of the epoch and his resolve to perform a memorable historical deed. It is no coincidence that whenever he was asked whether he was not afraid, noting that he invariably feels happy, Levski would answer the following: "Why should I feel afraid, given that I have beforehand sent my soul to God and have taken this path". Hence in this man from Karlovo ebullience and self-sacrifice merge in a whole that serves as a balance to his spirit and his character "unheard of" before.

In his work, prof. Genchev emphasizes the fact that the Apostle is wholly devoted to his fatherland, even though he has the grounds to believe that he can hardly bring the struggle to a successful end, given the serious risks that the illegal and illegitimate political activity create. **It is from here that stems a basic trait in Levski's mentality – his selflessness that is evident in the way he perceives his own destiny.** Evidence to this is the content of the famous letter he writes to Filip Totyu where he analyzes separate issues pertaining to the national liberation movement and reaches philosophical conclusions to expose his remarkable and vivid mental portrait. It is in this letter that he says the simple words: "We are yearning to see our Fatherland free, even though I might be told to look after the ducks. Isn't this the case? In my opinion this is what is fair and human". And goes on to say that: "I have pledged I will sacrifice myself for the Fatherland's liberation, rather than be someone else. I think the people should judge about this and I should not voice my own view. Humankind deems the latter as something that should be despised as foolish and simple. What else should I long for but see my Fatherland free. After all, this is our destiny today – I should not see myself sitting at a big desk but die, brother. This is the destiny and purpose we should give to any Bulgarian worker. It is then that our performance will shine brightly and Bulgaria will resound most as a single state throughout Europe" (Levski, 1973, p. 112).

In another letter written in the summer of 1872, when the intrigues against him started, Levski said: “I have dedicated myself to the Fatherland since 1861 and to serve it until my death and to work according to the public will”. Nikolay Genchev underlines that such self-sacrifice has nothing in common with the monk’s submission nor with the political brutality, nor with subservience to mean passions: “This is a strong human feeling that arises only in big souls during great epochs. A miserable epoch cannot give birth to such clean and strong human beings, while a narrow human soul cannot take in such a noble and proud self-sacrifice” (Genchev, 1987, p. 110).

In his research Nikolay Genchev, naturally, does not ignore one of Levski’s most typical traits that has been noted by all those writing about Levski. This is namely the Apostle’s bravery that is almost legendary. However the new thing that prof. Genchev adds to this topic is the fact that he exposes the content and the moral meaning of the historical responsibility that provides the fundament of Levski’s bravery. This is not an adventurous narrative inspired by the reading of memoirs, novels, sagas and the like: “Vasil Levski’s bravery is manifested above all in his resolve to bring down the old world, and stand up against the existing order that is based on military power, on tyranny and on a fanatical conservatism. His boldness and courage comprises the fact that amid the chaos of a wild empire, he managed to outline the contours of the future world. This is indeed a historical bravery. It has nothing to do with the pirate’s courage, or with the zealot’s peace of mind, or with the insanity of social adventurism. This is the courage of the great spirit and the beautiful mind“ (Genchev, 1987, p. 112).

Levski was so deeply dedicated to his great mission, that all that he did to perform this mission would bring him joy and the utmost gratification. It is only thus that we could possibly explain his supernatural perseverance, endurance and internal harmony. A specific fact is much revealing in this regard. It has not been widely known, for instance, that during the Second Legion, Levski fell ill. In order to save his life Serbian medical doctors perform an operation on his stomach in the town of Zaychar. He was on the brink of survival. This operation, however, did not prove to be fully successful (the most probable reason being that the wound was not sufficiently disinfected). As a result for more than five years – until he was hanged, Levski lived with such an unhealed wound. Matey Mitkaloto gave him advice and prescription about how to treat it with herbs. Yet this popular medical treatment was not of much help and as a result the Apostle started touring the whole of Bulgaria – for four times, regardless of the pain, risks and dangers of the surrounding environment. Furthermore he never had the chance to enjoy a sound sleep because conspiratorial activities were more easily performed at night. Hence in order to endure the colossal physical and

psychological tension, his entire energy was collected and devoted to the sacred deed he aspired to carry out (Haytov, 1982, pp. 1, 7).

Levski turned night into day and set out to perform his mission with a unique self-discipline. The perfect control over the mind, combined with indisputable organizational skills, is yet another trait of Levski's character that Nikolay Genchev dwells on and that stands out against the backdrop of the environment in the 1970s in socialist Bulgaria. For well known reasons, Bulgaria and the Balkans as a whole were in the zone of influence of the Ottoman Empire for centuries on end. This empire is characterized by all defects typical of the frame of thought and the activities carried out in the Orient during the Feudal era. Hence the man of the Orient tended not to take the initiative, given that the environment deterred them from accumulating serious financial welfare; such a personality tended to work in an easy manner; what was missing was the organization skills typical of the technically developed nations; it is quite often the case that any of today's duties were postponed for the next day; the man from the Middle East is not fond of taking risks. Against the backdrop of such backward and conservative traditions that manifested themselves in the Bulgarian national psychological makeup of the 19th century, the personality of Vasil Levski stands out: "Disciplined in terms of both personality and spirit, rigidly consistent, and never knowing the meaning of peace as a state of mind, he was invariably in high spirits and aspiring towards something. With such qualities, Levski managed to wake up the Bulgarian society from its centuries-long drowse and to affiliate it with something unknown, alluring and greater" (Genchev, 1987, p. 117).

The analyzed traits of the Apostle's mentality undoubtedly expose a harmoniously developed personality and integrity characterized by exceptional self-control and presence of mind. "In his personality co-exist mental ease and revolutionary resolve, the dreamer and the man of action, the skill to be leader with the wiseman's submission, the talent to issue orders with the readiness to submit to orders. He is demanding to other people, yet most demanding to himself. He is strong but never tough, his mental purity served as a mirror to all who contacted him. This is the only way to account for the fact that he managed to become a leader, even though he did not have the imperious and domineering nature of Stambolov and Benkovski, the rebellious glory of Hitov, the blazing pen of Rakovski or Karavelov's literary talent. He would lead the people through the magic of his integrity and personality – the Prometheus of Bulgarian freedom" (Haitov, 2007, p. 9)

An overall assessment of the book *Levski, the revolution and the future world* is an example of how an historical book can be at once a profound piece of research and a marvellous piece of journalism.

Levski's universal dimensions in the conditions of democracy

After 1989 as the mass media started publishing and promoting new or edited versions of the documents that evidenced the Apostle's activities, what took place was the promotion of various perspectives through which parallels were drawn between Levski and other European leaders of the second half of the 19th century – Guiseppe Mancini, Rigas Feraios, *Lajos Kossuth*, Sándor Petőfi, Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin, Guiseppe Garibaldi, *Fridtjof Nansen*, etc. The aim of this discourse among the representatives of the intelligentsia was to expose Levski's universal dimensions, and to place his views alongside concepts such as republicanism, constitutionalism, tolerance, rule of the people, rule of law, etc.

A special emphasis was placed on Levski's ideas connected with the revival and the reconstruction of the liberated state of Bulgaria. What transpires behind them are those from the political thought in Europe. Such an angle of analysis is present mainly in the academic research such as: Vasil Levski and Statehood. Second legal and historical scientific session. Sofia, 2004; Tsvetana Pavlovska, *I Believe in the Republic. Contemporary Republicanism in the Age of the Bulgarian Revival*, Sofia, 1999; Bulgarian Revival. Ideas, Personalities, Events. Vol. 5., Sofia, 2003; Georgi Yankov, *Political Thought from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2006; Ivan Stoyanov, *New Outlines of Vasil Levski's Ideology and Activity*, 2012; Trendafil Mitev, *Knowledge about Bulgaria*, Sofia, 2016; Plamen Mitev, *Creation and Activity of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee*, 1998; Doyno Doynov, *Levski. The Clearest Mystery*, 2014; Konstantin Kossev, *Vasil Levski and Bulgaria's Resurrection*, 2017; Plamen Pavlov, *Vasil Levski. The Other Name of Freedom*, 2017, etc. These books consider Levski not only as an organizer and leader of the revolution and of the Internal Revolutionary Organization but above all as an ideologist who lays the fundamental ideological pillars for the construction of the new Bulgarian statehood.

What dominates is the attempt to analyze Levski's ideas beyond the narrow national goals of a local uprising. Central to these books is the Apostle's republicanism, which he interprets as a replacement of the *despotic and tyrannical system* by a *democratic republic*. This idea of Levski's is attributed mainly to Mancini's influence. In the organization's draft statute titled *Workers' Statute for the Liberation of the Bulgarian People* (1871), the Apostle substantiates the Bulgarian people's motives and goals: "Through a common revolution a thorough transformation should be made of the present-day despotic and tyrannical system in the state that is to be replaced by a democratic republic (people's rule). At the very same place where our ancestors with the power of weaponry and with their own blood and where inhumanly raging today the Turkish cutthroats and janissaries and where the law of strength dominates, a temple of truth and fair

freedom should be built up. The Turkish gaffers' business and mentality should give way to agreement, brotherhood and the perfect equality between all peoples. Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, etc shall be equally treated on any terms: whether in belief, nationality, citizenship, or whatever else. They will all be subject to a common law, which will be drawn up by the will of all nationalities". These words uniquely expose Levski's broad worldview. It should not be forgotten that at the time there are only two genuine republics – Switzerland and the United States of America. In this context "Levski's ideal for a future free Bulgarian society rests on the most relevant achievements made by the democratic political thought from the Enlightenment. Above all the Apostle clearly states his preferences for the republican form of representative statehood. He highly appreciated the circumstances that in the specific Bulgarian conditions, there is no national dynasty, and that the Bulgarian aristocracy was done away with, while the people for five centuries had developed an egalitarian conscience. All these objective political circumstances suggest that likeliest and most acceptable should be the democratic republic. Furthermore, such a state order best matches the principle of the common will on which his revolutionary ideology and deeds are based" (Yankov, 2006, p. 195)

This is why the contemporary historiography lays the emphasis on the Apostle's maturity whereby he justifies the need to create a separate and independent Bulgarian state with a republican form of governance, in which elections, the rule of the people and of law will triumph. "Such a change is relevant for the Balkans, among others, and is also an integral part of the common European and world progress. There is not a single more successful alignment of the goals of the Bulgarian liberation with the spirit and the tendencies of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the revolutions of the 18 and 19 centuries among the political programs of persons and groups of the Bulgarian society during the Revival (and they are more than one)" (Doynov, 2012, pp. 181-182).

Levski convincingly defends his republican views⁵ in the report he writes to the *Svoboda (Freedom)* newspaper where he underlines the following: "We are also people and want to live a human life: we want to be fully free in our land where the Bulgarian lives – in Bulgaria, Thracia, Macedonia. No matter what nationality the people living in this place are, they will enjoy equal rights with the Bulgarian in everything. We will have a single flag on which 'a sacred and pure republic' will

⁵ In the adopted Statute of the BRCC of 1872 they are relieved. Researchers are unanimous that a compromise has been established between the ideas of Karavelov and Levski. Yet this does not affect Levski's revolutionary and democratic platform. He manages to preserve the following: the idea for a revolution and for taking immediate and radical revolutionary action. It is no coincidence that in a letter to Filip Totyu, who suggests that military assistance should be sought from Russia, the Apostle responds as follows: "Brother! We would not decline assistance from the devil either, yet we have our purpose".

be written,⁶ and in the Bulgarian land there will be no king but a people's rule". This future national state should be the 'temple of truth and fair freedom', where agreement, brotherhood, and the perfect equality between all nationalities will reign. This is how Levski equals the state to God's temple. "There is hardly another Bulgarian next to him or, even less so following him, that has made the conjecture that the modern organization of the state should be established in compliance with true freedom – that is, the truth as it is – free and complete. The truth in the elections for state and municipal institutions, the truth in the creation of these institutions, the truth in their functioning, the truth in all related to the state – the truth as a confession in a temple" (Stoyanov, 2011, p. 26). This is how Levski in a succinct yet clear way announces the advantages of the new society, which opposes the Turkish one as the only alternative type of society.

In the debate about the life and deed of Vasil Levski, which has continued in the contemporary academic and media space, it is increasingly the case that the Apostle's views are interpreted on the balance between the preservation of the domestic and the affiliation to the achievements and the values of the more progressive European nations and states. He argues that "being equal with the other peoples depends on our own united effort". After all, it is only thus that "Bulgaria will resound as the most glorious single state throughout Europe". What Levski sees as the first condition for Bulgaria's own image as a free state and member of the European family, is the preservation of the creative energy of patriotism and the people's independent existence. In Levski's ideological world, patriotism is an integral part of the spirit of the Bulgarian Revival. In modern times, the strategy for the Bulgarian national self-esteem was provided by Paisiy Hilendarski in the Slav-Bulgarian History. It is there that the monk from Athos places the Bulgarians within several prestigious coordinate systems: founders and creators of the Christian civilization, a far more honest and good nation compared to their neighbors (the Greek), which has even quite often determined the fate of the Balkans during the Middle Ages. And, most importantly, Paisiy was the first to see in the native language and in the historical memory the most prominent and mandatory signs of a developed nationality in modern times.

The contemporary stage in the development of the big public debate in Bulgaria related to the Apostle's spiritual heritage is particularly susceptible to Levski's ideas pertaining to tolerance and ethnic tolerability. After all, in the construction of this temple of "truth and fair freedom" Levski introduces as a remarkable principle "the equal treatment of all nationalities", which unveils

⁶ In the version edited by Lyuben Karavelov, this phrase is worded as follows: "On our flag that will be placed on the Balkan peninsula, only three words should be written: 'Freedom and all should be given what is due'. As Filip Panayotov points out, "the difference is huge". Levski's authentic phrase exposes his ideological richness which turns him into a revolutionary of a large scale, and so do his views of the future world.

him as a democrat of the highest rank. He is a zealous supporter of “agreement, brotherhood and the perfect equality between all peoples. Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, etc shall be equally treated on any terms: whether in belief, nationality, citizenship, or whatever else”. Yet it is important that we should specify that the Bulgarian functionaries during the Revival made a clear distinction between the ordinary working Turks and the Ottoman feudal ruling elite. In Proclamation to the Bulgarian People that Ivan Kassabov wrote in 1869, there is a call to arms. It is argued that the Turkish people will enjoy equal religious and political rights in the new liberated Bulgaria. What is also mentioned in the manifesto of the BRCC (Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee) of April-May 1872, is that “the Bulgarians do not rebel against the Turkish people but against the Turkish government and the Turks that support this government”. What is written in the Proclamation written by Hristo Botev and Stefan Stambolov, which was disseminated on the eve of the Stara Zagora uprising of 1875, is that ‘a brotherly hand’ should be lent to the peaceful Turks as well as help and guardianship: “We (the participants in the revolutionary organization) should regard the honour, property and life of the peaceful Turks as dear and enlightened as they themselves see them”.

By focusing on the equality between the different religions and nationalities, Vasil Levski pays special attention to the problem of the equal treatment of the citizens. Within this category he puts all residents of the future liberated Bulgarian republic – regardless of their belief or nationality. They are all entitled to enjoy equal civil freedoms and political rights. “Today’s age is the age of the freedom and equal treatment of all nationalities” – the Deacon writes in his letter of 6 October 1871 and goes on to say that: “Today he who feels worried and depressed and he who feels the burden of the slave’s chains and who bears the name of the mournful and shameful slave, has mustered up all his strength – both moral and physical – and seeks the opportunity to get rid of the burden of slavery in any way... Everyone wants to live a free life and to enjoy God’s nature, and wants to be a human being”. These words of the Apostle directly correspond to the ideas of the contemporary European world. What is more, they were uttered in the second half of the 19th century when the slavery had just been abolished in the United States and the manifesto had just been promulgated for repealing the serfdom in Russia. “These thoughts suffice to define the Apostle as a citizen not only of Bulgaria but a citizen of Europe and the world. After all, saying that the slogan that the 20th century is the century of freedom and equality of all nationalities, when you live in the conditions of an eastern Asian feudal despotism means too much. It means that you know this century, and are well aware of the European peoples and understand the new moments in the development of the European public space, and that you accept this

development for all – both for those in their own country, and for those that are still under foreign power” (Stoyanov, 2011, p. 31).

Levski provides an argumentation of the great universal idea that a man cannot possibly be the silent witness of slavery, even if there may be only a single enslaved nation! In his opinion the revolutionary’s commitment is to fight for the freedom of all peoples and after they liberate their own land, they should take on the fight for humanity and human values wherever they have been treaded.

A new aspect of the contemporary debates and views about Levski is the fact that his activity is analyzed in the context of his political apostleship, interpreted as the implementation of ideologies and new practices that are directed at an entirely revolutionary political activity. In its entirety this assumption was launched and embedded in the social thought in Bulgaria by Trendafil Mitev in his monograph *Bulgaria’s Civilizational Leaders* (2014). The researcher has justifiably defined Levski as a principally new type of functionary, who is completely different from the traditional until then types of political leaders. After all, “despite all weaknesses that the Bulgarian from the ages of Ottoman rule has – it is he, the Apostle, he takes up to sacrifice himself for the sake of people’s freedom!?” This is how Vasil Ivanov Kunchev reinvigorates and transforms the essence of apostleship in politics. It is this researcher that promotes the Apostle’s image not simply as being the first and immediate disseminator of new ideas, just like the Christian saints – the apostles Peter and Paul, but also as a worthy individual within the world revolutionary and political process. For, the political apostle is not an ordinary enlightener, disseminating only new ideas or a revolutionary practitioner, politician and statesman. He is the **leader of all the people**, who is the first to become aware of the specificity of the age in which he takes actions and **rejects** the completely outdated interpretations of his contemporary followers and supporters. The political apostle (later on such are Stefan Stambolov, Georgi Benkovski, Gotse Delchev, Dame Gruev, among others), is the one **to personally draw up** an original strategy and tactics for his practical action, so that the latter should **make up for all** the people’s faults and should ensure that he has optimal positives to achieve the desired social result. The political apostle **personally manages** the actions in the field, overcoming all possible adversities and hardships of human life. It is he who **gives up** worldly goods to which the normal people aspire and totally devotes himself to the social deed he has undertaken. As a rule of thumb, in his actions, the Apostle burns in the fire of struggle (Mitev, 2014, p. 208).

In this regard Levski is not simply a revolutionary but a civilizational apostle dedicated to the people’s cause who possesses unprecedented stoicism and has an adamantly defined mission that he will pursue a politics that is most beneficial to his people. Hence it is no accident that during his lifetime he was rightfully conferred the title of the Apostle of Freedom.

Conclusion

The narrative about the Apostle's ideas serves as a unifying core for generations of Bulgarians. In case a generation of Bulgarians had no idea about the Apostle's life, they would have lived a far more inconsistent, and to a certain degree chaotic and as a rule an unfruitful life. Levski's inexhaustible energy, his dedication to the social deed and his readiness for self-sacrifice show that the Apostle has believed that the the positive qualities and features of the Bulgarian people dominate over the inevitable defects determined by the Ottoman rule of 500 years in Moesia, Thracia and Macedonia. Apparently Levski has been convinced that fear has not caused a genetic damage to his contemporaries. After all, the rank and file of the Internal Revolutionary Organization (IRO) is joined by all strata of educated and honest patriots within the structure of the Bulgarian society during the Revival. It is namely Levski's unprecedented moral purity that bolsters their faith in the future of the Bulgarian people. This people that lived centuries on end under foreign rule and yet manages to give birth to titans such as the Apostle, Rakovski, Karavelov, Botev, Stambolov has managed to preserve and transfer in the course of time their basic human virtues.

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