

**Description of the original contributions
of
Assoc. Prof. Stefan Dechev, D.Sc.**

MONOGRAPHS

1. Between Common Meals and the Dishes of Constantinople: Diet and Cuisine in Ottoman Bulgaria and Neighboring Lands (from the 1830s to 1878). Sofia: RIVA, 2025, 575 pp. ISBN 978-954-320-992-7.

This work challenges the notion of Bulgarian culture as isolated, presenting it instead as open to innovation and deeply interconnected with developments across the Ottoman Empire and Europe. It examines shifts in daily life within the Ottoman Empire and their impact on dietary habits, while analyzing the spread of new utensils, foods, and dishes across various social strata. Early cookbooks are examined in detail, and the multifaceted nature of urban dining culture is described. The study makes a significant contribution through its broad Balkan perspective, offering the first analysis of culinary trends and cookbooks from across the Balkan lands and peoples that appeared prior to 1878.

2. The Unification Against the Backstage: Politics and Memory (1885–1998). Plovdiv: Janet 45, 2025, 477 pp. ISBN 978-619-186-982-4

Little-known facts regarding political developments in the Principality and Eastern Rumelia prior to September 6, 1885, are revealed here for the first time. The study seriously challenges the myth of universal unity surrounding the Unification of Bulgaria, as well as the unanimously positive memory of the event that has persisted for over a century. It analyzes the hidden forces that manipulated events, toppled governments, and opposed the Unification before September 6, 1885; examines the dramatic political conflicts that arose after 1885, refuting the notion of perfect national harmony following the event; and traces, in detail for the first time, how the Unification was remembered in the decades that followed. It also reveals in detail why the Unification failed to gain recognition as an official Bulgarian holiday until 1998.

STUDIES

1. Public Catering in Communist Bulgaria 1950s-1980s – Food and History, vol. 18, 1-2, 2020, Special issue Food and Drink in Communist Europe, pp. 49-74.

The system of public catering in communist Bulgaria between the early 1950s and the late 1980s is examined for the first time in academic literature. The study outlines the persistent gap between socialist ideology and the everyday realities faced by citizens. It reveals that, despite propaganda about culinary abundance, public dining establishments were characterized by poor hygiene, structural inefficiency, and a stark discrepancy between the promised plenty and the actual experience.

2. *Bulgarian Historiography and the Proto-ideology of the So-called "Revival Process" – Rumén Avramov (Ed.). The Forced Assimilation of Turks in Bulgaria, 1984–1989: Reflections on Ideology, History, and Consequences**. Centre for Advanced Study. Sofia: Riva, 2019, pp. 15–43.

For the first time, a detailed analysis has been conducted regarding the mechanisms and contributions of Bulgarian historiography (alongside ethnography and folklore studies) to legitimizing the totalitarian regime's assimilationist policy toward the Turks and Muslims of Bulgaria. The study reveals the proto-ideology behind the "Revival Process" and traces the concepts of ethnic homogeneity and the "restoration of roots," showing how they steadily paved the way for justifying the state-led policy. It also examines, for the first time, the methods used to marginalize the views of dissenting Ottomanists and to legitimize the prevailing narrative—a narrative that clearly bore the sanction of the relevant high-level ideological departments.

3. *Between Istanbul and Sarajevo via Belgrade - a Bulgarian cookbook from 1874* - in *A Garden of Earthly Delights – food in South-East Europe and the Balkans (17th – 19th c)*, Brill, Leiden, 2018, pp. 376-401.

For the first time, the second Bulgarian-language cookbook—published in Belgrade in 1874 by Dmitriia Smrikarov—is analyzed in great detail. The study demonstrates how food culture in the late Ottoman Balkans reflected a complex blend of regional, "Ottoman," and "Balkan" influences rather than isolated national cuisines. It outlines this culinary mix, highlighting various recipes that link the culinary traditions of Istanbul, Belgrade, and Sarajevo. It reveals that the region's culinary landscape was as culturally and ethnically diverse as its population prior to the crystallization of rigid modern national borders. Furthermore, it demonstrates for the first time how preparation methods—including the use of specific ingredients and regional meat dishes—connected the Bulgarian population to the broader dietary habits of the Danubian and Balkan regions.

4. "The Journey of the Bean to a Bulgarian National Dish: Ideology and Reality (18th–21st Centuries)" – *Historical Future (Istorichsko badeshte)* journal, 2015, No. 1–2, pp. 71–113.

For the first time, the introduction of the bean and its transformation from an everyday foodstuff into a symbol of national identity—spanning the period from the second half of the 18th century to the 21st century—are traced in depth and detail from historical and anthropological perspectives. The study reveals the distinction between the historical reality of dietary habits, on the one hand, and the subsequent ideological construction of tradition, on the other. It demonstrates in detail how the bean evolved into one of the defining markers of national cuisine.

5. Between Slavs and Old Bulgars: "Ancestors," "Race" and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century In: Geary, P., Klaniczay, G. *Manufacturing Middle Ages. Entangled History of Medievalism in nineteenth-century Europe*, Joep Leersen Series "National Cultivation of Culture". Amsterdam. Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, 2013, pp. 347-376.

<http://www.brill.com/manufacturing-middle-ages>

This study reveals how the Bulgarian national ideology of the late 19th century utilized the concepts of "race," "ancestors," and early medieval Slavic roots—prevalent at the time—to construct a modern national identity for the Bulgarians. For the first time, the analysis presents the influence of organicist ideologies regarding "tribe and nation" and of racial science on the development of Bulgarian national discourse.

6. "Hot Peppers" and Bulgarian National Cuisine: Between Historical Reality and Social Imagination (from the Second Half of the 18th Century to the Present Day) – *Historical Future*, 2013, No. 1–2, pp. 59–107.

This study offers the first analysis of the transformation of hot peppers and peppers in general—from an exotic commodity in the 18th century to a staple of Bulgarian national cuisine. It traces their integration into Bulgarian daily life over the course of several decades leading up to the mid-19th century. It also examines the symbolic significance of spiciness during the socialist era and pop-culture phenomena such as the *chushkopek* (pepper roaster), linking material culture to the construction of national identity.

ARTICLES

7. Bulgarian Historiography after 1989 – *Contemporary European History*, 2024, vol. 33, pp. 902-908.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/769846050/bulgarian-historiography-after-1989>

This is the first critical overview of Bulgarian historiography spanning the three decades following the changes of 1989, with a particular focus on the 20th century and contemporary history. The analysis examines the transition of historical scholarship from the communist regime to new methodological approaches and interpretations. It provides the first comprehensive account of key post-communist historiographical debates regarding previously taboo topics, the "archival revolution," and the emergence of new fields of research. Finally, the text addresses debates that have arisen in recent years, transcending the national paradigm and the left-right divide.

8. "Narrative Ingeniuty". About Bulgaria and Holocaust – Absences, Distortions, Sinkings. - *Sociological Problems*, 2024, No. 1, pp. 330-336.

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.sp-bg.eu/en/article/downloadFile/413

The first and, to date, only scholarly review of the Bulgarian translation of the work by French researcher Nadège Ragaru, „And the Bulgarian Jews Were Saved: A History of Knowledge about the Holocaust in Bulgaria“

9. Deportations from Macedonia and their Place in Bulgarian-Macedonian Relationships – *Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, vol. 20, No. 1-2/ 2023. *Identities*, pp. 92-103.

<https://identitiesjournal.edu.mk/index.php/IJPGC>

This study analyzes the extent to which—and the manner in which—the deportation of Jews

from Macedonia in March 1943 has shaped historical memory, political narratives, and diplomatic tensions between Bulgaria and North Macedonia in recent decades. It highlights the conflict between the narrative regarding the deported Macedonian Jews and that concerning the Jews saved within Bulgaria's pre-war borders, outlining the various stages this key point of contention between Sofia and Skopje has undergone, as well as the role of the international Jewish community in moderating and adjusting both narratives.

10. Bulgarian-Macedonian Cultural Conflict and Historical Narrative - *Avenues of Cooperation. Proceedings*, ed. Katerina Kolozova, Skopje: Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2022, pp. 50-59.

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.isshs.edu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Avenues-of-Cooperation-Proceedings.pdf>

For the first time, a way is being sought to explore and discuss sensitive historical topics between Bulgaria and North Macedonia without further exacerbating political and social tensions. The two national narratives are subjected to critical examination. The study considers how rigid, official national identities and state-sponsored historical narratives hinder mutual understanding and foster nationalist impassess. It traces the dangers inherent in the instrumentalization of history, analyzing how historical facts are often subordinated to contemporary political demands and nationalist myths, thereby sacrificing historical accuracy for short-term political goals. Finally, pathways to de-escalation are outlined through the reshaping of history education and public discourse on the past, encouraging multi-perspective approaches to the common and shared past.

11. Serbia – Peycheva, Lozanka et al. (eds.). *Constructing Bulgarian National Cultural Heritage Abroad*. Sofia: Paradigma, 2022, pp. 139–170.

The collection analyzes the historical and political contexts surrounding the construction and perception of the Bulgarian national minority and its cultural heritage in Serbia (the Western Outlands). The historical and anthropological analysis traces the evolution of Bulgarian communities in the Tsaribrod and Bosilegrad regions over time. It examines the ideological and nationalist narratives that influence the preservation or neglect of Bulgarian cultural heritage abroad. The identity of the local population is explored through the lens of modern theories regarding nations and nationalism.

12. *Military-Historical Heritage Abroad: Cross-Border Travel and Commemorative Practices* (co-authored with V. Voskresenski, L. Gergova, N. Vukov) – Peycheva, Lozanka et al. (eds.). *Constructing Bulgarian National Cultural Heritage Abroad*. Sofia: Paradigma, 2022, pp. 369–618.

Together with V. Voskresenski, L. Gergova, and N. Vukov, the study examines the interplay of historical memory, national narratives, and political relations in the interpretation of war memorials located outside the territory of present-day Bulgaria. Cross-border pilgrimages are analyzed in depth—both as instruments of political interaction and in the context of the intensification of historical disputes.

13. Denes Stefler, Stefan Detchev and others. *Traditional Eastern European Diet and Mortality: prospective evidence from the HAPIEE study* – European Journal of Nutrition, vol. 60, pp. 1091-1100 (2021)

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00394-020-02319-9>

Dénes Stefler is the leading author of the study, while Stefan Dechev and the co-authors provide a key cross-disciplinary contribution. The study examines the relationship between the traditional diet in Eastern Europe and mortality rates.

13a Detchev, Stefan. Food, borders, and interactions in South-East Europe (1830s –1870s) – In: Stefanov, Nenad and Srdjan Radović (eds.). *Boundaries and Borders in the Post-Yugoslav Space A European Experience*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2021, pp. 239-260.

The study outlines how culinary practices intersected and blurred social, political, cultural, and national boundaries in the pre-national and early national Balkans from the 1830s to the 1870s. The work highlights how food served as a vector for interaction and cultural exchange, despite emerging geopolitical divisions.

14. “Shopska salat”: The Road from a European Innovation to the National Culinary Symbol”, In: From Kebab to Ćevapčići. Eating Practices in Ottoman Europe” Interdisziplinäre Studien zum Östlichen Europa. Harrassowitz Wiesbaden, 2018, pp. 273-288.

This study traces, for the first time before an international academic audience, the historical creation and consolidation of the salad. Key contributions of the research lie in its interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon economic history, agricultural literature, and studies on vegetable production to analyze the emergence of this dish. The study examines the salad’s transformation from a standardized creation linked to state-run tourism in the mid-20th century (Balkantourist) into a deeply rooted national culinary emblem. It illustrates the recipe’s evolution from a modern, collective culinary innovation—influenced by broader European dietary trends—into a symbol of Bulgarian identity.

15. The Spread of Maize and Diet in the Balkans – *The Long Eighteenth Century. Vol. 1: The Past of the Balkans: Approaches and Visualizations*. Proceedings of the Conference of the Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Sofia, 2016, pp. 183–192.

<http://bulgc18.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Dalgiat-osemnadeseti-vek-1.pdf>

This study examines how the introduction and cultivation of maize transformed agriculture, the economy, and daily diets in the Balkan lands during the period specified in the title. The history of this foodstuff is explored through its connections to global processes, demographics, and changes within Ottoman society. The study traces how this new crop from the Americas spread across the Balkans, either replacing or complementing traditional grains. It also analyzes the impact of maize on culinary habits and the transition toward new local dishes and dining practices.

16. Sugar, Sweets, Power, and Pleasures in the Ottoman Eighteenth Century – The Long Eighteenth Century. Vol. 2: Pleasures and Prohibitions. Conference Proceedings of the Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Sofia, 2016, pp. 122–136.

<http://bulgc18.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Dalgiat-osemnadeseti-vek-2.pdf>

This study analyzes the relationship between the consumption of sugar-based products, social status, and the pursuit of pleasure within 18th-century Ottoman society. It demonstrates that sugar and sweets were not merely sources of sustenance but also served as markers of prestige and social standing. The work examines how the consumption of sweets was intertwined with elite practices, everyday culture, and the pleasures of the era, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the lifestyle, tastes, and cultural habits of the population in the Balkan and Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule during this period.

17. Between High Ottoman Cuisine and Europe: Slaveykov's Cookbook of 1870 and the Path to Modern Cooking – *Littera et Lingua*, Electronic Journal of Humanities, 2014, 3.

<http://slav.uni-sofia.bg/naum/lilijournal/2014/11/3/dechevs>

This study offers the first comprehensive and highly detailed analysis of the first cookbook in the Bulgarian language—authored by Petko Slaveykov and published in Constantinople in 1870. It characterizes the book as a cultural bridge between elite Istanbul Ottoman cuisine and modern European culinary practices. It demonstrates that Slaveykov's work is not merely a collection of folk recipes but comprises traditional Oriental dishes combined with European, Russian, and other culinary borrowings. The analysis reveals how the publication reflects the 19th-century European trend of transferring the professional skills of master chefs to the middle class and the new urban housewife. Finally, the text examines how food preparation evolved, becoming an integral part of the new urban lifestyle of Bulgarians on the eve of the Liberation.

18. From "Peasants" and "Christians" to "Bulgarians" and "Serbs" – Koprinarov, Lazar (Ed.). *Borders: Philosophical and Political Readings*. Sofia: Faber, 2012, pp. 9–28.

The study traces the evolution of mass self-identification among people in the Balkans between 1877 and 1918. It analyzes the transition from older, traditional forms of regional and religious affiliation—such as belonging to a village community or identifying simply as "Christians"—to the modern national consciousness of "Bulgarians" and "Serbs." The study also examines the impact of political and state borders on the formation of national cultural and social distinctions within the newly liberated Bulgarian state and neighboring Serbia.

HISTORY TEXTBOOK

The Hidden History. Polemics. Sofia: Paradox, 2019.

A critical re-evaluation of the established Bulgarian historical paradigm and the nationalist status quo is proposed. Traditional national narratives, as well as categories and frameworks—created or perpetuated by academic routines and dependencies—are challenged. The work encourages a fresh interpretation of historical facts and sources, seeking to identify inadequacies in our collective perception of the past. It provokes a historiographical debate challenging the ossified and retrograde views prevalent in Bulgarian historical scholarship. The specific contributions of this study focus on critiquing the academic historiographical status quo, Bulgarian-Macedonian relations, historical myths, the history of everyday life, microhistory, and gender history.