

# Jubileum / Юбилей



*Vassil Gjuzelev*

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## EX FONTIBUS AD VERITATEM. VASSIL GJUZELEV'S CONTRIBUTION TO SLAVIC AND BALKAN MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

Many scholars of Slavic and Balkan mediaeval studies for years read and use numerous books and documental publications by prominent Bulgarian historian Vassil Gjuzelev<sup>1</sup>. He is full member of the Bulgarian Academy of Science and President of the National Association of

<sup>1</sup> *Николов Г.Н.* Библиография на академик Васил Тодоров Гюзелев // ЛЪТОПИСЕЦЪ. ОУЧИТЕЛЪ. САМОДРЪЖЕЦЪ. Сборник в чест на Васил Гюзелев по случай неговата 80-годишнината. София, 2016. С. 15-96.

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Mediaeval and Byzantine Studies awarded with International Gottfried von Herder Prize. His Alma Mater — Sofia University «St. Clement of Ochrid», which he calls his «cloister» — is his true home for more than fifty years. Most of the faculty members — historians — are his former students who sincerely and deeply respect their Teacher.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 2016 Vassil Gjuzelev celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and it is good reason to recall his long and fruitful academic career from its very beginning in 1959 when the young historian graduated with *summa cum laude* from the History and Philosophy Department majoring in mediaeval Bulgarian history. His diploma paper on the pagan beliefs and funeral rites of ancient Southern Slavs marked the future trajectory of his studies. After two years of museum work in his native town of Dimitrovgrad the young historian began working at his University as Assistant Professor of Bulgarian history synchronously creating his first *opus magnum* — monograph on Boris-Michael, Prince and baptizer of Bulgaria (852–889)<sup>2</sup>. Published in 1969 this book immediately set its author among the elite of national historiography. Despite the monograph was more than enough to be defended as his first dissertation, Gjuzelev preferred to do another research (supported with ten months of sabbatical leave in Vienna working with outstanding Austrian Byzantinist Herbert Hunger) on the high administrative office of *kavkhan* and *ichirgu boil* in early mediaeval Bulgaria. With this dissertation he got his first degree in 1971 and a year later was elected Associate Professor. Since 1974 he headed the Chair of Bulgarian History for two full mandates to 1984. During these ten years Gjuzelev supervised the Section of mediaeval history in the national Institute for History and in 1973–1975 was Director of the newly founded National Historical Museum.

Huge administrative work did not slow down the historian's research. By those years Gjuzelev published several volumes of translated medieval sources on the Bulgarian history, which for years serve to many students and scholars all over the world, accompanying them with monograph on the new sources of mediaeval Bulgaria and collection of mediaeval European poetry dedicated to his motherland. He was among the main authors of two monumental tomes on the Bulgarian Middle Ages from the multi-volume edition of the Institute of History, and Brief History of Bulgaria translated into several languages. His monograph on Schools, Scriptoria, Books and Knowledge in Bulgaria in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> cc. written after his special course in Sofia University (1985) was later expanded and published in Germany (1993) and in Turkey (2001, together with his book on mediaeval Bulgarian capitals)<sup>3</sup>.

In 1984–1990 Vassil Gjuzelev worked again in his beloved Vienna as Director of Haus Wittgenstein — Institute of Bulgarian Culture contributing a lot for the development of international cooperation between Bulgarian and European scholars. The main result of his research work besides his second doctoral thesis on the history of Bulgarian Black Sea Coast and Dobrudja (published in 1995) was collection of sources on mediaeval Bulgarian history from Austrian libraries and archives, later published in two volumes<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Гюзелев В.* Княз Борис Първи. България през втората половина на IX век. София, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> *Гюзелев В.* Училища, скриптории, библиотеки и знания в България XIII–XIV в. София, 1985; *Gjuzelev V.* 1) *Bulgarien zwischen Orient und Okzident. Die Grundlagen seiner geistigen Kultur vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert.* Wien; Köln; Weimar, 1993; 2) *Mittelalterliches Bulgarien. Quellen, Geschichte, Hauptstädte und Kultur.* Istanbul, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Извори за средновековната история на България (VII–XV в.) в австрийските ръкописни сборки и архиви. Т. I. Български, други славянски и византийски извори. София, 1994; Т. II. Италиански, латински и немски извори. София, 2000.

Coming back home in 1990 Professor Gjuzelev found himself in quite different country than the one he had left some years before. Difficult years of so called transition in the nineties were not easy for academic life, but the scholar broke through with new achievements. He headed the Chair of Medieval History in his Alma Mater, the Archaeographical Commission at the National Library «St. Cyril and Method» and the National Committee (since 2003 — Association) of Mediaeval and Byzantine Studies. Gjuzelev wrote together with Ivan Bozhilov completely revised presentation of the Bulgarian mediaeval history — the first part of the three-volume *History of Bulgaria* (1999)<sup>5</sup>. Important results of his work was another source collection — this time from Venetian archives where Gjuzelev worked in 1974 with prominent Italian scholar Geo Pistarino (2001)<sup>6</sup>.

Sixteen years of the current century were probably the most industrious time for Gjuzelev. He published several books which successfully combine updated research with publications of sources — on Baptism and Christianization of Bulgaria (2006); Kavchans and ichirgu boils in the first Bulgarian Tsardom (2007); The Bulgarian 14<sup>th</sup> century (2009) as well as new source collections of mediaeval geographical descriptions of Bulgaria (2012); chancellery and accounting documents (2013). Founded by Gjuzelev publishing house «Bulgarian Historical Heritage» releases scholarly yearbook *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* (since 2000), which meets best standards of the international academic community and is accompanied by high quality new monographs on Bulgarian mediaeval history. The highlight of international recognition for Gjuzelev and the leaded by him national school of mediaeval and Byzantine studies was the 22<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies convened in Sofia in August 2011. High appreciation of Gjuzelev's contribution to the national historiography was expressed by publication of his collected works in five volumes — the largest collection by one scholar ever published in Bulgaria<sup>7</sup>.

The scholarly works by Vassil Gjuzelev combine deep investigation of various sources with wide chronology and thematic variety of the researched objects beginning from Bulgarian pagan times to the national history writing in the Modernity. He focuses at the history of secular, cultural and church institutions, contacts between mediaeval Bulgaria, Byzantium, Balkans and Mediterranean, development of education, knowledge and spiritual culture. The object of his true love is mediaeval poetry, especially its pages concerning Bulgaria. While studying it, and not only, the historian underlines the cultural and civilizational unity of mediaeval Europe, integral parts of which were Bulgaria, the Balkans, Byzantium and the Orthodox Slavs. From the 9<sup>th</sup> c. and to the Ottoman conquest mediaeval Bulgaria, changing forms of its political presence in Europe was important actor of the European history and made its significant and unique contribution to its development. The components of this contribution were Cyrillic alphabet and Slavonic church literature, state ideology and city material culture, transportation of and trade in specific stock through Balkan and Black Sea regions, Bulgaria's role in the regional interstate balance of power, which provided economic and cultural development of whole Europe.

<sup>5</sup> История на България: В 3 т. Т. I. История на средновековна България (VII–XIV в.). София, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Венециански документи за историята на България и българите от XII–XV в. София, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *Гюзелев В. Съчинения: В 5 т. Т. 1–5.* София, 2013–2015.

Being decent and loving son of his motherland Bulgaria Vassil Gjuzelev fully shared with her all crucial changes of the forties, fifties and nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as of the new millennium beginning, as hard-working wise inhabitant of his academic «cloister», meanwhile never trying to make it his ivory tower. It is impossible to see him on TV among changing speaking heads though some of his numerous disciples have chosen this role. Nevertheless his public statements, which do not happen often, always are met and well taken by the intellectual elite. Celebrating his previous anniversary in 2006 Vassil Gjuzelev ensured his colleagues that he is still admiring historical knowledge based upon sources but not on previously constructed schemes and verbal rhetoric, choosing the principle «*Ex fontibus ad veritatem*» and willing to keep fidelity to it to the end. We do believe that our beloved *Magister scientiae et vitae* will go on keeping it for many years full of new research, thinking and making sharp and wise conclusions to enrich our knowledge of mediaeval Bulgarian and European past and to motivate his attentive and interested readers to better understand its contemporary problems and perspectives.

*Ad multos annos Tangra!*

Данные о статье

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**Резюме:** В статье дается краткий обзор академической карьеры и научной работы выдающегося болгарского медиевиста Васила Гюзелева (род. 19 октября 1936), написанный двумя его учениками – болгарским и российским – и содержащий информацию о наиболее существенных достижениях ученого в славянских и балканских исследованиях к 80-летию ученого.

**Ключевые слова:** Васил Гюзелев, Болгария, исследования средневековья

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## Information about the article

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**Title:** Ex Fontibus Ad Veritatem. Vassil Gjuzelev's Contribution to Slavic and Balkan Mediaeval Studies

**Summary:** The article presents brief review of academic career of and scholarly works by prominent Bulgarian mediaevalist Vassil Gjuzelev (born October 19, 1936) written by two his disciples – Bulgarian and Russian – and contains information on the main contributions of the academician to Slavic and Balkan studies in occasion with his 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Keywords:** Vassil Gjuzelev, Bulgaria, Mediaeval studies

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