

# **The Treatment of the Redeemer: Bulgaria and its “Tsar Liberator”**

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Most travellers in Bulgaria usually take part in a package tour and fly directly to the beaches along the Black Sea coast. Those travellers however, who take the time to learn more about the history of Bulgaria will soon get to know the country’s capital, Sofia, its landmark Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (1882-1912), and become familiar with Bulgaria’s liberation by the Russians. Testimonials and historical markers about the Russian help are present throughout Bulgaria, especially in the northern half of the country. In Sofia itself, the most famous monument next to the cathedral, is the Monument to the Tsar Liberator (1901-1907), but the Russian Church (1912-1913) must also be named. The best-known memorial outside the capital city is undoubtedly the Shipka Pass, where a decisive battle took place in August 1877. Today, there is a memorial at the summit as well as a Russian church at the foot of these mountains (1885-1902). Moreover, the cathedral in Varna (1880-86), a large port in northeastern Bulgaria, is important, as is the memorial for Russian soldiers in Plovdiv. The latter is colloquially known as “Aljoshka” because it is mentioned in a popular Soviet song under this name. However, this memorial is, of all things, a memorial to Bulgaria’s “second liberation” by Russian troops in 1944 that led to the creation of “The People’s Democracy” in Bulgaria. “Russian churches” are to be found in several Bulgarian cities. They are all essentially built in Russian style, but also bear their nickname because they were built or planned by Russian architects after Bulgaria’s liberation from the Turks.<sup>1</sup> The way Bulgaria treated one of the liberators, a redeemer figure, will be the topic of the present paper.

## **1. The Monument to the Tsar Liberator**

A symbolic location was chosen for the *Car Osvoboditel*<sup>2</sup> monument: it is located opposite the Parliament and in viewing distance to the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral,

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1 One particularly interesting article on this topic has been published electronically, but only in Bulgarian (Koeva). The author has included a number of interesting facts about the construction history of Bulgarian “Russian” churches that cannot be found in any travel guide.

2 In common use, this is typically spelled “tsar,” but is “car” in linguistic transliteration (while, of course, the pronunciation of the word stays the same). Another important note concerns Bulgarian orthography: it was reformed in 1945, the year of the introduction of “the people’s democracy,” using Soviet orthography as the basis. One of the major elements of the reform was the elimination of the soft sign at the end of words (denoting palatalization). This change affected both substantives in the name of the monument. Using old orthography, the monument

forming a well-planned architectural complex together with the main building of the Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAN). This was planned while designing the area.<sup>3</sup>



*Image 1: The Monument to the Tsar Liberator*

The Bulgarian Wikipedia deals with the monument in its article about Sofia (<http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/София>) and includes a number of facts about it. It is a monument for the Russian Tsar Aleksandăr II, which was designed by Arnaldo Zocchi (1862-1940), a sculptor from Florence and creator of multiple monuments in Bulgaria. At the end of the nineteenth century, a design contest for the monument took place, in which almost 90 artists from 15 countries participated. On April 23, 1901, the foundations were laid. The monument was finished in 1903, but, due to the Russian-Japanese wars, it was officially opened only a few years later, on August 30, 1907, in the presence of

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was called *Car' Osvoboditel'*, and in the new system, without the soft sign (shown in transliteration with ' ). Both are correct, depending on the era.

- 3 Older images show, moreover, that the rear of the building of the Academy of Sciences (on the photo, the part of the building with the triangular gable) was originally missing, and instead, the view shows the Church of Saint Sophia, the name patron of the city. Today, this view is blocked.

many high-ranking guests of honor, including Prince Ferdinand I, the “Chosen Prince” (and tsar from 1908 onward);<sup>4</sup> other guests included the son of the tsar depicted in the monument, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovič<sup>5</sup>; military officers, such as General Stoletov, who had won the battle at Shipka; the son of General Gurko; veterans, etc.; the artist himself was also present.



Image 2: The Complex with the Memorial, the National Assembly, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, and the Academy of Sciences

The “Car Oswoboditel” memorial is also described in depth in the book *Nepoznata Sofija* (“*The Unknown Sofia*”, Bärnev-Bubi and Jurikov 2005). This book re-prints historical postcards from a private collection and briefly comments on them. Seventeen (!) images of the memorial – namely, its opening ceremony and some later phases – are depicted on pages 272 – 280. These old postcards verify, among other things, the historically correct name of the memorial, the date of its opening, and various contemporary honorary names for the tsar (including “Tsar Libérateur,” “Tzar Befreier,” “Tzar liberateure” [sic], and “Czar-Befreier”). It is also interesting to examine a historical photograph that is included in the book along with the postcards. It shows the artist and his winning draft, which consisted solely of the monument of the sculpture of the tsar on horseback (272). In other words: the monument’s pedestal and reliefs, which are a major focus for later interpretations of the piece, were not actually intended to be part of the original work.

4 A note for Bambergians: Ferdinand went into exile in Coburg after his abdication in 1918.

5 Members of the Russian royal family were typically mentioned only by their first name and their father’s name. As with the Windsors, their last name, i.e. Romanov, was usually not added.



*Image 3: The square in front of the parliament building, with the monument in the foreground and city and Vitoshka mountains in the background.*

One might like to add to this that the development of the city brought with it certain changes in perspectives. At the time of its construction, one could easily look past the memorial and see the city and Vitoshka mountains in the background (see Image 3). Today, the view is restricted due to the presence of tall new buildings (including an expensive hotel) which seem to form the background behind the monument. The view however, which the tsar himself has from his horse has remained unchanged, because the ensemble consisting of the National Assembly, the Academy of Sciences, and Nevsky Cathedral is same today as it has been at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only the view to the right area where the university is located, which was an open space at the time the monument was constructed, is now blocked by trees that have grown in the meantime. The part of the Sofia that is shown in Image 3, by the way, was built not long before the construction of the memorial, during a time when the new capital rapidly grew. These districts stem from the 1880s and, most importantly, offered to the nobility the possibility of settling near the government district.

## **2. The Monument's Inscription**

Surprisingly, the inscription on the monument is rarely mentioned in literature. In Bulgarian, it reads, “Carju Osvoboditelju Priznatelna Bălgarija,” or, in English, “To the liberating czar, the thankful Bulgaria.” This inscription raises some interesting linguistic questions. The second line is clearly Bulgarian, as can be seen from the orthography of “Bulgaria” and the missing Russian soft signs behind the “l” in the adjective *priznatelna*. The first line, however, deserves special attention: Bulgarian lost its nominal flexion hundreds of years ago, which means that in substantives, there are



no case endings any more. The relevant syntactic relations are expressed with the help of prepositions. However, here a dative singular masculine form is used twice, unambiguously marked with the ending *-ju*. Because Russian uses the same desinences, this may lead observers to think that the first line is actually in Russian and not in Bulgarian. The solution to this riddle lies in the fact that in Bulgarian, in specific, ceremonial situations, an artificial, historical dative form can be used, as can be seen here. The reason is that Bulgarian developed its modern linguistic norms relatively late (at the beginning of the eighteenth century) and the influence of Old Church Slavic (Old Bulgarian), which of course has case inflection, was still very prominent then. One (not entirely unwelcome) side effect of the use of the historicized Bulgarian form is that the two words in the first line are the same in Russian. Thus, the inscription would have been intelligible and familiar to both Russians and Bulgarians.

The other curiosity of the inscription has to do with the question of when the inscription was actually added to the monument. The many photographs in the aforementioned book *The Unknown Sofia* (Bärnev-Bubi and Jurikov 2005) verify that during the first years after its opening, there was no inscription to be found at the monument, that the respective place was simply empty. The editors either do not acknowledge this as a special fact or they simply do not comment on it. It is only on the twelfth postcard (of 17) in Bärnev-Bubi and Jurikov that the inscription is present. Unfortunately, it cannot be determined whether the inscription was planned later or what else could be the reason why it was missing at the beginning. The only thing that is clear is that this is not due to lack of time, because the monument was already finished in 1903 but, due to unforeseen circumstances, dedicated only years later – plenty of time, one would think, to add the inscription.



Image 4: Postcard from 1911, without description

There are a few images, including Image 4, with black discolorations at the position in question that give the impression that there has been something on the front side of the monument – an additional bas relief, but this cannot be determined on the basis of available old photographs alone. Also, it cannot be excluded, that the images were retouched, although there are no obvious reasons why this should have been the case.

### 3. The Tsar Liberator Boulevard

Between the memorial and the parliament building, there is a boulevard (see Image 5) that bears the same name as the memorial: “Tsar Liberator Boulevard” (*Bulevard Car Osvoboditel*). Today, it is the most magnificent one in Sofia, and at the same time the axis of the government quarter and home to a number of other important buildings: the university, the Parliament, the National Bank, the tsar’s palace, the presidential mansion, the former political party headquarters, the central department store, and many more important buildings (banks, ministries, the military club, embassies, the Russian Church, etc.). (The second main street in Sofia, the Vitosha Boulevard, is the main shopping street, where a number of expensive Western shops and boutiques are located today.) For orientation, we included a part of a modern city map of Sofia (see Image 5). The monument to the Tsar Liberator is at the lower right, under Narodno sabranie Square. To the left of this one can find the Bulevard Car Osvoboditel, and Vitosha Boulevard leads in a southern direction from Sv. Nedelya Square on the other side of the centre.



Image 5: Excerpt from a modern city map of Sofia



*Image 6: The boulevard, between the parliament and the monument*

There is a very interesting city map of Sofia from 1927 which is included in the book by Bärnev-Bubi and Jurakov and is very informative in a number of ways. In our context, it offers proof that the entire boulevard from the Tsar’s Palace to the Eagle Bridge (*Orlov most*) was once called “Bulevard Car’ Osvoboditel’.” Before the memorial was built, however, the street bore the name of its end destination, Constantinople Alley (*Carigradsko šose*) for all of its parts; this can be concluded from a city map of Sofia from 1879 – right after the liberation from the Turks – which is also shown in Bärnev-Bubi and Jurakov (9).

#### **4. Treatment of the Redeemer: The Monument to the Tsar Liberator**

4.1 During the socialist era, streets, squares, buildings, and companies were frequently renamed. This was common in all countries in the Eastern Bloc, including Bulgaria.<sup>6</sup> In Sofia, for example, the city center was called Lenin Square (today, it is Sv. Nedelja Square, after the church located in the middle of the square). Accordingly, in the travel guide by Smolenov and Michaelov (1981), the overview begins from this central square, which indeed was the historical city center.<sup>7</sup> The Boulevard Countess Maria-Louise was

6 Among the little-known facts about Bulgaria is that its largest port on the Black Sea, Varna, was called Stalin for a few years (1949-1956). Other cities were also renamed, such as Shumen, which was called Kolarovgrad from 1950 to 1965, in honor of Vasil Kolarov (1877-1950), a Bulgarian communist leader, transitional president from 1946 to 1947, foreign minister under Dimitrov and finally, in 1949-1950, until his death, prime minister.

7 The historical meaning is generally not relevant to modern tourists. They typically begin tours of the city with the much more spectacular Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, at the other end of the



called the Boulevard Georgi Dimitrov, the square in front of the former tsar's palace was called Square of November 9 (in reference to 1944, the date of the putsch in Bulgaria), the large arterial road leading towards the airport was called Lenin Boulevard (instead of *Carigradsko šose*, or Constantinople Alley), and there was even a Red Square (in front of the memorial for Ivan Vazov by the St. Sophia church). (In the same neighborhood, there was also an *ul. Moskovska*, or Moscow Street, this time, however, an old street name and not the result of socialist renaming.)

It goes without saying that one had to find a way to deal with the memorial of a Russian tsar in communist Bulgaria. The most important fact which has not been mentioned in any modern travel guide is that the Monument to the Tsar Liberator is, as far as we know, the only monument to a tsar in the entire Eastern Bloc that has managed to survive the socialist era. All others were taken down, at Moscow's Kremlin and elsewhere, and replaced with ubiquitous statues of Lenin.<sup>8</sup> The fact that the monument to the tsar was allowed to remain in Sofia shows the truly deep connection between the Bulgarian and Russian peoples. Since the memorial could not be removed, one came up with a more subtle way to deal with the conflict of the official form of government and a monument depicting a tsar. Now, we will at first look at some resources from the communist era.

4.2 Smolenow and Michailow (1983) go through a number of other sights of the city before finally discussing the memorial. The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral is discussed twenty pages prior, and after that, a few revolutionaries and the Parliament are mentioned before going on to the Monument to the Tsar Liberator. The complete text on the monument is as follows:

In the center of the square, there is one of the most impressive monuments in the capital, which dominates the entire square: the Monument to the Liberators, a gorgeous work of architecture and plastic art, created by the Italian sculptor Arnaldo Zocchi. The monument was erected in 1905 as a gesture of deepest thankfulness from the Bulgarian people to the Russian liberators. The base of the monument consists of three parts: a pedestal, a central area decorated with figures, and a large renaissance ledge. The artistic concept of the entire work is based on the unification of static Renaissance elements (figure of Tsar Alexander II on horseback) and dynamic baroque elements (the élan of the Russian troops and the Bulgarian militia). The sculptures on the front side of the memorial present the goddess of victory, who, with sword in hand, leads the charging Russian victors. To her right, is General Skobelev on horseback and, somewhat off to the side, Commander-in-Chief N. Nikolaievich is also depicted. To the left of the goddess Generals I. W. Gurko and N. P. Ignatiev can be seen. Behind General Skobelev, the Bulgarian militia fighters are

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city center, not the least because buses can park there. The travel guide by Weiss (1993) recommends beginning in the old city center, with the Banya Bashi Mosque, market hall, synagogue, and mineral baths before the Sv. Nedelja Church is mentioned eighth, which depicts it as a less important tourist site which it nowadays is indeed.

8 The central Lenin monument adorned the city center, near the former Lenin Square (Sv. Nedelja Square), opposite from the Sv. Petka Samardžiska church. Today, in the same location, there is a tall column with the figure of Sophia, the patron saint of the city.



marching under the Samara flag. The southern part of the composition shows the Russians being welcomed by the Bulgarian people. Under the sculpture, small bronze bas reliefs are attached to three sides of the memorial. On the southern side, there is the battle of the militia at Stara Sagora, led by Lieutenant Colonel Kalitin; in the west, there is the acceptance of the Treaty of San Stefano, and on the eastern side, there is a scene from the opening of the constitutional meeting in Veliko Tarnovo on February 10, 1879. On the front of the memorial, there is the inscription, “To the brothers who freed us. From thankful Bulgaria.” From an architectural and artistic standpoint, this memorial is among the most exemplary in Europe. (p. 123)

This last sentence about the European importance of the memorial is highly exaggerated, but for Sofia, it holds true; the memorial, after its opening, became a popular attraction.

The memorial was also renamed during the socialist era, from “Monument to the Tsar Liberator” to “Monument to the Liberators”: plural instead of singular, and the title of tsar taken out. As a consequence, the text of the inscription had also to be changed; it could not remain as it had been. So, after 1944, the first line of the inscription was changed; in its last word, the singular of “Liberator” was simply changed from the dative singular to the oblique plural, so that to casual observers, the manipulation may have not been that noticeable. In Bulgarian, the inscription was changed to “Na bratjata osvoboditeli Priznatelna Bălgarija.”<sup>9</sup> Translated, this means “To the liberating brothers, the thankful Bulgaria.” Apart from the lexical change, a linguist will notice that in this variant, normalized Bulgarian has been used with a prepositional construction (namely, *na* + oblique case), not, as with the word *Car*, the ‘real’ historical dative (*Carju*). After 1989, the original inscription was restituted and has stayed in place up to now.

Smolenow and Michailow describe the monument full of enthusiasm and quite comprehensively, but also with an obvious strategy: not from top to bottom, as is usual, but in reverse, so that the tsar is the last item discussed. The tsar is also discussed as an aside, mentioned in brackets, because he cannot completely be ignored, but the other sculptures are so elaborately described, that the reader is under the impression that they are the main object. The memorial is depicted in a color photograph (123), but again, not in a usual way. The picture has been taken from the side, so that the inscription cannot really be seen, and the image mainly focuses on a group of workers who seem to study the reliefs. It is also important to point out that in the description of the reliefs, a “Commander-in-Chief N. Nikolaievich” is named; with this less-noble sounding name, the authors obscure the fact that it is the Russian Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich, who was the high commander of the Russian forces until 1915 and highly respected in the west. In Michailow and Smolenow (1983) the memorial is of course also called “Memorial to the Liberators,” and again, and it is shown from the side, but this time from the other (48-49).

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9 I would like to thank my colleague Anissava Miltenova from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for the exact wording of the changed inscription as well as some more details. It should also be noted that the BAN dedicated an exhibition to the monument in 2005.

Summing up: if you cannot ignore the *image* of the redeemer, then at least divert the reader's or observer's attention away from the major figure to the details, and if an *inscription* cannot be removed without attracting attention, then at least replace the name of the redeemer.

It is well-known that in totalitarian systems jokes often express what locals could not articulate through other means of communication. For this reason, it is interesting that one popular joke centered around the memorial, and it goes as follows:

Our foreign minister comes down the [Boulevard] Ruski towards the memorial. As Tsar Alexander sees him, he bows and says, "Dear Ivan Bašev, look at the magnificence, look how beautifully this boulevard [on the occasion of a communist youth festival] is decorated! And now look at my poor horse. I have been sitting on it for the last 50 years. I don't want to look at it any more. For the festival, you should grant me a new horse!" "Well, you know," says the foreign minister, "it's not so easy. But I will present the idea to parliament tomorrow. You have my vote, in any case." It was debated in parliament until Prime Minister Živkov decides, "That's all for today. I will personally go and look at the horse." So, he walks down the Ruski with Ivan Bašev towards the monument. As Alexander sees them coming, he again bows from his horse. "But Ivan Bašev, what are you doing to me? I asked you for a horse. What should I do with a jackass?"<sup>10</sup>

4.3 In the book *Art Memorials in Bulgaria* (Berbenliev 1983), a volume from the *Collection of Art Memorials in Socialist Countries*, the Monument to the Tsar Liberator is depicted in image and word.<sup>11</sup>

SOFIA. – MONUMENT TO THE LIBERATORS. Boul. Russki/Parliament Square. Constructed after a contest in 1900 won by Italian sculptor Arnolfo Zocchi, dedicated in 1907. Since its construction, this memorial at the focal point of the square in front of the Parliament and located close to Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church, has been one of the sights in the capital. Its pyramidal composition is classically balanced (Neorenaissance), the bronze figure of Tsar Aleksandăr II on horseback, as well as the scenes on the high and low reliefs on the granite pedestal, are modestly depicted; still, the well-proportioned forms are impressive. (p. 393)

The accompanying photo shows the memorial from the front, and the base clearly does not bear the original inscription, but the changed one. However, it is impossible to read individual characters.

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10 Adapted from <[http://seniorentreff.at/autoren/Peter\\_Kurtenbach/1968.htm](http://seniorentreff.at/autoren/Peter_Kurtenbach/1968.htm)> (30 May 2010). See the same source for more texts and materials.

11 The series named was – in all socialist partiality – very carefully examined and announced. One could buy or trade at least individual volumes in their respective Slavic languages, as well as the entire series in German translation. The volumes were printed with a uniform format, layout, and with a characteristic black dust jacket which was its trademark. The photos are in black and white and printed on high-quality glossy paper. From the modern perspective, they are technically and aesthetically antiquated, but show an interesting, historical perspective of the buildings, excavations, frescos, etc.

Now, after these two examples and documents of the socialist change and journalistic treatment of the Monument to the Tsar Liberator, Western (German) sources will be examined.

4.4 In the well-known DuMont volume *Bulgarien (Bulgaria; Eckert 1984)*, there are two pages in the historical overview titled “Under the auspices of People’s Democracy” (79f.), in which Bulgaria’s close relationship to their Russian liberators is described. In the part dedicated to Sofia, the memorial is only mentioned by its socialist name “Monument to the Liberators” (city map on page 127). In the text itself, the monument is only briefly mentioned; here, the entry for the monument is a little more differentiating, but also not entirely correct:

The building of the Bulgarian National Assembly on the National Assembly Square (with the memorial of Russian Tsar Aleksandăr II, “the Liberator,” on horseback), originating as the work of an Austrian between 1884 and 1890. The Liberators’ Monument was built in 1907 by the Italian Arnaldo Zocchi. (p. 154)

When taking the year of publication into account, Eckert’s choice of words is somewhat understandable, but it is embarrassing that the DuMont travel guide (Weiss 1993) continues to write about the “Monument to the Liberators” which serves as a memorial to “the Russian Liberators” (67) and commemorates “the Russian liberators from Ottoman rule” (67 and 70), thus perpetuating the socialist re-interpretation of the monument.<sup>12</sup> At least, the main figure is described before the reliefs are mentioned: “The bronze figure on horseback depicts the Russian tsar Aleksandăr II, and a couple of reliefs of different scenes tell us about the events at the time” (70). There is no picture of the monument, which is understandable, given the limited size of the book. The choice of words as criticized above can be found all over the travel guide: the former Tsar’s Palace has been treated in a similar manner: It is first introduced in its current function and in bold letters as an “art gallery” (73). That the building once served as the tsar’s palace only follows later, in the body of the text. This could have and should have been handled the other way round: first mentioning the building as the (former) tsar’s palace or as a Turkish *konak* and then naming its historically rather secondary function as an art gallery.

4.5 In light of the previous text, another interesting text is the *Bulgarien-Handbuch (A Handbook of Bulgaria)* (1995), a book written with great love for the country. In this book, the memorial has been described in-depth, and we will cite the entire passage:

In front of the semi-circular hotel [the former “Grand Hotel Sofia”, now a “Radisson”], the Arnaldo Zocchi-designed Monument to the Liberators (1905) rises from the middle of the square. On the Renaissance pedestal, Tsar Aleksandăr II, leader of the successful troops in the Russian-Turkish war which brought the Bulgarians their long-sought freedom, appears on horseback. In order to correctly imagine their deeply felt gratitude to the Russians that lead Bulgarians to dedicate this memorial to their liberators, it is important to be aware of the

<sup>12</sup> As of August, 2006, the same Socialist name is still used on the German Wikipedia page for Sofia: (<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sofia>)

following: This people lived for half a millennium under total control of foreigners. This means, that approximately 20-25 generations could only give the hope of freedom to their children. All hopes were directed towards their brothers in faith in the northeast, the orthodox Russians. Their confidence was centered on “Djado Ivan” (“Grandfather Ivan,” as the Russians were affectionately called). Being finally liberated, the land fell into raptures of delight, an ecstasy of excitement, triumph, and the joy of victory. It is unusual how humbly the Bulgarians depict themselves and their part in the liberation in this memorial. To the feet of the tsar, the goddess Victoria leads the Russian soldiers and officers storming forwards. Only in the background, a few armed Bulgarian soldiers and rioters can be seen, and they were given a plump appearance. In reality, however, countless Bulgarian volunteers participated in the struggle for freedom, whose blood also flowed in streams.... The inscription on the monument states: “To the brothers that freed us. From thankful Bulgaria.” There are many monuments to victory in Europe, but this way of depicting the Bulgarians’ own role in historical happenings makes this monument one of the most noteworthy. (p. 234)

Embarrassingly, this travel guide from 1995 still calls the memorial by its socialist name, without mentioning its original name and later re-naming. It is especially telling that the author cites the inscription in its entirety. It seems like this was simply copied from Smolenov and Michaelov (123; also see 4.2) without checking to see if it was still accurate. On the other hand, it has to be positively mentioned that the author discusses the placement of the memorial with regard to the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and the symbolic connection between these objects. Almost even more embarrassing is the modern “Baedeker” guide, which confines itself to this short statement: “In the middle of the square, on a pedestal decorated with reliefs, is a monument of the liberators to honour the Russian army, created in early 20<sup>th</sup> century by sculptor Arnaldo Zocchi” (254). It has surely never been a monument to the army; the author, by the way, is the aforementioned H. Weiss.

4.6 As the quotations from the modern travel guides show, it might have been helpful and insightful if the authors had consulted historical travel guides from the time before socialism. In “Meyers Reisebüchern”, for example, Bulgaria is mentioned in a compilation volume along with Turkey, Romania, and Serbia. In this volume from 1908, everything is correctly described:

Opposite [the National Assembly], there is the imposing monument of the Tsar Liberator on horseback (Tsar Aleksandăr II of Russia), 16 m high, by A. Zocchi (Rome), unveiled in 1907; at the base of the relief: Bulgarian and Russian freedom fighters and the 2 m high figure on horseback of the leaders: Grand Duke Nikolaievich, Ignatiev, Gurkov, and Skobelev. (p. 52)

The volume also includes a city map of Sofia (44-45), and generally it is historically highly interesting, for example with regard to the “new cathedral” (that is the future Alexander Nevsky Cathedral), which was still being constructed at the time. Consequently, attention was being drawn to the old cathedral instead (currently the Church Sv. Nedelja, formerly Sv. Kralj) in the center of the city. The city map also shows a “Quarter of the Spanish Jews” as well as a “Gypsy Quarter”, a Turkish-named “Ütsch-bunar Square” etc.



Of course, Bulgarian travel guides from pre-socialist times, also correctly depict historical events. In Angelov’s (1935) comprehensive book about Sofia, for example, information goes way beyond that of a normal travel guide. This author discusses the “Tsar Liberator” monument first on page 52f., as part of the rubric “Memorials in Sofia.” His book, among other things, gives specific information about the international composition of the jury as well as the information that the tsar holds the Russian declaration of war in his hand.

## 5. The Treatment of Redeemers: The “Russian Boulevard”

The aforementioned boulevard between the memorial and the parliament building could of course not retain its former name after the renaming of the memorial: it was renamed “Russian Boulevard” (*Bulevard Ruski*). This name actually lends itself to the street very easily, because apart from the monument to the Tsar Liberator, there is also the Russian Church, also a famous sight of Sofia, on the same street, and the former Soviet embassy was also located nearby.

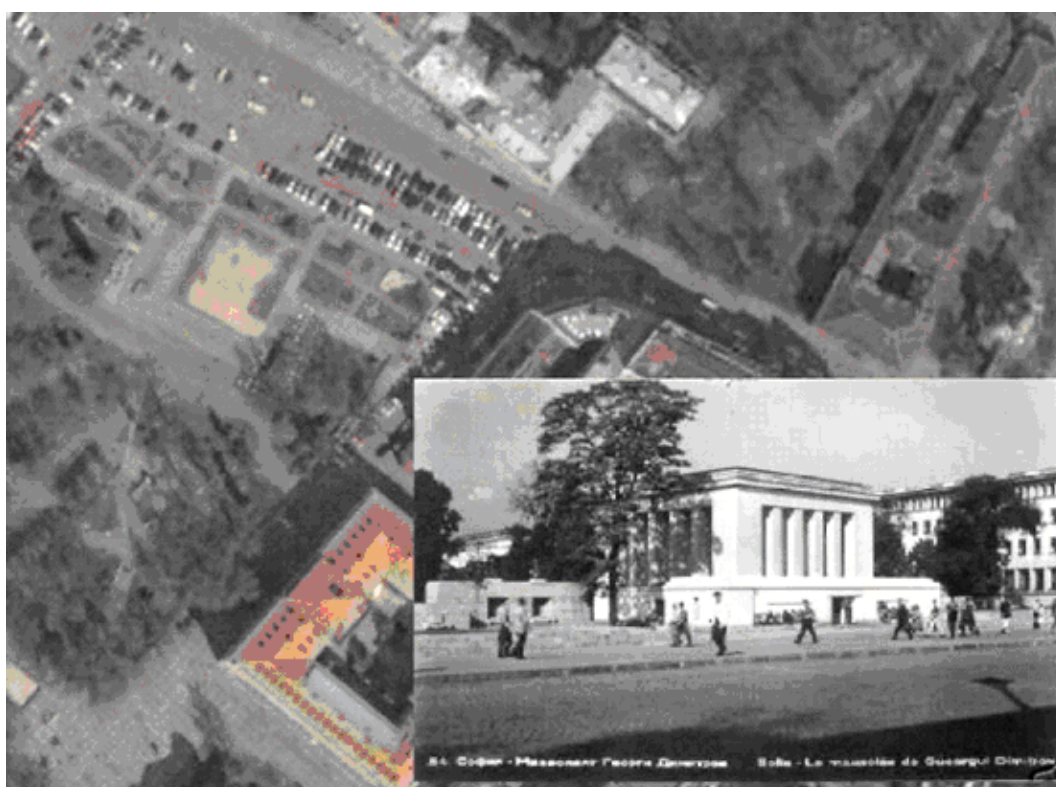
The Russian Boulevard, as write Smolenov and Michaelov, is named “to honor the Russian liberators” (120) – without telling their readers when this happened. Besides, there are additional squares along this boulevard that were also renamed. The “Square of December 9” has been renamed the “Count Alexander von Battenberg Square”, and the “Russian Boulevard” is again “Tsar Liberator Boulevard”. In their book, Bärnev-Bubi and Jurikov have also documented the Car Osvoboditel Boulevard with six images (330-332). The fact that it was renamed after the Communist take-over, one can see from a comparison of the text under the image on the fourth postcard (331) with the text on the postcard itself. On this postcard, the street is already called “Russian Boulevard” (*Bulevard Ruski*), but the title under the image states, “The Boul. ‘Car Osvoboditel,’ 1950s of the XX. Century.”

## 6. Conclusion

Especially in the current era, after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, one should be aware that even respected, serious Western sources at least occasionally continue to use the official socialist depictions of Eastern Europe. Probably (hopefully) this was done for a lack of information rather than intentionally. Because Bulgaria itself has returned to historically correct terms for the monument – and also many other re-named objects – hopefully future editions will be re-worked to include new (actually old, original) knowledge and use of language.

This topic could be easily elaborated presenting more obvious examples. A few of them shall be named at least in short. As Bulgaria symbolically placed the Monument to the Tsar Liberator opposite the Parliament, another symbolic memorial was later constructed on the same boulevard just a few hundred meters away. This memorial, a

mausoleum for Georgi Dimitrov based on a design from Moscow, is located across from the former tsar's palace, and it is the square in front of this mausoleum that was given the name "Square of September 9". This mausoleum is of course elaborately mentioned in socialist travel guides and depicted, e.g. in Smolenow and Michailow (81-83). Photographs show that even the well-known queues in front of the Lenin mausoleum at Red Square in Moscow were copied in Sofia. One can also learn a lot from the way the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov was treated, who was treated something like a redeemer during socialist times. At first, authorities really did not know how to use the mausoleum, so it was initially demonstratively abused as a public toilet until the part located above ground was eventually blown up. As a small reminder of the building once situated here, the foundation walls were left in place (they are still visible from aerial photos; see Image 7). The basement still serves as a public toilet. Clues as to the earlier use of the location are not posted there, and it will be interesting to see how future travel guides will deal with this information.



*Image 7: The Georgi Dimitrov Mausoleum and its former location*

It would also be worth examining other memorials for Russian tsar Aleksandăr II in Bulgaria, and also streets named after him. A "Tsar-Liberator Street" is to be found in the city of Shumen, too, and there is another memorial to him on Bunardžik Hill in Plovdiv. This memorial is inscribed with the text, "Battle near Philippopol during the reign of Russian tsar Aleksandăr II, under the command of General-Adjutant Gurko on

the 3, 4, and 5 of January, 1878.” It has more of a focus on the war than the tsar, whose name is naturally included in large letters, which is why this monument also serves as a memorial to Aleksandăr. Constructed in the fall of 1881 and also called “Monument to the Liberators”, the hill itself also bore this name. This memorial, a stone column with coat of arms and inscription has stayed unchanged, as far as we know. But as a counterpoint, so to speak, an additional monument that is somewhat taller and larger, was erected next to it after World War II: the aforementioned memorial to Soviet soldiers, affectionately named “Aljoshka”. Both of these monuments, however, are nothing but successors to a statue of Hercules that crowned this hill during antiquity.

Another curiosity concerns the Alexander Nevsky Memorial Cathedral, a landmark of Sofia that is referred to in next to all sources, plainly as a building erected in commemoration of Bulgaria’s liberation through the Russians and named after the Russian military leader Alexander Nevsky, the name sake and patron saint of Tsar Aleksandăr II. There were a number of difficulties during the construction (from 1904-1912) which proceeded a long planning phase (beginning in 1880). If the dedication to Alexander Nevsky was really so important, why was the cathedral renamed to “Cyril and Methodius Church” in 1916, only four years after its completion (as shown in many postcards from the period) and renamed again in 1920, only four years later? One source that communicates at least these facts is the Bulgarian version of Wikipedia, while other sources appear to know nothing about it.<sup>13</sup>

As one can see, the treatment of redeemers in and related to Bulgaria does not always follow a linear trend. Some reinterpretation is shown here, but they also require further research. This paper is only the first piece in the puzzle, and should serve as a motivation to continue research in this field.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Храм-памятник\\_Свети\\_Александър\\_Невски](http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Храм-памятник_Свети_Александър_Невски)

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