

FREEMASONRY IN BULGARIA

Introduction

Bulgaria has a chequered history. Having gained independence from the Ottoman Empire after World War I it became an ally of Germany in World War II and was accused of atrocities in Greece and then became a satellite of Russia until again gaining its independence. It has thus experienced extremes in political governance, in each case antipathetic to Freemasonry and yet Freemasonry flourishes there.

The History of Bulgaria



The history of Bulgaria¹ dates from around 5,000 BC when a sophisticated civilization already existed and produced some of the first pottery and jewelry in the world. Around 500 BC the tribes fell under Macedonian, Celtic and Roman domination. This mixture of ancient peoples was assimilated by the Slavs, who permanently settled on the peninsula after 500 AD.

Meanwhile in 632 the Bulgars, originally from Central Asia, formed an independent state that became known as Great Bulgaria. Pressure from the Khazars led to the subjugation of Great Bulgaria in the second half of the 7th century. One

of the leaders subsequently conquered Scythia Minor and Moesia Superior from the Byzantine Empire, expanding his new kingdom further into the Balkan Peninsula. A peace treaty with Byzantium in 681 and the establishment of a permanent Bulgarian capital at Pliska south of the Danube mark the beginning of the First Bulgarian Empire. The new state brought together Thracian remnants and Slavs under Bulgar rule, and a slow process of mutual assimilation began.

In the following centuries Bulgaria established itself as a powerful empire, dominating the Balkans through its aggressive military traditions and strong sense of national identity. Its ethnically and culturally diverse people united under a common religion, language and alphabet which formed and preserved the Bulgarian national consciousness despite foreign invasions and influences.

In the 11th century the First Bulgarian Empire collapsed under Rus' and Byzantine attacks, and became part of the Byzantine Empire until 1185. Then, a major uprising restored the Bulgarian state to form the Second Bulgarian Empire. After reaching its apogee in the 1230s, Bulgaria started to decline due to a number of factors, most notably its geographic position which rendered it vulnerable to simultaneous attacks and invasions from many sides.

In the late 13th century, Bulgaria was squeezed between the advancing Mongol hordes from the north and the Latin Empire from the south, eventually becoming a Mongol tributary state for a period of 25 years. A peasant rebellion, one of the few successful such in history, established the swineherd Ivaylo as a Tsar. His short reign was essential in recovering the integrity of the Bulgarian state. A period of relative thrive followed after 1300, but ended in 1371, when factional divisions caused Bulgaria to split into three small Tsardoms.

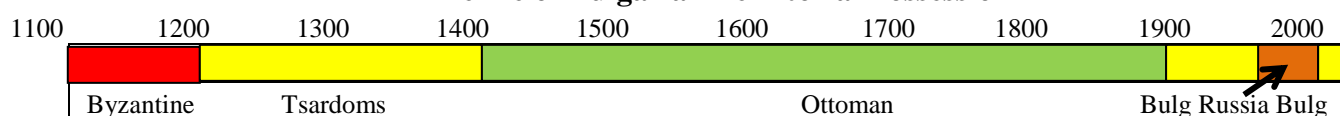
By 1396, they were subjugated by the Ottoman Empire. Following the elimination of the Bulgarian nobility and clergy by the Turks, Bulgaria entered an age of oppression, intellectual stagnation and misgovernment that would leave its culture shattered and isolated from Europe for the next 500 years. Some of its cultural heritage found its way to Russia, where it was adopted and developed.

¹Wikipedia

With the decline of the Ottoman Empire after 1700, signs of revival started to emerge. By the 19th century, the Bulgarian National Revival became a key component of the struggle for independence, which would culminate in the failed April uprising in 1876, which prompted the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the subsequent Liberation of Bulgaria. The initial Treaty of San Stefano was rejected by the Western Great Powers, and the following Treaty of Berlin limited Bulgaria's territories to Moesia and the region of Sofia. This left many ethnic Bulgarians out of the borders of the new state, which defined Bulgaria's militaristic approach to regional affairs and its allegiance to Germany in both World Wars.

After World War II Bulgaria became a Communist state. Bulgaria's economic advancement during the era came to an end in the 1980s, and the collapse of the Communist system in Eastern Europe marked a turning point for the country's development. A series of crises in the 1990s left much of Bulgaria's industry and agriculture in shambles, although a period of relative stabilization began with the election of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as prime minister in 2001. Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007.

Timeline of Bulgarian Territorial Possession



Freemasonry in Bulgaria

Any understanding of Freemasonry in Bulgaria must take into account the history of the Bogomils (“Dear to God”) who declared themselves against the dogma of the Church, the lavish decorations, the hypocrisy, greed and the striving for power of the clergy, and the merging of the church’s and the tsar’s powers. The Bogomils appealed for bringing back the virtues of real Christianity – kindness, humility, helping others, equal rights and lawfulness, abandon of opulence, admiration for human labour, dignity and high morals. They became very popular among Bulgarians in the 10th century, and this posed a threat to the power of the Tsar, who began a manhunt against them. It is believed the Rosicrucian Order was based on the Bogomil teachings. Its founder was Christian Rosicrucian. Historical research says he was born in a German family, which initiated him in the Bogomil teaching².

Now Bulgaria is officially a secular nation and the Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion but appoints Orthodoxy as an official religion. In the 2001 census, 82.6% Bulgarians declared as Orthodox Christians and 12.2% were Muslim. Other Christians are divided about equally between Catholic and Protestant.

The first reference of the existence of Masonic activity in Bulgaria dates from early nineteenth century. Members of these Lodges were brethren from Bulgaria, Greece, Russia, Italy and France. Lodges existed in Rousse, Vidin, Svishtov and Varna. The first Bulgarian Mason, however is known to be Ivan **Nikolov Vedar** (1827-1898), who was initiated in 1863 in the Oriental Lodge 687 in Constantinople. However an alternative source³ claims that the first Bulgarian, initiated as a Freemason, was **Archimandrite Efrem**, who used to live in the Bessarabian town of Kishinev. In 1820 he was member of Lodge Ovidius. After returning to Bulgaria he made attempts to establish a Lodge in the Bulgarian town of Rousse. Some Bulgarian intellectuals and revolutionaries were initiated into a number of English, French and German lodges.

Masonic ideas began to spread in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century but there were no organized Bulgarian lodges. Many Bulgarian men, however, worked and gained necessary experience while working with brethren from England, France and Germany. Contemporary Masonry was introduced into Bulgaria after the establishment of the Third Bulgarian State.

²“Author Dimitar Nedkov: Freemasonry in Bulgaria Didn't Happen the Right Way” [Maria Guineva](#)

³ The Commission on Information for Recognition - UGLE

The first Bulgarian lodge '1880 Balkan Star' was installed in Rouse in 1880 under the Great East of Portugal. The lodge 'Brotherhood' in Sofia was consecrated in 1883 also under the Great East of Portugal. In 1914 Lodge Zaria was created under the Grand Lodge of France in Sofia. The most important year for Bulgarian Masonry was 1917 when the Grand Symbolic Lodge of Bulgaria, consisting of two constituent lodges - Zaria and Svetlina with 100 brothers was consecrated. In the years between the two World Wars Bulgarian masons established contacts and were recognized by 88 brotherhoods around the world. Meanwhile new Masonic lodges were consecrated in different cities and by the end of 1940 the number of regular Freemasons in Bulgaria was over 240.

On January 23rd, 1941 the Bulgarian Parliament adopted the Defence of the Nation Law, which banned the existence of Masonic lodges in Bulgaria. Masonry in Bulgaria was again banned at the beginning of the communist regime. The Egyptian Rite of Memphis and Misraim, which was originally established in 1884 under the Grand Orient of Portugal, recommenced work at Sofia in 2007.

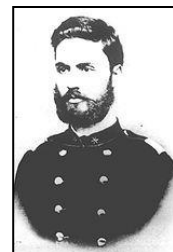
The first post-communist-era Masonic lodge in Bulgaria was re-established in 1991. There were internecine squabbles in Bulgarian Masonry which resulted in the Grand Lodge schism in 2001 but in 2011 the two Grand Lodges in the country re-combined to become the United Grand Lodge of Bulgaria and achieved recognition from the United Grand Lodge of England⁴. However in April 2012 the Commission on Information for Recognition (US) reported *“There continues to be no progress in the unification of Freemasonry in Bulgaria. The Commission received submissions from both Grand Lodges, but there appears to be no interest on the part of the United Grand Lodge of Bulgaria in entering discussions with the Grand Lodge AF&AM of Bulgaria, either for unification or for establishing a treaty to share the jurisdiction. Both of these Grand Lodges appear to practice regular Masonry, and both were of the same origin until they split in 2001. This Commission has urged the two Grand Lodges to resolve their differences for the past eight years to no avail; therefore this issue will not be addressed again until the brethren in Bulgaria reach some type of agreement that will meet the standards for recognition”*.

Some Famous Bulgarian Freemasons^{5,6}



Battenberg, Alexander (1857–1893) was the first Prince of Bulgaria after the Russian – Turkish Liberation War, in which he took part. Head of State during the 1885 Union of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia and the Serbian –Bulgarian War. The revolution of Plovdiv, which brought about the union of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria, took place with Alexander's consent, and he at once assumed the government of the province. In the year which followed, the prince gave evidence of considerable military and diplomatic ability. He rallied the Bulgarian army, now deprived of its Russian officers, to resist the Serbian invasion, and after a victory at Slivnitza pursued King Milan of Serbia into Serbian territory. A military plot cost him his throne.

Kanchev, Angel (1850 – 1872) was a Bulgarian revolutionary and Graduate from the Belgrade Military School. **Kanchev** is known as one of the most active participants in the movement to liberate Bulgaria from Ottoman rule and one of the closest people to Vasil Levski. The latter assigned **Kanchev** to organize and spread the movement in northern Bulgaria. In a short time he managed to create a large network of the movement. In 1872, while attempting to secretly cross the Bulgarian-Romanian border, **Kanchev** was surrounded by the police and committed suicide in order to not be caught.



⁴Freemasonry today- Friday, 16 September 2011

⁵Grand Lodge of Bulgaria website

⁶Wikipedia



Georgiev, Kimon (1882 - 1969) was a Bulgarian general and Prime Minister. In the 1930s he was a member of the right-wing military 'Link' movement. Together with fellow officers he committed a coup d'état in June 1934 and became Prime Minister, after which he abolished all political parties and labour unions. Influenced by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, **Georgiev** introduced a corporative economic system. During World War II, when Bulgaria is fighting on the side of the Axis, he joined the anti-Axis Fatherland Front (FF). In September 1944, the FF committed another coup d'état and **Georgiev** again became Prime Minister. **Georgiev** continued holding ministerial posts in all the cabinets until 1962 when he became a member of the Parliament's presidium.

Georgiev was twice awarded the title Hero of Socialist Labour.

Protogerov, Alexander (1868-1928,) was a Bulgarian general, politician and revolutionary as well as a member of the revolutionary movement in Macedonia and one of the leaders of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO). He volunteered in the Serbian-Bulgarian War and took part in the uprising in 1902. In the Balkan Wars **Protogerov** was one of the organizers of the Macedonian-Adrianopolitan Volunteer Corps. During World War I, he commanded the Third Infantry's Brigade of 11th Macedonian division and then became commandant of the Bulgarian troops in Serbia's occupied region. After the War, **Protogerov** was elected one of the leaders of VMRO and, in 1924, assisted negotiations with the Comintern about the creation of a united Macedonian movement. **Protogerov** signed the May Manifesto about forming a Balkan Communist Federation in cooperation with the Soviet Union although he denied this insisting it was a communist forgery. He was killed in Sofia by internal fighting.



Rakovski, Georgi Stoykov (1821–1867) was a 19th-century Bulgarian revolutionary, one of the creators of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement, poet, writer, journalist, and an important figure of the Bulgarian National Revival and the resistance against Ottoman rule. In Istanbul he worked as a lawyer and tradesman and took part in campaigns for a Bulgarian national church. **Rakovski** was arrested once more, this time due to his creation of a secret society of Bulgarians to assist the Russians in the Crimean War but he escaped and gathered a group of rebels. In 1861, in Belgrade, he organized a Bulgarian legion, and travelled through Europe recruiting support for his country's cause. After the conflict with the Ottoman Empire was resolved, **Rakovski** moved to Bucharest where he continued his journalistic activities and began organizing small groups of

revolutionary fighters.

Balan, Alexander (1858–1958) studied Slavic languages in Prague and Leipzig and earned a PhD in Philosophy from Prague University. He was the founder and first President of the Sofia University and a member of BA. **Balan** has authored more than 900 titles.



Stoilov, Konstantin (1853–1901) was a Bulgarian politician, one of the leaders of the Conservative Party and later of the People's Party. He studied Law in Heidelberg and was twice Prime Minister of Bulgaria. He worked as a judge, is Chief of staff of Alexander I and as an active Conservative, he held several ministerial posts. He took part in the Serbian-Bulgarian War as a platoon commander. He became Prime Minister (1886 – 1888), to be later appointed Justice Minister. In 1894 he founded the People's Party; won the elections and was Prime Minister from 1894 until 1899.

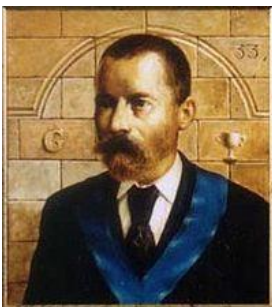
Stoyanov, Zahari (1850–1889) was a Bulgarian revolutionary, writer, and historian. A participant in the April Uprising of 1876, he became its best historiographer with his book "Notes from the Bulgarian Uprisings". **Stoyanov** directed the Unification of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in 1885, and was one of the leaders of the People's Liberal Party until the end of his life. Elected a Member of the Parliament in 1886, he became Deputy Speaker in 1887 and Speaker in 1888–1889





Petkov, Nikola (1893-1947) was a Bulgarian politician and one of the leaders of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS). He studied law and politics at the Sorbonne, Paris and returned to Bulgaria to participate in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). After World War I, **Petkov** worked in the Bulgarian Embassy in Paris. He returned to Bulgaria and became editor of two newspapers. He was elected a Member of the Parliament (1938-1939), but the election was invalidated due to his anti-fascist activity and **Petkov** was sent to exile. From 1944 to 1945, he was a Minister without Portfolio in the first government of the FF. In 1945, **Petkov** became a leader of the anti-communist United Opposition.

Velichkov, Konstantin (1855-1907) Studied in Istanbul and was active in the plotting of the uprising against the Ottoman Rule. He was a translator for the Russian officers during the Russian–Turkish War and became a member of the Parliament and Education Minister and Minister of Commerce and Agriculture. He initiated the opening of a fine arts school in Bulgaria, was editor of many newspapers and magazines and an author of fiction and memoirs.



Vedar, Ivan (1927-) is often referred to as the founder of Freemasonry in Bulgaria. He went to college in Malta, where he learned many languages. During the Crimean War, he traveled over Black Sea Harbours, possibly as a Russian spy. He continued his studies in the medical school in Bucharest and in 1863, in the Istanbul branch of Oriental Lodge he was initiated into masonry and reaches the 33rd degree in the Old and Accepted Scottish Rite. After the Liberation of Bulgaria, **Ivan Vedar** installed the first Bulgarian regular Masonic lodge Balkan Star in Ruse in 1880 but in 1887 **Vedar** was forced to "put asleep" all lodges.

Filov, Bogdan (1883–1945) was a Bulgarian archaeologist, art historian and politician. He was Prime Minister of Bulgaria during World War II when Bulgaria became the seventh nation to join the Axis Powers. He obtained a PhD in Leipzig and worked in the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia. **Filov** discovered Trebenishta, a necropolis of Peresadyes, rich with gold and iron artifacts and was elected President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 1940 **Filov**, an ally of Tsar Boris III, is appointed Prime Minister. Though a titular member of the Axis, Bulgaria stays out of the war as much as possible. Jews who were Bulgarian citizens were not deported but over 11,000 Jews from the new annexed territories, which weren't Bulgarian citizens, were deported to Death camps of Nazi Germany. With the arrival of the Communist regime, **Filov** was sentenced to death by the "People's Tribunal" and executed.



Burov, Atanas (1875–1954) was prominent Bulgarian businessman who studied law and economics in Paris and became a Member of the Parliament and Minister of Commerce, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labour, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister without Portfolio. In 1944 **Burov** was sentenced to one year prison by the People's Tribunal.

Tsankov, Aleksander (1879–1959) was a leading Bulgarian right-wing politician between the two World Wars, economist, and Speaker of the Parliament. He was a Professor of Political Economy and Prime Minister of Bulgaria. His term is marked by deep internal struggles with the Bulgarian Communist Party, which Tsankov represses mercilessly. A brief Greek invasion left Bulgaria crippled by debt and **Tsankov** was removed from office after failing to secure a loan for the country. **Tsankov** developed an admiration for Fascism and soon becomes a supporter of Adolf Hitler and sets up his own National Social Movement largely an imitation of the Nazi Party. **Tsankov** was appointed by the Nazis in 1944 as Prime Minister of the Bulgarian Government in Exile set up in Germany but he fled to Argentina.





Konstantinov, Aleko (1863-1897) was a Bulgarian writer, best known for being the first Bulgarian to write about his trips to Western Europe and America, which provided Bulgarian readers, who had recently gained independence from nearly 500 years of Ottoman rule, with a portrait of the developed world.

Other prominent Bulgarians who joined the Craft are⁷:-

- **Arnaudov, Mihail** (1878–1978) Dean of the Language Department and President of the Sofia University, Chair of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Education Minister.
- **Atanasov, Dimitar** (1894 –1979) Graduated with a PhD in Plant Pathology from the University of Wisconsin to become Professor at the Sofia University (1928) and Agriculture Minister.
- **Balabanov, Alexander** (1879–1955) Graduated with a PhD in Erlangen to become Professor of Classical Languages and Literature at Sofia University.
- **Boboshevski, Tsviatko** (1884–1952) A Lawyer he served as Commerce Minister and then Justice Minister and then as President of the Bulgarian Mortgage Bank.
- **Chilingirov, Stilyan** (1881–1962) was a Bulgarian writer, historian, politician and one of the founders of the Union of Bulgarian Writers and its President.
- **Eparch Stefan I** (1878–1957) Graduated with a PhD in Switzerland and became Metropolitan of Sofia and the Eparch of the Bulgarian Church until 1948. He took a crucial part in the fight to save Bulgarian Jews in World War II. He was a member of the London Freemasons Lodge.
- **Gabrovski, Petar** (1898–1945) was a lawyer and Minister of the Railroads, Posts, and Telegraphs and Minister of the Interior and Health Minister.
- **Ikonomov, Todor** (1835–1892) was a Graduate of the Theology Academy in Kiev, a Member of the Parliament, Regional Governor in Sliven and Burgas, Interior Minister and Mayor of Sofia.
- **Kioseivanov, Georgi** (1884–1960) was a lawyer and an Ambassador to Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia and then Foreign Minister. He became Prime Minister 1935-1940.
- **Kzasov, Dimo** (1886–1980) was a lawyer and Minister of Railroads, Posts, and Telegraphs, Chair the Union of Bulgarian Journalists and Ambassador to Yugoslavia. After the Communists come to power in 1944, he becomes Minister of Propaganda.
- **Kulishev, Georgi** (1904–1974) was a Bulgarian lawyer, politician, journalist and Foreign Minister, who was awarded with several orders by the Communist regime.
- **Lukov, Hristo** (1888–1943) was a General and Minister of War. After Bulgaria became an ally of Hitler's Germany, he insists the Bulgarian laws are insufficiently anti-Semitic.
- **Midilev, Petar** (1875–1939) was a Military officer and politician who became Interior Minister.
- **Miletich, Lyubomir**, Prof. (1863–1937) was one of the most prominent Bulgarian scientists and intellectuals and President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.
- **Moshanov, Stoycho** (1892–1975) was a Bulgarian military officer and politician. A General, he became Interior Minister and Health Minister but was persecuted by the Communist regime.
- **Radev, Simeon** (1879–1967) was a Bulgarian writer, journalist, diplomat and historian most famous for his two-volume book "The Builders of Modern Bulgaria".
- **Raynov, Nikolay** (1889–1954) was a Bulgarian writer, scientist and painter. The Christian Orthodox Church excommunicates him over the novel "Between the Desert and Life" dedicated to the life of Christ. **Raynov** was Arts Professor at Sofia University.
- **Staynov, Petko** (1890-1972) was a Bulgarian lawyer, Professor of Administrative Law and Interior Minister but was pushed to resign as Interior Minister under pressure coming from the Soviet Union over fears of his independent behaviour and critics of the Soviet policies.
- **Stoyanov, Petko** (1879-1973) was a Bulgarian finance expert, academic and Finance Minister.

⁷Grand Lodge of Bulgaria website

- **Velchev, Damyan** (1883–1954) was a member of the Fatherland Front, a pro-communist, anti-Axis resistance movement and Minister of Defence.
- **Zagorov, Slavcho** (1898–1965) was Professor of Statistics at the Sofia University, Economy Minister and Ambassador to Berlin during World War II. He was sentenced to death by the Communist “People’s Tribunal” and killed in 1945.
- **Zlatarov, Asen** (1885-1936) was a Professor at the Sofia University, editor of several scientific magazines, author of many articles, poems, fiction short stories and one novel.

Conclusions

It is a surprise to read the resumes of the many well-known and influential Freemasons who were members of the craft in Bulgaria and to reflect that Freemasonry makes some strange bed-fellows.

This character divergence becomes more understandable when it is remembered that the 20th century was a time of intense political and economic extremes in Bulgaria – from its liberation from Ottoman rule at the end of World War I, through its role in World War II as a Nazi ally, with all of the atrocities, to its oppressed communist period under Stalin.

It is reported “that the fall of Communism marked a deep change in national mentality, and most traditional moral values, such as timidity, justice and modesty have been either brought to extremes or abandoned. Social inequality, mysticism and general apathy are prevalent”⁸.

To the extent that this comment is accurate, modern Freemasonry has a vital task to fulfil in Bulgaria to help to restore faith, hope and dignity to its peoples and it is well worth our continued support. First it has to find its own harmony.

⁸Genov, Nikolay (2001). “*Recent social trends in Bulgaria 1990-1995*”. McGill Queens's University Press