

Bulgaria: *terra europeansis incognita* by Ivan Daraktchiev, Dukaty, 2010, ISBN 978-954-91584-3-4

A review by Virginia Curry, J.D., M.I.M., Omaha, NE, USA, April, 2013

It is past appropriate that this review began in the Spring of 2013 when Bulgaria is in the wrenching turmoil of revolution, the likes of which it has not experienced for over a generation and which this book can serve to help lead the people out of. Never has this writer encountered a book of such sweeping history, content and purpose as in **Bulgaria: *terra europeansis incognita***. It is in a class of its own. Truly, the immense natural and architectural beauty, diverse people, culture and history of Bulgaria is tragically unknown (thus, a land "incognita") to the West and is likely also *incognito* to much else of the educated world. So, this reader immediately felt cheated in her fine education by this heretofore unknown national history. Now, this critical gap in the West's understanding of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians has finally been filled by this vast compendium due to the vision and unrelenting research of its author, Ivan Daraktchiev, Ph.D. What this author covers in his book includes the prehistoric to ancient history, archeology, and ethnology of Bulgaria through the times of "Greater Bulgaria", which covers most of the surrounding modern Slavic nations, and more, up to the present. The achievements of his peoples in art, architecture, science, languages, religions, education, advanced life styles, trade, industrial and resource development as well as various economies from the prehistoric past up to the present are addressed. Throughout this book, the author provides innumerable captivating photos of the fabulous landscapes, rivers and shorelines of Bulgaria, as well as photos of its charming peoples plus important historic maps of its territorial evolution, after so many invasions and mergers. Numerous charts addressing the current status of the country along with many important modern economic indexes are included. Indeed, this 624 pages book is incomparably sweeping in its coverage of a Nation and its people.

For the reader's reference, I had the fortune to meet Ivan Daraktchiev, the author of this book, in Leuven, Belgium in 1983 while I was studying for a Master's degree there and he was a recent *émigré* in a Ph.D. program in microelectronics. Among other things, Ivan impressed me as a true polyglot (with some nine languages he fluently spoke then). He is also a polymath – well versed in, or otherwise highly knowledgeable across, many fields of science, mathematics, economics, finance and most liberal arts and high culture. He also impressed me then, as since, as a man of great integrity and one who truly loved his homeland, Bulgaria, of which he constantly spoke. He has been among the very few of trustworthy friends I have ever known and is of the finest

caliber of intellectual, gentleman, loyal friend and Bulgarian patriot. Thus, it is a great privilege to review his book and wish him and his fellow Bulgarians all the best in their trying current times. In the hope of encouraging others to read this important work, especially Bulgarians, the following is my honest assessment of its many merits.

What first struck this reader, are the sublime photos of the ancient Trakian (Thracian) tombs, filled with marvelous artifacts. Especially notable is the refined jewelry and other objects of fine art, which are testament to an extremely high level of civilization prior to the early Greek era, and even earlier than most of the early Pharaoh era. That many of these oldest tombs, shown and described in this book, date from 6,000 B.C.E. is astounding! Such cultural and anthropological history was unknown to me before reading this book and is worthy of attention, research and protection at the highest levels in archeology as well as from specialists in all other fields dedicated to preserving the history of human civilization.

Next, one is struck by the enormity of the mass migrations over the millennia into and through Bulgaria due to so many wars, natural disasters, as well as trade, occurring at this doorway between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Consequently, the diversity of the various ethnic populations, their cultures, religions, further migrations and history is deserving of much greater research and appreciation. Also, the photos of the incredible beauty of diverse Bulgarian landscapes, her important cities and charming towns and rural life, point further to a now advanced modern culture in possession of great human talent and natural resources located in a strategic part of Europe where "East meets West". Clearly, there is tremendous possibility for the resurgence of the Bulgarian peoples if the Nomenklatura (the author's term for the current corrupt rulers) can be deposed. The failure of "democracy" in Bulgaria (which in its perverted form has plagued the nation since 1989) to maximize the inherent potential of the Bulgarian people and the natural riches of Bulgaria is the saddest conclusion drawn from this book. Author Ivan Daraktchiev gives far too many concrete examples of how the primal forests, and other precious resources, are being secretly harvested and destroyed to benefit the corrupt few. The degradations of such treasures require generations of time, and huge cost and effort to replace. That Bulgaria and her peoples are being systematically raped on every level, by every means and through every form, is tragically made clear throughout this book. As the author reports, nearly 80% of the population is below or at poverty level, i.e., without sufficient income to provide heat, shelter, clothing, transport, food or even the most minimal medical care, which is just appalling. The suffering of the Bulgarian masses is incredible in face of the immense national resources of the nation as well as its being a member of the EU. That the majority of the population must go without heat and are near starvation, or in deep malnutrition, is not just a national crisis – it's an

EU and global human crisis – all of the world should be concerned.

Another huge shock for this American reviewer, is the author's proof that real income, services, living conditions, education level, crime and the protection of natural resources was demonstrably better during the Communist era. The most distressing lament given by the author is his near weekly chronicling from 2001 through 2009 of the continuing corruption of his government to the utter destruction of Bulgarian society. This horror is detailed in Chapter 36 of his book, "Bulgarian Blues – Chronicle of European Post-Communism". In addition to the proof that Bulgaria was better off during the Communist era, this reader was further shocked and dismayed to learn that Bulgaria has been a net contributor to the European Union, rather than a net beneficiary! How sad for a once great, proud and accomplished peoples! It is now the most impoverished nation in Europe! An additional tragedy reported by the author is the massive "brain drain" of intellectuals from Bulgaria since its opening to democracy in 1989. These bright, highly educated people need to be somehow induced to return to reestablish and reinvigorate their national heritage, nay, their birthright. Perhaps that is the best hope of a successful political revolution. Sadly, economic and personal security often trump loyalty and patriotism. Still, a Bulgarian society needs to be made where such top people want to remain as well as return.

The only major criticism of this important book is the fact that the author worked totally alone under extreme time pressure so that proper editing and proof-reading were not done. One hopes that future editions will correct these errors.