

“The Rethinking of Religious Belief in the Making of Modernity”

2017 Conference of the International Society for Intellectual History

Organized with the American University in Bulgaria

American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

May 30 – June 1, 2017

Useful information

Venue

This 3-day conference will take place at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), the second biggest American university in Europe, founded in 1991. AUBG is accredited in the USA and in Bulgaria and its diploma is recognized worldwide. The University offers BA programs with 11 majors and 18 minors, as well as an Executive MBA program. It provides the best state-of-the-art facilities in the region: high-tech classrooms, computer labs, comfortable dormitories, a modern English-language library, and a unique student center. Renowned scholars mentor students who represent more than 40 countries. Most graduates continue their studies at the best universities in the world. AUBG alumni are among the most sought-after specialists who occupy top positions at multinational companies, national governments, or leading NGOs worldwide.

The AUBG building where conference sessions will be held is the Balkanski Academic Center (see *photo below*). Buffet lunches will be offered at the AUBG restaurant located in the America for Bulgaria Student Center, which is right opposite the Balkanski Academic Center on the AUBG campus.

The AUBG campus is located in Blagoevgrad, a 70,000-person town 100 km south of the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. The campus is a five-minute walk from the center of Blagoevgrad, which features a large walking area with many shops, restaurants, bars, and other amenities.

A map with directions to the AUBG campus can be found at: <https://www.aubg.edu/maps-directions>



Travel and transportation

The closest airport is Sofia (SOF), which is 108 km from Blagoevgrad. Sofia Airport has two terminals: Terminal 1 serves low-cost airlines, while Terminal 2 serves many international airlines.

Whereas Sofia Airport is the most convenient airport to reach Blagoevgrad, the airports of Skopje in the Republic of Macedonia (SKP: 192 km from Blagoevgrad) and Thessaloniki in Greece (SKG: 213 km from Blagoevgrad) offer valid alternatives.

Blagoevgrad can be reached from Sofia Airport in the following ways:

- AUBG car transfer (cost: 100 Bulgarian leva – BGN, i.e. 51.12 EUR, each way for one person), to be reserved and paid for when registering for the conference, if you select this service. (Please see page 6 below for more details.) Depending on traffic, it may take from one hour to one and a half hour to reach Blagoevgrad from Sofia Airport by car. A recently inaugurated highway connects the area south of Sofia with Blagoevgrad.
- Car rental: several international rent-a-car companies operate at both terminals of Sofia Airport.
- Taxi: the taxi company serving Sofia Airport, i.e. “OK Supertrans” (phone number: 02-9732121), has offices in both terminals and, as of February 2017, it offers one-way drives to Sofia for 140 BGN (i.e. around 70 EUR) for a party of one to three persons. Additional charges for the baggage may apply. Reservation in advance is not needed.
- Coach: if you decide to travel to Blagoevgrad by coach, you will first need to reach the Central Bus Station (“Centralna Avtogara”), which is located in the center of Sofia. Although public transportation by bus and tube is available from Sofia Airport to Sofia city and to the Central Bus Station, the best way to travel from Sofia Airport to the Central Bus Station is by taxi, which may cost from 14 to 20 BGN (i.e. 7 to 10 EUR), depending on traffic. At the Central Bus Station, coaches to Blagoevgrad depart hourly every day, from 8am to 7pm, normally from platform 26. As of February 2017, a one-way ticket costs 10 BGN (i.e. around 5 EUR) and can be purchased directly from the driver. The drive from Sofia Airport to the Central Bus Station may take 20 to 30 minutes, depending on traffic, and it then takes around 90 minutes to reach Blagoevgrad by coach from the Central Bus Station of Sofia.

In Blagoevgrad, taxicabs are the most convenient public transportation service and are widely available. Taxi drivers do not accept credit cards and will only accept Bulgarian leva (BGN). The taxi fare is normally between 0.80 and 1 BGN (i.e. 0.40-0.50 EUR) per km. Taxi fares in Sofia are in the same range, and taxicabs are widely available there too.

Generally, taxi drivers do not speak English: while in Blagoevgrad, if you want to take a taxi from your hotel to the conference venue, just tell the taxi driver: “Amerikanski Universitet Biblioteka”, which refers to the AUBG Library in the Balkanski Academic Center (BAC), i.e. the building where the conference will take place.

In Blagoevgrad, hotels will be happy to call taxis for you, but, just in case, it is good to have a phone number of a trusted company – e.g. “Mega Chance” (073-882222) or “OK Taxi” (073-832121).

Visa information

Bulgaria is a member of the European Union as of January 2007, thereby enforcing the General Visa Policy of the EU (please see <http://www.mfa.bg/en/pages/109/index.html>).

Visas are not required by citizens of EU/EEA member states, as well as some non-EU countries (including, among others, the USA, Canada, and Australia), for a short stay period of up to 3 months. (For more details, please see this document of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mfa.bg/uploads/files/VisaRegime_for_foreigners_ordinary_passports_en.pdf).

Citizens of the majority of the countries that are not member states of the EU or EEA require a visa to enter Bulgaria and the EU. Visitors from these countries can obtain further information from the Bulgarian Embassies or Consulates in their countries (see <http://www.embassypages.com/bulgaria>).

If you require an official invitation letter from the organizers in order to attend the conference, please contact the Coordinator of the AUBG Conferences, Institutes and External Events Office, Ms. Radosveta Miltcheva, at rmiltcheva@aubg.edu



On-campus accommodation

AUBG offers on-campus accommodation in single occupancy ensuite rooms (only for conference participants) in its residence halls (*see photo below*) for a total of BGN 284.00 (i.e. EUR 145.20) for four nights (check-in May 29, check-out June 2, 2017). If you choose this service, please reserve and pay for it when registering for the conference. (Please see page 6 below for more details.)



Off-campus accommodation

If you opt for off-campus accommodation, the following hotels are within walking distance, or within a short drive, from the AUBG campus (specifically from the Balkanski Academic Center, where the conference will take place) and may be reserved in websites like Booking, Hotels, Trivago, etc.:

- Hotel Cardinal (★ ★): 450m from the Balkanski Academic Center, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Alpha (★ ★): 750m, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Pilevski (★ ★): 750m;
- Hotel Korona (★ ★): 800m, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Fenix (★ ★ ★): 900m, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Monte Cristo (★ ★ ★ ★): 1.1km, in the walking area (*see photo below*);
- Hotel Rio (★ ★): 1.2km;
- Hotel Kristo (★ ★ ★): 1.2km, in the historic district of Varosha, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Petkov (★ ★ ★): 1.2km, in the historic district of Varosha, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Luxor (★ ★): 1.5km, close to the walking area;
- Hotel Bali (★ ★ ★): 1.5km;
- Hotel Orient (★ ★): 1.6km.

The following hotels are outside of the center of Blagoevgrad, but can be reached from the AUBG campus through a short drive by car or taxi:

- Hotel Diva (★ ★): 2.2km from the Balkanski Academic Center;
- Hotel City (★ ★): 2.5km;
- Hotel Ezeretz (★ ★ ★ ★): 2.5km (*see photo below*);
- Hotel Apart (★ ★ ★): 2.6km;
- Hotel Hit (★ ★): 3.3km;
- Hotel Park Bachinovo (★ ★ ★): 5km, close to the Bachinovo Nature Park;
- Hotel Orbita (★ ★): 6km, close to the Bachinovo Nature Park.

Other hotels and guest houses are available in Blagoevgrad. When reserving a room at a hotel not in the above list, please make sure that the hotel you choose is in the municipality (not simply the province) of Blagoevgrad.



Meals

Three buffet lunches on the conference days will be served at the AUBG restaurant in the America for Bulgaria Student Center. The cost of these lunches for conference participants is included in the registration fee.

The conference banquet will be offered at a traditional Bulgarian restaurant in Blagoevgrad. The cost of the conference banquet for conference participants is included in the registration fee.

Participants will have to pay for their own meals on the evenings other than that of the conference banquet. Many restaurants, pizzerias, pubs, and bars are available in Blagoevgrad, particularly in the downtown.

Here is a table with some approximate prices of food and drinks in Blagoevgrad:

Meal / drink	Price per person
Coffee at a bar or restaurant	1 BGN (~0.50 EUR)
A 1-pint beer, a soft drink or a cappuccino at a bar or restaurant	2 BGN (~1 EUR)
Bulgarian spirits (50ml) at a bar or restaurant	2-4 BGN (~1-2 EUR)
Imported spirits (50ml) at a bar or restaurant	4-5 BGN (~2-2.50 EUR)
2- or 3-course meal at a self-service, including a beer or soft drink	6-10 BGN (~3-5 EUR)
A large pizza and a 1-pint beer or a soft drink at a pizzeria or restaurant	10 BGN (~5 EUR)
2- or 3-course meal at a restaurant, including beer or soft drinks	15-25 BGN (~8-13 EUR)
2- or 3-course meal at a restaurant, with local wine	20-30 BGN (~10-15 EUR)



Wi-Fi

AUBG will offer Wi-Fi connection on its campus to all conference participants for the duration of the conference through its Office of Communications and Computing. Instructions on how to have access to the AUBG Wi-Fi connection will be given at the conference.

In Blagoevgrad, Wi-Fi is also available at a number of bars, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses.

Registration

Instructions on how to register for the conference and to pay, through Epay.bg, for registration and for AUBG-provided optional services (i.e. on-campus accommodation and airport car transfers), if you select some or all of these services, are at this link: http://isih.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=5347

The registration deadline is March 31, 2017. Due to space availability and time constraints, only conference speakers, whose paper proposals have been accepted by the Organizing Committee, can register for, and participate in, this conference.

The registration fee amounts to BGN 240.00 (i.e. EUR 122.71), VAT included. The registration fee cannot be waived or reduced and is inclusive of three buffet lunches, the conference banquet, coffee breaks, Wi-Fi connection at the conference venue, a trip to the Rila Monastery,* the conference folder, and other services provided to all participants.

* The medieval Monastery of Saint Ivan of Rila (*see photo below*) is one of the nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Bulgaria. Entrance to the monastery and its church is free. The monastery also hosts a small museum: an individual admission ticket to the museum costs 8 BGN (i.e. around 4 EUR).



Optional services

- On-campus accommodation in single occupancy ensuite rooms (only for conference participants) for a total of BGN 284.00 (i.e. EUR 145.20) for four nights (check-in May 29, check-out June 2, 2017). To be reserved and paid for when registering for the conference (please see the registration webpage at this link: http://isih.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=5347)
- AUBG car transfer from and/or to Sofia Airport. (Cost: 100 BGN, i.e. 51.12 EUR, each way for one person). To be reserved and paid for when registering for the conference (please see the registration webpage at this link: http://isih.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=5347).
- The cost of the banquet for conference participants is included in the registration fee. Due to space restrictions, only conference participants will take part in the banquet.
- The cost of transportation by coach to the Rila Monastery for conference participants is included in the registration fee. Those willing to bring other persons (e.g. partners and/or children) to the Rila Monastery may do so for no additional charge. Those willing to bring other persons to the Rila Monastery have to inform the conference convenor, Dr. Diego Lucci, by March 31, 2017 via email at: dlucci@aubg.edu
- Post-conference trips to selected tourist destinations in the region, some of which are described at pp. 9-10 below. Costs depend on the available options, and the organization of post-conference trips depends on the number of interested participants. If you are interested in a post-conference trip, please contact the Coordinator of the AUBG Conferences, Institutes and External Events Office, Ms. Radosveta Miltcheva, via email at: rmiltcheva@aubg.edu

Currency

The Bulgarian currency is the “lev” (plural: “leva”), whose code is BGN. One lev is made up of 100 “stotinki” (cents). There is a fixed exchange rate between the Bulgarian lev and the euro: 1 BGN = 0.51 EUR; or 1 EUR = 1.95583 BGN. For US dollar, or other currencies, to lev exchange, it is best to check the currency exchange rate of the day.

A large number of bank branches, ATMs, and half a dozen exchange bureaus, offering reasonable exchange rates, may be found in Blagoevgrad. Exchange bureaus and ATMs are also available at Sofia Airport, although exchange bureaus at the airport have less convenient exchange rates than in Blagoevgrad or Sofia city.

In Bulgaria, banks are usually open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, but some banks may stay open until 5:30pm. Although some banks are also open on Saturday morning, most banks are closed at weekends and on public holidays. Exchange bureaus usually have longer working hours: most of them work until 6:00pm.

Language

Bulgarian is a Slavic language and uses the Cyrillic alphabet. Street signs are both in Cyrillic and in Latin characters and shop signs may be in either the Latin or Cyrillic alphabet. Restaurants will usually have menus in both Bulgarian and English and servers will be able to communicate with you in English. Some phrases to get you started:

- Hello – здравей (zdrah-**vay**)
- Good morning – добро утро (dohbro **ootro**)
- Good afternoon – добър ден (dohber den)
- Good evening – добър вечер (dohber **vecher**)
- How are you? – как сте (**kaak stay**)
- Goodbye – довиждане (doh-**veezh-duh-nay**)
- Thank you – благодаря (blah-go-dar-**iya**) or мерси (French “merci”, pronounced mer**see**)

Safety

Blagoevgrad is a virtually crime-free town, where one may walk around safely at all times of the day and the night. Although not many people speak English in Bulgaria (usually, it is younger people who speak English and other foreign languages), people in Bulgaria and particularly in Blagoevgrad are very nice and helpful to foreigners.

Sofia too, despite its size (i.e. 1.5 million people), is a safe and pleasant city, where violent crime is almost inexistent. However, if you decide to visit Sofia, beware of:

- Pickpockets on public transportation, in shopping malls, and in tourist areas (e.g. Vitosha Boulevard and the surroundings of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral).
- Counterfeit money dealers, who might approach you in tourist areas. We recommend you to exchange money only at bank branches or authorized exchange bureaus.
- Illegal taxicabs, which are much more expensive than authorized taxicabs. When at the airport or at a bus or train station, do not accept deals from persons approaching you and

offering taxi or other transportation services in the arrivals area or immediately outside of the airport or station. If you want to take a taxicab upon your arrival at Sofia Airport, we recommend you to stop by the office of “OK Supertrans” in the arrivals zone and make arrangements there: an employee of this taxi company will direct or accompany you to one of their taxicabs. Although the large majority of taxicabs in Sofia work for authorized companies, several illegal taxicabs operate in the city of Sofia. Before taking a taxi, please read the fare table on its windows, and avoid taking taxicabs which have fares largely exceeding 1 BGN per km or have no fare table on their windows.



Other practical information:

Time zone: Bulgaria is in the Eastern European Time zone (EET). The difference between the Greenwich Meridian Time zone (GMT) and the time in Bulgaria is +2 hours.

Weather: in late May and early June, the weather in Blagoevgrad is quite warm, with significant variations between day and night. The average temperatures range from 24°C (i.e. 75°F) to 29°C (i.e. 84°F) in the day, and from 10°C (i.e. 50°F) to 14°C (i.e. 57°F) in the night. Rain is possible: thus, an umbrella and a light raincoat are advisable, as well as a light sweater for the evenings.

Telephone services: mobile phone coverage is almost 100% anywhere in Blagoevgrad. When calling Bulgaria from abroad, dial +359 followed by the area code (e.g. 073 for Blagoevgrad), omitting the initial zero (e.g. 73 for Blagoevgrad), and the number required. For general emergencies, ambulance, fire, or police, dial 112.

Health and medical care: we advise you to have Health & Travel Insurance before coming to Bulgaria. Emergency cases will be dealt with locally at the AUBG Health Center.

Electricity: electrical current in Bulgaria is 220 V/50 Hz round. Two-pin European style plugs are used. Appliances designed to operate on 110/120 Volts need a voltage converter and a plug adapter. International adaptors can be found in the major electric shops in Blagoevgrad.

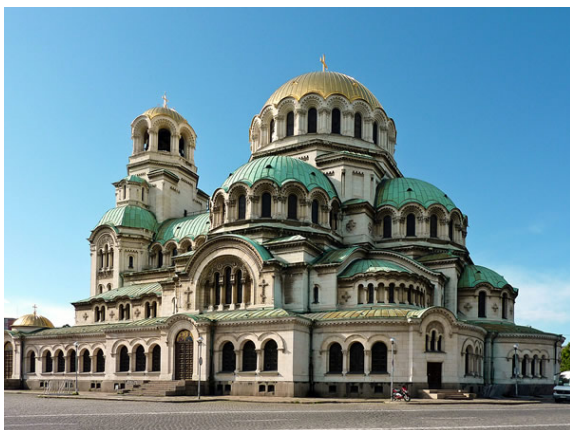
Smoking: Bulgaria is smoke-free in all public buildings, as well as in restaurants, bars, cafés, and shops. Designated smoking areas are located outside.

Entertainment and tourism in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria and Southeastern Europe

Blagoevgrad is a nice, safe, and lively college town located at the center of the Balkan Peninsula. It is a welcoming place to foreigners and offers a variety of affordable entertainment, dining, and accommodation options, including a large walking area (*see photo below*), many restaurants, bars, pubs, discos, shops, spa centers, two shopping malls, a water park, various pools, a go-kart track, a bowling center, a jogging path, a movie theater, several theaters, various public gardens, the historic district of Varosha (*see photo below*), and the Bachinovo Nature Park. Every year in May and June a number of public events, including concerts and music festivals, take place in the streets and squares of Blagoevgrad and can be attended for free.



Besides the Rila Monastery, various other tourist attractions in Bulgaria are within an easy drive from Blagoevgrad. The Bulgarian capital, Sofia, with its many museums, churches (including the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral: *see photo below*), and places of cultural interest is 100 km away and can be easily reached by car or coach. The ski and mountain resorts of Bansko and Borovets, the spa resort of Sandanski, and the traditional village of Melnik, with the Rozhen Monastery, are about a one-hour drive away. The beautiful city of Plovdiv, which features a Roman theater (*see photo below*), a Roman stadium, an Old Town famous for its Bulgarian Renaissance architectural style, and one of the oldest mosques in Europe, is three hours away by car or coach. Other historic sites and cities in Bulgaria, such as the medieval capital Veliko Tarnovo with the Tsarevets Fortress, the ancient sea town and UNESCO site of Nesebar, and the cities of Varna and Burgas on the Black Sea, may be reached in a few hours by car or coach.



Blagoevgrad is also an excellent starting point for trips to other countries in Southeastern Europe, such as Turkey, Greece, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Romania. Places of interest in these countries include the city of Istanbul with its many historic treasures (*see photo below*), Thessaloniki, Athens, and various archeological sites and sea resorts in Greece, Skopje and the historic town of Ohrid (*see photo below*) in the Republic of Macedonia, the Serbian capital Belgrade, and Bucharest and the Transylvania region in Romania.



Post-conference trips to some of the above destinations in Bulgaria and the region may be arranged in advance through the Conferences, Institutes and External Events Office (please see page 6 above).

Contacts

For more information on the conference, please contact the convenor, Prof. Diego Lucci, via email at: dlucci@aubg.edu

For practical information, please contact the Coordinator of the AUBG Conferences, Institutes and External Events Office, Ms. Radosveta Miltcheva, via email at: rmiltcheva@aubg.edu

