

BULGARIAN ART 120 YEARS

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ПРИКЛЮЧЕНИЯТА НА ЧОКО И БОКО

НЕВИДИМИН

ТРИ МЕСЕЦА ИЗМИНАХА ОТ МОМЕНТА, В КОЙТО ЖАБОКЪТ БОКО ИЗГЪЛАТА ХАПЧЕТАТА „НЕВИДИМИН“, И ОТ НЕГО ОСТАНА ДА СЕ ВИЖДА САМО СОБСТВЕНАТА МУ СЯНКА...



RUMEN PETKOV, The Adventures of Choko and Boko, the Daga, 1985.

COMIC STRIPS

COMIC STRIPS

Is there a national comic strip school in Bulgaria? The answer is provided by the names of more than 400 artists and script writers who worked in the genre. The circulations of comic strip books in Bulgaria have been impressive. Half a million is the number of the specialized editions prior to 1944, while the total number of copies of the *Daga* [Rainbow] and the *Chuden Svyat* [Wonderful World] periodicals sold was in excess of 10 million.

The *Balgaran* and the *Baraban* [Drum] magazines were the most important satirical periodicals at the beginning of the century. Petar Paspalev, Georgi Mashev, Chudomir, Rayko Aleksiev, Aleksandar Dobrinov, Petar Morozov and ubiquitous Aleksandar Bozhinov used to draw on topics of real interest: politics, electoral hypocrisy, wars, morality. Elin Pelin translated Wilhelm Busch, comic strips were a part of his career. Bozhinov was familiar with the *Simplicissimus*, the *Punch* and various French editions, but created the Pizho and Pendo characters – all native and familiar. In the *Baraban*, Rayko Aleksiev followed – jokingly and with affection – the “urban” manners and the mishaps of peasants newly arrived in the big city. Petar Paspalev, who lost his life early, left numerous funny school comic strips.

The 1920 – 1940 period saw a boom in the instructive, educational and entertaining publications for children. Comic strips were published in the papers the *Detska Zabava* [Children’s Fun], the *Block Mila*, the *Detsko Zdrave* [Children’s Health], the supplement the *Vrabche* [Sparrow] the richly adorned, colorful and full of Bulgarian folklore motifs the *Detska Radost* [Children’s Joy]. Vadim Lazarkevich, Naum Hadzhimladenov, Toma Grigorov and Stoyan Venev published their drawings in the *Pateka* [Path], the *Trezvo Dete* [Sober Child] the *Vazdarzhatelche* [Little Absterainer]. Rayko Aleksiev’s the *Shturets* [Cricket] published numerous ads in the form of comic strips.

During the 1940’s, a number of comic papers were published: the *Chuden svyat*, the *Ilyustrovano Chetivo* [Illustrated Reading], the *Sedmichna Zabava* [Weekly Fun], the *Romstrip*, the *Vesel Pataran* [Merry Duckling]. Walt Disney’s characters were popular, various adventure, science fiction and classic works adapted for comic strips were printed. Bulgarian talents contributed on a par with American, Italian, Yugoslavian artists: Aleksandar Denkov, Stoyan Venev, Lyuben Zidarov. Aleksandar Zhendov drew some of the title pieces of the periodicals and also several calendars where Disney’s characters walk hand in hand with Bulgarian children. The *Chuden Svyat* was released on Tuesdays. It featured Bulgarian folk tales, *One Thousand and One Nights*, adaptations of Russian and French classics, pirates, Indians and cowboys, stories of the Wild West, explorers of uncharted lands, magic tales about giants, dragons and medieval magicians. *Izvorat na Belonogata* [The Spring of the White-Legged] was a first attempt to adapt a contemporary Bulgarian author. The drawings in this curious comic are made by Pepa Genova. Several young authors



ALEKSANDAR DENKOV, *The Brave Eskimo*, after R. Doon’s book, the *Chuden svyat* magazine, 1942.



VADIM LAZARKEVICH, *Little Barber*, the *Chuden Svyat*, 1942.



STOYAN VENEV, *Grandpa and Grandson*, the *Ilsyustrovano Chetivo*, 1942.



Cover of the *Sedmichna Zabava* paper, drawing by Toma Grigorov, 1942.



NIKOLA MIRCHEV, *History*. Comic Strip, the *Starshel*, 1947.



ALEKSANDAR ZHENDOV, *From Ferdinand to the People's Republic*, the Papagal, 1946.



VLADIMIR KONOVALOV, *The Elusive*, script by Stefan Dichev, the Daga, 1979.

appear – Gogo Aleksiev and Stoyan Penchev, in the *Chuden Svyat*, Mihail Ruev in *Vesela Druzhina* [Jolly Company]. Stoyan Venev's drawings of stupid men, lazy brides, funny animals and boorish punishments are unique. Besides Bulgarian folk motives, he also drew, in his characteristic style, on the Ferenc Molnar's *The Paul Street Boys*. Vadim Lazarkevich created his *Little Barber*, applying his virtuoso line and delicate coloring. Despite his youth, Aleksandar Denkov did surprisingly well in the *Hrabriya Eskimos* [The Brave Eskimo] and managed to keep up the suspense for a total of 31 installments. In the *Chuden Svyat*, Denkov draws folk tales (*Foul Word*, *Quick Profit*, *Bad for Good*), a dark legend, *The Crown of Death*. Three issues prior the discontinuation of the newspaper, there appeared his *Ban Yanuka*, the *Defender of Sofia*, influenced by *Prince Valiant* and *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In the *Illustrated Reading*, besides the world famous characters of Flash Gordon, Tarzan, the Fiery Pilot, Taras Bulba and Mandrake the Magician, plus the series of the Russian refugees who lived in Yugoslavia, Aleksandar Denkov and Stoyan Venev, who also gave their colorful contribution as active collaborators, the remarkable talent of Lyuben Zidarov became also apparent. This young artist was mature and free in his artistic expression, building up his specific stylistics for each assignment. *The Prussian Bravery*, *The Weeping Willow*, *A Greek and a Bulgarian*, a number of comic strips based on Bulgarian folk tales and short stories (*The Cowardly Brave-man*, *Craft*, *Comrades* etc.) make him one of the most productive and memorable Bulgarian artists of that periodical. In the *Sedmichna Zabava*, the name of Toma



SVETOSLAV YANAKIEV, *The Exploits of the Count of Monte Cristo, his Friend Spas and Bimbo, the Unbooted Cat, the Daga*, 1979.



Cover of No 1 of the Daga magazine, 1979, designed by Georgi Gadelev.



EVGENIY YORDANOV, *Dobromir*, the Daga, 1982.



CHRISTO KARDZHILOV, *Elemag - Khan Tervel's Warrior*, the Daga, 1982.



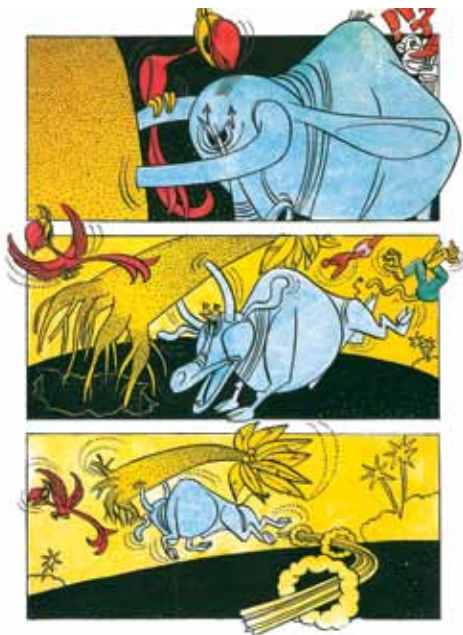
NIKIFOR RUSKOV, *My Life among the Indians*, the Daga, 1983.



DONYO DONEV, Cover for *Mind the Paint*, Balgarski Hudozhnik Publishing House, 1984.



PETAR STANIMIROV, *Yantar*. Original comic page, script by Svetoslav Slavchev, the Daga, 1984.



GRIGOR BOYADZHIEV, *The Adventures of Prof. Mnogotomov and Dunky, the Chuden svyat*, 1985.



NIKOLAY DODOV, *Darko*. Album of collected stories from the Daga, Septemvri Publishers, 1987.

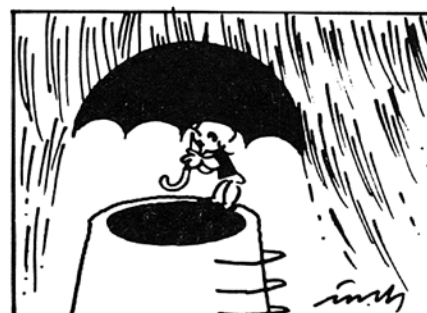
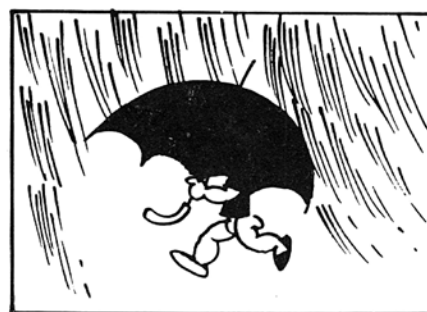


DIMITAR "DIMO" STOYANOV, *Original page for the ELO, the Daga*, 1989.

Grigorov will be remembered with his sequence *The Son of the Balkan* – a story about World War I.

After 1944, the art of comic strips served propaganda goals – indoctrinating children with "socialist virtues" using series of caricatures in the *Septemvriyche* [Little follower of the September Revolution] – (Todor Dinov, Lyuben Zidarov, Stoyan Venev etc.), scathing of "fascists and capitalists" on the pages of the *Starshel* [Hornet] – (Nikola Mirchev, Marko Behar, Stoyan Venev, Aleksandar Zhendov etc.) and establishing a satirical and grotesque image of history and the present in the *Papagal* [Parrot] satirical edition, where the talent of artists like Boris Angelushev and Aleksandar Zhendov was exploited and regular collaborators were Stoyan Venev, Tenyu Pindarev and Vasil Videnov, yet the tone was set by specially employed party censors hidden behind the anonymous "edited by a collective" caption.

Following Stalin's death in 1953, the communist bloc saw a period of relative thawing. Comic strips returned to the pages of papers and magazines. The atmosphere in the *Cosmos* magazine was favorable due to its atmosphere of freedom and the new stylistics in its graphic design. A circle of young artists formed around Boris Angelushev. Ivan Gongalov, in 1963, and Lilyana Angelova, in 1968, produced science-fiction comic strips in installments. Stoyan Shindarov's unusual talent also blossomed in this magazine. In 1973, he moved from separate illustrations on to actual sequences "in pictures and text". During the 1970's, propaganda comic strips were published in various papers, magazines and supplements. Pavel Gatev,



TODOR DINOV, *Little Annie*, Balgarski Hudozhnik, 1984.



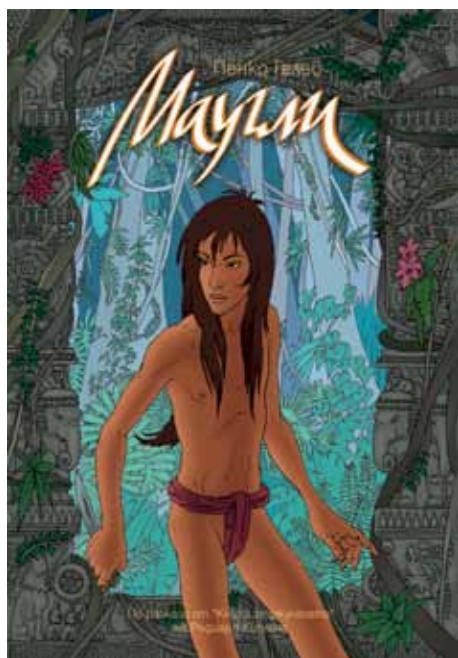
PENKO GELEV, Cover of the Mini Rix magazine, 1991.



LYUBEN ZIDAROV, *The Treasure Island*, Vedart, 2003.



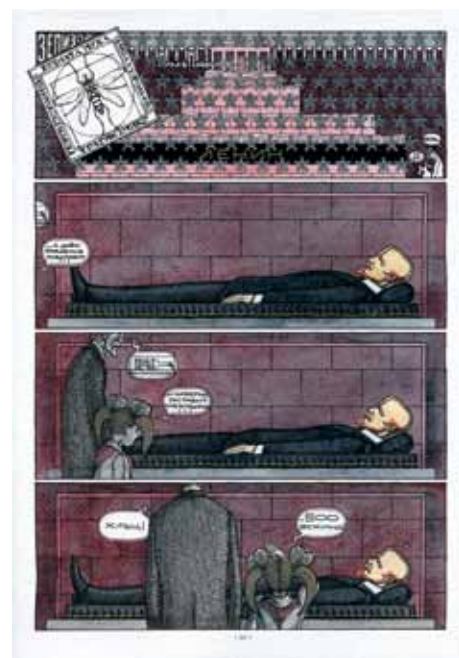
VENELIN VALKANOV, Original page for the Daga magazine, script by Doncho Tsonchev.



PENKO GELEV, *Maugli*, Gekon, 1997.



DANIEL ATANASOV (SATANASOV), *Bion*, the Daga, 2003.



NIKOLA TORomanov, *The Eternal Fly*, script by Georgi Gospodinov, Zhanet 45 Publishing House, 2010.



VESELIN PRAMATAROV, *The Tercial Lightey*, *The Rix* magazine, 1991.



Shanghai, comic strip by Dimitar Mitovski, script by Elin Rahnev, Disco-95 catalog, National Art Gallery, 1998.

Vladimir Konovalov, Kalina Taseva and Yuliy Minchev, Gencho Denchev, Stoyan Venev and Vasil Valchev drew stories in pictures in installments in the *Slaveyche* [Nightingale] children's magazine and also in a number of papers such as the *Rodni Prostoni* [Native Expanses], the *Septemvriyche*, the *Zhar* [Glowing Embers] etc. At the same time, comic strips for children were invariably present in the *Septemvriyche*, the *Plamache* [Little Flame] and the *Slaveyche* magazines, while the popular satirical paper the *Starshel* often printed caricature "suites" in sequences. Vasil Videnov continued to draw political comic strips for the communist party newspaper the *Rabotnichesko Delo* [Worker's Cause]. In these he upheld the Cuban revolution and decried "US militarism".

One of the most important generators of picture stories in Bulgaria was the *Balgarski Hudozhnik* [Bulgarian Artist] publishing house. At the end of the 1960's it published *The Great Khan* – a historical short story by Heruvim Rachev. For artist Gencho Denchev that was a debut in comic strips (years later he produced a comic adaptation of Boris Aprilov's *Lisko* [Little Fox] for the *Chuden Svyat*). Several "picture novels" followed. Ivan Krastev's science fiction stories were translated into images by Vladimir Korenev and Christo Braykov. Atanas Patsev told a story about the partisan resistance movement in his characteristic expressive style. Established artists sketched, with varying success, stories in pictures for the publishing house – Christo Neykov (Angel Voevoda [Angel Warlord]), the Kalina Taseva/Yuliy Minchev tandem etc. The Otechestvo, the Narodna Mladezh and the Prosveta publishing houses, too, issued comic-like stories in pictures – collections of poems or novelettes dedicated to Bulgarian history. As a rule, these editions did not use the entire amplitude of the comics – they seldom feature text balloons, margins with the author's narrative, inserted panels or onomatopoeic words.

Comics saw a real peak with the publishing of the *Daga* specialized edition during the 1979 – 1992 period. Artists who worked for it, later on defined the spirit of the 1990's, since some of them continued to produce comic strips and plan future editions through the beginning of the 21st century. More than 40 artists developed their skills and talent in the *Daga* magazine. The topics and graphic styles were diverse. History, science fiction, adventures, fantasy and comic sketches for children were carefully balanced, almost all sequences were in full color.

A talented, biting and uncompromising Stoyan Shindarov dictated this magazine's high standards in graphic quality. He produced several series of memorable illustrations (about St. St. Cyril and Methodius, Georgi Dimitrov's life etc.), and a short time before his untimely death the editorial board published *The Barefooted* – an urban story about children who sabotage in their own way the German soldiers in Sofia during World War II.

Artist Vladimir Konovalov took his characters from various historical periods – the ancient past (Spartacus), the national liberation struggle (Levski), the partisan resistance during World War II (Vasko). Christo Kardzhilov's work on the *Elemag* historical saga coincided with the shooting of the blockbuster movie about Khan Asparuh. The locations near Veliko Tarnovo where the movie was shot provided visual material for clashes between numerous armies and horseback fights. Konstantin "Koko" Georgiev, Vladimir "Harry" Varbanov, Nikolay Kirov applied distinctive registers of realistic drawing. Following several historical episodes Dimitar "Dimo" Stoyanov created the memorable science fiction story (ELO) in the tradition of Star Wars. Petar Stanimirov produced successful drawings for the *Daga* as well as funny sequences. *Yantar*, *Bubachko*, the



N, original drawing by Alex Maleev for the N, script by Steven King, Bard Publishing House, 2011.

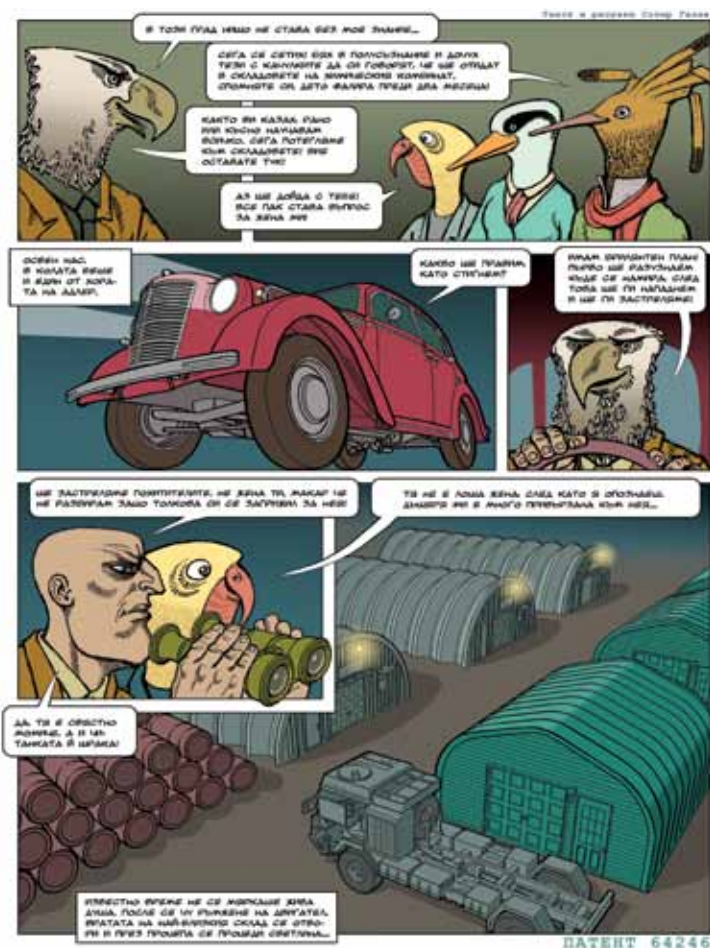


Nad Dagata, cover, The Daga magazine, 2012.

Treasure Island are but a small part of his large collection of picture narratives. Nikolay Dodov entertained several generations of children with his character who has a magic cap. Darko became a kind of symbol for the *Daga*. Other memorable picture stories were regularly published by Donyo Donev, Boris Dimovski, Venelin Valkanov, Rosen Manchev, Valentin Angelov, Todor Tsvetanov and others. Rumen Chaushev was one of the young authors who proved that a specialized art education was not a must for a successful comic strip artist. His sequence based on Kir Bulichov's works (*The Girl from Earth*), the stories about his own children, Yavor and Mitko's, mischief, provided an example to follow, and of courage and morality. Sotir Gelev who won a prize for animation in Leipzig, Germany, produced adaptations (*Bilbo Begins*, *The Lord of the Ring*) on Tolkien's books long before these became epic movies and thus brought the fantasy genre into Bulgarian comic strips. Evgeniy Yordanov became a legend in his own right quite early. He was the one and only artist who graduated from the Academy of Art and presented a comic strip before the state graduation committee.

His sequences, in the *Daga*, with the Dobromir character (script by Asen Kozhuharov) and Tomek (based on Alfred Szklarski's book) are among his greatest hits.

Besides the *Daga*, the *Chuden Svyat* magazine was also published by the Narodna Mladezh publishing house and this periodical widened the circle of artists engaged in comic art and also improved the quality of print and design. Bulgarian animated cartoon artists (well-established names like Donyo Donev and Anri Kulev, as well as young Lyubomir Yotov) worked there and once again reaffirmed the link between their true genre and comic strips. Beloved children's illustrators (Tonya Goranova, Nikifor Ruskov), designers and graphic artists (Dimitar Trendafilov, Ivan Gazdov) also made considerable contributions. The *Chuden Svyat* commissioned also popular artists from the *Daga* such as Christo Kardzhilov and Nikifor Ruskov while Petar Stanimirov and Evgeniy Yordanov together made the script and drawings for *Radul* – one of the most successful series of that magazine.



SOTIR GELEV, Patent 64246, the Nad Dagata 2 magazine, 2015.

After 1990, economic instability and mass emigration ruined the existing infrastructure and drove away the audience. Occasionally, American and French-Belgian comic strips were translated. Some artists published their own comic series but their resources usually lasted for a single number. Among the best (yet not the only ones) were the *Riko* and the *Rix* magazines. "Stories in Pictures" brought comic sequences back to its natural media from the beginning of the century – the newspaper. There, sequences of quality published P. Stanimirov, D. Stoyanov, E. Yordanov, N. Ruskov and some other artists who worked for the *Daga* before that. Following number 12, it changed its name to *Pulsar* but gradually declined out of sight. The comic artists turned to gamebooks and illustration of fantasy novels. Some of them emigrated and made successful careers abroad (Alex Maleev and Viktor Kalvachev as comic strip authors in the United States) or animated cartoonists (Rumen Petkov in the United States, Ivaylo Ivanchev in Australia). Others, who did not leave Bulgaria, dedicated their efforts to cinema and animation (Sotir Gelev), drew com-

ic sequences for western publishers (Penko Gelev for David Salariya) or developed concepts for video games (P. Stanimirov, E. Yordanov, Rosen Manchev) or turned to painting (C. Kardzhilov, V. Angelov). In the late 1990's, the exquisite comic album *Mowgli* was released by the Gekon Studio, drawings by Penko Gelev. The last decade of the century saw a curious appearing of comic art within the exposition of the National Gallery of Art. A comic book by Dimitar Mitovski is a full-fledged exhibit within the conceptual show of the Disco-95 group. Elin Rahnev's ironical text contrasts with the romantic touch that reproduces the "Journey to Shanghai" story in the style of the classic Hugo Pratt.

During the first years of the 21st century, 13 numbers of a magazine also entitled *Daga* were published. The artists are now different, various persons work for diverse graphic and TV media, the stylistics influenced by manga, street graffiti and various political and cultural events. Sibila Koserova, Georgi Murzhev, Bob Klisurski were among the more memorable names. The first graphic novelette the "Eternal Fly" was the work of a writer (Georgi Gospodinov) and a stage designer (Nikola Toromanov). The episodes of the so-called by the authors "tragicomics" were first published in the *Edno* (One) magazine and *Europeo*, and later on in an deluxe album edition. Despite the popular names of its authors and the media coverage, the "Eternal Fly" was far from the circulation numbers of the 1980's. Comic books had become an art for connoisseurs.

The year 2011 marked a new stage for Bulgarian comic art. An exhibition of drawings by almost forgotten master Stoyan Shindarov, titled *Second Start*, were brought out of his archives and displayed for the first time ever; these drawings were so far known only by poor-quality newspaper print and included his works for *The Second Start*, *The Trader from Munich* and *The Barefooted*. Then stage designers and artists sat together for the first time to discuss the situation with comic strips art. The team of the *Daga* project released an album, called *Above the Rainbow*, which became a collector's rarity.

Bulgarian comic book authors were successful and popular. Proof of this are the names of Ivan Koritarev, Svetlin Velinov, Daniel Atanasov (Satanasov), Konstantin "Titis" Vitkov, Boris Pramatarov. Petar Stanimirov won the prize for "Best realistic comic author" at the prestigious Belgrade festival. In 2013, the newly established "Comic Strips" section of the Union of Bulgarian Artists organized the First National Exhibition of Bulgarian Comic Strips. In 2014 it became international. The prize in the name of Aleksandar Denkov has its first winner – the doyen of Bulgarian comics, Lyuben Zidarov. He symbolically made a present to the young artists – his album entitled *The Treasure Island*, sketched more than 50 years ago. Comic strips art seems to be awakening once again.

Anton Staykov