

ON THE CROSS-PATH OF CULTURAL IDEAS

MACEDONIA, THE BALKANS, SOUTHEAST EUROPE -
HERITAGE, MANAGEMENT, RESOURCES

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ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MACEDONIA DURING WW1

BASED ON GERMAN AND AUSTRIAN ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE

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In this article we aim at shedding light on the Southern Balkan Peninsula during the First World War (1914-1918) and in particular on Macedonia along the so-called Salonica Front. Closely connected to wars and armed conflicts is their devastating impact on the Antique and Medieval Cultural Heritage, which has been documented meticulously and discussed thoroughly after 1945. If we take the First World War into consideration, could there have been any initiatives to do scholarly research on and to protect cultural monuments along or behind the front-lines? Our aim is to highlight Antique and Medieval monuments in Macedonia, be it churches, monasteries or archaeological remains, which were seen and documented by German armed forces as well as scholars in situ.

In this article we aim at shedding light on the Southern Balkan Peninsula during the "Great War" or First World War (1914-1918) and in particular on the so-called *Salonica Front* or *Macedonian Front*.¹ Closely connected to

¹ One of the authors, Mihailo St. Popović, has dealt with some aspects of Cultural Heritage and the *Salonica Front* in recent articles: Mihailo St. Popović, "Kunstschutz im Kriege – The Forgotten Scholarly Expeditions of the Central Powers in South-East Europe during World War I", *Thetis, Mannheimer Beiträge zur Klassischen Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns*, 20/2013, 287-292; Mihailo St. Popović, "Das Herrschaftsgebiet des Zaren Samuel im Mittelalter und dessen Erforschung zwischen 1890 und 1918", *Evropejskijat jugoiztok prez vtorata polovina na X – načaloto na XI vek. Istorija i kultura. Meždunarodna konferencija, Sofija, 6-8 oktombri 2014 g.*, Sofija 2015, 277-298; Mihailo St. Popović, "Das Zarenreich Bulgarien und der Souveräne Malteser Ritter Orden – Die österreichische

wars and armed conflicts is their devastating impact on the World's Cultural Heritage, which has been documented and discussed thoroughly after 1945. In our days the incessant world-wide media coverage has contributed significantly to public awareness and sensibility regarding the destruction of cultural monuments.²

If we take the disastrous effect of the First World War into consideration, could there have been any initiative to do scholarly research on and to protect cultural monuments along or behind the front-lines?

Let us turn to the historical and geographical setting first. After the beginning of the First World War on 28 July 1914 the Kingdom of Serbia succeeded in resisting the Austro-Hungarian Empire throughout the year 1914 and during the first half of the year 1915. A momentous change in the overall strategic situation on the Balkan Peninsula occurred, when Bulgaria joined the Central Powers in autumn 1915 and declared war on Serbia on 14 October 1915. Faced with simultaneous attacks from three sides (that is from West, North and East), the Serbian army started an organised retreat towards Kosovo and Metochia and from there via Albania to the Adriatic coast, from which it was finally evacuated to the islands of Vido and Corfu. After the victory of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian troops over Serbia in October 1915 and over Montenegro in January 1916, both countries were occupied by the Central Powers and their territories divided between three military commands as well as interests. Bulgaria organised the territories held by its troops into two zones, namely the "Morava Military Inspection Area" and the "Macedonia Military Inspection Area" with its headquarters in Skopje. Finally, the front came to a halt and was stabilised in today's Southern Albania and Northern Greece, where the so-called *Salonica Front* was established. The Central Powers divided

Sanitätsmission in Sofia (1915-1918)" [in press]; together with Veronika Polloczek, "Die Regionen von Bitola und Prilep und deren kulturelles Erbe während und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg", *Die Ursprünge der österreichischen Diplomatie in Mazedonien – mit Schwerpunkt auf das österreichisch-ungarische Konsulat in Bitola/Monastir 1851-1919* [in press]. The present article is, amongst others, based on scholarly results of the project "Die digitale Tabula Imperii Byzantini (Dig-TIB) als Beitrag zum Weltkulturerbe", which is funded by the Jubiläumsfonds der Österreichischen Nationalbank (Project No. 17771) from 1 March 2018 until 29 February 2020 as digital sub-project of the Long-Term Project "Tabula Imperii Byzantini (TIB)" of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna (cf. <https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/index.php?seite=sub&submenu=digtib>; accessed 31 January 2020).

² Cf. on the issue of Cultural Heritage and armed conflicts for example: Joris Kila, *Heritage under Siege: Military Implementation of Cultural Property Protection following the 1954 Hague Convention (Issues in Cultural Heritage Protection)*. Leiden 2012; Joris D. Kila, James A. Zeidler, *Cultural Heritage in the Crosshairs. Protecting Cultural Property during Conflict (Issues in Cultural Heritage Protection)*. Leiden 2013.

the front-line into several zones of responsibility. This front-line remained unchanged until May 1916. Then, the Bulgarian army advanced with German and Austrian support, occupied the area to the east of the river Strymon / Struma (that is the towns of Drama, Serres and Kavala) and created the "Drama Military Inspection Area". In a counter-offensive the Allied Powers succeeded in conquering the town of Bitola in November 1916 after fierce fighting. The damage to the town's monuments and civil infrastructure was substantial. The impact of destruction along the *Salonica Front* was remarkable. Most of the settlements were destroyed within a breadth of 50 to 60 km. In 1917/18 the German army had to withdraw the biggest part of its troops from South-East Europe in order to enhance its military potential in the West, thus weakening the position of the Central Powers in the Balkans. In the middle of September 1918 the Serbian army, which after its recovery on the island of Corfu had been despatched to the *Salonica Front* in the spring of 1916, launched a major offensive with French and British support with the aim to breach the front and liberate Serbia. In the battle of Dobro Pole Serbian units achieved a breakthrough after heavy fighting creating a gap in the German-Bulgarian section of the *Salonica Front*. The Bulgarian government signed a truce on 29 September 1918 in Thessalonica, which signified the capitulation of the Bulgarian army. The Serbian troops continued their advance towards the North and reached Belgrade on 31 October 1918.³

³ Cf. for example the following publications on the First World War on the territory of Macedonia: Jürgen Angelow, Gundula Gahlen, Oliver Stein, (ed.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg auf dem Balkan. Perspektiven der Forschung*, Berlin 2011; Cyril Falls, A. F. Becke, *History of the Great War based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Volume I: Military Operations Macedonia from the Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917. Volume II: Military Operations Macedonia from the Spring of 1917 to the End of the War*. Reprint London-Nashville, TN 1996; Richard C. Hall, *Balkan Breakthrough. The Battle of Dobro Pole 1918*. Bloomington, IN 2010; Paul Kirch, *Krieg und Verwaltung in Serbien und Mazedonien 1916-1918 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nachbismarkischen Zeit und des Weltkrieges 3)*. Stuttgart 1928; Bogdan Krizman, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch auf dem Balkan im Herbst 1918", *Österreichische Osthefte*, 10/1968, 268-293; Stilijan Nojkov, "Die Waffenhilfe des österreichisch-ungarischen Armeeoberkommandos für das bulgarische Heer nach dem Durchbruch der bulgarischen Verteidigungsfront in Makedonien 1918", *Miscellanea Bulgarica* 12/1998, 55-58; Björn Opfer, *Im Schatten des Krieges. Besatzung oder Anschluss – Befreiung oder Unterdrückung? Eine komparative Untersuchung über die bulgarische Herrschaft in Vardar-Makedonien 1915-1918 und 1941-1944 (Studien zur Geschichte, Kultur und Gesellschaft Südosteuropas 3)*. Münster 2005, 62-79; Petar Stojanov, *Makedonija vo vremeto na Balkanskite i Prvata svetska vojna 1912-1918*. Skopje 1969; Aleksandar Stojčev, *Dojran 1915-1918 (voeni operacii). Dojranskite pozicii - na Makedonskiot front - 1915-1918 godina*. Skopje 2007; Aleksandar Stojčev, *Makedonija i Makedonskiot front vo Prvata svetska vojna 1914-1918*. Skopje 2017; Vanče Stojčev, *Military History of Macedonia*. Skopje 2004, 485-528; Aleksandar Trajanovski, "Probitot na Makedonskiot

Various historical and ecclesiastical monuments were severely afflicted by the above-mentioned destruction along the *Salonica Front*. At this point we would like to present two interesting examples from the viewpoint of Cultural Heritage.

The first example is the Monastery of Saint Christopher in the village of Krstoar, which was originally erected in 1837 and lies approximately 4 km to the South of the city of Bitola. Photographs preserved in France reveal that the Monastery was destroyed by French artillery in 1916/17, which is clearly indicated by the French caption of the photograph: "Le Monastère détruit par notre artillerie".⁴ It is evident that the church was renovated after the First World War, when we consider its state in the year 2016 as shown in *Fig. 1*.



Fig. 1 The Church of *Sveti Hristofor Krstoarski* in the Village of Krstoar
(Mihailo St. Popović, *TIB* 16, 2016)

As second example we would like to introduce the Church of St. Nicholas in the village of Gradešnica, approximately 35 km to the East of the city of Bitola. On a photograph from the First World War (*Fig. 2*) we are able to

front (1918)", 60 godini Institut za Istorija. Zbornik na trudovi od međunarodnata naučna konferencija "Makedonija i sosedite", Skopje 08-09.12.2006 godina, Skopje 2010, 149-165.

⁴ L'Armée d'Orient commandée par le général Sarrail (3 octobre 1915 – 21 décembre 1917) : Sur le front de Florina et de Monastir (septembre 1916 – avril 1917), No. de série OR551A, No. tirage OR095031, Cote photographie K6068, Ministère de la Culture (France) – Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine – Diffusion RMN.

Cf. http://www2.culture.gouv.fr/public/mistral/memsmn_fr (accessed 31 January 2020).

discern that the church was severely damaged during the fierce fighting along the *Salonica Front*. Its current state is documented by *Fig. 3*. Thorough scholarly research is still needed to evaluate the relevant sources, especially the pictorial ones, on the particular monuments in the region from Byzantine times until the First World War and to combine them in order to create a holistic picture of the respective Cultural Heritage.

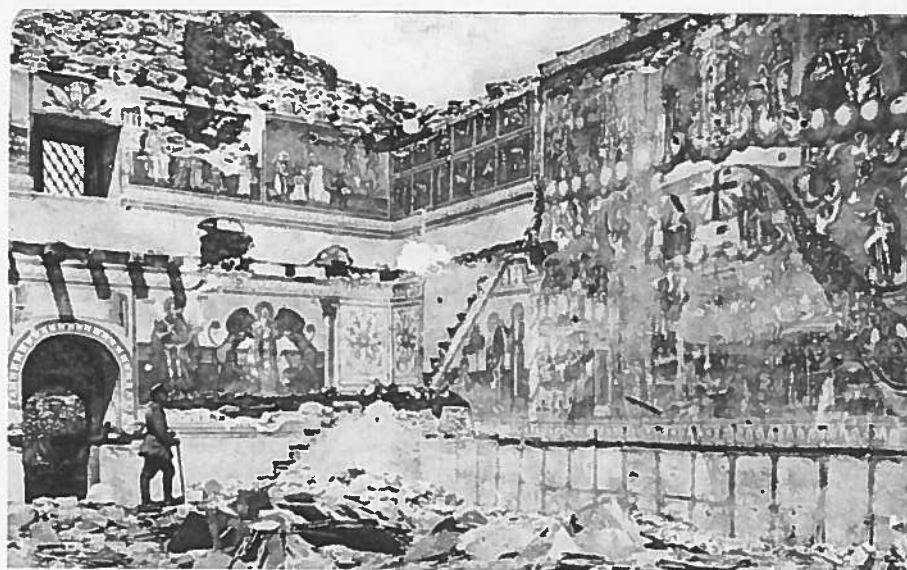


Fig. 2 A German Photograph of the Destroyed Church of Sveti Nikola in the Village of Gradešnica in the First World War (Mihailo St. Popović)

Turning to the sector of the German 11th army at the *Salonica Front* with the town of Prilep as its center, we come across the monograph "Auf den Trümmern Stobis" published by Karl Hald in 1917, which attests lively German archaeological activities behind the front-line. Archaeological finds and excavations were made in or near the villages of Stobi, Palikura, Rosoman, Sirkovo and Demir Kapija.⁵ At this point we would like to put an emphasis on the sites in Stobi and Palikura.

Today the archaeological site of Stobi is well researched and renowned in Macedonia as well as within the international scholarly community.⁶

⁵ Dr. Karl Hald, *Auf den Trümmern Stobis. Mit 62 Abbildungen und Kartenskizzen*. Stuttgart 1917. Cf. also the following reviews: M. Fichna, *Mitteilungen der Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 65/1922, 130; Balduin Saria, *Glasnik Skopskog Naučnog Društva*, 2/1927, 337f.

⁶ A bibliography on and summary of the excavation history is to be found in: Jelena Jarić, "Late Roman 'Anti-Pagan' Laws and Their Appearance in the Research of Roman Theatres in the Republic of Macedonia", *70 godini Institut za Istorija. 70 godini makedonska istoriografija*, Skopje 2017, 387-413; Dafina Gerasimovska, *Antički kući vo Makedonija*. Skopje

The city of Stobi was located on the old Balkan traffic artery, which connected, through the valleys of the rivers Morava and Vardar, the Danube in the North with the city of Thessalonica in the South of the Balkan Peninsula. Most probably Stobi was founded in the Hellenistic period during the 3rd to 2nd century BC. The city was taken over by the Romans during their expansion in South-East Europe and urbanised according to Roman designs. Different written sources attest to the importance of the city in Byzantine times. Around 450 AD a major destruction of the city occurred, which could be connected to Hunnish incursions. In 472 and 479 Stobi was conquered by the Ostrogoths. The city was hit by two earthquakes in 518 and 527, which lead to a partial abandonment of Stobi by its population. Nevertheless, the city continued to be the see of a bishop throughout the 6th and 7th centuries. The last mentioning of the city in the sources dates to the year 1014, when the Byzantine Emperor Basil II dispersed a local military garrison during his campaign against tsar Samuil in the Balkans.⁷



Fig. 3 The Church of Sveti Nikola in the Village of Gradešnica (Mihailo St. Popović, TIB 16, 2016)

1996, 25-29, 33-34; Liljana Miladinovska, *Makedonsko arheološko naučno društvo. Bibliografija na makedonskata arheologija (1945-2000)*. Skopje 2001, 21-22, 356-357, 380; Mikulčik, *Stobi. Antički grad*. Skopje 2003, 10-19.

⁷ A summary of the source-based and archaeological evidence in: Dimče Koco (ed.), *Arheološka karta na Republika Makedonija, Tom II (Makedonska akademija na naukite i umetnostite, Muzej na Makedonija – Arheološki oddel)*. Skopje 1996, 64-67.

As has already been mentioned, the starting point of the excavations at this site dates back to a German initiative during the First World War. Karl Hald informs us in his above-mentioned monograph that French and Serbian forces had dug out trenches in the area of the ancient city trying to resist the German, Austrian and Bulgarian offensive in 1915: "Das Ruinenfeld des einst so bedeutenden Knotenpunktes ist heute von französischen Schützengräben durchzogen, in denen sich Franzosen und Serben auf ihrem Rückzuge nach Süden im November 1915 gegen die anstürmenden Verbündeten zäh verteidigten, [...]"⁸ Hald even documented the trenches of the French and Serbian troops with photographs.⁹ These trenches unearthed remnants of the ancient city and inspired the German side to transform the "military excavations" into scholarly ones.¹⁰

As a consequence of this survey, the German army discovered the basilica in Palikura in 1916, located 2 km to the South-West of Stobi, as well as the cemetery basilica in 1917 and the episcopal basilica in 1918 in Stobi itself. Hald does not name the archaeologists involved in the respective campaigns, on which a later written source of the 1930s provides us with very useful information.¹¹

Fascinating is the story of the discovery of the basilica in Palikura. Hald reports that a troop of German engineers, who were encamped in Palikura and had the duty to construct roads in the area, noticed a pile of rubble, from which a marble column was sticking out. Neither a German landowner in Palikura named Zeisset, who had lived in the area for 33 years and on whose land the pile stood, nor the other inhabitants of the village had any relevant information. It was Field Marshal August von Mackensen (1849-1945), the commander in chief of the German-Austro-Hungarian-Bulgarian campaign against Serbia, who in person ordered the column to be excavated. The German soldiers discovered in 2 to 2,5 m depth a three-aisled basilica, which was documented by Hald.¹²

After the breakdown of the Central Powers at the *Salonica Front* in 1918 and the end of the First World War systematic archaeological excavations were undertaken in Stobi between 1924 and 1934 by the National Museum

⁸ K. Hald, *Auf den Trümmern...*, 19.

⁹ K. Hald, *Auf den Trümmern...*, 17.

¹⁰ We are grateful to our colleague Antonio Jakimovski, PhD (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Skopje) for the information that he and Goran Sanev accidentally found sections of the above-mentioned trenches during an archaeological campaign in the court of the House of Peristeri in 1997.

¹¹ K. Hald, *Auf den Trümmern...*, 29.

¹² K. Hald, *Auf den Trümmern...*, 29f.

in Belgrade under the supervision of the historians and archaeologists Balduin Saria (1893-1974) and Vladimir Petković (1874-1956). It was Vladimir Petković who applied the designation "Macedonian Pompeii" to Stobi. He also introduced the designations "Balkan Pompeii" and "Yugoslavian Pompeii" for the excavated city. From 1935 until 1941, the year which was marked by the attack of Nazi Germany against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the excavations were continued by Jozo Petrović (1892-?) and Djordje Mano-Zissi (1901-1995). By 1941 the following structures had been excavated: the Episcopal Basilica, the Theatre, the *Via Sacra*, parts of the Porta Heraklea, the Episcopal Residence, the Domus Fulonica, the Synagogue Basilica, two baths, the Theodosian Palace, the House of Parthenius and the House of Peristeri.¹³

In 1931 Vladimir Petković discovered a complex, which became known as "Synagogue Basilica". The name of the building stems from the fact that below the Basilica there are remains of two older Synagogues. The excavations were completed from 1970 to 1974. The archaeological discovery of the Synagogue in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia stirred a remarkable international media attention. The archive of the Austrian Archaeological Institute (Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna preserves an undated press report of the Vienna office of the *Times Wide World Photos*, which has to be dated to the 1930s and gives the following account: "Oldest Synagogue Excavated in Macedonian Pompeii. Professor VLADA PETKOVITCH has been supervising the excavations at Stobi, Macedonia, which is sometimes called the Balkan Pompeii, and is very satisfied with this years excavations, which have given very fine results. Among the excavated houses he has found a synagogue, which should be the oldest discovered synagogue in the world. This synagogue has been changed into a church, but there are still sufficient traces [sic!] existing to prove that the building was originally built as a synagogue."¹⁴

On the eve of the Second World War, at the end of July 1939, a certain Kurt Fiebig from the region of Senftenberg in Lower Austria addressed a letter to the Archaeological Institute of the German Reich in Berlin, in which he explains to have read an article on Stobi in the newspaper "Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung" in 1938 or 1939. He narrates that he was serving as military personnel at the railway hub of Gradsko in the vicinity of Stobi in 1917 and 1918. Fiebig

¹³ Cf. the following reports in Austrian newspapers on the excavations in Stobi: *Neues Wiener Abendblatt*, Nr. 251, 11.9.1924, 3; *Linzer Volksblatt*, Nr. 213, 16.9.1924, 6; *Salzburger Volksblatt*, Nr. 83, 10.4.1928, 10; *Reichspost*, Nr. 232, 23.8.1929, 5; *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, Nr. 18, 19.1.1930, 10; *Reichspost*, Nr. 251, 11.9.1930, 6; *Neues Wiener Journal*, Nr. 13897, 29.7.1932, 10; *Salzburger Volksblatt*, Folge 20, 25.1.1936, 7.

¹⁴ Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW), Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut (ÖAI), Karton Makedonien, Mappe Stobi.

remembers a German professor, whose name he has forgotten, and who conducted the excavations at Stobi with the support of the German back area. He thinks that the very same professor published a booklet on the excavations, which could be obtained in the library of the railway hub of Gradsko during the Great War, as well as postcards of the excavated monuments, which Fiebig had bought and lost at the end of the war. He asks the Archaeological Institute of the German Reich for help to provide him with the title of the above-mentioned booklet or with the quotations of other German or Yugoslav publications on Stobi. The Archaeological Institute of the German Reich in Berlin sent the respective letter to the local branch of the Institute in Vienna asking for a response to Fiebig's query. That is why the entire correspondence is preserved today in the archive of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Vienna.¹⁵

It is at this point that our article comes full circle. On 15 August 1939 the Viennese branch of the Archaeological Institute responded to Kurt Fiebig. From this letter we learn that the German professor who made photographs of the monuments in Stobi was the archaeologist and architect Friedrich Krischen (1881-1949), which gives us the answer to the above-mentioned question who was involved in the German excavations in the years 1916 to 1918. Moreover, the archaeologists in Vienna indicated to Fiebig the title of the booklet: it was Karl Hald's "Auf den Trümmern Stobis" – "On the ruins of Stobi" from 1917. ...

Our article has the aim to provide a first insight into a fascinating topic, namely the policies concerning Cultural Heritage in the Southern Balkan Peninsula in two World Wars. Our evidence spanned from German accounts of excavations behind the *Salonica Front* and their pioneering results, especially with regard to the ancient city of Stobi, to the scholarly initiatives, which were undertaken after the Allied victory in the newly formed Southern Slavonic Kingdom of Yugoslavia in order to deal with the cultural legacies of the First World War and to preserve the Cultural Heritage in this very area, and finally to the perception of archaeology in the First World War as reflected in sources on the eve of the Second World War.

¹⁵ Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW), Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut (ÖAI), Karton Makedonien, Mappe Stobi. The entire correspondence will be published for the first time in the forthcoming article of: Mihailo St. Popović, Veronika Polloczek, "Die Regionen von Bitola und Prilep und deren kulturelles Erbe während und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg", *Die Ursprünge der österreichischen Diplomatie in Mazedonien – mit Schwerpunkt auf das österreichisch-ungarische Konsulat in Bitola/Monastir 1851-1919* [in press].