

Macedonia:

A Voyage through History

*(Vol. 1, From Ancient Times
to the Ottoman Invasions)*

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7844-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7844-9

As a two volume set:

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8220-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8220-0

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The original draft manuscript of this book was designed for publishing as a single relatively long volume, but the publisher was unable to accept it in this format. I therefore split it to take volume one up to the end of the Byzantine era (in Macedonia) while volume two begins with the onset of Ottoman rule. This slightly unbalances the two volumes in bulk, but creates an historically more fundamental break than, say, starting volume two with the decline of Bulgaria and the rise of Serbia, after the Battle of Velbužd in 1330.

For assistance by reading and commenting on the manuscript I must thank Chris Brand, Colin Alexander, and my sister Rosemary. I have never actually met him, but the massive work of Aleksandar Matkovski hugely influenced my writing, and made me aware of the role of Sunni – Shia struggles throughout modern times in shaping Balkan history. Few people have been aware that these futile wars and rebellions overlapped into Europe. It seems probable too, that the Balkans (and Europe as a whole) may experience their resumption, thanks to the kind welcome to the people of the *Sharia* offered by the authorities in Germany and elsewhere in the EU.

Most of the people and places to which I refer are Macedonian, Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish and Serbian. Macedonian transliterates the Cyrillic to English according to the same rules as Serbo-Croatian, but Bulgarian transliterates (officially) much as does Russian. I have therefore tried to transliterate these names and places accordingly, but there are problems. For example, rendering the Christian name of Sandanski (from the Macedonian) as “Jane” looks absurd, but “Yane” is Bulgarian rather than Macedonian. Similarly Macedonian renders “Ts” as “c” making a correct rendering of “Tsar Samuel” as “Car Samuel”. On the whole therefore, I have favoured the Bulgarian rendering – as in for example “Gotse Delchev” over “Goce Delčev” even though the gentleman would not have wished for the Bulgarianisation of his name. As for Turkish terms, I have sometimes rendered them more readable by using their Slavic equivalents, as with “spahiluk” and spahija”. Christian names have been rendered in their English equivalent before the contemporary era.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: VOYAGING THROUGH MACEDONIAN HISTORY



Map of Macedonia

The territory of Macedonia has a documented legacy that embraces about 25 centuries of recorded history. Our next Chapter introduces the ancient Macedonian kingdom on the eve of the accession of King Alexander I (c.480 B.C.). This kingdom reached the apogee of its power under King Philip II (359-336 B.C.) and his son Alexander the Great. It remained a strong, wealthy state until its fall to the Romans in 167 B.C. The archaic and classical eras are covered in Chapters 2 and 3. They examine the emergence of the Macedonian Kingdom, from the late Sixth Century reign of Amyntas I, through the reign of Alexander the Great and to the power struggles that followed his premature death in 323, establishing the rule of Cassander. The underlying story of the early Macedonian Kingdom is that of a small tribal territory that acquired mining revenues, used them to master the Greeks in battle, and in so doing, slowly absorbed elements of classical Greek culture, by which it was transformed.

Chapter 4 deals with the Antigonid Kingdom, tracks its demise through its struggles against the hegemonic power of Rome, and covers the early period of Roman rule. The era of early Byzantine Christianity (up to the 5th Century A.D.) is the subject of Chapter 5. Attention is devoted to St. Paul's missions in Macedonia, and to the creation of Roman Salonica during the period of the anti-Christian Tetrarch Galerius. This was a period of superb creative achievement, which paradoxically witnessed the early flowering of Christian culture. The early Middle Ages between c. 540 and c.780 were the Dark Age of Byzantine history. This period of hunger, plague, and barbarian invasions is covered in Chapter 6. Key historical events of the Dark Age include the settlement of Slavs and Avars in the Balkans. The consequent immiseration of the Roman/Byzantine élite, which lost its landed wealth to the invaders, resulted in the cultural impoverishment associated with this era.

The rise and Christianisation of the first Bulgarian Empire in the 9th and 10th centuries is the subject of Chapter 7. Christianization and the creation of a written Slavonic language and liturgy were the work of a remarkable group of scholars – Cyril, Methodius, Clement and Naum, but their intellectual efforts left few visible traces for posterity, probably because they were later destroyed by the Greeks. In the 10th century, the once powerful Bulgarian state was overshadowed and then subsumed into the Byzantine Empire. As a kind of coda there follows (in Chapter 8) the strange story of the rise and fall of Tsar Samuel's ephemeral empire in Macedonia (c. 969-1018) and the attempt in c. 1040 to restore it, by a rebellion led by an able pretender, Peter Delyan.

In Chapters 9 to 11, we reach the high Middle Ages, when the hitherto unconquerable Byzantine Empire of Basil II fell into corruption and was so far weakened by 1204 that the Latin armies of the Fourth Crusade could attack and sack its once magnificent capital, Constantinople. The crusaders carved out new Latin fiefs in Macedonia. The Greeks of Nicaea managed to drive the Latins out again in 1263, but the restored Roman Empire of the Palaeologian dynasty was poorer and more fragile than hitherto. So, when we reach the 1330s, it is no longer the Greek - Byzantine state on which we focus, but the rise to Balkan hegemony of Serbia during the reign of Tsar Stephen Dušan (1330-55). For a moment, it seemed that Dušan might take Salonica and Constantinople to become the new Byzantine Emperor, but his death was followed by the fragmentation of his realm under his successors, followed by their defeat and disappearance under the unstoppable penetration of the Ottoman Turks.

The Byzantine Empire had been a monk-ridden theocratic state, in which the secular was subordinated to the divine. Its supreme religious institution, Mount Athos, the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy, is located in Macedonia. Athos is one of three peninsulas that extend into the Aegean like three fingers from the larger peninsula of Halkidiki, east of Salonica. Chapter 12 covers the history of Athos from the sketchily documented beginnings of its hermetic and monastic life in the early Middle Ages to the onset of Ottoman rule. Its monasteries were established in the 10th century on severe coenobitic principles imposed by St. Athanasius, but the story we have to tell is of human failings and descent into corruption from the austerity he demanded. This was nonetheless an era of superb creativity. Religion was the driving force behind the visual arts in Macedonia, as indeed it was throughout medieval Europe. Chapter 13 tries to re-create the fusion of religion, art and history in the Macedonian Lake District. It takes as its principal focus the lakeside churches and hermitages on Lakes Ohrid and Prespa in the 14th century, and the mystical cult of *isichasm* that informed their creation. The chapter serves also as the vehicle for the display and analysis of the frescoes that the *isichasts* venerated.

Chapter 14 is devoted to the 15th century consolidation of Ottoman rule in Macedonia. In this period there developed in Macedonia a terrible struggle between Sunni and Shia factions of Muslims, which both then and later far exceeded in significance the ineffectual efforts of Christian challenges to Ottoman rule. The Bektāṣī – the principal monastic order of the Shia - enjoyed especial power through their control of the Janissaries, the Christian boys taken by the Sultan for his imperial bodyguard. Despite the

sombre political background, it should be remembered that the Italian renaissance owes much to its origins in formerly Byzantine Europe, and much of this chapter has been fashioned around the life and times of a distinctive Renaissance historical personality – an extraordinary woman, diplomat and philanthropist, Sultana Mara or Maria Branković.

Ottoman rule in Macedonia extended from the late 14th century to 1912, and in Chapter 15, we cover the history of the Ottoman Empire as a great, if waning, power from the 16th century to the late 18th. The Sunni-Shia struggle was to re-emerge, despite which we note the extraordinary stability of Macedonia's Ottoman institutions and society until the late 17th century, and the sources of subsequent retardation. We also place emphasis on the rise of Balkan commerce in the latter part of this period, and the creation of a secular material culture.

The emergence of competing Balkan nationalisms is the central theme of chapter 16, which covers the Greek Revolution and the rival claims of the Bulgarian state established under the Berlin Treaty of 1878. Chapter 17 deals with the ceaseless insurgency and warfare in Macedonia between 1893 and 1908, when competing national terrorist gangs struggled for supremacy. The central event in the Macedonian historiography of this period was the Ilinden (Elijah's day) uprising of 1903. This needs careful analysis since its history has been corrupted by its importance to the Macedonian national myth. Macedonia was divided between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, events which initiated a renewed era of violence, discussed in Chapter 18. No Macedonian national identity had yet been allowed to emerge, since all three (prospective) successor states claimed its peoples as their own, and feared each others' rival claims. World War 2 and the Greek insurgency of 1944-49 provide the theme of Chapter 19, and raise the conveniently buried issue of "Greater Macedonia." The war in northern Greece was the last and worst phase of armed struggle between the Balkan nationalities, and Macedonia's political experience in this insurgency is vital to understanding the bitterness of inter-ethnic politics in Macedonia today. Greek writers largely avoid discussing it.

Chapter 20 takes up the story of Mount Athos from the 16th century to the present, again following its doleful descent from early austere Athanasian ideals. They say that if you want to find out what the Byzantine Empire was like in its heyday, you should visit the Holy Mountain. That is, if you are man, for women are still not allowed in. The excursion might remind

you that the Byzantine Empire was itself an avowedly holy institution, which was eaten away, like Athos, by corruption, intolerance and decay.

In August 1944, a (theoretically) sovereign Macedonian Peoples Republic was founded within Tito's Yugoslavia (Chapter 21). Macedonia was the poorest of the Yugoslav Republics, and should therefore have advanced relatively fast from backwardness, but the opposite happened, despite the lavishing on Macedonia of north Yugoslavian resources: the north-south gap widened. Like Yugoslavia itself, Yugoslav Macedonia was undermined by the failure of Tito's "self-managed" economic system to allocate these resources intelligently. Its history ends in 1991 with the fall of this Second Yugoslavia. The independent but timorous Republic of Macedonia was able to see the light of day, though its southern and northern neighbours might have preferred it strangled at birth. Our final chapter (Chapter 22) follows the problems associated with Macedonia's independence, in particularly its damaging ongoing political conflict with Greece, and the strained relationship between the Slav Macedonians and the Albanian minority, which briefly broke out into civil war in 2001. More recently, stridently nationalistic governments have sought to implant their own eccentric formulae for national identity.

Welcome to Macedonia. Its ancient, medieval and early modern histories bequeathed a tortured political heritage to posterity, and visual splendours that accompanied the diversity of political control. Hellenic temples and tombs, Serbian frescoes, Bulgarian monasteries, Vlach merchant palaces, Turkish minarets and infrastructure have left the imprimatur of different régimes and cultures. For this reason, I have tried to integrate the historical record with exploration of the heritage sites, both to encourage the reader to voyage through Macedonia's history, and for the discerning voyager, better to appreciate the history on show. Consequently, the early chapters on the classical Macedonian kingdom bring out the interplay of the historical record with 4th century B.C. pebble mosaics, ceramics and grave-goods buried with the Macedonian kings. The chapter on Early Christian Macedonia conducts the reader around Salonica during the reign of Galerius, butcher of the Christians, and creator of the city's finest historical monuments. The Early Christian era left a legacy of brilliant mosaic art, but the Dark Age that followed, as we might expect, left few cultural treasures, and a trail of destruction. From the end of the 10th century, we glimpse the visual legacy left by Tsar Samuel and his nemesis, the Byzantine Emperor Basil, called the Bulgar Slayer. There follow the changing images of "Macedonian", Comnene and Palaeologian religious art, the rogues' gallery of 14th century Serbian founder portraits in the

churches and monasteries, and the tangled religious mythology of the Holy Mountain. During the early Ottoman era, most new cultural monuments in Macedonia, especially in Skopje and Salonica, were of expressly Islamic character. The noteworthy urban residential buildings at Kastoria, Siatista, Ohrid, Kruševo and Melnik only date from the 17th to the early 19th centuries. This period, associated with the emergence of national cultures and consciousness, ranks below the classical and Byzantine eras in artistic significance, but the survivals from this “Balkan Renaissance” nevertheless impart charm to the Macedonian towns, – which is more than can be claimed of Macedonia’s dreadful 20th century architecture.

So welcome again to Macedonia. I have yet to explain what Macedonia consists of, and why the status of the state bearing this name - even its very existence - are matters fraught with dispute. Nobody can give a watertight definition of what Macedonia comprises, but for my purposes, it consists of certain territories in the Balkans retained under Ottoman administration after the Berlin Congress of 1878, thus comprising the *vilayets* (provinces) of Monastir, (Bitola) Kosovo and Selanik, (Salonica) minus fragments of Thessaly and Kosovo. It does not include Thrace or most of Albania. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 partitioned Macedonia between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. There have been several frontier rectifications since 1913, but the 1913 partition lines between these three have been little altered.

Vardar Macedonia, today’s Republic of Macedonia, liberated by Serbia in 1912, remained under Serbian rule during the time of the First Yugoslavia (1918-41). In 1944, it became one of the six Peoples Republics of Tito’s Yugoslavia. In 1991, Republic of Macedonia emerged as an independent, but landlocked, non-communist state. Its capital is Skopje, and its few more substantial towns include Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Tetovo and Veles: apart from Skopje, none have populations exceeding 100,000.

South of Vardar Macedonia lies the largest of the three Macedonian territories, in northern Greece. It is often referred to as Aegean Macedonia. Its limits extend in the west as far as the Pindus Mountains, beyond which lie Albania and Greek Epirus. Salonica is its major city and seaport. The western part of Aegean Macedonia includes the towns of Florina (Lerin), Kastoria (Kostur), Siatista, Kozani, Edessa (Voden), Veria (Ber) and Giannitsa (Yenidže). It is bounded in the south by the line of the Aliakmon (Bistritsa) river. It also extends to the heights of Olympus. To the east, Aegean Macedonia includes the Aegean coastline through Salonica beyond which it extends east as far as Kavalla. Beyond that, Greek Thrace

begins. Eastern Aegean Macedonia also includes the city of Serres, the peninsula of Halkidiki and Mount Athos, its appendage. Aegean Macedonia remained Greek after the insurgency of 1944-49, despite the efforts of its embattled Slavonic minority and their pro-Soviet backers. Until recently (1988), the term “Macedonia” was never used to describe the Government of Northern Greece, but conflict with the Republic of Macedonia over the name caused Greece to emphasise the “Macedonian-ness” of her Aegean territory.

Bulgaria received a slice of Macedonia from the Balkan War settlement, a territory referred to as Pirin Macedonia, whose towns include Petrič and Sandanski. Thanks to the disastrous outcome for Bulgaria of the Balkan Wars, it is also the smallest slice. Some sources treat the Bulgarian town of Kjustendil as lying within geographic Macedonia, though the district was liberated in 1878, not 1912-13. Bulgaria received huge inflows of Macedonians from the time of its self-government (1878) and, as its prime minister, Želju Želev, was to observe in 1991, there were more persons of Macedonian birth or descent in Bulgaria than in Macedonia.¹ This irredentist faction ensured that Bulgaria was intensely interested in the affairs of Macedonia, but not necessarily in Macedonia’s national interest. There have long been spats between the two countries as to whether Macedonia’s language was a dialect of Bulgarian or a distinct language, but when solidarity mattered most, Bulgaria proved to be Macedonia’s most loyal friend. When Macedonia declared her independence in 1991, Bulgaria was the first country to recognize her, and when Macedonia needed armaments in 2001 to resist an Albanian insurgency, it was Bulgaria that supplied them.

Macedonia also extends fractionally into Serbia. In August 1944, the founding assembly of the Peoples’ Republic of Macedonia – ASNOM – was held at the monastery of Sveti Prohor Pčinski, one of the few sites in Macedonia that was relatively safe from German or Bulgarian attack. As I understand it, in 1953 the borders were re-drawn, giving Sveti Prohor to Serbia. The monks, all Serbs, denied categorically to me that their monastery had ever hosted ASNOM. They were lying shamelessly.

As a result of the Balkan Wars, strips of territory settled by Slavonic speakers on the western shore of Lakes Prespa and Ohrid found their way into the new state of Albania. There are no towns on Albanian Lake Prespa, only villages, but it is still surprising to discover the local language is not Albanian (or Greek) but Macedonian. This Macedonian minority and its language enjoy official recognition.² The Albanian shore of Prespa

is exceptionally rich in its Byzantine artistic heritage, though its cave-churches are nearly impossible of access. Adjoining is Korçë and its (former) *sancak* extending as far as Moschopolis (Voskopoja), a district that was regarded by the Greeks, and was shown on old Greek maps, as part of Macedonia, on account of its “dominant” Greek Orthodox population (actually of Vlach descent). If the badly flawed 1913 border commission had accepted Greek rather than Austrian criteria for inclusion of this district, Korçë would have been allocated to Greece.³ In 2001, during the incipient civil war in Macedonia, the Macedonian Academy advanced a plan to exchange the Macedonian speaking territories in Albania against the Albanian speaking environs of Tetovo, Gostivar and Debar, and to accompany this with an exchange of populations. However, the president, the Albanians and the Macedonian opposition all vehemently rejected this proposal.⁴

Before the Balkan Wars, Macedonia was home to Slavs, Greeks, Albanians, Vlachs, Serbs, Turks, Torbeši or Poturci (half-Turks) kin to the Pomaks of Bulgaria, and Gypsies. They were not distributed in tidy geographical blocks, but were scattered throughout the territory. The culinary concept of a *Macédoine des fruits* was borrowed by analogy with Macedonia’s human, religious and linguistic diversity. However, Macedonian ethnology was never that simple. Many of Macedonia’s Slavs lived inside Greece’s post-1913 frontiers. They are referred to in Greek common parlance as “Bulgarians”⁵ (a pejorative) but in formal Greek sources as “Slavophone Greeks” (or plain “Slavophones”). This is Greek code for saying that these people, even though they spoke a Slavonic language, were really Greeks from every other aspect. The Greeks reached this standpoint because the Ottoman *millet* system entrusted the Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople with the administration of all Orthodox Christians. The Patriarchate was a purely Hellenic affair, and it operated exclusively in Greek language medium. Therefore, an Orthodox Christian was “Greek,” even if a “Slavophone.” Besides that, literate, upwardly mobile Slavophones tended in the 19th century to align themselves with Greek culture and speech; consequently, many Macedonians with Slavonic names were absorbed into the Hellenic cause, especially in southern – Aegean - Macedonia. Nevertheless, it was racial arrogance on the part of the Greeks (then as now) to assume that most Macedonian “Slavophones” were Greeks. There was no means for them to object to this designation. As the result of a dispute in 1924 between Greece and Yugoslavia, Greece withdrew from a plan to place the Slavonic minority under League of Nations protection, and enabled itself to deny these people any minority rights. This stance remains firm to this day.⁶ The absurd and racially

arrogant notion that “Slavophone Greeks” were merely loyal Greeks who happened by family tradition to speak Bulgarian or Macedonian was not substantiated even by the Greek Army’s sole census of national sentiment among the “Slavophones,” which it made in 1925. The “Slavophone” thesis supports the pretence that Greece is not home to a Slavonic national minority.

Just as the Greeks pretended their Slav-Macedonians were Hellenic, the Bulgarians rather more plausibly regarded them as Bulgarian, and their speech as a regional dialect of the Bulgarian language. Most of them (as Želev observed) were fierce Bulgarian patriots, so it is readily understandable that Bulgarians regard the Pirin province as part of geographical Macedonia, but its people as Bulgarian. Vardar Macedonia however is a more complex case. Up to World War 2, it was at least questionable whether many people in Vardar Macedonia felt themselves to be (unhyphenated) Macedonians. The Serbian authorities treated them as “South-Serbs,” an expression that was sometimes used in a derogatory sense, and few identified themselves as such. They had to be differentiated from (true) Serbs because the Macedonian language was more obviously distinct from Serbian than it was from Bulgarian. In the 1930s, most Slavs of Macedonia probably regarded themselves as Bulgarians,⁷ and their speech as a Bulgarian dialect, though a left-wing movement among intellectuals called for a Macedonian ethnic identity.

After World War 2, the Yugoslav Communists constructed the whole apparatus of a “Macedonian” language, national history and culture. God help anybody audacious enough to suggest that Slav-Macedonians were in fact Bulgarians, as many continued privately to think. Yet the fabrication worked brilliantly, because it gave Macedonians an identity (hitherto ambiguous), which was not Serbian, Bulgarian, or Greek, within a federative Yugoslavia that supposedly treated them as a constituent nation on a par with the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Since the 1940s, therefore, the majority people of Republic of Macedonia have called themselves “Macedonians” without any “Slavonic” hyphenation. This annoys the Greeks, to whom a “Macedonian” can only be either a Greek speaking Greek or a “Slavophone Greek.” The rest are “Bulgars” or “Yugoslavs.”

Ninety years of intermittent ethnic cleansing and educational standardisation simplified the pre-1913 map. From Aegean Macedonia, the Turks and most Slavonic speakers were forced out, leaving most of the territory Greek. Pirin Macedonia is similarly regarded as homogeneously Bulgarian. Vardar Macedonia remains diverse. The Greeks have gone, but

the two dominant peoples, Macedonians and Albanians, accounted in 2002 for 64% and 25% of the population respectively. There is still a significant Turkish minority of about 4%. Albanians form a solid block of settlement in areas adjacent to the Albanian frontier, and in a ragged band in the north of the Republic, which spreads to the Skopje villages and to the part of the city of Skopje that lies north of the Vardar River. They are not numerous in the south or east of Macedonia. Orthodoxy is the principal religion of the Slav Macedonians, but nowadays, neither the Macedonian Republic nor Pirin Macedonia is governed by the Greek (or Serbian) Patriarch. Most Albanians in Vardar Macedonia are Muslim, as are the Turks and a minority of Slavs, the Torbeši.” Muslims account for 33% of the population, but some of these are Bektaşi, whose loyalties are Shia.

If I confined the remit of this book to Republic of Macedonia - Vardar Macedonia, I would have to omit discussion of the ancient Kingdom and its greatest classical sites, because the kernel of the Kingdom lay within the present frontiers of Greece. Conversely, it would be impossible to define and write about Macedonia including only Aegean Macedonia: the Greeks see Macedonia as comprising the territories of the Macedonian kingdom at the time of Philip II. By this definition, only the southern half of Republic of Macedonia is indeed Macedonian territory. Certain cities in Vardar Macedonia, particularly Ohrid and Bitola (Monastir), Prilep and Veles, are regarded as belonging inside historic Macedonia, but the Greek definition excludes Skopje, the Republic’s capital city, because Philip II never managed to capture it.⁸ (Some Serbian historians have agreed to this exclusion, on the tenuous ground that Skopje belongs to “Old Serbia”).⁹

As I do not feel the urge to conform to Greek or Serbian national dogma, my definition of Macedonia includes all of Vardar Macedonia, as well as Aegean Macedonia and the Macedonian borderlands in Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia. My map and my coverage capture everything that could at a pinch be regarded as Macedonian but I have avoided drawing sharply delineated borders on it. Macedonia is essentially a geographical and cultural construct. The Republic of Macedonia extends over much less than half of it. There is another reason for leaving the boundaries blurred: maps representing Greater Macedonia are anathema to the Greeks, who see them as laying claim to the boundaries of a prospective unified Macedonian state, threatening Greece’s territorial integrity. Therefore, the maps in authoritative Greek publications never surround the territory with borders.¹⁰

My map and my book's coverage imply no inference about what the political boundaries in the area should be. The present borders are far from ideal, but it is hard to envisage border change that would create a net gain for the human condition. Besides, if borders were to be re-drawn, the most likely change would be to institutionalize the invisible lines that divide the Republic of Macedonia into Slavonic and Albanian territories, since the Albanians tirelessly press for federalization. Neither I nor anybody else can foresee any of Macedonia's borders being re-drawn to the disadvantage of Greece.

Greek paranoia over the threat posed to Greece's northern frontier led in the 1980s to incipient conflict with the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, and ever since then, Republic of Macedonia and Greece have been locked in dispute over the national existence of the former. Some of the bases of this dispute are of long-standing, going back to the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and earlier, but the present Greek-Macedonian tension is relatively newly wrought and synthetic affair.

The Greeks have produced many arguments to show why "Macedonia" has no right to exist except as a Hellenic entity inside Greece. The essence of the Greek stance on Macedonia is that the ancient Macedonian Kingdom was Greek and that nobody, least of all a nation of Slavonic newcomers who only arrived there about a millennium after the life of Philip II, had any claim upon the name, which was stolen from Greece. In the words of a huge border sign that confronted you in 2004 when you entered Greece by road from Bitola, "Macedonia was born Greek." There was no room for argument. Only Greeks had the right to identify themselves as Macedonians. As Ion Dragoumis, a Greek partisan hero of the Macedonian struggle had written in 1903, "Even if there were not a single Greek to be found in Macedonia, Macedonia would still have to be Greek."¹¹ The so-called Macedonian nation was therefore a "malignant growth" that the Serbs ought to remove from the Balkan scene¹² – presumably by re-christening Slav-Macedonians as "South-Serbs," that unsatisfactory invention of the inter-war era.

The "Macedonia was born Greek" logo needed to be buttressed by convincing evidence that the ancient Macedonians were themselves Greek. The ancient Macedonian élite learned to speak Greek and enjoyed Greek culture, but the Greeks themselves were not convinced of the Greek-ness of the Macedonians. The Macedonian royal house pretended to trace its origins from a man from Argos (therefore a Hellene) but the basis for its claim was purely propagandistic. The Greek descent issue had its first

airing in the aspirations of the shifty, ruthless King Alexander I of Macedonia (498–452 B.C.). He wanted to compete in the Olympic Games, which were open only to Greeks, but he was nearly barred from the competition because of objections that he was not Greek. However, his claim was upheld, because “he proved himself to be an Argyve” – and not therefore a barbarian Macedonian. Of course, he was Greek! Did he not take part in the Persian War? Yes, he did, but he represented Xerxes, King of the Persians, and fought on the Persian side in Persia’s invasion of Greece, though he was far from being alone among the Greeks in that. Earlier, he had even given his sister Gygaea in marriage to a Persian aristocrat as a bribe, and in so doing, he created “family ties with the Persians”.¹³ In the mid-4th century, the Athenian orator Demosthenes had no doubt that King Philip II and his Macedonians were barbarians, not Greeks. “Philip,” he declared “is not a Hellene He is only a miserable Macedon,” and alleged of the Macedonians that they were so barbaric that one could not even buy a decent slave in their country. Stripped of the pejoratives, Philip and his supporters largely agreed that Macedonians were not Greek.¹⁴ The confusion is addressed by Worthington, who argues that the Macedonians spoke a rustic variant of Greek, which was scarcely intelligible to the Hellenes. His evidence is plausible without being convincing.¹⁵ Stanley Casson, who explored this issue in depth, concluded that the Macedonians were non-Greek ‘barbarians’ who attempted to represent themselves as of Hellenic origin, but “in their aping of the Hellene, ... seldom succeeded in giving even a passable imitation.” Most painfully, the Macedonian could fight but “had little or no culture of his own to offer as a substitute for that of Hellas”.¹⁶ Eugene Borza, foremost historian of the pre-Alexandrine Macedonian kingdom, sifted the evidence to affirm, “as far as the ancient Greeks were concerned, the Macedonians were not Greeks.” The myth of the Argyve origins of the Temenid dynasty rested solely on Herodotus’ telling of the propaganda of Alexander I, who had his own reasons to try to convince the Hellenes that he was Greek.¹⁷ Only after the ancient Macedonians had subjected the Greek cities to themselves, did they become Hellenised by degrees. Macedonia was *not* born Greek.

If Greek claims based on antiquity seem far-fetched, the claims of the Macedonians are even less convincing. A Macedonian nationalist web site asserts, “the Slavonic tribes that settled in Macedonia merged with the native inhabitants who were descendants of Alexander the Great.” The nuttier Macedonian nationalists do indeed espouse the idea that “the Macedonians are an ethno-specific group ... distinct from their neighbours.... They have lived within a naturally defined territory ... for

over 4,000 years, and are the descendants of the ancient Macedonians and Alexander the Great.” They are therefore the only people who have any right to call themselves Macedonian.¹⁸ Supposedly, they were the original white race, and even had a written Slavonic language with an alphabet that has yet to be deciphered.¹⁹ This idea also takes up the notion that the Macedonians had indeed been Slavs from Russia, who had immigrated into the Balkans at a time before even the Greeks had arrived. Associated with this belief, we learn from them that Homer’s language was closer to modern Macedonian than any other (including Greek) as was “proven” with a computer by a Macedonian engineer in Toronto.²⁰ None of these “antiquized” ideas is particularly new. “I am not a Bulgar, a Greek or a Vlach – I am pure Macedonian as were Philip and Alexander and Aristotle,” wrote Slavejkov in 1871, and long before that, a succession of Croat writers, beginning with a Dominican friar in the 16th century, advanced the same ideas, enriching the “debate” with the notion that Alexander was a Serbian.²¹ Even the fancy that Homer was a Slav was first circulated in the 1850s by Dimitrije Miladinov.²² Today’s “antiquizers” have yet to catch up with this, since they do not much care for Serbians, but they make political capital by parading “Alexander of Macedon” as a precursor of the modern Macedonians.

A less extreme version of Macedonian nationalist historiography claims that the Slavonic immigrants of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries assimilated the resident population.²³ This is linked to the obsolete notion that the Slavs entered the Balkans as peaceful shepherds in search of grazing, whereas the evidence shows that they came in as waves of marauders. Moreover, they immigrated into a population vacuum. “Accounts of Slav and Bulgar raids give the impression of an empty land across which invaders could move with impunity.” The resident populations were not wiped out; they withdrew to cities with strong defensive walls, and under Justinian, 600 places were programmed for defence works, to shelter the local population during times of danger.²⁴ So there was little mixing of resident and Slavonic groups.

Besides, if they had “merged,” assimilation would have occurred in the opposite direction. In the Peloponnese, which received heavy 6th century Slavonic immigration, the Slavs (at one time the majority nation there) were assimilated into the Byzantine Empire and the Greek Church, and were subsequently distanced from Bulgarian Christianity. Exceptionally, enough of the native population survived for “re-connection” with the Byzantine world.²⁵ As a result, these Slavs were thoroughly Hellenized. The same would have happened in Macedonia if formerly dominant

incomers had taken wives from the resident population. These wives would have taught their children their mother tongue, and Slavonic would have died out. (Mother-tongue assimilation is why Turkic-Bulgarian language and culture disappeared, displaced by Bulgarian, a Slavonic tongue with Turkic traces.) The consolidation of Slavonic speech in Macedonia is testimony to the mutual isolation of the Slavonic and Greek races there in the early Middle Ages.

The idea that the Macedonian Slavs are (unlike the Bulgarians) “pure” Slavs, and can trace their ancestry back to Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians is not new. “Macedonism” can be traced back to the writing of George Pulevski, who published his *Macedonian Song Book* (in Sofia) in 1880. However, Pulevski, though talented, was an autodidact, and before Macedonia won its independence it was only uneducated people who seriously thought that way.²⁶ Yet such is the magic of nationalist doctrine, the present VMRO-DPMNE government increasingly espouses similar ideas. A web site claiming that the Slavonic tribes of Macedonia merged with the native inhabitants is incidentally dedicated to “proving” the Macedonians are not Bulgarians, for the Macedonian-Bulgarian ethnic dispute is no less vigorously (and dishonestly) pressed than the Macedonian-Greek. A case could be made that the Bulgarians are Slavs blended with a dash of proto-Bulgar, while the Macedonian rootstock is Slav with a dash of Avar. However, as proto-Bulgars and Avars were both Turkic peoples from the east Asian steppe, and not easily distinguishable from each other, the distinction is subtle rather than significant.

A variant of the Slavs-were-here-first scenario is the suggestion of Arnold Toynbee that the Paeonians of Thrace, a powerful tribe between c.540 and 511 B.C., were a people whose language (on the basis of place-name survival) was possibly Slavonic. Their capital was Bylazora (Veles). Though Paeonian power was broken by the Persians in 511 B.C., the tribes survived in the hills and retained their identity.²⁷ The Paeonians were a relatively civilized if warlike people, who had a coinage marked with a helmet. A fine Illyrian helmet dated c. 550 B.C. is inscribed “I belong to Paeon” in the Corinthian alphabet.²⁸ Many Paeonians were deported by King Philip V in about 182 B.C., but the story runs that the later Slavonic invasions were actually of Paeonians seeking their ancestral lands!²⁹ What is surprising is the political and intellectual effort invested by the Greeks in seeking to refute such shaky theses concerning Macedonian origins, which have made recent headway, but are still not universally accepted in Republic of Macedonia.

Nor is it clear that modern Greece can claim a more a consistent lineage from ancient Greece than can the Macedonians from ancient Macedonia, for as noted above, peninsular Greece was heavily Slavized in the early Middle Ages. If anybody can (and of course, does) claim a blood-link with the Macedonian kings, it is the Albanians. They can point out that the great Alexander III's mother Olympias was a Lyncestian (or Molossian) queen, that the Lyncestians were an Illyrian tribe, and that the Illyrians were the forebears of modern Albanians.^{30*} Moreover, Alexander's father Philip II also had a Lyncestian mother, Queen Eurydice, so it was reasonable for Konitza, a Muslim Albanian writer of 1919, to claim Philip II (as well as Alexander) for a "collateral ancestor".³¹ The argument that Macedonia must be Greek because the Alexander III of Macedonia was Greek, regardless of whatever the present inhabitants might be, is therefore absurd; two, possibly three, of Alexander's grandparents seem to have been proto-Albanians.

Disputes over ethnicity drawing upon the shaky source base of ancient history will not serve either party in convincing the European Union of the rightness or wrongness of competing ethnic claims, a matter towards which the EU affects a high-minded indifference, since it preaches multiculturalism. The intensity of the dispute is probably linked with the Greek insurgency (or Civil War) of 1946-49. The Greek Communists were hugely dependent on troops enlisted from the "Slavophone" minority in Aegean Macedonia. The Civil War appeared, particularly in the north of Greece, to be a Slavonic insurgency "concealed behind the cloak of KKE [The Greek Communist Party]; and fear of the Slav is a powerful emotion in Greece."³² Even this offers only a partial explanation for Greek antagonism towards the Republic of Macedonia. When pressed, the Greeks recall the barbarities perpetrated by Slav- Macedonian troops in the civil war. However, the Left, which always made the most noise about the Macedonian issue, was happy during the insurgency to fight against the Greek government, alongside the Slav Macedonians of Greece, taking aid from Yugoslavia, which wanted to annex the territory.

I will cover further details of the Graeco-Macedonian dispute, as it emerged from the time of Macedonia's independence, in the final chapter, where chronologically it belongs. However, the dispute unavoidably keeps surfacing in historical texts, because in the Balkans, the purpose of writing history is not to establish an objective record, but to advance a particular ethnic or political interest. Most authors, explicitly or otherwise, adopt

* However, the Croats also claim Illyrian descent.

inflexible political stances towards the Macedonia-Greece dispute, and tirelessly urge the favoured arguments of their chosen protagonist at all points. In what I see as a three-way dispute about Macedonian identity, I reject partisan approaches, but concede that the Bulgarian view probably does fractionally less violence to the ascertainable facts of history than either the Greek or Macedonian. However, this is immaterial. The fostering of Macedonian national identity in and after 1944 may have been a political artifice contrived to exclude Bulgaria from any claim on Vardar Macedonia, but it was executed with remarkable success and a minimum of popular friction. Consequently, most citizens of the (then) Peoples Republic of Macedonia accepted Macedonian identity, however spurious the Greeks or Bulgarians may regard it. The Republic of Macedonia's version of history violates common sense and the historical record more than either the Bulgarian or the Greek version. I have no qualms about demonstrating some of its absurdities, yet the fact remains that except for the Albanian and Turkish minorities, nearly all its people regard themselves as Macedonian, and feel patriotically disposed towards their country. No amount of Greek (or Bulgarian) historical, diplomatic, political and cultural posturing will convince them to swap their national identity for another.

This work has been a labour of love, a historical voyage of a different tenor to my publications on modern and contemporary Balkan economic history, which were written while I taught economic history at the University of Edinburgh. In 2005, after retirement, I bought a bijou apartment in the ancient town of Ohrid, looking down on the eponymous lake. This allowed me to explore the historical legacy of Macedonia in depth, and to deepen my knowledge of the Lake and its mysterious, seldom visited neighbour, Lake Prespa. It accounts for my chapter on the Lakes, their churches and hermit cells, some of which are linked with the rise of *isichasm*, a doctrine of late medieval mysticism. It may just convince my reader that the enchanting Macedonian Lake District contains some of Europe's most neglected cultural and aesthetic treasures.

I think you may want to go and see them for yourself.

References

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- ¹ Marolov, *Republic of Macedonia*, p. 100.
 - ² Ibid. p. 86
 - ³ Aarbakke, *Ethnic Rivalry*, pp. 5, 20; Hart, "Culture," pp. 200, 204; Brailsford, though anti-Greek in his sympathies, seems to have followed the same precedent.
 - ⁴ Phillips, *Macedonia: Warlords*, pp. 123-24.
 - ⁵ Barker, *Macedonia*, p. 10
 - ⁶ Ibid. p. 31
 - ⁷ Danforth, *Macedonian Conflict*, p. 65
 - ⁸ K'nchov, *Izabrani proizvedenija*, II, p. 90
 - ⁹ Barker, *Macedonia*, p. 9
 - ¹⁰ See also map in Danforth, *Macedonian Conflict*, p. 181
 - ¹¹ K. Vakalopoulos, *Modern History*, p. 222
 - ¹² Danforth, *Macedonian Conflict*, pp. 32-3
 - ¹³ Herodotus, V, 21, 22, VIII, 136.
 - ¹⁴ Shea, *Macedonia and Greece*, pp. 36, 38-41; Pribičević, *Macedonia*, p. 53
 - ¹⁵ Worthington, *Philip II*, p. 8 and Appendix 2, pp. 216-19.
 - ¹⁶ Casson, *Macedonia, Thrace and Illyria*, pp. 202-04
 - ¹⁷ Borza, *Shadow of Olympus*, p. 277
 - ¹⁸ Danforth, *Macedonian Conflict*, p. 43, citing a pamphlet issued in 1992 by the United Macedonians of Victoria.
 - ¹⁹ Mitev, Željazkova & Stojkovski, *Makedonija na kr'stop't*, p. 127.
 - ²⁰ *Sto makedonski godini*, p. 640.
 - ²¹ Taškovski, *Radjanjeto*, pp. 163 ff.
 - ²² Ibid. p. 167.
 - ²³ Shea, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 44
 - ²⁴ Whitby, "Balkans and Greece," pp. 716-8
 - ²⁵ Ibid. p. 730
 - ²⁶ Pribičević, *Macedonia*, pp. 112-13
 - ²⁷ Hammond & Griffith, *History of Macedonia*, II pp. 56-7
 - ²⁸ Ibid. II, p. 92
 - ²⁹ Shea, *Macedonia and Greece*, pp. 51-53
 - ³⁰ Brown, "In the realm of the double headed eagle," pp. 124-5.
 - ³¹ Macurdy, "Queen Eurydice," pp. 209-10; Hart, "Culture, civilization, and demarcation," p. 206.
 - ³² Sweet-Escott, *Greece*, p. 56.

CHAPTER TWO

ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL MACEDON, c.513-336 B.C.

Amyntas I, Alexander I and the Persian wars - Perdiccas II – Archelaus - Civil Wars and instability, 399-359 - Philip II, 359-336: Mining wealth - Philip II: Strategy and tactics - the phalanx and the catapult - Macedon under Philip II: the unification of Greece - The assassination of Philip II

This chapter on Macedon's early history begins effectively in c. 513 B.C. during the reign of the Temenid King Amyntas I, and terminates with the death of Philip II. The main task in this account is to show how the formerly insignificant non-Greek tribal state of Macedon evolved over about 175 years to become the dominant power in Greece – with ambitions to World Empire.

The boundaries of Macedon were unstable, but in the 5th century B.C., it was centred on the Emathian plain and the lowlands between the Axios and Aliakmon rivers. At times it stretched eastwards to Kavalla. To the northwest, around modern Bitola, were the lands of the Lyncestians (variously, Molossians), who are claimed to have been a sub-branch of the Macedonian people, the tribe of Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great. Their lands merged with those of the Illyrians of the Pindus, who were probably the ancestors of modern Albanians. There were no such things as good neighbours, for all were warrior societies, either at war with Macedon, or in alliance with it against another enemy. No state could exist in isolation from the violent political interplay of its neighbours, least of all in classical Greece, and from the beginning of our period, the history of Macedon was grimly interlocked with that of the Greek cities. Macedon was not itself a city-state, rather a tribal monarchy. The Macedonian élites came into contact with the Greeks, whose cultural leadership they came to accept. Therefore, they increasingly used the Greek language within their own circle. The language spoken by Macedon's tribes is called Macedonian, but it was not a written language, so inscriptions in Macedon were written in Greek. Macedonian probably had affinities with Greek, but

not with modern – Slavonic – Macedonian, for the Slavs were not to settle the territory for another millennium. It was the command language of the army, in which Alexander the Great was to communicate with his soldiers. Though his state was not self-evidently Greek, it suited its rulers to claim for themselves the cachet of Greek ancestry.

Its early capital, Aegae, (located at the present day village of Vergina) was Macedon's political centre and the burial place of its kings. Aegae was a fortress as well, but it was not what we would understand as a city. It remained the administrative capital of Macedon at least until the reign of Perdiccas II,¹ though nothing from that era survives.

Amyntas I, Alexander I and the Persian wars

The Temenid dynasty took its name from Temenus, mythical kinsman of the demigod Herakles. His putative descendant Perdiccas I arrived in Macedon in the 7th century B.C., after being banished from Argos in the Peloponnese.² According to Herodotus, Perdiccas and his brothers, after arriving in Macedon, worked as servants for a local ruler, but fled after a dispute over unpaid wages. After crossing the Aliakmon River, they resettled probably near (today's) Naoussa. Perdiccas was probably a mercenary who engaged in raiding in Macedon before setting himself up as a petty king.³ The Argyve connexion was a device employed to emphasise the (purported) Hellenic origin of the Temenids, a matter over which Perdiccas' successors felt insecure.

Perdiccas' throne (supposedly) passed sequentially from father to son.⁴ Herodotus listed eight kings, each the son of his predecessor, from Perdiccas I through Argaeus, Philip I, Aeropus, Alcetas, Amyntas I and Alexander I to Perdiccas II, from which Hammond devises a rough dating that allows 30 years per generation.⁵ Subsequent Macedonian genealogy displays no such tidy sequences, and frequent sanguine succession struggles would greatly have shortened the average reign. So Hammond's estimate that Perdiccas I founded the Macedonian kingdom in c.653 B.C. is probably too early: more likely, it occurred after 600.

For the Temenid dynasty in the 6th century, we know very little. King Argaeus fought an Illyrian tribe at a battle where his son Philip was killed.⁶ The earliest Macedonian king about whom we know anything more substantial was Amyntas I. He pushed the bounds of his kingdom eastwards across the Axios river. He and his son Alexander had to confront the expansionist might of the Persians, who in c. 513 became

interested in Macedon's newfound mineral wealth. By letting Alexander play a murderous trick on a Persian delegation, Amyntas became their ally. Alexander, the first king of his name, reigned from c. 498 to 452. His diplomatic arrangements with the Persians granted Macedon little respite, because in 492 B.C. a Persian army under King Darius' son-in-law, Mardonius, swept through Thrace, took Thasos Island, and forced Alexander's submission.⁷

The Persian expedition did not achieve its objectives, because its fleet lost nearly 300 ships and 20,000 men in a storm off Mount Athos, and was then so severely handled by the Brygi, a Thracian tribe, that Mardonius was forced to abandon the year's plans for invasion.⁸ In 490 King Darius tried again, and this time the Persians attacked Athens by sailing straight across the Aegean to avoid the perils off the Mount Athos peninsula. The invasion ended in destruction by the Athenians at Marathon, but it made Darius more determined than ever. In 486 he died before he could resume the campaign, and was succeeded by his son Xerxes. It took Xerxes six years before he could mount the invasion but he used the time for careful preparations. Mardonius' first invasion had left the Persians in control of the Mount Athos peninsula, so to avoid a similar shipwreck off Athos, Xerxes ordered excavation of a wide ship canal across the isthmus of Akti, which joins Athos to the mainland. The labourers, bending beneath the overseers' lash, took three years to complete it. Xerxes also bridged the Struma River and built a chain of supply depots along the route his army would take.⁹

His expedition in 480 was mounted on a huge scale – Herodotus claimed (extravagantly) that when it left Asia it comprised 1.7 million men accompanied by a fleet of 4,000 ships and 517,000 men.¹⁰ The Persian fleet passed through the Xerxes canal, and swept up the gulf of Thermai (at the head of which is today's Salonica) where the army was encamped. The Macedonians offered no resistance. When the Persians approached the pass of Tempe, which leads south from Macedonia into Thessaly, the Thessalians warned the Greeks that they could not defend the pass on their own, so the Athenians and Lacedaemonians (Spartans) sent an expeditionary force to hold it. Alexander, thereupon, sent envoys to tell the leaders of this expedition that the Persians would overwhelm them, and convinced them they should abandon the defence of Tempe, whereupon they sailed home. Alexander's primary motive, however, was to get the Persian army out of Macedon and into open undefended Thessaly.¹¹ As a result the Thessalians (like the Macedonians) became enthusiastic Persian allies, but the Persian expedition now faltered because its fleet was

decimated by a storm off the coast of Thessaly, an event that narrowed its margin of naval superiority.

The Greeks decided they would have to use Thermopylae, a narrower pass than Tempe, as a roadblock to stop the Persians reaching Athens.¹² The defence of Thermopylae by Sparta's King Leonidas was heroic but badly prepared, and the Persians finally overwhelmed its three hundred defenders. The Lacedaemonians retreated to defend the Isthmus of Corinth, abandoning Athens to its fate. The Athenians evacuated their city for Salamis Island, which they protected with their navy, and destroyed the Persian fleet. Part of the Great King's army trailed back to Sardis through Macedon and Thrace, starving and plague-ridden, while Mardonius, with 300,000 troops, the élite of the army, over-wintered in Thessaly and Macedon to resume campaigning.¹³ In Macedon, his colleague Artabazus felt the need to suppress an incipient revolt at Potidaea and Olynthus. All the inhabitants of Olynthus he massacred, and would have done likewise to the Potidaeans had they not turned the tables on him.¹⁴ The rag-tag Persian fleet fled to Samos.

In 479 B.C. Mardonius used Alexander once more as an ambassador to the Athenians, to win them over to the Persian side. Alexander tried unctuously to convince Athens of the futility of resistance, and the probability that if it did defeat the Persians in a land battle, a still larger army would be sent against it.¹⁵ He added his own opinion, as a "friend" of the Athenians, that King Xerxes was doing them great honour in offering them forgiveness. By implication, Mardonius wanted Athens as an ally against Sparta, so the Lacedaemonians hastily sent their own embassy to Athens to stiffen Athenian resolve. "Don't be seduced by Alexander the Macedonian," they warned, "he does as is natural for him to do – a tyrant himself, he helps a tyrant's cause." The Athenians took the point and sent Alexander away with a flea in his ear, warning him not to come back again.¹⁶ Alexander returned home and told Mardonius what had transpired in Athens, so Mardonius marched his army south and re-occupied Athens, whose people had once more been evacuated to Salamis. The Lacedaemonians reluctantly promised the Athenians their support, for fear lest their neighbour might join the enemy, and Mardonius, faced with this deadly alliance, decided to withdraw northwards.

The Persian expedition collapsed at the great Battle of Plataea, (479) in which Alexander and his Macedonian troops fought on the Persian side. Mardonius put them on his left wing facing the Athenians. On the eve of battle, Alexander made clandestine contact with the Athenians. Reassuring

them that “I am myself a Greek by descent,” he told them Mardonius would attack at dawn. That was all, but he believed it sufficed to exculpate him with the Greeks.¹⁷ The Greeks responded by switching the Spartan and Athenian positions, so that the Athenians rather than the Spartans { XE “Spartans: at Plataea” } would face the élite Persian troops. Mardonius promptly switched his Persians to the left wing, in order to terrorize the Spartans. This presumably left the Macedonians facing the Athenians again. To forestall the expected Persian dawn attack, the Greeks retired during the night. In the morning the Lacedaemonians { XE “Spartans:at Plataea” } attacked the Persian line, but took heavy casualties until Mardonius was unhorsed, after which his troops turned and fled. What happened on the other flank is unclear, but most of the Persians’ Greek allies “played the coward” – and Herodotus spoke no more of the Macedonians.¹⁸ In analysing the battle, Tom Holland ignores Alexander’s intervention, rightly regarding it as insignificant. The Persians fled home through Macedon¹⁹ - again. They must have left the country in a desperately hungry condition.

A number of finds date from the age of Amyntas and Alexander, in particular funerary objects found at Sindos, a suburb of Salonica, now held in the Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum. They include an especially appealing survival, a young woman with her pet on one of two marble “beds”. [Pl. 2.1]

Alexander pushed the bounds of Macedon to the coastal plains, displacing the Pierians in the west, and securing the mouth of the Vardar – Axios river. Macedon prospered mightily from his ambiguous relations with Persians and Greeks, for the Persians suppressed its Paeonian neighbours. The Bisaltae tribe had hitherto controlled mines of gold and silver at Mount Pangaeum or Mount Dysoron, near the mining centre of Amphipolis at the mouth of the Struma, but the Persians dispersed the tribe, leaving a vacuum into which Alexander moved before he, too, was attacked by the Persians. After the Persian collapse in 479 Alexander seized the mines and quickly put them into production.²⁰ Their revenues supplemented state earnings from the export of shipbuilding timber, and probably became of much greater importance. Alexander used their output to issue Macedon’s first silver coins. Their design was based on earlier Bisaltic issues, with the word “Alexandro” on the reverse replacing the former “Bisaltikon”.²¹ The obverse image of a mounted man was probably intended to represent himself. He was able to dedicate two golden statues of himself at Delphi and Olympia²² – further reminders to the Greeks of his dishonest claim to Hellenic status. Alexander had to defend his gains –