

MACEDONIA – A HISTORY TERM

Macedonia – un nume de istorie

Abstract: *The text deals with some aspects of the history of Macedonia. It starts with the modern dispute between the Bulgarians, Greeks and the leading political circles of post-War Yugoslavia concerning the name and the ethnic character of Macedonia – a country combining the ancient (Greek) and medieval/modern (Slavic) heritage. The chapter is based on a competent book by John Shea. The following chapter refers to late-medieval period, referring to the Late-Byzantine texts. These texts prove that the name of Macedonia was still in use from the late Antiquity till the 15th century. Some sources give no precise information, but a comparison between from different tomes might document some interesting tendencies. A contrary tendency in the evolution of the term was its shift to the northern or north-western direction, where since the 6th century the Slavonic population has increased and changed the ethnic character of the country. It is remarkable an important role to the development to the Cyrillo-Methodian mission represented in that region by Clement of Ohrid, Theophylact of Ohrid etc, as well as to the historical importance of the West-Bulgarian/Macedonian Tsardom of Samuel on 11th century and its later tradition. The text gives a generally reliable presentation of the problem.*

Keywords: *Byzantium, Macedonia, Balkans, Ohrid, Chernomen.*

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The name “Macedonia” appears in the Balkans throughout the history of The Middle Ages, yet today the history of this term remains a point of controversy. This is a consequence of an all round policy started as far back as The Middle Ages. In the 1980's when it became evident that Yugoslavia was going to disintegrate and a part of Macedonia would become independent, Greece was afraid that they would lose Aegean Macedonia to a reunified Macedonian state. Therefore, propaganda that “Macedonia is 4.000 years of Greek history” began. The very country that tried to destroy the Macedonian name now claimed that Macedonia is

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Greek. They had vehemently denied the existence of such a land, people, or language. Now they claimed that the land was Greek, but there were still no ethnic Macedonian people or language, that it was simply “Slavic” or “Bulgarian”. In Greece, the government tried to eliminate any trace of Macedonia. Since the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, however, a concerted programme was implemented in order to prove the “Greekness of Macedonia”. In August 1988 Greece renamed Northern Greece as “Macedonia”. Only after this renaming did Greek claims to Macedonian heritage gain widespread publicity.¹ More than that, Greece did not refer to any part of its current territory as Macedonia until 1988, when it adopted the name to replace that of Northern Greece. This point added weight to the notion that the dispute with Macedonia was a manufactured one.² The Greek government consistently denied the existence of both a Macedonian nation and a Macedonian minority in Northern Greece and adopted a policy of forced assimilation toward the Slavic-language-speaking inhabitants of Aegean Macedonia.³

The state of Macedonia was also in conflict with Bulgaria because of the country's official name. The government in Sofia refused to recognize the existence of a separate Macedonian nation and of a Macedonian language, claiming that Macedonians are a subgroup of the Bulgarian nation and that the Macedonian language spoken in Bulgaria is a dialect.

We can find the name “Macedonia” (in reference to a location) in many late-antique and Byzantine sources. Historical sources talk about a place called “Macedonia” in the context of the Goth, the Scythian, the Bulgarian, and the Slav attacks.

Ammianus Marcellinus (b. c. 325–330, d. c. 391–400 AD), a Roman soldier and historian and in the *Res Gestae*, told in Latin the history of Rome from the accession of the Emperor Nerva in 96 AD to the death of Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 AD, and indicates the border of Macedonia with Thrace: “And in the corner of the eastern borders binds with Macedonia through narrow and steep roads, known as Acontisma”.⁴

“The period of Pax romana was disturbed in the middle of the 3rd century when the Goths managed in a short period of time to impose themselves as a serious threat so that the whole of Macedonia was concerned about their attack”.⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265 – 339/340 AD), also known as Eusebius Pamphili, was a Greek historian of Christianity, an exegete, and a Christian polemicist. His work - *The*

¹ Shea 1997: 104

² *Ibidem*: 282

³ *Ibidem*: 108

⁴ Apud Mihăescu et alii 1970: 123

⁵ Shukarowa et alii 2008: 67

Chronicle - is divided into two parts. The first part (“Chronography”) is an epitome of universal history and arranged according to nations. Eusebius recalls the 263 AD Goth attack on Macedonia: “During the Olympics, in 263, Greece, Macedonia, Pontus and Asia were devastated by the Goths.”⁶ To resolve the administrative and economical crisis of the Empire, Diocletian's (284-305 AD) innovation, “based upon the implementation of the tetrarchic administration system, actually raised the position of the caesar and his heir, Maximilian Galerius (293–311 AD), who was entrusted with the jurisdiction over the major part of the Balkans, including the province of Macedonia, which was incorporated in the newly formed diocese, Moesia”.⁷

Anonymous Valesii recounts events in the life of Constantine. “After peace with the Goths was completed in these conditions, attention was directed it was directed against the Sarmatians that gave evidence of bad faith. Sarmatian slaves rebelled against their masters and drove them all out. Constantine received them and placed in Thrace, Scythia, Macedonia and Italy over 300.000 people of different ages and sexes.”⁸ Constantine I emerged as an indisputable ruler of the Byzantine Imperium. “The administrative and economical reforms had a direct impact on the increase of the administrative status of Macedonia and its promotion to diocese in 325 AD”.⁹

Hieronymus (345-420 AD) was one of the most erudite and active Christian Church Fathers. He translated the Bible into Latin and he continued Eusebius of Caesarea's chronicle. He left a collection of letters containing valuable historical information and in which the name “Macedonia” appears as a location: “I dread that I must enumerate the destruction of my time. For over 20 years, between Constantinople and the Alps of Italy Romans shed blood. Goths, Sarmatians, Alans, Huns, Vandals and Marcomanni ravage, plunder, and loot Scythia, Thrace, Macedonia, Dardania, Dacia, Thessaly, Alania, Epirus, Dalmatia and all of Pannonia.”¹⁰ By the direct involvement of the Goths led by Alaric, the Byzantine imperial court managed to secure control over this controversial part of the Balkans and in 401 it abolished the province of Macedonia Salutaris and reestablished a single province of Macedonia. The Huns forced the Byzantine Empire to “initiate new administrative changes during the year 448 that caused the new division of Macedonia Prima and Macedonia Secunda”.¹¹

⁶ Apud Mihăescu et alii 1970: 10

⁷ Shukarowa et alii 2008: 67

⁸ Apud Mihăescu et alii 1970: 48

⁹ Shukarowa et alii 2008: 68

¹⁰ Apud Mihăescu et alii 1970: 186

¹¹ Shukarowa et alii 2008: 71

In his “Advice and Stories of Kekaumenos”, a work comprising historical information that was composed between 1075–1078, the 11th century Byzantine writer Kekaumenos included pages about the Thracian Travelers and the revolt of 1066, where they took part together with the Bulgarian and Greek inhabitants of Larissa. These pages are particularly important for our interest, as they state that “the Byzantines are turning against them. They will flee from Epirus and Macedonia, and most will settle in Greece”.¹²

John Skylitzes (early 1040s – d. after 1101) recounts in his historical work - “Synopsis of Histories” - the events that happened between the enthronement of Michael I Rangabe (811) and the enthronement of Isaac I Komnenos. He tells that in 1059 the Emperor Isaac Komnenos concluded peace with the Hungarians and the Pechenegs, after they had made daily supply raids in Bulgaria, Thrace, and Macedonia.¹³

Michael Attaleiates or Attaliates (c. 1022-1080) was a Byzantine public servant and historian active in Constantinople and around the empire's provinces in the second half of the 11th century. Around 1079-1080 circulated “The History” of Michael Attaleiates, a political and military history of the Byzantine Empire from 1034 to 1079. In this vivid and largely reliable presentation of the empire's declining fortunes after the end of the Macedonian dynasty, he speaks of the events in 1053 when the Emperor Constantine IX instructs Romanos Diogenes, the Duke of Paristrion, and Bazil Monachos, the Duke of Bulgaria, how to face the Pechenegs: the armies will pass the highest peak situated as border between Macedonia and the lands near the Danube. After the events of 1065 some Uzes sought refuge with the Russians while others entered the service of the Byzantine Emperor, being colonized in Macedonia and receiving high titles.¹⁴

Nikephoros Bryennios (1062–1137) was a Byzantine general, statesman, and historian. At the suggestion of his mother-in-law (the Empress Irina) he wrote a history of the period between 1057 and 1081, from the victory of Isaac I Komnenos over Michael VI to the dethronement of Nikephoros III Botaneiates by Alexios I. He spoke about how the Emperor Michael VII Ducas Parapinakes faced attacks from Scythians and about the revolt of the Balkan Slavs. The Scythians often made inroads into Thrace and Macedonia.¹⁵

Anna Komnene (December 1st 1083 – 1153) was a Byzantine princess, scholar, physician, hospital administrator, and historian. She was the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I and his wife Irene Doukaina. She wrote the “Alexiad”, an account of her father's reign, which

¹² Elian, Tanaşoca 1975: 40

¹³ *Ibidem*: 62

¹⁴ *Ibidem*: 68 - 70

¹⁵ *Ibidem*: 78

is unique in that it was written by a princess about her father. Anna Komnene wrote that between 1087 and 1090 war began between the Byzantines and the Scythians. “They are expelled from parts of Macedonia and Philipopolis and placed their camp near the Danube”.¹⁶

In his “History”, Nikita Choniates (c. 1155 to 1217) recounts the events between 1118 and 1206 after periods of reign of the Byzantine emperors. He describes the victory of Byzantine Emperor John II Komnenus over the Scythians and brings into the memory of his contemporaries the events of the reign of Aexios I when Thrace was occupied and Macedonia was desolate.¹⁷

Georgios Akropolites (1217 or 1220 to 1282), author of “History”, follows the events between 1203 and 1261 during the so-called Empire of Nicaea. Between 1185 and 1207 there were several important events, but the uprising of the Asen brothers and the failed expedition of Emperor Isaac II are the most important: “in 1237, under the pressure of the Tartars, the Cumans refuged in the south of the Danube in Macedonia”.¹⁸

In his work “The History”, Georgios Pachymeres (1242 – c. 1310) shows the events that occurred between 1261 and 1308. “In 1285 under the threat of the pirates and the Tartars the Emperor Andronicus II Paleiologos orders the displacement of the population. Those who lived in Thrace and Macedonia will be protected in fortresses, even if they are not safe”.¹⁹

After the death of Theodosius I the Roman Empire split in two. Macedonia was included in Byzantium, the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. In the next three centuries the invasions of Visigoths, Huns, Vandals, and Slavs altered the demographic of Macedonia.

In the 6th century Slavs from Northeastern Europe gradually penetrated and settled in the Balkans, challenging Byzantine supremacy. Macedonia was one of the peninsula’s first areas where Slavs settled. Except for major cities such as Salonika, Seres, Edessa (Voden), and Veroia (Ber), numerous Slav tribes colonized all of Macedonia by the 610s. By the second half of the 6th century, Byzantine writers referred to these Slavic-settled areas in Macedonia as “Sklaviniai” and often identified a Sklaviniai with a particular tribe, for example the Sklaviniai of the Dragoviti. In 658 Emperor Constantine II (641–668) decisively defeated the Sklavi besieging Salonika and forced them to acknowledge the real authority of the Byzantine state. However, the struggle for control of the Sklavi continued. At the end of the 7th century it became part of the wider struggle in the peninsula, when the new Bulgarian state in the Northeast began to challenge Byzantium for

¹⁶ *Ibidem*: 96

¹⁷ *Ibidem*: 244

¹⁸ Apud Mihăescu et alii 1970: 405

¹⁹ Elian, Tanaşoca 1975: 448

control not only of the Macedonian Sklavi but also of Constantinople itself. In the war with Byzantium from 809 to 811, the Bulgarian ruler Khan Krum defeated the army of Emperor Nikephoros I (802–811) with Avar and Sklavi support. In 814 the Sklavi joined Krum's army that marched on Constantinople. Krum's unexpected death ended the advance and allowed Byzantium to establish its real sovereignty and rule over the Sklavi in Macedonia.

“In the early 9th century an administrative unit (theme) of makedonikon was established in what is now Thrace (split among Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey) with Adrianopole as a capital”.²⁰ Early in the 9th century the growing power of the Bulgarian rulers challenged Byzantium's authority in Macedonia and throughout the Balkans. Boris continued the expansion, extending his state across the Vardar into Western Macedonia. “Bulgarian historians have seen that [moment] as the turning point in which Macedonian Slavs were assimilated into the Slavo-Bulgar ethnos, which had been evolving since the establishment of a common state North of the Balkan range in the 680s”.²¹ In return, Boris swore to accept Christianity from Constantinople rather than from Rome, with it as his state's official Church and religion. This medieval territorial state, or the first Bulgarian empire, reached its zenith under Tsar Simeon (893–927). He extended his frontiers in every direction: to the Sava and Drina rivers, into Serbian lands in the Northwest, to the Adriatic in the West, into Macedonian and Albanian lands in the Southwest, and into Thrace in the Southeast. He assumed the title of “Tsar of the Bulgars and Autocrat of the Romans” [Greeks] and became master of the Northern Balkans and probably the most powerful ruler in Eastern Europe. However, his numerous campaigns against Constantinople failed. He could not seize the imperial crown. When he died in 927 he left his vast, multi-ethnic empire in a state of exhaustion and rife with internal dissension. According to the peace agreement that Tsar Peter (927–69) concluded with Byzantium in 927, Bulgaria returned some Byzantine lands and Constantinople recognized Peter as Tsar of the Bulgarians. However, Bulgaria did not return the Macedonian lands. Byzantium acknowledged them as Bulgarian possessions. Byzantium began to refer to and treat the Macedonian Slavs as Bulgarian subjects, and Byzantine historians and chroniclers soon followed suit.

After the death of the Bulgarian Tsar Roman in 997, Samuel became the founder of a powerful empire. In the late 990s Samuel attained the pinnacle of his power. He was the master of most of the Balkans. Gradually he built a kingdom which by the end of the century comprised most of the

²⁰ Bechev 2009: III

²¹ *Ibidem*: III

former Bulgarian lands between the Black Sea and the Adriatic, with the addition of Serbia up to the lower Sava, Albania, Southern Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus. This large territorial empire centered in Macedonia. Its capital was first on an island in Lake Prespa and later in Ohrid, and it had an ethnically diverse population. In addition to the Macedonian Slavs and the Slavs of Greece, it included Bulgarians, Serbs, Croats, Greeks (Byzantines), Albanians, and Vlachs. There were also Romans (Italians) on the Adriatic coast and Vardariot Turks and Armenians, whom Samuel settled in Polagonia, Prespa, and Ohrid. Samuel proclaimed himself tsar of the Bulgarian Empire. “The fact that Byzantium did not recognize the legitimacy of the powerful Macedonian Empire logically brought Samuel in a position to require support from the Western Church”.²²

Ohrid was made the capital of the Bulgarian Empire during the rule of Samuel. From 990 to 1018 Ohrid was also the seat of the Bulgarian Patriarchate. After the Byzantine conquest of the city in 1018, the Bulgarian Patriarchate was downgraded to an Archbishopric and placed under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

Theophylactus of Ohrid (c. 1050 – c. 1109) was one of the most famous Byzantine writers. In his correspondence he maintains the traditional independence of the Diocese of Ohrid. The Bishop of Constantinople, he says, has no right of ordination in Bulgaria, whose bishop is independent.

Demetrius Chomatianus, Archbishop of Ohrid and Greek canonist of the 13th century who possessed the See of Ohrid from 1217 to 1234, is noted for his letter to (St.) Sabas, Archbishop of Serbia, which dealt with the jurisdictions of the Churches of Ochrida and Ipek (1220) and with the coronation of the despot Theodore Ducas (1223), and for his correspondence with the Patriarch German II of Constantinople in relation to the consecration of the bishop of Serbia, which Demetrius did not consider canonical. These exchanges of letters are important for the history of Byzantine Canon Law of that epoch. In a letter to the Serbian King Stefan Radoslav, Demetrius Chomatianus testifies that the population in his bishopry speaks Bulgarian. “We (...) having received your questions, shall answer each of them in accordance with the teaching of our holy fathers and with the written and unwritten customs of the Church; but not into our artistic language, but in ordinary simple, prosaic speech so that, in this fashion, what is written may be well understood, because without sufficient knowledge, particularly of the Bulgarian language, it stands to reason that one cannot interpret or speak”.²³ In his compilation “Brief Life of Clement of Ohrid”, Demetrius Chomatianus testifies that Clement is

²² Shukarowa et alii 2008: 99

²³ Ivanov 1917: 148

Bulgarian and that the population in Macedonia is Bulgarian. "This great father of ours and light of Bulgaria [Clement] originated from the European Moesians whom the people usually also know as Bulgarians (...) First, together with the divine Nahum, Angelarius and Gorazd, he diligently studied the Holy Scriptures, translated, with divine assistance, into the local Bulgarian tongue by Cyril, a true father of godlike wisdom and equal to the Apostles, and from the very beginning he was with Methodius, the wellknown teacher of the Moesian people in piety and the Orthodox faith. When the divine Cyril passed to the better life, having already appraised Hadrian, at that time Pope of ancient Rome, of his apostolic mission and the perfecting of the talent vouched safe to him, and after Methodius had been appointed Archbishop of Moravia and Bulgaria by the selfsame Pope, then Clement was also elevated to a bishop's throne, since Methodius appointed him as Bishop of the whole of Illyricum and of the Bulgarian people who possessed the country. He [Clement] most frequently resided in the Illyrian town of Lichnida, centre of the surrounding towns and which nowadays is called Ohrid in the language of the Moesians, and in Cephalinia, which in Bulgarian is Glavinitsa, where he also left monuments."²⁴

By the summer of 1018 when Basil entered Samuel's capital, Ohrid, the four-decade-long struggle was over. Samuel's Macedonian kingdom didn't exist anymore. Macedonia would remain under direct Byzantine rule for two centuries. The Byzantine Empire was master of the Balkans for the first time since the Slav occupation. After the Byzantine conquest of Ohrid in 1018, the Bulgarian Patriarchate was downgraded to an Archbishopric and placed under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

Between 1081 and 1083, the Normans roamed through and devastated most of Macedonia. In 1107 and 1108 Normans again laid waste to Western Macedonia. In the 13th and 14th centuries Ohrid changed hands between the Despotate of Epirus, the Bulgarian, the Byzantine, and the Serbian Empires.

The disintegration of Byzantium was complete on April 13th 1204, when the Fourth Crusade captured and looted Constantinople. The victorious Latins, who only held the imperial capital until 1261, abolished the Orthodox Byzantine Empire and set up their own feudal states, with the most important being the Latin empire at Constantinople and the Latin kingdom in Salonika. Various states competed for the Byzantine tradition and inheritance: the empire of Nicaea, across the Straits; the Despotate of Epirus, on the Adriatic; and the kingdom of Serbia and the empire of

²⁴ Milev 1966: 175-176

Bulgaria, which controlled the Northern Balkans. Throughout Latin rule in Constantinople, control of Macedonia and/or its parts shifted from one power to another. “The different ambitions and strategic aims of the new dynasties that emerged caused the creation of new separate state with capital of Salonika, which was known as the Kingdom of Salonika. The territory of Macedonia was incorporated within this new Kingdom”.²⁵

At the beginning, one area was under the kingdom of Salonika, while the regions of Skopje and Ohrid became part (1204–1207) of the Bulgarian empire under Tsar Kaloian (1197–1207). After the latter’s unexpected death in 1214, part of Macedonia, which included Skopje and Ohrid, fell to the despotate of Epirus. After 1224, when it conquered the Latin kingdom of Salonika, Epirus appeared as the rising power in the Balkans and successor to Byzantium. However, in 1230, at the battle of Klokonitsa, Ivan Asen II (1218–1241) defeated the Epirotes and eliminated Epirus from the successional struggle. Bulgaria annexed Thrace, most of Macedonia, and part of Albania. After Ivan Asen II died, the country descended into complete feudal anarchy. The Nicaean empire challenged Bulgaria’s dominance in Macedonia and the Balkans and began to expand its influence on the European side of the Straits. Its armies moved into Eastern Macedonia and threw Epirus out of Salonika in 1246. Nicaea, Epirus, Bulgaria, and Serbia struggled over the rest of Macedonia until the Nicaeans forced the Latins out of Constantinople and reestablished the Byzantine Empire. For the last time, Byzantium was master of all of Macedonia. “After conquering Constantinople in 1261, the Nicaean Emperor Michael VII Palaeologus (1259 – 1282) renewed the Byzantine traditions so that Macedonia was again incorporated within the framework of the reestablished Byzantine Empire”.²⁶

However, merely two decades later, the Serbian king Milutin (1282–1321) began to challenge Byzantium’s position. Serbia completed its conquest of Macedonia under Stephen (Stefan) Dusan (1331–55), the empire’s greatest medieval ruler. In 1334 his forces captured Ohrid, Prilep, and Strumica; one decade later, Kastoria (Kostur), Florina (Lerin), and Edessa (Voden) further South. The occupation of Seres in 1345 consolidated Serbian control of Macedonia except for Salonika, and Stephen assumed the title of Tsar of the Serbs and Greeks. The battle of Chernomen marked the beginning of the Ottoman conquest of Macedonia. “This happened the night between the 25th and 26th of September 1371”.²⁷ Before 1400, the Ottoman Empire ruled all of Macedonia except for Salonika, which it temporarily occupied in 1387. Macedonia would remain under Ottoman

²⁵ Shukarowa et alii 2008: 112

²⁶ *Ibidem*: 113

²⁷ *Ibidem*: 120-121

domination for well over five hundred years, until the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.

Macedonia appears throughout the history of The Middle Ages in the Balkans, yet the history of this term remains a point of controversy today. This phenomenon is not limited to Macedonia, of course: the question of terminology for entire territories and peoples in history sometimes take an irrational turn, particularly in the Balkans. Highly-pronounced hegemonistic and nationalist feelings have at times turned medieval, let alone modern history into a battleground, accompaniment to contemporary chauvinistic euphoria and internecine struggles.

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