

The Tradition of Cultural Heritage Research in North Macedonia

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of immovable cultural heritage, digital technologies, and education in the Republic of North Macedonia. The country's rich historical and archaeological legacy, shaped by diverse civilizations such as the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans, is reflected in its numerous cultural monuments, archaeological sites, and museum collections. With over 4,700 documented archaeological sites, Macedonia's cultural heritage is essential to its national identity and historical continuity. Archaeology plays a crucial role in reconstructing the past through the fragmented remains of material culture, offering insights into human beliefs, aspirations, and daily life. The cultural heritage of North Macedonia has long been a subject of scholarly interest, with research spanning from early travelogues and European explorers in the 19th century to modern systematic excavations. This paper traces the development of archaeological research in North Macedonia, highlighting key figures, discoveries, and institutions that have contributed to the study and preservation of its rich heritage. The study also explores the impact of historical events, including the Ottoman period, the World Wars, and the post-independence era, on cultural heritage research and conservation efforts. Furthermore, it examines the role of modern methodologies, including digital archaeology, in safeguarding and interpreting archaeological sites. By synthesizing historical scholarship and contemporary advancements, this research underscores the significance of North Macedonia's archaeological heritage and its continued study in a global context. This research underscores the significance of integrating digital tools into heritage management and education to protect and promote Macedonia's cultural assets for future generations.

Key words: *Cultural Heritage, Research History, Results, North Macedonia*

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Introduction

My topic entitled immovable cultural heritage, digital technologies and education in R. S. Macedonia is connected with cultural heritage, the education about it, and the modern digital technologies with which it is processed and supplemented, reconstructed, and visually presented in the Republic of S. Macedonia.

The three segments have different levels of research and application. Cultural heritage is the most researched and classified. For several decades, one national and several local protection institutes, as well as conservation centers, have existed and functioned successfully. With the establishment of the Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in 2004, a new factor and quality in protection was added. Starting from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, as well as from other international conventions for the protection of human rights, the Macedonian cultural heritage is established as a fundamental value of the state and society that is protected in all circumstances.

Located in Southeast Europe, the Republic of Macedonia is a country with a rich history, and complex socio-economic development and represents a crossroad between civilizations in the past which has resulted in remarkable cultural diversity and a rich archaeological heritage. The geographical position of the Republic of Macedonia being in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, and a lot of natural beauties and goods that are found here, have been a major cause of these spaces being inhabited by different people and civilizations, ranging from ancient Greece and the Roman Empire to the Ottoman Empire.² All of them have left traces in the material culture of the Republic of Macedonia as fortresses, cemeteries, houses, churches, monasteries, mosques, baths, etc. in various styles, from Byzantine to Oriental, but all of them have their own indigenous native art.³ Archaeological findings, castles, churches, mosques, and folk architecture arouse special interest.

In this regard, according to the Archaeological map of the Republic of Macedonia, more than 4700 archaeological sites dating from the Palaeolithic to the Ottoman epoch are registered in Macedonia. The above figure cannot be far from reality but it must be taken into consideration also that, even recently, new archaeological sites of notable importance have been discovered, opening the possibility of further increasing the numbers and distribution of

² M. Panov, *Touristic values of particular areas in the Republic of Macedonia: Annual Proceedings* (book 16), Skopje, 1968, 217-272

³ I. Baseski, *Cultural monuments in Prilep and surrounding*, G. Sight, Skopje, 1981, 88-98

the cultural heritage in Macedonia. Around 100 of them are protected by law, and in addition, the archaeological sites of Skupi, Stobi, and Heraclea Lyncestis, including all archaeological sites discovered in the old town core of Ohrid are protected with legal Act by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. In addition, approximately 30 archaeological collections located in the national and local museums have extensive protection.⁴

Taken as a whole, the immovable cultural heritage of Macedonia appears quite impressive: a cultural heritage spanning from prehistory to Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman cultural contexts and resources. The same can be said of the richness of the collections of the Macedonian museums, some of them of exceptional importance, especially in the field of Byzantine painting.⁵

About the history of cultural heritage research.

Archeology has a difficult but noble task, from the broken remains of the objects that once represented a direct or indirect reflection of human thoughts, beliefs, aspirations, and needs, to assembling munitions mosaics that should adequately reflect the long-past reality. Bringing to light, preserving, and putting to service these monuments of cultural heritage for the benefit of humanity has been and remains a constant challenge. Therefore, the great interest of researchers in dealing with the issue of cultural heritage should not be surprising.

This interest in researching the cultural heritage of North Macedonia has long attracted many archaeologists, culturologists, tour guides, amateurs, etc., to publish their results in the form of studies, catalogs, or diaries.

An important aid when dealing with material culture and its role in everyday life is *The Archaeological Map of the Republic of Macedonia*⁶ with the material documented therein. Only archaeological research enables us to place the findings of this study on a broader source basis.⁷ Evidence of material culture supplements the information provided by written sources and is often the only source of information on various aspects of everyday life.

⁴ Pasko Kuzman, *Archaeological sites*, Skopje: Cultural heritage protection office, 2009, 11.

⁵ *Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe: MACEDONIA* (Former Yugoslav Republic of), Mission Report 14-23 November 2004, Venice: UNESCO, 2004, 16.

⁶ *Arheološka karta na Republika Makedonija*, I-II. Skopje 1996.

⁷ R. Wenskus, "Randbemerkungen zum Verhältnis von Historie und Archäologie, insbesondere mittelalterlicher Geschichte und Mittelalterarchäologie", in: H. JANKUHN – R. WENSKUS (Hrsg.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und Archäologie. Untersuchungen zur Siedlungs-, Wirtschafts- und Kirchengeschichte* (Vorträge und Forschungen 22). Sigmaringen 1979, 637-657.

In the context of archaeological research and cultural heritage in Macedonia and other countries under Ottoman rule, the circumstances were not very favorable for their development until the 19th century. Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) is one of the most famous Ottoman travelogues, besides Silahdar, Solak Zade, Hadji Kalfa, and so on. Evliya Çelebi's numerous and extensive "Travelogues" (Seyahatname) mostly contain memoirs of Ottoman culture and religion, but also provide important: historical, and geographical information. In his Travelogue (Seyahatname) he described several towns, including Skopje, Kumanovo, Bitola, Resen, Stip, and Prilep. Though his notes are primarily about contemporary life, architecture, culture, and society, he occasionally provides some historical information on the old towers, ruins, mosques, etc. It is quite probable that in his notes on the journey undertaken in 1670 to Albania, which Çelebi recorded in his 8th volume, some parts of Via Egnatia were described.⁸

Indeed, the interest in antiquities increased with the arrival of more foreign travelers in the 19th century. The earliest systematic work that included the N. Macedonian regions was *Theophilus Lucas Fridericus Tafel* from 1837 and 1841–1842 on Via Egnatia, an old prehistoric and ancient road connecting the Adriatic with the Aegean, passing across the southernmost parts of N. Macedonia. Among the Western authors who researched and described historic Macedonia and its antiquities were quite frequently consuls and other civil servants in foreign missions. François Charles Hugues Laurent Pouqueville, before becoming a French consul in Patras, extensively traveled across (still Ottoman) Greece and the Balkans. In 1805 he published *Voyage en Morée et à Constantinople et en Albanie*,⁹ and in 1820 *Voyage dans la Grèce*.¹⁰ In 1811 he also visited the area of Lake Ohrid and attributed the ancient town of Lychnidos to the monastery of St. Naum. He also recorded Via Egnatia's remains in the area of Struga (north of Lake Ohrid lake).

French historian and archaeologist *Leon Heuzey* first located the city at the confluence of the rivers Crna and Vardar. Heuzey described his travels through this country in 1855 and 1861 when he visited the central and southern Aegean Macedonia and Albania.¹¹ The most

⁸ Кемал Аручи, "Македонија и соседните области во хрониката на Солак Заде", *Гласник на Институтот за национална историја* XIX, 3 (Скопје, 1975), 233-260; Andrej Iliev, Aleksandar Grizev, "Historical and sociological aspects of Evlija Çelebi's travelogue for Macedonian cities", *Knowledge: International Journal*, vol.38, no.5 (Skopje, 2020), 1185-1186; Predrag Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, Ljubljana: The history of archeology, 2021, 283.

⁹ François Charles H.L. Pouqueville, *Voyage en Morée, à Constantinople, en Albanie, et dans plusieurs autres parties de l'Empire ottoman*, Volume 2, Paris: Gibon, 1805.

¹⁰ François Charles H.L. Pouqueville, *Voyage dans le Grèce: comprenant la description ancienne et moderne de l'Epire, de l'Illyrie grecque de la Macédonie Cisaxienne...*, Paris: chez Firmin Didot père et fils, 1820.

¹¹ Léon Heuzey et H. Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macédoine. par Léon Heuzey et H. Daumet*, Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C.ie, 1876; P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 284.

famous British scholar who researched N. Macedonia was Arthur Evans. He published his observations on the antiquities in Macedonia and this country and his essays on antiquities from Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo in the already mentioned publication *Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum I-IV*.¹² Towards the end of the 19th century, the art and historical heritage of Macedonia also became increasingly studied by Serbian scholars (*L. Stojanović, M. Veselinović, R. Ćurković*) and Russian (*V. Gligorovich, N.P. Kondyukov, P.H. Milyukov*).¹³ Followed by Austrian philologist and diplomat J.G. von Hann. Later A. von Premerstein and N. Vulić recorded many inscriptions and monuments in its vicinity.¹⁴

In the context of the destruction of cultural monuments, which suffered from the First World War, we also find data published by German archaeologists. 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 Trummern Stobis” published by Karl Hald in 1917, which attests to 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. At this point, we would like to emphasize the sites in Stobi and Palikura.¹⁵ The first information on Palaeolithic finds came from Ettienne Patte (1918) who published a short article on a pointed stone hand axe found near Kristiforovo and three scrapers near Bukovo (Bitola region).

The first reported excavations started during the World War I by German officers and the archaeologist F. Krischen. Between 1923 and 1940, the excavations were directed by Balduin Saria, R. Eger, Kj. Truhelka, V. Petkovic, J. Petrovic, and Dj. Mano-Zissi from the National Museum, Serbia. Systematic growth of archeology and data on the state of cultural heritage in North Macedonia began to grow after the Second World War¹⁶.

The first archaeologist at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje was Grga Novak, a Croat, but he worked as a professor of ancient history (1920-1924). It was only in 1926 that

¹² Sir Arthur Evans, *Antiquarian researches in Illyricum*: Part I-IV Communicated to the Society of antiquaries, Westminster: Nichols & sons, 1883-1885.

¹³ Đ. Miljković, *Prilog kon istorijata na muzejskoto delo na teritorijata na SR Makedonija*. Istoriski muzej na Makedonija, Skopje, 1982, 31; P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 284.

¹⁴ *Master onservation Plan For The Archaeological Site of Stobi, R. Of North Macedonia* (edit. S. Blazhevsk, A. Pencheva, J. Stewart, I. Vasilev), Skopje: National Institution Stobi, R. of North Macedonia Balkan Heritage Foundation, Bulgarija, 2021, 22-23.

¹⁵ Karl Hard, *Auf den Trümmern Stobis*, Stuttgart: Strecker and Schröder, 1917; cited by: Mihailo St.Popović, Toni Filipovski, “Antique and Medieval Cultural Heritage in Macedonia during WW1: Based on German and Austrian Archival Evidence”, in: *On the Cross-Path of Cultural Ideas: Macedonia, the Balkans, Southeast Europe – Heritage, Management, Resources*. Skopje 2020, 13.

¹⁶ P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 285-286.

the Chair in Archaeology was established with the appointment of Ćiro Truhelka. After an extraordinary career in the Provincial Museum in Sarajevo before 1918, Truhelka, in 1926, quite reluctantly accepted the professorship in Skopje.¹⁷ He had to start from scratch since there was almost no archaeological literature in the faculty's library, no funds for research, and archaeology was considered a supplementary subject. Despite his endeavors to secure the necessary infrastructure for teaching archaeology, after his retirement in 1931, the Chair in Archaeology was left vacant until after the Second World War. France Mesesnel took on the teaching of art history (another subject Truhelka taught).¹⁷ The most famous site in N. Macedonia that Vulić investigated was Trebenište in the Ohrid Lake area. Between 1930 and 1934, Vulić excavated a late prehistoric necropolis and discovered two golden masks dated mid-1st millennium BC.¹⁸

By far the least known periods are the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic. Except for a few sporadic finds, nothing else was known about these two periods before the 1950s. The first Palaeolithic site was discovered in 1956 in the Makarovec cave near Veles, and by the late 1970s, there were still only four Palaeolithic sites recorded in the country. More systematic research was initiated in the late 1990s, mostly by surveying caves. The first systematic excavations took place only two decades ago (1999, 2003, and 2004 in the Golema Pesht site, some 60 km southwest of Skopje), revealing late Middle and Upper Palaeolithic finds.¹⁹ On the other hand, the situation with the Neolithic period is quite the opposite. This period, together with the Iron Age, are the best-researched prehistoric periods. At present, there are some 180 to 200 known Neolithic sites in the country.²⁰

The period between 1945 and 1991 was characterized by significant and dynamic development (economic, industrial, urban, and cultural). In this context, the modern Macedonian nation ultimately developed its identity in culture, religion, and language and autonomous governing institutions. The oldest archaeological institution was the National Museum (1945), which took over the collections of the former Museum of South Serbia and began building new archaeological collections in 1947.²¹

¹⁷ Ćiro Truhelka, "Arheološke beleške iz Južne Srbije", *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva* V (Skopje, 1929), 59-85; Ć. Truhelka, "Bibliografski popis mojih publikacija", *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 33-34 (Sarajevo, 1921-1922), 37-42; P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 286.

¹⁸ Nikola Vulić, "Antički spomenici naše zemlje", *Spomenik LXXI* (Beograd, Drugi razred 55/1931), 218-220.

¹⁹ P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 271.

²⁰ Voislav Sanev, "Tumba Maxari", *Arheološka karta* 2, Skopje 1996, 377-378; Dragi Mitrevski, "Praistorija na Republika Makedonija", in: P. Kuzman (ed.), *Makedonija, Mileniumski kulturno-istoriski fakti*, vol. 1, Skopje: Media Print Makedonija and Univerzitet Euro-Balkan, 2013, 83-266; Voislav Sanev, "Mlado kameno vreme", in: *Arheološka karta na Republika Makedonija*, Tom 1, Makedonska akademija na naukite i umetnostite and Muzej na Makedonija, Skopje 1994, 26-42.

²¹ P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 282.

From 1955 to 1969, the Archaeological Museum of Skopje and the Agency for Protection of Monuments of Culture, North Macedonia were in charge of further archaeological research. In the timeframe of 1970 until 1980, the excavations were directed by Dj. Mano-Zissi and J. Wiseman – the Museum of Veles, North Macedonia, University of Austin, Texas, and later Boston University – both of the USA. Some rescue excavations in the nineties (1992-1995) were conducted by the Agency for Protection of Monuments of Culture, North Macedonia. Since 2008, a large-scale excavation campaign has aimed to complete the excavation of all the buildings that were only partly unearthed and to uncover new areas of the site.²²

After gaining independence (from 1991 onwards), the changes were very gradual and not of the magnitude known from the previous periods. However, the political context left a strong imprint on archaeology's image and status in N. Macedonia. The first Macedonian archaeologists had degrees in art history (Dimče Koco, Vasil Lahtov, Blaga Aleksova) or graduated from archaeology in Belgrade and Zagreb (Vlado Malenko, Vera Bitrakova-Grozdanova, Vojislav Sanev, Borka Josifovska).²³

Regarding the cultural heritage of the early Christian period, the doyen of Macedonian archaeology, academician professor Dr. Blaga Aleksova, devoted his entire fruitful life to the research of early Christianity. Starting with her studies on the early Christian buildings along the course of Bregalnica, Stobi and on the territory of almost all of Macedonia, published in several renowned professional magazines from the country and abroad; to her capital work *Loca Sanctorum Macedoniae*, she makes a cross-section of the discovered objects, their typology, distribution, as well as an attempt to sublimate the cults spread in these spaces from the 4th to the 9th century.²⁴

Academic Vera Bitrakova-Grozdanova, in the study of the *Старохристијански споменици во Охридско*,²⁵ gives thorough observations about the dating, influences, and mosaic decoration of the early Christian buildings from the Ohrid region. Her long-term field research on the island of Golem Grad and the Prespa region provides detailed and in-depth analyses of the concentration of early Christian monuments in that region. Of course, this also

²² <https://balkanheritage.org/stobi-excavation-project/>

²³ P. Novaković, *The history of archeology in the Western Balkans*, 290.

²⁴ Blaga Aleksova, *Loca sanctorum Macedoniae: the cult of martyrs in Macedonia from the 4th to the 9th centuries*, Skopje: Institut for Old Slav Culture, Prilep; Macedonian civilization, Skopje, 1997; Блага Алексова, Виктор Лилчиќ, “КАТАЛОГ Ранохристијански цркви во Македонија”, *Македонско Наследство* 5 (Скопје, 1997), 21-25; Блага Алексова, “Ранохристијанскиот период, во монографијата” *Уметничко богатство на Македонија*, (Скопје 1984), 96-119.

²⁵ Вера Битракова-Грозданова, *Старохристијански споменици во Охридско*, Охрид, 1975.

includes her last works dedicated to late antique Lychnides, with a special reference to the newly discovered basilicas of the Plaoshnik site.

The last monographs of Professor Ivan Mikulčić on Stobi and Heraclea (*Хераклеја Линкестис : антички град во Македонија*) shed additional light on the appearance of the episcopal basilicas that adorned these cities in late antiquity.²⁶

The monographs of Professor Elizabeta Dimitrova, *Керамичките релјефи од Виничкото Кале, Ѓурѓа; Најстарите христијански симболи; and Виничката мистерија, Керамичката ризница од доцноантичкото кале*;²⁷ It is an in-depth fund for elucidating the entangled ecclesiastical-historical occasions in the 5th and 6th centuries, as well as for a stylistic-iconographical analysis of fine art, which in the period from the appearance of Christianity, breathes with its fine art patterns.

The monograph of Professor Snezhana Filipova, *Архитектонска декоративна скулптура во Македонија во 5-6 и 11-12 век*; represents a significant step forward towards the understanding of early Christian symbolism, style and iconography.²⁸

The corpus of previous publications represents a solid base that will continue to bring new research and conclusions in the field of archeology and cultural heritage.

Conclusions:

The conclusion of this paper emphasizes the ongoing importance and challenges of archaeology in North Macedonia. It highlights the field's role in reconstructing historical realities from fragmented material culture and stresses the significance of preserving and utilizing cultural heritage for the benefit of humanity.

The paper acknowledges the long-standing interest of researchers, from early travelers and scholars to modern archaeologists, in documenting and analyzing the region's rich archaeological and cultural history. It details how systematic archaeological efforts evolved

²⁶ Иван Микулчиќ, *Хераклеја Линкестис : антички град во Македонија – Heraclea: ancient City in Macedonia*, Magor, 2007; idem, *Антички градови во Македонија, макропроект: Историја на културата на Македонија*, книга 8, Скопје: МАНУ, 1999.

²⁷ Елизабета Димитрова, *Керамичките релјефи од Виничкото Кале, Ѓурѓа*, Скопје 1993; idem, *Најстарите христијански симболи, Македонска цивилизација*, Скопје 1995; idem, *Виничката мистерија, Керамичката ризница од доцноантичкото кале - The Vinica Mystery. The Ceramic Treasures of a Late Antique Fortress*, Музеј теракота, Винаца 2012.

²⁸ Снежана Филипова, *Архитектонска декоративна скулптура во Македонија во 5-6 и 11-12 век*, Скопје Мелбурн: Матица Македонска, 1997; Idem, *Ранохристијанските културни центри и творечките процеси во уметноста на Македонија*, Скопје 2020.

over time, particularly after the Second World War and during the country's independence, with increasing contributions from Macedonian scholars.

Continued interest in cultural heritage – Research into the archaeological wealth of North Macedonia has attracted local and foreign scholars, producing a number of publications and studies.

Contributions of foreign and local scholars - from Ottoman and European travelers (Silahdar, Solak Zade, Hadji Kalfa and so on. Evliya Çelebi's) of past centuries to modern scholars, ancient settlements, historical roads such as the Via Egnatia and various archaeological monuments have been documented and explored.

Development of archaeology in different periods – Until the 19th century, conditions for the development of archaeology were unfavorable. After World War II and during the socialist period (1945-1991), there was a great development in this field, while after the independence of Macedonia in 1991, the changes were gradual but significant.

Study of Early - Christianity Renowned Macedonian scholars have made a great contribution to the study of Christian heritage, analyzing basilicas, mosaics, and early Christian symbols.

Continuity of archaeological research – Numerous publications and monographs constitute a solid basis for further research, paving the way for new discoveries in the field of archaeology and cultural heritage of North Macedonia.

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