

## DEGRADATION OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA DUE TO INADEQUATE PROTECTION

**Stojan Velkoski<sup>1</sup>, Marina Malish<sup>2</sup>, Vesna Mirjanoska<sup>4</sup>, Jane Velkoski,  
Mihail Velkoski<sup>5</sup>, Aleksandar Mirjanoski<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>GAPE Institute – Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Security - Skopje

e-mail: contact@igape.edu.mk; mmalis@fb.uklo.edu.mk

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**Abstract:** *The cultural heritage of a society has always been a reflection of the past cultural development of the citizens living in the respective country.*

*On the other hand, it is exactly the cultural heritage that preserves the roots of an ancient, Biblical people. Hence is the need to preserve its cultural heritage which mirrors not only the past, but also the future of a people. There have always been tendencies to misappropriate or destroy the rich cultural heritages as was the one of Macedonia. The most frequent methods of destruction of the cultural heritage is by war, illegal excavations etc. The methods of usurpation are different: forgery, unnatural birth-rate of newly arrived minorities, the so-called instant peoples, usurpation through occupation of the territory etc. In such cases, the foreign usurpers tend to keep the arrogated objects, regardless of the methods and means to achieve it. They insert bribed people as officers into the responsible institutions, to act within the society with the plan and the purpose of alienation, damaging, derogation or dissimulation of the cultural heritage. The Macedonian cultural heritage is also a subject to such a phenomenon, ravaged from outside but not less from inside. We witness the ever more frequent unauthorized disclosure and sale of artifacts by illegal excavators and traders, but also replacement of originals by copies and disappearance of artifacts from the premises where they are kept and preserved by the national institutions. A series of projects have been suggested to prevent this phenomenon but the Ministry in charge is unable to take the appropriate actions, due to the lack of awareness, conscientiousness and professionalism in the majority of employees at the respective positions. The majority of the staff have been employed following the criteria of some party loyalty or the ethnic affiliation scheme, without any special criteria, or have accepted the appropriate position with destructive intentions concerning the cultural heritage on the short or the long run; this brings nothing but loss in the cultural heritage. The Macedonian cultural heritage is of a great international importance, as it mirrors the authenticity of the people and their strivings to maintain the culture and the civilization of the ancient Macedonians. Macedonia is the biggest archeological locality on Earth and it is necessary that this great heritage be protected by the international community, as it does not belong only to the Macedonian people, but is important to the whole civilized world as well.*

### Introduction

The cultural heritage of the Macedonian churches and monasteries as well as on the different localities is one of the most important segments of the Macedonian history and identity. The icons and the artifacts as a form of cultural heritage have a special role in it, witnessing the creativity and the spirituality of the collective cultural memory. As cultural heritage, the Macedonian icons and artifacts have an exceptional artistic value, and have therefore always been an attractive subject of misappropriation. The cultural heritage of a people, especially of the Macedonian people, which is the unique in Europe as a Biblically autochthonous, consists of numerous cultural elements such as the language, literature, toponyms, costumes, art, beliefs, spirituality, architecture, movable and immovable archeological and other cultural heritage as well as other types of cultural heritage, folklore etc. All this is included in the cultural heritage of a nation. The archeological excavations confirm the degree of development of a society that once existed. The approach towards cultural heritage reveals the level of civility of a people in the respective period. Part of the movable and immovable cultural heritage is also a type of a living spiritual energy which maintains and encompasses other elements related to the concept of Earth-Universe-other dimension, processes which are still unknown to us and still difficult to grasp. The care for the cultural heritage should not be the responsibility of the official institutions only, but we all entrusted by the previous generations to cherish and manage it appropriately. The material, moral and spiritual responsibility should be borne in parallel with the social

hierarchy. Any passive attitude can be regarded as complicity in this type of crime, regardless of the reasons for the said passive attitude.

### **Material and methods**

#### **- Birth rate**

There are peoples that, due to the closed character of their culture, language and religion, have always differed from the others, birth-rate being one of those type of self-differentiation. It is known that many civilizations, as the Egyptian and others, have thus perished. If we take a look at the peoples of those periods from an anthropological point of view (the Ptolemies), that engendered both the pharaohs and the present-day Egyptians, we can conclude that there are two peoples differing from both racial and anthropological aspect: the one that has perished and the other that inherited their place. The recent, so-called refugee crises from Asia towards Europe and the settlement of the refugees mostly in Germany, caused the displacement of many German families from the regions where they have lived so far towards other regions or to another Christian country. This is also happening on the other continents, in the USA, Canada, Australia etc. The local population leaves its homes under the influence of the massive number of newcomers, and the price of their abandoned homes significantly drops. Now, such instant settlers suppress the native populations in many other societies besides the Macedonian one, misappropriate their cultural heritage and create confusion in history. The responsible institutions do not possess the appropriate capacity to prevent this phenomenon, finding it easier to leave the problem to be solved by itself with time, while time goes in their favor. They differ from the indigenous population by their customs, language, religion, habits or anthropological features. They manifest aggressive and uncivilized behavior. Unable to cope with this, the indigenous and more civilized population is forced to abandon the respective region. This process is most frequently related to religion or race. In Europe and on the Balkans this process is reflected in the population with Muslim and Christian religion. Unable to withstand the fundamentalist traditions and behavior of the Muslim fundamentalists settled on the European land, the indigenous population decides to migrate. The governments do not sense the consequences and allow, overtly or secretly, such structures to keep settling, even giving them more rights than the ones given to the domestic people. In e-Yugoslavia, it was known that the President Tito honored each 11<sup>th</sup> child born in a family of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by being the baby's godfather. He personally helped those families. The period from 1945 to 1988 was marked by technological development of the country, in which one of the three parts of Macedonia was a constitutive part. The Muslim population overtly refused to provide education for their children, especially to the girls, as the primary occupation of that population was cattle raising and they were unwilling to get involved in the industrial development. In that period the Christian families gave birth to approximately 2 to 4 children whereas the number of children in the Muslim families was 9 to 11. The Christians embraced the industrialization process, and started to emigrate from the villages into the towns and cities and Muslim families settled in their areas. All the cultural and national heritage was left to people of a different religion and culture. The sacral and other buildings of the Christians and thereby, the movable and unmovable cultural heritage of a civilization were destroyed in many Christian villages where Muslims, more precisely Albanians settled as new owners of the houses and lands. In today's Macedonia, the minorities are favored in comparison to the indigenous population in all spheres of life: schooling, employment, taxation policies, sanctions etc. In such an atmosphere, the indigenous Christian population is forced to emigrate from the regions now inhabited by Muslim newcomers. They immediately transform the Christian schools and temples into mosques.

#### **- Destruction of the toponyms**

Toponyms are part of the cultural heritage of a population. The newly arrived people, which currently outnumber the indigenous population in certain regions are unrighteously changing the toponyms. For example, the names of certain villages in the Kichevo region were changed after the new mayor of Albanian ethnicity came on duty. Thus the Macedonian name of the village Premka (in Cyrillic: Премка) is now Premkë (in Latin script, Albanian orthography), and the name of the village Shutovo Шyтoвo is now Shitovë (Fig.1-2).



Fig. 1. Destruction of the toponym of the village of Premka into Premkë



Fig. 2. Destruction of the toponym of the village of Shutovo into Shitovë

The Christian graves and churches in many such villages have been destroyed and replaced by newly erected mosques, residential buildings or arable land, the purpose of this phenomenon being to eradicate all traces of the existence of Christianity with its cultural treasures. The destruction of the cultural heritage of a people is related to the destruction of the language of the authentic people, as is the case of the elimination of the Macedonian language and the imposition of the language of the newly, instantly migrated peoples, which is the case in West Macedonia. There are several reasons for this attitude towards the cultural heritage among which are the financial benefit, the ideological and chauvinist ideologies of the newcomers, their historic benefit, the insufficient care and expertise in the responsible institutions, corruption, organized crime from abroad and the said institutions in charge etc.

- ***Destruction of the ecclesiastical cultural heritage***

There are objective and subjective factors of destruction of the cultural heritage. This heritage in Macedonia is continuously exposed to illegal and criminal activities, initiated with a purpose, which is the religious dominance described above, the destruction of a culture by the neighboring or other peoples, insufficient care of the responsible authorities (Fig. 3), financial benefit etc. But, this criminal activity persists partly because of the accessibility to the artifacts, which enables for their frequent misappropriation, or destruction. It is known that a number of Christian churches and monasteries have been transformed into mosques, thus destroying a cultural heritage of a huge importance, changing history itself and making it confuse, usable for everyday political purposes.



Fig. 3. Icons of St. Athanasios in the village of Premka, Kichevo region, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century

These precious icons have been left without any special treatment. In its yard there is an old Templar cemetery, probably dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4. Old Templar cemetery in the yard of the church of St. Athanasios in the village of Premka, Kichevo region, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century

According to some legends, the area of the village of Premka was a passage from one valley to the other, which was used by caravans who travelled from the Kichevo region towards the area named Porechie, to continue towards Bitola and Thessaloniki. This was so until forty years ago. The village had always been Christian, located on the slopes of the Bistra mountain, in the area named Pacharizitsa – Tanasitsa, inhabited by farmers, cattle-raisers and Templar soldiers. A large number of the soldiers were killed in a massive battle with a big army downhill from the village, at the location named Bojni Kamen; the village was then burnt and destroyed. Three families managed to return to the village, the most belligerent among them being the so-called Volchevtsi family. They buried their Templar brothers and placed Templar symbols on their graves, built the new Tanasitsa church and new residential and cattle-keeping buildings; they were accompanied by other families from the surroundings. Afterwards, the same tombs were used for burial of the other members of their families, always by engraving their names and years of birth and death on the stony Templar crosses. All this was happening to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century; afterwards, the cemetery was spread towards the Ilinets location, which had been in use as long time ago as in the Roman Empire.

- ***Destruction of the cultural heritage by random and unprofessional archeological excavations***

The cultural heritage mirrors the indigenous population in every society; the same holds for the Macedonians. These stone-embossed scripts indicate that those engraved signs represent a script which was in use 4,000 years ago (Fig. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5. Embossed script from 4,000 years ago found near Kumanovo



Fig. 6. A statue of a king's head from 4,000 years ago, 2 meters tall – Kumanovo area

These written remains indicate the existence of a literate civilization in these regions as long as 4,000 years ago. But some unscrupulous individuals have already tried to destroy them, and the purpose of those attempts remains unknown. After the archeological excavations by the official institutions the locations are left in a chaos. The locations remains exposed to snow, frost and sun, which leads to their decay. Such is the case of the Knezhie – Bilazora location in the town of Sveti Nikole, dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fig. 7 and 8)



Fig. 7. Remains of pillars from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Bilazora locality, left to atmospheric influences and decay



Fig. 8. Remains of pillars from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Bilazora locality, left to atmospheric influences and decay

The most frequent response of the institutions is that there are no sufficient finances in the budget to bring the works to an end. The damages resulting from such an attitude are irreplaceable. Such destructions of the Macedonian cultural heritage are, unfortunately, numerous, e.-g: the Roman bridge in the village of Stratsin, the iconostasis the church in the village of Brezitsa and many others (Fig. 9 – 10).



Fig. 9. A Roman bridge facing total destruction in the village of Stratsin, KUmanovo area



Fig. 10. The decaying iconostasis in the village of Brezitsa, Skopje area

### Purpose

The purpose of this paper can be explained in three points as follows: 1. Research of the on-the-spot situation of the cultural heritage, 2. Public indication to the institutions of the necessity to solve the problem 3. Affirmation of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Macedonia, 4. Protection of the cultural heritage and its presentation to the scientific public worldwide, 5. Raising of the awareness and the conscientiousness of the competent institutions and of the people in general about its protection.

## Results

The basic reason for the increase of criminal acts over icons and cultural heritage reflects the absence of a preventive mechanism or their protection, and a protection strategy on a national level. Nevertheless, the presence of this type of crime and its worrying increase indicates the existence of many serious shortcomings and omissions caused by diverse objective and subjective factors.

The objective reasons are the shortcomings in the legislation corps referring to and regulating this matter, the treatment that this issue is given by the national punitive policy, the dysfunctional system of prevention and security of the constructions and locations, the need to raise the social and spiritual awareness, and education, the yet undetermined responsibility and the overlapping of the competencies and the priorities of the institutions in this field, which results in a conflict of interests and absence of real and strategic initiatives for protection of the cultural heritage. All this is enhanced by the subjective factors leading to the appearance of this type of crime which finds an excellent possibility and an overt opportunity to effectuate its interests exactly due to the shortcomings reflected by the objective factor. The subjective factors are the rapid growth of the number of organized criminal groups, established by domestic and foreign institutions and individuals. As a subjective factor on this plan, is the interest of third countries to possess and appropriate the Macedonian cultural heritage as part of a destructive political agenda against the Macedonian cultural identity and history; in this direction there is an endless number of interested collection-owners within the country and abroad which are interested in possessing the Macedonian cultural values.

The Law on Protection of the Cultural Heritage, established in 2004 is an insufficient legislative solution to ensure legal protection of the cultural heritage. There is an obvious need to pass a special law on collections and antique shops, as well as on associations that will carry out researches in the field of archeology, ethnology, collection of antiquities and artifacts made of valuable materials. Chronologically, the punitive policy towards cultural heritage crime demonstrates a tendency to introduce stricter sanctions than the existing ones, which is a logical outcome of the seriousness of this social problem which seriously threatens with even larger damages to the Macedonian cultural heritage. Namely, Article 266 of the Penal Code which reads: "If an individual bestows or permanently alienates any cultural heritage of special importance for the nation, they will be sanctioned with a prison sentence of 3 to 10 years; on the other hand, Article 266-v sanctions any unauthorized trade with goods under temporary protection, any cultural heritage or natural value with a prison sentence of one to five years. In relation with this article, we would like to emphasize that there is some illogicality regarding the sanction, as there is a crime (trade) which is more serious than the misappropriation or keeping an object of cultural heritage, but a lower sentence has been established anyway.

One of the problems in the protection of the Macedonian ecclesiastical cultural heritage in the churches is the absence of a defined differentiation of the competencies among the state institutions (more precisely, the Cultural Heritage Protection Administration) and the Macedonian Orthodox Church. There is no sufficient coordination, cooperation and assistance between these two institutions, although they are the most competent ones to resolve this problem. The need to change and amend the Law on Protection of the Cultural Heritage is of extreme importance. The cooperation between the domestic and the foreign institutions is also inevitable, as is the education of the population, especially of the employees of the competent institutions.

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