

On the Ethno-Cultural Basis of Ancient Macedonia

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In scholar works on ancient history, the concept of Macedonia is identified as the State of the Ancient Macedonians. It has to do with a separate, completely distinct political, social and economic society, developed on the territory to the north of the mountain massif of Pindus and Olympus, along the basins of the three main rivers (Bistritsa or Haliacmon on the west, Vardar or Axios in the central region, and Struma or Strymon in the east); or, on the territory north of the Hellenic south, between the Illyrian west and the Thracian east. The image of Ancient Macedonia is formed mainly from the data related to the period from the V to the II century BC, a brief period in essence, but an exclusively affirmative period, during which the whole historical glory of Ancient Macedonia is contained. Macedonia, as a geographical and administrative unit, also existed during the Roman Classical period, although it was in the shadow of its famous past.

What is indisputable is that the political, ethnic and geographical boundaries of Ancient Macedonia were in a perpetual state of change and they never mutually overlapped. However, the concept of Macedonia is most often related to the Ancient Macedonian monarchy and, as a result of its very historical magnitude and significance, the subject that led to that situation has been forgotten. Of course, it was not the administration, but rather the people who lived in that area. It is for this reason that we have to observe the context beyond the given chronological and territorial frames, throughout its entire cultural and ethnic development.

Different peoples and cultures existed and lived on the territory of Macedonia, i.e. within the boundaries of its greatest historical glory, not only in the past, but even now, in the present; and as a result of the significance of that glory, they are, as such, regularly regarded as identical and ide-

ntified with that land. As such, Macedonia really does represent a name which originates from the State of the Ancient Macedonians; however, the important questions that need to be asked and answered are: what was that population like, i.e., what elements was it composed of, and which cultural processes did it go through before the political society known as Ancient Macedonia was established?

Some researchers simply recognise a Greek people in the ancient Macedonians, who were constantly developing in that particular area in the last two millennia BC.¹ Others take into consideration the Greek origin of the Macedonian royal family, while they see the people as a mixture of different Balkan tribes that had lived in the area. Other researchers hold the opinion that they are a different people with their own language, a non-Greek culture and their own specific cultural development. There are also assumptions that the ancient Macedonian population may be of a Thracian or, even, Illyrian origin.²

All such assumptions mostly result from the written sources, as well as the sparse remnants of the language spoken by the Ancient Macedonians, which, in terms of its characteristics, still represents data that is extremely open to different interpretations, depending on the viewpoint.

A satisfactory answer to these questions may be generated only through a high degree of research and knowledge, either about the centuries prior to the formation of the Macedonian State, or about the Iron and the Bronze Ages in that region of the Balkans. Unfortunately, the ethno-cultural processes which brought about the existence of the Ancient Macedonians, as well as their State, have not been fully researched and understood.

These are the questions waiting to be answered, mainly from an archaeological point of view; however, nowadays, archaeological research is conducted separately within the several modern Balkan states. It is dependent on the individual national interests, as well as both on the individual opportunities for the research on this subject, as well as the broad scientific and international affirmation of the results obtained. In other words, the research conducted is neither sufficient, nor is there complete insight into the archaeological state on the territory of the former Ancient Macedonia. However, it seems that there are sufficient indicative moments for an elemen-

¹ SEKELLARIOU, 1983: 10-12.

² SEKELLARIOU, 1983: 43-63.

itary level of comprehension concerning the cultural values from which Ancient Macedonia came into existence.

According to the Greek chronology and cultural periodisation, the period of development of the pre-Roman culture is defined as a Classical and Hellenic period. Due to their proximity, immediate contacts, as well as the direct influences from the south, that periodisation is also used for the regions to the north of the Greek territory, or for the territory of the south Illyrian communities in the west, the Thracian in the east, as well as for the Paenonian-Macedonian communities between them. Regarding the cultures of the first two ethnic groups, the terms Illyrian or Thracian culture are established from the Classical or Hellenic culture, and are widely used, which is not the case of the Macedonian communities. However, although the cultural values created on the territory of Macedonia are not at all different in regards to their relation with the Greek culture from the contemporary southern Illyrian and Thracian culture, they are observed mainly through the Greek point of view. Often, without going into details concerning the genesis and character of these phenomena, they are simply treated as cultural values of Greek origin.

Most of the data concerning the character and the values of the cultural phenomena on the territory of Classical Macedonia originated from the research of the major urban centres, such as Pella, Dion, Amphipolis, and others, and from the period of the already, fully adopted Hellenic values of living. Mostly due to that fact, and, to a great extent, due to the low degree of archaeological research, especially on the territory of present-day Republic of Macedonia, large gaps still exist in the scientific understanding of this material.

However, it is an indisputable fact that the Illyrian, Thracian and Macedonian societies had ongoing and close relations ever since the centuries of prae- and proto- history, and moving through the processes of their entire ethno-cultural creation. On the other hand, they manifest identical cultural relations with the Greek territory to the south. Subsequently, all of them, at the end of that process, manifest similar phenomena regarding the Hellenic culture, as follows:

- They have their own language, but they do not have their own alphabet, and so they use the Greek one;
- They use the Greek pantheon and its means of expression in practicing their religion and artistic ideas;

- They have their own political, economic and military systems, different from the Greek ones;
- They have their own kings, dynasties and administrative organisation;
- They maintain direct contacts to the Greek world mainly through the Greek colonies; in the case of the Illyrians – on the Adriatic coast, in the case of the Thracians – along the northern Aegean coast and the Black Sea coast, and, in the case of the Macedonians – in the Thermaic gulf and Chalcidice.

If this is so, then the methodological inconsistency that, for decades, has signified scientific leverage when dealing with these questions is obvious. Therefore, we should finally accept the existence of a separate Macedonian culture, differentiated, at least, at the level of the contemporary Illyrian or Thracian culture, which would be quite a logical expectation.

Previous historical and linguistic combinations cannot provide a complete answer to these questions. More material evidence is necessary to be had from the entire Macedonian territory, which means that we should start looking at the earlier periods in order to, firstly, determine whether it was a cultural continuity or discontinuity that was in existence during the prae- and proto- historical development of the communities on that territory. In other words, the question that needs to be answered is: did the early historical Macedonian values develop out of the local cultures of the Bronze and Iron Ages, or were they brought over from the south, the result of large demographic changes?

In the contemporary Greek academic community, there is wide-spread belief in the opinion that in the last 4 000 years, Macedonian history is a part of Greek history. Its development, according to Greek scholars, may be continually traced back to the so-called EHIII period (around 2300 BC), or to the arrival of a certain Indo-European group of people (proto-Greeks) in Macedonia. Although there is neither any archaeological acknowledgment whatsoever, nor any language remnants, it is, nevertheless, claimed that those communities spoke a certain early form of Greek. Furthermore, supported by different stories about the later migrations and unclear ethno-cultural combinations, those people are treated as a basic ethnic core, from whom some migrated to the south (about 1900 BC), while some remained in the region between Thessaly and Macedonia, as the basis of the Doric peoples. After spreading throughout Continental Greece, Peloponnesus and the

Greek islands, these “proto-Greek” immigrants from Macedonia, according to certain scholars, even appear as the possible creators of the Mycenaean civilisation, but without the Doric ethnic element, which remained in Macedonia.³ Several centuries later, with the so-called Doric migration and their settlement in the south, the ethno-genetic process of the formation of the Greek ethnos is to be entirely completed.⁴

This image of the settling of the earliest, provisionally speaking, Greek communities on Continental Greece, simply, but lacking any material evidence whatsoever, encompasses the territory of Macedonia, as well. Thus, it becomes not only a part of the Hellenic story, but a crucial one at that, as well.

On the other hand, archaeology still does not recognise the elements of the migration processes which, from the time of the Early Bronze Age, brought the so-called proto-Greek culture to Macedonia, and there is even less data concerning the breakthrough of the cultural values of Macedonia to the south. Rather, there is a variety of archaeological findings, which support that the processes of the Indo-Europeanisation of both the Aegean basin and Macedonia developed in completely different ways, through migrations from different directions, in different time periods and through different cultural processes.⁵

The settling of the Indo-European communities in Macedonia occurred from the north, across the Danube basin and the Central Balkans, while the first Indo-Europeans (so-called proto-Greeks) settled in Greece from the east, from the Anatolia region. The processes of the Indo-Europeanisation of Macedonia developed slowly and gradually, during the whole of the III and II millennia BC, while Continental Greece and Peloponnesus were completely Indo-Europeanised ever since the earliest centuries of the II millennium BC, with all the conditions for the development of the Mycenaean civilisation on those territories.⁶

The only similarities that connect Macedonia to Continental Greece in those processes towards the end of the Early and the beginning of the

³ SEKELLARIOU, 1983: 44-46.

⁴ DREWS, 1988: 158.

⁵ GAMKRELIDZE & IVANOV, 1995: 792-852; MELLAART, 196: 99-139; JOVANOVIĆ, 1979: 397-417; GARASANIN, 1982: 163.

⁶ HOPPER, 1972: 19-25; GARASANIN, 1982: 163.

Middle Bronze Age are certain ephemeral phenomena, mainly in ceramics, which make a limited appearance in the narrow belt along the North Aegean coast. They can only serve as possible indicators of the course of entrance of the first Indo-Europeans from the Anatolian area to the Greek land, but not in Macedonia.⁷

Macedonia, as a continental region, remained outside those processes, freely developing its still, in essence, Eneolithic culture within the Balkans, and not among the Aegean ethno-cultural cluster, known as a cultural complex, so-called “Bubanj-Salkutsa-Krivodol”.⁸

In that sense, the most indicative find is the site Sitagri near Drama.⁹ In approximately the middle of the III millennium, it appears as the most continental settlement, or, the west periphery of – this said with some reservation – the Anatolian-Asia Minor territory of the Early Bronze Age. However, at the same time, it is the most southern find of certain North Balkan occurrences, connected even to the so-called Vuchedol culture of the Danube basin.

The archaeological situation concerning the Early Bronze Age in the western regions of Macedonia is even more obvious and shows an even closer and clearer cultural connection to the North Balkans, in contrast to the almost non-existing connection with the Aegean region and southern Greece.

In the late centuries of the III millennium, in the greater Pelagonia region, from Prilep in the north, to deep in the south, a rather strong local cultural group, called the Pelagonian or Armenochori group, was formed.¹⁰ This group, together with other related groups (around the large lakes – the group of Malich III, along the Vardar and the Morava – the group of Bubanj Hum III) clearly formed a unique cultural complex. Macedonia, with its largest part, belonged to the so-called Central Balkans cultural complex of the Early Bronze Age, which did not indicate any obvious connection to the contemporary early Helladic culture (EHIII) in the south, in the Aegean basin.

⁷ DICKINSON, 1977: 49.

⁸ TASIĆ, 1979: 87-114; TASIĆ, 1995: 10-35; MITREVSKI, 2003: 39-42.

⁹ RENFREW *et al.*, 1986.

¹⁰ GARAŠANIN, 1983: 463-471.

Many settlements have been discovered from that period, mostly in the region of Bitola, in Pelagonia, but also in the area that belongs to modern-day Greece, where the best known are the localities of Armenochori near Lerin and Mandalo and Archontico near Ianitsa.¹¹

In the next phase, which chronologically sets the Middle Helladic Age in the Aegean basin (MH), the Pelagonian, or the so-called Armenochori culture, continued its ongoing development on the grounds of the Eneolithic culture in that part of the Balkans. In contrast to the Middle Helladic culture in Greece, whose Indo-European character is indisputable, the Indo-European elements in the Pelagonia (Armenochori) cultural group are not completely certain. For example, one of the strongest indicators of the Indo-European population, or the tumulus burial, was strongly expressed in the Middle Helladic culture in Greece¹², while, at that time, there were no tumuli in Macedonia. They appeared more than a thousand years later, by the beginning of the Iron Age, as a phenomenon, which spread from another direction, namely, from the areas of present-day middle and southeast Albania.¹³

After the Mycenaean civilisation achieved its final form, Macedonia left the Mycenaean or Greek world of the Late Bronze Age. Like the other neighbouring regions in the north of Thessaly, it remained outside any integration processes with the Mycenaean world throughout the whole of the Mycenaean development.¹⁴ Only in some regions of special Mycenaean interest, was there limited, mainly trading contact between the Mycenaean and non-Mycenaean world in the north. Those influences and breakthroughs of Mycenaean elements occurred mainly along the coast, and only across the river basins, which, directly or indirectly, led to the regions of interest for the Mycenaean economy and trade. Such was, for example, the valley of the Devoll in present-day southeast Albania, which, merging with Shkumba, and together with the Osum, led to the region of Korcha - Kolonja, which was rich in various mineral finds, mostly in copper ore.¹⁵ This was also true of the valley of the Haliacmon (Bistritsa), which led to the same region be-

¹¹ PAPAFTIMIU & PILALI, 1997: 81-88; ANDREU, 1996: 570.

¹² HAMMOND, 1967: 105; HAMMOND, 1970: 66; MITREVSKI 1997: 102.

¹³ GARAŠANIN, 1983: 463-471.

¹⁴ KILIAN, 1985: 447-450; SMIT, 1989: 174-180.

¹⁵ KARAMITROU-MENTESSIDI, 1999; BEJKO, 2002.

neath the large lakes.¹⁶ The valley of the Vardar, which led through the Vardovo and Gevgelija region (extremely rich in copper ore) to the Skopje and Tetovo region was also exposed, where besides copper ore, rich deposits of gold were discovered.¹⁷ The valley of the Struma, especially the Lower Struma, was a very suitable region for the exploitation of copper, gold and silver, or for carrying out various Mycenaean interests.¹⁸ The advantages of all the above-mentioned regions in the easy exploitation and transport of wooden material to the coast should also not be forgotten.

In this way, for the first time, there was an expansion of direct influences from the Aegean south to the inner Balkans, and the main communication lines, which played a crucial role in the later connection of Macedonia and the surrounding regions to the Hellenic territory, or to the Greek colonies along the Albanian and North Aegean coast, were also established.

Due to the similarity in their location, as well as their resources, these four regions appear to be in similar relations with the Mycenaean world in the south, more precisely, they manifest similar cultural phenomena produced by those relations.¹⁹

Aside from the communication lines, the values of the local cultures of the Bronze Age were nurtured with almost no contacts with the culture of the Aegean Bronze Age.

At that time, the territory that will later become known as Macedonia was dominated by the Paeonian ethno-cultural element, spread mainly along the valley of the Vardar, with its tributaries, and throughout Pelagonia. The Lower Vardar and the surrounding region in the west, i.e., Homer's Emaethia was set as a centre of the Paeonians. The culture, which developed on that particular territory at the end of the Bronze Age, was full of local characteristics, essentially different from the contemporary late Mycenaean culture in the southern parts of Greece.

Sometime around the XIV century BC, various influences from the Mycenaean south in Macedonia began to spread, directly through Thessaly

¹⁶ KARAMITROU-MENTESSIDI, 1989: 71; KARAMITROU-MENTESSIDI, 1999: 269, sl. 124.

¹⁷ MITREVSKI D. 1998, 449-456; MITREVSKI D. 2003, 46-51.

¹⁸ VALLA, 2007: 259, sl. 18-20.

¹⁹ MITREVSKI, 2007; MITREVSKI, 2008.

or through certain points of the northern Aegean coast (possible Mycenaean emporiums or colonies), such as Torone, Toumba-Thessaloniki or Saratse.²⁰

Instances of this can be seen through numerous finds along the valley of the Vardar, within the so-called Vardar Valley or Ulanci group of the late Bronze Age. Among them, the most famous are the multi-layer settlements along the Lower Vardar (Kastanas, Vardino, Vardaroftsa, Kilindir), as well as some northern settlements and necropolises (Vardarski Rid and Kofilak in Gevgelija, and necropolises along the Middle Vardar, such as Ulanci and Vodovratski Pat, near Gradsko, Manastir-Caska, near Veles, and others).²¹

From the Lower Vardar, or, from Homer's centre of the Paeonians, Amydon (it is assumed that it was the settlement of Vardaroftsa), Paeonian military units departed to defend Troy in the battle against the united Greeks. Not only that, but in Homer's description of the battle between the Greek hero, Achilles, and the Paeonian leader, Asteropaeus, the Paeonians and their territory are clearly explained, the territory which is, essentially, the same one where Ancient Macedonia is going to be developed.

Following this, the unavoidable questions that arise are whether, and to which extent, there was a cultural continuity from the Homeric to the period of Herodotus, and whether the ethnic structure of that territory's population underwent serious changes from the time of the Paeonians of Homer (XIII century BC) to the Paeonians of Herodotus (V century BC). The answers may be found in the research carried out concerning the Iron Age in that part of the Balkans.

Archaeological findings, to a great extent, acknowledge certain migration processes at the beginning of that period. However, the question is how much those processes changed the demographic structure of the population during the Iron Age, or were they only marginal breakthroughs of cultural values, without any significant demographic changes?

Certain data on the earliest possible migrations in Macedonia apply to the time around the late Bronze Age. In the local culture of that time, certain elements of the Aegean culture of the Bronze Age are documented. Among those elements (in the ceramics, metal), the most indicative are the bronze items in the shape of miniature double axes, which are in essence

²⁰ SMIT, 1989: 174-180; ANDREU & KOTSAKIS, 1999: 107-116; HEURTLEY, 1939.

²¹ MITREVSKI, 1998: 449-456; MITREVSKI, 2003: 46-51; JOVCEVSKA, 2007.

one of the brightest symbols of the Aegean (Cretan) Bronze Age. Those items appeared for the first time in Macedonia towards the end of the Bronze Age, in the form of ritual-cult belts, formed by a number of miniature double axes. The most striking samples were discovered in the necropolis in Ulanci, near Gradsko, related to burials of women of distinctive category and rank.²²

In the next phase of the Early Iron Age, the miniature double axes acquired special significance and popularity in Macedonia as cult objects, still connected to extraordinary female burials (Vergina, Visoi - Beranci, Vojnik - Kumanovo, Tremnik - Negotino, Genikokastro - Killis, and others).²³ As a result, but also due to the Cretan toponymy along the valley of the Vardar, it may already be assumed that the Aegean, in essence, Cretan elements in the Late Bronze Age, are the result of a historically perceived settling of a group of Cretans under the leadership of Botton, somewhere in the Paeonian Emathia.²⁴ Later, during the period of the Macedonians, this region was called Bottiaia, in honour of the legendary Cretan Botton. Thus, certain elements of the Aegean Bronze Age, as opposed to Greece, were preserved and treasured in Macedonia throughout the Iron Age in order to appear in their full beauty when the right conditions would be procured. The same happened with the appearance of the gold burial masks towards the end of the VI century BC in Trebenishte, Petilep, Sindos, and Archontico. They were, in essence, an Egyptian idea, unknown to the Greek rational spirit and beliefs.²⁵ That idea on the Balkans was launched by Crete, firstly, through the burials of the rich rulers held in the Mycenaean burial circles (XVI century BC), and later, that idea found fertile ground in the Macedonian burial customs of the tribal aristocracy at the end of VI century BC.²⁶

In that way, certain elements from the Aegean Bronze Age, which were abandoned in Continental Greece, were accepted in Macedonia and integrated in the local culture of the Iron Age, adapted to the local taste and needs, of course.

²² VIDESKI, 2007: 313-320.

²³ RADT, 1974; MITREVSKI, 1997 (catalogue of necropolises); SAVOPOULOU, 1988: Fig. 11.

²⁴ *Strabo*, VII fr.11.

²⁵ MITREVSKI, 1995: 191-203.

²⁶ POPOVIC, 1966.

The following migration movements across Macedonia took place in the XII to the beginning of the XI century BC. They left deep marks on the further cultural development, but did not cause any significant demographic changes.²⁷ This had to do with the breakthrough on the northern and the Central Balkan communities along the valleys of the Morava and the Vardar to the south, to the already destroyed Mycenaean centres in Greece. Their ultimate goal was not Macedonia; yet, those processes lasted for a longer period of time and ultimately resulted in a high degree of depopulation along the valley of the Vardar, as the most exposed region of the destructive events within those boundaries. These migration processes served to connect different cultures and communities, from the valley of the Danube to Peloponnesus, but, at the same time, they caused an undisputable cultural drop in the communities that were involved. There are documents which note that in Macedonia, especially along the valley of the Vardar, there were a number of Bronze Age settlements that were burnt down and destroyed (Stolot-Ulantsi, Vardarski Rid II-Gevgelija, Vardina, Vardaroftsa, Kastanas). The bearers of those processes also left their own burial rites, by cremation (Hipodrom-Skopje, Western necropolis-Stobi, Paleo Genikokastro-Kilkis). Their burial rites and customs, by cremation in urns, were, in essence, a feature of the northern and the central part of the Balkans, diametrically different from the local culture.²⁸ In such necropolises, as well as in the burnt layers of the settlements, there was a new material culture (ceramics, weapons, jewellery) of a Northern Balkans, Central Balkans and Danube origin. The most representative example of this is the settlement in Manastir-Caska near Veles, one of the main points of the local Vardar valley, or, the so-called Ulanci group of the late Bronze Age.²⁹ It was a powerful settlement in which burnt layers of the last departure, numerous typical North Balkan objects (battle axes – Celts, and spears) characteristic of the XII century BC were discovered.

However, apart from all the consequences upon the Iron Age culture in Macedonia, there are no indicators that these events caused any deep demographic changes. The only thing that may be said is that the Iron Age brought about the forging of closer and longer lasting cultural relations be-

²⁷ MITREVSKI, 2003: 31-39; MITREVSKI, 2007: 447-448.

²⁸ MITREVSKI, 2003: 115-124; SAVOPOULOU, 1988: 306-308.

²⁹ JOVCEVSKA, 2007.

tween the Macedonian and the Central Balkan communities. There was a new cultural orientation of the Iron Age communities in Macedonia, more to the north, towards the valley of the Morava, than towards the Hellenic geometric south.³⁰

The character of the above-mentioned migration processes across Macedonia may be seen fully only by an analysis of the newly created situation in southern Greece. Elements of the culture of the bearers of the mentioned migrations are clearly documented in a number of sites in southern Greece. There, on the ruins of the Mycenaean centres and in the new proto-geometric necropolises, new types of ceramics, sculpture, a new way of burial by cremation, with its origin from the regions along the Danube – the Central Balkans, appear.³¹ In this way, it is obvious that those very migrations, from the valley of the Danube, along the valleys of the Morava and the Vardar, to Peloponnesus in the south, are becoming more carefully documented, and can serve as an illustration of the so-called Doric migrations, as one of the most significant historical events in Hellenic history.

In Macedonia, following those events, or, after the settlements along the valley of the Vardar were destroyed and burnt down a number of times, the situation stabilised upon the foundations of the old local Bronze Age culture. The further cultural development in the conditions offered by the new Iron Age continued without any difficulties.

During the whole Iron Age (VIII to VI century), all the conditions for the complete exhibition and flourishing of the local cultural values were met. Along the valley of the Vardar and its tributaries, an economically powerful and highly developed Paeonian culture was created, which surpassed the Balkans at that time and influenced the neighbouring cultural groups.³²

The centre of that culture was in the region of the lower valley of the Vardar, or, in the territory of the future Ancient Macedonian region of Amphaxitis. Due to the extraordinary mining possibilities, as well as the metallurgy of the bronze there (in the Valandovo – Gevgelija – Kilkis region), during the VII and VI centuries BC, there was a special concentration of the population and a speedy economic and cultural development. The so-called

³⁰ MITREVSKI, 2003: 109-122.

³¹ GARAŠANIN, 1953; STEFANOVICH, 1973; DIAMOND, 1988.

³² MITREVSKI, 1997: 70; MITREVSKI, 2003: 53-61.

Lower Vardar, or Gevgelija group of the Iron Age was formed, whose bearers were the South Paeonian communities.³³

The numerous necropolises and settlements in that region (Deleli-Valandovo, Suva Reka and Milci-Gevgelija, Lisichin Dol-Marvinci, Vardarski Rid-Gevgelija, Isar-Marvinci, Glos-Grchishte, Chaushica and Bohemica-Kukush, and so on) all display a high level of culture, with striking local characteristics in the manner of burial, ceramics, jewellery, cult, bronze plastics and suchlike. In addition, we should especially emphasize the group of so-called Macedonian Bronzes, within which the older forms were distinguished as cult Paeonian Bronzes.³⁴ Those were different types of pendants, amulets and pendants connected to specific religious beliefs and ritual activities in the Paeonian communities. They represented the strongest expression of the Paeonian culture of the Iron Age, specifically, that of Paeonian folklore and religion.

The manifestation of that culture was essentially different from the contemporary phenomena present in the south of Macedonia, in the Hellenic world, where different costumes, different jewellery, different ceramics were used; different religious needs were applied, which were practiced in a completely different manner. This cannot be explained simply as a result of the different geography or different climate conditions. It is about essential differences which are, in essence, the most distinctive features of a culture or a people.

Accordingly, it is evident that the Iron Age in Macedonia was characterised by a culture with separate and clearly recognizable features. It was a special compilation of different elements established on the foundations of the Bronze Age local tradition, which gave that culture a unique physiognomy with unique values.³⁵

According to its character, the Iron Age in Macedonia displayed the biggest similarities with the neighbouring regions in the west and the east, which had a similar geo-cultural position in regards to the Hellenic world in the south. In that sense, the contemporary cultures in Epirus, South Albania and South Thrace can be said to be the closest to the Iron Age culture in Macedonia.

³³ VASIC, 1987; MITREVSKI, 1997: 82.

³⁴ BOUZEK, 1974; MITREVSKI, 1988; MITREVSKI, 2007: 563-582.

³⁵ MITREVSKI D. 2008.

It is undisputable that in the culture of the Iron Age in Macedonia certain elements of different communities (Triballi, Bryges, Molossians and others) may be discovered, but the dominant place belonged to the Paeonian ethnicity, with its Paeonian culture. In terms of its character and genesis, that culture was certainly not Greek.

The first political community on that territory, or Ancient Macedonia, under the rule of the Argead dynasty was formed out of such Iron Age culture and peoples.

The Hellenic influences in that part of the Balkans began to spread with the establishment of the Greek colonies in Chalcidice and the northern Aegean coast. This, indisputably, led to the adoption of certain cultural criteria from the south, or to the gradual Hellenisation of the local cultural values in the communities, which had direct communication with the northern Aegean coast. Consequently, a large part of the, admittedly, Macedonian communities during the period from the V to the IV century BC, had already adopted the habits of the general early ancient or classical civilisation.

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