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Fabricating Identity from Ancient Shards: Memory Construction and Cultural Appropriation in the New Macedonian Question

“Every age has the renaissance of antiquity it deserves”

Aby Warburg

In the Republic of Macedonia, the use of archaeology to support the construction of national identity is a relatively new phenomenon, but it has been steadily growing since the declaration of independence in 1991. In sharp contrast to the nation-building process of the Greeks, Serbians, and Bulgarians, whose main ideological components were drawn from a “glorious past,” Macedonian nationalism in the mid-twentieth century looked to an equally “glorious future.” This paper analyzes the construction of popular archaeology in the Republic of Macedonia, and particularly the creative mechanisms driving it, its relation with the national and international academic world, its spread to a public of non-specialists through new media, its reception by society and its political utilization in constructing the national identity.

Keywords: Macedonia, national identity, archeology, modernity

Introduction

On May 18, 2009, two-hundred classical scholars sent a letter to the President Barack Obama of the United States asking his intervention in what is today known as the “new Macedonian question”:

Dear President Obama,
We, the undersigned scholars of Graeco-Roman antiquity, respectfully request that you intervene to clean up some of the historical debris left in southeast Europe by the previous U.S. administration.

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1 This article stems from my research fellowship in the Historisches Seminar–Arbeitsbereich Osteuropäische Geschichte at the Johannes-Gutenberg University of Mainz. I am extremely grateful to the Thyssen Stiftung for financing this position and to Hans-Christian Maner for his support, comments, and contributions. Great thanks must also go to Filippo Carlà for his help and advice. I am also grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer, who contributed to improve the quality of this paper. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Prof. James Waltson who passed away on Monday May 12, 2014.
2 The number of subscribers on March 24, 2014 reached 374.
The letter proceeds to substantiate its signatories’ cause with items of evidence obtained from ancient sources. The closing sentence calls for the direct intervention of Barack Obama in the matter:

We call upon you, Mr. President, to help—in whatever ways you deem appropriate—the government in Skopje to understand that it cannot build a national identity at the expense of historic truth. Our common international society cannot survive when history is ignored, much less when history is fabricated.3

This paper analyzes the creative mechanisms that stand behind the construction of the archaeological discourse in the new Macedonian question through a comparative analysis of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia.4 In particular, it explores the scientific community’s role in national identity, aiming to demonstrate that the use and appropriation of archaeological heritage is a complex and articulated process, which is conditioned by more than political agents alone, at both the national and international levels. There is a complicated dialectic between archaeology intended as science, its popularization, the influence exerted by different interest groups, and the different cultural policies of the states involved.

Old and New Macedonian Questions

What is Macedonia? Can Macedonia be considered as a nation? The Macedonian question arose when the European powers signed the treaties of San Stefano (March 1878) and Berlin (July 1878) to resolve the nineteenth-century power vacuum in the Balkans following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. These established new political and territorial borders.5 Many ethnic groups embraced the Western idea of the nation-state and its concomitant secular

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4 The Republic of Macedonia is referred within the UN as “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (FYROM), pending a resolution to the dispute about the country’s name.

identity to replace the Ottoman millet system, which granted collective rights to members of confessional groups. It is worth remembering that the term “Macedonia” was almost unknown within the Ottoman Empire. Western travelers, cartographers, and politicians, however, regularly used it to refer to the region after the Renaissance, and it was re-adopted for local use by the Greeks in the early nineteenth century.

Following the First and the Second Balkan Wars (1912–13), most of the broader Macedonian territory was divided between Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. In 1918, after the First World War, the territory of the modern Macedonian state became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In 1944, with the victory of the Partisans over the Bulgarians and the Germans in sight, mass support for the new Partisan movement triggered off a nation-building process. The mobilization efforts and mass responses led to the constitution of the Macedonian republic within the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Communist Party provided the basic preconditions for the “Macedonization” of part of Vardarska Banovina encompassing the whole of today’s Republic of Macedonia, southern parts of Southern and Eastern Serbia and south-eastern parts of Kosovo. It did so by mobilizing large segments of society through political, ideological and national claims that relied mainly on the language as the most important means of identity construction.

Heritage and archaeology did not become an important element within the Macedonian nationalist discourse until the 1970s. Archaeology first came to prominence after the drafting of the 1974 Constitution, which articulated the importance of a specifically ethnic Macedonian identity. In the decades that followed, political and historiographical controversies over Macedonia colored the relationship of SFR Yugoslavia with its neighbors. In particular, different constructions of the ethnogenesis and formation of the South Slavs

6 Macedonia was part of the “Rum millet.” See Fikret Adanir, Die Makedonische Frage. Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1908 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner Verlag, 1979).
in the Macedonian region from prehistoric times until the present were made by political propagandists and professional historians in Athens, Belgrade, Sofia, Thessaloniki, and other places. These arguments diverged so fundamentally as to be mutually incompatible.\textsuperscript{10}

At the same time as a Macedonian nationalist archaeology was emerging, Greek national archaeology also began to take more interest in the subject of Macedonia.\textsuperscript{11} The sensational finds at the excavation of the Great Tumulus at Vergina in 1977 attracted considerable attention and raised the profile of the Macedonian dynasties of Philip II and Alexander within the Greek nationalist discourse.\textsuperscript{12}

The significance of archaeology in the nationalist discourse of Macedonia became even greater after the collapse of Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Macedonian state in 1991. This gave rise to a new Macedonian question. Once again, Bulgaria and Greece challenged the legitimacy of Macedonian nationhood, although Bulgaria, unlike Greece, recognized the Republic of Macedonia.\textsuperscript{13} In Greek protests, Alexander the Great was deployed as a kind of “super-Greek”\textsuperscript{14} hero against what was regarded as the theft of Greece’s heritage by non-Greek people. The Macedonian king became the symbol of the Greek historical argument summed up in the slogan “Macedonia is Greek, was Greek, and always will be Greek.”

Some scholars see the new Macedonian question as a resurgence of the old one.\textsuperscript{15} The role of archaeology and heritage in this new contemporary phase, however, is far greater than it was previously. Indeed, archaeology is absolutely central to the political debates surrounding contemporary Macedonian identity, both within and outside the borders of the independent Republic of Macedonia.

\textsuperscript{10} Troebst, \textit{Das makedonische Jahrhundert}, 409–24.
\textsuperscript{14} Kees Klok, “History and the Conflict over the Name ‘Macedonia’ (1990–1995): Constructing and Using Historical Interpretation,” in \textit{Constructions of Greek Past}, 64.
\textsuperscript{15} Troebst, \textit{Das makedonische Jahrhundert}, 371.
At international political level, a particularly important focus point is the continuing dispute over the name of the new state. The name “Macedonia” is contested between the Republic of Macedonia and the Greek region of Macedonia. Most other countries continue to use the official name FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) to designate the independent post-1991 state, although the name Republic of Macedonia is being used always more frequently in journalism, sport, etc. The debate has particularly come to the fore since the mid-2000s as a result of accession talks between the Republic of Macedonia, the EU, and NATO. A vocal campaign was launched on the Greek side, making conscious use of archaeology and heritage, with local and international academics joining politicians to support Greece’s claims. The Republic of Macedonia has similarly mobilized archaeology and heritage to pursue a policy of “antiquization”.

Archaeology is also significant in the construction of narratives of national unity and cohesion in the Republic of Macedonia. Despite remaining at peace through the Yugoslav wars, the country was seriously destabilized by the conflict in Kosovo, and there was a subsequent armed clash between Albanians and the Macedonian police in the Albanian-populated areas of the country. The Albanian minority in the Republic of Macedonia represents a substantial 35 percent of the population.16 Albanian demands in Macedonia range from greater use of the Albanian language in higher education to the secession of regions with high Albanian population. Noteworthy is the increasing importance of Muslim religious affiliation as an identity-marker in the Albanian community, in opposition to the mainstream Macedonian identity, which, although currently constructed primarily on the basis of the archaeological discourse focusing on antiquity and Alexander the Great, also draws on the Orthodox religion.

*Archaeology, National Identity, and Modernity*

There has been substantial research into the relationship between archaeology and nationalism. Early research into the topic explored the interaction between archaeology and the state. The groundbreaking 1995 volume edited by Kohl and Fawcett demonstrated beyond doubt that archaeology is a politicized discipline.17

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The book focuses on the influence of nationalism on professional standards of behavior and research traditions within the discipline.\textsuperscript{18} One of its arguments is that the misuse of archaeological evidence can be avoided by following scholarly standards\textsuperscript{19} and that it is absurd to assert that there are no empirical limits to the manner in which archaeologists can responsibly interpret their data.\textsuperscript{20}

An opposite point of view on the relation of nationalism to archaeology is expressed by M. Diaz-Andreu and T. Champion.\textsuperscript{21} They argue that there is no such thing as non-political, value-free archaeology. Archaeologists have underestimated the relationship between nationalism and archaeology. Nationalism stimulated the very creation of archaeology as a science and has informed the organization and infrastructure of archaeological knowledge. The relation is based on the concept of the nation conceived as the natural unit of a human group which by its very nature has the right to constitute a political entity. Diaz-Andreu and Champion argue that the simple existence of nations implies the existence of a past which should be known and propagated, converting de facto the production of nation's history into a patriotic duty.\textsuperscript{22}

Y. Hamilakis, following Thomas’ reflection on archaeology and modernity,\textsuperscript{23} refines Champion and Diaz’s positions, arguing that the study of the link between archaeology and nationalism is not a study of the abuse of the first by the second but of the development of a device of modernity; and that archaeology as an autonomous discipline serves the needs of the most powerful ideology of that modernity, i.e. the nation-state.\textsuperscript{24} Hamilakis criticizes Kohl and Fawcett’s objectivist position, which sees nationalist readings of the past as distortions from an objective truth and uses concepts like “metahistory” and “usable past” to refer to those segments of history and archaeology that are selectively assembled by modern individuals to weave narratives that support

\textsuperscript{18} Neil A. Silberman, “Promised Lands and Chosen Peoples: The Politics and Poetics of Archaeological Narratives,” in Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology, 250, original emphasis.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 249–62.
\textsuperscript{20} Bruce Trigger, “Romanticism, Nationalism and Archaeology,” in Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology, 263–79.
\textsuperscript{23} Julian Thomas, Archaeology and Modernity (London: Routledge, 2004).
specific political goals.\textsuperscript{25} He asserts that archaeology has to be viewed as cultural product rather than as the pursuit of truth. The diversity of readings of the past should be seen as a phenomenon which can function as a mirror for the self-reflexive critical reexamination of the discipline as a whole.\textsuperscript{26} In criticizing the positivist approach, Hamilakis argues that

in the attempt to condemn an ideology of exclusion, new boundaries are reproduced by constructing the knowing subject, the holder of objectified knowledge who condemns the irrational “other”, “orientalizing” thus the producers and the followers of nationalist myths set against the rational and scientific “West”.\textsuperscript{27}

In the modernist view, archaeology are believed to have the potential to reveal profound truths below the surface concerning the origin and history of current nation states.\textsuperscript{28} Significant concepts like appropriation\textsuperscript{29} and authenticity\textsuperscript{30} can be then used to examine the relation of archaeology to identity-building through a constructivist approach, based on Foucault’s argument that the

“will to truth” is the major system of exclusion that forges discourse which ends to exert a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint on other discourses. [...] What is at stake in the will to truth, in the will to utter this “true” discourse, if not desire and power?\textsuperscript{31}

In the “Western world,” archaeologists perceive themselves as officially entitled by society at large to use archaeological material as resource for

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\textsuperscript{27} Hamilakis, “Through the Looking Glass,” 978.
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understanding the cultural past in pursuit of the truth. Nicholas and Wyle argue that in their combined roles of scientists and self-identified stewards of the past, archaeologists have long enjoyed considerable privilege of access and authority in determining how archaeological materials should be used, by whom and for what purposes.\(^{32}\)

Indeed, Nicholas and Wyle’s argument demonstrates that archaeology as a discipline is inherently a practice of cultural appropriation, at least in a significant majority of the contexts where it has become established as a professional research enterprise.\(^{33}\) Even if scholars play an important role in articulating archaeological narratives, however, they have far less control over the patterns of appropriation than they commonly assume.\(^{34}\) The vision of the past that emerges in analyzing the dynamic nature of appropriation of the past as an intentional process whose mechanism affects social change is that uses of the past have to be considered as pointers to competing visions of the future at both individual and group levels.\(^{35}\) Scientific archaeology also adopts such a vision.

Parallel—and apparently opposite—to the concept and mechanisms of appropriation is the move toward a global (and globalized) archaeology.\(^{36}\) The debate on the notion of appropriation and ownership, the role of a globalized scientific archaeology and the impact of archaeological projects on local communities occupy an important place in the relation of archaeology and politics.\(^{37}\) National archaeology and heritage are under pressure through cultural processes of internationalization and globalization and both archaeology and other types of heritage are increasingly regarded as a legacy not of an eternal human

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33 Ibid., 12.
34 Ibid., 27.
experience, but of a certain type of European modernity.\textsuperscript{38} The phenomenon of globalization and the paradox of monuments being simultaneously of national and global significance\textsuperscript{39}—at least for the Western imagination—are also symptoms of dynamic change in the Western conception of cultural heritage. This conception, however, is rooted in the revival of antiquity that characterized the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment and continued into the nineteenth century, latterly competing with Romanticism.

\textit{Memory Constructions in Greece}

There is abundant literature devoted to the analysis of archaeology and national identity in Greece. Greece may be considered the European paradigm-state of those cultural and political practices where the construction of national identity had massive recourse to the archaeological narrative.\textsuperscript{40} One of the traits of Greek national identity-building is the relation between global and local cultural dynamics. This has characterized the modern Greek state and its identity construction from its very beginnings. Following Hamilakis, one can distinguish different sets of Hellenisms: the “new Hellenism,” which was imported into Greece in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, and what Hamilakis calls the “Indigenous Hellenism,” the appropriation of Western Hellenism by local societies in Greece in the mid to late nineteenth century and its recasting as a novel and quasi-religious form of imagining time and place, past and present, of producing and reproducing national identities.\textsuperscript{41} One of the symbols of this global/local identity process is the Parthenon, which holds a double significance as a national and universal monument. Another example of the double status of ancient Greece as local and global \textit{lieu de memoire} is the holding of the first Olympic games of the modern era in Greece in 1896. The modern Olympic

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\item \textsuperscript{39} Hamilakis, \textit{The Nation and Its Ruins}.
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Games were conceived as the revival of the ancient games, linking ancient history and classical *topoi* to modern Greece. That event projected Greece into international modernity as the legitimate heir of the classical world,42 conceived as the cradle of western culture. This image was proposed again in the opening ceremony of the Olympic games in 2004, when

emphasis on continuity (though with a certain antique bias), a celebration of the all-time classic Greek ideal (albeit in its consummation through art), an allusion to some of the eternal Greek values—such as democracy, the theatre or Christian faith—[were] all suitably packaged for worldwide broadcast and PG audiences throughout [...].43

It is not only in popular depictions of antiquity where modern Greece is represented as the legitimate heir of classical Greece. The website www.macedonia-evidence.org can be regarded as a good example of how this image is also deeply rooted in academia. This website, which is promoted by scholars who support the Greek nationalist position on the new Macedonian question, presents the ancient Macedonians as Greeks, and links ancient and modern Greece through an unbroken line of racial and cultural continuity, concluding that only modern Greeks have the right to identify themselves as Macedonians. The use of the name “Macedonia” is conceived as an act of plagiarism against the Greek people, and by calling themselves “Macedonians” the Slavs are “stealing” a Greek name and “falsifying” Greek history.44 The website features the letter to President Obama quoted in the introduction. It claims that the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia

not only abrogated geographic and historic fact, but it also has unleashed a dangerous epidemic of historical revisionism, of which the most obvious symptom is the misappropriation by the government in Skopje of the most famous of Macedonians, Alexander the Great.

The letter goes on to argue that:

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[...] Macedonia and Macedonian Greeks have been located for at least 2,500 years just where the modern Greek province of Macedonia is. Exactly this same relationship is true for Attica and Athenian Greeks, Argos and Argive Greeks, Corinth and Corinthian Greeks, etc. [...] Alexander the Great was thoroughly and indisputably Greek. [...] Alexander the Great was Greek, not Slavic, and Slavs and their language were nowhere near Alexander or his homeland until 1000 years later. This brings us back to the geographic area known in antiquity as Paonia. Why would the people who live there now call themselves Macedonians and their land Macedonia? Why would they abduct a completely Greek figure and make him their national hero?45

Together with documents selected from ancient sources, the letter to President Obama is available both in digital and hardcopy to a larger non-specialist public, with the title “Macedonia-Evidence”. As underlined by Frank Holt in the prologue of the book, featured on the home page of the site, “At the very least, Mr. Presidents and Madam Secretaries and Peoples of the World, please consider carefully the contents of this book and the credentials of those who have contributed to it.”46

Several scholars responded positively to the plea of Stephen G. Miller, the author of the letter to Obama, and signed it. Among the negative reactions was a short response paper by Andreas Willi. In a counter-answer, Miller concludes
with a bitter criticism of Willi’s positions, arguing that “[these] statements are [...] a real threat to the fundamentals of our profession as classical scholars. If historical integrity is not important to our society, then *neither are we.*”\(^{47}\)

Another—but different—case of direct involvement of the scholarship in the “new Macedonian question” is described by Danforth, who was invited as speaker at the First International Congress on Macedonian Studies held in 1988 at La Trobe University in Melbourne. He described the symposium as “a thinly veiled attempt to provide academic legitimacy to the Greek nationalist position on what is generally known as ‘the Macedonian question’.”\(^{48}\)

The congress, which was advertised in a Greek Macedonian diaspora publication in clear political terms, attracted to its opening ceremony a huge number of Slav Macedonian demonstrators carrying signs reading pro-Macedonian slogans.\(^{49}\)

What is relevant to the topic discussed here is not the validity of the scientific conclusions proposed by the scholars, but their *voluntary or involuntary* commitment to present political issues. Indeed, it is clear that the position expressed by a significant proportion of Western scholars on the new Macedonian question concerns present Greek and Macedonian identities rather than ancient ones.

On the other hand, cultural policies carried on by the Greek state and the insistence on identifying modern Greece with classical Greece, appropriating an origin so distant in time, are efforts which show how much concern there is to justify the contemporary existence of the state of Greece and its place in the Western World. Indeed, the Greek state has played a fundamental role in national identity construction since the nineteenth century, promoting archaeology above all else as identity-building tool.

This is evident, for example, from an analysis of the narratives of the past reflected in the new Acropolis Museum. These narratives are clearly driven by an ambitious ideological agenda for the nation’s past.\(^{50}\) The new Acropolis Museum complements the national classicization project still in progress on the Acropolis and acts as its counterpart in a game of mirrors between the past and the present. The modern Greek state, through the systematic creation of “virtual ruins”

\(^{48}\) Danforth, “Ancient Macedonia,” 591.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 589–91.
such as the Parthenon and the other monuments on the Athenian Acropolis, is attempting the “instrumentalisation of its Classical heritage for the edification of its citizens as well as its visitors.”\textsuperscript{51} This is achieved through the kind of classicist agenda as was pursued in the Western world in the nineteenth century. Dimitri Planzos expresses robust criticism of the new Acropolis Museum, which “ends up being a representation of what modernity ought to look like, or in fact a parody of what modernity actually is.”\textsuperscript{52}

The promotion of national narratives of the past in the new Polycentric Museum of Aigai is of particular relevance to the new Macedonian question. Great effort was put into having Aigai (Vergina), the ancient first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia, adopted on the World Heritage List.\textsuperscript{53} Significantly, the site was inscribed in 1996, a few years after the outbreak of the name issue with the then newly born Republic of Macedonia. In the website of the new Polycentric Museum of Aigai, “the royal capital of Macedon,” one can find a wonderful and comprehensive set of information on Ancient Macedonia.\textsuperscript{54} Reinforcing the symbolic importance of Aigai-Vergina in the new Macedonian question is the identification of one of the “royal tombs” in the Great Tumulus

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\caption{Porta Macedonia on Pella Square in Skopje.}
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\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 624, emphasis in the original.
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as the tomb of Philip II, who conquered all the Greek cities, paving the way for his son Alexander and the expansion of the Hellenistic world.

The presentation of the palace of Aigai “together with the Parthenon” as being “the most significant building of classical Greece” constructs a powerful ideological link between what the present idea of Hellenic identity sees as the two capital cities representative of both ancient and modern Greekness, Aigai and Athens. The website conveys the spectacular archaeological findings and the museum displays through visual and verbal language that leaves no doubt of the ideology underlying this great narrative of the past.

Memory Constructions in ex-Yugoslavia and the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

Archaeology and its role in identity construction and political discourse have been the subject of much less analysis in ex-Yugoslavia than they have been in Greece. Some work on the new Macedonian question and the utilization of ancient Macedonian heritage and ancient Macedonian symbols has been published in recent years, but very little of this deals with the issues from a Macedonian perspective.

In the early 1990s, when many citizens of ex-Yugoslavia perceived the contrast between the accelerating political integration of the European Union and the violent broke up of Yugoslavia in the subsequent war, which culminated in the dreadful “ethnic cleansing”, archaeologists again became interested in the relation of their subject with nationalism, ethnicity, and identity. Competing versions of ethnic and cultural identities were at the basis of competing claims for territorial sovereignty in the Yugoslav conflict. Cultural heritage was presented as evidence of those claims. From the middle of the 1990s, there was a steady proliferation of books and papers devoted to these topics. Interestingly, in

58 Among the others see Brown and Hamilakis, eds., The Usable Past; Kane, ed., The Politics of Archaeology; Díaz-Andreu, A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology; Timothy Insoll, ed., The Archaeology of Identities (London: Routledge, 2007).
discussing the significance of the concept of identity and its application to the past, the authors frequently mention the Yugoslav wars as an emblematic example, but never go into depth on ex-Yugoslavia itself. For example, in the work of P. Graves-Brown, S. Jones, and C. Gamble ex-Yugoslavia appears throughout the volume as a reference for archaeology and identity issues, mainly in relation to nationalist discourses, ethnicity, and xenophobia, but no chapter deals specifically with the topic.

Together with Marxist and Soviet approaches, archaeology in ex-Yugoslavia was strongly influenced by the “German School,” a colloquialism which can be used to group different approaches to archaeology in use in German-speaking countries. The Austrian influences which dominated archaeology and antiquities in the western Balkans in the nineteenth century gave way to the imposition of German archaeological scientific standards in the twentieth. This is clearly shown by Predrag Novaković, who has analyzed the background of more than 90% of all archaeologists or archaeological professionals working in western Balkans in the period 1870–1945 to determine who was most influential. Before World War II the striking majority of scholars active in what would become Yugoslavia graduated or received their PhDs in Austrian or German universities. With some simplification, it can be argued that the focus of the “German” approach to archaeology was on two major units of observation: the artifact itself and culture as a particular assemblage of artifacts in time and space, implying a particular socio-cultural (frequently ethnic or ethnic-like) grouping of peoples. Priority was given to those aspects of the archaeological past which were perceived as instrumental for explaining national history and ethnogenesis, or the ethnic history of a specific territory. Even though Yugoslavian archaeology distanced itself from the most extreme theories of the German culture-history approach, the “German School” played an important role in influencing archaeological research.

The Yugoslav regime supported and promoted archaeology as an instrument for emancipating the Yugoslav nations and promoting the achievements of the new society. It adopted a Marxist approach to archaeology. In this way, the interpretative framework of ethnogenesis in use in Yugoslav archaeology resulted from a mixture of pre-war “German” culture-history and Marxist and Soviet approaches, blended with local backgrounds. For example, “Illyrians” were seen as macro-ethnic group made up of heterogeneous and culturally loosely linked tribes inhabiting Roman Illyricum, whose unification into a single ethnos was prevented by the Roman occupation completed in the early first century CE. The Illyrian past was set up as a parallel with the ideology of socialist federal Yugoslavia, “pervaded by brotherhood-and-unity” and made up of different but akin nations bound by a joint political structure. Regional and political issues and conflicts, such as the Serbian–Albanian conflict over Kosovo, were similarly projected into the past through the debate over the ethnic origins of the Dardanians, a people who inhabited the area in antiquity. However, the early medieval Slavic period, rather than the Iron Age, represented the focal point for archaeological investigation in Yugoslavia, as well as for its nation building policy.

The deconstruction of the Illyrians and of other archaeological discourses which had been shaped by Yugoslav ideology began when the geo-political frame of Yugoslavia started to dissolve in 1970. The decentralized constitution of 1974 and the subsequent disintegration of a compact Yugoslavian identity favored the rise of nationalism in the 1980s. In some cases, the academic community participated actively in the creation of the nationalist agendas and contributed to the development of new collective identities which would serve what was understood as the “interest of the nation.” One such case was the backing of Milošević’s nationalistic policy by the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts.

As a member of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was regarded as marginal to the archaeological discourse in Yugoslav ethnogenesis, which concentrated on more central areas. Indeed, the use of archaeology

64 Slapšak, “Entangled Histories in South-East Europe,” 416.
66 Ibid., 426.
67 See for example Nikola Tasić, Arheološko blago Kosova I Metohije, Od eneolita do ranog srednjeg veka (Belgrade: Srpska Akademija nauka I umetnosti Muzej u Prištini, 1998).
to support national identity construction in the Republic of Macedonia is a relatively new phenomenon, but it has steadily increased since the declaration of independence in 1991. In sharp contrast to the nationbuilding process of the Greeks, Serbians, and Bulgarians, whose main ideological components were drawn from a “glorious past,” Macedonian nationalism in the mid-twentieth century looked to an equally “glorious future.”69 Only after independence was the birth date of the Macedonian nation moved back from the foundation of IMRO and the 1903 Ilinden uprising to the fourth century BCE. The emphasis on Alexander the Great as the father of the modern Macedonian nation started to be widely used following the victory of VMRO DPMNE in the 2006 general election.70

A few years after the 1991 declaration of independence, the Iron Age origins of the Macedonians began to make a strong appearance in scientific literature, thanks largely to the scholarly work of D. Mitrevski.71 An ethnogenetic and historical interpretation of the Iron Age material culture led E. Petrova to recognize that the Bryges, an ancient ethnos poorly studied by the international academic world, were the direct ancestors of the Paeonians, who were in turn identified as the direct ancestors of the Macedonians.72 It is indicative that in the second volume of Civilizacii na počvata na Makedonija,73 the Hellenistic and Roman periods are completely absent, while pre-protohistory and the Middle Ages are thoroughly covered. Scholarly attention to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE has rapidly increased in the last decade, resulting in the increasing preference for the Hellenistic period as the golden age74 of the present Macedonian nation.

The Skopje 2014 campaign was launched by the government of the Republic of Macedonia in 2010. This is aimed at giving the city of Skopje a classical style through the construction of new public and governmental buildings. Skopje

69 Troebst, Das makedonische Jahrhundert, 257.
70 The Vnatrešna makedonska revolucionernka organizacija – Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), simplified as VMRO-DPMNE, is the leading party in the Republic of Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE is a Christian-democratic right-oriented party whose “Antiquization” policy has been widely criticized for its nationalist aims.
71 Dragi Mitrevski, Protoistoriskite zavednici vo Makedonija. Preku pogrebuvanjeto i pogrebnite manifestocii (Skopje: Kulturno-istorisko nasledstvo na Republika Makedonija, 1997).
72 Eleonora Petrova, Brigite na centralniot Balkan vo II i I milenium pred n.e. (Skopje: Muzej na Makedonija, 1996).
city center has been adorned with a large number of statues of which the most important is undoubtedly the impressive Vojn na Konj (warrior on a horse), which occupies the ideological and physical center of Ploštad Makedonija (Macedonia square). The old Muzej na Makedonija (Museum of Macedonia) located in the heart of the Stara Čarsija, the old city, has been relocated in a new neoclassical building specifically built on the northern shore of the Vardar River, opposed to Ploštad Makedonija.

The government’s antiquization policy, however, does not seem to enjoy the direct support of Macedonian archaeologists and historians, with some significant exceptions. Research conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Skopje University led by K. Kolozova shows that archaeologists, together with other professionals of different disciplines, express a strongly negative opinion on the Skopje 2014 project and the antiquization campaign.75

Although the Hellenistic period occupies a prominent part in the nationalistic discourse, there are new excavations and projects to appraise the archaeological heritage as a whole. As well as the new archaeological Museum in Skopje, the last decade has seen the establishment of several new archaeological open-air museums in key sites of the country. The most significant of these, or at least the newest and largest, are Tumba Madžari near Skopje, and Ohrid, where an entire pile-dwelling settlement has been completely reconstructed.

Tumba Madžari is an outstanding Early Neolithic site located in the Gazi Baba municipality of Skopje. There have been several exceptional findings since the first archaeological excavations directed by Vojslav Sanev in 1978. Walking through the open-air museum one can dive into a 8,000-year-old world in four fully-equipped reconstructions of prehistoric huts, where everyday scenes are recreated with life-size mannequins. Throughout the website of Tumba Madžari open-air museum it is stressed that “the settlement of Tumba Madžari is the protogenic core of today’s Skopje.”76 It is significant that the “Great Mother,” the terracotta idol which has made Tumba Madžari famous to a worldwide community of specialists, is represented on the frieze decorating Porta Macedonia, a triumphal arch located on Pella Square in Skopje.

The Museum on Water, which opened at Ohrid on December 8, 2008, lies in the suggestive Bay of the Bones and features a reconstruction of a settlement

from the Iron and Bronze ages. It is advertised as “a place where the visitors will be able to travel back in time.” The political importance of the new museum lies in the valuable archeological and scientific data significant for the functioning of the ethno-genesis, and the beginnings of the formation and recognition of the tribes in ethnical sense [...], between 1200 and 700 BC [the Bryges] left for Asia Minor, forming the state of Phrygia, which is very important for us because in a certain way, we are ethnically connected with them.77

Open-air museums, excavations, exhibitions, monuments, and architectural structures connected to antiquity and archaeological heritage are contributing to the shaping of a contemporary Macedonian ideal and physical landscape in assumed continuity with an ancient past, and to bolstering the connection to the land. Open-air museums welcome schoolchildren and the general public and host various activities for bringing people together. Thanks to their powerful “affective”78 influence these re-enactments serve as a means for visitors to became part of the millenary Macedonian history. By experiencing a full immersion in an open-air museum, the visitor gets a feeling of authentic and long-lasting emotional connection to the site even if she has been there only for few hours.79 This cultural policy, which makes abundant use of archaeological discourse and historicist arguments to construct and foster Macedonian identity, is one of the main causes for the embitterment of the conflict on Macedonian identity at international political level.

Museums and archaeological excavations are widely promoted trough the Internet. According to the ITU (International Telecommunication Union), the United Nations agency for information and communication technologies, the internet is used by 51 percent of the population in the Republic of Macedonia, and is therefore an information channel capable of reaching a wide domestic

78 On the affective turn, i.e. the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on affect, individual experience and daily life rather than historical events, structures and processes, see Vanessa Agnew, “History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present,” Rethinking History 11, no. 3 (2007): 299–312.
79 For an example of the strong link to the land constructed by participating in an excavation, see the example of Masada in Gori, “The Stones of Contention,” 219–20.
audience. It can also be argued that Macedonian nationalism focusing on the past has grown almost in parallel with the spread of new technologies and new media in the country.

**Appropriations of the Past**

The following points emerge from the examples discussed here:

– The physicality of archaeology gives an added sense of material reality to the feelings of belonging and continuity that underlie national identity constructions. Archaeological heritage and its display are used to provide tangible proofs of the past and are conceived and interpreted as physical representations of the concept of national identity. However, this use of archaeology by nation-states coexists with approaches to archaeological heritage that point toward shared heritage and “global culture.” Global culture should be conceived less as an alleged homogenizing process and more in terms of the variety and diversity of popular and local discourses.

– In both Greece and the Republic of Macedonia, the work of archaeologists and scholars concerned with antiquity actively contributes to the creation of identities. The ideal connection of present-day to ancient Greece through the modern conception of antiquity is present in more than just national narratives and popular archaeology. It is also vividly present in the imagination of many scholars as lieu de memoire. This type of Hellenism revives the Romantic idea of Greece as the idealized and preferred locus for academic research and may be regarded as the direct legacy of what Hamilakis has defined as new Hellenism.

Arjun Appadurai’s work on issues of globalization and the relationship between modernity and tradition reflects on the role of archaeology and its connections to modernity. In an interview on the topic of archaeology and its relation to nationalism he argues that:

> Professional archaeology is intimately tied to state institutions, national institutions and the ruling political party; [...] even the question of how archaeology could enter the space of conversation reminded us that


archaeology is a key site through which the apparatus of nations can reflect the politics of remembering.

He continues affirming that “in so far as archaeology professionally remains very closely tied in many countries to [...] ‘producing the people’ it remains a critical player in the economy of remembering and forgetting.”

As contributors to “producing the people” and instruments of soft power, archaeology and archaeologists play a crucial role in cultural diplomacy and in policies reflecting visions of heritage which derive from specific political visions and historical conditions.

Just like economic development, archaeology needs to be sustainable and not “predatory,” and to be capable of exploring different ways of claiming origins without excluding. In the new Macedonian question, the search for origins has direct repercussions for domestic and foreign policy in the states involved. The past has an ambivalent meaning in the western Balkans today: the past and its material traces are the favorite locus for violent fights and preferred symbols of identity struggles, but the study and preservation of the past are also used by the European Union, through the support of archaeological projects in the new states, to endorse the culture of peace and mutual understanding. Are these goals really achievable when academics are first of all supporting a “predatory” claim for origins, as in the case of the new Macedonian question?

Considering that the study of classics is declining in the Western world, it may be that scholars “reclaiming” antiquity in the new Macedonian question are

86 Appadurai, “The Globalization of Archaeology and Heritage,” 44. “So one of my big concerns now is why certain identities, which are parts of pairs or sets which have been in some form of workable juxtaposition at a certain point in time, become predatory. Why does one of them, or sometimes both, become animated by the idea that there is only room for one of them? When and under what circumstances does this happen?”
actually reclaiming their own importance and their role in society. To regain its place in the contemporary cultural debate, archaeology—like the other branches of the humanities concerned with antiquity—needs an engagement with the present, first of all by acknowledging the political significance of antiquity in present Western societies and thus rejecting the modernist ideal of the archaeologist as a scientist who stands apart from the array of evidence and its political context and offers a definitive interpretation. Nonetheless, looking at the influence of the modernist approach to archaeology and antiquity on the new Macedonian question, one may question if the “postmodern turn” really has produced a change within the discipline in this sense. A major result of the postmodern critique in archaeology seems to be a further expansion of the scope of the discipline and its role in society, but this expansion seems to have involved only some aspects of the discipline and has overlooked others. Using Friedman’s words, one can argue that the act of identification of the person (the classicist) in a higher project (the pursuit of historical truth) is an act of pure existential authenticity, a “consumption of identity canalized by a negotiation between self-definition and the array of possibilities offered by the capitalist market.”

The economic recession that started in the late 2000s put the humanities under greater pressure than ever to justify their existence to administrators, policy makers, students, and parents. Reclaiming archaeology from modernism, and insisting that all aspects of practice are imbued with power and politics, may represent an important step to move toward new ways of engagement with the past and the present.

94 Hall, “Milieux de mémoire.”
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