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Vlasis Vlasidis*

*Department for Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies
University of Macedonia
Thessaloniki*

The Serbian Heritage of the Great War in Greece

Abstract: During the First World War Serbian soldiers were encamped or fought in different parts of Greece. Many of them died there of diseases or exhaustion or were killed in battle. This paper looks at the issue of cemeteries of and memorials to the dead Serbian soldiers (primarily in the area of Corfu, Thessaloniki and Florina) in the context of post-war relations between Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), at the attitude of post-Second World War Yugoslavia towards them, and the Serbs' revived interest in their First World War history. It also takes a look at the image of Serbs in the memory of local people.

Keywords: First World War, Serbia, heritage, Greece, Corfu, Thessaloniki, Aridea, Vidos, Zeitenlik, monuments

During the First World War, Serbia and Greece were allies fighting against the Germans and the Bulgarians. But after the war ended their governments parted ways. Serbia managed to unite the Southern Slavs in a new state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS), which dominated the Balkan region during the interwar period. Greece, on the other hand, was defeated in the Greek-Turkish War in Asia Minor and became the recipient of the largest part of the Christian population of Asia Minor. Greece and Serbia may have had shared common interests during the interwar period, but the Kingdom of SCS looked at Greece not as its equal, but as a minor ally.¹

In 1923, the Kingdom of SCS tried to raise all the issues its government was concerned with, such as the issue of a Serbian free trade zone in the port of Thessaloniki,² the use of the Thessaloniki–Gevgelija railway line and the recog-

* vlasisidis@hotmail.com

¹ A. Koulas, "Οι Ελληνογιουγκοσλαβικές σχέσεις από το 1923 έως το 1928" [Greek-Jugoslav Relations 1923–1928] (Ph.D. thesis, Thessaloniki 2007), 17; E. Hatzivasileiou, *Ο Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος, η ελληνοτουρκική προσέγγιση και το πρόβλημα ασφάλειας στα Βαλκάνια 1928–1931* [Eleftherios Venizelos, Greek-Turkish approach and security issues in the Balkans 1928–1931] (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies 1999), 38, 39.

² For the Serbian Zone at Thessaloniki Harbour see Diplomatic and Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece (DIAYE), 1923, f. 52 s.f. 5; 1928, f. 7, s.f. 1; *Εφημερίς*

inition of the Slavic-speaking minority in Greek Macedonia as a Serbian minority, utilizing its authority as a regional power.³ The Greek state made extensive concessions to Serbia over the Serbian free trade zone in the port of Thessaloniki, since its goal was to join the Little Entente, but the foreign minister of the Kingdom of SCS did not accept the Greek request at the conference of the Little Entente held at Sinaia, Romania.⁴

When Greece recognized the Slavic-speaking inhabitants of Greek Macedonia as ethnic Bulgarians and guaranteed their protection (pursuant to the Politis-Kalfoff Protocol of 29 September 1924), the government of the Kingdom of SCS expressed its strong opposition. The Kingdom of SCS claimed that the Slavic-speaking residents of Greek Macedonia were, in fact, Serbs rather than Bulgarians, and that only Serbs lived in Serbian Macedonia. On 2 February 1925, the Greek parliament refused to ratify the protocol, because of strong pressure from the Kingdom of SCS (which threatened to renounce the Greek-Serbian alliance treaty signed in 1913). The negotiations lasted several months, until 10 June 1925, when the League of Nations nullified it.⁵

Throughout the interwar period, the Kingdom of SCS would continue to regard the Slav Macedonians in Greece as Serbs, thus raising the Greek government's suspicion of Serbian intentions in Greek Macedonia. All of the above conclude the historical context of that time dictating the nature of relations between the two nations.

In the subsequent years, after the First World War, the Serbian authorities, war veterans and civilian organizations wished to visit the locations where the Serbian Army had achieved glory in battle. They fulfilled their wish by visiting the cemeteries of fallen Serbian soldiers. The sites of interest to the Serbs were Corfu, Thessaloniki, the geographical line from Mt Dzena, through Dobro Pole, to Kaimakchalan and Florina. Descendants of Serbian fallen soldiers visited the cemeteries quite often and used to replace the wooden crosses on their ancestors' graves with tombstones.

Individuals and the Serbian press, especially the daily *Politika*, published articles claiming that the Serbian cemeteries located between Thessaloniki and

της Κυβερνήσεως [Government Gazette] no. 317, 2 Nov. 1923, ch. A.

³ Koulas, "Οι Ελληνογιογκοσλαβικές σχέσεις".

⁴ DIAYE, 1923, f.89, s.f. 2, Royal Hellenic Legation in Bucharest to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sinaia, 29 July 1923.

⁵ For the protocol Politis-Kalfoff and its impact, see A. Τούντα-Φεργάδη, *Μειονότητες στα Βαλκάνια. Βαλκανικές διασκέψεις 1930–1934* [Minorities in the Balkans. Balkan conferences 1930–1934] (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1994); K. D. Kentrotis, "International status of minorities: The case of the Balkans", *Balkan Studies* XXXVIII/2 (1997), 355–377; I. D. Michailidis, "Traditional Friends and Occasional Claimants: Serbian claims in Macedonia between the wars", *Balkan Studies*, XXXVI/1 (1995), 103–108.

Florina had suffered severe damage. Authorities of Kingdom of SCS submitted verbal notes to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning this issue.⁶ However, most of the damage had been the result of the passage of time and exposure to harsh winter conditions, in addition to low-quality materials used for constructing temporary cemeteries (wooden crosses, stone and barbed wire).⁷

The issue was a complicated one, since there were 213 temporary cemeteries in Greek Macedonia and another 27 on Corfu, according to the authorities of the Kingdom of SCS.⁸ The constantly arising difficulties in supervising the maintenance of and taking care of such a large number of cemeteries, most of which were located in mountainous regions, led the government of the Kingdom of SCS to think of having the remains of deceased soldiers relocated and two permanent central cemeteries and ossuaries constructed, in Thessaloniki and Corfu respectively. In 1924, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Kingdom of SCS set up a special commission whose purpose was to visit the Serbian cemeteries in Greece, make inquiries and decide whether the construction of two permanent cemeteries was the most appropriate solution.⁹

In late 1926, the government of the Kingdom of SCS decided and announced that a mausoleum and ossuary were to be created in Zeitinlik (City of Thessaloniki) to hold the remains of 7,000 Serbian soldiers who either had remained unburied or had been buried in temporary cemeteries in Greek Macedonia.¹⁰ The Greek government was officially informed of that decision in July 1927¹¹ and raised no objections.¹² The amount of material (cement, steel, marble, granite) imported from Serbia for the construction of the mausoleum and

⁶ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Mavroudis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgrade, 4 Apr. 1924, no. 51; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation du Royaume Serbes, Croates et Slovenes en Grèce, Note Verbale, Athens, 12 Jan. 1926, no. 88/3; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovenes en Grèce, Note Verbale, Athens, 28 Mar. 1926, no. 308.

⁷ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, P. Sarigiannis, Head of the Greek Army to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 11 Mar. 1926, no. 2563/563.

⁸ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation Royale de Yougoslavie en Grèce to Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Note Verbale, Athens, 12 June 1930, no. 24156.

⁹ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Royal Hellenic Legation in Belgrade to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgrade, 30 May 1924, no. 884; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Deputy Governor of Macedonia to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thessaloniki 31 July 1924, no. 15247.

¹⁰ “Spomenik-kapela u Zejtinliku kod Soluna. Projekt g. A.Vasica”, *Politika*, 17 Nov. 1926; Vlasis Vlasidis, “Τα στρατιωτικά νεκροταφεία του Α΄ Παγκόσμιου Πολέμου στη Μακεδονία” [First World War cemeteries in Macedonia], *Θεσσαλονίκη* VIII (2013), 332–333.

¹¹ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croats et Slovenes en Grèce, Note Verbale, Athens 27 July 1927, no. 467.

¹² DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, G. Vrontamitis, Deputy Head of the Greek Army to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens 30 Nov. 1927, no. 6359/150, conf.

the mausoleum's large size caused worries and aroused questions,¹³ but careful investigation showed that all of the material was indeed used for the construction of the mausoleum.¹⁴

In 1930, the Yugoslav Legation requested Greek permission to have the remains of 6,000 Serbian soldiers transferred from 213 sites between Florina and Thessaloniki to the Zeitinlik cemetery; the Greek government granted permission without delay.¹⁵ After the inauguration of the mausoleum, the remains of Serbian soldiers kept in other locations were transferred to the ossuary-crypt. The transfer took place during the first months of 1931.¹⁶ A year earlier, in 1930, the remains of Serbian soldiers had been gathered from various temporary cemeteries on Corfu and transferred to the island of Vidos, where a mausoleum was to be constructed.¹⁷

The ownership of the land on which temporary Serbian cemeteries in Greek Macedonia had been established was a complicated issue, since in some cases it belonged to local communities and in some to private owners, in which case the owners were compensated. This is why the Governor General of Greek Macedonia, Stylianos Gonatas, recommended that the now vacated land be returned to communal and private owners without any publicity. If monuments existed there, their maintenance was to be the landowners' responsibility.¹⁸

The construction of a similar memorial ossuary for Serbian soldiers on Corfu was not such a simple matter. As early as 1916, the Serbian authorities requested of the Greek government to be allocated a large tract of land on the

¹³ DIAYE, 1927–1938, A/5/3 (A26), Ministry of the Economy to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 25 June 1932, no. 4688; DIAYE, 1927–1938, A/5/3 (A26), General Staff of the Army, 2nd Dept. to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 9 Aug. 1934, no. 2793/237.

¹⁴ DIAYE, 1927–1938, A/5/3 (A26), General Staff of the Army, 2nd Dept. to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 3 Dec. 1934, no. 3342/405, conf.; DIAYE, 1927–1938, A/5/3 (A26), General Staff of the Army, 2nd Dept. to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 11 Jan. 1935, no. 25/33, conf.

¹⁵ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croats et Slovenes en Grèce to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 13 May 1930, no. 433; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croats et Slovenes en Grèce, Athens, 12 June 1930, no. 24156.

¹⁶ For the exhumation and transfer of the Serb soldiers from the villages of Florina district, see DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Report of the Head of Sitaria village, Sitaria, 1 Dec. 1931; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Report of the Head of Vevi village, Vevi, 1 Dec. 1931; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Report of Antoniadis, Head of Achlada village, Achlada, 29 Nov. 1931; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Report of the Head of 3rd Army camp, Meliti, 2 Dec. 1931.

¹⁷ DIAYE, 1932, A/45/9, Jokovic, Yugoslav military attaché to Corfu Prefect, Corfu, 2 Sep. 1930, no. 103.

¹⁸ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Stylianos Gonatas, Governor-General of Macedonia to Ministry of War, 2nd Dept. Thessaloniki, 28 Mar. 1932, no. 39215.

island of Vidos for a cemetery and a memorial.¹⁹ Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos had agreed to the creation of a memorial on Vidos.²⁰ The government of the Kingdom of SCS restated its request for a memorial on Vidos in 1920. The Greek government accepted it and recommended to the Legation of the Kingdom of SCS that technical staff should be sent from Serbia to Corfu to negotiate with the Prefect of Corfu.²¹ Nevertheless, the agreement remained unfulfilled due to obstructions by the Kingdom of SCS.

In 1925, the government of the Kingdom of SCS decided that it was necessary to exhume and transfer all the remains from the temporary cemeteries on the islands of Corfu and Lazareto to Vidos, where a mausoleum with an ossuary was to be built.²² The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs disagreed mainly because the requested area was too large.²³ Local societies and the Municipality of Corfu also protested strongly.²⁴

The Greek government offered to allocate an area of 1,600 m² on the island of Vidos for the creation of a memorial,²⁵ but the government of the Kingdom of SCS requested a tract of 12,000 m² in the area of the already existing military cemetery.²⁶ In order to apply more pressure on Greece and to show the importance of Vidos for the Serbian nation, the fleet of the Kingdom of SCS paid two friendly visits to Corfu, in 1929²⁷ and in 1934 respectively. In fact, on its second visit a delegation set up a 3.85-m-high cross on Vidos. The delegation setting up the cross was accompanied by 114 members of the lower and upper

¹⁹ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation de Serbie to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 15 Oct. 1916, no. 1237.

²⁰ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Petmezas to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Corfu, 10 Nov. 1917, no. 8799.

²¹ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères to Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes en ville, Athens, 9/22 Oct. 1920, no. 30466.

²² DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes to Ministry of Naval Affairs, Athens, 23 Oct. 1925, no. 654.

²³ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Corfu Prefect, Athens, 13 Nov. 1925, no. 35823/35714, conf.; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes, Athens, 20 Jan. 1926, no. 38422/1297.

²⁴ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Telegram to all Greek authorities, Corfu, 26 Dec. 1925; DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Garrison Headquarters of Corfu to General Staff of the Army, Corfu, 2 Jan. 1926, no. 1.

²⁵ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes, Athens, 20 Jan. 1926, no. 38422.

²⁶ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Légation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 3 Aug. 1928, no. 443.

²⁷ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Corfu Prefecture, Athens, 25 Apr. 1929, no. 4662, conf.

chambers of Yugoslav Parliament, along with the former finance minister Milan Stojadinović and twelve journalists.²⁸ Eventually, the mausoleum was designed by the Russian-born Serbian architect Nikolai Krasnov and built under the supervision of the local engineer Joseph Cohen. Construction began in 1936 and was completed in 1939.

Apart from taking care of the cemeteries, the Kingdom of SCS tried to organize a series of events in commemoration of the First World War on Greek soil, but without success. More important was the request for an official commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Battle of Kaimakchalan under the auspices and in the presence of King Alexander of Yugoslavia at the top of the mountain. The Greek state was cautious about the request of Kingdom of SCS, but the harsh weather put an end to such concerns, preventing the commemoration from taking place.²⁹

Corfu

Memories of the Serbian wartime presence were preserved by local people, in addition to the official preservation of the memory by the Kingdom of SCS itself through the erection and maintenance of numerous monuments on the locations where the Serbian Army had been encamped or fought. These locations were the regions of Corfu, Thessaloniki, Aridea and Florina. Initially, the locals of Corfu did not perceive the exhausted and starved Serbian soldiers, who had crossed Albania, as a regular army.³⁰ But the discipline shown by the Serbian soldiers and their kind behaviour towards the locals changed their impressions of them completely. That resulted in many mixed marriages and the vital assistance of several locals to the Serbian Army and administration during the war. The Serbian government, which remained in the city of Corfu until the end of the war using various public buildings, made a good impression on local communities. An expression of good faith of the local people and authorities towards the Serbian refugees was the allocation of schools for their children's education, in 1917 and 1918, and of three churches for worship.³¹ The plays by

²⁸ DIAYE, 1932–1934, A/5/3, Melas to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgrade, 12 May 1934.

²⁹ See DIAYE, 1926, f. 69 s.f. 7, Thessaloniki Press Bureau, Commemoration of the Battle of Kaimakchalan.

³⁰ J. Tomašević, *O A' Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος και η Ελλάδα στα μάτια του ξενιτεμένου σερβικού στρατού* [First World War and Greece in the eyes of the Serbian army abroad] (Thessaloniki: MA, 2013), 23. N. Randjelović, *Srpski parlament na Krfu 1916–1918* (Niš: Zograf, 2003), 61–63, 161.

³¹ D. Janković, "Serbian pupils in Greece during the First World War", *Η Καβάλα και τα Βαλκάνια: από την αρχαιότητα μέχρι σήμερα 2* [Kavala and the Balkans: from Antiquity until the present] (Kavala: ILAK, 2004), vol. II, 545–562.

the Serbian author and actor Brana Cvetković, the Serbian songs composed and sung in Corfu and the Serbs' participation in local festivities created an even better image in the eyes of the Corfiots.³² The Serbian Army's rapid transfer from Corfu, commenced in April 1916, left only good memories. It is reasonable to assume that the situation would have probably been different had the Serbian Army remained in Corfu for a longer time.

As a result, the positive impression the Serbs made amongst the locals lasted for years to come. Mixed marriages contributed to this by strengthening family ties. They were also conducive to Serbian officials, journalists and families paying visits to Corfu to commemorate their dead in the subsequent years. On the occasion of King Alexander's visit, in May 1922, he inaugurated the first memorial to the dead Serbian soldiers, a stone cross set up by the Navy of the Kingdom of SCS.³³ The local people of Corfu saw very positively any Serbian reaction to the Tellini incident, the bombardment and short occupation of Corfu by the Italians, or so interpreted the attitude of the Serbs.³⁴

During the next few years, the Greek authorities and some local organizations were worried about the motives underlying the request of the Kingdom of SCS for permission to build a huge memorial on Corfu, although the Corfiots did not share their reservations. Contrary to what happened in other parts of Greece, the memory of the Serbs remained alive there after the Second World War. Perhaps it faded away elsewhere because Socialist Yugoslavia was not interested in preserving this kind of memory.³⁵ The most important issue at that time was Socialist Yugoslavia and the Partisans. Indeed, when Tito visited Corfu in 1954, he himself reportedly removed the symbols of interwar Yugoslavia from the ossuary on Vidos.³⁶ Between 1950 and 1990 visitors were few.

In the 1900s the Municipality of Corfu donated a downtown building for the Serbian House. Every year more and more Serbs come to Corfu to visit the Serbian House and the ossuary on Vidos. More and more of them are going to Corfu in order to find their own Serbian identity. In 2001, Corfu and

³² Tomašević, *Ο Α΄ Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος*, 36–37.

³³ V. Vlasidis, *Μεταξύ μνήμης και λήθης. Μνημεία και κοιμητήρια του Μακεδονικού Μετώπου* [Between memory and forgetfulness. Monuments and Cemeteries of the Macedonian Front] (Thessaloniki: Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, 2016), 161.

³⁴ Koulas, "Οι Ελληνοϊταλικές σχέσεις", 44–45. For the Corfu incident see I. Papafloratos, *Η ελληνοϊταλική κρίση τον 1923/Το επεισόδιο Tellini/Κέρκυρας* [The Greek-Italian crisis of 1923. The Tellini/Corfu incident] (Athens: Sakoulas, 2009).

³⁵ V. Vlasidis, "Rediscovering the First World War Serbian Monuments in Greece – From Ignorance to Consideration of the Cultural Heritage", in *Zbornik radova sa međunarodne konferencije Arhiv, mediji i kultura sećanja u Prvom svetskom ratu*, Novi Sad, 29–30. oktobar 2014, ed. Dragana Ćiraković and Miroslav Jaćimović (Novi Sad: 2014), 310.

³⁶ Interview with Ljubomir Saramandić, Corfu, 18 Apr. 2018.

Vidos were visited by 4,000–5,000 Serbs, and in 2017–2018 the number rose to 30,000–40,000 visitors. Some of them come as tourists but become pilgrims and some Serbs even perceive Vidos as their own Jerusalem.³⁷

Thessaloniki

The situation in Thessaloniki was different. After the Second World War the Yugoslav consular authorities did not show much interest in the preservation and presentation of the First World War monuments on Greek soil; as a matter of fact, they did exactly the opposite. As a result of neglect, most monuments either were completely gone or fell in ruin. Memory of the war was preserved by veterans, who continued taking trips to Thessaloniki and to the battlefields in Yugoslavia.³⁸

Serbian First World War veterans, popularly known as *Solunci* (Salonikans), never stopped visiting the tombs of their dead fellow soldiers in Thessaloniki, with one exception: the period of 1940–1953. Even when the last of the veterans died, their children and grandchildren continued to come. However, by the time the last veteran died, that is to say, the late 1980s, the Macedonian (Salonika) Front became well known in Serbia once more, through the books of Milivoje Alimpić and Petar Opačić. Many Serbs started to travel to Greece in order to visit the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos, the Zeitenlik cemetery in Thessaloniki and the one on Vidos. In fact, the Zeitenlik cemetery keeper, Djordje Mihailović, the descendant of a *Solunac*, would always welcome them wearing the Serbian army uniform. During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, Zeitenlik became even more important to the Serbs, as shown by the fact that many communities, associations and individuals leaf there flags, hats, uniforms and photographs of Serbs killed in the wars fought in Croatia and Bosnia.

Today hundreds of people from Serbia visit Zeitenlik every week, where the new keeper, Predrag Nedeljković, serves as their guide. Each year, at the end of September, major events take place, with the participation of many veteran associations and many visitors from Serbia and the Republika Srpska.³⁹

Local authorities have always had reservations about these numerous visits to Zeitenlik, often seeing them as Serbia's display of power and of its interest in Thessaloniki and its hinterland. However, they have always been more concerned about the issue of the Serbian zone in the port of Thessaloniki than about the veterans' visits.⁴⁰ The local inhabitants never cared about Allied cemeteries.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview with George Mihailović, Thessaloniki, 18 Mar. 2013.

³⁹ Interview with Predrag Nedeljković, Thessaloniki, 27 July 2017.

⁴⁰ E. Kofos, "Ελληνικό κράτος και μακεδονικές ταυτότητες (1950–2005)" [The Greek state and Macedonian identities 1950–2005], in *Μακεδονικές ταυτότητες στο χρόνο. Διεπιστημονικές*

They had more important problems to deal with. Thessaloniki was completely destroyed by the Great Fire of 1917 and then underwent great population changes. During the interwar period Bulgarians and Muslims left the city and its large Jewish community was exterminated during the Second World War. On the other hand, many Greek refugees from the Black Sea, Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor settled in Thessaloniki, mostly in the western part of the city, some near or around Zeitenlik. But they were always more interested in their own lost homeland than in Serbian, French and British soldiers of the First World War.⁴¹ After the Second World War, most of them did not even know that the Allied cemeteries were the last resting place of the dead of the First and not the Second World War. This situation has changed a lot in recent days.

Aridea (former Subotsko) District

Until the 1930s there were in this region many monuments and cemeteries dedicated to the First World War, including Kaimakchalan, Vetrenik, Golo Bilo, Dzena, Dobro Pole. Some monuments are still standing, such as those in Exaplatanos and the city of Aridea.⁴² However, the monument by the French sculptor Marcel Canguilhem set up by the French and Serbian Association d'Anciens Combattants du Front de Macédoine at Dobro Pole in 1938 was destroyed by the Bulgarians in 1942.

The region of Aridea was inhabited also by Muslim populations until 1924, when they departed for Turkey as part of the population exchange dictated by the Treaty of Lausanne. Before leaving, several Muslims had buried their gold near or under Serbian monuments, mainly drinking fountains and tombstones. When their descendants began to return in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the locals suspected that they were digging for the gold. As a result, many Serbian monuments were destroyed, because the locals themselves began digging for the Muslim gold. The most significant were the demolition of the Serbian fountain and the Timok Memorial in the village of Slatina (now Hrysi) in Aridea.⁴³

προσεγγίσεις [Macedonian Identities through Time] ed. Ioannis Stefanidis, Vlasis Vlasidis and Evangelos Kofos (Athens: Patakis, 2008) 365–380; K. Katsanos, *Το ανύπαρκτο ζήτημα. Οι ελληνογιογγκοσλαβικές σχέσεις και το Μακεδονικό 1950–1967* [A non-existent issue. Greek-Yugoslav relations and the Macedonian Question] (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2013).

⁴¹ V. Vlasidis, "This is not our War. Salonika Front War Memory", in *World War I in Central and Eastern Europe: Politics, Culture and Society*, Conference proceedings, School of History and Archives, University College of Dublin, Dublin, May 9–10, 2014, ed. Judith Devlin (Dublin, in press).

⁴² Vlasidis, *Μεταξύ μνήμης και λήθης*, 113, 114.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 110.

The region's inhabitants nowadays are both natives and refugees. No one remembers Serbian soldiers of the First World War. By contrast, there is a memory of Tito's Partisans supporting the Greek Communist guerrillas during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). Therefore, their impression of the Serbs is similar to what their stance was during the Greek Civil War. However, in recent years, after many personal visits to the area and the discovery and identification of monuments and cemeteries, the locals have a very positive view of the Serbs' fighting on the Macedonian Front to reclaim their homeland and they respect the ruins and monuments.

Florina

In Florina, where the headquarters of the French Armée d'Orient was located in the period of 1916–1918, there was a substantial Serbian presence throughout the war. As a result of its close proximity to the border with Serbia, many Greek residents from Monastir and the surroundings came to Florina as refugees in 1912, after the First Balkan War, and in 1915, after the Serbian Army's retreat and the capture of Monastir by the Bulgarians. Therefore, there was a significant refugee population in the city. Thus, a Serbian civilian administration was created and a French-Serbian school was established in 1918/19, in which all the refugees' children from Monastir were compulsorily enrolled.

At the same time, many postcards were printed showing a cityscape of Florina and the name Florina or Lerin (in Serbian) on the front side and various sentences in the Cyrillic alphabet on the back.⁴⁴ All this indicates that, had the war not ended successfully for the Serbs, some of them would have claimed residence in Florina.

The presence of Serbs in Florina, as French allies, was not welcome by the Greek local authorities and inhabitants. Florina was an area where pro-King Constantine and anti-Venizelos sentiment prevailed. In 1915, Ion Dragoumis was elected as the anti-Venizelist party's deputy for Florina.⁴⁵ Therefore, the inhabitants of Florina regarded Greece's participation in the war as a hostile act of the Venizelists and the presence of the French and Serbs in the city as an act of French domination or even occupation. After the war and the offensive of the French and Serbian troops towards Belgrade, the situation changed. The French-Serbian school was shut down. The postcards continued to circulate, but the word "Serbie" was erased. The Greek administration, education and

⁴⁴ D. Mekasis, "Το πέρασμα των Σέρβων από τη Φλώρινα" [The passage of Serbs from Florina], *Florineanews*, 9 Nov. 2013, http://florineanews.blogspot.gr/2013/11/blog-post_9846.html (downloaded 20/4/2017).

⁴⁵ For more information see The American School of Classical Studies in Athens Archives, Ion Dragoumis Processing History, Parliamentary Activities-Exile.

banking systems and all the institutions expanded not only to Florina but to the surrounding villages as well. However, the French and the Serbs left a cultural imprint on the local population. Many of those who had attended the French-Serbian school recalled the Serbian Army, along with the French, and even more so the visits of Alexander of Serbia, and in many cases, passed on the same feelings to their children.⁴⁶

Also, during the interwar period, several Slavic-speaking people residing in the region defined themselves as Serbs in order not to be considered as Bulgarians by the Greek authorities. Therefore, there was a vivid memory of the Serbian army and administration in Florina. That changed radically after the Second World War and the Greek Civil War. At that time, Tito's Yugoslavia and his support to the Greek Communist Party was the main and only collective memory, which wiped out any recollection the local people had of the Serbian Army and Serbia in the First World War and the interwar period.⁴⁷

The population of Florina has only in recent years begun to learn about the French and Serbian presence in the region during the First World War. In fact, a photographic exhibition pertaining to the presence of French and Serbian armies in Florina took place there in 2013, and some articles were published in academic journals and local newspapers.⁴⁸ But the memory of the Great War is not strong even now and most researchers and residents are much more interested in the Second World War and the Greek Civil War.

Conclusion

This is, in general, the Serbian First World War legacy in Greece. In spite of Serbia and Greece traditionally having friendly relations in the Balkan region, their goals in the interwar period and after the Second World War diverged, causing tension in their relations more than once. Nevertheless, Greece agreed to the founding of monumental Serbian cemeteries in its territory and the visits of Serbs throughout the interwar period. The impact of the Serbian heritage

⁴⁶ Interview with Theodoros Vosdou, Florina, 16 Nov. 2007; Interview with Nikos Tolios, Florina, 16 Nov. 2007; Interview with Thanasis Georgoulas, Florina, 23 Jan. 2008.

⁴⁷ Kofos, "Ελληνικό κράτος", 360–380; I. Manos, "Σύγχρονες εκδοχές της μακεδονικής ταυτότητας στην περιοχή της Φλώρινας" [Current aspects of Macedonian identities in the Florina region], in *Μακεδονικές ταυτότητες στο χρόνο. Διεπιστημονικές προσεγγίσεις* [Macedonian Identities through Time], ed. Ioannis Stefanidis, Vlasis Vlasidis and Evangelos Kofos (Athens: Patakis, 2008), 419–436.

⁴⁸ Exposition photographique "Première Guerre Mondiale. L'Armée d'Orient à Florina", 27 photos from the French Ministry of Culture; 25 from the War Museum collection; 4 from the Thessaloniki History Centre; and 13 recent photos, Vlasis Vlasidis City of Florina, Consulat Général de France à Thessalonique, Florina, 7 Jan. 2013, and War Museum, Athens, 6 Mar. 2013; Mekasis, "Το πέρασμα των Σέρβων από τη Φλώρινα".

varies from one region of Greece to another. Where there was no other kind of contact and no conflict of interests, such as on Corfu, the image of the Serbs remained positive and vivid. In Greek Macedonia, where Tito was involved or even interfered in the Greek Civil War by helping the Communist guerrillas, the memory of Serbia's role in the Great War was extinguished and replaced by that of the Yugoslav involvement. In Thessaloniki, where people had to deal with many problems involved in the settlement of refugees, the frequent visits of Serbian veterans were sometimes looked at with suspicion and indifference, but they were never a major event for the city and its inhabitants.

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