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ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The Museum presents the movements for the liberation of Macedonia and its integration into the Hellenic State. Emphasis is placed on “Makedonikos Agonas” (“the Struggle for Macedonia”) (1904-1908). This was an irregular warfare fought mainly between Greeks and Bulgarians in what was at the time a part of the Ottoman Empire. Both sides were vying to strengthen their hold in the region in anticipation of the expected collapse of Turkey.

The “Struggle for Macedonia” is one of a series of unconventional wars fought by the Greeks since their war of independence (1821-1828), aiming to unite the “unredeemed” Greek inhabited regions of the Ottoman Empire in a modern Hellenic state. In Macedonia this process was concluded with the Balkan wars of 1912-13. With the peace treaty of Bucharest (August 1913), Hellenic Macedonia became part of the Hellenic national territory. Thus, five hundred years of Ottoman rule came to its end.

For the Greek Macedonians, and, indeed, for the Hellenes at large, the “Struggle for Macedonia” has come to symbolize not only a century long struggle for freedom, but also the survival and revival of a cultural heritage traced back to a period of over two millennia.

A VISIT TO THE MUSEUM

The Museum’s collections are on show in seven halls on the ground floor. They are arranged by date and subject.

In the Multi-Purpose hall on the first floor there are:
- temporary exhibitions
- showings of the film The Struggle for Macedonia (in Greek, English, French, and German)
- the audiovisual teaching movie A Journey with Pavlos Melas through Macedonia.

Located, also, on the first floor is, the Research Centre for Macedonian History and Documentation (KEMIT), with its historical archives. Computer databases are available for searching information about the “Struggle for Macedonia”, the area it covered and the people who were involved in it.

In the basement there are life-size 3-D models of scenes from the Struggle.
THE MUSEUM BUILDING

The building where the Museum is based is one of the most important historical and architectural monuments of Thessaloniki. It was built in 1894 thanks to a donation by the Greek benefactor Andreas Syngros (1830-1899), while its premises were designed, by the leading German architect Ernst Ziller (1837-1923). From 1894 to the liberation of Macedonia, in 1912, it served as the consulate general of Greece in Thessaloniki, and since 1980, it is the home of the Museum for the Macedonian Struggle.

THE REGION OF MACEDONIA

In ancient times, Macedonia was a Hellenic kingdom inhabited by the ancient Macedonians. Their kings, Philip II and Alexander the Great, spread Hellenic civilization to the frontiers of India. Later, Macedonia was conquered by the Romans. For centuries, in medieval times, it was part of the Byzantine Empire. From 1430 to 1912-13, it was part of the Ottoman lands in Europe. In the course of over two millennia various peoples invaded this Greek region, conquered parts of it or settled there. Thus, for centuries, the region of Macedonia, as well as most parts of the Balkans, experienced the co-habitation of peoples of different origin, language and creed.

In the late nineteenth century, Macedonia became an apple of discord between Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. Each of these countries wanted to win over the populations living in the region and ultimately control the area, wholly or partly. The rivalry came to an end with the Balkan Wars. The Treaty of Bucharest (1913), adjudicated portions of this geographical area to the three neighbour countries.

The region of Hellenic Macedonia comprises most of the ancient Macedonian kingdom of kings Philip and Alexander. This is further attested by the richness of archaeological sites and monuments, which include the sites of the two capitals of the ancient kingdom: Aegae (now, Vergina) and Pella.

Today the region of Hellenic Macedonia is the largest administrative district in Greece. The ministry of Macedonia and Thrace is located in the capital city of Thessaloniki—named by Cassander after his wife, the sister of Alexander the Great—with a population exceeding one million inhabitants.
1821-1822 The year 1821 saw the outbreak of the Greek revolution against the Ottomans that led to the founding of an independent modern Greece. Along with the other regions inhabited by Greeks, the Macedonians took part in what has been known as the “Greek War of Independence”. Risings broke out in Mount Athos and Halkidiki, Mount Vermio, Naoussa and districts of central Macedonia, the Mount Olympus district and the Pieria mountains. Nevertheless, the risings were not properly prepared and ended in defeat. Naoussa and other towns were captured by the Ottoman troops and its heroic defenders were put to the sword. Rebels who escaped went to southern Greece to continue the fight. When the Hellenic state came into being (1830), Macedonia, as well as other Ottoman Greek regions like Thessaly, Epirus, Crete the Aegean islands etc were left outside i.g.rts narrow borders. Nevertheless the Macedonians, along with the Cretans, the Thessalians and the Epirotes continued their efforts to liberate their own native homelands.

1854-1856 During the Crimean War new Greek risings broke out in the Greek provinces of Turkey. In Macedonia, such uprising occurred on three fronts: Western Macedonia, Halkidiki, and Mount Olympus. They had only limited success. The European Powers were not much interested in the revolts, as their own interests were bound up with maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.
The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 caused the Greek Macedonians to revolt once more. The uprising broke out a few days before the Ottomans came to terms with the Russians at San Stefano, a suburb of Constantinople. Here Russia tried to create a ‘Greater Bulgaria’ that would swallow up almost the whole of Macedonia except for Thessaloniki and Halkidiki. Meanwhile the Greek revolt was spreading to Pieria, to Kozani, and as far afield as Monastir (present Bitola), in protest against the San Stefano agreements. A few months later, at the Congress of Berlin, the Great Powers decided to create two autonomous Principalities — Bulgaria and ‘Eastern Rumelia’ — respectively north and south of the Balkan mountain range, but Macedonia remained in the fold of the Ottoman Empire. A few years later Bulgaria acted upon its aspirations in Macedonia through the organized action of armed bands (the “komitadjis”), which mainly targeted the Greek communities therein.

In the summer of 1896 more Greek uprisings broke out in Macedonia. These were repeated in the spring of 1897, at virtually the same time as the Greco-Turkish war. The Greek defeat in that war, brought the Greek revolts in Macedonia to an end.
Macedonian society was traditional but in the process of modernization. Because of crushing debts and rampant money-lending, farmers in the countryside lived in conditions bordering on the inhuman, especially in the çiftlik, the great estates. In upland districts, stockbreeding flourished. Emigration was fairly widespread, with merchants, professionals and specialist craftsmen moving within the Ottoman Empire or outside it, and making considerable profits. The curse of the mountainous regions was lawlessness: the inhabitants were constantly at the mercy of numerous brigands, Muslim or Christian.

In the towns society was quicker to change. Because the countryside was unsafe, the population moved into the towns and a labour force came into being. Development was accelerated by the simultaneous presence of the armed forces, commercial representatives from Europe, and the many public servants. A new breath of economic life was given by the coming of the railway, which also helped to disseminate new ideas. In parallel with the machines now coming into the inhabitants’ lives, educational establishments were being built and cultural societies founded, while newspapers and magazines expressed their political and national views in no uncertain terms.

Meanwhile self-government at the communal level resulted in the emergence of various different social forces, even as the social balance was tilted by the misery of farmer and worker. Soon national competition became the central issue in every aspect of social life.
HALL C
GREECE’S CONSULATE-GENERAL AT THESSALONIKI
The Consul-General’s Office (reconstruction)

The headquarters of the Struggle for Macedonia was Greece’s Consulate-General at Thessaloniki. It was staffed by diplomats and hand-picked officers, all working as ‘special clerks’. Their task was to study the situation, and to organize the local Greeks in carrying out their defence against a massive Bulgarian effort of proselytism which had started almost a decade ago in the mid-1890s. They were in contact with leading figures of the church, professionals, teachers, armed rebels, and representatives of the town and village Committees. In directing operations, the Consulate-General worked in close cooperation with the other Hellenic consulates and vice-consulates in Macedonia, as well as with the “Macedonian Committee” of Dimitrios Kalapothis in Athens.

Leading figure in this operation was the Consul General of Thessaloniki, Lambros Koromilas (1856–1923), who held this office from May 1904 to summer 1906. The success of his work provoked protests from the Ottoman government, which forced the Hellenic government to recall him from his post to Athens. Despite this, he was given the title of ‘Inspector of Hellenic Consulates in Macedonia’ and went on with his work until the end of 1907, when he was posted as Ambassador to Washington.
The armed Struggle was a guerrilla war mainly between Greeks and Bulgarians. The strategic aim of each side, whether in town or in the countryside, was to whip up national feeling among its supporters and to scare its opponents. For this purpose, they would organize support, supply and information networks manned by members from all social classes, in town and country.

The Greek struggle relied on the willingness of individuals and the military throughout the Hellenic world to enlist in the armed bands. A vital part was played by the local slav-speaking Greeks (Graikomans), the warriors whose deeds and self-sacrifice neutralised any Bulgarian assertions about the ethnic character of Macedonia. Fighting alongside them, with fanatical zeal, were Vlach-speaking Greeks in town and village, resistant to the idea of being ‘adopted’ by Romania. Together with them, and as one man, fought volunteers from Hellas (from Pelion, the Mani, the Ionian Islands, and other parts) and from regions outside Hellenic sovereign territory (Crete, Epirus, Eastern Rumelia, Cyprus). Plans were drawn up so that the bands should be distributed and operate successfully, and it was the Hellenic consulates’ job to put these plans into practice. Geography and the lie of the land dictated the strategic options; the aim was to have control of main roads and mountain passes, vital for supply lines and for the control of the countryside.
Living conditions were tough for the armed bands in the countryside. They kitted themselves out with clothing of any kind that would protect them from cold and rain, and were constantly on the move under cover of night. They would hide in some sheepfold or the cellar of some village house. To eat daily was a luxury. Sickness, privation, and lack of medicines were the harsh reality. This was the situation facing Pavlos Melas, the fiery patriot who became, at the cost of his life, a symbol of Greek determination to liberate Macedonia.

In the towns, under the noses of the Ottoman authorities, confrontation between Greek and Bulgarian had perforce to be a kind of conspiracy. The Greek ‘counter-offensive’ against Bulgarian infiltration started with education, the very nerve centre of rivalry. It then spread to the governance of Christian communities, to the trades unions, to professional activity, and to social security (to win over the weaker brethren). Networks of informants and supporters, such as “Amyna” (Defense) at Monastir and the “Thessaloniki Organization”, which infiltrated all social strata were formed and sustained.

The clergy played an important part in town and village. Once Bulgaria’s national emancipation manifested itself in the founding of an autonomous church, the Exarchate, which promptly split off from the Patriarchate in Constantinople, it was inevitable that the clergy would be caught up in the strife between Greeks and Bulgarians. All who changed sides in the church struggle thereby changed preference of nation. Hellenism’s first line of defence was the loyalty of the lower local clergy to the Patriarch. It was, in the nature of things, the priests who were the easiest and also the most symbolic target for the Bulgarian komitadji. The second line of defence was a new generation of dynamic, well-educated bishops. The Patriarchate begun to appoint such men in Macedonia, when, at the start of the twentieth century, it was forced by events unambiguously to go over to the offensive.
July 1908 saw the Young Turk Revolution. This was a military coup, whose aim was to rescue the Ottoman Empire from an impending carve-up by putting the Constitution into practice and at the same time modernizing the administrative system. The Young Turks were originally opposed to the Sultan’s absolute rule. They formed a political organization known as the Committee of Union and Progress, with the promise of equal rights and equality before the law for all the Empire’s subjects. This enabled them, once in power, to achieve the surrender of the Greek and Bulgarian guerrilla bands, and triumphantly to give them amnesty. But ultimately the hard-line nationalism of the new regime blew its relations with the Balkan countries sky-high, thus bringing on the start of the Balkan Wars.

In autumn 1912 Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro co-operated and declared war, one after the other, on the Ottoman Empire.

With the assistance of veteran fighters, the Greek army made a quick thrust into the heartlands of Macedonia, to free Thessaloniki, on 26th October 1912. Epirus and the islands of the eastern Aegean were also liberated at this time. Hardly had hostilities died down, than friction broke out between the Balkan allies. This culminated, in mid June 1913, in a pre-emptive attack by Bulgaria against Serbia and Greece. The Hellenic army retaliated and liberated Eastern Macedonia after some tough battles. In every village there were bloody encounters, whether between regular units or irregulars. Meanwhile Serbian, Turkish and Rumanian troops drove irresistibly forward into Bulgarian territory.
This Second Balkan War ended with the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), which ratified Hellenic sovereignty over the greater part of the lands of Macedonia, corresponding more or less to the actual historical area of ancient Macedonia.

Now that Greece had also secured Crete and Southern Epirus, she had almost doubled her territory and her population. But her chequered career was not yet at an end.
In 1914 the Great War broke out. Greece eventually sided with the Entente (principally France, Great Britain, and Russia) against the Central Powers (Germany and Austro-Hungary, with Turkey and Bulgaria as their allies). Bulgaria occupied Eastern Macedonia anew and systematically deported its inhabitants. The defeat of the Central Powers led to the signing of the treaty of Neuilly (1919) which compelled Bulgaria to evacuate the temporarily occupied Greek Macedonian provinces as well as western Thrace. A special provision of the treaty provided that Greece and Bulgaria could proceed with the exchange of populations on a voluntary basis. Meanwhile, Greece’s disastrous Asia Minor campaign (1919-1922) was concluded by the treaty of Lausanne (1923), which provided for a compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. One of the consequences was the arrival in Greece of more than a million of Greek refugees from Turkey. The settlement of hundreds of thousands destitute refugees in the “new lands” (Hellenic Macedonia included) significantly strengthened the Greek majority of the population.

During the Second World War, Greece chose, once again, to fight, against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria) alongside the western allies. The Hellenic army scored the first allied victory during the Greek-Italian war (Oct. 1940 to Apr. 1941). Following a second attack, this time by the Germans via Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (April 6, 1941) Greece came under a triple occupation — by Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria. Once again, the Bulgarian occupation authorities in western Thrace and Eastern Macedonia, reverted to their First World War tactics of expelling the Greek inhabitants of the region seeking to replace them with Bulgarians. Occupation by the foreign invading armies ended in October 1944, and Greece returned to the previous regime.
Meanwhile, the termination of the war brought major changes to Greece’s other northern neighbour, Yugoslavia, which was transformed into a socialist (communist) federation of six constituent federative republics. Its southern republic was named “People’s Republic of Macedonia” and its Slav population was officially recognized as a separate Slavonic ethnicity.

During the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), Belgrade (via Skopje) assisted the Greek communist insurrection, in the expectation of annexing parts of Hellenic Macedonia. The end of the fratricidal war in Greece annulled the vision for the Slav Macedonians in Skopje for expansion to the Aegean coast.

Forty years later, in 1991, with the dissolution of Federal Yugoslavia, the former federative republic of Macedonia proclaimed itself independent, under the name “Republika Makedonija”. Its territorial aspirations against Hellenic Macedonia were given a new lease of life. Claims were not limited to Hellenic territories but sought to challenge and to usurp cherished symbols and the cultural heritage of the Greek Macedonians. Under these circumstances the reactions of the Greeks, especially in Macedonia, were reasonable and unavoidable.
FOUNDATION OF THE MUSEUM FOR THE MACEDONIAN STRUGGLE

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