

A Battle for the Graves: the Absurdity of the Propaganda in Macedonia

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In this paper I will deal with a segment of the propaganda war that was waged in Ottoman Macedonia at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century. It has to do with an absurd “battle for the graves” among the Orthodox Christian communities in Macedonia, an issue that has, until now, remained untouched. Nevertheless, there are references made in history books to some bizarre fragments of this “battle for the graves”, mentioned simply to illustrate the ferocious nature of propaganda, as well as man’s unscrupulousness.

Towards the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century Macedonia was truly a stage for propaganda activities and confrontations.¹ Namely, at that time, Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian propaganda was actively spun on the territory of Macedonia, in that Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania made attempts, using propaganda, to establish their own “national supporters” there, who would subsequently serve to champion each country’s political aspirations. Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, as neighboring countries of Ottoman Macedonia, openly displayed the territorial pretensions they possessed towards it. The target group the three countries aimed for was the Macedonian Orthodox Christian population, which, in essence, was neither Greek, nor Bulgarian, nor Serbian, even though the said countries strove to prove that very thing. The Romanian propaganda,

¹ For more on this, see: Ванчо ЃОРЃИЕВ, Слобода или смрт. Македонското револуционерно движење во Солунскиот вилает (1893-1903), Скопје, 2003, 93-124 [Vančo GJORGIEV, Freedom or Death. The Macedonian Revolutionary Movement in the Salonica Vilayet (1893-1903), Skopje, 2003].

on the other hand, targeted the Vlach (Aromanian) population. However, due to its geographical location, Romania had no opportunity for territorial expansion onto Macedonian territory. As a result, Romanian propaganda in Macedonia ought to be seen more as a tactical method to exert pressure on Bulgaria to make territorial concessions in Dobrudja.

The aforementioned propaganda was wielded through the churches, schools and other humanitarian institutions. It would provide financial assistance for the construction and reconstruction of churches and schools, obtain religious and school books, educate priests and teachers, fund the schools and pay the teachers, finance the construction of school dormitories, award scholarships, open hospitals and pay the doctors, and so on. Thus, in this way, the basic religious, educational and humane needs of the Macedonian Orthodox population were used in order to impose a national awareness so as to achieve the political ends of the sponsors. In this race for “Macedonian souls”, the said countries invested an enormous amount of financial and intellectual potential, and at the same time they managed to mobilize and stimulate a significant part of the local leaders with the various grants and subsidies they offered.

The propaganda in Macedonia was motivated by the specific Ottoman system of Millets. For a very long time the population in the Ottoman Empire identified itself in accordance with the religious affiliation – Christian or Muslim. In some remote regions of Macedonia, regions that had not been affected by the propaganda war, this way of identification continued to exist well into the beginning of the XX century.² According to the system of

² The English humanist Henry Noel Brailsford, who resided in Macedonia following the Ilinden Uprising (1903), noted the enormous influence propaganda had on the people concerning the issue of declaring their nationality. In order to confirm his thesis, he gathered several boys from a mountain village located in the Ohrid region, a village that had neither priest nor school teacher, and where nobody knew how to read, and took them up to the remains of the Ohrid fortress so as to check their knowledge of their tradition. Then he asked them: “Who built this?” The answer he received was: “The liberated men”. The next question he asked was: “And who were they?” The answer that followed was: “Our grandfathers”. “Yes, but were they Serbs or Bulgarians or Greeks or Turks?” And their answer was: “They were not Turks, they were Christians”. (БРИЈЛСФОРД Х. Н., Македонија, Скопје, 2003, 159-160. [BRAILSFORD, H. N., Macedonia, Skopje, 2003, 159-160]).

Millets, the Orthodox population that was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was registered as “Rum Millet”. This term encompassed all Orthodox Christians, regardless of their ethnic and linguistic affiliation. Since the Patriarchate of Constantinople was under Greek spiritual and cultural influence, following the appearance of nationalism on the Balkans, the term “Rum Millet” became a synonym for declaring oneself Greek. Following the formation of the Greek state, the Patriarchate of Constantinople became the mouthpiece for Greek nationalism.

The situation on the Balkans, and especially in Macedonia, changed after the Bulgarian Exarchate was formed in 1870. The Exarchate, as an Orthodox Church, was supposed to resolve the church aspirations of the Slavic population in the Empire. In accordance with the system of Millets, those who decided to fall under its jurisdiction became known as “Bulgar Millet”, a term synonymous with declaring oneself Bulgarian. Thanks to the Slavic language, the Bulgarian Exarchate witnessed a quick expansion of its influence on the territory of Macedonia at the Patriarchate’s expense, and this resulted in a conflict arising between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate. In the meantime, the Principality of Bulgaria was formed in 1878. The Principality lost no time in displaying its pretensions towards Macedonia, at the same time making systematic use of the services offered by the Exarchate. Serbia also had pretensions towards Macedonia; the Serbs, however, did not have their own Church in the Ottoman Empire and as a result, following the formation of the Exarchate, and especially that of the Principality of Bulgaria, they were forced to seek concessions from the Patriarchate of Constantinople in promoting the Serbian cause, as opposed to the Bulgarian one. In this way, the Greek and the Serbian propaganda united in mutual collaboration against the Bulgarian one. The Romanian propaganda, on the other hand, which targeted the Vlach population, came into conflict with the Greek one. Hence, a temporary collaboration developed between the Romanian and the Bulgarian propaganda in Macedonia, against that of the Greeks.

Nevertheless, the most ferocious conflict in Macedonia was the one waged between the Bulgarian and the Greek propaganda. A genuine war developed between these two opposing sides battling for domination of the Macedonian Orthodox population. The conflict that existed between Bulgaria and Greece was fought under the veil of a church dispute between the

Patriarchate and the Exarchate, but in reality, it was a dispute between two nationalistic sets of propaganda.

Since the “national supporters” were in essence molded through the religious-educational institutions, the two Orthodox Churches began to battle over who would control them. Up to the time the Exarchate was formed, all the churches in Macedonia fell under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. However, after some of the population removed themselves over to the Exarchate, the next issue to surface was that concerning the control of the churches.³ In places where the population removed to the Exarchate with the Government’s consent, the churches were turned over to the possession of the Exarchian church community. However, the issue of the communal property of the Church caused serious problems in the mixed regions, in places where one part of the population remained under the aegis of the Patriarchate, while another went over to the Exarchate. From a religious point of view, this problem seems nonsensical and superfluous, bearing in mind the fact that both church communities were Orthodox. Yet, in the case with Macedonia, this issue bears a purely political, i.e., nationalistic connotation, since what was at stake was the language that the services would be conducted in, and even more importantly, how precisely (in whose Millet) the followers would be registered. It is for this reason that the battle for the control of the churches was in fact a battle for the “populace”, and hence the reason for the fierce nature of the conflict. In most cases the issue concerning the possession of the churches in the mixed regions was resolved with mediation from the Government. In the beginning the Government imposed a system whereby both communities were allowed to use the churches in turns, regardless of their number, in which, following the principle of “divide et impera”, it would usually give advantage to the weaker side. In that way, it deliberately deepened the conflict between the opposing sides, thinking that this would allow it to retain its control over them.

Following the dispute over the churches, which represented a battle for the souls of the living, surfaced a dispute over the graveyards, which developed into a battle for the dead. Up until the time the population was divided into patriarchists and exarchists, the deceased from the Orthodox community were buried in only one graveyard. However, after the popula-

³ Ванчо ЃОРЃИЈЕВ. СЛОБОДА ИЛИ СМРТ... [Vančo GJORGIEV, Freedom or Death ...], 97.

tion was divided during the peak of the propaganda war, not even the deceased were spared and allowed to rest in peace, and as such, an unscrupulous battle concerning the location and the way of burial commenced. Seeing as how the living were removing themselves from its jurisdiction, the Patriarchate made an attempt to retain its control over the dead, seeking the best time and method with which to cause the most anguish to the opposing side. The issue concerning the burial of the defectors from the Patriarchate habitually enkindled at times when a new Exarchate community was formed; furthermore, when a priest or a prominent representative of the community was to be buried; a young person or a child. In such situations the patriarchists would act out a number of different scenarios with which they would provoke disorder, such as preventing the exarchists from burying their deceased in the existing graveyard; digging the body up and throwing it out of the grave; taking the body of the deceased by force and having a Greek priest bury it, and other base acts, thus causing the deceased to remain unburied for days. In such situations violent clashes would ensue and unavoidably the Government's intervention would follow. In most cases, the Government would intervene at random, not taking a principled stand on the matter. Sometimes the problem would be resolved by assignment of a new burial ground; at other times it would be resolved by digging the body up and reburying it in a different location; or by burying it in the existing graveyard, but without a funeral service being conducted by a priest; then, burials organized by the military and the police without the deceased's closest relatives in attendance. Each case was unique and a story in itself, but what was certain was the fact that both Orthodox Churches, the Patriarchate and the Exarchate, by placing themselves in the service of the Greek and Bulgarian propaganda machinery in the merciless race for Macedonian Orthodox souls, trampled the basic Christian and human principles according to which the dead should be allowed to rest in peace. The Vlachs (Aromanians), who were targeted by the Romanian propaganda, were not spared either in the battle for the graves carried out by the Patriarchate.

The following examples serve to illustrate the fierce and vile nature of this battle.

An exarchate priest passed away in March 1888, in Serres. Up until that time, the Orthodox Christians in the city had been buried in only one burial ground. This time, the patriarchist community did not allow the deceased exarchate priest to be buried in the existing graveyard, even though

the local Ottoman authorities insisted on this. The issue concerning the burial of the exarchate priest was resolved only after the vâli of Salonica – Ghalib Pasha, intervened, having ordered a separate burial ground for the exarchists to be assigned.⁴ This is how the exarchate community in Serres came to have a separate graveyard only for them.

Two months later a similar problem arose in Dojran. In May 1888 several exarchists were digging a grave for one of their dead in the Christian graveyard in Dojran and while doing so, they were attacked by patriarchists, who prevented them from completing their job. The incident was barely contained from turning into riots and causing unrest in the whole city. As a result, the Exarchian local council lodged a protest with the vâli of Salonica and the Grand Vizier. The vâli ordered the local authorities to make sure that the burial took place in the existing graveyard. Furthermore, with the intention to prevent similar such incidents from occurring in the future, the vâli issued orders for a separate burial ground to be assigned for the exarchists.⁵

In April 1891, 250 families from Strumica denounced the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and defected to the spiritual guidance offered by the Bulgarian Exarchate. To meet the spiritual needs of the exarchate community in Strumica, the Exarchian local council of Salonica, with vâli Ghalib Pasha's consent, sent over the priest Christos. As the only Orthodox Church in the town remained in the possession of the patriarchists, the exarchists had to carry out their religious rites in a single room in the house where Christos lived. In the first four-five months things moved along rather smoothly; however, over time conflicts arose once again concerning the burial of the deceased exarchists. In November 1891 a child from the exarchate community passed away, and his parents had him buried in the existing Christian graveyard. However, during the night the patriarchists dug up the body and threw it out of the graveyard.⁶ The problem with the burials in Strumica was resolved in the spring of 1892, when, at the insistence of the vâli of Salonica, Zihni Pasha, the exarchists were assigned a separate burial ground.⁷

⁴ Британски дипломатически документи по българския национален въпрос, т. I, (1878-1893, София, 1993, 289 [British Diplomatic Documents Concerning the Bulgarian National Question, vol. I, (1878-1893, Sofia, 1993, 289].

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Idem, 325.

⁷ Idem, 336.

In 1897 the Bulgarian Exarchate received a sultanic berât to assign its own Metropolitan in Bitola. The Patriarchate also had its own Metropolitan in Bitola. Thus, there were two Orthodox Metropolitans in the city, from two rival churches. This served to further deepen the existing gap between the two Orthodox communities. Even before the arrival of the Exarchian bishop, an exarchate religious-educational community already existed in Bitola, as well as a separate graveyard, and thus, there were two burial grounds in the city, where mainly patriarchists were buried in one, while in the other one – exarchists. Nevertheless, the decision brought by the local authorities enabled both communities to make equal use of the graveyards, and this was accepted by both Orthodox groups. This lenient policy was spoiled by the bishop of the Patriarchate following the arrival of the Metropolitan of the Exarchate.

The provocation came from the patriarchist bishop, when he announced that he had forbidden the “schismatic priests” to perform funeral rites on a “Greek graveyard”, at the same time stressing that should anybody from the exarchist community wish to bury their deceased in the patriarchist graveyard, they would have to call a Greek priest. The exarchists agreed to this, under the condition that the patriarchists not make use of the exarchist graveyard.⁸ However, the patriarchist bishop made another statement that caused anger when he said that he would bury the deceased from his community in the exarchist graveyard, and that he would do so starting from the very next day. And, he did indeed do as he said he would. The next day the patriarchists took the body of one of their deceased to the exarchist graveyard, the participants in the funeral procession armed with sticks, their intent to enter the exarchist graveyard obvious. In response to this, the exarchists organized themselves to “defend” their graveyard, and when the funeral procession arrived, the “defenders” attacked the priest and the remaining participants with sticks. The patriarchists ran every which way, leaving the casket bearing the deceased on the road.⁹ Immediately after this, the patriarchists lodged a complaint with the Sublime Porte protesting against the existing decision of the local authorities, which had allowed both communities to make equal use of the Orthodox graveyard.

⁸ СИМОН ДРАКУЛ, *Македонија меѓу автономијата и дележот*, том први, Куманово, 1995, 237. [Simon DRAKUL, *Macedonia between Autonomy and Division*, vol. I, Kumanovo, 1995, 237].

⁹ Idem.

In the village of Prosechen, in the sanjak of Drama, there were two churches in one yard. After the villagers had separated into patriarchists and exarchists, the authorities assigned the larger church over to the possession of the patriarchists, while the smaller one was given over to the exarchists. The sole village graveyard was located next to the churches. According to the tradition, the priests who had passed away were buried near the larger of the two churches, in the joint church yard. However, once the villagers had separated into two rival communities, the burial of the priests became the cause of discord. On 25 May (O.S.) 1902, the exarchist priest Georgi Frkachev passed away.¹⁰ In accordance with the tradition, he was buried where the priests were meant to be buried, near the larger church, which served to upset the patriarchists because they felt that a “schismatic” priest should not be buried in the vicinity of a patriarchist church. For this reason, they lodged a complaint with the patriarchist bishop in Drama, as well as with the mutasarrif of Drama. The binbashi Hussein (commander of the gendarmerie) was sent to the village of Prosechen, accompanied by a number of gendarmes, in order to resolve the matter. The binbashi set up guards along the village roads, as well as on the bridge connecting Prosechen with the village of Pleven, with the aim to prevent the exarchists from moving in towards the church and the graveyard. Under these measures of security, the buried priest was dug up and reburied in a new grave, only several meters away, but closer to the exarchist church, which was located in the same yard. This sacrilege over the deceased priest was carried out four days following his death, when the body had begun to decay and smell.¹¹ The seeds of discontent in this village had been sown; the bitter fruits would begin to be picked in the future.

In the same village, Prosechen, in the summer of 1905, Hajji Georgi Ivanov, the main initiator for the removal of the majority of the villagers to the Exarchate, passed away. Because of this, on 12 June (O.S.) 1905, the patriarchist priests in Drama, having finished with their liturgy, threw a curse on the deceased “schismatic” priest and his sons. At the same time, they

¹⁰ Величко ГЕОРГИЕВ - Стайко ТРИФОНОВ, Гръцката и сръбската пропаганда в Македония (краят на XIX и началото на XX век), София, 1995, 23. [Veličko GEORGIEV – Staiko TRIFONOV, The Greek and Serbian Propaganda in Macedonia (end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century), Sofia, 1995, 23].

¹¹ Idem.

pointed out that the deceased, as a “pure-blooded Hellene”, following his long teaching career in the Greek schools, had betrayed the Grand Church and turned “schismatic”. Furthermore, they threatened everyone who maintained any kind of contact with his sons with *aphorismos* (temporary excommunication).¹² Incited by this act, the patriarchists from Prosechen attempted to desecrate the body of the deceased Georgi. On the eve of 15 June 1905, five Grecomans from Prosechen entered the graveyard and under the veil of darkness began to dig up the grave of the deceased. Once they had dug it up, they opened up the casket and tried to pull the body out. At that time, the exarchist Tomco Frkachev happened to be passing by the graveyard, looking for his lost oxen. Surprised by his unexpected presence, the grave diggers ran away. However, among them, Frkachev was able to recognize two patriarchist fellow-villagers and he informed the president of the village exarchist community about what he had witnessed, who in turn immediately informed the *mudir* and demanded that the guilty parties were arrested and punished. The *mudir* issued orders that the dug up grave be filled in, but he did not take any measures in connection with catching the perpetrators. As a result, the president of the exarchist community went to Drama, where he complained to the *mutasarrif*, and at the same time informed the officers from the English mission of the incident. This led to one of their representatives coming to Prosechen to see for himself the body of the deceased dug up from his grave. It was only then that the body was once again buried. Concerning this incident, it is also interesting to note that on the night the grave diggers were digging up the grave they had brought with them a horse. This led the exarchists to suspect that the horse had been brought along so that the body of the deceased could be taken to an unknown location.¹³

Another tragicomedy having to do with the burial of exarchists took place in the village of Furka, in the Dojran region. This village housed 68 families, 61 of which were exarchist, and 7 – patriarchist. In fact, it was only the priest and his closest relatives that remained patriarchists.¹⁴ By orders of the authorities, the church and the graveyard were under their control, and, furthermore, again with the support of the authorities, the *muhtar* (the vil-

¹² *Idem*, 61.

¹³ *Idem*.

¹⁴ СИМОН ДРАКУЛ, Македонија меѓу автономијата и дележот, том четврти, 208 [Simon DRAKUL, Macedonia between Autonomy and Division, vol. IV].

lage chief) was chosen from among the patriarchist community. The village had a military and a gendarmerie watch-tower.

On 14 August 1905 a girl from the exarchist community in the village passed away. Since the exarchists in the village did not have their own priest, they asked the authorities to allow the exarchist priest from Dojran to conduct the burial. However, as they received no reply from them, on 15 August the family of the deceased girl sent the Inspector-General of Macedonia, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha a telegram with a pre-paid reply. Finally, on 16 August an exarchist priest arrived in the village, accompanied by a suvar (cavalryman). The priest had brought with him at that time a letter for the commander of the gendarmerie watch-tower, where it was written that he would have to carry out the burial rites in the home of the deceased, and that he was forbidden to enter the church and the graveyard, as they both belonged to the patriarchists. Since the commander of the gendarmerie was at that time absent from the village, the priest gave the letter to the military officer, who approved its content, and only then could a grave be dug. In the meantime, the patriarchist priest appeared from the field and after he had talked to the officer, who was living in his house, he began to chase the workers away from the graveyard, and asked the officer to stop the funeral. One of the villagers then reminded the officer of the letter addressed to the commander of the gendarmerie and asked him to allow the funeral to take place, as the body of the deceased had begun to decay due to the heat. However, the military officer responded that he did not recognize the decisions of the civil authorities, and attacked the villager. This resulted in a full-blown argument and fistfight at the graveyard between the military and the villagers. The chaos caused the people to quickly disperse, and the funeral did not take place. The body of the deceased girl was finally buried on the fourth day (17 August), after the commander of the gendarmerie returned to the village.¹⁵ In connection with this incident, Major Voronin, from the Russian military mission, noted in his report that the exarchist population in the village was living under dire hardships “and has grown quite agitated over this last incident ... [as a result of which] it has become impossible to even think about establishing any kind of reconciliation and peace among the Christian population of the kaaza if the civil authorities continue to be

¹⁵ Idem, 297.

so unjust towards the exarchist population, and the antagonism is increasing day by day.”¹⁶

Novo Selo, near Salonica, housed 120 families, 60 of which were exarchist and 60 – patriarchist. The exarchist community in the village was formed around 1890. Due to disagreements concerning the use of the village church, the authorities closed it down for 7 whole years. In 1903, the patriarchists opened it, without obtaining anybody’s consent, and began to use it. This incited the exarchists to send a number of requests to the authorities, asking for the introduction of the principle of “munawabeh”, i.e., taking turns. In practice, this meant making alternating use of the church by the two communities, i.e., using it in turns one week each. However, the authorities did not approve the request, and as a result, the only village church remained in the hands of the patriarchists. Regardless of the disagreements that existed concerning the use of the church, the members of both communities buried their dead in the only village graveyard.¹⁷ This way of doing things came to a stop 15 years later in an incident provoked by the patriarchists during the funeral of one-year-old Slavco, who belonged to the exarchist community. On 17 August 1906, a procession of exarchists headed to the graveyard in order to bury the previously mentioned child. The boy’s father had a feeling that the patriarchists might cause trouble during the funeral since the church warden would not give him the keys to the gate of the graveyard. He informed the gendarmerie chaush Hussein of this and asked him, as a government representative, to not allow such undesirable things to take place. The reply he received was that the exarchist priest would be allowed to accompany the procession only up to graveyard gate. When the procession arrived at the graveyard, they were met by the Greek teachers Christo Temeleidi and Georgi Dimitrov, as well as by the Greco-man Nikola Hristov. They threatened them with guns and were ready to shoot at the people in the procession should the exarchist priest enter the graveyard and conduct the funeral. Under such threats, the family of the deceased child, in order to avoid bloodshed, agreed to have the burial without the last rites performed by the priest.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that while

¹⁶ Idem, 298.

¹⁷ СИМОН ДРАКУЛ, *Македонија меѓу автономијата и дележот*, петти том, Куманово, 1998, 157-158. [Simon DRAKUL, *Macedonia between Autonomy and Division*, vol. V, Kumanovo, 1998, 157-158].

¹⁸ Idem, 157.

all this was taking place, the gendarmerie chaush spent the time in conversation with the patriarchist representatives in the house of the muhtar Tashe Donchev, without taking any concrete measures to remedy the situation.

In the beginning of March 1910, Greek propaganda, with the use of bribery, “managed to get inside the head of the exarchist priest”, Stojan Rushkov, from the village of Elshan (near Serres), and to “convert” him into being pro-Greek. Bearing in mind the fact that the said priest had been ordained by an exarchist (Bulgarian) bishop, whose church had been declared schismatic by the Patriarchate, the Greek bishop from Serres decided to first subject this priest to undergo “a purging of his sins”.¹⁹ And so, on 8 March 1910, “the unfortunate priest” was made “deacon” by the Greek bishop, and his re-ordination as a “priest” was scheduled on 14 March (O.S.), this time by an “orthodox” bishop. In the meantime, the Greek propaganda machine engaged several more supporters from the surrounding villages, who used intimidation, bribery and other means to force the exarchist community to return to the Patriarchate. And this time, also, the dead were made use of in “the battle for the living”.

On 20 March (O.S.) 1910, in the village of Prosenik, near Serres, Dina Vlahov passed away, recognized for his efforts in making the villagers turn from the Patriarchate to the Exarchate.²⁰ Because of this, the patriarchists forbade that the deceased be buried in the graveyard, which had up to that time been used by both “sides”. Following this, the exarchist representatives in the village complained to the mutasarrif of Serres, who sent the gendarmerie yuzbashi to the village, instructing him to organize the funeral in the existing graveyard. However, the patriarchists refused to hand over the key to the gate of the graveyard, which had been enclosed with a stone fence, the explanation being that the road to the graveyard passed through the church yard, and the church was in their possession. In such circumstances, the yuzbashi came up with the perfect solution. In order not to break down the gate, he ordered that the body of the deceased be brought into the graveyard over the fence with the help of a ladder, and only then could the funeral take place. The head of the Bulgarian consulate in Serres

¹⁹ Величко ГЕОРГИЕВ - Стайко ТРИФОНОВ, История на Българите 1878-1944 в документи, том I, 1878-1912, част втора, София, 1996, 274-275. [Veličko GEORGIEV – Staiko TRIFONOV, History of the Bulgarians 1878-1944 in Documents, vol. I, 1878-1912, part 2, Sofia, 1996, 274-275].

²⁰ Idem, 275.

qualified this miserable and tragicomic act as a “success”, since the authorities had managed to protect the deceased’s right to be buried in the place where his forebears were resting.²¹

On 24 March (O.S.) 1910, in the village of Elshan, Angelina Atanasova, a member of the Bulgarian Exarchate, passed away. On this occasion the patriarchists used a different tack, in that two Grecomans, “supporters of the Greek propaganda”, together with the chaush Taksim and the onbashi Abdulrahman, went to the house of the deceased woman, beat up her son-in-law, Nikola Nachov, and then took the body to the church. The deceased woman, without her family’s consent, was sung a requiem by a Greek priest (from the Patriarchate), and was then buried in the village graveyard. For this reason, that same day the exarchist village elder, together with the azades (councilors), as well as the beaten up N. Nachov, went to Serres to complain to the mutasarrif. Furthermore, the victim of the beating, N. Nachov, whose face was covered in bruises, had obtained a doctor’s note confirming his injuries.²² Archimandrite Illarion, the head of the exarchist metropolitan diocese, also showed an interest in this incident. He lodged a takrir (complaint) with mutasarrif Qazim Bey, with which he protested against the violation of the law, stressing that this had been carried out with the cooperation of the representatives of the public authorities, who had behaved like “obedient servants to Greek propaganda”. He, furthermore, announced that he would personally go to Elshan in order to dig up the body of the deceased woman and sing a requiem in the Bulgarian way. The mutasarrif, setting off from the experience that this might trigger off a bigger incident, had a group of approximately ten guards, led by the gendarmerie yuzbashi, accompany Illarion. In all likelihood, this was probably the reason why Illarion was met in the village by all the exarchists, and even several patriarchists. The body of the deceased woman was dug up, and after the requiem had been sung “the Bulgarian way”, it was buried once again. Following the questioning the archimandrite carried out, as well as the poll that had been conducted by the yuzbashi, it was ascertained that the chaush Taksim and the onbashi Abdulrahman, who had cooperated with the patriarchists, had, in fact, been bribed.²³

²¹ Idem, 275.

²² Idem, 276.

²³ Idem.

The battle for the graveyards was not waged only by the patriarchs and the exarchists. This battle for the dead and their graves also affected that segment of the Aromanian population in Macedonia, which under the influence of the Romanian propaganda, had begun to reject the Patriarchate of Constantinople and insist on religious services in Romanian. Because of this, this part of the Vlach population came into conflict with the Patriarchate, among other things, about how and where the dead were buried.

Apostol Mărgărit, the head protagonist of the Romanian propaganda among the Vlach population in Macedonia, passed away on 6 October 1903, in Bitola. According to August Kral, the Austro-Hungarian consul from Bitola, Apostol Mărgărit had, even by dying, provided the opportunity for the “success of his party”.²⁴ This statement was made owing to the fact that a special location had been set for Apostol Mărgărit’s funeral, a location where the Aromanian population that had been under the influence of the Romanian propaganda, was to be buried in the future. The fact that a consul had deemed that a “success” illustrates the fierce nature of the battle for the graves in Macedonia.

Since Apostol Mărgărit played a significant role in the Romanian propaganda in Macedonia, he was anathematized by the Patriarchate, and such, was considered not worthy to be buried by a Greek priest and in a Greek graveyard. However, the Metropolitan from the Bitola Patriarchate, out of pragmatic reasons, tried to take advantage of the case, and so, suggested that the deceased be sung a requiem in the church of the Patriarchate, but in Greek, and even went as far as to show his readiness to attend the funeral himself.²⁵ Romania also tried to take advantage of Apostol Mărgărit’s funeral. It felt that the deceased should not “be buried on Greek soil and by Greek priests”, since he had spent his whole life “fighting

²⁴ Извештаи од 1903-1904 година на австриските претставници во Македонија, (превод, редакција и коментар: Данчо Зографски), Скопје, 1955, 187. [Reports from the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, 1903-1904 (translated, edited and commented by Dancho Zografski), Skopje, 1955, 187].

²⁵ Крсте БИТОВСКИ, Дејноста на пелагониската митрополија, 1878-1912, Скопје, 1968, 147. [Krste BITOVSKI, The Activities of the Archbishopric of Pelagonia, 1878-1912, Skopje, 1968, 147].

against the Greeks”.²⁶ Following the instructions issued by the Romanian Minister of External Affairs, a parcel of land was to be bought for a grave, near the patriarchist graveyard. However, the patriarchist Metropolitan attempted to sabotage this initiative, and he even claimed that he would also personally bury the Romanian consul should he die in Bitola.²⁷ In any case, the Aromanians managed to buy a parcel of land in order to bury Apostol Mărgărit. Several days later, Mărgărit’s embalmed body was buried with all the necessary honors in the presence of numerous representatives from the diplomatic corps in Bitola, with the exception of the Greek consul.²⁸

Even though the issue of the graves of the pro-Romanian community in Bitola appeared to have been solved, nevertheless, the Patriarchate would not give up so easily in that it caused problems concerning how and where the burials would take place. In the beginning of 1904, a member of the pro-Romanian gendarmerie passed away in Bitola. The pro-Romanian Vlachs barely managed to remove the body, using force, from the Greek priests and had a Vlach priest bury it, in Romanian, on the parcel of land next to Apostol Mărgărit.²⁹

The patriarchist Archbishopric in Bitola could not accept the fact that it seemed to be losing even the deceased, and for this reason it tightened up its efforts to retain at least them in its power. The bizarre nature of this battle can best be illustrated with the following example. On 10 June 1904, in Bitola, an Aromanian, Christo Dimitri, from the pro-Romanian party, passed away.³⁰ His family asked the Romanian priest from the village

²⁶ Никола МИНОВ, Романската пропаганда и ароманското прашање во Македонија (1860-1903), магистерска теза - ракопис, Скопје, 2010, 202. [Nikola MINOV, The Romanian Propaganda and the Aromanian Question in Macedonia (1860-1903), unpublished M.A. thesis, Skopje 2010, 202].

²⁷ Крсте БИГОВСКИ, Дејноста на Пелагониската митрополија ..., 147; 254. [Krstе BIGOVSKI, The Activities of the Archbishopric of Pelagonia ..., 147; 254].

²⁸ Никола МИНОВ, Романската пропаганда и ароманското прашање ..., 203. [Nikola MINOV, The Romanian Propaganda and the Aromanian Question ..., 203].

²⁹ Симон ДРАКУЛ, Македонија меѓу автономијата и дележот, трети том, 82. [Simon DRAKUL, Macedonia between Autonomy and Division, vol. III, 82].

³⁰ Христо СИЛЯНОВЪ, Освободителните борби на Македонија, томъ втори, Софија, 1943, 262-263, белешка 3. [Hristo SILYANOV, The Liberation Struggles of Macedonia, vol. II, Sofia, 1943, 262-263, n.3].

of Gopesh to conduct the burial ceremony. Finding out about this, the very next day the family of the deceased was personally visited by the patriarchist Metropolitan, who tried to persuade them to have a Greek priest perform the funeral. His suggestion, however, was rejected. Then, the insulted Metropolitan asked that the authorities arrest the Vlach (Romanian) teachers who happened to be with the family of the deceased, saying that they had offended him. In the meantime, approximately 300 pro-Romanian Aromanians had gathered in front of the house of the deceased, and they even received support from the Exarchian community. The Greek bishop found himself cornered, and had to escape through the window. In the afternoon, pro-Greek Aromanians gathered in front of the house of the deceased and would not allow the body to be removed without a Greek priest. As a result, the body was not buried. On the third day, the issue of the burial of the deceased Dimitri was taken up in front of the district council (*mejlis idare*). With 5 votes for and 3 against, it was decided that the family of the deceased should be allowed to choose the priest who would conduct the ceremony. Despite the decision reached by the council, however, the pro-Greek Vlachs continued their siege of the deceased's house, not allowing the body to be removed and buried. In the meantime, a fight erupted near the house between the two opposing sides. Since it was in the middle of the summer heat, and the body of the deceased had not been buried for 3 days by that time, the authorities ordered that it be embalmed. Even after 3 days, neither of the two opposing sides wanted to give in and finally this issue reached Constantinople, from where orders were issued by telegram to bury the body on neutral territory, by the gendarmerie, without any priests present.³¹

Any comments concerning this incident, as well as the previously-mentioned ones, are superfluous.

³¹ Idem; Извештаи од 1903-1904 година на австриските претставници во Македонија ... 224-225 [Reports from the Austrian representatives in Macedonia ..., 1903-1904, 224-225]; БРЕЈЛСФОРД Ноел Хенри, Македонија. Нејзините народи и нејзината иднина, Скопје, 2003, 258-259 [BRAILSFORD, H. N., Macedonia. Its Peoples and its Future, Skopje, 2003, 258-259]; СИМОН ДРАКУЛ, Македонија меѓу автономијата и дележот, трети том, 220-221 [SIMON DRAKUL, Macedonia between Autonomy and Division, vol. III, 220-221].