

DUKE VELKO VELKOVSKI – SKOCHIVIRSKI

Gjorji Lazarevski¹

One of the bright pages of Macedonian history is the Ilinden epic from 1903. A large number of our patriots and brave fighters for the freedom of Macedonia fought and died in it. A large number of those brave fighters are recorded in the national history in a worthy way, and some are only mentioned, such as **Duke Velko Velkovski-Skochivirski** - a close associate of the legendary Bitola Duke Gjorgji Sugarev.

Writing about the revolutionary activity of significant characters from our Macedonian history is never enough. Although a whole century or more has passed since their death until today. Their heroism always captivates and awakens in Man eerie feelings from which new forces are born for further investigation of the whole truth. **Their work never dies. They will live forever in the public consciousness.**

Due to the numerous violences that were perpetrated on the peaceful Christian population during the Ottoman slavery, a part of the families of **Cegan** (Aegean Macedonia) fled in different directions. **The Ushkovci brothers from Cegan** reached the village of Petalino (now completely displaced). After some time they separated in different places. One of them, Velko Ushkov (grandfather of Velko Skochivirski) went to the village of Skochivir, another to the village of Budimerci, and then in Sovic, the third in Polog, (the locals of the village of Polog called them - Cheganci), and the fourth Bozin Ushkov - stayed in the village of Petalino. In the villages of Skochivir and Sovich, numerous families are known who carry the nickname Ushkovci.

This truth can also be confirmed by the linguistic peculiarities of the Cheganc people presented in the monographs: **Memories of Cheganc** by Dr. Jane Dimulkovski and **Chegan Revolt** by Mile Brzovski, which are still found today among the inhabitants of the mentioned villages, as well as their numerous family ties .Во потрага по вистината за војводата Велко Скочивирски, патот не однесе во семејството на Најдо (Ушков) Велковски роден 1930 година во селото Скочивир, а сега жител во Битола, човек со добро здравје и пособно бистар ум и паметење.

According to his statement, Duke Velko Skochivirski comes from the Ushkovci family from the village of Skochivir, which family immigrated from the village of Cegan - Lerinsko, Aegean Macedonia, says Najdo Velkovski.

Duke Velko's father was Cvetko, the third son of Velko Ushkov, and his mother was Jovanka Velkovska from the Ristevski family. In the song "Na Boga se mole Velko Vojvoda" (Velko Vojvoda prays to God) dedicated to Duke Velko, it is clearly stated that his father was killed by Shakir-aga from Bitola. According to Najdo Velkovski, Velko's father was killed by the Turks because he was an ajduk together with Kote from Dobrovenski (meaning the father of Duke Dedo Koljo Dobrovenski). Among other things, she was the reason for embedding the great hatred towards the Turkish dignitaries in the soul of Velko Skochivirski.

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As Velko Velkovski grew up, he became more and more aware of the difficult position of the enslaved people. Obsessed with his father's ideal, the desire for revenge, as well as the desire for the freedom of his country, he decided to bravely fight for the freedom of Macedonia.

Velko Velkovski - Skochivirski was at first in the troop of Gjorgji Sugarev, but after gaining the necessary combat experience, he became an independent regional duke in Prilepsko. His military activities were completely under the control of the bodies of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and he was in close contact with the dukes from the entire region, among whom were: Gjorgji Sugarev, Shaqir duke, Dedo Koljo Dobrovenski and all the other dukes of that stormy period filled with fights and bloodshed.

There are modest data in Macedonian history about this fierce fighter for the freedom of Macedonia.

In the monograph on Gjorgji Sugarev, by the famous historian Gjorgji Dimovski-Colev from Bitola on pages 92 and 94, the author clearly noted the role of Duke Velko Skochivirski and his connection with the actions of the troop led by the legendary Duke Gjorgji Sugarev.²

The goal of the traitors is clearly indicated, and it was to send all the associates of Gjorgji Sugarev, including Duke Velko Skochivirski, to different directions so that Sugarev would be left alone, as really happened.

The traitors had an elaborate plan. All the troops, one by one, were gradually liquidated. Thus came the turn of Duke Gjorgji Sugarev who was killed with his troop on March 23, 1906 (old style) above the monastery in the village of Paralovo, Bitola.

In the monodrama Paralovske Chukari by the author Bogoja Tanevski, in which it is written about the famous duke of Bitola, Gjorgji Sugarev, and which is based on the testimony of Blaze Trajchevski-Erboski from the village of Vranjevci, who was one of the eyewitnesses, it is clearly stated what the role of Duke Velko was Skochivirski.³

According to Blazhe Trajchevski-Erboski, "Velko the duke from the village of Skochivir, fought with the Greek troops, somewhere near the villages of Cegel, Polog, Iveni, Slivica, Skochivir..."

The troops of Duke Velko and Gjorgji Sugarev were supposed to meet in the village of Vranjevci, but the meeting did not take place because Sugarev was late to the scheduled place.

The next meeting of the two troops was planned in the village of Gnilesh in the house of Petko Bonev. However, there was no meeting here either because the two troops separated in the night. Velko Skochivirski knew very well how much Sugarev needed him in these moments, but fate seemed to want Sugarev to remain alone and end up in the way the traitors wanted him supremely. And so it happened.

Duke Velko Velkovski - Skochivirski with his troop continued on his way to destroy the Andarst troops that were ravaging our villages both in Bitola and Prilep.

In the beginning of 1904, and in accordance with the MRO, the resignation of the Macedonian churches from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate and moving to the side of the Exarchate began. That made the supporters of the Patriarchate very angry and with the help of organized Andartian troops led by Greek officers they started a mass slaughter of the innocent population, with the sole aim of returning to the arms of the Patriarchate.

The reason for this transition of the churches to the Exarchate was, on the one hand, the attitude of the MRO, and on the other hand, the Bulgarian language was very close to the Macedonian language, which made it acceptable for them, because it was also far more

²Gjorgji Dimovski-Tsolev, Gjorgji Sugarev, "Misirkov", Bitola, 1988, p. 92,94

³Bogoja Tanevski, Paralovski chukari, Bitola, 2002, p.6

understandable for the people compared to the Greek language that was practiced in church singing until then but the believers did not understand it at all.

In each village the inhabitants were divided into patriarchs and exarchists. Clashes of one against the other began. The patriarchs aided by the Andarts committed numerous atrocities on the innocent population. This is how the Andart slaughter took place in the villages: in Iveni on January 19, 1906, when 17 souls were slaughtered, in Gnilesh, on September 16, 1906, 13 men were slaughtered from 15 houses and 7 horses were taken, in Bareshani, 6 souls from Nikola's family were slaughtered Atanasov. The villages were also attacked: Krstoar, Lisolaj, Sveta Petka, Optichari, Petrich, Crnobuki, Sredno Egri, Smilevo and other Macedonian villages. In many of these villages the Andart attack was repulsed.⁴

Such happenings were a frequent occurrence in almost every village.

Can a person remain calm knowing all this?!

Can a person forgive the traitors who betrayed the best and bravest sons who fought for the freedom of the Macedonian people?! Never!!

No matter how hard it was in his soul, Velko Skochivirski was merciless towards traitors. He punished them with the most severe punishments. He was known to the people as the executioner from **Chegan**.

After the death of Duke Gjorgji Sugarev, Velko Velkovski Skochivirski, convinced of the correctness of his ideals, continued the fighting path with the troop.

Thus, on May 14 (old style) 1906, he arrived in the village of Klepach with his troop. They settled in Strezo Milev's house.

According to the locals: Petre Milevski (nephew of the Comita Strezo Milevski), and now priest in the church "St. Archangel Michael" in the village of Klepach, as well as Ljupco and Zivko Murgovski from the same village, the death of Duke Velko Skochivirski and his troop took place in the family house of Comita Strezo Milevski. Duke Velko and his troop settled in the house of their Comita Strezo. They were distributed in three of their houses which were next to each other in the same yard.

According to the interlocutors, the troop was reported to the Turks. At night, the entire village of Klepach was raided. The ring tightened around the houses. The soldier knew exactly where the comites and Duke Velko Skochivirski were.

The next day, **May 15 (old style) 1906⁵**, a skirmish began at dawn. There were wounded and killed on both sides. After several hours of shooting, the asker ordered the three houses to be set on fire and thus their lives were put to an end.

They died like all other fighters for the freedom of Macedonia. They fought bravely, but their lives ended with betrayal by Greek spies.

Velko Vojvoda escaped from Chegan, arrived in Skochivir, died in Klepach. He left behind numerous relatives who bear his surname Velkovski.

***He gave his life for the freedom of Macedonia.** That's how many died, that's how Velko Velkovski-Skochivirski died together with his troop, a total of 9 freedom fighters.*

The bodies of the murdered were buried in the church in the village of Klepach. During the Second World War, when the Bulgarian authorities were stationed in the village of Klepach, a monument was made to the fallen fighters. A common tomb was made and a marble slab with an inscription was placed. According to the Bulgarian ideology of the time, the text of the marble tablet on which the names of the fallen comites are written together with their duke Velko Skochivirski was composed. Here is the full content of the text on the tombstone:

The text is written in Bulgarian, and we provide it here in translation.

⁴Hristo Siljanov, The liberation struggles of Macedonia, Kultura, Skopje, 2004, p.246-248

⁵http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velko_Skochivirski

This is where the duke was killed by an enemy Turkish bullet in 1904
Velko Skochivirchetto
Hristo Romanov from Brnik
Dimitar Beranski village Beranci
Dimitar Animale from Bitola
Kostadin Animale from Bitola
Nedelko Dolimanov village Srpci
Strezo Milev village Klepach
Stojan Gjorchev, Klepach village
Tase Kostov village Krusha
*They died for the freedom of Macedonia and the unification of Bulgaria**
He who falls in the fight for freedom does not die

In compiling this text, an oversight was made regarding the year of death. So, most likely according to someone's statement, they died in 1904, and the actual day of their death is May 15 (old style) 1906 (Bulgarian Wikipedia - Velko Skochivirski)

This monument in Klepac seems to want to tell us that we have forgotten them.

And we have really forgotten them. To this day, no one has visited their monument. No one has restored it or decorated it with flowers.

As it was done by the Bulgarian authorities during the Second World War, it has remained so until today. The Bulgarians noticed their importance for history, and we forgot them

The activity of Duke Velko Velkovski Skochivirski was especially noted by the local population. That's why the people sang the song Na Boga se mole Velko vojvoda, which we present here in its entirety.

Na Boga se mole Velko vojvoda⁶

Na boga se mole Velko vojvoda,
Na boga se mole Velko vojvoda:
daj mi, bozhe, vino provirno,
ta da mi razvie gora zelena,
ta da zabushat bushnite papri,
ta da sobera luta druzhina,
ta da izleza vo gora zelena.
Ja da si oda vo grada Bitola,
ta da mu plata na Shakir aga,
teshki borchevi za mojot tatko.
Glava kje mu secha na toj edepsas,
glava kje mu secha na kol kje ja klada.
Kje ja proshetam niz Bitola grada,
za da ja vidat sete efendi,
sete efendi i kajmakamot.

From the content of the song, among other things, we discover that Duke Velko's father was killed by Shakir-aga and he seeks revenge on Shakir-aga from Bitola.

⁶Gjorgji Beldzigerovski, In the fields without friends, Macedonian folk songs, DNU - Bitola, 1989, song no. 233, p. 309

The work of Duke Velko Velkovski Skochivirski was an inspiration for the people and he sang it in this song **Song for Sugarev**.⁷

Izvika Velko vojvoda
Od Marioskrite chukari
-Kade si Gjorgji da dojdish
Od Greci da ne kurtulish
Od pusto Grchko kolenje-
I na drugari se nazhali
Glasoj se raznosija do nebesi
I mu dochul Gjorgji Sugare
Vo Demirhisarskrite balkani
-Eve sum Velko vojvoda
Vo Demirhisarskrite balkani
Sega kje trgnam, poteglam
Niz Demirhisarskrite balkani.
Jas kje minam niz pole
Niz pole pusto Bitolsko
Poletu mnogu opasno...

In the continuation of the poem, the movement of Sugarev until his death in the village of Paralovo - Bitola is shown.

Completely confident in his statement, Najdo Velkovski, who is 82 years old, in 2012 told us the family tree of Duke Velko Velkovski - Skochivirski. The same has been checked and supplemented with the data obtained from the Register of Births and the Register of Deaths for the village of Skochivir for the relevant period, which is kept in the Historical Archive of R. Macedonia, Regional Department-Bitola.

Velko Ushkov is originally from Chegan - Lerinsko. He married and left a large family. Most of them still bear the last name Vekovski.

Velko Ushkov had sons: Risto, Petre and Cvetko.

Cvetko is the third son of Velko Ushkov. He married Jovanka. Their daughter Elena was born first, and Velko was born as the second child on April 5 (old style) 1877. He was baptized on April 10, 1877 in the "St. Petka" in the village of Skochivir. Priest Konstantin Simonovski from the village of Brod, and Elena, daughter of Cvetko Velkovski from the village of Skochivir, is recorded as the godmother.⁸ He died on April 15 (old style) 1906 as a captain of a troop at the age of 29.

In 1906, at the age of 76, his grandfather Velko Ushkov also died of old age.

** Note. In 2021 a member of Duke Velko Velkovski-Skochivirski's family together with the villagers and local church of Klepach replaced the monument with one written in the local Macedonian language and without the text about Bulgaria, which they considered to be false history. That section reads "They died for the freedom of Macedonia".*

LITERATURE:

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⁷Gjorgji Dimovski - Tsolev, Gjorgji Sugarev, Misirkov, Bitola, 1988. p. 114

⁸Historical Archive of Macedonia, Regional Department - Bitola, Register of births for the village of Skochivir for the year 1877

3. Dr. Jane Dimulkovski, Memories of Chegan, Bitola, 2000.
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7. Bogoja Tanevski, Paralovske chukari, Bitola, 2002.
8. http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velko_Skochivirski

INFORMANTS WHO GAVE STATEMENTS IN 2012

1. Najdo Ushkov Velkovski from the village of Skochivir
2. Zhivko Murgovski village of Klepach - Prilep
3. Ljupcho Murgovski village Klepach - Prilep
4. Petre Milevski village Klepach. – Prilep

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