Prespa in Flames and Smoke

By

Kosta Mundushev

(Translated from Macedonian to English and edited by Risto Stefov)

Prespa in Flames and Smoke

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In place of a preface

The book "Prespa in flames and smoke" is the work of many years of effort and a wish to write something that, in a way, would be a monographic display of a portion of Prespa, otherwise known as Lower Prespa, and now most of it being part of Greece. Kosta Mundushev, author of this book, was born in this part of Prespa, in the village Rabi. His great love for his homeland is what gave him the energy to write this short history of Lower Prespa and to highlight its natural, geographic and ethnic lines as an integral part of the Prespa Valley.

In addition to his love for his homeland, Kosta Mundushev has carried and is carrying with him a desire to say something about the difficult history in this part of Prespa, about the struggles and suffering of the Macedonian people in this region during the many centuries of occupation and oppression and with their desire for freedom unfulfilled. He wants to say something about the many bitter, imposed disappointments and suffering that each individual has experienced with their hopes and dreams being shattered…

Kosta Mundushev has written about one part of Prespa, the south part, the occupied part of partitioned Prespa. But Prespa is larger and must not be seen as simply partitioned. The reader should know that only part of Prespa's history is presented here. However, we have made some effort to also provide the reader with, a small part, of all of Prespa's history, its legends and its reality.

The Prespa valley is divided into two parts; Gorna Prespa and Dolna Prespa. Today Gorna Prespa, a small part of Dolna Prespa and most of Lake Prespa belong to the municipality of Resen and are part of the Republic of Macedonia. Dolna Prespa and the lower part of Lake Prespa, as well as Lake Mala Prespa are occupied components, occupied by Greece and Albania. This tragic situation resulted from the invasion, occupation and division of Macedonia executed after the Balkan Wars and again after the First World War.

From the east, north and west Prespa is surrounded by the Prespa mountain ranges called Baba, with Pelister as it peak, Bigla ,with Tsrni and Golovrv as its peaks, and ending at Mount Galichitsa. The

Southern part of Prespa starts at Lake Prespa, also called Lake Golema Prepa, and covers Lake Mala Prespa.

The part of Prespa encompassed by Resen, along with the plain around the villages Tsarev Dvor, Drmeni and Bela Tsrkva, is the most fertile part of this valley.

People from Prespa, especially from Resen, were among the first pechalbari (migrant workers) known to venture outside of their own town to seek employment. During the 19th and early 20th century many even drifted out overseas as far as America and Australia to seek migrant work. Some sought work closer in places like Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey (Istanbul), France and other places in Europe.

The Western Macedonian road corridor intersects with the Southern Macedonian and Epirus road corridors in Resen near an area called Makazi. These routes were widely used by caravans before the Balkan Wars. Now these roadways, covered with asphalt, stretching beautifully along the lake connect the tourist areas and the villages Asamati, Pretor and Krani on the east side, and Sirhan, Oteshevo, Tsarina and Steni, on the west side.

We also have remnants of the ancient Via Egnatia corridor, built during Roman times, still running through the Prespa valley.

It is said that part of the Brsiak tribe settled in Prespa during the seventh century AD.

During the Ottoman occupation Turkish people were brought to Resen to settle the fertile countryside south of it. During the 18th century, Ottoman feudal lords of Albanian descent began bringing Albanian colonists from elsewhere and settled them in Resen Region.

Resen, as an urban settlement, began to accelerate and grew at the beginning of the 19th century.

The town Prespa was well known during King Samoil's time. It was located near Prespa Lake and served as the capital for the medieval

Macedonian state. In the 10th and 11th century, during Samoil, Gavril Radomir and Iovan Vladislav's reign, the first capital of the first medieval Macedonian state was Prespa. The town Prespa was also the seat of the highest ecclesiastical religious leader in Samoil's Kingdom, the Archbishop of the autocephalous Macedonian church, whose headquarters was later moved to Ohrid.

The tombstone belonging to Samoil's parents, one of the oldest monuments dating back to 993 AD containing inscriptions in the Macedonian (Cyrillic) language, was found in Dolna Prespa. Prespa has many other such rich medieval cultural and historic monuments. There is also the church built in 1191 AD located near the village Kurbinovo, as well as the Slivnitsa monastery.

Prespa belongs in the part of Macedonia where resistance against Ottoman oppression and feudal exploitation began earlier than in other parts of Macedonia. Dr. Hristo Tatarchev from Resen was among the founders and President of TMORO (Secret Macedonian Liberation Revolutionary Organization). Resen, led by Voivoda (rebel leader) Slaveiko Arsov, was among the most prepared regions to take part in the Ilinden Uprising. There were both major and minor battles taking place in Prespa between the rebels and the Ottoman army. When the uprising was suppressed the Bashibuzuks (Muslim armed civilians) and Ottoman army took cruel revenge against the Macedonian population which included mass massacres. Many of the villages were also burned down and people were left homeless. The main preoccupation of the population in the now tattered Prespa, between the two world wars, was agriculture and livestock. Some people, however, continued to seek their fortunes as pechalbari (migrant workers). Seeds of a labour movement first began to appear in Gorna Prespa, especially in 1920, when the majority of the people in the villages voted overwhelmingly for communist candidates. Many people from Prespa Region, at the call of the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia), also volunteered to go and fight in the Spanish Civil War in the struggle against Franco's fascist regime.

Communist party organizations began to appear in Prespa around 1936 and especially after 1938. Among the most deserving people

for spreading progressive ideas was the poet and student Mite Bogoevski.

Prespa suffered further fragmentations during the Nazi occupation. The part of Prespa located north of the town Resen was placed under Bulgarian fascist occupation while sections to the south of Resen were placed under Italian fascist occupation, who then connected this part of Prespa to so-called Greater Albania where the Albanian fascists aided the Italian occupiers.

The communists in Prespa, as early as 1941, became organized and began preparations to drive out the fascists. The first partisan groups were formed in Prespa in 1942. On July 6, 1942 the Bitola-Prespa detachment "Dame Gruev" was formed. Also parallel with that bodies of a people's government were formed.

On August 2, 1943 the famous "Prespa Council" was formed in the village Oteshevo, which was attended by members of the CPM Central Committee and the NOV and POM Headquarters, whose decisions had enormous importance for increasing the partisan movement in Macedonia.

A large number of people from Prespa joined the units fighting in the National Liberation War in Macedonia. Resen and Prespa were freed from the occupiers on September 11, 1944.

Serving in the NOV partisan units in the upper part of Prespa were 1902 fighters from Prespa alone, from whom 29 were memorialized in the "Partisan Memorial - 1941". The poet Mite Bogoevski, who was involved in the Prespa Uprising, is a national hero. In their struggle to free their homeland, 128 people from Prespa sacrificed their lives. The following people from Prespa will remain in Macedonia's history as prominent partisan leaders and commanders; Naume Veslievski-Ofcharot, Mite Trpovski-Voivodata, Tsvetko Uzunovski-Abas and many others.

In the past 44 years, after being freed from the occupiers, the people from Resen Region experienced unprecedented historic progress in all spheres of social, economic and cultural life. The stormy progress, especially in the last twenty years or so, had greatly

changed Prespa's character. When the old pechalbari (migrant workers) returned home after some years of absence, they simply could not recognize their homeland from the progress it had undergone. They were filled with tears of joy and had nothing more to say than warm words of praise for what they found.

In contrast to the Resen side of Prespa, the southern part of Prespa remained torn up and still occupied by foreign rulers, now under Greece and Albania. The Macedonian people from this part of Prespa, along with the other parts of Greek occupied Macedonia, took a very active role in the Anti-Fascist War. According to historian and journalist Dr. Risto Kiriazovski, "more than 25,000 Macedonians fought in the ranks of ELAS and its reserves, and more than 14,000 Macedonian fighters fought in the ranks of DAG, and about 6,000 more in its auxiliary services, representing more than a third of the total combat forces in DAG. Also, from about the 58,000 casualties received during the Greek Civil War, about 25,000 were Macedonians. If we consider the ratio of the total Macedonian and Greek populations, we can easily see that the Macedonian contribution in this common Greek-Macedonian struggle was staggering. A large part of that population was from Dolna Prespa, now located in Greek occupied Macedonia. Unfortunately, in spite of all the great sacrifices made by the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia, they still failed in their aspirations for national and social liberation.

Kosta Mundushev's book, by describing Dolna Prespa's experience, in a way, has highlighted the entire Macedonian people's struggle, aspirations and suffering in Greek occupied Macedonia.

We wish the author well and congratulate him for his contribution to the history of the whole of Prespa and for making it available through this book to all the readers and to all the people of Prespa, wherever they may live.

The author and the publisher of this book would like to say that this book, by no means fully covers the history of Dolna Prespa. And this is why the author has chosen to entitle his work "Prespa in flames and smoke". This means that this story is mostly a view of his own experience and that of his generation, but not everything.

There is a lot more to Prespa's history and to Macedonia in general than what has been said here. Let that be well understood.

The Publisher and the Editorial Board, through the words written here, would like to take the opportunity to express their gratitude to all those who helped shape this book. Included among them are the Republican Community for Scientific Research in Skopje, the Republican Community of Culture, Tabak Macedonia – Skopje, and the business organizations of Resen municipality.

Giorgi Tankovski and Traiko Ognenovski

Mala Prespa: division, WW I and displacement

The First Balkan War and Macedonia's Division

The First Balkan War was about to expire. The Serbian army was in Bitola, the Greek army was just entering Lerin. Then, on October 27, 1912, Serbian cannon shells began to fall on Giavato, a major transfer point for the fleeing Ottoman army withdrawing from Bitola to Albania.

The road from Nakolets to R'bi was teeming with fleeing Ottoman soldiers, as was the sandy road going around the two lakes and heading for Perovo Kula and Albania. As the Giatovo transition road became occupied by Serbian troops, the Ottomans were forced to retreat through the Braichino-German crossing. A battle broke out in Mocherta, near German, between the fleeing Ottomans and the Serbian invaders. Two Serbian soldiers were killed and buried on site. Their graves were preserved. One of them was named Stefan Dobrovoletsot (the volunteer).

As the Ottoman army retreated from Bitola and Resen it left behind destruction and desolation, and victimized the Prespa civilian population. The Ottoman soldiers gathered all the cattle and sheep and everything else they could carry from the villages and violently took them away. They exercised robbery and violence at every opportunity.

On October 19, 1912 the Serbian army took all of Prespa up to the Kaludieritsa hill at Preval at the entrance of Prespa, above the villages Orovnik, Rudari and P'pli. Several days later the Greek army arrived at the same line. And with this, the Macedonian people's fate was sealed. To this day the region remains under alien rule.

On October 28, 1912 a Greek army regiment invaded Lerin. The next day the Serbian army also invaded Lerin.

The three Balkan countries, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, drove the Ottomans out of Macedonia and divided it into three parts and later into four, with Albania taking a small piece. In the early months of

the First Balkan War, Mala Prespa was under Serbian control with Preval as the provisional border between Greece and Serbia.

The six-hundred-year-old Ottoman occupation of the Balkans left many shadows of wrong doing and many victims. Prespa was no exception. The Ottoman Muslims forcibly abducted young Christian women and seized properties from the indigenous Macedonian population. After the Ottoman army left, what little of the Muslim population that remained in Prespa was mostly Albanian. The remaining Muslims became frightened and thought that the Macedonian people would take revenge but that did not happen because taking revenge was not in the nature of the Macedonian people.

In the fall of 1913 the Greek-Serbian border was moved to Markova Noga. The Serbian army withdrew from eighteen villages and they fell under Greek administration. After that the Greek army occupied this part of Prespa and Prespa itself was partitioned into two parts. One part was taken by Serbia and the other part, with 32 villages, was taken by Greece. Later in 1923, 14 villages located on the southwest part of Prespa, held by Serbia since 1912, were given to Albania. Included among the Prespa villages given to Albania were Globochani with 320 residents, Gorna Goritsa with 136 residents, Dolna Goritsa with 210 residents, Tuminets, Tserie, Stenie, and Shulin with 70 residents, Pustets with 463 residents, Leska with 103 residents, Zrnosko with 100 residents, Konsko, Rakitsko, Zagradets and Shuets. These were villages that belonged to the Lerin Region composition.

After Prespa was partitioned and annexed by Greece, Serbia and Albania, borders were erected and Prespa was broken into three pieces. The part of Prespa annexed by Greece broke ties with all the villages annexed by Serbia. In other words, German now occupied by Greece, a village which, since Ottoman times, was the administration centre for the region broke contact with the villages Slivnitsa Arvati, Kranie, Shtrbovo Braichino Liuboino, Nakolets and Dolno Dupeni, as well as some other Mala Prespa villages which were now occupied by Serbia. Families were permanently divided as a result of these imposed borders.

The people of Prespa from the eighteen villages, that were annexed by Greece, suffered in isolation being cut off from their families until the big catastrophe in 1949, when the entire Macedonian population in Greek occupied Prespa was forced to leave its homeland en masse. The daily pressure and terror tactics the Greeks exerted on the Macedonian people in Mala Prespa, since 1912, continued to the day they left and continues to this day for those who chose to stay.

The Greeks, now conquerors of part of Macedonia, stopped their advance at Markova Noga where they placed their solid border with a 2 kilometre wide population free zone. No one was allowed to enter the 2 kilometre wide border zone. The Greek ruling circles knew that the population in their newly-conquered Macedonian territory was Macedonian. They also knew that the same Macedonian people lived on the other side of the border; that is why the border had to be solid so that no one could cross it. This, of course, would make it easier for the Greeks to assimilate the Macedonian people in its occupied territory. And as soon as the Greeks consolidated their power over the Macedonian territory, they began their planned assimilation. Also as soon as the Greeks shut the borders tight, they began to expel all Macedonians who they were unable to assimilate. Those Macedonians who refused to be assimilated into the Greek fold were expelled to Bulgaria and Serbia. As part of the assimilating tactics, liturgy in the Macedonian language in the churches was banned and replaced with Greek. Any Macedonian priest who refused to conduct liturgy in the Greek language was expelled and replaced with a Greek priest. The expelled priests were exiled from their homeland. Teachers were also sent to the villages to teach the Greek language. All the icons in the churches and monasteries, which had Macedonian inscriptions written on them, were either replaced with icons with Greek inscriptions or were defaced and painted over with Greek letters. All painted murals on walls that had Macedonian writing were scratched or painted over. Macedonian inscriptions on grave markers were also defaced or removed and the markers destroyed.

World War I

Prespa became a battleground during World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1919, during which time the opposing armies were testing their strength. A large front opened up in Prespa when the Bulgarian and German armies reached the current Greek-Serbian border in Markova Noga and occupied the positions from Goritsa Hill, Sveti Ilia and Slivie over the villages R'bi and German, to Mount Baltan. Here they dug trenches and made a strong defensive line. The allied armies, composed of Frenchmen, Serbians, Russians, and Greeks, came to Prespa later and took positions at Pechkoets and Leskata Hills over the villages Medovo, R'bi and German. These three villages were located between the two fronts and were fired upon by both sides as battles raged on. When the Bulgarian and German armies arrived, the Greek border guard retreated from Mala Prespa. In fact, the entire Greek administration including the Greek teachers and priests retreated from Prespa and fled south to Greece. The Macedonian language once again became the liturgy of choice in Prespa. The moment the Bulgarian army arrived in Prespa, Bulgarian soldiers began to forcibly confiscate sheep, goats and large parts of cattle herds.

According to testimonies from some of the oldest residents in R'bi, Tsar Samoil's tombstone was buried inside the wall at the entrance of the "Sveti Iovan Prespanski" monastery. For centuries the tombstone plate was kept in the church altar in the "Prechista" (Purity/Virgin) Church in R'bi. With the restoration of the monastery, in 1870, villagers from R'bi took the tombstone and inserted it as part of the monastery's wall. Tsar Samoil was a true legend for the people of Prespa. Then on Sveti Iovan's day, the people of Prespa gathered at the monastery and, while celebrating Sveti Iovan's day, also paid homage to their true legend. Unfortunately soldiers from the Bulgarian army stationed on the same hill discovered the tombstone plate and took it. They also took other relics from Samoil's time, including those kept in the "Sveti German" church in the village German, and in the "Prechista" church in R'bi. They loaded the stone relics onto a truck and transported them to Bulgaria.

Because it was an important holiday, many people from the Prespa villages attended the Sveti Ail (St. Achilles) celebration held in the Sveti Ail Church right on the island. The 1917 celebration was no exception except that across the lake the French and Serbian armies had their artillery batteries set up on Graishta Hill. When the French and Serbian soldiers saw crowds gathering at the Sveti Ail church, they decided to use them as "target practice" and fired their cannons for almost half an hour until the church collapsed. Many houses on the island were also hit and destroyed and many of the people celebrating were left dead and wounded. Later this crime was justified by alleging that Bulgarian soldiers had landed on the island and that the French and Serbian artilleries were targeting the Bulgarians. But the Bulgarians could not have landed on the island because the bridge and the passage at Perovo were held by the French and Serbian armies. The people of Prespa viewed this murderous act as intentional.

On many occasions the allied armies forcibly took men from the Prespa villages and put them to work transporting military equipment and food to their military camps. Some men were held for several months. A group of men was taken and forced to work crushing stones for road construction. This group worked together with a number of disarmed Russian soldiers. The best fields in Prespa Valley were confiscated and planted with vegetables to feed the armies. The French army even had troops from their colonies, mainly from Africa. Among them were also those who misbehaved and deliberately attacked people, especially women. These degenerates often tried to force themselves onto the women and rape them. The population of Prespa was forced to bear and endure all this while the allied armies were preparing to attack the Bulgarian and German armies. The Headquarters that operated this front made a decision to evacuate the villages German, R'bi and Medovo and overnight moved the villagers to the villages Zhelevo and Oshchima on the other side of Prespa, where they remained for more than two months. In the meantime, after several attacks, the allies finally succeeded in driving out the enemy from these positions and moved the front to the hills above Krania and Mount Pelister. When the people who were evacuated returned back to their villages, they found their homes looted. There was a regiment of Russian troops headquartered in R'bi that was also fighting at this front. But after

the October Revolution in Russia, in October 1917, these soldiers were disarmed and detained as prisoners. They were forced to do hard labour building roads in the Prespa hills and mountains leading to the fronts.

Many soldiers from both sides were killed in Prespa. The war also brought great poverty to the people of Prespa as well as many diseases. When the war ended it left behind an epidemic of the Spanish flu, which killed part of the population. While the epidemic lasted, an average of 2 to 3 people from each village died every day. When the war ended the old borders that divided Prespa before the war were again erected with some modifications. Serbia lost 18 villages in this part of Prespa. They were given to Greece. How these people faired under Greek rule after that, only time will tell.

With its division in 1913, Prespa lost one master, the Ottomans, and acquired two new masters, the Greeks and Serbians. But then in 1924 it acquired a third master, the Albanians. The people of Prespa who had lived together for many centuries, and together shared their misery under very difficult conditions which the Ottomans forced on them such as slavery, Islam, confiscation of properties, and so on. However, the Macedonian Christians persisted. Many of them became victims of aggression but fought back to preserve their faith, their culture and their nation. Now, on top of all those things, the Greeks tried to rob them of their entire Macedonian identity by forcing them to become Greeks. When the Greeks came to Mala Prespa they banned the Macedonian language from the churches and forced the Greek language on the people, even in liturgy. After that the Greeks brought Greek teachers to the Macedonian villages to teach the people Greek. The Greeks introduced a “military draft” and collected all the younger men up to age 25 and sent them to the army to learn to speak Greek. The Greeks even lay barbed along the newly installed Greek-Serbian border that separated the newly acquired villages. It took over a year before relations between the two sides improved and the people in Prespa were allowed to visit their families. For over a year family members from the one side of the fence, with clenched hearts and tears in their eyes, stared at family members on the other side, not wanting to be separated. The Greeks introduced schools for children over the age of three, with special classes for learning the Greek language. The Greeks took

strong measures against those parents whose children did not attend school regularly or did not wear the carefully chosen Greek school uniforms recommended by the Greek administration.

The Greek-Turkish War (1919-1922) and exchange of populations

Delighted with the success in winning Macedonian territory, the Greek ruling circles could not wait to expand their state with ambitions at extending it towards Asia Minor by declaring war on Turkey. With their declaration of war the Greeks began a general mobilization, especially in their newly acquired Macedonian territories. About 40 soldiers from Mala Prespa alone were mobilized and sent to fight in Asia Minor with many never returning. There were also many wounded and maimed, made victims by Greek chauvinistic aspirations for a Greater Greece.

This war was a frightful and ghastly experience for many of the Mala Prespa soldiers who survived it. During their withdrawal from Turkey, when they were loaded onto Greek ships along with their military equipment to leave the Turkish coast, many who were left behind were slaughtered by the Turkish army. And how were these Macedonian fighters, who participated in the Greek war and in other subsequent Greek national liberation struggles, rewarded? We will see in subsequent chapters in this book.

When the war was over Greece and Turkey agreed to exchange populations. Greece attacked Turkey to allegedly “save” the Greek population living in Asia Minor and that was why these population exchanges were mandatory. But instead of exchanging Turks for Greeks, the two sides ended up exchanging Muslims for Christians since Greeks never existed in Turkey. While Turkey accepted the Macedonian Muslims that Greece wanted to get rid of, Greece had to accept the Christian Turks for whom it attacked Turkey to save. In their mandatory population exchanges Greece received one and a half million colonists and settlers, of whom more than 600,000 it settled in Greek occupied Macedonia. Later those Macedonians the Greeks could not easily assimilate were evicted to Serbia and Bulgaria. Identified as candidates for eviction in Mala Prespa were Nikola Kazako, Mitre Baliov and Gligor Baliov, but the Greeks

failed to evict them. This was not like in other parts of Macedonia where, due to the great terror the Greeks perpetrated against the Macedonian people, many fled. The Muslims, mostly Albanian families, living in Prespa who refused to leave in the past at any cost were forced to leave under this agreement. Their properties and houses were given to the Asia Minor colonists and settlers. Many of the Asia Minor colonists and settlers were settled in Mala Prespa in the various villages. They were settled in the villages Vineni, P'pli, German, Shaovtsi and R'bi. The settlers, outside of speaking Turkish, also spoke a language that was distorted and incomprehensible to the Greeks.

Forced assimilation imposed on the Macedonians

The Turkish Christian settlers from Asia Minor soon became known as "Prosfigi" to the Macedonian people. The Greeks referred to the settlers as "guardians of the dangers from the north" and give them unlimited rights. They were even allowed to carry weapons which they proudly carried to the fields where they worked. The Macedonian residents of Prespa were not surprised because they had become accustomed and for years had watched the Turks carry rifles and daggers on their bodies. They used their weapons to threaten the Macedonian people, to take the water rights from them when watering the fields, to grab Macedonian girls working in the field or walking on the road, to kill people they did not like, and so on. As much as they could tolerate, the Macedonian people could not always tolerate every abuse perpetrated against them. In 1892 when Alia, a Muslim, tried to grab Stefana Bakushova, a Christian from the village R'bi, her brothers Petre and Mitre killed him and return their sister to their home after which they fled to Anatolia. They hid there for years. Mitre died and Petre married a Meshtanka woman and in 1924, as a Christian, used the agreement between Greece and Turkey and, with his two sons Risto and Stefan, returned to his village R'bi.

During and after the Greco-Turkish war, life in Mala Prespa was very difficult because most of the men who did the heavy work at home were taken to the front, and there were very few capable hands left to till the soil. After the war was over most of the men went to work abroad to various countries, while mostly women remained in

the villages to look after the households as well as doing the heavy labour required in the fields.

When the Greeks came to Macedonia and Mala Prespa they appointed Greek people to government service positions. The Prespa peasants were never given the chance to manage their own affairs. All the "conquerors" who came to Macedonia and Prespa forced the Macedonian people to do the heavy labour jobs because all they cared about was their own profiteering.

During this period the Greek government had not yet banned the Macedonian language and Macedonians spoke Macedonian at home and still sang Macedonian songs, including revolutionary songs about the Ilinden Uprising. But if one needed any work done in the Greek institutions they needed to speak Greek.

In 1926, by special law issued by the Greek government, all Macedonian people's names as well as village, town, city, river, lake and mountain names were changed from Macedonian to Greek.

Here are some of the names changed from Macedonian to Greek

Macedonia	Greek	Macedonian	Greek
Sekula	Sterios	Vakushov	Vakitsidis
Stoiche	Ianis	Bechkov	Vecikopoulos
Kote	Kostas	Popovski	Papadopoulos
Velian	Paskalis	Petkov	Paraskevopoulos

Macedonian names of villages renamed into Greek

Macedonia	Greek	Macedonian	Greek
German	Agios Germanos	R'bi	Lemos
Medovo	Milionas	Strkovo	Plati
Rudari	Kalitea	P'pli	Lefkona
Orovnik	Karies	Besfina	Sfika
Bukovik	Oksii	Lok	Mikrolimni
Drenovo	Kranies	Trnava	Angatoto
Grazhdeno	Vrondero	Orovo	Piksos

DR'bitishta Daseri Vineni Pili
Nivitsi Psarades Ail Agios Ahileos

Residents in	1913	1920	1940
Ail	92	64	100
Besfina	431	348	324
Bukoik	151	131	141
Vineni	-	-	207
Grazhdeno	437	380	507
German	1,621	1,542	2,170
Drenovo	124	115	150
DR'bitishta	50	34	75
Lok	203	202	316
Medovo	130	151	209
Nivitsi	674	589	770
Orovnik	222	244	162
Orovo	463	373	489
P'pli	490	492	422
R'bi	477	555	738
Rudari	266	337	379
Strkovo	170	215	268
Trnaa	87	65	84
Total	5988	6837	7517

Many things changed at a grass roots level in Mala Prespa. The names of the people, the names of the villages, the names of churches and monasteries, as well as the names of mountains and rivers… They were all given Greek names. The Greek language and every other subject was taught in Greek in the schools. The language of liturgy in the churches was also Greek. Separate classes were created for children ages 3 to 6 so they could learn the Greek language. They were very closely monitored so that they would learn the Greek language at a young age. Schools and classes for the young children were opened in all the Mala Prespa villages, even in those villages where the number of students was quite small, even with less than 10 students. In contrast, there were villages in the south part of Greece, in Greece proper, where they had a greater number of students but had no teachers for them.

The students in all the Greek schools in Greek occupied Macedonia were not allowed to speak Macedonian and their teachers were responsible to make sure of that. The students were even forbidden to speak Macedonian with their parents. In 1925, however, as obligated by the August 10, 1920 Sevres Agreement, a special committee in Athens prepared a Macedonian language primer printed in the Latin alphabet. This was intended for the Macedonian children, in Greek occupied Macedonia, to learn Macedonian. The primer, entitled "Abecedar", was published in Athens but was never introduced into the schools for which it was intended.

In the elementary school in R'bi, which I personally attended in the years 1924 to 1930, our teachers would not allow us to speak Macedonian, not even at home with our parents. They thought that if the children spoke Greek at home the parents too would learn Greek. Our village R'bi was divided into two neighbourhoods, upper and lower, which were divided by the German River and by a water ditch located about one hundred metres from the river. The ditch had a small bridge over it which was the only crossing point to the lower R'bi neighbourhood and the school. The border for the students from the upper neighbourhood, beyond which they could speak Macedonian, was the little bridge over the ditch. As soon as they crossed the little bridge, returning from school, they felt safe to speak Macedonian. Between the little bridge over the ditch and the big bridge over the German River there were military barracks. One day, while returning from school, we began speaking Macedonian as soon as we crossed the little bridge. Then I heard one of the officers ordering us to stop. When we did he scolded us and reported us to our teacher. All of us who were in that group were beaten. After that we moved our border for speaking Macedonian to beyond the barracks.

In 1936, with the Metaxas dictatorship coming to power, the Macedonian language was outright banned. Anyone caught speaking Macedonian was severely punished. But, in spite of the ban and the heavy penalties imposed, the Macedonian people in Mala Prespa continued to speak Macedonian in secret.

The villages German, R'bi, P'pli, Lok and Orovo were first to be hit by Greek assimilation practices because these villages harboured

Greek public order services. German, the administrative centre for all of Dolna Prespa from Ottoman times, now became the administrative centre for Mala Prespa. German was one of the bigger villages in Prespa Region with 2,170 inhabitants and besides being the local Greek ministry for public order it also housed the border military district, the court for Mala Prespa, the Directorate of Forestry and other Greek administrative services. Due to the large number of public and administrative services and Greeks, the Macedonian residents in this village were subjected to all sorts of harassments.

The government officials sent to this region from the southern part of Greece were advised that the population living here was not Greek. They were told that the people living here were without a "culture" and were capable of "eating a person alive". They were told that these people were illiterate and semi-literate at best. They were told that these people had never seen any part of the outside world and did not know if anyone else outside of their world existed. They were told that these people were incapable of holding a job in public office or in the government. They were also told that these people would believe everything they were told. And finally they were told that they were sent here to "manage the population".

From 1926 to 1930, a person named Dzhulavis was appointed judge in the German District Court. Dzhulavis came to Mala Prespa armed to the teeth and never left his home in German or walked the streets alone. He was always accompanied by police, had a rifle and was always ready to shoot. He kept his rifle hanging by the door in his room where he lived.

Mala Prespa - Rapid economic development and stiff resistance against assimilation

From 1926 to 1930 Mala Prespa experienced growth especially in the construction of new houses. The large number of pechalbari (migrant workers) who, after the Greco-Turkish War, traveled abroad to seek employment began to send back large sums of money as well as bring back their earning when they returned to their homes. Most of this money was invested in building new homes, which in time changed the face of their communities. With this

money people were also able to purchase meat, cheese, beans and wheat products, foods that were in high demand because Greece, due to its passive approach, was experiencing shortages. In addition to the increase in income and production, Mala Prespa also experienced population growth.

Following in the old Macedonian tradition, the money brought back from pechalba was also invested in posh weddings, celebrations and fairs that sometimes lasted several days. On May 12th, during the "Germavden" (German day) celebration, the number of weddings held on that one day numbered as high as 25. As many as 8 weddings were held in Nivitsi during the "Bogoroditsa" (Virgin Mary) celebration. A large celebration was put on during "Iovanden" in Goritsa in R'bi at the "Sveti Iovan Prespanski" monastery, which lasted for several days. Similar celebrations were held in other villages because every village had its own patron saint and celebrated its own day. The people from Mala Prespa gathered together and attended each other's celebrations in massive numbers. They sang, danced and rejoiced. Macedonians songs were sung and played by the local bands and Macedonian dances were put on during all of these joyful holiday celebrations.

The few government officials who were sent to Mala Prespa to "manage the population" very quickly adapted to the Macedonian people and to their customs. Some even sang Macedonian songs together with the Macedonians. The Asia Minor Turkish Christian colonists and settlers did not participate in these Macedonian events mainly because their customs were completely different, not only from the Macedonian but also from the Greek customs. They had their own distinct customs and always stayed away. After living for several years among the Macedonian people in Mala Prespa, German judge Dzhilavis became closely acquainted with the Macedonian culture and, one day, as he was looking at the amount, varieties and quality of food resting on the tables at a wedding, spread his arms wide open and said: "God, what is this, is this the horrible nation that we should be afraid of and defend ourselves from with guns?" Later he was heard saying: "The way things are going today, in place of us making Greeks out of these Macedonians, they are making Macedonians out of us. We now speak their language, we are accepting their customs and we sing

their songs with them." He then handed his rifle to Stefan Chetelev from German, who was a hunter and told him: "Take it and kill bears with it, I have no use for it, I have no one to defend myself from, these people are not killers…"

The people who left their homes and went to seek their fortunes around the world never lost their love for their people, traditions and for their homeland, even after several years of absence. In fact their love for their people and homeland became even stronger and many organized themselves in Macedonian organizations and freely expressed their resentment against the conquerors of their country. When they returned back home, many had gained the knowledge and experience they needed to resist the new conqueror's gendarmes, government officials and managers, as well as the Asia Minor colonists, who suppressed the local Macedonian population.

A communist Vlach named Kiriakopoulos from the village Psoderi, Lerin Region, was elected MP for the German District in Mala Prespa during the 1926 parliamentary elections in Greece. Ten village children from Mala Prespa were sent to study in the secondary schools in Lerin and other places. They had progressive tendencies with a strong desire to learn more about the Macedonian people and were active in the progressive movement. Included among them was my own brother Vancho Mundushev who attended the school for teachers in Lerin and who was arrested and imprisoned for being a communist. After he finished his schooling he was not able to get a job as a teacher and was forced to work in agriculture. The same thing happened to Kire Grezhlov from German, who completed his education in agriculture. All of the captives were severely tortured. Vancho died in 1937 during Metaxas's dictatorship.

In 1930 a large school was built in the village German, part of which was envisioned to become a secondary school (gymnasium). Unfortunately the Greek government "managers" in Lerin, having experience with the Macedonian youths who studied there, thought it would be a mistake to allow such a high school to function in Mala Prespa, even though it had all the means and qualifications. So the school in German was left to function as a primary school only.

Declaring a dictatorship in Greece

On August 4, 1936 Ioannis Metaxas, a man of fascist upbringing, declared Greece a dictatorship. With his arrival to power the Macedonian situation in Greek occupied Macedonia took a turn from bad to worse. The new Metaxas government installed its own people in Lerin and Mala Prespa. These people were cruel and brutally harassed and persecuted those people with Macedonian feelings and those who hesitated to obey them. There were many cases where Macedonians were imprisoned, or given salted herring to eat and no water to drink, or castor oil to drink, just because they were caught speaking Macedonian.

In 1937 the Metaxas government banned the Macedonian language and made it illegal to speak. In October 1937 Ioannis Tsaksiras, president of the Lerin and Kostur Districts, confidant of the then government, and a personal friend of Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas, made every effort and used every method of torture possible to assimilate the Macedonian population into the Greek fold. He was infamous for his misdeeds and for issuing orders to teach the Macedonian people the Greek language by force. He started evening schools in Mala Prespa and forced all men and women over the age of 25 to attend classes. This whole situation was bizarre and difficult to understand but I will do my best to explain it.

Every evening after the regular classes were over, a small bell was used to summon the adults to attend evening classes. Adult men and women, with notebooks under their arms, walked to the school. The women, mothers of two or three very young children, some suckling babies, had to leave their children home crying because they had not seen their mothers all day. These same women, who worked all day in the fields and who cooked a meal for their families in the evening, were now expected to drop everything, leave their crying children behind and run to school to learn Greek. Sometimes the mothers took their crying children with them… as far as the school yard… where the gendarmes snatched them from their arms, threatened to beat the women and yelled profanities at them for bringing their children with them. The older children who ran after their mothers were beaten back by the gendarmes and chased home. It was even

more difficult going to night school in the winter with snow and ice, especially for the older men and women who were not steady on their feet. Someone, a family member, had to bring them to school and then take them back home. There were cases of elderly women who had slipped on the ice and had fallen and broken an arm or a leg. The teachers were required to keep daily records of all those who were present and who were absent. These records were then submitted to the police station and those who were absent were punished. The Greek government took very unpopular measures against the Macedonian population and these unpopular measures were compounded because the "assimilation process" was entrusted to a number of incompetent bureaucrats.

Let us have a look at an example of what happened in the school in R'bi: One evening the teacher questioned 60-year-old Vasilitsa Iankulova, who up to this time was unable to learn or remember a single word in Greek. The teacher asked: "Pos se lene" (what is your name) but the woman understood nothing and attempted to repeat what the teacher had asked and said: "Posolena" which in Macedonian means "salted". Suddenly there was an outburst of laughter in the classroom. The young women could not stop themselves from laughing. The teacher became very angry and first he yelled at the women who were giggling and then at Vasilitsa for saying that. Poor Vasilitsa felt insulted by both the young women and by the much younger teacher who yelled at her. To the young women she angrily said: "Go ahead, laugh, you silly mares, laugh instead of crying for losing your own language…" And to the teacher she said: "My son, I have my own language which is enough for me, I don't need another language. We are happy that the Turks were not like you. We would all have been Turks today including you Greeks…" The younger women bowed their heads down and the teacher became red in the face but continued with his lesson.

The pressure to Hellenize the Macedonian people was getting stronger with each passing day and expanded to the homes, the fields and on the roads. Gendarmes and policemen patrolled the streets and squatted under people's windows every night, listening to the private conversations of families to see which language they spoke; Macedonian or Greek. They spent hours sitting behind walls and bushes waiting for people to pass by and catch them speaking

Macedonian. All those caught were given a hefty fine and their names were entered in the “black book” of offenders. Many people were fined this way.

Here is an example: Boris Demirov was with his mother in his own house and he spoke to her in Macedonian because this was the only language she knew. Unfortunately a policeman happened to be hiding under their window and heard them speak Macedonian. The policeman then rushed into the house, grabbed Boris and took him to German to pay the fine and then he wrote his name in the black book.

After 14 years away from home, seeking his fortune in Australia, Stoian Mundushev finally returned home. During the fall of 1939 Stoian, along with some people from his village, went to gather firewood on Nivichka Mountain. After crossing the Perovo-Kula bridge they climbed up the slope towards the hill while speaking Macedonian out loud. Stoian was telling the others about his life experiences in Australia. Suddenly two armed gendarmes jumped out of the bushes like scarecrows and startled the group. They arrested everyone and, along with their horses and donkeys, took them to the gendarmerie in German, 8 long kilometres away. Here Stoian said to the chief: “I saw images of a Macedonian man and a Macedonian woman in a world magazine with their tongues cut off and a Greek holding the scissors in his hand with which he cut the tongues…” He also told the chief that he had served three years in the Greek army and had fought for Greece in Asia Minor against Turkey. He then lifted his pant leg and showed him the scar from a wound he received at the front. But even after all that, the chief was too stupid to understand what Stoian was telling him in his own Greek language. He punished all of his friends including Stoian for speaking Macedonian.

Spiro Bakushov was plowing his field and at one point cursed his oxen in Macedonian for not going in a straight line. Unbeknownst to him a gendarme was hiding behind a wall, he then jumped out violently, grabbed Spiro and his oxen and took them to German to pay the fine.

These were the kinds of tactics the Greeks used in R'bi and in the other Mala Prespa villages to intimidate the Macedonian people in order to Hellenize them. This was an every hour and an every day endless affair that the Macedonian people had to endure at the hands of the Greeks, with no end in sight. It was a sad, sad picture indeed to watch the idiotic gendarmes, with batons in hand, beating the Macedonians on the head, forcing them to march like cattle in front of them to the courts in order to punish them for speaking Macedonian, their own mother tongue and, for most, the only language they spoke. Also sad were the images of gendarmes crashing weddings because some older Macedonians liked to sing Macedonian songs, arresting the old offenders and destroying the wedding altogether.

The gendarme chiefs in the villages German, Orovo, P'pli and Lok constantly threatened the offenders who illegally spoke Macedonian and often beat them with a stick or a belt while yelling at them: "If you don't know God's Greek language put shit in your mouths and never again speak that cursed banned tongue, which poisons the pure Greek air…" People all over Greek occupied Macedonia caught speaking Macedonian were arrested, sent to prisons, beaten and tortured, as well as paid hefty fines. Repeat offenders were also forced to drink castor oil and eat salted herring in the presence of gendarmes. Castor oil caused a lot of stomach pain and humiliating diarrhea, salted herring caused great thirst for which no water was given.

In the meantime in Athens, in the corridors of the Greek capital, senior officials in the various government ministries, even middle officials, greeted each other in the Turkish, Vlach and Albanian languages but never in Macedonian.

With Ioannis Metaxas coming to power, the Greek youth was educated following in the examples of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Boys aged 16 to 25 were enrolled in EON, the Greek fascist youth organization. We were forced to join this organization and each member wore a dark blue uniform with a white tie and white belt. We were allowed to keep the uniforms at home. Every Sunday we dressed ourselves in our uniforms and marched to church. When liturgy was over we marched in the streets

of the villages and sang the song “Why are people happy”. Often young people, dressed in their uniform, lined up and marched to visit other villages and others from the other villages came to visit us. Youth clubs were opened in the larger villages which had radios, a rarity at the time. R’bi had such a club. The EON club in R’bi was entrusted to the care of Giorgios Kolovos, a tax officer. He was an agile man and every night he invited us to the club so that he could tell us stories about the “beauty of Greece” with its many vineyards, olive groves and fishing voyages. He even taught us old Greek songs.

In 1938 Mala Prespa was visited by Ioannis Tsaksiras, the then District President for Lerin and Kostur Districts. The man made every effort to assimilate the Macedonian population in villages by encouraging his men to torment the people.

Ioannis Tsaksiras came to Mala Prespa to see for himself and be assured that all his orders were being carried out as ordered. He ordered all the men from the villages to appear in R’bi and, as a result, a lot of people showed up at R’bi square where Tsaksiras came out on a balcony and delivered a speech. Among other things he said: “Mala Prespa has resisted our orders to teach the Greek language. A lot of people don’t want to speak Greek here, which is evident from the large number of offenders that the security authorities have prosecuted and punished…” Looking serious and in an angry tone of voice, Tsaksiras went on to say: “If this is not corrected immediately we have a plan and that plan will soon be launched. All men and women over the age of 18 will be expelled and resettled and we will bring others here…” He then said: “Correct this problem because we are committed to implementing the new plan…” Then, while pointing towards the island Ail, he angrily said: “Then, when you can no longer see that anathematized island, you will speak Greek. We will only leave the minors here and I can assure you we will not have problems with them…” The people who heard the President’s speech suddenly got shivers all over their bodies and broke into a cold sweat. Tsaksiras had the power to do this because he had the support of the Greek government. Later, in 1949, his dream came true when a great number of older Macedonians were driven out of their homeland

and exiled. Nikos Zahariadis, CPG Secretary General, accomplished in 1949 what Tsakritsas was dreaming of doing in 1938.

Italian occupation of neighbouring Albania with aims at invading Prespa

The April 1939 the Italian occupation of Albania greatly influenced the situation in Mala Prespa, prompting the Greek government to take measures to defend the country. Orders were issued to build a defensive line along Mala Prespa's border with Albania. The Greeks were authorized to employ the Macedonian population to do all the labour, which resulted in the entire Macedonian male population, ages 8 to 65, to be drafted and forced to work for free. The people were divided into work gangs and sent to do various jobs. Each person was delegated a task which they were expected to complete during the day. Their objective was to develop an entire network of bunkers, tunnels, hideouts, warehouses and trenches along the entire border line. Specialists and engineering units supervised the work. At the same time a second defense line was started, in which the key strategic points and bunkers were built and reinforced with concrete. These bunkers were built by the military with help from the civilian population.

Twelve concrete bunkers were built in Mala Prespa which comprised the main line of defense. Construction of these two defensive lines continued until the end of October 1940 when Italy declared war on Greece.

Italy declares war on Greece

On October 28, 1940 Italy declared war on Greece. The same day, the population from the villages Nivitsi, Ail, Vineni, Orovo Grazhdeno, Trnava and DR'bitishta was evacuated to the upper Mala Prespa villages where it remained until Ivan Mountain and the city Korcha were captured by the Greek army.

Great merit must be attributed to the Macedonian fighters for stopping Mussolini's Italian fascist army, even though it possessed the most modern arms and weapons. It was the Macedonian sons who bravely fought at this front, suffered, bled for six months and lost many lives in the Albanian mountains defending Greece. The number of dead and wounded was not small and neither was the Macedonian heroism demonstrated by those who participated in this war. Here is a small example of what a company did whose soldiers were all Macedonians:

The Fifteenth Greek Army Division, which during the war was called the "Steel Division", consisted of the 28th and 33rd Regiments whose soldiers were from the Macedonian border areas, mainly from Lerin, Kostur, Sorovich and Mala Prespa Regions. This Division protected the border line and was like a wedge between Albania and Prespa that ran along Mounts Malimadi and Verba, and between Yugoslavia and Prespa that ran along Mount Kaimakchalan. The deteriorating situation in Albania then prompted the Division to concentrate all forces along the Albanian border.

The soldiers of the Fifth Detachment in the II Battalion of the 33rd Regiment were all Macedonians. Only the officers and an old sergeant were Greek. There were also ten young men from the Asia Minor colonist and settler families who had been settled in the Mala Prespa and Lerin Regions. On August 15, 1940 the Fifth Detachment, which numbered about 120 soldiers, started to dig trenches along the hills near Rulia and the crossroads at Breznitsa Bridge, as well as in the areas around the villages Breznitsa and Smrdesh. On October 20th, 1940 the Detachment stopped digging and moved to Besfina, to the detachment's headquarters.

With Italy declaring war on Greece, the Italian amphibious forces swept into Greek territory. The soldiers of the Fifth Detachment left Besfina and during the night of October 29, 1940, under heavy rain, climbed over Verba Mountain and assumed their combat positions in the hills over the village V'mbel. In the morning the Italians invaded and captured the hills. This was the first enemy attack during this war. On October 30, 1940 the Fifth Detachment, along with two companies from II-Battalion, invaded and took the Albanian village Vrbnik. Here they captured their first Italian prisoners. The Detachment continued to fight from November 1 to 6, 1940. Then, on November 7, 1940, the 33rd Regiment stormed and took Bilishta. During this battle the Fifth Detachment stormed the hills above Bilishta and took them and then stormed Bilishta itself. Many soldiers received wounds, including the Detachment's commander Captain Rondoianis, Andrea Prodanov from Lerin and Sotir Madzhev from German. Sotir Vidinov from R'bi was killed during these battles.

After it took Bilishta, the Fifth Detachment withdrew from the first line and remained in the village Vrbnik for a few days of rest. From there it traveled over the villages Besfina, R'bi and Orovo and entered Albania again where it took its new position in the hills of Mount Ivan above the village Rakitsko.

The Fifth Detachment attacked these hill four times. But the Italians continued to stubbornly hold them. Each time the Detachment attacked it suffered casualties both dead and wounded. During its fifth attack the Detachment employed its artillery and managed to take the hill. The same day Mount Ivan was taken, and several days later, Korcha was taken pushing the Italians out.

The battle to take Mount Ivan lasted 10 days. It was a bloody struggle of life and death during which many Macedonian soldiers were killed including Traiko Bechkov from R'bi. Nikola Markov from R'bi was also severely wounded. In fact half of the soldiers from the Fifth Detachment lost their lives taking this nameless hill. This prompted those who survived to name it "Hill of death". The Italians withdrew.

The half-massacred detachments of the 33rd Regiment stayed in the several villages near the town Bilishta for 10 days after which, on December 5, 1940, they were sent back to the front. “We traveled along the road to Kiafezhezhi during the night in a rainstorm,” wrote Mundushev, “and stayed in Kiafezhezhi for one day and one night. After that we followed the same road towards the village Frasher and took an up hill mountain path. It started to snow hard but as we continued up hill the snowfall subsided and later it turned into fine powdery snow which was swept by the strong wind. It was night and very dark, the path we traveled on was covered with large drifts of snow. The horses and mules, which carried heavy loads of food and ammunition, kept slipping and sliding. Some fell into deep crevices covered by snow drifts. It was impossible to help them in the dark as we traveled completely blind. We were beaten down by the strong wind and by the flying snow. The soldiers could hardly move, holding each other for dear life. But in spite of our great difficulty we arrived at the village Frasher in the morning. Unfortunately we lost a large number of our animals and livestock that traveled with us. All the soldiers, dressed in their tattered uniforms and torn shoes, were wet and cold and suffered immensely during this trip...” concluded Mundushev, author of this book.

The next morning everything was covered with a thick layer of snow, the thermometer was showing minus ten degrees celsius and the sky was clear and bright. Italian aircraft were seen hovering above, dropping bombs and occasionally firing bursts of machine gun fire. Artillery shells were heard exploding and machine gun fire on the hills over Frasher. The Fifth Detachment was now at the front.

In snow up to their knees, the Fifth Detachment soldiers, still wearing their tattered uniforms and shoes with holes, left during the night to take their positions at the front. By dawn they were there and the same day they attacked the enemy.

It was a fierce attack forcing the Italians to withdraw leaving behind their wounded. The Fifth Detachment went on a chase and their fast advance left many of the fleeing Italians dead and wounded. Some Italians decided to surrender.

The Detachment experienced great difficulties due to the deep snow and due to the many wounded and captured Italian soldiers it was looking after.

At a height of 1200 metres above sea level, the Italians blocked the Detachment's path and the fighters were unable to drive them out. Here the Italians had raised a strong defensive line, which prompted the Greek army to launch an attack with more troops, artillery and mortars. The Greek army unfortunately was not prepared for this. Supplying a front line with food and ammunition at such a height in winter conditions was difficult. Snow was falling every day and the roads were jeopardized. The little food the soldiers carried with them was quickly eaten and now they were all left hungry. It was also very cold and the temperature at that height was hovering around minus 15 degrees celsius. The soldiers had no choice but to stand, with rifles in hand, and defend themselves from enemy attacks. When they exhausted all their food supply and ate the last can of meat and last loaf of bread, they began to eat the dead horses and mules which froze to death.

The few villages with the scattered houses that were inhabited in this mountainous region were unable to help much with food, because they themselves did not have enough to survive the winter. The Greek army, however, forced itself on them and confiscated their herds of sheep, goats and cattle, as well as their corn stashes. During the first days after the confiscations, the soldiers ate everything roasted but that made them all sick with strong diarrhea. After that they ate everything boiled. Their health conditions had deteriorated so much, especially from the lice epidemic, that they had contracted typhoid. Two soldiers from the Fifth Detachment died as a result of this.

Transporting the wounded was very difficult. They had to be carried on mountainous terrain in knee deep snow for over 5 kilometres. Many of the severely wounded soldiers died along the way from the bitter cold. And so did Sergeant Alexiou.

"On January 7, 1941, I, with Sergeant Alexiou from Kalamata, Trifun Mirchev from Nivitsi and Petre Mangov from Banitsa, was sent to scout the area and find a place for the Fifth Detachment to

attack and break through the Italian noose at hill 1200. Unfortunately we were spotted by the Italian air force on a ridge and we were bombed. Trifun was slightly wounded. One of Alexiou's legs was broken and he was also wounded on his shoulder and upper arm. We bound their wounds and made a makeshift stretcher with sticks and a blanket for Alexiou, who we then took to a doctor at the nearest first aid medical station," said Mundushev.

They had to carry Alexiou for several kilometres in snow up to their knees and in bitter cold. Unfortunately the sergeant died on the way. On January 8, 1940 the Greek Regiment attacked and took hill 1200. The Italians were defeated during a battle that lasted half a day. Many Italians surrendered to the First Detachment. The First Detachment also suffered losses of its own with many dead and wounded. German Mundushev from R'bi was also killed here.

After the Italians lost hill 1200, many Italian soldiers surrendered as individuals and as groups, even as entire units along with their officers. This massive surrender created great difficulties for the Fifth Detachment which had to find food and accommodation for its Italian prisoners. All these prisoners had to be transferred to the interior and the Detachment did not have enough manpower, so it ended up sending one Macedonian soldier to escort a row of a hundred Italian soldiers. Some of the Italian prisoners had musical instruments with them, such as accordions, guitars and flutes, and played music along the long marches seeming like they were escorting a wedding, and not coming from the front.

After all this the Fifth Detachment again lost half of its fighters, who were immediately replaced but not with Macedonians. The Fifth Detachment was replenished with Greeks because most of the Macedonians were wounded, killed, or removed from the Detachment and sent to other duties.

"When we were carrying Sergeant Alexiou on the makeshift stretcher, he grabbed my arm, pulled me down, kissed me on the cheek and said: 'You are my brother, and if I am still alive and may God keep you alive, I will come to Prespa to see you and you are welcome to come to Kalamata, my Macedonian friend!' It was noble of him to recognize me as a comrade, friend and brother, but most

importantly as a Macedonian! These were the Sergeant's parting words as he left us forever. The remaining Macedonian troops in the Detachment always spoke Macedonian and no one made any fuss. Some of the Greek officers even wondered why the Greek government outlawed our Macedonian language..." said Mundushev.

After hill 1200 was taken, the Detachment was sent to attack the village Bumbeshi. On its way it took several smaller villages including the village Kaiza. In Kaiza the Detachment took some time off to celebrate its victories. The soldiers and officers gathered together in a large room and rejoiced by singing Macedonian and Greek songs, at the expense of Mussolini. The Greek soldiers who heard Macedonian songs for the first time were a bit hesitant but soon warmed up to them and joined the Macedonians in their celebration. The Macedonian soldiers even tried to teach the Greeks Macedonian words but most they could not pronounce. "Some of the officers, who were familiar with our popular Macedonian songs, were encouraging us to sing the song 'Tri godini Donke' and kept yelling at us 'donke', 'donke', 'donke'… We Macedonians with this struggle did not only believe we deserved, but strongly believed that we would acquire our freedom in Greece…" said Mundushev.

Every day the Fifth Detachment was under fire. As the Italians retreated, the Detachment followed behind step by step and would not allow them to take a break. "And the deeper we entered Albanian interior the more our supply lines of food and ammunition were disrupted and so was our ability to send back our wounded..." said Mundushev.

The Greek army made great efforts to take the narrow gorge at Klisura and the road along the foot of Mount Trepeshina up to the great Inn known as the Balabani and the village Bumbeshi, so that the supply line to the front would be free. The army also took another village located on the road between the narrow gorge at Klisura and Balabani, which only left Bumbeshi to take behind which lay the Italian front line. This village had to be taken because otherwise the Italians could easily retake the Klisura gorge and cut off the supply line.

The 2nd Battalion in the 33rd Regiment initiated the attack on the village Bumbeshi, which had to cross a river of waist deep water on foot in February during the coldest part of the winter. At the beginning of February the weather was sunny, nice and warm. The battalion continued to attack up hill. Then, about four hours of bloody fighting later, it finally made the ascent and took the village. All the Detachments were decimated and the soldiers were exhausted. A few days later the Detachment was again re-enforced with fresh troops and was given shovels and pickaxes and ordered to dig itself in.

A few days later the Italians started a counter-attack in order to re-capture the village. “But, we refused to give it up. We also collected the wounded Italian soldiers who could not withdraw and gave them first aid. We then sent them to our hospitals to be treated...” said Mundushev.

The Italian artillery, without interruption, continually bombed the water sources to prevent the Greek army from obtaining water for its fighters and for the wounded. Many were killed and wounded trying to get water. Others had to be sent a long distance to get water from the river. A group of 20 soldiers held their position on top of a small hill under which clear water flowed in a ravine. The Italians held the opposite hill. In the beginning both sides got their water from the ravine during the night. Later both sides began to get their water during the day. “When we went down to get our water, we carried a white flag to let the Italians know that we were there to get our water. They did the same and we shared the water like brothers…” said Mundushev.

Many dead Italian soldiers were left behind in the neutral zone and as the weather began to warm up the place began to stink. Both sides were in danger of contracting diseases and starting an epidemic. “Then an Italian delegation consisting of 3 priests, dressed in white robes carrying large crosses with chains around their necks, came to our side and asked for a truce and a ceasefire in order to bury the dead bodies. The Greek Government rejected their request…” said Mundushev.

The Italians often bombarded the Greek held positions with cannon fire which lasted for several hours. Many of the fighters from the Fifth Detachment were wounded and killed this way. “Nine men were wounded and fourteen killed. It was a real massacre. Some of the soldiers were wounded not just once but two or even three times. It was difficult to endure, especially when we had to fight while wounded. Captain Rondoianis was still suffering from his wounds when he was sent back to the front to resume command of his Detachment. When he asked how many of the old soldiers remained we told him only eight. And when he asked what happened to the others, we told him they were killed or heavily wounded. We also listed all the names of those who were killed. He started to cry. He cried like a little child and we cried too. He told us he was proud of us. He also said that he always told his colleagues that ‘all my fighters are Macedonians and jump into the fire like lions and we envy them’…” said Mundushev.

On March 9, 1941 the Greek held positions around the village Bumbeshi were attacked by the Italians in a massive offensive which lasted two days and two nights without interruption. The Macedonian soldiers were told that this offensive was initiated by Mussolini himself, who came to Albania and joined his soldiers at the front. When it was over the entire hillside and village were covered in smoke and dust. Tons of explosives were unleashed on the terrain. “But in spite of all that, we remained vigilant in our defense of the line by inflicting heavy losses against the enemy. We too acquired many losses. Many trucks waited at the river bank to take the wounded. The soldiers we lost in our Detachments were quickly replaced with new soldiers. Some of them never made it to the top of the hill, they were either killed or wounded on the way. Of those who made it, many were asking to see the Macedonians and tell them in person how much they admired their heroism…” said Mundushev.

After Germany attacked Yugoslavia and Greece, the Fifth Detachment found itself in a difficult position. It had to withdraw from the front fast otherwise it would be trapped. On April 9, 1940 the Regiment left the front and withdrew to the bridge at Merdzhani near the Greek-Albanian border. The regiment was ordered to take a defensive position in order to allow the withdrawal of all remaining

troops from Albania, which were in danger of being severed. Some of the Regiment officers, however, refused to accept the orders which created panic among the troops. The same day, on April 13, 1940, during the evening, many soldiers deserted the army and fled back to their villages and homes. Unfortunately many fell into Italian hands and into ambushes carried out by Albanian armed gangs working with the Italians. One part managed to escape the Albanian ambush and returned back to its regiment. Many soldiers perished attempting to escape. The next day the remaining troops crossed the bridge in Merdzhani and entered Greek territory near the town Konitsa where they stayed a few days. On April 23 they entered Ianina and found it occupied by the German army.

There were many soldiers in Ianina and many more were arriving each day. Headquarters issued an order for the soldiers not to leave and to wait for new orders. Upon their arrival, the Germans took their weapons and confiscated their food. All the bakeries and shops in the city were closed and there was nothing for the multitudes to eat.

Slowly the soldiers began to leave the city.

Tsamburas from Kozhani, a retired Headquarters officer from the 2nd Battalion, was there telling the soldiers to go home, to go back to their villages. He informed the soldiers that their Headquarters was allegedly attempting to somehow transfer to Cairo and re-establish itself there. On April 26, 1940 most soldiers, including Mundushev, left Ianina and headed for home.

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While the sons of many Macedonian families died in the Albanian mountains defending Greece's honour, Tsaksiras's fanatical Greek faction never stopped persecuting the Mala Prespa Macedonian civilians; parents and relatives of the young men who died for Greece. Even during the most desperate times, these Greeks had Macedonians locked up in their prison simply because they felt Macedonian. Included among them was Mitre Kuzmanov from the village German whose son Ilia fought in the 33rd Regiment of the

Greek army. Mitre was sent to prison because he refused to adhere to Tsaksiras's wishes.

Macedonian awareness for liberation rises

With the German penetration into Greek territory, the Greek government troops and gendarmes, as well as the Greek administrative staff, including the teachers who were staying in Mala Prespa, fled Prespa via Kostur and went south into the Greek interior. In the meantime, before the new occupiers took hold, Mala Prespa was free like never before. Unfortunately, at the same time, the region became lawless. Those who felt brave broke into the military barracks and watchtowers and stole everything that was left behind including the military uniforms. They took their wagons and carts and stole everything they thought might be useful. The sentry booths were also looted. Even the doors and windows were taken from the barracks in R'bi. Some even climbed on the roof and began to remove the roof tiles but a number of older men told them to stop and they left.

The situation was quickly deteriorating and something had to be done to stop it and fast. Something needed to be done to stop the thugs from looting the abandoned public properties and from the violence because it was scaring the population. With no one to stop them the thugs escalated their criminal activities to terrorizing and robbing ordinary people. Wearing masks and disguises the thugs ran around the streets and mugged and pillaged people. Some stood at the crossroads and robbed everyone who passed by.

Some people in the villages, who were concerned about this, took matters into their own hands and began to form local councils and took initiatives to bring order to their villages. With its success in preventing crime, all villages eventually established local councils made up of respected elders. The councils vowed not to allow the Macedonian people to sink low on the moral scale. Their motto was: "We will not do what the Ottomans did to us for centuries and what the Greeks did to us for years…" The Macedonian councils even went as far as extending their protection to the Asia Minor Turkish Christian settlers and colonists. The protection offered by the councils stabilized the situation. All disputes arising in the villages were settled by the councils.

After Greece fell and the Italian front was abandoned, many Greek army soldiers, mostly Macedonians, were left at the front. After they ran out of food, the barely surviving soldiers, waiting for new orders, eventually decided to leave and go home. These soldiers were returning in groups or alone. When people who worked in the fields spotted them, they dropped everything and ran to welcome them back. Happiest were the parents of the soldiers who returned safe and sound.

On July 25, 1941 one of Cholakoglu's newly formed gendarme units was introduced into Mala Prespa. This was part of Cholakoglu's newly established security services. Cholakoglu was the leader of the quisling government installed in Greece by the occupiers. The composition of the new gendarmes consisted mostly of former gendarmes and supporters of Metaxas, who earlier were deployed in the former gendarmerie stations in Mala Prespa. Cholakoglu's people informed the population that the new gendarmes, together with the new government, would provide the necessary security for the people. Unfortunately the arrival of the quisling government in Mala Prespa brought with it unrest. The gendarme presence and activities practically sank the sagging morale of the population, especially when the gendarmes proved themselves to be faithful servants of the Germans and started collecting taxes for them.

For much of the population in the Mala Prespa villages nothing had changed. With the arrival of these undesirable gendarmes, it was like stepping back in time to the Metaxas dictatorship era when people were humiliated, tormented, tortured and imprisoned. The bitter life was back and there was no sight of it ending anytime soon. As their desire for freedom grew, one day the Mala Prespa villagers got together and agreed to protest against the quisling government and politely ask it to leave the villages. Unfortunately the gendarmes did not agree and told the people they had weapons and were not afraid to use them.

The wave of discontent among the people was the strongest and most effective in the village German. The same day the villagers protested and their request was turned down, they turned off the water to the gendarmerie. The villagers also agreed that no one was

to supply the gendarmes with food. And the people did exactly that. The gendarmes remained without food and water for days. From time to time overnight gunfire and machine gun bursts were heard through the village. In his panic the chief of the gendarmes made several attempts to contact the Germans in Lerin and establish a relationship with them, but without success. Finally, after four days of being isolated, the chief stuck a white flag out of this office window signaling that he wanted to leave. When he was given the signal, one by one his gendarmes left the building and together they left the village German and took shelter in the barracks in R'bi. Unfortunately for them, the people of R'bi were not too happy to have them in their village. So the reception they received in German followed them in R'bi. After returning from working in their fields, in the evening of June 29th the R'bi villagers got together in the village square and agreed to send a delegation to the barracks to tell the gendarmes to immediately leave the village. The delegation met with the chief who not only refused to leave but told them: "We are not leaving and are prepared to fight to the last man…" When the delegation returned it found about 100 men waiting in the square and more arriving. The situation was becoming very tense and word quickly spread to the other villages. Then, about 10 minutes later, a column of about 200 men was heard singing Macedonian revolutionary songs and approaching R'bi from German. By the time the column arrived about 350 Macedonian men in total had gathered and were singing Macedonian revolutionary songs. The men then marched to the R'bi barracks to demonstrate their displeasure. When they approached the R'bi bridge the quisling gendarmes opened fire on them. Not anticipating being fired upon, the demonstrators ran in panic. Some ran down the river and others fled back and ran down the village streets. About an hour later, when the situation calmed down, another group of villagers tried to go down to the barracks but they too were shot at. The gendarmes killed Mial Mundushev from R'bi and wounded Done Bechkov also from R'bi. During the night the gendarmes left the barracks and fled to Lerin.

About 10 days later the German army arrived in Mala Prespa with tanks and brought with it the gendarmes that had fled earlier. The Germans gathered all the people from the various villages together and threatened them with harm while demanding they surrender the

troublemakers. No one was surrendered. A while later, the German officer leading the German unit said: "We will forgive you this time but if this happens again your villages will be burned down and you will all be killed…" He then pointed to the gendarmes and said: "These people will remain here and will be your government. They are our people, they are the German government…" Several village men approached the officer and told him: "Regardless of whether they are part of your government or not, we just don't want them here and we have our own reasons…" The German officer became visibly upset and yelled: "Communists!" One of the men replied and said: "We are not communists, we are Macedonians… but they will not allow us to be Macedonians and they are trying to turn us into Greeks by force." The officer then looked at him and said: "We must have order here!" he then turned around and left. The gendarmes took their original positions and remained in the villages.

The gendarmes of the German-installed Greek quisling government were never recognized or accepted as a government in Mala Prespa by the Mala Prespa villagers. The gendarmes were there but were treated like they were not there. The Macedonian people in Mala Prespa went as far as speaking Macedonian and singing Macedonian songs, including songs about the Ilinden Uprising, in their presence. But the German-appointed gendarmes were not happy and constantly endeavoured to quell the strong Macedonian spirit. A barn was burned down in R'bi and no one knew at the time how the fire was started, but this incident gave the gendarmes reason to arrest 9 individuals and send them to 6 months in prison. Their hearing took place in Lerin and not once was the "burned barn" mentioned during their trial. These 9 people were sent to prison because they were accused of organizing an armed attack against the gendarmes in R'bi and of being rebels. Later it was revealed that the barn was intentionally burned down by the gendarmes to create a reason to round up the 9 individuals.

In the other part of Prespa, more precisely Dolna Prespa, the Italians were in control. Italian soldiers were stationed in the village Liuboino. The Markova Noga pass was also guarded by Italian troops. At some point, Italian Occupational Command stationed in Kostur and German Occupation Command stationed in Lerin made

an agreement to put Mala Prespa under Italian control. The Italians arrived in Mala Prespa in November 1941.

Mala Prespa under Italian occupation

When the Italians came to Mala Prespa they established military stations in the villages Orovo, R'bi, P'pli, German and Lok. They set their artillery batteries on Krina Hill, at Nivitsi Mountain. With the arrival of the Italians to Mala Prespa, the Greek-quisling gendarmerie left and went to Lerin. Mala Prespa was then placed under the Kostur administration.

About 10 days after the Italians established themselves in Mala Prespa, they invited the people of Prespa and demanded of them to surrender their weapons. This was in response to what they had been informed by the German authorities and by the Greek quislings of Mala Prespa. The Italians also asked the people to return some of the items that were taken from the R'bi barracks after the Greek army left. People were held in the barracks at R'bi for days and were grossly abused while being questioned about the weapons they allegedly possessed. The Italians did the same in the villages German, P'pli, Lok and Orovo. They summoned people from all the villages and kept them there for days while interrogating them about alleged weapons. A special Italian interrogation unit numbering about fifty soldiers was sent to R'bi exclusively for these interrogations. The Italian interrogators were accommodated in the R'bi barracks.

When all the Macedonian people from Mala Prespa were gathered together, summoned by the Italian special unit, the Italian officer in charge pulled out his notebook and, in the Macedonian language, read the words: "Those of you who have weapons are to bring them here immediately. Those who refuse to give up their weapons will be shot. You have one hour to surrender your weapons..." It was well understood that the Macedonians possessed weapons to defend themselves from the Greeks. An hour later the villagers were again summoned to appear before the Italians but no one was carrying weapons. When the officer saw that no weapons were brought back he went into a fit of rage. He ordered the people to line up in three columns. He grabbed his shmaizer (rifle) walked ten metres in front

of them and raised it ready to shoot. He stood there for 2 minutes aiming his gun at the people. Everyone was frozen with fear. He then said: “I will give you one more minute to step forward and speak up before I start shooting… Anyone who speaks will be spared…” He looked at his watch. Everyone was silent. He again looked at his watch and ordered his troops to escort the people to German where he said he was going to shoot them. The three columns of 150 people were escorted to German and locked up in one of the classrooms in the local school.

Packed together like sardines in a can, the villagers were left there for three days standing erect leaning against one another. During the same three days more people from German and from the other villages were brought to the same school and huddled in the other classrooms. The villagers were sorted by village and placed in separate classrooms under guard. The first day after their arrival, the officer had them taken out of the classrooms, one by one, and interrogated. He intimidated them by threatening them with violence and death while having his soldiers beat them with sticks, batons and belts. He blindfolded some and yelled at them very loudly: “Tell me, where is your weapon?! Tell me now or I will shoot you!” He then fired his hand gun towards the classroom windows in order to scare the others into thinking that he had killed them. He then had his soldiers tell one another, “the officer just killed another one”, and sometimes they gave a person’s name. After each person was interrogated they were taken to a separate classroom. The special Italian interrogation unit remained in Mala Prespa for 10 days during which it used several different ways of interrogation, tormenting and torturing the Mala Prespa population to uncover its stashes of weapons. The population endured the torture but did not succumb to the Italian interrogation and no weapons were discovered. The villages had weapons and the Italians knew it because the Greek army stationed in Mala Prespa left everything it had behind, including their weapons and ammunition because the soldiers did not want to be caught armed if they fell into enemy hands. The only soldiers who did carry their weapons were those returning from the Albanian front. Most of those soldiers were disarmed by the occupiers.

People were coming to Mala Prespa from as far as Epirus looking for work in the early spring of 1942, during the great famine. It is difficult to express the plight of these people who, with shovel and pick in hand, worked from dawn to dusk building a 200 km road leading to Mala Prespa, just to be given food for that day. The Prespa villagers had enough food and did not experience famine like these people but still they gave whatever they could to all who knocked on their door. They gave them food and drink and even sent some with them to take to their children. Most of the starving Macedonian soldiers sent down to Epirus after they left the Albanian front remember how it was for them and the kindness the people of Epirus showed them by giving them food and water when they were starving. It was only fair that the people of Prespa now pay them back with equal kindness. The most difficult part of this famine was to express the pain and suffering that came with it. “We were brothers at the front when we bled together fighting against Mussolini and they looked after us, gave us food and water and kept us in their homes over night when we passed through the villages of Epirus, Ianina and Kostur on our way back home. It is time now that we extend the same to them. We were obligated to them…” says Mundushev. The hardest and most shameful part about this period was when young women fell into the hands of Italian soldiers who took them away from their children, husbands and elderly parents who depended on them and held them as hostages, having their way with them, sometimes for weeks, to satisfy their passions. The Prespa villagers tried to hide their women from the Italians but sometimes they failed.

Mala Prespa was paradise for the Italians. In the summer of 1942 they made an inventory of all the sheep, cattle and other animals in Prespa Region and confiscated 20% of the livestock and took it to Kostur. After the first confiscation the Italians returned to the villages every month. Upon their arrival they ordered the people to bring their livestock home for the evening so that they could survey it. The next day the people were ordered to bring their livestock to the village square so that the numbers could be verified. The Italians then arbitrarily chose what to take and how many. The villagers were then forced to escort the confiscated livestock to Kostur on foot, 60 km away. When the harvest was collected in the fall the Italians took a portion of the wheat and beans sent it to Kostur.

Birth of Macedonian partisan groups and military detachments

Partisans began to appear in the Prespa mountains in the spring of 1943. With their appearance the Italian army began to take a much harsher stand towards the local population. They began to take more cattle and sheep and took whatever else they wanted without any kind of order. For the time that the Italians stayed in Mala Prespa more than three-quarters of the sheep and about half of the cattle were confiscated.

The Macedonian people from Greek occupied Macedonia, who, since Macedonia was invaded, occupied and partitioned in 1912, 1913, were oppressed by the Greeks, worked closely with the CPG, but now as Macedonians they had a need to connect to and cooperate with their Macedonian brothers and sisters in Serbian occupied Macedonia. As the first order of business, the Macedonians from Lerin Region began to cooperate with their comrades from Bitola Region in order to create a joint resistance movement and rise up against the occupiers. Included among the first Macedonians to rise up to the challenge of organizing such a movement was Ilia Dimovski-Gotse who, with his comrades, traveled between Bitola and Lerin in order to make the necessary connections. This cooperation began in the summer of 1941 and continued to strengthen with time. More contacts were made and more people became involved in 1942 when a number of illegal Macedonian immigrants from Bitola landed in Lerin. The comrades from Bitola greatly contributed to the rapid development of the liberation movement in Greek occupied Macedonia.

When the first partisans appeared in Vicho, Greek occupied Macedonia, in early spring of 1943, the Macedonians from Serbian Occupied Macedonia who were staying in Lerin decided to join them. Towards the end of 1942 a larger group of partisans, belonging to the “Iane Sandanski” detachment, created in September 1942 in the grove above the village Lavtsi, for a second time returned to the Lerin Region terrain and joined the Lerin Region detachment formed in early spring of 1943.

The “Dame Gruev” detachment was created on July 6, 1942 on Bigla Mountain above the village Zlateri. And, like the Bitola-Prespa detachment created in April 1943, it too slipped through to Mala Prespa and demonstrated its intentions in several villages, explaining the situation to the people that the Bulgarian occupiers in Serbian occupied Macedonia were no better than the Italians and Germans, and that they too terrorized and killed Macedonians. The detachment then moved to Lerin Region and established relations with the Lerin Vicho partisan detachment. The two detachments agreed to conduct joint actions in Lerin and Kostur Regions. One of the aims in this joint action was to demonstrate, through rallies and other means, the awareness of the Macedonian liberation struggle. This was one of the great achievements which resulted in the disarming of the Kostur Region village counter-bands.

On May 22, 1943 the detachment “Gotse Delchev” was formed on the slopes of Mount Vicho near the village Prekopana.

At the end of May 1943 the “Gotse Delchev” detachment arrived in the Mala Prespa villages and held several rallies. The Macedonian population not only received it with honours but was greatly astonished by its appearance.

The CPG District Committee for this region demanded that these detachments be disbanded and that the detachment composed of Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia also be disbanded and placed under ELAS command. So, in order to avoid problems, the Macedonian Party leadership agreed with the CPG and on June 1, 1943 ordered the detachment from Greek occupied Macedonia to be disbanded.

The detachment consisting of partisans from Serbian occupied Macedonia was ordered to leave. It went to Mount Pelister and from there it descended into the village Kaloizana, above Braichino. The detachment composed of fighters from Greek occupied Macedonia left for Mount Vicho where it acted in the areas around Radosh, Bigla and Kaimakchalan. The detachment from Serbian occupied Macedonia that was forced to leave the Macedonian territory often returned to Mala Prespa for short visits in order to raise the morale of the Macedonian people and to point them in the right direction;

towards Macedonia's liberation. These Macedonian partisans were always received with enthusiasm by the Macedonian population of Mala Prespa and were always given full support.

The Lerin detachment was later split into two detachments. One was named "Kaimakchalan" and the other retained its old name "Vicho". Then, after some consultations between the Lerin Region partisan leadership and the ELAS representatives from Lerin District, on June 20, 1943 an agreement was reached to reorganize the detachments. It was decided to move the detachments to new locations and rename some of them. The "Vicho" detachment was renamed to "Bigla" on account that it was moved to Bigla to act in that region and in Mala Prespa. After the reorganization was completed the detachments were moved to their new positions. The "Bigla" detachment was split into small groups and local activists were added to it to assist in its attacks against the Italians in R'bi, German, P'pli and Lok. These groups terrorized the Italians in R'bi, who, for the most part, barricaded themselves in the R'bi barracks waiting to be attached. The Italians definitely remained under guard in their barracks during the night. Their artillery that was positioned on Krina Hill occasionally fired shells near the villages during the night to ward off partisans. The Italians also imposed a curfew, prohibiting the population from movement from sunset to sunrise. The Italians used local men to guard them during the night. These men, with sticks in hand, were sent out in groups of three at night to roam the village streets where the Italians stayed.

With the presence of partisans in the region, the Italians soldiers become even more ruthless towards the local Mala Prespa population.

In April 1943, 20 villagers from the village German, who were extremely disappointed with the Greeks, were armed with firearms by the Italians.

Then when the "Gotse Delchev" detachment, led by Kole Kininski, arrived in German in early June 1943, the armed villagers surrendered their weapons and later a large number of them joined the partisans.

One night in August 1943 the "Bigla" detachment, commanded by Dimitar Tupurkovski from Oshchima with Giorgi Nedelkovski-Makedona as its commissar, attacked the R'bi barracks where the Italian army was stationed and killed and wounded many Italians and burned down part of the barracks. During the battle the Italian artillery at Krina Hill shelled areas near them and around the village, creating great panic and fear among the R'bi population. It was a real struggle as if fighting at a front.

After the partisans attacked the Italians in R'bi, the German army, stationed in Lerin, sent a motorized unit to drive the partisans out, but without success. Sometime before the end of August 1943, over 20 people were gathered together at the Garvan Mountain dairy in German Mountain. There were also some partisans among them. Unfortunately they were spotted by the artillery at Krina Hill. Artillery command informed air command in Korcha who then sent a bomber to bomb the mountain dairy, killing Andrea Petkov from the village German and wounding three others.

On September 10, 1943 the Italians left Prespa. The local population in R'bi was forcibly drafted to carry the Italians and their belongings on their horse-drawn wagons and take them to Liuboino. When they arrived at the hill facing Liuboino they were stopped by another Italian army group which had occupied the hill.

After several hours of waiting they were freed and they continued their trek to Liuboino. When the first wagons with the Italians arrived on the field in front of Liuboino, a partisan appeared in front of them. He was wearing a red scarf around his neck and in his right hand he firmly held a shmaizer (rifle). He was a partisan from the "Gotse Delchev" detachment which had arrived in Luboino to greet and disarm the Italian soldiers. But at that very moment a German motorized unit arrived and a battle broke out inside Liuboino. "I still remember that day watching that partisan run right through a line of Italians and they, moving aside to let him pass, were yelling: 'Bono partizano! Bono partizano!'…" says Mundushev. Also among the party transporting the Italians to Liuboino was Lazo Sekulov from R'bi. Sitting in the cart next to Mundushev, Sekulov said: "The partisans should now drop them off (meaning the Italians) in the Nakolets swamp and let them catch some frogs…" he then broke out

laughing. When they returned from Luboino they noticed the body of the partisan laying dead in the field. Two partisans were killed during the skirmish. While the battle was taking place the civilians from R'bi were sheltered in Stoian Iankulov's house. Much later a plaque was placed in the Liuboino field to honour the slain partisans.

Mala Prespa was freed during the fall of 1943. The Prespa population organized itself in the anti-fascist organizations primarily led by the CPG and EAM. Many joined the ELAS reserves and EPON. In December 1943, after its formation, the Macedonian population began to join SNOF. During this period Mala Prespa played a major role in the development of the resistance movement against the occupiers in Greek occupied Macedonia.

In the first half of October 1943 the "Gotse Delchev" detachment was stationed in the villages German, R'bi, Rudari and Nivitsi. The partisans were met with great enthusiasm by the Mala Prespa residents and were given huge support. On November 11, 1943 the partisans from the "Gotse Delchev" and "Dame Gruev" detachments were combined in the village Vineni to form the "Stiv Naumov" battalion.

According to Stoian Glogovets's diary, on December 7, 1943 the Macedonian-Kosovo Brigade left Debrtsa and headed for Prespa. Glogovets was commissar of this brigade. The brigade took a break in the village Goritsa for some rest and food. On December 8, 1943 the brigade passed through Pustets and arrived in Zrnosko where it spent the night. The next day, on December 9, 1943, it left early in the morning and arrived at the village Orovo. After a short rest the first battalion of this brigade, along with its Headquarters, continued on its way to the village Grazhdeno. The battalion rested here. Its soldiers were taken as guests into the various homes and were given food and refreshments. They also spent the night here. On December 10, 1943 they arrived in German. But the German bridge was destroyed so the partisans had to find another way to cross the river. The entire brigade along with is headquarters arrived in German. The fourth battalion was then ordered to go to the village Medovo. The rest of the brigade and its headquarters remained in German. The soldiers of the battalion sent to Medovo were accommodated by

the villagers in their own homes. The partisans were well looked after with food and accommodations. On December 11, 1943, under orders from the brigade commander, the battalion returned to German. Here it had to execute a Montenegrin deserter who had fled the prison camp in Solun. The Montenegrin was a former policeman serving the Italians. He had killed many people. He, along with others like himself, was imprisoned in the Solun prisons but escaped and was captured in the village Grazhdeno.

The brigade leaders held a speech in German during which they informed the population about the importance of the Macedonian struggle. After lunch the battalion was sent back to Medovo. Interestingly, according to Glogovats, the houses in Medovo were very beautiful with 2 or 3 floors. After spending the night in Medovo the battalion, on December 12, 1943, returned back to German. After spending some time in German the entire brigade and its headquarters left and, through the mountains, headed for Buf. The brigade was well received in Buf, after which it continued on its way to Kaimakchalan through Gorno and Dolno Kleshtino and through Krushoradi, where it was also well received by the local Macedonian population.

It is important at this point to emphasize the important role the Macedonian partisans from Serbian occupied Macedonia played in Mala Prespa during their visits. It was they who informed the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia of their obligations as Macedonians and pointed them in the right direction to struggle for their national freedom and independence. These detachments were well organized in large formations with iron clad discipline, and were determined to fight to the end in order to achieve their freedom and their national independence. Their morale was very high, especially among the younger men. The civilian Macedonian population in Greek occupied Macedonia admired their spirit and considered them their brothers and did everything in their power to help them. These partisans sang patriotic songs which moved the spirits and warmed the hearts of the population. There was one particular song which they heard often, which went something like this: “Your freedom is in front of you, pick up a gun and fight and you will have it, now is your time. If you don’t, you

will lose your chance, others will take it from you and you will remain without it, and who knows for how long…"

Bulgarians and the crimes they committed in Prespa

With Italy's capitulation on September 10, 1943, the Bulgarian occupation units, which up to now held Resen and the Makazi Pass, occupied the Prespa to Markova Noga villages along the Greek-Yugoslav border only 4 km away from the villages German and R'bi. The Bulgarians were well aware that partisans existed in these villages and were familiar with their fighting potential. They also knew that the general Prespa population supported the partisans and the Bulgarians were eager to do something about it. The local Prespa population was also well aware that the Bulgarians had not come here to do good.

"January 17, 1944 was a day I and all the villagers from my village prefer to forget. At about 9 o'clock in the morning, on this day, we heard gunfire and machine gun bursts all around our village. The small children, who at the time were out in their yards or playing in the streets, also heard the shooting and ran to their homes. The children, however, were not the only ones to loathe the Bulgarians. About 10 minutes later the shooting stopped and the Bulgarian soldiers ran down the village streets blocking the houses. The church bell then started ringing, signaling for the people to come to the village square for a village meeting. The Bulgarians did this every time they wanted to speak to the villagers. They gathered the population at meetings and made speeches demeaning the partisans, while pretending to be the liberators of Macedonia," says Mundushev. Then, while the villagers gathered at the village square, Bulgarian soldiers conducted searches in their homes looking for weapons and looting them.

One time a group of young men ages 17 to 20 were walking from German to R'bi and the moment they heard gunfire they fled down into the Gushaitsa Ditch, which itself led to R'bi. As they followed the ditch they decided to go up a creek towards Medovo. At that point they were spotted by Bulgarian soldiers who themselves were going to R'bi over the Medovo-R'bi Hill. They surprised the boys and caught them as they were fleeing. They had nothing to handcuff

them with so the Bulgarians cut some barbed wire they had found and tied their hands tight. Then they tied the boys together, again with barbed wire. The boys were tied so tightly that blood was dripping from their wrists and bodies. On top of that the boys were beaten by the soldiers with their rifle butts and kicked at every opportunity. One of the boys at one point lost his balance and fell down, and because they were all tied together all the boys fell down. But instead of being helped up, the soldiers beat them for having fallen down.

The Major, who was the highest ranking officer in the group of Bulgarian soldiers, an older man, perched on a horse, ordered his soldiers to take the boys to Markova Noga. When the villagers found out the boys were to be taken away, a number of older men from the same village pleaded with the Major to release them but he refused. So the boys were then taken to Markova Noga by force while being beaten and kicked all the way there.

Later a young officer appeared on the balcony at one of the houses in the village square and made a speech. Among other things, he said that the Bulgarians were strong and had a strong ally in the Germans, and together they would conquer this country and make it their own.

The young Macedonian boys who had escaped from the claws of the Gestapo and from the Germans in Lerin and Prespa Regions, and who came to save their lives by joining the partisans, were by misfortune caught by the Bulgarian fascists near the village Dolno Dupeni and, in a cruel manner, killed with picks and knives. This morbid incident shook the population of Prespa.

In honour of these massacred Macedonian boys, the Municipal Assembly of Resen raised a plaque near the Greek border and planted 7 pines trees.

Ten days after the incident, Bulgarian troops stormed the Watchtower in Markova Noga and invaded the liberated Prespa territory, arriving under the water mills in R'bi. This time, however, they ran into a Macedonian partisan unit visiting R'bi. The villagers who were left outside the village to act as lookouts saw the

Bulgarians and immediately informed the partisans. The partisans were not afraid of the Bulgarians and did not flee. They surrounded the Bulgarian soldiers cutting off their escape route and then attacked them. They killed one Bulgarian soldier and wounded two. The remaining troops broke through the encirclement and escaped across a field. They then hid in the reeds of a swamp where they remained until reinforcements came to save them. The partisans withdrew from the village but the Bulgarians did not enter it that day.

Macedonian-Kosovo Brigade visits Mala Prespa a second time

According to Stoian Glagovats's diary, the Macedonian-Kosovo Brigade, after a long and difficult journey, arrived in the village Lok in Mala Prespa early in the morning on April 23. The local population welcomed the partisans with much fanfare, gusto and offerings of food, drink and anything else that was needed. Then at 6 o'clock in the evening, with help from the local fisherman, the partisans boarded a number of boats, crossed Mala Prespa Lake and arrived in the village DR'bitishta. From there they traveled through the village Grazhdeno and in the morning of April 25, crossed the border and arrived on Albanian territory in the village Tserie. From there they went to Debrtsa and Karaorman.

Balists from Albania attack Mala Prespa

The Mala Prespa villages were attacked many times by Albanian Balists who often accompanied German search parties, looking in the houses for partisans and weapons and in the meantime looting the people's jewelry, carpets, blankets and everything valuable they could find. They also took chickens, lambs, rakia (brandy) and then fled. "I remember one such Balist attack in my village, which happened to coincide with a visit of a small partisan group that included two Englishmen from the English military mission in ELAS. The Balists were not opposed by the people and were given everything they asked for so that they would leave as soon as possible. The two Englishmen were impressed by how the general population handled the situation," says Mundushev.

In April 1944 the CPG decided to dissolve SNOF. The Macedonian people were left in disbelief.

Forming large Macedonian detachments

On August 2, 1944 the Lerin-Kostur battalion was created in the village Pozdivishta, Kostur Region, and was named "Gotse" after its commander Ilia Dimovski-Gotse. The "Gotse" Battalion fought fierce battles against the occupiers and inflicted great damage on them.

Macedonian language school for teachers opened in the village German

In early August 1944 preparations were made to open Macedonian schools for the 1944/45 academic year. For this purpose 20 young Macedonians, who had already graduated from Greek school as teachers, were sent to German to prepare a program and lessons to introduce Macedonian language classes. When everything was ready and classes were about to begin, the teachers were withdrawn by order of ELAS Headquarters. Apparently, according to ELAS, it was forbidden to teach Macedonian in schools. The population was waiting with great interest to see the first Macedonian teachers but was very disappointed. It was suspected that this order was issued by the CPG and EAM leaderships.

Greek resistance leadership liquidates Macedonian partisan movement

The CPG Central Committee leadership, during its preparations to sign the Kaserta Agreement with the Greek government in exile, decided to disband the Macedonian battalion. The Macedonian leaders, however, did not agree with this decision and, to avoid bloodshed, they decided to transfer the Macedonian battalion over to Yugoslavia where it could continue to fight against the Germans. ELAS wanted to break up the Macedonian battalion by force and was ready to attack it. Many of the units belonging to the Macedonian battalion, on their way to Yugoslavia, passed through Mala Prespa and visited the people of German and R'bi where they were met with enthusiasm. At that time many young people from the

Mala Prespa villages joined these units and fought in Yugoslavia. Later a Greek ELAS unit arrived in Mala Prespa and arrested a number of people from the various villages in retaliation.

The Varkiza Agreement killed the resistance movement in Greece

On February 12, 1945 the Varkiza Agreement was signed between representatives from the CPG and EAM and between representatives from Papandreou's Greek government in exile. This Agreement, which called for ELAS and the resistance movement to lay down its arms, marked the final defeat of the resistance movement in Greece. After this it became very clear to the Macedonian people in Mala Prespa that Mala Prespa was going to be given to the same Greeks that held it before. It was clear to the people that their torment would begin anew and their countless sacrifices and the blood they spilled during the struggle would be for nothing.

The Greek Civil War comes to Mala Prespa – Monarcho-Fascists perpetrate terror

On May 14, 1945 the Greek Monarcho-Fascist army arrived in Mala Prespa and settled its soldiers and its other security services in people's houses. The moment they arrived the Greeks immediately started their terror campaign. The same day they arrived in R'bi, the Greek army officer in charge summoned the people of R'bi and told them that this place today was Greece and from now on everyone was to speak Greek and only Greek. Those who didn't like it were free to leave now, and with his hand pointed towards the Yugoslav border located 3 km north from the village. He then imposed a curfew on the villagers. He told them they could not travel outside their village limits without authorization and that in special cases only, they would need to acquire a one-time travel pass from the military. The same day he ordered all work in the fields to be done only between sunup and sunset. Anyone found in the fields outside of this timeframe would be shot on sight.

Fearing the worst, many Macedonian men left their homes and villages and either took shelter in the mountains and forests, or crossed over the Yugoslav border.

A few days later a group of armed soldiers, together with some armed civilians from the Asian Minor colonist neighbourhoods such as the Shaovtsi from German and the Bostandzhiovtsi from R'bi, broke into the houses of the men who had left the villages and looted them and stripped them of their valuables including furniture and groceries. They also stole their sheep and slaughtered them and feasted on them to frighten the population so that it would leave. They also took 6 women from R'bi whose husbands had fled and put them in a prison in Lerin, initiating a massive campaign of detentions and torture.

On June 14, 1945 the same officer in R'bi, mentioned earlier, gathered all the men in R'bi, lined them up in rows of three and had his soldiers escort them to the police station in the village German. The people were left outside of the police station under guard for an hour. Then the gendarmerie chief for Lerin Region came out and read out the names of seven people from R'bi. The gendarmes immediately removed these men and had them handcuffed. They then loaded them in a military truck and sent them to a prison in Lerin. Four of these men were later taken to the Cassandra prison camps.

On June 18, 1945 the Monarcho-Fascist gendarmes gathered all the people in the village Polpli and arrested 10 men and women. They then tied them up, loaded them on a truck and sent them to a prison in Lerin. From there they sent them to the prison camps in Cassandra. Included among those taken from P'pli were Risto Ioshev and Stoian Angelov. Both men were killed in May 1947. This terror had forced many of the former resistance fighters to again go to the mountains and form armed groups.

On June 22, 1945 Georgios Iatrakas, a former police officer who had served in P'pli, who was also a German spy and who had difficulties changing his old habits, was killed in P'pli. He was shot at dawn. News of his murder quickly reached all the villages. Fearing the worst, that somehow this murder was going to be pinned on the Macedonians, the people fled the villages. The men left and hid in the reeds at the Mala Prespa lakeshore. The women left the villages and went to work in the fields. About an hour later a unit of soldiers

arrived in P'pli square from Zhelevo. The armed soldiers jumped out of their trucks and besieged village. They forcibly broke into houses, breaking doors down and searching every room. No one knows what they were looking for but when they were done they had looted all the homes. They stole valuables such as clothes, jewelry, precious ornaments, gold coins including necklaces with gold coins that brides wore during wedding ceremonies. Several elderly women and some younger women who remained behind were rounded up and marched to the village square where they were loaded on a truck, taken to Zhelevo and locked up in the village school. The soldiers also wanted to burn down all the houses but because the Macedonian houses were together with the houses of the Asia Minor colonists, they decided against it. The women who were taken to Zhelevo were kept there for 20 days. They were tortured and beaten to unconsciousness every day. One of the women, Tsvetkoitsa Kekienova, was beaten to death. Her husband was suspected of being one of conspirators who murdered Iatrakas. Some of the men who had left to hide, particularly the older ones, could not return to their homes because too many times the Asia Minor colonists had accused them of being part of the "Ohrana", a Bulgarian fascist organization, and too many times had told them to leave R'bi and go to Bulgaria.

On July 15, 1945 the P'pli chief of police, a man named Sarandopoulos, with his gendarmes, a number of soldiers and his armed spies from the Asia Minor colonist communities, during the night surrounded Nikola Steriovski's house in Orovnik. Steriovski at the time was CPG Regional Secretary for Mala Prespa. They captured Steriovski and took him to a cornfield at the bottom of the village. Then, according to eyewitness testimony, they tortured him by pulling out his finger and toenails, by poking him with knives and by cutting his veins. They tortured him all night until he died. This crime shook the entire population of Mala Prespa.

On August 22, 1945 six residents from the village German were abducted outside their village and taken to a prison in Lerin.

On August 27, 1945 three people from German and six from Orovo were abducted and taken to prison in Lerin.

On August 29, 1945 a Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit surrounded the village Besfina, shot at the residents and then looted their houses. They took whatever they could get their hands on including honey and sheep, and as they were leaving the village they abducted a woman and took her with them to their camp in Lerin.

On August 30, 1945 the same Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit surrounded Bukoik and abducted three men and brought them to the prison in Lerin.

On August 30, 1945 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit surrounded a small region in Prespa called Afrika and killed two and wounded several unarmed villagers. Afrika Region encompasses the villages of the western part of the lake including Nivitsi, Vineni, Orovo, Grazhdeno, Trnaa and DR'bitishta.

On September 9, 1945 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit searched the village Strkovo and arrested two women.

On September 16, 1945 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit again attacked Strkovo. The rampaging government troops surrounded the village and, after searching the houses, arrested 7 men and 4 women.

On October 10, 1945 the same Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit attacked Rudary and arrested 15 men.

On October 15, 1945 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit again surrounded and attacked Strkovo. That day 17 men were accused of conducting autonomist activities and were arrested.

From October 20 to 24, 1945 the village German was surrounded by gendarmes and the army, during which time all the houses were searched and 65 men and women were arrested. They were taken to the local police station in German where they were tortured and abused and then they were sent to the prisons in Lerin.

In November 1946 the Monarcho-Fascists went from village to village and searched every house. If a male family member was nowhere to be found that family faced confiscations. They

confiscated food and movable items. Most of these confiscations, however, were committed by the Asia Minor colonists who closely followed the Monarcho-Fascist armed search groups.

On November 16, 1945 German was again surrounded and attacked. This time 70 men and women, accused of being autonomists, were arrested and taken away.

The terror campaigns continued all through the autumn and winter. The Monarcho-Fascists, aided by individuals from the Asia Minor colonist communities, relentlessly persecuted and harassed the Macedonian people, continuously calling on them to leave their homes and go away. To go away on their own before they were expelled by them.

On March 5, 1946 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit attacked the village Lok and arrested 12 men and 3 others from the village Bukoik.

On March 31, 1946 parliamentary elections were held in Greece. The terror campaign was escalated before and during the election. The Asia Minor colonist spies relentlessly threatened to expel all those Macedonians who refused to go to the polls. On the day of the elections the same Asia Minor colonist spies stood in front of the polling stations, handing the voters marked ballots and watched them to make sure they deposited them in the ballot boxes.

On May 1, 1946 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit again attacked Lok and harassed the population.

On May 9, 1946 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit attacked Trnaa and arrested 8 people.

On June 10, 1946 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search unit surrounded the village Besfina and for several days severely tortured the population. This was because the Macedonian villages sang Macedonian songs and danced Macedonian dances during the Easter holidays. They arrested 40 men and women and mercilessly beat them and after that they sent them to prison in Lerin.

On July 28, 1946 government troops again surrounded Besfina and arrested 4 men.

On August 29, 1946 Besfina was again attacked and looted. One woman was arrested and all the sheep were taken.

On August 30, 1946 the Monarcho-Fascist armed search gangs surrounded Bukoik and arrested 3 men.

These are just some of the many terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Greek Monarcho-Fascists in Mala Prespa in 1945 and 1946.

Terror escalates with the emergence of Macedonian armed bands

Due to the fierce terror campaigns perpetrated by the Greek Monarcho-Fascists, illegal armed groups began to pop up in the mountains of Mala Prespa during the spring of 1946. These were Macedonian armed groups who were fed up with how the Macedonian people were treated and began to fight back against the gendarmes and Greek military in Mala Prespa.

The Monarcho-Fascist authorities with their mobs relentlessly harassed the Macedonian population in Mala Prespa. The atrocities they committed against the Macedonian people are difficult to describe. The previous action taken to "Hellenize" the Macedonian population was now upgraded to include killing and expulsion of Macedonian people from their ancestral homes. The aim of the great pressure put on the people, with the killing and jailing, was to force them to leave their homeland. The people who did not leave and decided to remain at home were living under the most difficult conditions imaginable. They did not know when there would be a knock on the door and who would be knocking. They feared for their lives every time the dog barked in the yard. They lived in anticipation that at any moment the soldiers, gendarmes and their spies would break the door down, enter the houses and kill them. Even if they were taken alive they were not sure if they would make it to jail or be killed on the way. Even if they survived all that, they were still unsure how they would be judged and what verdict the military courts would reach. And even if they were found not guilty

and escaped a death sentence, they were not sure that they would wake up alive in the morning. Even if they survived this time, there was always the next time… and the cycle of life and death and great fear, continued. People lived day to day in never ending fear.

As the number of partisans grew and made their presence in the villages, the Monarcho-Fascist mercenaries and gendarmes became angrier and angrier. The chief of police at the German police station, a man named Gizas who was also police chief of all of Mala Prespa, was a man without human feelings. He used his extensive network of gendarmes, soldiers, policemen and spies, from the Asia Minor colonist communities, to spread terror in the Macedonian villages. Every day Gizas had his goons round up men, women and girls from the villages and bring them to the various gendarmerie stations in Mala Prespa. He kept them there for days and sometimes weeks. He had them beaten and tortured in the most primitive ways. He accused them of having committed all sorts of crimes and wanted them to acknowledge things they had not seen or done. He then had them loaded onto trucks and sent to prisons in Lerin. And when all the prisons were full, he had them locked up in barns.

Gizas, better known as Mala Prespa's executioner, who had already dragged hundreds of people from the Mala Prespa villages to the police station in German and P'pli, who had them tortured and murdered and then sent to the prisons in Lerin, and who had the courts in Lerin find them guilty and sentenced to death, was still thirsty for more blood. During the night of April 27, 1946, after midnight, Gizas had 40 men and 6 women arrested in the village German, and after he had them tortured he sent them to the prison in Lerin. Then these people, along with others abducted on November 16, 1946, were tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. They were executed on October 28, 1948 in Lerin. Included among those executed were Metodia Torkov, Stoian Iankov, German Boglev, Vasil Belev, Fote Mechkarov, Stoian Liangov, Vangel Chetelev, Ioshe Iovanov, Andreia Ivanov, Lazo Rusev, Vangel Nushev, German Babinkostev and German Mladenov. It is difficult to express the suffering that the Macedonian people endured in this region while being tormented and tortured by the Greek gendarmerie and other Greek military units and armed bands during this period, when these monsters existed in Mala Prespa. It is also equally

difficult to express the will of the Macedonian people; still resisting after all that was done to them. It is worthwhile mentioning at this point that the 13 young men mentioned above, who were sentenced to death in the Lerin prison, on the day of their execution they were loaded onto trucks, and while being driven on the main street in Lerin in the night they sang aloud the song "Vo borba, vo borba Makedonski narode" (To battle, to battle Macedonian nation). Many of the people in Lerin ran to their windows thinking that the partisans had taken Lerin. When the executioners had the young men line up in front of the firing squad, near the already dug graves, the boys again sang revolutionary songs and, before being shot, yelled "We die for Macedonia's freedom".

This deplorable and ghastly act shook all of Lerin and Prespa.

The material that UNRA donated after WW II, which was intended to be distributed among the war-torn civilian population, was in fact taken by a few people, mostly by the armed spies who worked against the people and who, at the time, no one was able to resist.

Lazo Kiuchukot, an Asia Minor colonist from the Shaovtsi settlement, a warden responsible for the water supply in R'bi, with his rifle over his shoulder broke into Nikola Stoianov's house and began to yell demanding that Nikola give him his red rooster because Lazo apparently liked to eat red roosters. But Nikola had partisan guests in his home who immediately disarmed him and threatened him with harm. Lazo never bothered Nikola again.

Ilia, the forester from the village German, along with two Greek gendarmes, came out of Apostole's bar in R'bi and headed for the village German. They were drunk and swaggered like fools as they went down the road. On their way they expressed their love to all the women they passed by in the dusk, returning from the water spring. On the other side of the road partisans were visiting Petre Vidinov at his house. The partisans became very angry when they heard how the three were treating the women and were ready to murder them. Petre stopped them because, as Petre said, an incident like this will give the Monarcho-Fascists an excuse to destroy the entire village. These are the kinds of conditions of violence and

lawlessness the Macedonian people had to live through in the hands of the Greek government.

The Macedonian partisan units during this period acted independently and separately from those of DAG. The two forces were not unified until November 21, 1946. Combined they were stronger and were able to carry out broader actions against the Monarcho-Fascist army.

The Agreement to combine forces was signed in the village Turie, Lerin Region.

United Nations Commission investigating Greek allegations

A United Nations Special Investigation Commission paid a visit to Greece in the spring of 1947 to investigate the situation on the ground which the Greek government, the main culprit that created it, was blaming on its neighbours Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. So in order to present the Commission with the actual picture of the situation on the ground, especially regarding the terror waged against the Macedonian people, the Mala Prespa resistance organizations, in cooperation with the organizations of other villages and regions, prepared a memorandum and was ready to deliver it to the Commission the moment it arrived in Mala Prespa. There were also individual people who traveled far and risked their lives to meet with the Commission in person and provided it with evidence of the terror perpetrated by the Greek state authorities. Even though it was very difficult to talk to the Commission because Gizas Sarandopoulos's people were threatening everyone with death, people who were determined found ways to do it.

Unfortunately the Commission did not visit Mala Prespa, so the people who prepared the memorandum, including the many signatures they collected from the population, sent it to DAG headquarters. It is also important at this point to mention that activists Stoian Angelov and Risto Ioshev, after serving their sentences in Cassandra and being released, again became involved in resistance related activities. On April 23, 1947 they were again arrested for gathering materials to be given to the UN Inquiry Commission, and after the Commission left Greece they, along with

40 other Macedonians and Greeks, were tried in a military court in Lerin and 22 of them were sentenced to death. Included among those who were sentenced to death were Risto Ioshev, Stoian Dimovski from P'pli and Ioanidis, a physician from Lerin and EAM Regional Committee secretary. They were executed on July 27, 1947.

Instead of subsiding, as expected, the terror campaign during the UN Commission's visit to Greece was further escalated in Mala Prespa.

On March 24, 1947, at 2 o'clock in the morning, the Greek Monarcho-Fascist army surrounded R'bi. For about an hour the gendarmes and their spies broke into people's houses and apprehended 26 men and 6 girls, right out of their beds. A truck was waiting for them at the bridge over the river onto which the people were pushed and prodded and loaded like cattle. From there they were taken to P'pli and locked up in a barn.

While in the barn Sarandopoulos, the rabid chief of the gendarmerie, began to shout at them calling them agents if Ohrana (Bulgarian fascist organization in Macedonia) and swearing and cursing at them using vulgar words and threatening to kill them all and burn down their houses.

The chief was so rabid, his teeth were chattering and his hair was straggly, he looked more like an animal than a man. The next day he, personally, and his goons beat the people so badly that they could not recognize one another.

About 10 days later Sarandopoulos sent the captives to the prisons in Lerin where they were tried by a military court and sentenced to ten years of hard labour.

On April 17, 1947 30 men and 6 women were arrested in German. Sarandopoulos was determined to break the population's spirit and have them lose faith in the struggle as well as reduce the number of people actively participating and helping the partisan movement. The people arrested in German were accused of being active participants in helping the UN Inquiry Commission gather materials.

By now the partisan movement had grown in numbers and strength and was able to liberate Mala Prespa. The population was also willing and ready to help. Even the main road from Lerin to Mala Prespa, a stretch of about 65 kilometres, was under partisan control. The only way the government army could supply the Mala Prespa gendarmerie was through brute force. In order to deliver a truckload or two with supplies, the trucks had to be accompanied by a large unit of army soldiers.

On May 10, 1947 the partisans attacked the police station in Lok. After a few hours of fierce fighting, the station fell into partisan hands. Only two gendarmes survived by, in the midst of the firefight, managing to hide in a pigsty. When the battle was over they fled the village and hid in the lake reeds. They then swam through the reeds and arrived in Graishta and from there, all wet and muddy, they arrived at the police station in P'pli where Sarandopoulos was staying at the time. The partisans succeeded in taking this police station because they had help from the villages Lok, Bukovik, Orovnik and most of all Besfina, where the partisans were sheltered in preparation for the attack.

The gendarmes who survived the battle delivered the terrible news to the government army. This struck fear in Sarandopoulos's heart because of few days later he left Mala Prespa and went to Lerin. Sometime later, 8 soldiers from the Greek army stationed in Orovo deserted and surrendered to the partisans. Afraid that more soldiers were going to desert, and for safety reasons, the Greek officers decided to move the gendarmes out of the Mala Prespa villages and concentrated them all in R'bi. All the Asia Minor colonist spies and aids to Gizas Sarandopoulos, and Sarandopoulos himself, also moved to R'bi.

The Greek military in R'bi dug trenches and in some places in the village built bunkers and set itself in wait for an attack from the partisans. When the soldiers found out that the Prespa-Lerin road link was under partisan control, they began to lose faith in their officers. A group of 10 soldiers then fled R'bi and surrendered to the partisans. This undermined the tranquility and confidence of the Greek military. Even the armed Asia Minor colonist gangs began to feel uncertain. Then one day the partisans made threats that they

would attack R'bi. At this point Sarandopoulos lost complete confidence in his abilities and abandoned his command. The soldiers and officers despised him for the malevolence. Feeling insecure and afraid of falling into partisan hands, Sarandopoulos again fled to Lerin.

Day and night the Greek Monarcho-Fascist army lay in the trenches expecting an attack at any moment. The longer the soldiers waited the more their morale dropped. They were now expecting that a massive attack was being prepared and their fear kept increasing with time. Their situation continued to deteriorate so they turned to the Asia Minor colonists to rescue them. Then, without anyone firing a single gun shot, on May 25, 1947 the Monarcho-Fascists came out of the trenches. The military together with the gendarmes, Asia Minor colonists, Asia Minor colonist spies, their families and their household possessions were all loaded on horse-drawn wagons. They left Mala Prespa in a long column and headed for Lerin. After that Mala Prespa was free.

When the column crossed over Bigla Peak heading for Lerin, the partisans attacked the army which immediately withdrew. In Lerin in the meantime preparations were being made to defend the city. According to eyewitness testimonies, from the people who were there with their horse-drawn wagons, forced to transport household items for the Asia Minor colonists, Lerin was expecting a massive attack from the partisans. In the skirmish at Bigla, Ioshe Stamkov from R'bi who was taken forcibly was killed. The next day a funeral was held in R'bi which was attended by the partisans and many Mala Prespa villagers.

Mala Prespa a free territory for the Partisans

After the government troops and gendarmes left Mala Prespa it again became a free territory for the partisans. The Mala Prespa population was able to invite the partisans, and sons of the Macedonian people, to freely visit their villages and homes and, with them, to participate in the struggle. The organizations NOF and AFZH, which were up to now operating secretly, were able to operate openly and recruit new members to replace those who had been sent to prison. People were now free to join AKE, the agrarian

party. And to make that happen Mala Prespa was visited by Papous, a member of the Executive Bureau and Vice President of AKE, who came to Mala Prespa to create the first cooperative through which the partisans would be supplied with food and clothing, and the general civilian population would be supplied with discretionary items like salt and sugar. German Velianichki was appointed President of the cooperative and Kosta Mundushev (author of this book) was appointed his deputy.

Ten days later, after everything was finalized, the food and clothing collection for the partisans was started. Every day carts pulled by horses and donkeys were loaded with food and clothing and delivered to the partisans.

On June 18, 1947 several carts were loaded with wheat and beans and taken to Breznitsa. While returning the ox-drawn carts were spotted by Greek aircraft. After the Partisan base was discovered the aircraft bombed the carts, during which time 65 year-old Traian Giorgievski was killed and several oxen were wounded.

Mobilizing the Macedonian population into DAG and into other revolutionary operations

In the second half of June, 1947, by order of DAG Supreme Command, all people ages 19 to 25 were mobilized into DAG's ranks. In August 1947, by orders of DAG Supreme Command, all men under the age of 35 and all women between 17 to 25 years of age were to be mobilized. So in the months of July and August, 1945, about 850 men and 400 women were mobilized from Mala Prespa alone. Now if we add the other 100 or so people who had taken up arms before that, we would have over 1,350 armed partisans in DAG from Mala Prespa alone. This means that more than 20% of the total Mala Prespa population was mobilized in DAG alone.

There were also around 400 men and women from Mala Prespa in the Greek prisons, not to mention that many Macedonians also worked behind the scenes in Mala Prespa. All in all a great number of Macedonian people were committed to the resistance movement

in Greek occupied Macedonia, with over 10,000 partisans fighting in DAG alone.

After Mala Prespa was freed from the Monarcho-Fascists, the Greek resistance movement appointed a new chief in the region. All that we knew about him is that he was a Greek from Thessaly. He belonged to the DAG Supreme Command. His attitude towards the Macedonian people was strange at best, which caused suspicion and anxiety among the Macedonians, especially about the Greek resistance leadership's intentions towards the Macedonians even though the official Greek proclamation towards them was positive. About a month after he took office, the security chief killed Miana Steriov from Rudari and Risto Kaptelov from Strkovo because they were supposedly pro-government regime supporters, but that was never proven.

In 1947 NOF opened a school in Mala Prespa and wanted to start teaching in the Macedonian language. For this reason 20 Macedonian teachers were assembled in German and put through a Macedonian instruction course, which lasted from November 1 to November 20. But the new security chief from Thessaly spoke to a number of Macedonian and a larger number of Asia Minor colonists to request from DAG that Greek be taught alongside with Macedonian. He also told Macedonian parents that if they sent their children to Macedonian school they would turn into fools. By the fall of 1947 only Macedonian schools operated in the Mala Prespa villages. The Thessalian security chief was eventually replaced at NOF's insistence.

In 1947 DAG took extensive actions against the government army and the gendarmerie. By now DAG had over 10,000 fighters and by April 1948, that number grew to 25,000. By early September 1949 about 7,800 fighters were operating in western Greek occupied Macedonia. This goes to show that the largest part of this force was Macedonian from western Greek occupied Macedonia and from Mala Prespa. At this time the partisans had decided to attack and seize several cities including Grevena, Komotini, Konitsa, Mechovo as well as some larger villages. The majority of participants in these partisan actions were Macedonians. Many partisans were killed in these bloody battles. Over 650 partisans were killed in the battle for

Konitsa alone. It was devastating for Mala Prespa when the bad news began to arrive.

In October 1947 elections were held in the Mala Prespa villages to select new village councils. Kosta Mundushev (author of this book) was elected president.

After DAG took action against the government regime, the Monarcho-Fascists went after the families in the villages in western Macedonia, who had family members fighting in DAG, exiled them and seized their properties. In November and December 1947 over 200 of these families, consisting mainly of elderly adults, women and children, were left homeless and had to move to the villages P'pli, R'bi and German.

Creating a partisan caretaker government

On December 23, 1947 the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece was created. Two days later, on December 25, 1947, the villagers from R'bi were moved to German. It was a cold day and a lot of snow had fallen; up to the knees. The villagers didn't know why they were being moved and didn't want to move. They wanted to stay home together with their families to look after their livestock; feed and water their oxen, horses, donkeys, sheep and so on. Their resettlement from R'bi to German was ordered by General Markos Vafiadis, supreme commander of DAG's forces. The next day the DAG officers' academy, the school for non-commissioned officers and the school for the public militia were settled in R'bi. The district board for Lerin Region and the agricultural cooperative board for Lerin Region were settled in P'pli. The provisional democratic government of Greece was settled in Vineni. Hospitals were established in Nivitsi and Grazhdeno. In the spring of 1948 the CPG Central Committee was settled in Vineni and later DAG General Headquarters was also moved there. In essence, Mala Prespa became the capital of the resistance movement. To support all these activities many hidden underground warehouses were established all over Mala Prespa. They were made with large poplar logs. All the poplar trees in this region that had been growing for decades were cut down just for this purpose.

During 1948 and 1949 Mala Prespa was a training centre to train DAG officers. The entire DAG establishment was also managed from Mala Prespa. All decisions made by the CPG and provisional government were also made here.

With the establishment of schools, hospitals and DAG administration centres, a large number of partisans and various personnel from all over Greek occupied Macedonia and Greece were present in the Mala Prespa villages. They were there to be treated in the hospitals, to learn in the schools and to attend various meetings. It was also a rest area for wounded fighters before returning to combat. The villages in this area were often attacked by the Greek air force that flew its planes individually or in squadrons. They descended low over the villages and dropped bombs on the houses and roads. Sometimes they dropped napalm bombs on the houses, which caused large fires to erupt and smoke and dust to be raised covering the village like fog. These attacks often left devastation behind, dead and wounded people, destroyed houses, blown up bridges and large craters on the roads.

The pigs were not slaughtered in the winter of 1947 and 1948 because there was a lack of salt and the meat could not be preserved. The people began to use their cheese and pickled vegetable brine in place of salt until it ran out. The people then began to eat their food and bread without salt. The agricultural cooperatives, through DAG, made every effort to supply the population with the necessary products including salt, but for a while no salt was available. The first supplies of salt began to arrive in Mala Prespa towards the end of February 1948.

Monarcho-Fascist aircraft bomb Macedonian school in German

About 500 children from German and R'bi were attending Macedonian classes in the large school in German. This was the first time in Mala Prespa's history that such a large number of Macedonian students were taught in their mother tongue. Because of this the Greek Monarcho-Fascists continued to bomb the school in German while classes were held and when the school was full of children. The provisional democratic government of Greece, in response to the bombings, made great efforts to save the children. It

proposed that all children under the age of 16 be taken out of the war zones and sent to Yugoslavia and to the other people's republics. With this plan the children would be rescued from the daily bombings and aircraft attacks and their mothers would be freed to support the war effort. Many were sent to the front as regular DAG fighters.

On February 28, 1948, at 7 o'clock in the morning, the children were in their classrooms sitting at their desks as they were every day, waiting for classes to begin. Except this morning the teachers said that there would be no classes and sent the students home. The teachers decided to have a teacher's meeting that day.

At 7:30 the same morning people heard aircraft noises coming from the direction of the village Buf. Suddenly 3 bombers appeared over German and dropped dozens of bombs and napalm on top of the school in German. Most of the bombs missed the school and landed in the yard and surrounding houses. One bomb hit the corner of the school and caused most of the school to collapse. There were many children playing in the school yard before the bombers arrived. When they heard the aircraft approaching German most fled. When the teachers heard the aircraft they all ran outside. Whatever children remained in the yard they took to the bomb shelters. They grabbed the children and ran. Several houses were hit by napalm and burned down and so did some of the surrounding houses. Two women were killed. The strong explosion and blasts smashed the glass in most of the school windows as well as the windows of most houses in the vicinity.

According to observations, about 20 minutes after the first aerial attack took place a second squadron of 7 aircraft, the spitfire kind, attacked German from the hill behind the village. This time the aircraft appeared without being heard. The planners of these bombings had calculated the approximate time when the people would be coming out of the shelters and onto the streets before they attacked again. They knew that the parents of the school children would be frantic looking for their children and so they used the opportunity to inflict maximum damage. What they didn't count on was that the school would be empty that day. As luck would have it, most of the children were at home with their parents. There were,

however, some children who had not returned home. There were also those who did not know that the children were dismissed that morning and assumed they were all killed when they saw the school had collapsed. Those mothers whose children did not return home, along with some of their neighbours, frantically ran to the school looking for them. The streets around the school were filled with people, at which point the aircraft swooped down on them firing rockets and machine gun bursts and dropping bombs and spreading death over the entire village. The second round of attacks lasted half an hour. Under the smoke and dust cover lay the dead and wounded and the burning houses and barns. All sorts of noises filtered through the thick smoke; the roar of wounded cattle, dogs howling and the moans of the wounded people. All those who could walk quickly ran out of the village looking for safer ground. The village was devastated. People were crying and calling for help from inside the cloud of smoke, hoping for someone to come and save them. During the second attack one girl, two women and one man were killed and over 20 were wounded.

"The salt had arrived in Mala Prespa and February 28, 1948 was the day that we, the people from R'bi, were dividing our salt with the people of German. We were all waiting outside the store, about 70 of us when the attack took place.

The next day we were at the cemetery attending the funeral and burying those who were killed. The remains of the dead were buried next to one another as the R'bi and German villagers mourned and paid their respects to their dead relatives, friends and fellow villagers…" says Kosta Mundushev.

This was a deliberate and massive attack in an attempt to destroy the Macedonian population and cannot be considered less than a crime against humanity and genocide, which was no different than the genocide perpetrated against Jews in the various concentration camps by Hitler in World War II.

A lot of people had had just about enough of the Greeks and the next evening, on March 1, 1948, many from both German and R'bi decided to flee to Yugoslavia. A few days later the newspaper "Demokratis" an organ of DAG, announced that over 600 people,

mostly mothers with young children and old men and women from the villages German and R'bi, fled to Yugoslavia after a massive air strike on a school in German in which about 500 students were taught in their mother tongue. The number of people who left, however, was much higher. The masterminds of the attack knew that many would flee after a large bombardment. And they were not wrong.

In the month of April 1948, by order of the provisional democratic government of Greece, all children up to age 16 were to be moved to Yugoslavia and hence to the People's Republic of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania.

The cooperatives were now activated and all the sheep were passed on to them. The young people who were disabled or unable to fight in DAG were put in charge of shepherding the flocks of sheep. The sheep were milked twice a day and the milk was delivered to the sheepfold in Strkovo, which processed it and made cheese for the partisans. All the fields were also turned into cooperatives and worked jointly. Fishing cooperatives were also created and staffed by the older fisherman from the fishing villages. The entire free population had joined the cooperatives but still there were shortages of manpower.

Government troops attack DAG in Gramos

In June 1948 the Monarcho-Fascist government army launched a large-scale offensive against DAG in Gramos. The partisans fought bravely in their defense of this mountain but the enemy possessed more troops and the latest weapons, while the partisans who defended this mountain were in need of both ammunition and food. While the partisans had children fighting on their side, the Greek army had well-trained and well-armed soldiers on its side. And while these children fought to the death, their parents from the nearby villages in Kostur, Lerin and Mala Prespa Regions assisted them with horseloads of food supplies and ammunition. All through the dark of night they traveled treacherous paths over 150 kilometres long to supply them. The majority of the DAG forces were concentrated on Gramos which had hundreds of DAG fighters, of whom the majority were from the Mala Prespa villages. A group of

villagers, both men and women, from R'bi took their horses loaded with food to Gramos but on their return they were cut off by government troops so they were forced to flee to Albania. For as long as the Gramos and Bela Voda front line lasted Mala Prespa was safe. Unfortunately it was poorly guarded and in some areas was not guarded at all.

At the end of June 1948 a group of thirty Monarcho-Fascist soldiers from Lerin, near the village Buf, traveled over Bela Voda and entered the liberated territory of Mala Prespa unnoticed and reached the first houses in the village German. News of the Government troop penetration traveled like wildfire, prompting the civilian population from German, R'bi, Medovo and Strkovo to flee to the Yugoslav border at Markova Noga, where it remained until midnight. A Partisan detachment stationed in Ramna quickly took the road from Buf to German and came down on German where it was ready to clash with the Monarcho-Fascist soldiers. Knowing the danger they were in, the Monarcho-Fascists fell back and took defensive measures. They left the village and went back but not along the Ramna road. They went down the Garvan road near the village Rakovo and avoided a clash with the partisans. The population that had fled to the Yugoslav border and wanted to cross into Yugoslavia was convinced by representatives of the provisional democratic government of Greece to return home, and they did.

Informburo resolution against Yugoslavia and the construction of a defense line in Bela Voda

On June 28, 1948 the Informburo Resolution against Yugoslavia was published. The Resolution was not well accepted by the people of Mala Prespa, especially by those who assisted and were committed to assisting DAG. The Macedonian people were well aware that Yugoslavia was their friend because Yugoslavia, in spite of the Informburo Resolution, was still providing services to the Macedonian people like accepting to treat their wounded from the daily bombings, receiving refugees and providing salvation for fleeing young children and people fleeing the war. The greatest indignation came from the CPG slanders against Comrade Tito, of whom they were proud. The CPG's deteriorating relations with Yugoslavia were used by the CPG to close the Yugoslav-Greek

border. Several days after the Informburo Resolution was published, DAG's Central Committee issued an order to close the border with Yugoslavia. Guards with trained dogs were placed along the border and anyone caught fleeing was to be shot. Then an order came down forcing the entire population under 65 years of age to be mobilized into the war effort to construct a defense line along the Lerin to Bela Voda defense line. The mobilized old men and women from the liberated territory of Mala Prespa and from the Kostur Region villages were divided into work gangs and sent to work. Men over the age of 55 were sent in the mountains to cut trees and construct 20 to 24 centimetre wide and 4 metre long beams. Women up to 45 years old were to carry these beams on their shoulders to wherever they were required. These poor women sometimes were forced to travel up steep hills for close to a kilometre carrying the logs on their shoulders. From there these logs were taken by even older men who employed oxen to drag the tree trunks to wherever the bunkers were being built. Women over the age of 60 were employed to harvest corn and rye on the mountain plateaus.

Thousands and thousands of trees were cut to build the many hundreds of bunkers that dotted the terrain along the Bela Voda Mountain range creating a strong 20 kilometre long defensive line. Food stores were also created and stocked with food and ammunition along the defense line. Delays were not tolerated, the defense line had to be built fast in order to prevent an imminent attack against Mala Prespa.

After the Gramos operation was over, Bela Voda was reinforced with partisans who also participated in the construction of this line. By now the only people who remained in the villages were the very old, the sick and the disabled men and women with no one to help them. There was also the occasional young mother with a small suckling child who still remained in the villages. But even these women were not immune from the draft. They too were deployed working in shifts, kneading and baking bread and doing other essential things for the working population and for the partisans. The young fighters who were badly wounded and disabled and incapable of fighting in DAG's ranks were sent to work in the villages looking after the village cattle and sheep.

The people who worked on the construction of the defense line, worked under very difficult conditions. They worked day and night in the rain, snow, in cold weather and in the dark of night. They carried huge logs uphill, downhill, through the bushes, slipping and falling, working non-stop day and night. Greek air planes flew low over them and they had to dodge machine gun bursts and missiles. At night the artillery attacked them with shells and the poor civilians doing the work were in great danger. They were in greater danger than the partisans who were hiding in trenches and bunkers. Because they were always outdoors they suffered the most. Every day they were bombed and killed or wounded. On top of that they were inundated with bad news of people being killed and they often wondered who was going to be next, a son, a husband, a brother, a brother-in-law, or a friend. The mothers often put stones together in mock graves, lit candles and wept for hours while tearing their hair out.

On August 15, 1948 Lazo Angelovski, from the village Grazhdeno, was killed in Lerin. He was a member of the National Board for Lerin Region responsible for the Macedonian school programs. Lazo was the organizer and lecturer of the course for the Macedonian teachers held in German in the fall of 1947. Lazo was captured by the Monarcho-Fasists in September 1947, at Shupurka Pass located between Bela Voda and Buf. He was sentenced to death for orchestrating the Macedonian schools in the Mala Prespa villages and for assisting the educational system in the Lerin Region villages. On August 15, 1948 the Monarcho-Fascists in Lerin tied Lazo behind a horse with a rope and dragged him through the streets of Lerin. By doing this they wanted to show their hatred for the Macedonian educator.

On October 28, 1948 13 young people from German were shot to death in Lerin. When the tragic news arrived in German, the Prespa liberation movement held a church service for them. All the people who were still left in German, the people from the Mala Prespa as well as Lerin Region villages attended the service.

Women mobilized into DAG's ranks

On November 23, 1948, by order of DAG command, all able-bodied women were to be mobilized into DAG. This order was published in the newspaper "Demokratis", an organ of DAG, which in part read: "All able-bodied women ages 18 to 35 are to be mobilized into the ranks of DAG…" The order came into force immediately after it was published in the newspaper. The mobilization took place in the village P'pli.

The women from all the Mala Prespa villages were picked up and escorted to P'pli where they were met by a committee of three senior DAG members and representatives from the provisional democratic government of Greece. The three member committee consisted of Vasilis Bardzhiotas, Petros Kokalis and Stavro Kochev. The committee divided the women into three groups. They put the healthy and strong women in the first group to be sent to a camp in Rudari to train with weapons. They put the weak and sick women in the second group. These women were to be sent to the hospital in Grazheno and after they recovered they too were to be sent to the training camp and to be issued weapons. The disabled women and those who had very young children were placed in group three. These women were not sent to train as regular DAG fighters but were obliged to perform other duties in support of DAG and the resistance movement.

The women who on the first day were selected to go to a training camp protested and refused to go. All night they remained outside the place where they were mobilized. It was a cold night and the next morning they were covered in frost. The next day at dawn a group of two dozen armed partisans arrived in P'pli and escorted the women to Rudari. They trained for a few days in the Rudari meadows and were taught how to handle weapons. After a month of training they were assigned to DAG units. These mobilized women were the last members of their families to have remained at home. When the partisans took them to P'pli to be mobilized, most put locks on the doors of their houses. The homes where a dozen family members used to live were now completely empty and devoid of people. Some of the women left behind old and sick relatives; a mother-in-law, a father-in-law, a father, a mother, grandparents… A

lot of them had husbands, brothers and sisters who were already dead; lost to the war… This is why these women protested and did not want to pick up arms. Unfortunately they had no choice. They were ordered to start to build a defensive line, assemble first aid units and stretchers and carry out various resistance-related tasks in the villages.

DAG units attack Lerin

On February 12, 1949 DAG launched an attack on the city Lerin intending to capture it. The women who were mobilized in P'pli in November 1948 were part of the units that were involved in this attack. It had been snowing at the time and the snow was knee high. The temperature had plummeted to below zero. During the attack some of the units approached the city limits but that's as far as they got. The Greek Monarcho-Fascists held their positions and did not budge. The partisans were unable to take the city. Being hardly prepared and trained to fight against a seasoned army in the cold of winter, most of the young partisan women were slaughtered in the battlefield. Many were killed and wounded as they tried to escape. One part of them fell into the hands of the enemy. Because the partisans were unable to take the city they decided to withdraw before dawn. They had to pull back and over the hills of Mount Bela Voda to escape.

Because of the deep snow the withdrawal was much more difficult than anticipated. Long columns had to travel over narrow trails over the mountains in waist deep snow. Many of the women were unable to continue the arduous trek and were left stuck in the snow, dotting the white terrain. That day the Greek air force flew many sorties and turned the snow into fire and left nothing standing alive. The withdrawing DAG units were repeatedly attacked as the fighters fought the snow trying to escape.

The partisans, among whom many were women, were forced to stay and hide in the snow and in the bushes where they were stuck. The night was dark but as they helped each other they made it over the mountain. They were cold and miserable. Many of the women fell ill; some who were severely wounded succumbed to their injuries and to the bitter cold.

The Macedonian partisan women and DAG fighters threw themselves into the fire during the attack on Lerin without worrying about their own young lives. We cannot say enough about their heroism. Women and girls took up weapons and without having mastered how to use them fought bravely in the cold and snow. They did that because it was impossible to live under the hatred of the Greek Monarcho-Fascists who had brought so much evil into their world.

"I would like to say something about one of the participants in the attack on Lerin. It involves a young 18 year-old woman from the village German whose name was Germania Paikova. Germania's example is typical of all her peers who were involved in the Lerin attack.

Even though Germania was badly wounded she continued to move forward, as well as encouraged her co-fighters to fight on, shouting forward, forward! Due to her heavy wounds she knew she would not be able to withdraw. The government troops tried to capture her several times but were unable to get close. She continued to fire at them. Then when she completely weakened and could no longer shoot at them, the government troops rushed her and captured her. While she was still alive the government soldiers dragged her through the streets of Lerin so that the people could see the prize they had captured. She was bleeding badly and they painted the streets with her blood. They then savagely murdered her," says Mundushev.

DAG military court imposes death sentences against those attempting to flee to Yugoslavia

On March 5, 1949 Zahariadis's rabid clique stood before the partisan military court in German, stationed in one of the classrooms in the school in German, and conducted an open trial in front of about fifty elderly people who were forcibly brought to witness the proceedings. Among the people tried were 50 year-old Bogoia Pandov from R'bi and 50 year-old Bozhinitsa and Donevitsa Giakov from German. Bogoia was accused of assisting people who wanted to flee to Yugoslavia by helping them find a safe crossing over the

Greek-Yugoslav border. Donevitsa and Bozhinitsa were accused of wanting to flee to Yugoslavia. Another person on trial was the Greek Blianga. He was from one of the villages located at the foot of Gramos. He and his family were expelled from his village by the Monarcho-Fascists in 1947 and at the time were living German. Blianga was accused of attempting to smuggle his own family, as well as other people, over the border into Yugoslavia. The DAG military court judges found all these people guilty of having committed these crimes and sentenced them all to death. A few days later Blianga was released… because he was a Greek. The Macedonians on the other hand were executed as planned. About fifty innocent Macedonians were killed this way by Zahariadis's agents under mostly under trumped up charges.

By March 1949, the only people left in the Mala Prespa villages were the old and sick who could not walk. The rest were all gone. Every able body that was able to move was drafted in aid of the war effort supplying the fronts and building the defensive line in Bela Voda. Spring was approaching and there was no one at home to plow and sow the fields. The village cattle and sheep were left to fend for themselves and were now the new masters of the fields and meadows. There was also no one to harvest the meadows. The sheep belonged to no one and were food for partisans. There was also no one to harvest the wheat that had been planted in the fall the year before. During the day the village streets were empty and only the dogs roamed them. Airplanes flew above every day dropping bombs, rockets and napalm, burning houses and raising smoke and dust. There were also several groups of young women with infants. They were busy kneading and baking bread. They did all that during the night. In early August the construction of the front line was halted because the front was breached and all the people who worked there were transferred to the units that defended this line. The men older than 60 and the women over 50 were sent home to their villages.

Forming KOEM and CPG actions against Yugoslavia

On March 25 and 26, 1949 the NOF 2nd Congress was held in the village P'pli in Mala Prespa. The next day, March 27, 1949, 163 delegates attended the 2nd Congress. These delegates were

Macedonian communists who decided to set up a communist organization for the people of Greek occupied Macedonia known as "The Communist Organization of the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia" or KOEM. Immediately after its formation KOEM cells began to pop up in the Mala Prespa villages.

During the spring and summer of 1949 the CPG, or more precisely Zahariadis himself personally took over managing the defamatory propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia and its leadership. For this purpose, on June 20, 1949, Zahariadis convened a KOEM extraordinary emergency meeting held in his cave above the village Vineni where he was hiding. The meeting lasted all night. Many of the Macedonian leaders and executives who earlier exercised some free will were removed and replaced by those who agreed with Zahariadis. They were also removed from their positions in NOF and KOEM and sent to DAG to fight at the Gramos front as regular fighters.

At the same time, through his supporters, Zahariadis intensified his agitation and propaganda against Yugoslavia and against the leadership of the People's Republic of Macedonia, all throughout the Mala Prespa villages.

The Macedonian population, however, was not indifferent to the slanders against Yugoslavia and against its leadership, which in the past and in the many years of struggling for the Macedonian national liberation had helped the population in Mala Prespa. The Macedonian people were not only sympathetic but also had absolute confidence in Yugoslavia. The Macedonians had sympathy for the Yugoslav leadership, especially for Tito, who helped create the Macedonian state and who guaranteed the survival of the entire Macedonian nation. And now, in the heat of the Greek Civil War, the people of Mala Prespa counted on Yugoslavia to help them save their children and their people, to provide relief for them from the daily bombings, as well as to provide them with material aid during the long struggle. The people refused to accept Zahariadis's propaganda.

As a result of Zahariadis's strong stand against Yugoslavia, the Macedonian people begun to lose confidence in his leadership of the

movement and in him personally. The Macedonians were not happy having to carry the heaviest burden in this struggle and without being adequately represented in leadership positions, especially in the CPG Central Committee, in the Provisional Democratic Government and in DAG. On top of that, all the men from the Mala Prespa, Kostur and Lerin Region villages were fighting in DAG and now all the women too were mobilized as regular soldiers. If that was not enough, Zahariadis even mobilized the very children, ages 14 to 16, who were sent to the people's republics to be saved, and made them into DAG regular fighters. All the older men and women, sick and disabled who were able to hold a shovel were also mobilized and sent to build defensive lines and other ancillary works: transferring the wounded, supplying weapons and ammunition to the units at the front, and so on. All these people were put in the front line where many died for Zahariadis. This was deliberate with aims at destroying the Macedonian people, and after all this what kind of confidence should they have in Zahariadis? Zahariadis was personally responsible for putting the locks on the Macedonian homes and making the Macedonian villages desolate.

Some Macedonians started to openly oppose Zahariadis's defamatory actions against Yugoslavia only because they saw it us unfair and not factual. These people unfortunately were mercilessly persecuted by Zahariadis and his like-minded cronies. In July 1949 Pelopidas, a Greek working in the agronomist nursery in P'pli, and members of his staff responsible for growing fruit and vegetables intended for members of Greek senior management in R'bi, along with some other like-minded people, tried to kill 4 Macedonians who did not agree with Zahariadis's stand on Yugoslavia. But thanks to the intervention of some clever villagers they were saved.

DAG attacked at Vicho and the Macedonian population fleeing to Albania

On August 9, 1949, the well armed Monarcho-Fascist army launched a massive attack against the partisans in Vicho and managed to invade the free territory. Kosta Mandushev was with the partisans who were defending the line on Bigla Mountain around the large band on the road to Lerin. Mandushev was responsible for a unit of field medics numbering about thirty people, both men and

women from villages R'bi and Medovo. The next three days, from August 10 to 13,1949, there was unusual silence in the twenty kilometer front. On occasion a shot was fired or a grenade exploded or a machine gun burst was heard. No airplanes flew these three days.

August 13, 1949 was a beautiful sunny day. The front was still quiet, but down bellow, in Rulia, Oshchima and Zhelevo, there was a roar of bomb explosions and burst of gunfire. The roar grew louder and louder. Then, around 9 o'clock in the morning, several aircraft flew over Preval, entered Mala Prespa, dropped their bombs and then flew back in the same direction they came from. At 10 am, rockets from short range mortars and grenades were heard exploding on Preval Hill. When the mortars stopped, Monarch-Fascist soldiers were spotted climbing up the hill preparing to take it. Several aircraft flew over them, swooped down and fired machinegun bursts and dropped bombs. A huge cloud of smoke was seeing rising over the hill.

When the Monarcho-Fascist soldiers reached Preval peak and began to crest it, they suddenly stopped and dropped to the ground. A fierce firefight broke out. Then around noon, a group of Monarcho-Fascist soldiers separated themselves from the Preval front line and attempted to climb over Bariacheto height so that afterwards they could descend to Ramna and cut off the partisan withdrawal from the front line in Bela Voda and thus create panic among the partisans left behind. Unfortunately for them, this group was hindered by a strong partisan counter attack that pushed them back. The enemy pushed hard at Preval with constant waves of attacks. They almost succeeded in penetrating Mala Prespa and hampering the withdrawal of the partisan units stationed at the Bela Voda front line.

No one knew what to do at the Bela Voda front line. The fighters watched the struggle take place on Preval Hill and waited with anticipation. If the enemy gained advantage then Mala Prespa would fall in their hands and they would be cut off. The partisans on Preval Hill were fighting a stronger foe who had more advanced weaponry. The partisans in Bela Voda sat on pins and needles waiting for their

next order, hoping it would be to withdraw and abandon the line. No one was allowed to do anything without orders from Headquarters.

The aircraft started flying again around 3 pm swooping down and firing rockets and machinegun bursts. The situation from the distance appeared to be dismal. The women at the Bela Voda front looked worried and some began to cry. At 5 pm orders came to Bela Voda ordering the partisans to "immediately withdraw, leave the front and go to German". The retreat was very difficult. The partisans had to leave the safety of their trenches and bunkers and run out in the open while it was still light outside. More and more aircraft appeared and followed their movement and would not allow them to get going. The enemy then began to fire their artillery from Lerin. The women had difficulties running and moving fast. The time was passing quickly and they were still in Bigla.

One by one they crawled towards the deep Kosara brook and regrouped there. From there they took a path that led them through a beech tree grove over the Bela Voda crest and over the hill where the water was truly frothy and white. The crest was continuously shelled. But, one by one they crossed it and traveled the distance. The women were afraid to go along so they were accompanied by men. After they crossed the ridge they followed a narrow road through Kievaintsa and landed in the flatlands below where they were joined by a column of partisans and people who had fled the front and had followed the winding stone infested narrow mountain road while pushing their way towards German.

They left the front, they left the front line which for two years the population of Mala Prespa, Kostur and Lerin Regions, had built with sweat and blood. They left the line and with it they left their greatest hope for freedom behind. This front collapsed without a single gunshot fired.

The partisans arrived in German around 10 pm. The village square was teeming with fighters. The various units that arrived from the Bela Voda front were quickly reinforced, regrouped and dispatched to Preval, to the Kalugieritsa hillside near the village Rudari. On one side of the village square about 20 older women from Buf were assembled together holding sacks with their belongings. A couple of

partisans from the people's militia were prodding them to get going so that they could show them the way to Perovo Tower and from there to the Albanian border. The women protested and refused to go to Albania, they preferred to flee to Yugoslavia. They refused to move from the spot they were standing on. One of the partisans argued with them and one of the women yelled out loud: "Go ahead kill me then, what worse could you do to me than kill me… Without my family I am already dead. Kill me and bury me here, at least my grave will be on my soil…"

There were also partisans in the R'bi village square instructing the civilians who had just arrived from the Bela Voda front line on how to find their way to Perovo Tower and from there to the Albanian border. No one was allowed to stray from this path. Kosta Mandushev, author of this book, tried to go home to his house in R'bi to see his wife who was expecting any day now but the partisans from the people's militia, who were there to make sure no one escaped, would not allow him. But Kosta went anyway. Being familiar with the village he slipped down the river and went home.

In those days the villages of Mala Prespa were frequented by squadrons of aircraft that buzzed the sky all day long repeatedly dropping bombs, rockets and napalm. They swooped down along the road from Preval to R'bi and to Perovo Tower and then went back. The planes came from two directions, Kostur and Lerin, and mowed the terrain down with their machine guns. They dropped large bombs and destroyed the bridge in Perovo. No one could cross this bridge without being shot at. The people who remained behind had to hide in the ditches and brooks until it was dark.

In the evening the R'bi church bell began to ring and about twenty men and women arrived at the village square. The partisans who summoned them said they had orders to immediately move the villagers out. They ordered them to go to Nivitsi. Stoian Doichinov, Vasil Bechkov, Traiko Bakushov, Nacho Sekoulov and the other men and women who arrived at the village square told the partisans that they were not going anywhere. "You are not taking us from here, from our homes. We belong here and not in Nivitsi. We don't want to be killed on the road." They then turned around and went home. About an hour later it became cloudy and started to rain.

Columns of people with their horsedrawn carts, loaded with food and blankets, took to the road and headed for Perovo Tower and Nivitsi. The other villagers from Mala Prespa did the same.

Kosta Mandushev met no one on his way to his house. When he went in there was no one inside. He yelled several times but got no response. He stepped out to the garden and yelled but got no response there either. He then went out on the street and was met by two partisans from the people's militia who stopped him. He explained to them that he had just arrived from the Bela Voda front and came home to see his wife. They told him that there were a few old women in the house next door and a younger woman who was having a difficult time giving birth. Kosta quickly rushed to the Sekulov house but there were partisans in the yard who stopped him. But after he explained they let him in. He quickly climbed up the stairs and entered the room where the woman was struggling to give birth. When she saw him she said: "Now that you are here I am no longer afraid…"

Kosta ran back down to the yard and asked the partisans to help him take his wife to the Markova Noga Yugoslav border because she was having problems giving birth and needed a doctor. They said the only person who could give him permission was their commander in German. Kosta ran towards German as fast as he could but his fast motion alerted the people's militia guarding the road who became suspicious and stopped him. He was forced to explain and lost a lot of time in the process. It was midnight when he arrived in German. He explained his situation to the commander and asked him for help; to send several partisans to carry the woman to Markova Noga. He briskly said: "Impossible!"

"Yes it is possible," said Kosta, "We constantly take wounded from the hills on stretchers, even when we are bombed. It's a short distance and the road is flat and safe!"

"No! Take her to Nivitsi!" ordered the commander.

"She will never make it to Nivitsi, she will die on the road!" replied Kosta Mundushev.

“I have orders to send everyone to Nivitsi!” replied the commander.

“She is protected by international law,” said Kosta, “because she served in Bela Voda carrying logs. She now needs your help.” “Are you Macedonian?” asked Kosta. “I thought so, I recognize you. Now you need to save a Macedonian woman’s life… a fighter’s life!” added Kosta.

“No! It’s impossible!” replied the commander and turned to speak to a group of officers and abandoned Kosta.

Kosta returned home disappointed. The women from Buf were no longer in the village square. When Kosta got home his wife had already given birth to a girl. The people’s militia partisans were going house to house in the village streets collecting the last remaining people who had returned from Bela Voda and were now collecting the cows and oxen and loading up their ox-drawn wagons with their meager belongings. Expediently Kosta too hitched his oxen to his wagon and put his wife Dora with his new born daughter on it. He checked his watch. It was one o’clock in the morning when they left their home. The partisans stopped them at the Virishta crossroads next to the village. Kosta asked them to let them pass and help them get to Markova Noga but they refused. Dora too asked them. She became emotional and began to cry. Their reply was: “We can’t let you go. We have orders!”

They continued to travel along the valley road and when they reached the main road that crossed into Yugoslavia they found it blocked. They were stopped by a number of women partisans. Neither Kosta’s appeals and pleas nor Dora’s crying helped. The women partisans who told them the same thing that the partisans in Virishta and the commander in German had told them: “Impossible!” Kosta turned his wagon around and, 300metres away, they joined the column of wagons and people heading for the Perovo bridge.

Also included among the civilians and wagons in the large column heading for Perovo Tower were partisans carrying heavy weapons and ammunition, horses and mules with heavy loads, elderly men and women and livestock. The column looked like muddy rainwater

traveling down a river after a strong rainstorm during dry weather. Everyone was rushing trying to get ahead and cross the bridge before dawn, before the aircraft came back. Kosta and his family arrived at the bridge around 3:30 in the morning. The bridge was bombed the previous day and was demolished but the engineering units worked on it and it was now repaired. An older officer sat about 20 metres away from the bridge and informed all those who crossed where to go. Soldiers were stopped about 100 metres from the bridge and were assembled to the side. There were a number of officers who immediately assembled teams and sent them to Nivitsi Mountain to guard the road and bridge. The civilian population continued on its way to Vineni and to the Albanian border.

The road from Perovo to Vineni passed over Mala Prespa Lake at the Nivitsi Mountain pass where there were large boulders and many curves. About 50 metres past the lake, the uphill road was rocky and uneven. The wagon could not travel as fast over the rocky road as it did over the sandy flat road between the two lakes. The oxen were not outfitted with metal shoes and had difficulty walking on the stones. The wagon too shook and tilted from side to side making it difficult for Dora and the young passenger. Dora began to bleed. Dawn was breaking and the airplanes would soon be arriving. The wagon was going slowly. Other wagons that followed behind were in a rush to get by. People came over to help but there was nothing they could do. The road between the two lakes, past the last mills in R'bi stretching about 8 km to the bridge was covered with partisans returning from the front. All these people were rushing to cross the bridge before dawn and hide in the Nivitsi Mountain rocks and trees.

At about 4:30 in the morning Kosta noticed seven aircraft coming from the Bela Voda direction, swooping down over German and R'bi and attacking the road to Perovo Tower. People suddenly rushed towards the bridge and every which way, many fell to the ground. The aircraft went back up again, circled over R'bi and came back attacking the people on the road again and again. Two aircraft returned back to R'bi and followed the road to Vineni and the Albanian border. The planes swooped down low and machine gunned the people, the wagons, the livestock and the horses carrying the heavy loads. Many people and livestock were killed during the first pass. When the aircraft appeared over German, Kosta was on

Krina Hill opposite the island Ail. He tried to get Dora and the baby off the wagon but by then the airplanes were over them so they took shelter near the wagon. Bullets were flying all around them and several rockets exploded nearby, covering them with dust and smelly smoke. There are no words that Kosta could use to describe his experience that day. “I would never, ever want to relive this day again…” he said.

Located about 20 metres away, opposite Ail Island, was a larger boulder and several juniper bushes. Kosta and his family spent the day there while they watched the helpless people and their livestock moving by from P’pli and R’bi and heading for the Perovo Tower, as well as from Perovo to Vineni along the 15 km long road while bleeding and dying along the way. It was a sunny day. The airplanes circled around the sky like vultures swooping down and spreading death and destruction to countless defenseless people and livestock.

The airplanes created a lot of carnage with the first attack on R’bi and Vineni. Many people and livestock were killed, cut down as they attempted to cross the bridge. People who made it past the bridge were assisted by the partisans who, from the mountains, fired at the aircraft. The hardest hit were the people with wagons and families, who were on the road during the first attack. Many were killed and even more were wounded. Many abandoned their belongings, left the road and ran into the mountains to hide. Some took the wounded and tried to get help. The oxen and other animals pulling the wagons such as horses, donkeys and mules were left on the road. Most were killed throughout the day. The only people on the road before the bridge who remained alive after the attacks were those who fled the attacks and hid in the mire of Lake Mala Prespa and in the waters of Lake Golema Prespa. Those who were closest to the bridge and tried to cross were cut down by the aircraft.

Nikolitsa Ushlinova from German was about 1 km away from crossing the bridge when she had her traumatic incident. She was leading her donkey loaded with her possessions with one hand, and in her other arm she carried a two-year girl. The donkey was hit and fell down wounded. She too fell down but was lightly wounded. Also beside her were partisans who were killed and wounded. Nikolitsa got up, ran towards the lake and covered herself and the

little girl with sand. Then an airplane was shot down by the partisans and it fell beside her. She became very frightened and when the airplanes withdrew from the attack she got out of the sand, took the little girl and ran for the bridge. The partisans at the bridge ran to help her. They grabbed the girl and her and ran over the bridge. From there she was sent to Nivitsi and to the Albanian village Zrnosko.

Kosta and his family spent the entire day hiding from the airplanes under the heat of the summer sun. The planes kept flying in and out from two directions, from Kostur and from Lerin, all throughout the day, bringing death and destruction. By the end of the day the entire place was burning. The lake was within reach but no one dared go and get some water; everyone was burning with thirst. Many people gave up getting their wagons and oxen. They just left them on the road and fled down the mountain to the village Orovo and from there to the Albanian border. These poor people had been tormented for centuries; killed and chased and now they were being driven out of their homes forever while leaving their blood behind. The century-old injustices could no longer be tolerated and the people were left with little choice; fight and die or run. Their blood now flowed marking the soil and depositing in it their great pains and sadness, remnants of their glorious history.

A nurse and several partisans bandaged the wounded. A partisan came over to Dora and gave her several pills. She caressed the baby girl and called her Vasa. This was the name of her sister who was killed in the battle for Gramos.

The road from Orovnik via P'pli, Strkovo and R'bi was mined by the DAG saboteurs. When the government army tanks tried to cross it they were turned into scrap metal, dust and smoke. At about noon a few tanks arrived in R'bi followed by a large number of government soldiers. They launched a fierce attack in the flat areas and around the village R'bi. It was a fight of life and death. The helpless partisans and remnants of the civilian population were cut to pieces in this battlefield. It was a sad sight and a disaster. The people who were hiding in the ditches, fields, reeds and swamps between the two lakes were sought out and executed by Monarcho-Fascist executioners, who slaughtered them like ravenous beasts.

Some Monarcho-Fascists preferred to kill partisans with their knives, slicing their throats open and watching them struggle while they were dying. People who were on the mountain above Perovo watched their friends, relatives, fellow villagers and Macedonian compatriots being murdered and they could do nothing to help them. Many could not watch and looked away. Thank God the airplanes were withdrawn and not able to take part in the carnage. The Greek army unfortunately took their place. The aircraft were now redirected to pour fire down the road and around the road from the bridge to the Albanian border where the population and DAG units were attempting to cross into Albania.

The Greek Monarcho-Fascist butchers took the opportunity to kill as many Macedonians as possible during these crucial moments when the population and the partisans were most vulnerable. They took advantage of the people fleeing along the road from Drenovo to Albania to mercilessly butcher them. DAG had already lost the war and would have fled on its own and there was no need for the slaughter. The civilian population had done nothing to provoke this wrath and was only attempting to save itself. It was unarmed and helpless, so why did it have to be slaughtered en masse? These were genocidal crimes committed by the Greek government for which it has yet to answer. Zahariadis too was guilty of these crimes because he was the one who committed the Macedonian people to take part in this genocidal war. There is no doubt about it that this war was staged to destroy the Macedonian nation in Greek occupied Macedonia.

All the prisoners kept captive by the partisans in Drenovo were surrendered to the people's militia to escort them to Albania. But metres away from the Albanian border the Greeks executed many of them. Included among those executed were Bogoia Pandovski from R'bi, Bozhinitsa and Donevitsa Giakov from German, whom we earlier mentioned were tried for attempting to flee in Yugoslavia.

When the tanks arrived in R'bi, one tank broke off and, followed by government soldiers, took the road to Perovo. They went and examined the wreckage of the downed airplane and then returned back towards R'bi. The Monarcho-Fascist generals, it seems, were in a hurry to do something. They wanted to cut off the column of

refugees from reaching the Albanian border, as soon as possible, so they diverted the tank and the soldiers to go in pursuit. But when the tank came to within a kilometre of the bridge, the partisans blew up the bridge. The partisans shot rockets and mortars from the hill above and downed the bridge. Several soldiers were killed but the tank survived and returned to R'bi. After this incident the enemy tanks and units halted their movement and diverted their attention towards the Sveti Ilia church behind R'bi. This helped the remaining DAG units to withdraw to the Yugoslav border.

People in Markova Noga could hear gunfire in the fields of German and R'bi. Some of the partisan units were cut off and were making attempts to break through but without success. They found themselves in a dangerous and dismal situation. Many were killed and some were wounded and captured. Some fled to the mountains in German and others crossed the Yugoslav border. The first to flee to Yugoslavia were those partisans who guarded the roads at Virishta, preventing civilians from going to Yugoslavia. The very people who would not allow the civilian population to go to Yugoslavia now themselves fled to Yugoslavia. R'bi and German were only 3 km away from the Yugoslav border, yet Zahariadis ordered the civilian population from those villages to travel 15 km to the Albanian border and face butchery and unbelievable horrors. One cannot help but ask "why?"

In Albania

As soon as it got dark and the airplanes left the skies, Kosta and his family continued their trek towards the Albanian border. They first helped the people move the remaining living oxen, horses and donkeys from the road, moved aside some of the wagons blocking the road and continued on their way on foot. The oxen were hungry and thirsty and found it difficult to pull the wagons. Kosta, his family and the refugees traveling with them spent the night in Vineni and Orovo and crossed the Albanian border at dawn on August 15, 1949 and landed in the Albanian village Zrnosko, located on the shore of Golema Prespa Lake at the foot of Ivan Mountain.

During the night of August 15, 1949 DAG saboteurs widened the riverbed in Perovo connecting the two lakes and the next day water flowing from the smaller lake to the bigger lake had eroded the river bottom and made it impassable for the government troops and tanks. At the same time the partisans also planted some mines.

The first thing the people, who survived the attacks and arrived in Zrnosko alive, did was to immediately run to the lakeshore and drink water. The oxen too ran along with them, wagons and all, and lined up on the lakeshore extinguishing their thirst. Still frightened from the attacks, the people quickly dispersed into the woods around the village and stayed there until the evening. There were people lined up for approximately 2 km along the lakeshore drinking water all day long. Some left and others arrived. Some of the women even washed their clothes. Men brought their wagons and soaked their wheels because they had dried and were falling apart from the heat of the sun. Some men repaired their wagons of damage caused by the exploding bombs and shells. Many of the wounded were placed in a sheltered ditch above the village. The sheep that were given to the cooperative and the cattle that were grazing in the fields were collected by a number of partisans and also brought to Zrnosko. Some of the farmers who brought their sheep with them slaughtered some, lit bonfires and roasted and boiled flesh meat. The people were curious to know what was going to happen to them and to their sons and daughters who were still fighting on the other side of the border. They were asking one another questions but the partisans kept separating them, insisting that they don't discuss such matters. The partisans tried to maintain order and would not even allow them to light fires for fear that the smoke would give their position away and the airplanes would come and bomb them. But no matter how hard the partisans tried, many people were so disappointed that they no longer cared if the planes came and bombed them. Dora was bleeding again and the nurse gave her more pills and an injection to stop the bleeding.

With time, more and more partisans and people kept arriving in the Albanian village.

On August 15, 1949 a bulldozer and a priest were brought to a mass grave near R'bi to bury the hundreds of partisans and even more

civilians who had been killed by the Monarcho-Fascist air strikes and shelling. A priest and a bulldozer performed the funeral. The Monarcho-Fascists gathered all the bodies scattered across the fields and dumped them in a common grave which the bulldozer had excavated earlier. The priest then performed the ritual and the bulldozer covered up the bodies with soil. There were no relatives, friends, comrades, flowers, or wreaths at the funeral, no honour guard to honour the fallen soldiers and no farewell speeches.

When it got dark the column was assembled again and it continued on its way into the Albanian interior. When it reached Leska, the oxen could no longer pull the wagons uphill and the people were forced to push them one by one until they reached the top. They were at Golem Zavoi on Mount Ivan by dawn and before noon on August 16, 1949, they arrived at the Maliki meadows. They remained there for three days. The oxen were let loose to graze in the swamp and disappeared in the tall reeds. On the third day the oxen were collected and brought back. While the people were stationary in Maliki meadows, a number of trucks arrived and brought them food, mostly bread and canned meat. Two women took Kosta's newborn girl to the village near the meadows for a mother, who had just given birth, to nurse her. Many bonfires were lit during the night which gave an indication of the vastness of the refugee camp. There were many, many people assembled at the Maliki meadows.

After three days of rest, on August 18, 1949 at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the long column began moving again along the road to Pogradets. The sun above was grilling hot and made the trek difficult. Albanians workers working in the fields stopped working and kept gazing at the masses of the unfortunate passing by. Even small children came out to gaze at them. The travelers looked dirty and tired and stared down at the ground as they continued their trek to oblivion. The oxen walked very slowly, their legs were swollen. When the front of the column reached the gardens at the outskirts of the town, the skies became cloudy and it began to thunder. When the cloud came over them the sky opened up and spilled everything it had on them. Hail the size of walnuts began to fall and turned the ground into white ice. The people were traveling under open skies and were drenched by the rain and pelted by the hail. The column

stopped until the cloud passed and it had stopped raining. The column then continued with everyone walking wet and even more down-spirited and miserable.

They passed through the town in the dark and stopped above the road on the shore of Lake Ohrid, 2 km away from town. The people immediately started looking for suitable places to camp. Some went to collect wood and start a fire to warm up and dry their clothes. The weather began to turn ugly again with lightning and thunder heard in the distance. A half hour later it began to rain. The rain was mixed with hail and strong winds. The lake waters began to rise and waves began to splash the road. The people, who arrived late at night and were not familiar with the terrain, camped near the road. They were pounded by the heavy rain and splashed by the waves. Others camped near a brook which quickly became flooded. A child drowned. This created a major stir and panic in the campers everywhere. Voices could be heard screaming and crying in the dark. The wind began to blow, wildly dispersing the clouds but also creating wild waves slamming and pounding the shoreline. The strong north wind was cold especially on the wet bodies. Many spent the night shivering and shaking.

In the morning many woke up stiff and frozen cold. From the night before Dora had a fever and she seemed worse in the morning. There was no doctor to be found. Kosta began to believe the refugees were cursed. He thought to himself: “Where were these clouds, the rain and this wind in Perovo when we needed them, when we were pounded by the Greek airplanes… when so many of my people were killed and wounded. If we had this kind of weather not only would we not have suffered so much but many more people would have been saved. What did these people do to deserve this? Isn’t it enough that they struggled and suffered in the war from the oldest adult to the youngest child? Where will all these people be accommodated now? Why were they driven from their homeland? They all had homes… their own houses and their own beds. They had their own fields, vineyards and barns filled with grain, and vats filled with cheese. These are hard working and obedient people. These people now have neither homes nor a roof over their heads. They are left under the open sky, victims of someone else’s grand plan, driven out like wild animals… like they had no human

feelings… like they felt no pain… beaten down by a storm from which they don't know how to defend…"

The next day, August 19, 1949, the weather was sunny and warm. There were clothes being washed and dried for a length of 2 kms along the shoreline of Lake Ohrid. The same day an order was issued ordering everyone who brought livestock with them, to surrender their animals to the Albanian authorities. The oxen, cows, sheep, etc., were to be taken to the town park and passed on to the Albanian authorities. There were people seen kissing their animals goodbye when they were separated, just like they were family members.

On August 20, 1949 about 5,000 men, women and children were loaded onto trucks and taken to the town Elbasan. They were offloaded in a large fallow field, in front of the large hospital located near the city, where they spent seven miserable days baking in the sun.

There was only one fountain of water in the entire camp. Hundreds of people continuously waited in a long queue just to get a drink of water. There was no water for washing clothes. Every morning Kosta got up very early in the morning and waited in a long line just to get some water to make tea. He did the same at lunch and dinner. The food they received from the cauldron was inedible and Kosta often threw it in the garbage.

Among the large number of patients housed in the big hospital, there were also many partisans recovering from the wounds they acquired in the battles they fought during the Greek Civil War. The next day after the refugees arrived in the camp, many went through the hospital rooms looking for friends and relatives. Many found their sons and daughters, some without limbs, missing a leg or an arm. Some were disfigured and were missing eyes, teeth, etc. In many of the hospital rooms lay young men and women who could not even move from their beds. Many people who arrived during the second wave of refugees, because they were cut off by the bombing from the first wave, found many of their villagers, relatives and friends here who had been butchered by the Greek aircraft. Some found out about the fate of their sons and daughters who fought alongside with

the patients and who lost their lives in the battles in Gramos, Vicho, Preval, etc. When the mothers found out their sons and daughters had been killed and their bodies were left on the terrain, or buried without a marker, they all broke down and cried and covered themselves in black. They mourned and pulled their hair for days. The campground in front of the hospital was dotted with mourners crying over the ground like it was a giant tomb, but without a single grave.

There was no one capable of calming down the situation or the grief-stricken mothers mourning their dead children. It was a catastrophe. How could anyone calm them down when mothers found out their children were killed, wounded, or captured by the Monarcho-Fascists and sentenced to death? What could one say to a mother who found her daughter mutilated and disfigured? How would she have children? And if she managed to have children, how would she look after them? What man would even want to marry a disfigured, armless, or legless woman? Who would give this poor woman a grandchild? And who was going to look after her when she was old and grey and could no longer look after herself anymore? The poor grieving mothers had enough to worry about being thrown out of their homes and now this? They crossed the border and no one had told them where they were, where they were going and when they would be returning to their homes, if ever. What would happen to their houses, gardens, fields, vineyards, furniture and when would they marry their young ones? Not knowing all these things and knowing that their children were already dead and gone, many of these women saw no future and no cause for going on living. These people began to hate themselves. They saw themselves as cursed and did not want to even look at themselves. They did not want to look at those around them. They hated themselves. They hated everything around them. They did not want eat or drink.

Word got out that they were going to the People's Republic of Poland. Unfortunately these words had no effect on the gloomy situation in the camp. "Where is Poland?" someone asked. "Why are we going so far away?" someone else asked. "They killed our children, they destroyed our families, houses and livestock and now they will be sending us to Poland?" said another. "Will they give our properties and houses to the Greeks?" asked another. About the

same time the rumours were started about the refugees going to Poland, representatives from the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece were sent to diffuse the situation in the camp and to confirm that indeed the refugees would be going to Poland. During a gathering the government representative said: “In the People’s Republic of Poland you will meet your grandchildren who left your homes last year. You will meet your children who were wounded and sent to Poland to be treated in the hospitals and who are well now. You will gather together your families and you will live well in Poland…” He then said: “Poland is a great and rich country; it has a well-developed and major industry. You will live in cities and you will work in factories. Your children will be educated in middle and high schools and will be able to work in various crafts…” The only thing that mattered to the Macedonian refugees, especially to the grieving and heartbroken mothers, was the hope they would again see their grandchildren and surviving children. And indeed that helped enough to give the hopeless some hope.

A boat trip to the People's Republic of Poland

On August 27, 1949 past noon, the trucks that were sent to take the refugees to the port of Durres began to assemble and load people at the back of the hospital. As the trucks arrived at the port of Durres the people were immediately escorted directly onto the ship. Standing at the ship's entrance was Barba Traiko with several of his people. They examined each person who arrived and everyone that looked young and healthy was set aside. They were not allowed to board the ship. Barba Traiko had orders from Zahariadis to assemble new groups of young and healthy Macedonian partisans and send them back to the Mountains in Greek occupied Macedonia so that they too could be "consumed" by the Monarcho-Fascists.

On August 28, 1949 the Polish ship "Koshchushko" left the Albanian port of Durres at dawn and sailed the blue waters of the Adriatic Sea headed to the People's Republic of Poland.

"Koshchushko" in its bowels carried the wounded and tormented mourners, the kind of people who had only bad memories, especially of their conquerors and tormentors, the Greeks, all varieties of Greeks, including the communists led by Zahariadis who had prevented the Macedonian people from Mala Prespa from fleeing to Yugoslavia. So many more people would have been saved had Zahariadis allowed them to cross the Yugoslav border located only a few kilometres away. Instead he sent them to hell, to cross the Albanian border far away through an abyss of fire. It was Zahariadis who ordered a mass evacuation with the intent to uproot every single Macedonian from their ancestral home and forced them to abandon their place of birth where they lived for centuries. It was Zahariadis who loaded the Macedonian people onto the cargo ship "Koshchushko" and exiled them permanently, and then looked at others to put the blame on for his own failures. Perhaps they were not failures; maybe this is what he always wanted. Maybe this was part of the long-term Greek plan; the Greek dream to have a Macedonia without Macedonians? Then he had the nerve to blame the Macedonians for failing to win the war. An un-winnable war, an

impossible war, controlled and intentional war perpetrated by Zahariadis himself.

When they boarded the ship everyone looked for a comfortable place to sit but this was a cargo ship and there were no comfortable places, only a floor. Immediately after the ship sailed the captain visited the passengers. He said that he was honoured to have them on his ship. He was honoured to be carrying the fighters and heroes of communism and internationalism, the kind who are rarely found in the world. He apologized for placing them in a cargo ship unfit to carry people and promised to do everything he could to make the trip more comfortable. At the same time a nurse, followed by two sailors, went around checking everyone sprawled on the floor looking for sick people. Anyone found to be sick was carried off by the sailors and taken to the ship's infirmary to be examined by the ship's doctors. The two sailors took Dora and her little girl and placed them in a separate room. Here she was seen by a doctor, given plenty of food to eat and new clothes for her and her baby. There were many wounded on the ship who were looked after by a team of doctors who were on top of the situation. During lunch and dinner the people were taken in groups to the ship's mess, in an orderly fashion. Twelve days after the ship sailed the refugees arrived in Poland at the port in Gdinia.

Most of the people traveling on this ship were seeing the sea for the first time. They were all excited and wanted to go up on deck and watch the water and the islands. The weather was beautiful and the sea was calm. They saw many airplanes fly over. People unfortunately were not allowed to go on deck during the day but some were so excited they took risks and snuck out.

They traveled with high hopes that they would meet members of their families in Poland, and with the change of environment their nature began to shift and the people seemed a little happier. Unfortunately this sentiment was short-lived. When the ship entered African waters the sun again began to beat down on them. The cargo chambers they lay in turned into ovens. This was the first time these poor people had experienced high temperatures like this. The women suffered the most because they were wearing thick and heavy clothes. They stripped down to their undergarments but still it

was not enough to keep them cool. The men stripped down to their underpants and managed to keep a bit cooler. They dripped of sweat and being unwashed for a long time made them look like wild African tribesmen.

After they passed Gibraltar and entered the Atlantic waters they ran into a big rain and windstorm. From being cooked to death they were now freezing in temperatures that dropped below 20 degrees. Most of them began to shiver from the cold. Now they were happy to put on their thick woolen garments. As the ship traveled further into the Atlantic the storm intensified and huge waves battered the ship, lifting it up high and dropping it low looking as if it was about to be swallowed by the sea. Almost everyone became seasick and many vomited all over the place. The more the ship rocked the more they vomited. Then, when they passed the channel Lamansh, Naum Plaskov from German died. The Poles gave him a funeral in accordance with the rules of the sea and tossed his dead body into the water.

Two children were born during this voyage. The captain and the ship's staff were overjoyed.

Landing on Polish soil

The ship entered Polish waters on September 9, 1949 and anchored at the port of Gdinia in the evening. The Polish sailors helped the old people descend the ship's stairs while the wounded were lowered by cranes. They all boarded a train that waited for them on the rail tracks next to the ship. The Polish military was present all around them and kept watch. There were also many Poles around who tried to get near the train but were turned away by the Polish soldiers.

Their arrival in Poland was a new experience for the refugees. It was an unforgettably pleasant experience. They were welcomed with sincere friendship and with complicity, understanding that they were victims of a war and that they had been exiled from their homes and lands. They understood that they were a tormented and tortured people who were carrying their pain and burden with them, so they made sure everything was done to facilitate them in the best possible

way. After the train left the port and headed for the interior, an older Polish man went around the cars and shook hands with everyone. He was welcoming everyone to Poland. The refugee children who were evacuated to Poland in April 1948, through Yugoslavia, were now in boarding schools and were cared for by the Poles. There were several of these children in each car on the train who were serving food and drinks throughout the entire trip. These children were the first joy the refugees had had in a long time. Some children even met their parents on the train.

The next day the train arrived in Vrotslav and as it passed through the city everyone went to the windows to see the magnificent city in which several hundred-thousand Poles lived before the war. It was one of the most beautiful cities in Europe and now all that was left were crumbling buildings and streets littered with waste. And as one of the Polish workers on the train explained, Poland suffered immensely during the war with Germany. Poland alone lost over 7.5 million people to the German crematoriums, mostly young men and women, and now all its cities were desolate and in ruins. The Macedonian refugees, without exception, immediately fell in love with the Poles because they realized the Poles were victims too and had been butchered, just like the Macedonians. Lazo Sekulov from R'bi, who knew a few Polish words which he learned from the Polish people when he was in America, said to one Pole: "We have been tormented by the Ottomans, Germans, Italians and Bulgarians, but never as much as by the Greeks…" The moment the Polish man heard that he excitedly asked: "But aren't you Greek?" "NO!" Lazo replied loudly. "We are Macedonians!" "So you are Slavic people, just like us…" said the Pole and hugged Lazo. Even outside of Greece and a few thousand kilometres away from their homeland, the CPG still insisted that the Macedonians were Greeks.

After two days of traveling by train, the refuges arrived at a small railway station near the city Katovitse where they were loaded onto buses and transferred to the resort Mendzheguzhe.

In Mendzheguzhe they were settled in a number of beautiful and luxurious hotels located in the picturesque mountainside near the Czechoslovakian border, surrounded by a dense pine forest. The same day that they arrived they were issued new clothing. The

people from the villages German and R'bi were settled in the hotel "Modilas", the largest hotel in the resort. A few days later the various hotels were renamed and given names of the Mala Prespa villages to correspond with the origin of the people residing in them.

The local post office was kept very busy during the first few weeks after the refugees arrived. Hundreds of letters from various countries in the world were arriving which the local post office had to deliver to the various hotels. The Macedonian people were scattered all over the world and only through letters were they able to communicate with each other and share their pain. In the beginning all letters arriving from Yugoslavia had to be first inspected by Zahariadis's cronies before they could be delivered. Zahariadis's cronies also obstructed all letters from being sent to Yugoslavia. If anyone wanted to send a letter to Yugoslavia he or she had to rely on the Polish staff to mail it outside of the hotels. But this was a punishable offence and strict measures were taken against those who broke the rules and sent mail to Yugoslavia. Thankfully many Poles were sympathetic to the Macedonians and regularly delivered such mail.

The tables in the hotel restaurants were set three times a day like at a wedding. The refugees quickly became accustomed to the food served by the Poles but nothing could fill their void of loneliness. Anxiously they waited for replies to the letters they sent to various countries in the world and every unanswered letter was met with tears and pain. Every day many waited to get permission to leave the country or to bring family members to the country. The biggest obstacle to all this were Zahariadis's cronies and Zahariadis himself, who constantly looked for "culprits" to blame for his personal failures and for losing the Greek Civil War. Zahariadis's rabid clique even looked in Mendzhegushe for people to blame for Zahariadis's personal failure. Initially Zahariadis blamed the Macedonian cadres, many of whom he removed from the CPG. Many were even sent to prison, including Tane Naumov and Kosta Kirkov. Others were forced to make statements and blame Yugoslavia for his failures. The only people Zahariadis trusted were those who criticized Yugoslavia heavily. The vast majority, however, were Greeks. Them he called Zahariadis's children and they were sent to finish high school. He then turned them into his minions and used them to torment the Macedonian people, even here

in Poland several thousand kilometres away from their homes. And those Greeks who kept to themselves and said nothing, Zahariadis treated them the same way he treated Tsaksiras, Gizas and Sarandopoulos.

The refugees stayed in Mendzheguzhe for about six months after which, on March 20, 1950, they were sent to work. There too the Poles welcomed them with open arms.

The Polish people spared no expense to accommodate the Macedonian people and not just now. They also helped DAG during the Greek Civil War. Polish hospitals treated many of DAG's wounded fighters, many of whom were Macedonians. The Macedonian children were also accepted, welcomed and looked after in the Polish boarding schools and afterwards were provided with secondary and higher education. Even DAG fighters who arrived after the war were accepted in the Polish schools and allowed to complete secondary school and enjoy higher education, as well as enter various trades and work in factories.

While Stalin was still alive, Zahariadis requested from the Polish leadership to establish prison camps so that he could jail the "unruly". The Poles, however, refused him because, they said, it would reflect badly on the Polish nation which did not consider the people they had accepted to help and protect as criminals.

The following tables list the names of the fighters from Mala Prespa who died during the liberation war and during the Greek Civil War, from 1941 to 1949. The names were obtained from the INI archives in Skopje.

The village German

Serafim Giakov	German Grozdanovski
Lambro Petkov	Mitre Pitropovski
Ilia Liaov	Krstin Vlashki
Kote Golchev	Vangel Vlashki
Miaile Popovski	Atanas Vlashki
Risto Nikovski	Stefo Mechkarov
German Liaov	Mitre Kolev

Vangel Liaov
Traiko Iankov
Stoian Liangov
Risto Guerov
Vangel Gerovski
Stoian Koliachkov
Elena Koliachkova
Spase Koliachkov
Kote T. Petkov
Ioshe Nikin
Simo Sekoulov
German Vrlevski
Ilia Kuzmanov
Bogoia Nushev
Mitre Liangov
Goche Doichinovski
Pando Dupchinov
Elena Durlova
Kote Durlot
Goche Arnautovski
Mitre Paikov
Germania Paikova
Tanas Kirinkov
Mitre Topalov
Mitre Veliainchin
Bogoia Muchkarov
Ioshe Topalov
Peter Boglev
Stoian Petkashinov
Lambro Kufalov
Sandra Kufalova
Tanas Paikov
Risto T. Aseincharov
Bozin Aseincharov
Tanas Grozdanovski
Risto T. Grozdanovski
Vasilka Kufalova
Tanas Rousev
Ahilea Vlaskki
Vangel Kaichovski
Ilia Nedinkin
Atanas Nikovski
Pavle Giakov
Vangel Giakov
Vasil Giakov
Mitre Saragilov
Petre Ioanov
Done Dimovski
German Dolgiot
Mitre Machev
Vasil Machev
Trifon Nushev
Nikola Boshev
Stoian Boshev
Naum Iankulov
Nikola Popovski
Alekso Popovski
Bogoia Lelifanov
Nikola Chetelev
Tsvetko Chetelev
Bogoia Doichinovski
Kire Grezhliov
Done Kaichovski
Goche Kiprev
Stoian Kiprev
Mitre Machev
Kote Dzhuklev
Traiko Sivakov
Alekso Ushlinov
Vasil Kaichovski
Vangel K. Ushlinov
Iana Durlova
Ioshe V. Damovski
Ilia L. Paikov
Tronda Gerovska
Eftim Gashtov
Vangel Giakov
Dora Karlovska
Pavle Shapkov

Killed by bombs dropped on the village

Stoia Petkova
Stefo Velainchin
Ristosia Ginova

The village R'bi

(Missing in this list are the names of the 13 dead people from the village Medovo.)

Fote Popfotev
Goche Popfotev
German Vidinov
Andrea Prodanov
Vasil Mialchev
Done Zarovski
Sotir Zarovski
Nikola Nikolov
Fote Vidinov
Ioshe Popovski
Ioshe Markov
Todor Giakovski
Metodia Giakovski
Boris Demirov
Vangel Demirov
Vangel Popnaumov
Socrat Popnaumov
Tsvetko Mundushev
Pavle Sekulov
Fote Bechkov
Mitre Bechkov
Vasil Bakushov
Goche Georgiev
Bosilko Georgiev
Lazo Prodanov
Traian Georgiev
Tronda Popnaumova

The village Shtrkovo

Pando Kostovski
Vasil Kostovski
Iane Kostovski
Gorgan Grozdanovski
Stavre Temelkovski
Goshe Ristovski
Alekso Kostadinovski
Sotir Ristovski
Iane V. Ristovski
Mitre Ristovski
Traiko Ristovski
Stefana Stefanovska
Mihail Minevski
Ristosia Kostovska

The village P'pli

Iankula Petrovski
Risto Petrovski
Stoian Popovski
Kole Kochovski

Dosta Filipova
Traiko Tutunovski
Vasil Steriovski
Risto Miovski
Mitre Gerovski
Traikoitsa Dimanova
Pavle Begovski
Fote Karanfilovski
Stoian Tomovski
Stoian Dimovski
Sotira Traikovska

The village of Rudari

Goche Krstevski
Kosta Krstevski
Petre Gerovski
Mitre Hristovski
Ilia Hristovski
Pando Mihailovski
Ioshe Gerovski
Goche Karulovska
Iani Mihailovski
Vangel Mitrevski
Ioshe Fotevski
Naum Bogoevski
Vasil Georgievski
Stavre Kalevski
Kostadinka Kostevska
Nikola Kalevski
Vangel Dimovski
Fote Hristovski
Vangel Hristovski
Spiro Vangelovski
Vangel Gerovski
Pavle Karulovski
Risto N. Kalevski
Spiro Fotevski
Fote Fotevski
Nikola Georgievski
Risto Georgievski
Naum Miailov

The village Bukoik

Risto Mechkarovski
Vangel Mechkarovski
Risto Sekulovski
Vasil Taskovski
Done Mechkarovski
Tanas Sekulovski
Mitre Sekulovski
Mitre Taskovski

The village Besfina

Kiro Grozdanovski
Anastas Angelovski
Kosta Giorgiovski
Spiro Skenderovski
Giorgi Skenderovski
Spiro Kapovski
Lazo Cholakovski
Risto Fotevski
Iovanche Nichovski
Ilo Krstevski
Iani Skenderovski
Petre Dukovski
Giorgi Cholakovski
Stoian Popovski

Kole Kirovski
Risto Skenderovski
Stefana Koieva
Sevda Nichovska
Gana Nichovska
Tode R. Popovski
Vasil Paunin
Mitre L. Skenderovski
Ristana Kalkovska
Stoina Vanova
Traiko R. Popovski

The village Lok

Pando Stefanovski
Mial Novachevski
Stailo Dimitrovski
Mitre Petrovski
Vidin Spirovski
Spiro Angelovski
Velika Apostolova
Atanas Nikolovski
Trifun Petrovski
Petre Novachevski
Iozhe Nashulov
Krstin Petrovski
German Tsvetkovski
Done Hristovski
Kole Apostolovski
Simo Traikovski
Iosif Nikolovski

The village Drenovo

Ilia Ilovski
Vasil Kirovski
Stoiana Kostovska
Nikola Ilovski
Leko Ilovski
Stoian Atanasovski
Vasil Sotirovski
Sofia Bogdanova
Kiro Ilovski
Mihail Ilovski

The village Grazhdeno

Philip K. Kostovski
Kosta Traianov
Ioshe Boinov
Vangel Mitrev
Sandra Stoianova
Mial R. Kalinovski
Filip D. Kochovski
Toma D. Traikovski
Leko S. Traikovski
Mitre S. Ognenovski
Elena Petrevska
Boris G. DR'bitski
German K. Ianetomu
Marko L. Vasilevski
Nake I Kochovski
Kiro N. Kochovski
Sofia Koteva
Fote K. Nestorovski
Zugra Koteva
Krsto G. Nestorovski

Lazo Filipov
Boris K. Tsvetkovski
Petre R. Ristevski
Ilia V. Ristevski
Mial I. Ristevski
Tanas D. Ristevski
Boris Krstinov
Lefteria Traianova
Mial Boinov
Krsto L. Sekulovski
Kote S. Ralevski
Alekso Kalinov
Boris I. Kochovski
Mitre N. Kochovski
Tranda S. Kochovska
Trane F. Traikovski
Vangel S. Traikovski
Vasil D. Donevski
Klime Gelev
Fote S. Markoichin
Fotia G. Ristevska
Risto M. Ristevski
Ioshe S. Ristevski
Goche F. Ristevski

The village Trnaa

(Missing in this list are the names of fallen soldiers from the villages Orovnik, Orovo, DR'bitishta, Nivitsi and Ail because of lack of data in the INI archives. There were no participants from Vineni, the majority of the population were Asia Minor colonists loyal to the Greek government.)

Kotse Kumanov
Hristo Mitrovski
Pavle Pavlev
Hristo Pandovski

Prespa in flames

On the road you travel through our country
You came to us to climb the Brtse Hill,
To take a good look at the village German
To take a look at the other villages
And to see if your heart won't bleed.

Oh, my dear traveler! Why did you come now?
Why did you not come sooner?
To see Tsrniche full of people
To see people singing, people smiling
Oh, my dear traveler! Why didn't you come sooner?

To see twenty weddings to hear twenty drums beating
To see twenty brides
Brides in the morning dew
Wearing ornate Maisko clothes.

My unlucky traveler! Why did you come now?
To see the unharvested fields and meadows and uncollected grains and grass?
To see the houses destroyed and homes demolished
To see fourteen heroes buried in a single grave
Seven young boys in the same grave?
To see the many graves side by side?

To see the fourteen abandoned houses
Fourteen houses where heroes were born
To see a village with houses abandoned
Each house a home to a hero
Where all people are heroes.

Oh! My dear traveler!
Have you seen the beautiful Germania?
Wounded and covered in blood
Being dragged alive in the streets of Lerin?

Have you seen the cursed prisons and torture chambers?
With iron doors and iron-barred windows

In Orovo, German, Polpli and Lok
If you look at them and you shudder
Places where they tortured the heroes
For whom many mothers wept
Have you seen the masonry on which their bodies were tortured
And where walls were smeared with their blood?

Oh, my dear traveler
Look away, far in the beyond
Look at the seven towering pines
They are not pines
They are seven young Macedonian heroes
Who side by side lie in a single grave!
Look away, far away in the valley
Look at the unharvested fields and meadows
There are no people to do the job
No one to harvest the grains
No one to cut the grass…

My dear traveler
A black cloud hangs over Perovo
Flames are licking the sky
Loud rumbling is heard over the mountains
Go there and have a look
My brothers are all there
Locked in a struggle of life and death…

I am a young boy!
To Perovo I cannot go!
There the bridge over the river has been destroyed
And no one can cross the raging waters
The flames are rising up high
The earth and forests are shaking
And the place stinks of gunpowder

I am a young boy!
To Perovo I cannot go!
The bridge over the river has been demolished
No one can cross the river
Many people have perished

Many young have been cut down
And with it death has taken many…

The wounded bury themselves in the sand
The dead lay on the sand
People throw themselves in the lake
Blood flows from the people
The soil burns and the water boils from the fire
The entire lakeshore is red
The land is covered with fire and smoke
I am a young boy, there I cannot go!

Oh my dear traveler! Why come now?
Why did you not come sooner?
To see Tsrniche full of people
To see the people smile and sing…

Oh my dear traveler Why did you not come earlier?

Legends and Hardship

Legends

How Prespa got its name

From what the old people of Prespa have told us, according to out oral narrative, once upon a time there were fertile flatlands covering the area where the lakes are today. There also existed many villages including the town Prespa. Then a pond began to appear and over time stretched along the junction where the Yugoslav-Greek-Albanian border is today. The town Prespa itself was located on the shore of today's Mala Prespa Lake near the island Sveti Petar. Prespa unfortunately was destroyed by a strong earthquake which engulfed the entire region. There is also a legend associated with how Prespa, the town, got its name. Legend has it that Prespa was a very beautiful town with large buildings, shops and a bazaar. Here many of the local traders traded with many cities outside of Prepa which brought great wealth and high culture to the town.

Once upon a time a rich merchant lived in the town Prespa who had only one daughter. When she was about 15 or 16 years old, she began to wear lavish clothing and expensive jewelry which, on top of her beautiful blue eyes and blond hair, made her extraordinarily beautiful and very attractive. Every man in Prespa wanted her and would have taken her for a bride given the opportunity. She was the pride of the entire town. Unfortunately, even though her parents were very rich and happy, one day she died.

Her death shook not only her parents but the entire town. They held a grand funeral for her which was attended by the entire town's population. For her funeral the beautiful dead girl was dressed in her finest precious silk garments, with many ornaments of gold and silver which made her body and face shine.

Attracted by this extraordinary wealth, the two gravediggers who dug her grave agreed to later come back dig up the dead girl's grave and take all her valuables. This was to be done during the night when the town's people were all sleeping. When night came the two gravediggers arrived at the grave, dug up the soil and removed the dead girl's body from the coffin and placed it on the grass. Having spent a long time digging in the dark, the grave diggers lost track of

time. Realizing that dawn was about to break and they would be visible in the open space, the two grave diggers hastily covered up the grave, grabbed the girl's body and ran for the church. There they hastily undressed her. On her neck she was wearing a gold amulet which the undertakers tried but could not remove. Everything else they took and ran but agreed to comeback the next night and try again to remove the amulet and also bury the girl's body.

The grave diggers then left and went to their homes. They were very tired and so they quickly went to bed. The younger man instantly fell asleep. The dead girl appeared in his dream wearing only her underwear and in her hand she held a dagger with which she threatened to kill him if he did not return her clothes and jewelry. He suddenly woke up all frightened and was no longer able to sleep. He decided that the next day he would return the stolen items. The older gravedigger could not sleep either. He could not get the shiny gold amulet out of his mind. So, he decided to go back to the church by himself earlier and try to get it off the girl's neck.

The two gravediggers could not wait until it was dark. The older man went to the church first. He lit a candle and began to untie the chain holding the amulet. It was tied very tightly. He was sure he wouldn't be able to untie it so he decided to cut off the girl's head in order to remove it. He took out his knife he always carried with him on his belt, sharpened it on a stone, lifted the dead girl's body and placed it over his knees. He then pushed the girl's head exposing her neck and looked for a place to start cutting. The moment he put his knife on her neck the girl slipped off his knees, fell down to the ground and then suddenly stood up on her feet. In a very timid voice she asked where she was. Frightened by her site, the gravedigger dropped his knife and stood there petrified and unable to answer her. At that very moment the second gravedigger entered the church. He too became petrified. All three kept looking at each other in silence. After their fear subsided a little they began to talk.

"Where am I? And who are you and why have you brought me here?" she demanded to know.

After they lost their fear, the two grave diggers explained everything to her and all three were happy with the way things turned out.

The girl thanked the gravediggers for saving her life and in gratitude kissed their hands and feet. She then asked them to take her home to her parents and promised them plenty of rich rewards for their services. The gravediggers were not so sure about the girl's plan and they figured saving her life was not such a good idea. They remembered that there were strict laws against robbing the dead and punishment for that was being burned alive.

"I am sorry my dear but we will have to kill you…" said the older gravedigger.

The girl did not expect such a response and was petrified by it. She looked around left and right to see if she could escape. When she saw that she couldn't because there were two of them and had weapons, she again fell to her knees, kissed their feet and begged for mercy.

"We can't save you…" said the older man. "We must kill you now…" He then bent down to pick up his knife he had dropped on the ground earlier and went towards her.

The girl spread her arms wide open and demanded mercy. The younger gravedigger watching all this felt sorry for the girl, jumped his co-conspirator, took his knife away and said:

"Wait, let's not kill her. Let's change her name and we will sell her to one of the many traders that come here.

He then said to the girl: "From now on your name will be Prespa (overslept) on account that you did not die but overslept. From now on you will call yourself Prespa. In addition to that you will take an oath to never tell anyone and you will remain alive and no one will ever know about all this.

The girl was pleased with this and again fell to her knees and kissed their hands and feet and the said:

"I swear that I will fulfill this oath…"

That evening they dressed Prespa in old clothes and cut her hair. They then took her to the market and sold her to some traders who were passing through the city. Ten days later she arrived in Tsarigrad (Istanbul). Here Prespa was taken to the slave market and sold for a lot of money. An old but rich merchant who lived alone with his wife, who needed a young slave to look after them, bought her.

Prespa looked after her old masters like they were her own parents. And because she did that they too began to regard her as their own daughter. After their death, she inherited their entire wealth. Now, besides being beautiful Prespa was also a very rich woman. Nevertheless, she was not happy because she knew that she was living in someone else's country. Soon she developed the desire to return to her own homeland and as soon as possible. One day she decided to do just that.

Then, one day the woman from this town near the small lake in the wide and rich fields who was born, grew up, "died", and got her name "Prespa" here, returned with a caravan of camels, horses and several servants carrying gifts. She parked her entourage in front of the house she was born and went inside. Everyone around her bowed their heads down including her old grieving parents. When she told them that she was their daughter they refused to believe her. They insisted that their daughter had died ten years ago. Refusing to give up she gave them credible evidence of her childhood and even showed them the amulet her mother had given her. But despite her efforts to show them that she indeed was their daughter, they still did not believe her. Prespa persisted with her might, but unfortunately her parents still did not believe her. They threw her out of their house and reported her to the town authorities. Prespa was then told she had three days to leave town. Prespa in desperation asked the authorities to open the grave of the girl they all thought had died. Then, after they did and found no body, and after receiving assurances from the authorities that they would not punish those who saved her, she told them who they were. When everything was check out her case was declared a miracle. Her parents got their daughter back and the town held a celebration in her honour. Prespa kept her new name and the mayor gave her the town's key. She became widely known and many people, even from

distant parts of the land, came to see her. And because of the miracle that took place in this town, the town's officials decided to rename their town and call it Prespa. Later, the entire surrounding area and the lakes too became known as Prespa.

Prespa and Reka

The river that flows for about 200 meters connecting the two Prespa lakes near Perovo Tower was called Reka (River). The river flows from Lake Mala Prespa to Lake Golema Prespa.

According to oral history, this river was much longer, much wider and carried a larger flow of water. The river began at the foot of Mount Verba near the village Lok and ended at the curve of Mount Nivitsi in a place called Root, where the lake is now the deepest. At that time the lake was very small in which the river flowed and its waters disappeared in underground cracks and channels in Mount Galichitsa and reappeared in Lake Ohrid.

According to oral accounts, in days of old Prespa was a wide and fertile plain, with many villages and, as we mentioned earlier, the town Prespa was also located there. Prespa River was most liked named "Prespa" because of its close proximity to the town Prespa and because it was a large river worthy of having a name. And as mentioned earlier, Prespa and the surrounding beautiful villages were hit by a devastating earthquake which not only destroyed them but sunk the entire valley. The entire area sunk deep into the eroded underground and water eventually flooded the entire region forever. Years of erosion created underground channels and cracks around Galichitsa under which the water was draining. And all these underground caverns collapsed when the earthquake struck. The small lake then began to grow into a lake swallowing the town and all the surrounding villages and flooding all the gardens and fields. The area continued to flood over the years until it reached the present level. As the water level rose year after year, the original Prespa residents kept moving to higher ground and settled to where they are found today. Many of the people from old Prespa also settled in the villages Zhelevo, Oshchima, Rulia, Breznitsa, Gabresh, and in the region called Koreshta. And because this population came

from the area called Reka, it acquired the name Rekartsi, a name they still carry to this day.

There is a large water spring gushing from underground near the village Lok. This is where the river begins to which the springs in the villages Drenovo, Trnaa and Vineni add to that empty in the lakes. There are also the rivers in Rudari, German and Braichino as well as the rivers and streams that add to the larger river which flows near Vidrinets island and continued towards Ail on the east side cutting across the valley then approaching Nakolets and flowing in Mala Prespa Lake in a place called Root at the junction of the Yugoslav-Greek-Albanian border, as it passes by the great bend on Mount Nivitsi. And as the water builds up into Lake Mala Prespa it flows through the crevices under Galichitsa Mountain and flows into Lake Ohrid. At the Sveti Naum monastery at the foot of Mount Galichitsa there are large springs of water which empty into Lake Ohrid. Tests have been conducted which prove the origin of this water is Lake Prespa. Likewise, the water found in the plane in Poplenska Goritsa leads us to the conclusion that this water travels underground through cracks and channels under Mount Goritsa for a length of approximately 1 km before it surfaces again and flows into Lake Mala Prespa. Otherwise, this plane would have been a bog. These cracks are wide enough to allow fish to swim through the underground channels and to spawn on the other side of the mountain leaving large amounts of fish for the villagers in P'pli to catch in their ditches.

The great river that used to cut the valley that separated Prespa into Upper and Lower Prespa had many bridges that connected the various villages and settlements. But, due to the frequent autumn rains and melting mountain snows in the spring, the river was often flooded pouring silt into the fields and damaging the crops which prompted its early rulers and later Tsar Samoil, to clear the river bed and widen the river with labour from the Koreshtata population whose land was inert and they were exempt from all duties of the state. It was therefore their duty to clear the riverbed and in order to do that these people stayed in Prespa in groups and after a few months a year, alternated with other groups. Given, that these people cleaned the river bed for decades they eventually became known as the Rekartsi (river people) of Prespa.

As mentioned earlier, the town Prespa was located above the shore of the little lake, near the island Sveti Petar. This was an old town which, along with some the larger settlements, was well developed both in population and economic activities. This was largely due to the fact that this town was located on the road between Heraclea (Bitola) and Lihnica (Ohrid) and the Adriatic Sea. There was also the miracle in the legend mentioned earlier, which gave the town not only its name but also its fame. Prespa was the town of the beautiful rich girl who died and was resurrected.

Unfortunately there is nothing left of old Prespa today. There is only its name and where it is located. It is the fishermen near this site that keep the legend alive. There are ruins of some larger settlements, as well as some ruins of castles and churches and other buildings, including some cobbled stone roads 2 meters underwater, but none can be connected to the old town for certain.

A large settlement began to develop in the Latin Cemetery locality, near the village P'pli. Ore was melted in the settlement extracted from the Rudari mine located near the present village Rudari, which actually got its name from the mine (rudnik). Weapons and other military equipment were fabricated from the melted ore. The then rulers of Prespa and later Tsar Samoil forged most of their arms and weapons in Prespa. This settlement also produced and shaped copper objects that were used in the households. All that is left of this settlement today are large heaps of stones.

The modern residents of P'pli who cultivated these lands often found ancient objects including old building foundations and sewerage and water channels everywhere they dug. They found piles of broken clay jags, various coins and other metal objects. They also found many tombs and some of the skeletons were much larger compared to the people living there today. This appears to be a very old settlement which was guarded by two forts. The Graishta Fortress located on Graishta hill and the Tumba Fortress located between Rudari and the old settlement. It is not known who built these fortresses.

The old settlement was destroyed by Basil II's soldiers when they invaded Prespa and since then it was never restored to its original splendor. It was again completely destroyed by the Ottomans. When the Ottoman army invaded the Balkans and came to Prespa it was met with much resistance and many Ottomans soldiers were killed in the battles. In order to capture the settlement the Ottomans resorted to burning it down and killing its population. The survivors settled in present day P'pli. But the Ottomans did not stop there; they also attacked the Sveti Giorgia monastery near Rudari. The monks living there would not surrender and resisted the Ottoman attacks. The monastery was surrounded and under siege for a few weeks. When the Ottomans seized it, they locked the monks in their own separate cells and kept them there until they died of starvation. This place is called Kielie (cell) and the hill over the small Sveti Giorgi monastery is called Kaludieritsa (home of the monks).

A large settlement also existed on the shore of Lake Mala Prespa near the village Vineni. Most of its ruins now lie beneath the lake waters. On the coastline are the ruins of the big Sveti Giorgi church. Within about a kilometre of this neighborhood is the old village Vineni with about 50 houses, which later was moved to the foot of the hill to avoid being flooded.

The village Ail is now located on the northwest side of the island. In ancient times this was a very rich and powerful village and stretched all the way to the east side at the foot of the island.

The great river flowed by the village Ail and on the opposite side of its bank was the village Opaa. When the women from the two villages went to do the laundry they often talked to one another over the river. At this point in time the river was about 2 to 3 metres deep.

There is also a small island, a few hectares wide, called Vidrinets (otter) in Lake Mala Prespa. This island consists mostly of rocks and has a large cave in it. Before the lake waters rose, this area was dry and when the shepherds brought their sheep to drink water they often housed them in the cave to keep them out of the sun and to milk them. There are also many otters in the waters all around the island which, in the winter when the lake is frozen and covered with

ice, are seen lying on the rocks on the island. The island Vidrinets (otter) got its name from the otters. Given that the island is so close to the river flow, there are many fish that the otters can eat.

Long ago there was a village called Bushkani located near the island Vidrinets, which played a significant role in the development of handicrafts in the settlement. Bushkani was located on the road leading from Korcha through today's Drenovo into the town Prespa and the Prespa settlements. When it flooded the residents from Buskani eventually settled in the villages Orovnik, Bukoik and Lok.

The village Opaa, located opposite Ail, was the last village to be abandoned by its residents who settled in the villages Strkovo and Rudari. The families Tolev and Maialov now living in Rudari and the families Kostandinov today living in Shtrkovo are originally from Opaa. The residents still call them Opaaitsi (from Opaa). The area that once was Opaa in the Gradinieto locality today is flooded with water about a metre and a half deep. There is a 500 metre long cobblestone road stretching from Perovo Tower towards Gradinieto and Opaa heading towards the Slogot locality, which today is submerged under 1.5 metres of water.

The village Nakolets was moved several times. Before the most recent move when floodwaters began to surround the village, the residents built a cobblestone road and drove poles (kolie) into the ground to keep the soil from eroding, especially under the cobblestone road. The village got its name Nakolets from the kolie (poles).

The village Drenovo is located at the entrance to the road from Korcha to Prespa. There were several inns in this village where many traders and their caravans spent the night on their way to market. All that remains of them today are the stones from the destroyed former inns, and a place called Anovite (inns).

On the land between Ail and the mainland towards Krina Hill, now submerged under three metres of water, lies a 3 metre wide cobblestone road raised about 1.5 metres above the ground but submerged about 1m below the surface. This cobblestone road is a remnant from Tsar Samoil's time. There was a swamp that existed

there during Samoil's time and so he built a cobblestone road over it. It was later upgraded and raised when the area began to flood.

In 1935 the level of Lake Golema Prespa fell about a metre below the level of Lake Mala Prespa.

Residents of the nearby villages widened the river banks at Perovo Tower and for several hours the small river flow turned into a monstrous torrent which immediately washed away the bridge, the only link between the villages of Dolna Prespa and Gorna Prespa leaving the population cut off for several months until the water level of the two lakes leveled off. They then built a new bridge. When the waters of Lake Mala Prespa were drained the cobblestone road leading to Ail became exposed and the people began to use until it was flooded again. In some places along the cobblestone road there were so-called open crossings for boats to cross when the water level fell.

The bridge and the river at Perovo Tower occupy an important place in Macedonia's history. And as mentioned earlier, on August 14, 1949, when DAG was withdrawing from the Greek Civil War, along with the civilian population of Mala Prespa, they were exposed to mass butchery perpetrated by the Greek government air force. At this critical juncture the Greek government army pushed hard to invade Prespa and cut off the partisans from escaping over the Albanian border. During the evening of August 15, 1949 the riverbed was once again excavated and the river, for a short time, turned into a torrent, and thus prevented the government tanks and troops from crossing, giving the fleeing partisans and war refugees a of couple days to escape while the Greek government continued its pursuit by boats over the lake. In those two days the vast majority of the partisans and civilians had moved into the Albanian interior and were saved.

On account of the various legends and claims made by the fishermen about what is under the waters of the Prespa Lakes, Mala Prespa hired two divers in 1936 who then went down to the bottom of Lake Mala Prespa to examine the various locations according to instructions given to them by the fishermen. And indeed they found remains of buildings in several places at the bottom of the lake that

included houses and churches and, in some places, where the old river flowed they found beams of wood that were at one time part of bridges.

Located on the coastline of Lake Golema Prespa, in the bay near the Root settlement, is the village Nivitsi whose residents are all fisherman. The people in this village speak an ancient Macedonian dialect which has been preserved for a long time. This is because this village has been completely cut off from the rest of the Prespa villages and has largely evolved independently.

Tsar Samoil and Prespa

When Tsar Samoil was looking for a place to locate his capital for his Macedonian state, the Macedonian king purposely chose Prespa. Prespa at the time was a large, rich and peaceful area with large settlements, rich and fertile fields, rich pastures, rich hunting and fishing grounds, a small lake, a large river and a swamp. Prespa had all the right ingredients to support his army and his slaves. Samoil also saw Prespa as a fortress which provided his army and his administration a peaceful stay and rest after returning from campaigns and conquests.

The moment Samoil decided to make Prespa his capital, he immediately started huge projects to build his country's economy and strengthen its culture.

The first thing he did was to hire people to clear the river basin which for a long time had been neglected and its blocked flow had flooded the most fertile fields in the valley. For this purpose he ordered the Koreshtata population, now known as the called Rekartsi, whose own land was unproductive, to move to Prespa in groups and clear the silt. The Rekartsi were required to clean up the river all across the fields and to dig channels in the swamp to drain the water. And because of that they were exempt from all state duties.

After these people successfully cleared the riverbed and drained the fields through the channels they dug, they were legislated to do this

work the next year and over time it became their permanent preoccupation until the land was completely flooded by the lakes.

In the wet season, particularly during the fall and winter, the road from Krina Hill to Ail was usually very wet and difficult to cross because of the developing swamp. So Tsar Samoil decided to build a nice path of cobblestones over it. For this project he put his slaves, part of his army and the Prespa population to work. The people worked uninterrupted until the road was built. When it was completed the road was 3 metres wide and 1.5 kilometres long. The stones used to build the road came from local sources and were carried by hand, passed on from person to person. The job, in which women were also involved, even mothers of young children, was completed very quickly. While their mothers worked on the road, the little suckling children were looked after by old women. One woman usually looked after 10 children. When she put them to sleep she rocked all their cribs with a single rope which she had used to tie them together.

After constructing the cobblestone road Samoil built a palace in Ail and settled there. He then moved his administration to Ail. By digging the various channels through the fields the old marsh quickly dried up and the soil became fertile again. The Ail villagers were very proud of their cobblestone road and considered it as one of the greatest benefits contributed by Tsar Samoil. Every visitor who comes to Ail was first shown the cobblestone road before they were taken to see other places.

After Samoil moved to Prespa he began to build cultural monuments. After constructing his palace he built the St. Achilles church in Ail. This large and beautiful church had 12 altars and 12 priests performing liturgy. Samoil built this church after his great victory against the Byzantine army in Larissa. When he entered Larissa and saw the beautiful St. Achilles church he wanted to build a similar church in Prespa. He sought out the Larissa master builders who built the church there and brought them with him to Ail. Samoil also took Patriarch Achilles's bones, in whose honour he built this church. Patriarch Achilles's bones were buried in one of the altars, which gave the church the name St. Achilles. The church was

located on the east side of the foot of Ail which is now submerged under the lake water. Only the church's ruins remain today.

According to eye witness accounts, the St. Achilles church in Ail was destroyed in 1918. Before that many people came to the church on St. Achilles's day, and along with them came all the priests from the Prespa villages who then performed liturgy and participated in the ceremonies.

According to eye witness accounts the church was destroyed in 1918 during the First World War by the allied army consisting of Frenchmen, Serbians and Greeks stationed on Mount Graishta about 5 km away from Ail. They bombed Ail with their cannons while ceremonies were taking place in the St. Achilles church. The Bulgarian front was located at Sveti Ilia and Slivia in R'bi and German. A lot of people had attended liturgy that day and as the parishioners were leaving St. Achilles the allies bombed the church. They pounded the church with their artillery for half an hour until it was in ruins. The church collapsed and several houses in the village were destroyed. People too were killed and wounded.

Given that the distance from Graishta to Ail was short, the allies could have easily determined that there were no Bulgarian soldiers attending liturgy at St. Achilles that day. So it would appear that something else motivated them to destroy the church. The allies also knew that the Bulgarians could not have come to Ail even if they wanted to because their way was cut off and well-guarded by the allies themselves.

The motivation for the destruction of this beautiful Macedonian church in Prespa to this day remains a mystery.

Ioakim, the chief master builder who supervised the construction of the St. Achilles church in Ail, was from Veles Region, today's Republic of Macedonia. This builder became a legend in Prespa and was responsible for building several churches including the Sveti Giorgi church in a settlement near Vineni, from which only ruins remain today deep in the waters of Lake Mala Prespa.

At the foot of Goritsa Hill in P'pli, near the source of the large underground spring, the master builder built the Sveta Iana church whose ruins today lie under the waters of Lake Prespa. Later a new Sveta Iana church was built but much smaller and up higher. The same master builder also built the Virgin Mary church in R'bi, in the same style as the St. Achilles church but smaller in size and with one altar. This church was later openly destroyed and we know why (because it was a Macedonian church). In the ruins we could see the scattered marble and the destroyed marble tombstones. A new Byzantine style church was later built right beside it. This was the church of Sveti Prechista. On its altar and side walls one could see a few thin layers of plaster one on top of another. Each layer had new images painted in different periods.

While he was in Prespa, Tsar Samoil built many churches but most of the churches he built were in Ail and R'bi. Included among the churches he built in Ail were St. Achilles, Sveti Spas, Sveti Giorgi, Sveti Dimitria and Sveta Bogoroditsa. Sveta Bogoroditsa later became a large monastery housing many monks. The monks cultivated the land that belonged to the monastery as well as bred many flocks of sheep and cattle. With their proceeds they cared for and maintained other churches and considered Ail to be sacred ground. Later, as much of Mala Prespa became flooded, Ail began to turn into an island and was cut off from Prespa. At this time many of the monks and residents began to leave their "holy" land. Those remaining, with assistance from the Prespa villages, upgraded the cobblestone road by adding more stones to bring the road above the water level which by then had risen about 1.5 metres.

In 1942 the Italians positioned their artillery in Krina. To cover their military barracks they stripped the monastery of its roof tiles. The last monk living in this monastery died in 1943.

Ioakim, the master builder, also built several churches in R'bi including Sveti Prechista (The Virgin Mary), Sveti Dimitria, Sveta Petka and Sveti Nikola. The Sveti Nikola church was destroyed by the Ottomans who then built a mosque on top of it. But because of a great flood, which affected the village, the mosque was moved and the villagers again built a Sveti Nikola church on the same foundation but smaller in size.

According to old accounts, Tsar Samoil also built a church on Goritsa Hill near R'bi. This church was dedicated to Sveti Iovan Prespanski. This church was built to guard the fields and keep the crops safe from storms. In 1870 the villagers from R'bi rebuilt this church and made it much bigger. At the front door they placed Samoil's gravestone for safekeeping which earlier, for many centuries, was kept in the church of the Virgin Mary in R'bi. This church now became a symbol for the Prespa population in which the people gathered to celebrate Sveti Iovan. Unfortunately in 1918, during World War I, one day the Bulgarians discovered Samoil's grave stone and took it. They also took many other artifacts from all the churches in R'bi and Goritsa, annihilating walls and tombstones in the process. All the artifacts were taken to Bulgaria.

The village R'bi was named "R'bi" meaning "slaves" because of the proximity of the neighbourhood where Samoil kept his slaves, whom he had captured during his various campaigns against Byzantium. Because of its location, climate and sources of water, R'bi was a good place for Samoil to spend time and relax. Because it was a nice place, Samoil enriched it with churches where rites and ceremonies could be performed which he personally could attend. The Slaves who existed adjacent to R'bi were guarded by the military. They were put to work on various projects and, guided by the master builders, built buildings, churches, roads and other structures. One section of slaves worked in the fields and gardens growing food for the military. Unfortunately those fields and gardens located near the village Onaa, now all rest under water.

Ail had little surface water and its drinking water had to be obtained from several dug wells. Unfortunately the wells were not sufficient to provide enough water for the entire population so more water had to be obtained from alternate water sources such as those from Vineni 3 km away. It is also worth mentioning that Samoil made every effort to drain the Prespa swamps, clear the debris in the Prespa River and build several bridges to keep the communities and his military connected together. He himself was a great worker and supervisor. He was also a great strategist and won many victories over the Byzantines, bringing much wealth to Prespa. Much of the wealth and treasures Samoil looted he kept in various caves in Ail.

Lured by desires to find treasures and gold left behind by the Tsar, in 1937 excavators, under the strict supervision of the Greek government, began to dig in various places on Ail. They dug in places where knowledgeable people of the island's history had advised them to dig, during which time they uncovered a number of gravestones inscribed with Slavic letters, as well as many other items of that time. The tombstones and other objects found during the digging were then confiscated by the Greek government, packed in crates and sent south to Greece. Many of the diggers were hoping to find Patriarch Achilles's bones and return them to their original tomb in Larissa but without success.

Tsar Samoil won many victories over the Byzantines and when he returned to Prespa he brought the spoils of war with him which included slaves. The Prespa population always paid him homage and often celebrated his victories by conducting rites and ceremonies in the various churches. Every time Samoil was spotted from Graishta returning to Prespa with his entourage, the people lit large fires and the smoke was seen in all the Prespa villages. At the same time the people rang the church bells in all the villages marking his arrival to the capital.

There are two stories in regards to where Tsar Samoil was buried. According to one story he was buried on Ail in one of the altars in the church of St. Achilles. According to the other story he was buried in R'bi, in the church of the Virgin Mary. Considering that he often visited R'bi to rest and after he met his blinded soldiers in Prespa, he became very ill and died. Because his gravestone was kept for centuries in the church of the Virgin Mary, many believe he was buried in R'bi.

Mala Prespa under Turkish rule

Stories

In the late 17th and early 18th century the Ottomans were committing unprecedented violence and crimes against the Prespa villages. This unbearable tyranny was perpetrated against the Macedonian Christian population, in an attempt to force the people to obey the Ottomans and accept Islam. Killings and violence were a common theme with open aims at Islamizing the Christians.

The Islamic minority which lived in several villages, held most of the fertile land which had been confiscated and forcibly acquired from the people by the Ottoman hierarchy including the Albanian Beys and Agas for whom the Macedonian people worked. Most of the Macedonian population lived in villages on the mountains. And almost all the villages in the mountains were barren land. Even the barren land was owned mostly by Albanian landlords who were able to buy it from the Ottomans with money they earned working abroad.

The Macedonian population also raised livestock which has been part of their economy for a long time. They were good at rearing large flocks of sheep, goats and cattle. Each family owned a flock of sheep and goats. The villages near the lakes also dealt with fishing. The people utilized the natural resources of the lakes with members in larger families exclusively dealing with fishing and others with dairy farming. Markets in Bitola and Korcha were consistently supplied cheese, butter, wool, meat and fish from Prespa. The Prespa villagers, to some extent, also supplied their products to the Albanians who dealt mainly in agriculture by employing Macedonians to do the work.

It was common practice for the Albanians to go to Macedonian villages and kidnap young people, especially young women, and force them to harvest and process their crops without pay while they kept their own women behind high fences. This was an age during which the Christian Macedonian woman was seen as a lower form of life and abused in unimaginable ways by these Albanian Muslims.

There is much to say about the Macedonian woman in the history of mankind. There were four things with which she was inextricably connected. The Macedonian woman also deserves the greatest credit for the preservation of the Macedonian nation. She did that in spite of all odds and how she was treated and exposed to the many conquerors who trampled over Macedonia.

The Macedonian woman was a great devotee to our religion and consistently performed religious rites. Her Macedonian language was the only language for her. Unlike her male counterpart who spoke foreign languages, she never wanted to speak a single foreign word. Unlike her male counterpart who traveled far and wide looking for migrant work and returned home with money and a few of someone else's words, she preferred to stay home and labour on her own lands and despised his foreign words: Vlach, Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian…

The Macedonian folk dress is the greatest cultural identifier of the Macedonian woman. It is not just the uniqueness of her dress but the fact that she fashioned it herself with utmost patience, decorating it with unique patterns and colours that not only look beautiful but identify her family and community. The woman's dress is much more complex than the man's which, by the way, is also made by the Macedonian woman.

The Macedonian woman is a great mother. Her husband sometimes helps with rearing the children but when he is forced to leave home and go to work far away, sometimes for years, the woman takes over maintenance of the entire household. She worked on the Bey's fields, shepherded the sheep and cut the firewood in the mountains.

She was valuable and adorned with her folk dress which made her very attractive to the Albanian Muslims. Being Muslim and allowed to bear arms, the Ottoman authorities armed the Albanian men and gave them unlimited authority, which they often used against the Macedonians. This unlimited authority was exercised to misappropriate Macedonian women to satisfy their passions. They killed any Macedonian man who tried to protect the honour of the women. Even Albanian men from the lower class often grabbed

Macedonian girls, if not for themselves then for someone wealthy. A wealthy Albanian would be willing to pay large sums of money.

Religion was the only legal defense the Macedonians had. The Christian population was maintained in large family groups, sometimes reaching up to fifty members per family. The priests were the initiators for organizing religious celebrations, such as fairs where the entire village or a number of villages could participate. These celebrations quickly developed into popular attractions. The priests sometimes played the role of teachers and counselors, and sometimes used their position for their own enrichment.

I will try to highlight some events that took place during Ottoman times, in order to provide a clearer picture of events that took place during that period and subsequent to the period when the Albanians disappeared from Prespa. I will confine my scope to R'bi only.

There are 18 villages, including the village R'bi, located in the lower part of Prespa situated next to the Republic of Macedonia's southern border. These villages are now occupied by Greece. This settlement, according to old legends, dates back to before Tsar Samoil took residence in Prespa. We are told that Tsar Samoil kept many of the slaves he captured, during his campaigns against the Byzantines, in the R'bi vicinity. Samoil built many magnificent churches in this settlement with marble columns as seen today in the ruins. R'bi now has four churches one of which is the church of Sveti Nikola (St. Nicholas).

About a dozen large Macedonian families lived in R'bi in the period from 1780 to 1820, with 30 to 50 family members in each. There were also a few but much smaller Albanian families also living in R'bi but they possessed most of the fertile land, much of which in fact belonged to the Bey Alia. The Bey was a young Albanian man who inherited the chiflik (feudal estate) from his father. The Bey rented his fields to the Albanians who then had the Macedonians work them.

The Macedonians had a small stretch of barren land. They raised large flocks of sheep and goats, fished and on occasion managed to earn higher revenues than the Albanians. While the Macedonian

men and women worked on the Albanian fields, the Albanian Muslims kept their wives and women locked in their yards behind high walls.

When the young Albanian Bey took over the estates from his father he brought violence and crime into the village. Before that Alia Bey served in the Ottoman army and had taken part in many battles in the Ottoman-led wars against various countries. He was brought up by the state and by the Muslim religion and was unable to see the Christians as people and only saw them as "infidels", a plague in the Ottoman Empire. He wanted to be very rich and live in luxurious quarters with a large harem of women from many nations and religions who he was prepared to Islamize. He was a true Islamic commander of his time. Supported by his government he took personal action to exert pressure to Islamize the entire R'bi population. The Macedonian population, however, resisted and, as a result, suffered many casualties. The village priest, a man named Giorgia, used his position to encourage the villagers not to give in to Albanian demands and sacrifice themselves if necessary.

Young Alia Bey ordered his minions to destroy the Sveti Nikola Christian Orthodox church down to its foundation and build a mosque on top of it. He also ordered an Islamic school (meftep) be built beside the mosque. The priest Giorgia did his best to oppose the Bey but was unable. The Bey forced the villagers to send their children to attend Muslim school and learn the Koran. The priest opposed the Bey again but this time the Bey had him killed. Before he was murdered, the priest had gathered all the Christian children in the church and had taught them to sing religious psalms and much about the Christian religion. After the Bey killed the priest he grabbed one of the priest's daughters, a girl name Ristana, and to spite him even more put her in his harem.

A little later, Alia Bey and several prominent Albanians from the village invited all the villagers to the village square and told them that they had three days to convert to Islam or otherwise their churches would be demolished and mosques would be built on top of their foundations. The women were ordered to wear Muslim clothing. Then everyone was invited to attend a Muslim celebration that was going to be attended by Muslim representatives from Bitola

and Ianina. Those who did not attend the celebration, they were told, would be put to the sword.

The villagers were worried like never before. They gathered in the church and everyone was given a chance to speak. In the end they all decided to go and visit the Bey and beg him not to change their identity and religion. They were prepared to give him everything he wanted in exchange for not changing their identity and religion. They appointed a few older men and sent them to see the Bey. The Bey received them and they humbled themselves down to earth, bowed down before him and said: "Dear Bey, we beg you not to change our nationality and religion. Your religion and nation are good, we have nothing bad to say about it, but God ordered us to be this way and that is how we wish to remain. We do not want to go against God's will. Our faith and nation was left to our care by our past generations and we want to leave it the way, it is for our future generations. If we don't we will be committing a great sin against God and against our descendants. Ask for whatever you want, whatever you say we will deliver to you but please spare our identity and faith.

The Bey, sitting down with his legs crossed, drank his coffee and listened to the old people humble themselves before him. He then put his cup down, stood up and said: "Since you have come to me with a concern, I take it upon himself to take care of your concern and make it easier for you…" The Bey then thought for a moment and continued. "You can keep your language but your religion must change…" He paused, thought about it for a moment and said: "Our Muslim faith is better than all the religions in the world, including the Christian faith. It is time now for you Macedonian Christians to give up your current faith and embrace Islam; many other Macedonians have already done that." He then told them that he was not a Turk but an Albanian and his origin was from the Albanian village Frasher. He then spread his arms wide open and said: "I received Islam and I became a Bey…" after which he chuckled.

The old people were not happy with the Bey's demands and tried to haggle with him, offering him everything they had but he refused to back down. For his final offer he said: "This is how it's going to be, you will give me all your lands and you will come and work for me

as my slaves. I will be your owner and you my slaves. I and only I will own you, none of the other Beys and Agas will be able to touch you." At that point the three old people looked at each other and, without saying another word, rose, bowed to the Bey and left. The Bey too motioned with his hand to honour them and escorted them to the courtyard.

Taip was an Albanian who lived with the Albanians in the village. He was an older dignified man who respected everyone and never had any trouble with the "infidels" (Christians). He always invited everyone to his place during Bairam and Ramadan. Also included among his houseguests were Christians who came to honour him during the Muslim holidays. Taip was well-aware of the wicked deeds perpetrated by his compatriots against the Christians. About that he often used to say: "The Turks still have the warrior and conquering spirit but Allah is going to punish them for what they are doing to the Christians because Allah is Allah for both Muslims and Christians and he loves all his people equally. Allah himself made both the Turks and the Christians and all the many nations and religions that exist in this country." To his Christian friends Taip used to say: "Struggle for your nation and faith because they were given to you by God. It is a great sin to forsake them." Both Albanians and Macedonians used to visit Taip and he advised them both about their fortunes and misfortunes.

At night the villagers gathered together in several of their houses and during the day they gathered in the fields. They talked and talked and no one wanted to give up their identity or faith. They convinced themselves that they would rather die than give up their nation or their faith. A man called Ognen Nivichki who had moved to R'bi from Nivitsi said: "We have come this far; why should we wait any longer. Let us grab some weapons and fight the Turks and whoever wins, wins. At least our voices will be heard everywhere and in Istanbul, and whoever dies, dies but we are all not going to die and our nation and the faith will remain. Let those who remain alive honour our deeds and keep our identity and our faith will remain alive…" When the women found out about this they began to cry and wail as if their men had already been killed. They even went to church to pray for their souls. They were afraid their men would be killed and they would all end up locked up in harems,

covered with veils and never again be able to wear their beautiful folk dresses which they had fashioned with their own hands.

The situation was dire and the poor people became desperate. Everything that took centuries to build was about to be destroyed. The men gathered together in the church and decided to give the Bey everything he wanted including themselves, to become his slaves in order to save their identity and faith. They then went home to sleep.

When Taip found out about this he took it very hard. He got some of the older Christians together and said: “If you become the Bey’s slaves he will not protect you. The Albanians will still abuse you, even more now, and will take your women. The Bey himself will even do that because you will be his slaves. You will still have no weapons or power. In fact you will have nothing, not even the protection of others who might want to help you.” Taip then went to the Bey and told him that if he does what he is planning to do he will be attacked, he will die at the time when he wants to live the most. The property he was about to acquire, he told the Bey, will be taken by the wind. He predicted the Muslims may have a bit more daylight but the Macedonians will have the night. He said that there will be war and many people will be lost. And Taip was right, all his predictions eventually did come true.

When the villagers gathered at the village church Naido Mundushev, head of the Mundushev family with thirty men, wives, children and grandchildren in the households, said: “Hold on to what you have and do not surrender anything to the Albanians, not our nation, not our faith and not our lands. They are now afraid, terribly scared of what we might do to them and they will do nothing to get in our way. If they kill some of us then let them kill us but we will not surrender. Ognen and Naido got together and they tried to hold onto everybody’s lands but they couldn’t. They tried to persuade the villagers not to give them up but could not convince them. This is because the villagers were very frightened and the Bey and the Albanians knew it. Only Naido and Ognen did not surrender their lands to the Bey.

The Bey then took all the men from the village who promised him their lands along with everything they owned, and together they rode on horses all the way to Ianina, because Ianina was the pashadom (administrative centre) where the Bey could legally acquire these people's properties. Naido and Ognen and some of the other villagers did not go to Ianina and did not give up their lands. All those villagers who gave their lands to the Bey then became his slaves and whatever they earned had to be shared with the Bey, who took half of their proceeds for himself.

With his newly acquired wealth the Bey built a hospice in Prespa. Around the hospice he planted trees which grew into a forest. He brought more women into his harem, beautiful young Christian women who gave him a lot of pleasure. But for some reason he became cruel towards his slaves and also against the Albanians. The Bey also forced himself on Naido and Ognen and wanted to take their lands but they refused to give them to him. The Bey threatened to murder them and killed Naido's son Temelko and took one of his granddaughters, Ristana, daughter of his son Ilia. He also tried to kill another son, Naum, but only wounded him in the leg. Naum was crippled but died of old age. The Bey continued to threaten these two families to no end, so they decided to leave the village and Prespa altogether. They went to Saragiol, Kozhani Region, where the Bey was unable to mistreat them. The R'bi villagers in the meantime kept working for the Bey, making him richer and richer with each passing day while his beautiful and slender women lived lavishly in his quarters. The Albanians in the village began to envy him so he procured a number of body guards who kept him safe and followed him around wherever he went.

After Greece became independent the situation in Macedonia began to change. Instead of pushing to Islamize the Macedonian population, to forcibly take its lands and to terrorize it to no end, the Muslims began to fear it. They realized a Macedonian insurrection was imminent and so the Muslims gradually began to sell their lands for money and the Bey in R'bi began to seek buyers for his slaves and for the land he had seized from them.

The first person to buy part of the Bey's estate was a priest named Naum from Nivitsi who had moved to R'bi. This priest had about 20

Prespa villages under his jurisdiction where he performed religious ceremonies. The Bey also authorized his own slaves as well as all Christian villagers to purchase parts of his estate. As a result many men from Prespa left their families and went abroad, all around the world, to seek work and earn money to expand their holdings. Prespa men took on migrant work in Vlashko (Wallachia), Anatolia and even in Russia. Many of these people went around the world to earn money so that they could buy back their own lands. Many Macedonians fought in the Peloponnesus and helped the Greeks liberate Morea during the Greek uprising, believing that the Greeks would do the same for the Macedonians when their time came. Unfortunately the Greeks had different ideas.

A year after Naido Mundushev fled to Saragiol, he died. He passed away longing for his son Temelko and for his niece Ristana. He died missing his home and the lands he had abandoned and for having had to start building his life all over again. The trauma of all this was too great for him and he died of a broken heart. His sons Naum and Ilia, as well as Temelko's children, remained in Saragiol for the next 30 years. Then when the situation in Prespa changed, they returned back to their native village, together with their families. They took back their properties from the Bey by legal means because they still had evidence (title and deeds) that they were the rightful owners. Naum and Ilia settled with their families in R'bi while Temelko's sons and their families settled in German. It is interesting to mention here that the Temelkov families that settled in German were nicknamed "Saragilov" by the villagers of German because they came from Saragiol. Even though the Saragilov families in German and the Mundushev families in R'bi had gone for 30 years, they still longed for Prespa and were happy to return.

The priest Naum, unlike the priest Giorgia who fought to save the Macedonian identity and faith, used his position and influence to enrich himself. He had 20 villages under his jurisdiction and was unable to perform all his religious rites. He, however, developed a clever plan and in it he included his trusted followers. Every time there was an event somewhere in his jurisdiction, Naum had his devoted followers come to see him. Naum always stayed in R'bi wherever he performed the religious services. The people who came to see him humbly bowed in front of him and kissed his hand and

then informed him of an event taking place where his services were required. Some person would inform him for example that someone named Filian had died in a village and that the priest was needed to perform the funeral. Another person would inform him that Filian's son was getting married on Sunday and that the priest was needed to perform the marriage ceremony. All these people who came to see the priest brought with them cakes and wine. Then another person would come and tell him that Filian had a newborn son and that he needed a priest on Sunday to do the christening. The priest obviously could not possibly go to all these services so his reply was: "Go, do the funeral yourselves, go get married and enjoy the wedding, go and give your infant son a name, I will perform all the services for you from right here and place their names here in my big book.

Naum continued with his plan year round. Twice a year, in the spring and fall, he climbed on his horse and together with his servant went to visit the villages. The villagers in each village were honoured to have him as their guest and looked forward to his visits. His church assistants in the villages made sure that he was accommodated in the homes of the most prominent families where he dined well in the company of the most prominent villagers. For the village the priest's visit was a great event during which he held liturgy in the local church. At the end of the day he invited all the villagers, opened his big book and read the names of all those people for whom he had provided religious services from afar and who owed him money. He then, in addition to asking to be paid for the supposed work he had done, also wanted the gifts owed to him from the funerals, weddings, baptisms and so on, such as tips, socks, scarves, etc. Because everyone wanted to be indebted to the priest, they all paid up and made good on what he asked. By the time the priest went through all the villages he had collected a horse load of money and gifts. After returning to R'bi, Naum visited the Bey and purchased more of his estate.

One time Naum purchased a large field near the entrance of the village for much less than the field was actually worth. The field unfortunately was littered with rocks both large and small. Every morning after he purchased the field, Naum picked up his walking stick and went to visit it. Passersby who saw him standing at the

road beside his field often greeted him with kind words and kissed his hand. With time more and more people came to see him and get his blessings. Then as the number of people increased he asked them to help him move the rocks out of the field. Some even spent the entire day obliging him. So, over time, the priest not only removed the stones but he had the people build a wall around his field. And he did it for free.

The Bey kept many young and beautiful women in his harem. Outside, the beautiful women swam in the pool and wandered around in the garden, which was surrounded by a high fence. Inside the harem there were individually furnished rooms and many bathrooms where the beautiful women bathed. One day, as the Bey lay on his couch under the shade of his trees, smoked his tobacco pipe and stared at the slender figures of the naked women, a wasp began to buzz. He tried to swat it but it fell on his cheek and stung him. He screamed in pain and all the women ran to him. His face immediately began to swell and one of his eyes became swollen shut. The women took him to the hospice but because he was not a Turk he asked them to take him home to Frasher, to his own hometown in Albania. Being certain that he was going to die he wanted his soul to rest in Frasher and his body to be buried in his family's cemetery. Twenty of his slaves from R'bi were summoned to help. They put him on a stretcher and walked him to Frasher, about 150 kilometres away from R'bi, and far from his lodgings and his homestead. The Bey did not make it and died along the way. One of his three sons, the youngest, inherited his estate and hospice in R'bi. The other two went to his other estates. The Bey was rich and had many estates. His women remained in Frasher to mourn him.

Many men from Prespa pursued employment elsewhere, even migrant work overseas. While some were coming back with money in their pockets, others left to seek their fortunes. Everyone's aim was to purchase back the lands that the Ottomans and, in the case of R'bi, the Albanian Bey had confiscated from them. They were prepared to purchase their lands back, be it from the Bey or from the other Albanians who began to feel uncomfortable living in R'bi. Many also held onto their money and even pooled it with others, waiting for the right moment so that they could purchase a lot more land for less.

Lazo Bechkov returned to R'bi from having worked in Vlashko (Wallachia) and with the money he made he wanted to purchase a field from the Bey. Lazo made a deal with the Bey. But before he was able to deliver the money to him, the money he had worked so hard to make in Vlashko so that he could purchase the field he wanted, a Turkish man name Rustem was appointed civil guard in R'bi. When Lazo met Rustem, Rustem was carrying a rifle over his shoulder and a dagger on his belt. Rustem greeted Lazo and sat on one of the small stools in Lazo's yard. Lazo greeted him back and asked him what he wanted. Rustem then asked Lazo how his return trip from abroad was and so on. When the pleasantries were over Rustem informed Lazo that he intended to come back later to his house to have dinner with him and instructed Lazo to prepare dinner for him. Lazo had no problem with that and accepted him as his guest. Rustem then said: "Great then, this young lady here will prepare two chickens, one roasted and the other boiled." Lazo had two daughter-in-laws whose husbands, his sons, were working abroad in Vlashko. Lazo had returned home so that he could purchase the field he wanted from the Bey. True to his word Rustem came back in the evening and the two men had dinner together. After dinner Rustem said: "Well Lazo, thank you for the dinner, but now I am going to tell you why I came here. I came here to tell you that your father owed my father one golden lira. I have not told you about this before but now I want the lira back." Lazo looked at him with a surprised look on his face because he did not know anything about this. He asked his mother and she too did not know anything about this. Lazo's father was dead now but he had never mentioned anything like this to him or to his wife. Lazo did not believe such a transaction ever took place and could not accept Rustem's word alone and told him so. Rustem became very upset and sprang to his feet. He then pulled out his dagger and yelled: "You dirty bastard, you think I would lie for one lira? Give me the lira or I will end your life right now!" Rustem's outburst upset the women and they all began to cry. Lazo agreed to give him a lira and asked his wife to bring one over. Rustem then said: "Wait a minute, its no longer one lira but five gold coins, I also want interest for it." Lazo realized that Rustem was there to swindle him but he had no choice and so he gave him the five gold liras and Rustem went on his way.

Rustem took the five gold coins and went straight to his cousin's house. He went to boast to his cousin Nedzhat how he had swindled 5 gold coins from Lazo Bechkov. After hearing Rustem's story Nedzhat figured that he too could swindle some gold coins from Lazo. Without wasting much time Nedzhat threw his rifle over his shoulder, placed his dagger in his belt and off he went to Lazo's house. Nedzhat greeted Lazo and sat down on the stool. He then explained to Lazo why he was there. He said that his father had given Lazo's father 5 gold coins and that Nedzhat was now there to collect them. Lazo told Nedzhat exactly what he told Rustem; that he was not aware of such a transaction ever taking place. Nedzhat then got very upset and rushed towards Lazo to stab him. At that very moment a number of men from the neighbourhood entered the room, who had been summoned there to help by one of Lazo's daughter-in-laws. Nedzhat again tried to stab Lazo but one of the men grabbed him and said to him: "You will only kill one of us but the rest of us will cut you to pieces and toss you in the lake. All the men had axes in their hands and were ready to attack him. Nedzhat became so frightened that his dagger fell out of his hand and he fled Lazo's home in fear.

In 1840 on Petrovden (St. Peter's day), Prespa was hit with a bad storm. The clouds were dark and dense with much lightning and strong thunder. The villages German and R'bi were experiencing the worst part of the storm, which extended on the hills beyond these villages. The heavy rains created torrents of water that flooded the villages and all the fields. When the first torrents appeared, the river was pushing all sorts of debris including rocks and uprooted trees. The debris knocked out the bridges as if they were made of paper. When the flood waters entered R'bi they swept away the mosque and many houses including the Bey's residential quarters. All that was left was wasteland and heaps of stones. The river, that until then emptied its water in Lake Mala Prespa, had changed its course and during the flood began to empty in Lake Golema Prespa. Several villagers from German and R'bi lost their lives in the flood and so did many sheep, goats and cattle. It was said that fish were found on the hills above the villages, fish and a lot of water that was sucked out by the storm (tornado) from the lakes and deposited high on top of these hills.

Some years after the mosque was destroyed by the storm in R'bi, the people of R'bi decided to rebuild their old Sveti Nikola church on its original foundation. As mentioned earlier, this was the church the Albanians had destroyed and on top of which they built a mosque. Now that the water had taken away the mosque, it was time to bring back the old church. The villagers decided on this and swore that they would spill their blood if necessary to bring back their church. Soon after that Sveti Nikola came back to life. Their intention to resurrect the church was made very clear even to the Albanians. The Bey naturally objected with the words: "It is too controversial to be building a church or a mosque on that spot..." The priest Foti, however, advised the villagers to be ready and to start building when he gave them the signal and the signal was given to them during a Muslim holiday. The people built the church, covered it, hung icons, lit oil lamps and remained in it despite Albanian attempts to ruin it. After it was built the priest occupied it and would not come out. Unable to destroy the church themselves, the Albanians took their complaints to Bitola. Bitola sent investigators who visited the church and ruled that it should stay and Sveti Nikola was allowed to exist.

Encouraged by their victory with re-building Sveti Nikola, the villagers from R'bi decided to renew the little Sveti Iovan church on Goritsa Hill and turned it into Sveti Iovan Prespanski monastery. Turning it into a monastery naturally gave Sveti Iovan greater importance and more people could attend, especially during the Sveti Iovan holiday. On top of that, as mentioned earlier, Tsar Samoil's tombstone was moved here and built into the front wall at the entrance. And as mentioned earlier, Samoil's tombstone was kept at the "Prechista" (Virgin Mary) church in R'bi. And also, as mentioned earlier, the Bulgarian troops during World War I discovered the tombstone and took it to Bulgaria.

Influenced by the Bishop of Bitola, a Greek teacher was sent to R'bi in 1875. His name was Hristidis. He was sent to R'bi to teach the Macedonian children the Greek alphabet. The teacher, however, was a Macedonian and knew the Macedonian language well. In the few years he spent in R'bi he taught the children to write using Greek letters with Macedonian words. The priest Foti and many of the villagers wanted him to teach the children the Macedonian alphabet

and when they made that clear to him he left the village. Foti, the priest, was then summoned to see the bishop in Bitola who scolded him. In response Foti said: “The Greeks too are Christians but they are Greeks, speak Greek and study Greek, but we are Macedonians and we want our children to be taught Macedonian…” The Bishop told the priest that he was anathematized and the priest in response said: “I don’t serve you, my holy bishop; I serve God, our faith and our people...”

The Albanians unfortunately continued to harass the people of R’bi, robbing them, abducting the women, plundering their properties and livestock and even committing murder. In 1880 the 30 year-old R’bi Bey named Arslan, riding on horseback with his armed companions, came upon Krstin Krstinov’s vineyard. Krstin, his son Petre and his daughter Dafina were digging the vineyard. The Turks got off their horses and tried to abduct Dafina. Petre jumped in front of her in an attempt to prevent her abduction and was shot. There were other villagers in the vicinity who quickly arrived and defended Dafina. A few days later a number of the village men visited the Bey and told him to leave the village and to take precautions because the villagers were upset by what he had done and were ready to lynch him. The Bey became frightened and left the village and his estate unguarded.

The priest Foti, unlike the priest Naum, was a pious and honest person. He strictly followed the rules of his Christian religion and introduced some rules of his own. He always carried a weapon and was ready to use it, especially against those who challenged his nation and religion. Foti followed his own regime in the church. He would not give communion to anyone who walked into his church dirty and with dirty clothes and shoes. He went to Bitola, bought shoes and a new robe and kept them in the church. During Christmas and Easter all the villagers were given communion. Those who came with dirty clothes were not allowed to enter the church and waited outside. He then made them wear the gown he kept in the church before offering them communion. They had to wait outside in the snow and wind before the priest took them inside, one by one, for their communion.

One day in 1892 Stefana Bakushova was returning from fetching water from the spring. Alia, with several of his Albanians friends

and family members, grabbed the girl and forcibly carried her running towards their house. Stefana resisted with all her might but they overpowered her. Stefana, however, had three brothers and they, with several other men from the village, ran after Alia and gave him chase. In the fight that took place when they caught up to Alia, Mitre, her oldest brother, shot and killed Alia. The brothers took Stefana from the Albanians and returned her home. Two of the brothers, Mitre and his younger brother Petre, then fled R'bi and went to Anatolia in hiding. No one knew where they were for a long time. Several years later Mitre died. Petre married a native of Anatolia and lived there for 30 years. He returned to R'bi with his two sons under the population exchange Agreement between Greece and Turkey, during which Muslims from Greece were expelled to Turkey and Christians from Turkey were sent to Greece.

One day in the summer of 1901, Spiro Petkov-Lopataro was watering his field planted with corn. At the time a Muslim Albanian man named Orhan lived in R'bi, whom the Albanians called Aga because he had a lot of land. He was a grumpy old man who had mischievous grandchildren who ran around the village streets throwing rocks at the Macedonian people. But, because of him, no one dared complain. Orhan also had a field adjacent to Spiro Petkov's and that field too was planted with corn. The same day Spiro was watering his field, Orhan decided to water his and so he cut off Spiro's water. When Spiro's water dried up he went looking to see what had happened. He found Orhan sitting in the corner of his field smoking a cigarette. When Spiro asked him what happened to his water, Orhan told him to get lost and called him all sorts of names. He then told him that he did not want to speak to him. Spiro got angry and struck Orhan on the head with his hoe and cracked his skull open. Orhan fell into the water. Spiro then went home, took his wife and children and fled to the mountains. There he lived with the rebels and he himself became a rebel. He was assigned to the squad led by Kote from Rulia. Kote unfortunately switched sides and fought for the illegal Greek armed bands. Spiro was killed fighting as a rebel during the 1903 Ilinden Uprising.

The people of Prespa were ready and prepared to fight in the Macedonian Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman Empire. They wanted their freedom and to make Macedonia an independent state

for the Macedonian population. The villagers had purchased their own weapons and ammunition mainly from the donations they received from the migrant workers working abroad in America, who themselves could not join the sacred struggle for their freedom and to put an end to their tyranny under the Ottoman yoke. All men who could carry a gun took up arms and went to the mountains to become rebels. The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization made an appeal to all Macedonians including those in America to return to Macedonia and join the armed struggle. Many did. On the day of the uprising, the Albanians were told that the Macedonians had raised arms against the Ottoman establishment and anyone who fought in aid of the establishment would face consequences. Most of the Muslims, including the Albanians, locked themselves in their homes and did not come out until the villages were silent again. There was no presence of Albanians anywhere while the rebellion was taking place. The only ones present were the rebels patrolling the roads and maintaining the communication links.

When the Ottoman army arrived in Prespa the situation began to change. Ottoman soldiers were stationed between the villages Shtrkovo and Rudari and were preparing to attack the rebels who were holding the hills. With the emergence of the Ottoman army the Albanians in the Prespa villages began to again attack the Macedonian population. Macedonian families who had family members involved with the rebels were advised to immediately leave. Most families fled to the mountains and joined the rebels and some hid in the lake reeds. All the elderly and sick who remained at home were savagely beaten, tortured and abused by the Albanians. There was an incident in P'pli where a woman was ordered to get out of the house. But because she was giving birth she could not get out fast enough. So the enraged Albanians savagely tore her up, removed her child from her womb and stabbed it with a bayonet. The mother also died. In their crazed state the Albanians burned both villages, R'bi and P'pli.

The hill above Shtrkovo was held by Petre Liaov's detachment composed of rebels from the Prespa villages. They were attacked by the Ottoman army around 4 pm the same day. The rebels repelled the Ottomans with fierce force and killed and wounded many. They were surprised by the great heroism demonstrated by the rebels and

by their organizational abilities. That evening the Ottoman army retreated. Then, after a few days of quiet, the Ottomans came back, this time in the thousands and reinforced with cannons. The rebels were only one small detachment. After engaging the much superior army and fighting bravely, the rebels knew they had no chance of pushing them back so Petre Liaov ordered the rebels to abandon the hill and regroup behind the large boulder on the hill above Shtrkovo. When they regrouped they took inventory of their wounded and provided first aid. Several, who were badly wounded, were transported behind the lines to German Mountain. The remaining rebels and their leader, once again pledged their loyalty to the cause, kissed their weapons and prepared again to fight and die for their freedom. Petre gave the rebels their final orders. He then asked a group of 20 to stay behind and guard the boulder and then, in the dark of night, slip away and regroup at the pre-designated place where they were going to get their next orders.

Twenty young men from the nearby Prespa villages stood guard behind the great boulder and held the Ottoman army back. The young Macedonians fought bravely holding their positions and waiting for nightfall. The sun hid behind the great mountain and dusk began to fall. Cannon balls kept hitting the boulder and raining down shattered stones. The soldiers tried to climb the hill but the young rebels pushed them back, those were their orders. The enemy kept pushing and they came face to face. The closer the enemy approached the greater their desire to fight for their freedom. There was no fear in their hearts, only heroism, potent heroism. They fought to protect the great boulder with its pitted surface like it was all of Macedonia.

Suddenly the guns went silent. An hour later an Ottoman platoon finely climbed the hill and surrounded the great boulder. The rebels all lay there clenching their rifles. The boulder was soaked in blood. The young rebels were dead… laying there in the wild grass. Since then this boulder became known as the Red Rock.

A few days later relatives of the killed rebels came to the Red Rock and took the bodies of their dead. They were wounded so badly that they were unrecognizable. Being baked by the summer sun for several days also did not help. They only recognized them by their

clothing. The young fighters could not be properly buried like fighters because the village was being carefully watched by the Ottoman army. The fighters were heroes who laid down their lives for the freedom of their people and they did not need monuments to remind the people of that. Their mothers visited their graves and cried and cried in silence. They cried in silence being watched by the Albanians and again they cried in silence being watched by the Greeks. The mothers cried until they themselves were dead. General mourning was declared all over Prespa and was carried out in secret and in silence. The women, old and young, wore black head kerchiefs. They also replaced their white embroidered shirts with simple and plain shirts. The Prespa folk dress became the simplest dress in all of Macedonia. And with this outfit the women of Prespa perpetuated the great sadness that had befallen them.

After the great battle at Red Rock over Shtrkovo, the Bashi-Buzuks (armed Muslim civilians) began to appear in Prespa looting and pillaging homes. The Ottoman army in retribution also committed violent crimes against the villages and jailed many people in the Bitola dungeons. Many Macedonian patriots from Prespa lay in the sinister prisons in Bitola until 1908.

Love stories from Mala Prespa

Dafina

Stoianka, Nedelko Mechkarovski's daughter, and Menka, Zlate Zelkarovski's daughter, put their water jugs down in front of Nedelko Mechkarovski's gate and leaned on the large stone beside the door. The street was on an incline and the women stopped to rest as they returned from the water spring with jugs full of water. The returning women often put down their jugs by the stone to rest and to finish the conversations they had started at the water spring.

The two women resumed the conversation they had started earlier about Dafina the orphan girl. This is what her peers called her; Dafina the orphan. Dafina's mother had died when Dafina was ten years old.

"I can't stand my mother," said Stoianka, "she tells me this and she tells me that about Dafina. She constantly talks about how the priest praises Dafina about this and about that. Now I hear from my mother that Dafina is being praised by Doichin the grocer. She is polite, smart, a hard worker… and there is no other girl like her in the entire village. And now my parents are rubbing all that in my face. Dafina this and Dafina that…"

"Please don't talk to me about Dafina," said Menka, "I am sick of hearing about Dafina. Both the priest and Ognen are competing trying to get her to marry their sons. That's why they are constantly praising her. They should be looking at their own immature sons first and see if those snot-nosed boys are even ready for marriage. Besides, she is older than them. She doesn't want them, she likes Nikola Bosilkov and everyone says she locks herself in the barn with him.

The girls were so engrossed in their own conversations that they failed to notice the Mechkarov gate open and Nedelkoitsa come out. When they saw her they were startled. Nedelkoitsa snapped at them and said:

"Stop your yapping girls! Look at the time! It's late! Aren't you afraid of the Albanians? They will come, grab you and carry you away. Get moving!" and then swung her rolling pin at Stoianka.

Stoianka suddenly moved and the rolling pin hit the stone and broke. Nedelkoitsa got even angrier and raised her voice:

"When we talk about Dafina both of you get angry, but let me tell you this… You will never measure up to Dafina. I have seen matchmakers come from everywhere for her… and for you?" looking at her daughter, "not one up to now… No one has knocked on our gate for you…"

Nedelkoitsa then turned to Menka and said: "There is your mother waiting for you… Get going!" She then pushed Stoianka into the yard and scolded her some more:

"Don't tell your father about this," said Nedelkoitsa, "he will lop your head off with the ax. The dining table is set and the people are ready to eat and where are you with the water? No water to drink! And there you are on the street putting your life in danger! Frightening, truly frightening behaviour!"

Menka's mother Zlateitsa stepped out of the gate and waited for her daughter to arrive. She was worried sick about her because she was late again. And then when she arrived she did the same as Nedelkoitsa had done. She scolded her:

"Where have you been? Every night it's the same thing! Who waits for their daughters at their gates? Only Nedelkoitsa and I, that's who…! I am so ashamed I have to hide from my neighbours while I wait for you, worried sick!" she said and pushed her daughter into the yard.

Krstinitsa, Dafina's mother, who had passed on when Dafina was young, left behind two children, Petre and Dafina. Krstin, her husband, was only thirty years old when she died. When Krstin was mourning his dead wife on her 3rd anniversary, Sekulitsa Kozhovska said to him:

"Krstin you are doing great honours for your dead wife. You have done everything that needed to be done for her. Now it is time for you re-marry and take a woman into your home to bring up your

children and give you some joy. There's Grozda, Srebret's daughter, she is a widow and a good woman. You should take her…"

"Please let me be straight with you Sekulitsa," replied Krstin, "you know how Petra (Krstinitsa) and I got married. We were very much in love but I guess we were not very lucky. Three years I have passed without her. I am not marrying now. I am not going to trample on our love or on my commitment to her. Let it be known that I married Petra for love. I am also happy with the children she gave me. They survived the worst and are now feeling much better. I am happy with my Dafina and how she is doing. In a few years from now I will also have my son Petre marry a nice girl.

Sekulitsa got closer to Krstin, put her hand on his shoulder and said: "My dear Krstin, you say you married for love and it feels like it was yesterday? We were all in German celebrating Germanden when word got out that Petra eloped with you, Krstin Nivichki. We were all left there standing, surprised. You were an orphan and a very poor man and she was from a rich family. God bless her soul, the poor woman, she was what she was, very beautiful. Petra was the most beautiful of all of us. It was most unfortunate that we lost her, such a beautiful woman. All of you bachelors in village constantly swirled around her and were busy sending your matchmakers. You were handsome too. There was not a thing wrong with you. There is nothing wrong with you now either. Do you really think you married for love? When I married Sekula I did not marry him for love but I want you to know that I love him now. I love him and cannot do without him. Even if he is not home one day I feel like I am lost in the world. He feels the same about me. Listen to me, get married! Take Grozda and you too will fall in love again…" she advised him.

"Sekulitsa, you are my friend, so please don't advise me to get married," replied Krstin.

The day Krstin's wife Petra got sick they were both working in their field harvesting wheat. At lunch time Petra said:

“I don’t feel good. My stomach is burning like its on fire and my leg is numb. You go ahead and eat, I will rest for a while under the willow tree.” And she did that.

Krstin worked alone all day and occasionally looked in on Petra but she was getting worse and worse. By evening Krstin was very worried and decided to get help. He ran across the fields looking for someone with a wagon to take her home. He ran into Naido and his wife who were harvesting their crops nearby. Krstin ran over to them looking pale and worried. But before Naidoitsa had a chance to ask him what was wrong, in a panicked tone of voice he said: “Petra is very sick.”

“What happened?” asked Naidoitsa. “This morning we came to work together and she was fine. What happened since then?”

“Yes, she was fine this morning but now she is in a lot of pain. I don’t want her to die in the field, I want to take her home,” replied Krstin.

Naido and his wife took their bags and their water jugs. They hid their sickles in the wheat stalks and ran towards the willow tree where Petra was.

“You and Naidoitsa worry too much,” said Naido to Petra.

“Please Naido, do whatever you can and take me home,” replied Petra. “I just want to be home with my children, I don’t want to die here in the field. I don’t know what’s wrong with me and if I die, I die. My legs have become very weak and I can’t stand up.”

“You worry too much,” said Naido. “You are frail like my Naidotsa here. She will get a slight headache and immediately will start complaining, saying she will die. And when I tell her she is overeating, she would say: ‘Oh, you don’t care about me, you will find someone else.’ If it was that easy to die Naidoitsa would have died a hundred times by now.”

“Stop talking nonsense now and look after the sick woman,” snapped Naidoitsa at Naido. “When you men see us dead then you

will believe us," added Naidoitsa and in a loud voice told the two men to, "Take the woman home and make sure she is okay!"

"My stomach is burning, it feels like it's on fire and it hurts, I can't even put by hand on it. My right leg is completely numb and I am losing my voice…" complained Petra.

"Cool towels, go and get some towels and wet them," ordered Naido and while Naidoitsa went to get the towels Naido wet his handkerchief in the ditch and gave it to Petra.

Naidoitsa quickly returned with a wet towel and placed it over Petra's stomach.

Naido then turned to Krstin and said: "Do you remember the time we were in Mora and were working for that Greek guy who got sick? He had exactly the same symptoms, a burning stomach and a numb leg. The doctor put cool cloths on his stomach and a few days later he was okay."

The two men whispered to one another and after that Naido raced across the field and soon returned with Sekula who brought a wagon with him. During this time Naidoitsa kept wetting the towel and placing it on Petra's stomach. At one point Petra said: "My dear friend may God bless you and your children. Thank God for bringing you here to help me…" She then relaxed and lay back.

They placed some grass on the wagon to cushion the ride and put Petra on top of it. Naidoitsa also go in the wagon, sat down and placed Petra's head in her lap. The wagon pulled into Krstin's yard and the men carried Petra into a small room. Krstin took a woolen cover out of a chest, placed it over the straw carpet and put Petra on it.

Word of Petra's situation spread throughout the village like wildfire. Much credit was given to Sekula for saving her life. If it wasn't for him, his wagon and oxen, many said, Petra would have died. Many of the women in the village arrived at Petra's house to see how she was doing and how they could be of help. Included among the women who came were Sekulitsa Kozhovska, Zlateitsa

Mechkarovska, Grozda the priest's wife and Ognenitsa. Several little children also snuck in with the women but Sekulitsa yelled at them and they fled.

Poor Petra lay on the colourful, red-fringed bedcover, which she had made herself, all curled up and in pain while her children Petre and Dafina sat quietly beside her. She held their hands in her hands and would not let them leave. With tears running from her eyes and with a weak voice she said to them: "My dear angels, Mommy does not want to leave you but she may have to…"

"Enough woman, you are scaring the children. You are not going to leave them! Tomorrow you will wake up fine!" said Sekulitsa. "Last year you scared us like this too but you recovered…"

"Last year, I was able to stand up. Now my legs have swelled up…" replied Petra.

The little room where Petra was lying became stuffy so Sekulitsa opened the window to let some fresh air in. A little later Giurgia the faith-healer walked in. All the women moved out of the way to let her come close to Petra. She asked Petra where her pain was. Petra pointed to her stomach and legs. Giurgia first told the women to close the window, and then she ordered everyone to go out except Naidoitsa and Krstin.

Giurgia was an old woman with wrinkles on her face but she had been doing this for a long time. She treated her fellow villagers, children, women and sometimes men, the best way she knew how. The villagers loved her and regretted the day that she would die and that there would be no one else to look after them. Giurgia got closer to Petra and everyone waited for her to take her hand and make her rise to her feet. Giurgia had helped Petra give birth to her two children and to one that did not survive. She helped many other women in the village giving birth. Even miscarriages were entrusted to her. This serious and trusted work she tried to do without tricks and in the most competent way. To the pregnant women who wanted to miscarry, she gave medicines prepared from various roots of bitter grasses. Giurgia rubbed the women's stomachs and used all her expertise and then encouraged the women to put sticks

underneath. The women drank the bitter herbs and put sticks and rolled around in pain as they strongly massaged their abdomen. Many of them, unfortunately, died along with their offspring. Giurgia, from the bottom of her heart and soul, always loved to help women who suffered and had no other choice left in their lives. But sometimes God did not agree with Giurgia and took those lives away. God did not like all women to be helped, some he wanted punished.

One time Giurgia took on the job of curing Srebre Zelkaroski. Srebre was a 26 year old young man who had gone abroad to Vlashko (Wallachia) to work on the ships in the Port of Galats. He became very ill and the Romanian doctors there told him his illness could not be cured in Romania. They advised him to go home and every spring the shepherds took their sheep to the mountain sheepfold, he should go with them and stay there all summer. They advised him to remain in the dairies and to drink as much milk as he could and to sleep in the outdoors in the clean air together with the sheep. And so Srebre returned to his village. Srebre had tuberculosis and continuously coughed a choking cough. But Giurgia had different ideas. She suggested that he should lie down and be covered with warm loaves of bread just after they were removed from the oven. She suggested he lie down on his chest, cover himself with a blanket and have someone place the hot loaves on top of and all around him. She also told him to make sure to perspire plenty. Srebre did as Giurgia asked and then he began to bleed. A week later he died. Grozda his wife, who was taken as a refugee, was left a widow very young.

Giurgia asked Petra to lie on her back and pull her legs in. She then ran her hand over her stomach to examine it and said:

“The problem is in your little heart. I will now twist your navel, put a pot on it and you will be fine…”

Krstin had eagerly waited to hear what Giurgia had to say and was now relieved.

“My dear Aunt Giurgia, all I hope for is for my Petra to get better. I will do anything for you if you will do that for me...”

“Don’t be so scared. Show some courage, you are a man…” she replied.

A few minutes later Giurgia twisted Petra’s navel and placed a steaming pot on her belly and determined how long it should stay on her and after that for how long they should be putting hot compresses on her.

Krstin stayed with his wife all night long putting compresses on her belly. Petra was in agony and kept telling Krstin to stop. She begged him to put cool towels like Naido had told him, but Krstin refused to listen and trusted Giurgia’s advice. A couple of days later Petra died. Little Dafina now became the woman of the house and the entire load of running the household fell on her little shoulders. She had to mature fast and at a very young age.

Krstin celebrated his name day on Krstovden (The Holy Cross) and all the men in his village came to see him and celebrate his glorious name day with him. Dafina alone was put in charge of hosting the celebration and looking after all the guests and her father’s friends who came to see him. Krstin had invited many guests for lunch including Naido Bosilkov, Sekula Kozhovski, the priest and Ognen. Krstin had a lot of food on the table, which included a baked lamb and a roasted piglet. Dafina served the guests with finesse. This was the first time Ognen had seen such an eloquent banquet. He was very impressed. He thought to himself: “Look at these people! Krstin and his children wear tattered clothes outside but will spare no expense inside when it comes to dining.” Ognen could not keep his eyes off Dafina as she laboured to please everyone. “What a wife she will make for my son Giorgi…” he thought to himself. “So what if Krstin was a poor man. Look at me, I am a rich man but my women are incapable of such finesse when it comes to dining.” Ognen thought to himself. “I must have this pretty flower and I don’t care what the people say. She is gold and I must have her for my son. I know there will be people who will say all sorts of things but when they see what she is capable of they will think differently. They will say bravo, bravo for Ognen, he married his son to a capable woman… a jewel.” Ognen thought for a moment and then said to himself: “It would be nice to take a bride for my son from a

rich family, a rich man like myself, and together with the in-laws we will be richer. But then I will have to spend a lot of money to keep them happy. I don't like that. And I don't think my daughter-in-laws father is going to be like Krstin, who I admire very much. No one is going to give me their daughter for less than 20 liras of expenses. The richer the in-laws the more they will want me to spend for the wedding. It will cost me plenty. But with Ktstin that will never happen. I would not have to spend a lot of money with Ktstin. He has very little so how can he ask me to spend a lot? He will also owe me because I am taking his daughter into a rich family. I will be rescuing his daughter from roasting in the sun working in the fields?" Ognen then thought for a moment and decided he needed to think about this a bit more.

Ognen's thoughts were interrupted when Sekula lifted his glass of wine and said:

"Ognen pick up your glass and let's toast to our good friend Ktstin who has provided us with all this good food. To Ktstin! To his children and let there be more sheep in his flock so that we can eat more roast lamb next year when we visit him on his name day."

"You are welcome! You are welcome to come back next year. That's what the good food is for, to share with our friends…" replied Ktstin.

Sekula then cut a piece from the tail of the roasted lamb and served it to the priest. He then cut a piece from the shoulder and served it to Ognen. And after that he served everyone else in the order that they were sitting.

"We the poor people… this is how we like it…" said Sekula. "We like to get together and eat and drink…" and then he picked up his glass of wine, turned towards Ognen and said: "And you rich people are always calculating things trying to determine how much this and how much that will cost you. You always want to know how much the lamb, the wine, the rakia and all the other foods and drinks will cost you and then you will come to the conclusion it will cost you too much so you and your wives will stay home. Well, lucky for us poor people we don't know how to calculate things and whichever

lamb looks good we make a meal of it." Sekula then raised his glass of wine and toasted Ktstin. He then said: "Drink up, we don't measure the wine and the rakia, whatever is in the barrel we share with our friends, that's what holidays are for. We don't need to keep any for next year, in the fall we will make some more. It is important that we follow our traditions, we are Macedonians after all.

The priest then picked up his wine glass, raised it, toasted Ktstin and blessed Sekula for his candor and for his loyalty and patriotism. He then took a bite from the tail of the roasted lamb and said: "This is how the faith is kept… This is how the nation is cherished…" He then turned to Ognen and said: "You, Ognen, I have never seen you sit together with our people before…"

"From now on I will always be there… with our people, I assure you…" replied Ognen.

"And so you should. You should also come to church. I have seen Ognenitsa in church but never you. Not even on Christmas or Easter. I always see you hanging around with the Bey and his relatives…" said the priest.

Ognen looked a bit uncomfortable.

There were many men and women from the village in the church on Pokladi (Shrove Tuesday). Ktstin was standing beside the Psalter and was singing. Beside him, standing on a stool was Spiro who was whispering to Luka the priest and from time to time sang out loud in response to the chorus. Ognen decided to come to church that day and was wearing high boots and a leather coat. He stood in the cubical next to the Psalter and from time to time he too sang a word or two with Ktstin. On this important occasion Luka, the priest, wore his new priest's robe and the new cross around his neck. And even though Luka knew all the psalms he was illiterate and unable to write. He wrote an "X" in place of his signature. He was not very good at singing either, that is why he always sang very slowly and kept the people in church for hours and hours. He used to say he did not want anything that had to do with his liturgy left out. Everything is written down for a purpose, he used to say, and he was not going

to ignore that purpose. When he passed by with his chalice everyone crossed themselves. When he shook the incense vessel white puffs of smoke came out. The women bent down to smell the incense and the men came out of the cubicles looking like they were bowing to the priest. Ognen bent down low almost to the ground.

Sekulitsa Kozhoska stood beside the priest's wife. In a loud voice she asked:

"Is that your Spiro who is singing with Ktstin?"

"Yes, that's him." replied the priest's wife.

"Congratulations! Your son has grown up. Soon you will be marrying him off," said Sekulitsa.

"I will marry him but I don't know to which girl yet. Many families have offered me their daughters but I am particular. We plan to send our son to Orid to become a priest, the girl must be beautiful and smart in order to be a priest's wife," replied the priest's wife.

"You are right! You are right! That's how it has to be! She has to fit in a priest's home. Smart and beautiful just like yourself…" said Sekulitsa.

"To be honest with you Sekulitsa I am proud of my son, he is very capable. I am not telling this to boast like Ognenitsa boasts about her son Giorgia, but my Spiro sings even at home. He will lock himself in his room and take the Gospel in his hands and sing… You should hear him sing beautifully. He sings even more beautifully than his father. There he is… you can hear him for yourself. He sings better than Ktstin. And the priest, my husband, constantly teaches him a lot. I always tell him not to push my son too much. I believe the child cannot mature properly if you constantly quarrel with him. They need to grow. The priest would then say to me: 'Leave the boy to me; I know how a priest's son should be.' And I do," replied the priest's wife.

"Why don't you take Dafina, Ktstin Nivichki's daughter? She is some girl isn't she? She will be gold wherever she goes.

Unfortunately your son is a bit young but he will mature. The priest was the same when he was growing up, but look at him now?" said Sekulitsa.

Behind the priest's wife stood Ognenitsa, Nedelkoitsa and Zlateitsa who were conversing loudly.

"Ognenitsa," said Zlateitsa, "look, that's Spiro the priest's son singing with Ktstin. Listen to him sing so beautifully, more beautifully than his father."

"I hear the priest is going to send him to Orid, so that he too can become a priest like himself. He will follow in the family tradition, like father like son…" added Nedelkoitsa.

"I don't want to sound like I am bragging but Spiro is nothing compared to my own son Giorgia. My son is a golden boy and very smart. Every evening he sits with his father and they look over the books and do many calculations. He is smart alright, very smart. He listens to his father very carefully and doesn't miss a word. I always remind Ognen how smart our son is and how lucky we are to have such a boy. I just hope that we can find a beautiful bride for him that is also smart, the kind that I like. I am telling you straight!" said Ognenitsa in a loud voice making sure the priest's wife heard her.

"Oh my dear woman, you shouldn't worry at all, you rich people can find a bride anywhere and you can be choosy about it. What about us poor people? Who will marry our poor daughters?" piped up Nedelkoitsa.

"Don't be an idiot," said Zlateitsa quietly and elbowed Nedelkoitsa. "Our daughters don't need those two for husbands. If God is willing they can marry Ognen and the priest's son but I don't want my Menka marrying either boy. My Zlate has many fields and we can work and make a living. I would rather have my daughter slave on our fields and never marry than to have her marry for money or for wealth. If I find her a husband I will find her a husband who matches her character and not like Spiro or Giorgia who have no character. Can you imagine my daughter having to eat a ration of

bread because Ognen is too stingy to feed her? My God my daughter is used to eating like a horse…" yelled Zlateitsa in frustration.

Everyone turned their heads to see what the fuss was about. Sekula then yelled at the women: "What is this, a church or the market? If you want to marry your children then take your conversations home. We want to observe the liturgy here, not listen to your bickering!"

"Well, I can't do this," said Naidoitsa to Srebrenitsa who were standing behind Ognenitsa and the priest's wife. "I can't boast like them. But my Nikola, there he is on the floor beside Giorgia and Spiro, can twirl those two around his little finger and can carry them uphill in his mouth. Let others praise him, I will not praise him. Many matchmakers have come to me from everywhere. May all their children be well, I don't want to criticize anyone, everyone is good, but I will not marry my Nikola now. I am not going to do what Ognenitsa is doing, boasting in the church so everyone can hear her.

"I don't know, my dear woman, I don't know how they can boast so much. And why do they boast so much about their men? They are not men to boast about. I had a husband who was worth more than all the men in the village, but I was not lucky. I was never like Ognenitsa. And now Ognen is threatening to send the Bey's gendarmes after me. He can send the gendarmes against his own wife because she is the biggest boaster of them all," said Srebreitsa.

"How did that happen you poor woman? Why is Ognen sending the gendarmes after you? What did you do to him?" asked Naidoitsa.

"I didn't do anything to him, but when you leave yourself open like me, everyone will want to take something from you. I am going to tell you, I am not going to hide it from you. I was in Ognen's store; I wanted to buy some oil and sugar. He and I were alone in the store and he started on me. He came close to me and wanted to grab me. He said to me: 'Oh, so you are a widow, you are a beautiful widow. You are the most beautiful of all the women…' He also said all sorts of things and was again ready to grab me. I pulled away and said: 'Isn't Ognenitsa enough for you? Ognenitsa is a beautiful woman, since you seem to like beautiful women.' But that bastard locked the

door on me and said he would call the gendarmes and have me arrested, for what I don't know. I am telling you the truth Naidoitsa, I had no choice but to give him what he wanted. Now I am afraid I may be pregnant. What am I going to do if I am pregnant? This is what that jackass did to me. Now he is here bowing to the priest like he is a good Christian. Did you see how he bowed?" asked Srebreitsa.

"Why didn't you marry Krstin? Why do you have to be so choosy? Was it because Srebre was more handsome? Krstin is handsome too but he doesn't constantly comb his hair like your Srebre did, is that it? But as you can see Krstin sings, he has a beautiful voice, listen to him…." said Naidoitsa.

"Naidoitsa, it isn't like that, Krstin does not want to get married. I would marry him this instant but he doesn't want to get married. Others told me about this too. One time Krstin said: "I am not getting married; I will not step on Petra's love and wedding vows." And the priest, let me tell you a thing or two about him, he is no better that Ognen…" replied Srebreitsa and went silent.

Naidoitsa looked at her and in a low tone of voice said: "They have nothing better to do… They sit around all day and harass the women…"

"Let me tell you about the priest… he too did to me like Ognen. He came to my house to bless it. He always came to the house, blessed it and then left. One time, I don't know what got into his head, he sprinkled me with his holy water and naturally I kissed his hand as always. Suddenly he grabbed my hand. Father, Father, I said to him, your wife is much more beautiful than me. 'That's okay,' he said, 'but I like you better…' I protested and said: 'If you came here to bless my house do your job and go because I am going to start screaming and all the neighbours will be here. They will see what kind of priest you are.' He then began to beg me not to scream. He said: 'Please Srebreitsa don't do that because then I will have to go straight to the lake and drown myself.' You know, before that when he came to my home I showed him a lot of respect and even invited him to stay for lunch. I always baked a zelnik and roasted a chicken… and look what he wanted to do to me. Now he comes,

does his blessing quickly, sprinkles the walls and is gone. He doesn't even want me to put money in his kettle," said Srebreitsa.

"Let me tell you Srebreitsa, I don't envy Ognenitsa or the priest's wife or the money they have. It is true that we are poor, but my Naido is a decent man… he is truly a decent man…" said Naidoitsa.

"My Srebre was the same way… never once did he ever turn his eyes away..." replied Srebreitsa.

Sekula again looked at the women and yelled: "Stop talking or I will have to escort you out of the church. This is a church not a market. If you come here for prayer then fine, otherwise leave…"

The priest's wife left the church very angry. She was so angry she was shaking and went straight to bed. When the priest came home he saw her lying there all covered up. He came closer and said: "Did they jinx you at the church?!"

She refused to speak. The priest put his hand on her forehead to see if she had a fever but she pushed his hand away and covered her head. The priest thought for a moment and said:

"Yes, you have been jinxed, I need to bless you and the curse will go away. At this point she uncovered herself, sat up and, in an angry tone of voice, said: "You should bless those who bake zelniks and roast chickens for you, and not me!"

"My dear wife, you have never said anything like this to me before, I am a priest, I go to all the houses in the village and sometimes I stay for lunch. The people respect me and often honour me, and whatever they ask of me I accommodate them, this is my job," replied the priest.

"I should have listened to my father when he told me about you, but I didn't because I wanted to be a priest's wife. He said: 'Once a week he will go to church and the rest of the days he will lounge around the house. Once a month he will visit the people's houses with his kettle in hand and spray (bless) them with (holy) water. And that's all he will be doing...' Now let me ask you this; did you ever

break into a sweat, I mean from labouring? The villagers work for a living. They cultivate, plant, harvest their crops and then they come here and give you their earnings. All you do is go to church and sing for them and advise them on what to do; do this, do that, don't do this, as if they don't know what to do themselves. And do you ever do what you tell others to do? And look at me; I sit at home like a captive. My heart breaks when I watch my peers going to work and working for a living side by side with their husbands, living an honest life and being honest and venerable to one another. And you, you follow Ognen's path and share his whores with him... I have been loyal and faithful to you. I have done everything you asked. I have served you while you sat in the shade doing nothing… I cared for you and what do I get? Look at these people, they may be poor but no one has died because of lack of food. No one was burned because they worked under the sun. Look at my own father, he is not a priest but he is a decent man and an excellent husband, the other village men aren't priests either and they all live well. No one has run over to Ognen, knocking at his door, begging for bread!"

Ognenitsa too was furious when she returned home. She opened all the doors inside the house and angrily paced from room to room. She was impatiently waiting for Ognen to arrive. Ognen came late and when he opened the door Ognenitsa attacked him. She was swollen with rage, eagerly waiting for him to return so that she could thrust her anger at him because of the things she heard about him at church from Grozda (Srebreitsa).

Wasting no time she began to yell at him saying: "Why did you bring me here so that I can be your slave?! To wash your underwear?! You know very well how many boys loved me and wanted me to marry them! But I picked you Ognen, and now you make me regret it! And now I have to listen to Naidoitsa saying how poor she is but how much better off she is than me. I have to listen to her boasting about how decent Naido is. And you and the priest, chasing whores…! I wish to God you never came back… I don't care if they think that they are better than me but for you to desire one of them more than me, and to force yourself on one of them, that disgusts me! And then you have the nerve to come back here to be with me… Up to now I considered you my husband but from now on don't even come near me. What in God's name made you go

to the whores instead of coming to me, to your beautiful wife who loves you? You stupid idiot, I don't even know why I am with you. There are so many men in this village that want me but I didn't want to disappoint my father who wanted me to marry you! How would you like it if I went whoring with every man I met? I had to listen to my father who didn't know what he was talking about, that if I married you there would always be food on the table! Whoever heard of anyone not having food on their table? But then I was naïve and I didn't know that you couldn't take food to bed and that you needed a man who loved and respected you and who you loved and respected. Don't ever come back to me, go to your whores, they can make your dinner and wash your underwear," she said and slammed the bedroom door in his face.

Ognen forcefully pushed the door open. The door hit the wall and made a loud bang. Ognen jumped into the room angry about his wife's accusations and with a loud and conquering tone of voice, said: "What is your problem wife? You are complaining about me? I gave you everything you could ever want without you having to lift a finger and this is how you repay me? By being rabid?!"

"Rabid? You are saying that I am rabid? You are the one who is rabid and don't know what you're doing! You are so obsessed with your money you don't care who you hurt. You constantly sit there with your book making loans and collecting interest and when your neighbours don't have money to pay you back, you take their oxen and their sheep, ruining their livelihood and their lives, and for what? So that you can have more money?! What are you going to do with all that money if you are not willing to spend it? Take it with you when you die? And you call me rabid! You never worry about how these people you rob will survive and the fact that they curse your bones, and mine too, for robbing them like that! And on top of that you are pursuing the whores…" replied Ognenitsa angrily.

"Oh, come on wife? Get out of here and stop yapping so much. You are too much… You are interfering in my affairs too much…" said Ognen.

"You don't want me to interfere? Hah? And let the women speak in the church? Hah?" she asked.

“Well you can go ahead and listen to the women and they will put food on your table, I suppose. Can’t you see that they are trying to ruin us? To see us suffer? I gave you everything you wanted and still you are not satisfied. Why didn’t you marry one of those poor slobs of whom you speak? And I am sure you would have been very happy wallowing in the mud, drinking water from the trough and baking in the hot sun like a lizard…” replied Ognen.

“And I suppose you did right by me! Bringing the Bey’s gendarmes into my house so that they could leer and wink at me and have me serve them rakia like they owned me. And then you dare come here and tell me that you have never seen a feast like the one served in Krstin’s house. Did you ever bring any worthy guests here so that I could show you what I am capable of? Did you ever bring me the kind of ingredients needed make such a feast possible? No! Everything about you is money, money, money!” said Ognenitsa.

Ognen got very angry, raised his hand in an attempt to strike his wife, and yelled:

“Get out of my sight! I don’t want to look at you any more! Go or I will strike you!” and ran after her. Intimidated, Ognenitsa ran into the other room and locked herself in. Ognen then shook his head and said: “What a stupid woman, interfering in my affairs and making me want to hit her.”

Krstin Nivichki and Naido Bosilkov were friends. They became good friends when they were working as lumberjacks in Mora. After Krstin’s wife died, Naidoitsa helped him and gave him moral support which he would never forget. These two families were always together and often worked in the fields together. Whenever Krstin went to the mountains to collect firewood he also collected some for the Bosilkov’s. Whenever Naido went to plow his field he also plowed Krstin’s field. They helped each other at every opportunity. Their friendship filtered down to their children, to Naido’s son Nikola and to Krstin’s daughter Dafina. Even when their children were very small there was a great friendship between them. Later, as they grew up, their friendship flourished into love. Day by day their love grew stronger and stronger but Menka and

Stoianka did not like that and looked for ways to break them up. But Nikola and Dafina took an oath that they would love one another no matter what anyone said or did.

Naidoitsa could see that their children loved each other and feared, but it was an unjustified fear, that this kind of strong love in young people could not go well if not sheltered properly. It had been foretold a long time ago that sincere young love of pure hearts would not end well if not managed properly. One day she decided to tell Naido about this. She said:

"Why don't we ask Krstin to give us Dafina for our Nikola? She is a beautiful girl and grows more beautiful with each passing day. Let's talk to Krstin now, even though she is still young, because later others may ask for her."

Unfortunately Naido could not see things the way Naidoitsa saw them. Naido did not want to ask Krstin for the girl, not before Krstin had married his son Petre who was older than Dafina. Naido's reply to Naidoitsa was:

"Let Krstin marry Petre first, let them bring a bride home so that she can look after them, and after that we will talk about Dafina."

Not too long afterwards Krstin made a deal with Sekula Kozhovski for his son Petre to marry Sekula's daughter Fania. The entire village was invited and showed up at the wedding. Included among the special guests were the priest, the priest's wife and their son Spiro, and Ognen, his wife and son Giorgi. Naido, his wife and their son Nikola had gone there the day before to help with the wedding preparations. Nadoitsa peeled all the potatoes and onions and helped with the cooking. During the evening there was much dancing and celebrating in the yard. Dafina led one of the dances and Nikola followed. Naidoitsa, while still peeling onions and wearing her apron, with a knife in her hand, ran outside to see the young ones dance. Her eyes were in tears from peeling the onions.

And there they were, Stoianka and Menka gossiping again. "Look at them, these important ones," said Stoianka to Menka, "they are not even engaged and they are dancing together holding hands. Where

are our mothers now to see them? Let them see who Dafina really is. See if they continue to say Dafina this and Dafina that. Dafina will marry Nikola and she will be like us with chapped lips and sun burned."

After dinner the bride and groom led the first dance and beside them danced Dafina followed by others. The guests, one after the other, dropped money in the band player's box. Ognenitsa poked Ognen so that he too could tip the band. Ognen started looking, searching his pockets but could find no money. Ognenitsa looked embarrassed. She turned around, pulled out the oilcloth wallet from her bag, picked up a coin and dropped it in the box. The priest's wife did the same.

Before the guests left the wedding the bride gave each a gift. She placed a pair of socks on Ognen's shoulder. Ognen again stuck his hand in his pocket and managed to scrape a grosh (a Turkish coin equivalent to a penny). Ognenitsa too pulled out her oilcloth wallet gave the bride and groom a grosh and Dafina a lira (gold coin). Ognen mumbled something but Ognenitsa winked at him and he went silent. Early in the morning the next day, after the wedding was over, the women took their cauldrons to the river to boil water to wash their clothes. But even before they had a chance to wash their hands, they all surrounded Naidoitsa. There was Nedelkoitsa, Zlateitsa and Grozda asking all sorts of questions about the wedding. Naidoitsa told the women how the wedding was, the kind of gifts the bride gave out, and how nice the bride was to everyone.

"She gave out a lot of gifts," said Naidoitsa. "I have no idea how she managed to make so many. When did she make them? When did she embroider them? The shirts were all beautiful and looked like they were all hand-embroidered…"

"I too have everything ready for my daughter," interrupted Nedelkoitsa. "Everything is ready, all I have to do now is put my Stoianka on the horse..."

"I too have everything ready…" added Zlateitsa.

Naidoitsa then decided to talk about herself and said: “I too will soon marry my son Nikola. He and Petre were baptized at the same time in the same water.”

“I too will marry my daughter,” said Nedelkoitsa. “My husband always says a female child is like meat and will begin to stink if you keep it too long in the house.”

“That’s how it is Nedelkoitsa, Zlate says the same thing to me and I won’t hold my daughter home for much longer. The earliest opportunity I find I will immediately marry her off. My blessed one is the same, anywhere she goes she will open the house, she knows how to do everything; to work at home, in the fields, look after guests… she will do anything. She is a bit chatty but even a bitter horse can be led…” replied Zlateitsa.

“I will not praise my son like the rest of them praise their own children. I want others to notice my son for who he is. I am not like Ognenitsa and the priest’s wife who boast in church. My Nikola is a lucky boy. I am not going to find him a bride, I will let him pick whoever he wants, whoever he loves…” said Naidoitsa.

Grozda, who had listened to all the women talk, finally decided to say something. She got close to Naidoitsa, grabbed her by the arm, pulled her to the side and said: “Naidoitsa, I heard that you want to take Dafina for your son Nikola. Naidoitsa, if you can only pull that off… it will make me very happy. I want to see both Ognenitsa and the priest’s wife explode because they brag so much.”

“To tell you the truth Grozda, I will take her. Our children are very much in love and it’s only natural that they marry. I will take her in the fall. Krstin has already spent a lot for his son’s wedding and I don’t want to overburden him,” replied Naidoitsa.

Grozda quickly washed her clothes, took them home, spread them over the line to dry and quickly ran to Ognenitsa’s house. When Ognenitsa saw her she tried to avoid her but Grozda saw her and ran over to her to give her some news.

She said: “Ognenitsa, I have something important to tell you. Today I saw Naidoitsa at the river and from what I learned her son Nikola will marry Dafina, but because Krstin is strapped for cash, because he spent all his money on his son’s wedding, Dafina’s wedding won’t take place until the fall. Ognenitsa, I am telling you, Dafina is not for Naidoitsa, she is for you. You and Dafina will be the envy of the entire village. It’s true, your Giorgia is a bit young but he will grow up. His time will come…”

“My dear Grozda, for a long time now I have been telling my stupid husband to make his move but he has a thick skull which not even an ax can cut. He is constantly in that damn store and that’s all he does. He is not interested in anything but a big book and the Bey’s gendarmes. Well, what can I tell you my dear Grozda? Your Srebre died but while he was alive you and he had a good life together. But look at me! I have a husband but what good is he? He is not a man, he is a beast. I have been in chains from the day I married him!” said Ognenitsa as tears rolled down her cheeks. She pulled out her handkerchief to wipe them and continued:

“And now Naidoitsa is going to take Dafina. I don’t know what to do! What should I do?”

“Listen, my dear Ognenitsa, I will do this deed for you. As long as you have me things will work out for you. I will go to Krstin myself. I will go to his house and have a good talk with him,” she said and crossed herself in front of Ognenitsa. “You know that things are certain with Krstin. But I am telling you he has no money to pay for a second wedding so close to the first. That’s why it’s going to be easy. You just make sure you do your part to convince Dafina to marry Giorgia. I will bring Dafina alone to your house so that you two can have a long chat,” said Srebreitsa.

“If you will do this for me I will pay you handsomely,” said Ognenitsa and then went to the next room and returned with several gold coins. She gave them to Grozda and said: “Take them and use them as you need to…”

Grozda then left Ognenitsa's house and went straight to the priest's house. The priest's wife, like Ognenitsa, tried to avoid her but it was too late, she was already inside the house.

"I had no intention of walking in but I have something important to tell you. I was by the river today and I heard something you need to know," said Grozda to the priest's wife, who then immediately invited Grozda into a room so they could have a private conversation. The priest's wife gave Grozda a chair and Grozda sat in the middle of the room. The priest's wife sat next to her.

"Today at the river I heard that Naidoitsa plans to take Dafina for her son Nikola. I also know that Ognenitsa hired people and gave them money to convince Dafina to marry her son Giorgia. But Dafina is not a good fit for Naidoitsa or for Ognenitsa, she should be with you. She is a good fit for you. The girl has grown without a mother and will accept you like a real mother. And that is why I came here to speak with you…" said Srebreitsa.

"Thank you! Thank you very much for coming to me. May God bless you! Even though my husband is a priest, he doesn't know about these things. And if Ognenitsa has money, then so do I! If it is about money then how much money could it possibly be? All we need to do is find a person to do the job," replied the priest's wife.

"I will do it!" said Grozda and hit her chest with her hand. "I will bring Dafina to your house and you can have a private chat with her. Then leave the rest to me. It should be easy to convince Krstin. I will go to his house myself and have a frank talk with him," said Srebreitsa.

The priest's wife smiled and said: "Only you, Grozda, only you can do the job, I don't trust anyone else…" She, like Ognenitsa, then gave Grozda several gold coins and told her to use them as required, and that she would give her more later if needed.

Grozda found the right time, got dressed in her new clothes, put on her head kerchief, looked at herself in the mirror several times, adjusted her clothes and went to visit Krstin. Krstin was at home alone and when he saw Grozda so well dressed and looking

younger, coming to his place alone and uninvited, he became weak at the knees. In a surprised tone of voice he said: “Come on in Grozda, come on in,” and gave her a chair to sit on.

“I didn’t want to bother you but I saw you were alone Krstin, so I decided to come over. I can leave if you want me to,” said Grozda.

“Stay, please stay, why wouldn’t I want you to stay. This is the first time you have come to visit me, why wouldn’t I want you? Everyone likes you and why shouldn’t I?” said Krstin nervously.

Grozda was already red in the face when she walked into the house; her face was now even redder. She stood up, went closer to Krstin and said:

“Krstin, you truly are a good man, everyone praises you, and it warms my heart to hear that. I go to church mostly to listen to your beautiful voice. To hear you sing...”

“Really Grozda? Do you really think I have a beautiful voice?” he asked.

“It is beautiful to me. Lately, all I can think about is you. Something is spinning inside my head and every night I see you in my dreams. I see us when we were young walking together…” said Grozda moving closer to Krstin and putting her arm on his shoulder, giving him chills. Grozda then said:

“When I became a widow I thought to myself: “If I ever remarry I will only marry Krstin and no one else…”

“Why didn’t you tell me about this before, my dear Grozda?” relied Krstin, pulling her towards him, putting his arms around her and forgetting about his dead wife Petra. After that day Krstin forgot everything and visited Grozda at her house often.

A few days later Krstin went to Grozda’s for dinner and spent the night there. She prepared a good meal for him and through the dinner conversation she said:

“Your daughter is ready for marriage, why don’t you marry her to the priest’s son Spiro? She will be going into a priest’s house, she will have plenty to eat and will stay home all the time? And if you don’t want her marrying the priest’s boy then give her to Ognen for his son Giorgia. Ognen is rich, very rich. You can’t believe how rich he is. Your daughter will be content and for that she will be very grateful to you.”

Not wanting to ruin the mood and disappoint Grozda, and remembering how it was for him to lose Petra and living alone and in pain for so many years, Krstin dodged the subject somewhat. He knew Dafina was in love with Nikola, his best friend’s son and regretted not having spoken to Naido about this. Krstin thought about it many times but never made the effort to speak to Naido and Naidoitsa about Dafina marrying Nikola. Krstin thought about what Grozda said, turned towards her, looked her in the eyes and said:

“My dear Grozda it’s not for me to say. The priest is a good husband and his wife is a good housekeeper, so I don’t understand what the difference is between a normal house and a priest’s house. They are all houses. Ognen too is a husband Ognenitsa is his wife, they are a family just like everyone else. If Ognen is rich, so rich that he doesn’t even know how much money he has, that’s his business, it has nothing to do with me. Besides, I would not want my daughter to go to a rich house and feel useless and obligated to others when she is fully capable of building a good life for herself. I agree with you that there is no father out there who would not do everything possible to give his child a good life. But everything is possible when love is involved. You remember when Petra and I got married? Her father refused to give her to me but Petra left him and came with me. I am not doing the same to my Dafina, her word in this matter is final and she has my blessing to decide for herself who she wants to marry.

The next day when Dafina was coming back from the water spring, Grozda waited for her at the front gate. When Dafina arrived she invited her to go into the yard where Grozda helped her take the jugs off her shoulders. Grozda greeted her kindly and politely and asked her how things were going with her brother’s new bride. When Dafina was done talking Grozda said:

“My dear girl, now it’s your turn to get married. You are so beautiful you deserve to be in a beautiful and rich house. Don’t be a fool and go to a poor house where, every day, you have to go to the fields, burn in the sun and constantly get chapped lips.”

But Dafina wasted no time and immediately answered her: “I will go where destiny takes me, dear aunt…”

“No, no my dear child, you must seek your own destiny. It won’t come to you on its own,” replied Grozda.

“I am not that lucky me dear aunt, how can I seek my own destiny when my mother rests under a slab? And who cares so much about me to grant me what I want?” said Dafina, beginning to cry.

“Please don’t cry my beautiful girl, you are breaking my heart. I grew up just like you, an orphan and know exactly how it feels. But for you my dear girl,” said Grozda, stroking Dafina’s hair, “there is no better and richer place than Ognen the grocer’s house or the priest’s house. Ognen has a lot of money, more than he knows, and Ognenitsa is a beautiful woman just like you. And the priest too has plenty of money and his wife is also beautiful. Giorgia and Spiro are a little young but they will mature over the years and you will see what kind of fine men they will turn out to be. Now you need to make your choice between those two places before some other young girls come along and take them. Don’t take too long to decide and then live a lifetime of regret…” concluded Grozda.

“Oh, my dear aunt, there is no magpie without a tail, and I too will not be left without a husband. If I can’t find a better man then I will find a mediocre man, I have no worries,” replied Dafina.

“No, my dear girl, today you have a chance to roll the golden dice, and not like now without a penny in your pocket...” advised Grozda.

A few days later Grozda convinced Dafina to pay Ognenitsa a visit. Ognenitsa welcomed her with open arms.

“My dear beautiful girl, I will be your mother…” she said and took Dafina for a tour around the house to show her the colourful finery she had in the rooms and in the chests and all the carpets that covered the floors. “Everything you see my dear is for you…” she said. Then, after chatting for a while, Ognenitsa placed a few gold coins in Dafina’s hand.

A while later Grozda convinced Dafina to go and see the priest’s wife. She was even more courteous than Ognenitsa. She told Dafina that Spiro was going to be a priest and that she would be a priest’s wife, just like her, and would be respected and honoured by all the women. She would have a place at every head table in every event. And, like Ognenitsa, she shoved several gold coins into Dafina’s hand.

After that Grozda visited both Ognenitsa and the priest’s wife and advised them both to invite Krstin and the newlyweds (his son and wife) for dinner. Ognenitsa invited them first. The next evening Krstin and the young couple showed up at Ognen’s house. Ognenitsa put everything she had on the table so that it would look rich and beautiful, and catered to her dear guests the best she could. She then said to Ognen: “These are the kind of guests I want brought to my house, not the Bey’s gendarmes…”

All through dinner Ognenitsa boasted about her son Giorgia and how smart he was and that he knew everything about keeping the books and had learned all that from his father.

A few days later Krstin and the young couple were invited for dinner to the priest’s house. There was plenty to talk about with the priest but the priest used this opportunity to talk mostly about church affairs, mainly because both he and Krstin sang in the church. The dinner table here was not as rich and full as that at Ognenitsa’s. The priest’s wife too boasted about her son Spiro and how well he sang the psalms.

After the dinners were over, Grozda went back to see Ognenitsa and advised her to take Ognen with her to go and visit Krstin and ask him for Dafina’s hand to marry their son Giorgia. Whatever discussions took place and decisions were made during this visit

were to be kept strictly confidential. It was important to keep things secret so that the villagers didn't find out, especially Naidoitsa, who could derail the whole thing. Grozda also told the priest's wife exactly the same thing.

Ognen and his wife went to visit Krstin after dark. Ognen brought with him a large golden coin, a "pendolira", with which he was going to "seal the deal". When the deal was done, Ognen was planning to toss the big gold coin on the table and, with its shine, brighten up everything in the room and take Krstin's breath away. Ognen knocked on the door and Dafina came out to receive them. Dafina then took them to a room, made them comfortable and kissed their hands. Petre and the new bride also came into the room, greeted the guests and also kissed their hands. After that Krstin came in and immediately began to chat with Ognen. Krstin told him the story of how he and his friend Naido had worked in Mora (Peloponnesus) as lumberjacks. He told him how they used to make roof beams out of poplar trees and how they dug the huge vineyards. Ognen told stories of how he debated with the Bey's gendarmes, how they stole grain from the Bey and brought it to his store and traded it for rakia, and so on. Then, when Ognen was about to open his mouth and tell Krstin why they were there, the dog began to bark loudly in the yard.

Krstin jumped to his feet, ran outside and, moments later, returned with the priest and his wife.

The sight of the priest and his wife shocked Ognenitsa. The priest greeted both Ognen and Ognenitsa. Ognen made a place for the priest to sit at the head of the table. After the new guests were welcomed by Dafina and the newlyweds, Krstin sat down again and began to chat with the priest. They at least had something in common to talk about - the church. Ognen, not to be left out, delved right into their conversation like he knew their affairs and was in constant agreement with them. Ognenitsa and the priest's wife began to talk about their sons and each took a turn to outdo the other, boasting about whose son was better. Then, suddenly, both couples got up at the same time and said that they wanted to go. They realized things were heating up and neither couple wanted to

tip their hand as to why they were there. While walking out the priest said:

“It is so nice to get together like this once in a while, to converse with one another and to respect one another.”

Ognenitsa and the priest’s wife looked a little shell-shocked.

Around the same time Dafina began to avoid Nikola. Nikola was nervous about that, about losing his beloved Dafina whom he was soon going to marry. Grozda’s secret could not be hidden for too long and soon it became public knowledge. Stoianka and Menka also found out and were at the forefront of spreading the daily gossip, which they had gathered throughout the village, to the girls at the water source. Zlateitsa and Nedelkoitsa constantly argued with their daughters not to do that but no one was listening.

The priest went to Ognen’s store and Ognen told him: “Priest, priest don’t interfere in my affairs. You are sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong. You want Krstin’s daughter when you very well know she is mine…” Ognen then raised his finger, shook it and said: “Don’t do this to me, because when the Bishop comes here I will have him shave your beard. I know whose money you use to buy yourself favours…?” The priest looked at him, picked up his cane and then left the store.

On Giurgiovden (St. George’s Day) many girls gathered at the swings and among them were Dafina, Stoianka and Menka. Dafina was swinging on the large swing hanging from the walnut tree and another girl was pushing her. The other girls were singing a taunting song that went something like this:

Hey Giurgie, Giurgie,
Whose is the one on the swing?
The mother’s or the father’s,
We will toss her into the yard,
In Ognen’s yard,
We will toss her into the lap,
In Giorgia’s lap.

Dafina looked left and right and momentarily locked eyes with Nikola. She felt like the entire sky had fallen on her. She asked the girl to stop pushing the swing because she said she felt nauseated. Nikola looked very handsome, the most handsome of all the bachelors hanging around the swings. Giorgia and Spiro, standing beside Nikola, looked like soaked kittens. All the village girls circled around Nikola.

Dafina got off the swing and sat on the side all alone. She watched the girls flirt with Nikola and noticed how ugly and disgusting Giorgia and Spiro were compared to him. Dafina thought to herself: "What have I done? I have allowed Nikola to slip out of my hands… Now everyone is looking at me and saying: 'There goes 'the important one', she was so much in love with Nikola and now she was going to marry someone else.' Oh my dear mother where are you when I need you. Why did you leave me? And why was it so important for me to come here today to be humiliated by Stoianka and Menka? To watch Nikola flirt with girls he otherwise would never have turned an eye on? Oh dear God what have I done? Where can I go and hide so no one can find me? They lied to me, Grozda lied to me. She was the one that brainwashed me!" said Dafina to herself and again looked at Nikola. And every time she looked at him he looked more and more handsome. She now loved him even more than before. "It would be so nice if he would come over so that I could tell him how much more I loved him…" she thought to herself.

Nikola's heart was wounded. Dafina kept looking at him and with her eyes kept asking him for his forgiveness. But at the same time she knew what he was thinking. He was thinking that 'she was not sincere'… He was thinking that 'he was not good enough for her'. He was thinking 'she had deceived him and never really liked him'. That's how Dafina would have felt if she was in Nikola's shoes. Dafina's eyes kept drifting towards Nikola. Nikola also kept looking at her. She was the most beautiful of them all. She looked sorrowful and gloomy and he was troubled by it. He began to wonder if she had been deceived. If someone had promised her or her family something that they could not turn down, like a lot of money. He thought to himself that if she came over to him he would forgive her and take her back.

The village Bey was a young man in his early thirties. His father died when he was a little boy. The Bey grew up in the village. His grandfather was a cruel man and tormented the Christians. He took their fields by force and turned most of them into slaves who then worked for him. The Bey had his sights in Dafina even when she was a little girl. One time when he saw her he thought to himself: "She is young now but when she grows up I will make her my wife." Then when the Bey discovered that his friend Ognen was looking to make her his daughter-in-law and so was the priest, he realized that the time for waiting had passed. It was time to act. All he needed now was an opportunity to snatch her. He ordered his gendarmes to keep an eye on her.

With guns in their belts the two gendarmes, Bekir and Osman, kept a watch on Dafina day after day reporting their observations to their master. Then one day the Bey got on his horse and, with his gendarmes, went after Dafina who at the time was carrying a pan with zelnik on her head, heading to feed the workers in one of their fields.

Before arriving at the narrow part of the road surrounded by blackberry bushes, wild plum trees, willows and shrubs, at the Virishta crossroads where there were five branches of the road, three of which went to the village and the other two went to fields, Dafina saw the Albanians riding their horses. She immediately realized that they were looking for her. Then, as they furiously rode around the bend towards her, she said to herself: "Oh God, what am I going to do now? They will grab me. God please help me escape this evil." Then, before her eyes, she saw her mother who told her: "Quickly jump into the brook!" Dafina jumped and ran down the covered part, all covered with thick wild plum tree branches tightly woven with willow branches and blackberry bushes, and hid deep in the shrubs.

The three Albanians on horseback took to the open space towards the crossroads where they figured Dafina would be. But Dafina was nowhere to be seen. They rode their horses back and forth about three times but Dafina was nowhere to be found. They spoke a few Albanian words and then they headed for the valley. When they arrived at Krstin's field Dafina was not there. They turned back and

looked again and still no Dafina. The Bey got upset with his gendarmes because he thought that they had deceived him. They all returned to their quarters.

Dafina lay low for a while and when the situation calmed down she came out of the bushes and headed for the fields. She took extra precautions to make sure that she was not followed before she arrived at her father's field. She was shaking with fear and was cut all over her body from the thorns. They quickly undressed her, bandaged her wounds and dressed her in men's clothing. Petre, her brother, then took her home.

The Bey was young and inexperienced and his gendarmes were drunks. Even today, when they were called to serve their master and do an important job they were drunk. The Bey began to yearn for Dafina, not because he liked her that much but because she had escaped from his hands when he was most certain that he would have her in his quarters. He locked himself in the inn and refused to come out. He didn't want to see or talk to anyone. He kept thinking and making plans on how to seize Dafina and again sent his gendarmes to spy on her.

The incident with the Albanians wanting to abduct Dafina reached Nikola's ears. Petre told him. Both Nikola and Petre were furious and took an oath to pay the Bey back for what he was going to do. They armed themselves with firearms, which they carried with them, and looked for an opportunity to ambush the Bey.

Afraid to come out, Dafina stayed locked in the house for weeks. There was work to be done in the fields and she could no longer sit around, so one day she decided to go to work, but not alone. She was accompanied by Petre and his wife. Both Ognenitsa and the priest's wife, in the meantime, promised Grozda a lot of money if she could bring Dafina to stay with them and hide in their houses. Grozda tried to do that but Dafina told her: "My dear aunt Grozda, it would have been good for you if you had married someone after Uncle Srebre died, and now you would have had your own family and would not need to run around ruining other people's families…"

Dafina struggled with the idea of eloping with Nikola but how would she be able to make that arrangement? Who would she tell? And more importantly would Nikola even want her back? Nikola, on the other hand, was well-aware of Dafina's situation with the Bey and he too looked for ways to take her with him; if not for his wife, then to save her from the Bey's claws. Sooner of later the Bey was going to have her and, if not now, he would grab her another time. Both Nikola and Dafina were facing great hardship and uncertainty.

Dafina decided to meet with Nikola. Her first words to him were:

"I am sorry for what happened but believe me it was not my fault. I have no mother to teach me what to do and to look after my interests; I relied on Grozda for that and she took advantage of me." Nikola and Dafina quickly made up, resolved their misunderstandings and agreed to run away together the next night.

The next day Krstin, Petre, Petre's bride and Dafina went to work in the vineyard. Naido, Naidoitsa and Nikola were also working in their vineyard nearby. Petre and the two young women worked closely together and constantly whispered while singing. Krstin, working on the side of the vineyard, was pruning the unproductive branches. Dafina stopped singing, turned to Petre's bride and said:

"I had a bad dream last night. I dreamt of seeing the Bey with his gendarmes riding their horses and chasing me through the vineyards. I ran as fast as I could but they kept catching up and there, in front of me, was a poplar tree. The poplar was very tall but I climbed it all the way to the top. The Albanians pulled out their axes and began to cut the tree. I shook like a big chicken with every chop. The poplar began to fall and leaned on the poplar tree next to it. What can I tell you, I was shaking like a leaf…"

"This can't be good. Your dream is an omen…something is going to happen to you," replied the young woman. And just as she finished talking, there, from behind the blackberry bushes, appeared the Bey and his two gendarmes on horseback and they were coming towards them.

The three Albanians pulled the reins on their horses to slow them down and as the horses began to turn, they broke many of the tender vine shoots, damaging the vineyard. The Bey got off his horse and before he was welcomed by the vineyard owner on his property, he darted towards Dafina and tried to grab her arm. Dafina pulled away but he still persisted yelling: "You hid on me in the brook before but there is no escape for you this time. You are coming with me! I will put you in the inn, in a nice comfortable and colourful room where you don't have to work and maids will serve you. And on top of that, you don't have to marry Ognen's snot-nosed kid..."

Dafina again pushed him away and said: "Get out of here, I will never marry an Albanian and I will never change my identity or my faith… Never!"

Petre was very upset and quickly became very impatient with the Bey. His hair was standing up and his blood was boiling, and he no longer had the will to hold himself back. He pulled out the pistol he was hiding under his vest in his chest pocket and jumped towards the Bey like a beast. He pulled the Bey's hand off his sister and said: "My sister will never marry an Albanian. I will shoot her right here before I let you take her." He then adjusted the gun in his hand. At that crucial moment, afraid that Petre might shoot the Bey, one of his gendarmes shot Petre and Petre fell to the ground, badly wounded in the chest. The two women went crazy and began to scream out loud.

That got Nikola's attention and when he saw the Albanians he ran over to Krstin's vineyard, pulled out his pistol and jumped the gendarme who had shot Petre. When he wrestled him down he disarmed him and began to beat and kick him. Naido and Krstin threw themselves on the Bey and the women picked up their hoes, overpowered the other gendarme and began to beat him. The commotion attracted more people, both Albanian and Macedonian, who then began to fight for life and death. Petre lay there flat on the ground badly wounded with no one to help him.

More villagers working in the nearby fields arrived at the scene; Sekula with Sekulitsa, Nedelko with Nedelkoitsa, Zlate with Zlateitsa, and others. Sekula grabbed the Bey, disarmed him, tossed

his gun aside and shook him by the shoulders. There was great commotion on the Albanian side and, being afraid that they would all be killed, some ran off and others got on their horses and fled to the village. While they ran the villagers taunted them.

The Bey ran off and locked himself in his inn. The other Albanians locked themselves in their houses. Sekula, Nikola and the other men put Petre on a stretcher and took him back to the village. But before reaching the village more men arrived to help. With axes and pitchforks in their arms they all went to the Bey's house and surrounded the hospice. They then started shouting, calling for him to come out and cursing him.

Nikola took Dafina with him to his house where Naidoitsa welcomed her into her home, kissed her on her forehead like she was Nikola's bride and the three then went to see how Petre was doing.

The Bey and several Albanians from the village who took part in the attack were terrified. They locked themselves in their houses and refused to come out, especially after the police arrived in the village.

A few days later Sekula and several other villagers paid a visit to the Bey and informed him that they had come to see him on behalf of the villagers to tell him that he had embarrassed the village, that he was an embarrassment to the community and that he needed to take measures to correct this problem. They also warned them that the villagers would not forget Petre's blood being spilled in the vineyards and that they were prepared to take further measures against him. They told him the time of his grandfather grabbing girls from the fields and forcing himself on them was over. Now there were rebels in the mountains and if he didn't shape up soon, his blood would be spilled in the vineyards.

A few months later the Bey left the village and never came back again.

Dinka

Dinka sat on a small stool in Doichin Dzhepovski's big yard embroidering her wedding dress. She was wearing a white head kerchief with yellow tassels that covered most of her face. Dinka used the head kerchief to keep the sun out of her face because every spring the hot sun caused her face to break into a rash. Dinka had been working embroidering her wedding dress for almost a year. Her mother kept complaining because she taking too long but Dinka ignored her and went outside in the yard just to avoid her mother.

Dinka patiently pushed the needle through the dress, slowly adding colourful strings and day after day making beautiful patterns that grew larger and prettier. Dinka embroidered the dress and occasionally softly sang songs. Her thoughts carried her to Martin and how she was going to have him for a husband. Martin and Dinka had loved each other for three years and now Dinka waited for her father to give her his final blessings before the couple could be engaged. Once they were engaged Martin could visit Dinka in her home. Together then they could gather tender stalks of kiselets (sorrel) in the meadows. Together they could gather colourful flowers for her. They could even dance together holding hands. She stopped embroidering and looked up: "My father will not allow me to marry Martin but I love him so much..." she said to herself. And the more her father was against her marrying Martin, the more Dinka loved him. But Dinka's family had some very strict rules… and with that her entire fate rested in her father's hands.

Dinka and Martin were in love but they had to love each other from afar. Whenever Dinka wanted to say something to Martin she had to convey it through her friend Grozda, and vice versa. It was a nightmare for the couple. Martin belonged to a poor family and Doichin, Dinka's father, wanted nothing to do with him. Doichin, on the other hand, was a wealthy person and was not about to give his daughter to a man from a poor family. A matchmaker came to see Doichin, sent by Martin's family, requesting the hand of his daughter Dinka for their son Martin because their children were supposedly in love with each other. Doichin not only found that idea appalling, but he got so angry that he began to smash things in the house and nearly hit Doichinitsa.

“That is not possible! That can’t be!” Doichin yelled at the matchmaker. “I will not allow them to meet with me. I have my pride! I am a pillar of the community in this village and I will not give my daughter to a destitute family. Leave now and tell those who sent you that love alone is not an option. Dinka will do what I say and not what she wants...”

The matchmaker then said: “Don’t you think that your daughter could elope and embarrass you?”

“I don’t care! If she wants to elope then let her. She can go and live with them and work and burn in the sun if she likes him that much...” he replied.

Grozda, Dinka’s friend, often advised Dinka telling her: “If you are going to elope, elope now, don’t wait because your father will promise you to someone else. And there was Giuveza as an example of someone who kept saying ‘I will elope, I will elope’ but her father engaged her to Sekula and now she was sorry that she did not elope…”

Dinka continued embroidering her dress, singing a little, pondering all these things but could not decide if she wanted to elope. The creaking of the front gate startled her and snapped her back from her daydreaming. She raised her head to see who had opened the gate and immediately stood up and hid her dress under the stool. She ran towards the guests who walked in and said:

“Welcome Dimitria! How is Dolia?” she asked and took the reins of his horse. She then greeted Dimitria’s companion Mitre and also took the reins of his horse. She then took the horses under the porch, tied them and gave them some hay to graze on.

After they left their horses with Dinka, Dimitria and Mitre climbed up the stone stairs and entered the house. They shook hands with Doichin and Doichinitsa and then they were escorted into one of their guest rooms.

The guests crossed their legs and sat on the carpet. Doichin asked Dimitria how Dolia and the children were. Doichin then turned to Mitre and asked him about his family, about old Petre and the rest of the family of forty people. Doichinitsa and Dinka brought the sofra (very low table) into the room and placed some rakia and a number of wooden bowls filled with cheese and other appetizers on it. Doichin entertained the guests by conversing with them asking them about the harvest, the vineyards, the sheep, the milk and the fishing. He also asked them if the Albanians were causing mischief and if they were intimidated by the appearance of rebels.

“Things are not as bad as they used to be,” replied Mitre, “but, with the Albanians, they are like wolves pretending to be sheep… It is impossible. They occasionally cause us grief…”

The guests were served lunch with wine to toast all the good things in life including the rich harvest of wheat, grapes and milk, the lakes that provide the fish and to thank God for helping the rebels gain power and get rid of the centuries-old slavery.

After the guests had their lunch, Dinka and her mother cleared the sofra. Dinka swept the crumbs and cleaned the carpet. She then brought some walnuts and another jug full of wine. Dimitria adjusted himself a little and said:

“Doichin, we came here to talk to you about Dinka. We want to take her to R’bi for Petre’s family.

Doichin thought for a moment and said: “Great, but about which Petre are you talking?”

Mitre then took a lira (gold coin) out of his pocket and dropped it on the colourful handkerchief Doichin had placed on the carpet. Doichin then took the coin and said:

“Congratulations! He then put the coin in his wallet which hung around his neck. After that he stood up and so did the guests, and they all shook hands, kissed each other on the cheeks and congratulated each other with hardy handshakes and again sat down on the carpet. Then one of them picked up the wine jug and passed it

around and each took a long drink of wine. They all agreed not to send gifts to everyone involved. This is because Petre did not want the attention associated with giving out gifts and having to send young people to distribute them. It was a long road to R'bi and after all it was dangerous with Albanians and Turks lurking all over the place. Some idiot might attack the young girls on the way and shame them. Petre's instructions were to give Doichin 10 gold coins to seal the deal. To that Doichin said:

"No, ten gold coins is too much, I will accept five. My daughter is not for sale and I am not going to sell her for money…" said Doichin.

Doichin saw himself as a decent and well-respected man who was well dressed with the finest clothing, who had many fields, meadows, vineyards and herds of sheep. By rights he was a wealthy Macedonian. Whenever he sat at the dinner table and conversed with people he always played with his amber, yellow beads. Then in a loud voice Doichin summoned his daughter to come into the room. Dinka entered the room and stood in front of her father, and in the presence of his guests he said:

"Daughter, I want you to know that I have made arrangements to engage you. I engaged you to Mitre's brother. You now can kiss the hands of our guests," said Doichin pointing at Mitre and then said: "You will be together with your sister Dolia in R'bi."

Dinka went completely red in the face. Her ears were even glowing red. She first kissed her father's hand and then kissed everyone else's hands in the order where they were sitting. They then gave Doichin the gold coins as promised. Doichin then said:

"Daughter, you should know, I am sending you to a home with a rich family with a respected name and I am doing this for your own good." He then ordered her to go and get her things ready.

He said: "Go with your mother and prepare your things and everything else that you want to send because these gentlemen are in a hurry, the road is long and they want to get home before nightfall."

Dinka was in shock. She could not believe what had just happened. The redness on her face and ears was refusing to subside. After she kissed everyone's hands she left the room and still she could not believe what had just happened. Before leaving the room she, once again, looked at Mitre and thought to herself: "If he is anything like his brother he will not be too bad…" and ran to her mother crying. Doichinitsa tried to calm her down and said:

"Please daughter, don't cry. Your father is not abandoning you. He is sending you to a good home. Your father-in-law is a rich and respected member of society. You will have a mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, aunts, uncles… a family of forty members who will love you. The boy you are going to marry is a handsome young man. You will also be together with your sister Dolia. Dimitria praised this family well. Oh, my beautiful daughter..." said her mother, giving Dinka a hug. "Go now and get your things. Don't worry about the gifts I will prepare them for you. And stop crying, the people are in a hurry and want to get going. The road is long and they don't want to travel in the night. There are all sorts of thieves. I don't want to worry about that too," said her mother.

Dinka stopped crying, wiped the tears from her eyes and, with a sad tone of voice, said:

"Mother, they went over ten villages to look for a bride. What does that tell you about the groom? If he was a "worthy man" they wouldn't be coming here on the other side of Prespa to look for a bride where no one knows him. Believe me, they knocked on many doors and were turned down before they came here. What do we know about this man?" Dinka then raised her voice and said: "I don't want to go R'bi and I don't want him. There are plenty of bachelors in Ezereni. When there are no more eligible bachelors here in Ezereni, then I will consider going outside of my community. You say they are rich, wealthy and have a good name? But tell me who ever died of starvation? Show me who stood in front of our door begging father to give them food? No one, that's right, no one. Everybody works and is self-sufficient…"

Dinka leaned on the cupboard and tucked her hands under her apron. Doichinitsa came over to calm her down and said:

“Please dear daughter, don’t do this. Please don’t embarrass your father. Just go and get your things.” Dinka now began to cry aloud and stomped on the floor yelling: “I am not going! I don’t like him! I don’t know him! Get that through your thick heads! I will never marry him!”

Doichinitsa now could see that her daughter would not cooperate, would not obey her father and refused to honour her father’s agreement, for which he gave his word and received compensation.

Doichinitsa then got angry and began to yell at her. “Get going you bitch or I will call your father and God knows what he will do to you! He gave these people his word. I didn’t, so if you have a problem then go argue with him. And I can tell you this much; he is not going to take his word back, not for you not for anyone…” she said and set out to go to get Doichin. She then turned around and yelled: “Stop your crying! Do you think it was any better for me? I didn’t like it either when they engaged me to your father. I took fits, kicked and screamed like you are doing now but what good did that do me? I still married your father. That was the destiny chosen for me. Now this is your destiny…”

Dinka had never heard such harsh words come out of her mother’s mouth. They frightened her. She decided to obey her and said:

“I will give them my things but I will never go to R’bi. I will run away and marry another. I told you before and I will tell you again, I will not marry a man I have never seen before. I am not going to allow you to tell me who I should be living with, that is a decision for me to make.”

Dinka collected all her things, including the gifts, and took them to the room with the guests. Once again she kissed the guest’s hands and escorted them to the front yard. Dimitria took the bag with her gifts and hung it on his horse’s saddle and got on his horse. Once again they all took a drink from the wine jug, shook hands and left.

The sun was almost behind Galichitsa Mountain and it was going to get dark very soon. The distance from Ezereni to R’bi was about 30

km. They decided to ride their horses hard. They knew that traveling during the dark of night was risky because the roads were full of theives ready to rob travelers at gunpoint and sometimes kill them. They rushed as much as they could but, unfortunately, that did not help them.

Markova Noga was always a dangerous place and this time was no exception. A number of scoundrels must have seen our travelers rushing to make it by the pass and waited for them. Often they waited for hours for travelers to pass by so that they could ambush them. Then when the two travelers arrived at Markova Noga, they stopped about a hundred metres from the large stones hanging over the lakeshore. At that point their horses perked up their ears. They knew they were being watched. Dimitria said: “We need to go forward because if we turn back they will shoot us.”

They tightened the reins on their horses, kicked their heels and took a run forward. Upon reaching the large rocks two figures appeared in front of them pointing their rifle barrels at them. They ordered them to get off their horses and hold their hands up above their heads. If they didn’t they threatened to shoot them.

This place for centuries has been a nightmare for travelers and a heaven for thieves. People have died here. The robbers hid behind the stones and were difficult to spot until it was too late. The bodies of those killed were easy to dispose. They were tossed in the lake behind the rocks and carried away by the waves.

Prespa even has a legend around this place. A long time ago, during his lifetime, Marko Krale (King Marko) often went to Prespa to help his powerless people cope with the violence perpetrated against them by the Ottomans. One time he was invited to a wedding celebration in Prespa during which a bride was delivered from Liuboino to the Prespa villages via R’bi. When the wedding procession was returning with the bride and was about to pass by the large stones, it was attacked by a number of Muslims who tried to abduct the Christian bride. They didn’t know that Marko Krale was traveling with them. A violent scuffle broke out and the Muslims barely escaped with their lives. The abduction was prevented. According to the legend, Marko Krale was so powerful that when he

fought against the abductors he accidentally kicked one of the rocks and left a footprint in it. The legend also says that whenever Marko's horse jumped it left hoof prints. Such prints exist in the large stones at Markova Noga (Marko's foot). And that is how the place got its name.

As the two figures approached the travelers, they noticed that their faces were covered with mud. The travelers now realized that they were in danger and at risk of being robbed and harmed. Even though the travelers knew that every stone and every bush was a possible hiding place for robbers, still they were not discouraged or afraid. The travelers did not get off the horses or put their hands up, but sat on their horses until the robbers got close. Dimitria and Mitre both spoke Albanian and Dimitria, without being asked, spoke first, in Albanian. In a firm and commanding voice he said: "We are coming from Bitola and going to R'bi to see the Bey. We are close relatives of the Bey and he is expecting us for dinner." Dimitria then reached into his saddlebag, pulled out a few coins and tossed them on the road in front of the robbers. He also asked them how long it would take to reach R'bi from there. The Albanian thugs were simple people from the villages and easy to fool. They were afraid of the Bey and did not want to anger him by robbing his people. They realized that only Albanians close to the Bey would dare to travel at night unarmed. The moment the robbers realized that they both quickly fled and did not take the money from the ground. R'bi from there was a short, fifteen minute horse ride, and the travelers made it unharmed.

Along the way Dimitria said to Mitre: "Look at these Albanians fools! They will take your life for a few coins."

Kote had no idea what his big brothers Mitre and Dimitria had done for him and Dinka.

Like he did every day, this day too Kote got up early in the morning, rushed downstairs, splashed some water on his face and wiped it with his woolen towel. The friction from the rough towel made his face look red like a Prespa apple. Kote then grabbed his shepherd's bag with bread and some onions for him and his father Sterio, which his mother had prepared for them, and some lumps of baked bran for

the dogs and, as usual, stretched his arm out and picked up his shepherd's staff which he had made from a green branch himself. He then tossed his shepherd's coat over his shoulder and off he went to the sheepfold. Kote's father Sterio was a professional dairy farmer and a shepherd. Sterio has been a shepherd since he was a young boy. He enjoyed tossing his shepherd's coat over his shoulder, carrying his shepherd's staff and playing his flute while following the sheep in the grazing grounds all over the mountains. But now he was too old to travel over the mountains and spent his time in the sheepfold processing the milk. It was a new season now and Sterio has just started processing the first milk with which he made soft and hard cheese, butter and cottage cheese. That is why Kote's mother only sent bread and onions for their meals; the sheepfold was going to provide the rest.

When Kote was 16 years old his family sent him on pechalba (migrant work) to Anadol (Anatolia) where he worked for 3 years carrying mud (mortar) for a couple of master builders. He worked every day, including Sundays and holidays, from morning till night and when the day was done he was responsible for cleaning and washing the tools, hammers and trowels, as well as the pans where the mud was mixed. He was also sent from house to house, with a bag over his shoulder, begging people to give him bread for himself and for the master builders. When Kote returned home after the 3 years, he had saved 10 gold coins. During the evening on the day that Kote returned home, there were ten elderly men sitting at the dining room table waiting for Petre to finish eating so that they could start eating. The moment Petre declared that he was done eating Kote took out his gold coins and placed them on the table. Petre was the oldest member in the family of forty. He was 80 years old. He took the gold coins and put them in his oilcloth wallet which he carried around his neck. He then stood up, kissed Kote on the forehead and said God bless you. The next day Petre went to the Bey and with the 10 gold coins purchased a field for the family.

Petre's family was large and consisted of brothers, cousins, sons, wives and grandchildren. Petre was in charge of all family affairs. He made all the schedules and decisions each day of who was going to work and where. Some family members were assigned to permanent jobs, like Sterio who was in charge of managing 250

head of sheep. Spiro was in charge of managing the fishing. Spiro spent his entire life fishing the lakes. Iovan had 3 horses under his care and was responsible for providing firewood for the family. In the summer when the grains were harvested Iovan was in charge of collecting, processing and securing the harvest. Several of the men were ploughmen and did the plowing and sowing. They also harvested the grass and hay from the meadows. Petre's family was well-organized and all the jobs were done quickly and efficiently. The barns were full of grain and straw and the vats were packed with cheese, and every day the fisherman brought baskets of fresh fish into the house. This family had more than enough to eat and to take to market in Bitola. Petre's family was a powerful family which the Albanians did not dare touch.

Petre had about a dozen or so young men and just as many young women in his family. During the winter when the nights were long and there was no field work to be done, Petre gathered all his grandchildren after dinner in the large room and had them sing songs and dance for him. Sterio was always available to play his bagpipes, even though he was old. Sometimes Petre joined his grandchildren in a dance showing them how it was done. Petre took great care of his family, defending its honour, its faith and its Macedonian identity.

One winter when it was time to make the rakia (brandy), a lot of snow had fallen. The family members struggled through knee-high snow delivering water from the river to the boiler. They each carried pots full of water through the village, passing by the bar frequented by the Bey's gendarmes who often played cards and ogled the young ladies passing by. This time they were ogling Petre's granddaughters and tossing wicked words at them. The moment Petre found out about this he ordered the boiling to stop. The next day he ordered his boys to dig up a well in his own yard. The well was dug the same day and when it filled with water he resumed the boiling of his rakia. He had his boys and girls take buckets of water from the well and supply the boiler uninterrupted.

When the Sveti Iovan Prespanski (St. John of Prespa) monastery was being renovated, at Goritsa Hill in R'bi, Petre appointed Giorgia in charge of delivering stones and water to the master builders. He

was to use his wagon and work for the duration of the project. Petre also initiated the move of Tsar Samoil's tombstone from the "Prechista" (Virgin Mary) church in R'bi, where it had rested for centuries, to the Sveti Iovan Prespanski monastery, and to have it placed at the front door of the church.

Like every day before, this day too Kote shepherded his sheep on top of Ilia Hill while practicing playing his father's bagpipes. This day he returned home late. He went down the street and under the window of Blaguna's house. Every night Kote took the same path home and passed under Blaguna's house where she waited for him. Kote loved Blaguna and without her, he felt, his life would be empty. No one asked Kote what he wanted. Petre together with the older men decided everything about the family. Kote passed under Blaguna's window and saw her waiting for him near the window. After looking at one another for a long time Kote left and headed home.

He opened the big gate in the front yard and went inside. To his surprise, sitting in the courtyard were Petkana, Stefana, Giurgia and the other young girls and brides, all holding gifts, candy and bunches of basil wrapped with red yarn. They were all dressed in their finest and colourful dresses. When Kote saw the gifts he approached Petkana and said: "Whose turn is it this time? It must be yours... Congratulations Petkana, and may I be next..."

Petkana took Kote's hand, squeezed it and said: "Great. You are back. All these gifts are for you. All you need to do now is find some paitoni (passenger carriages); you will be taking us all to Ezereni (Dinka's village)." Kote turned red in the face and said: "What Ezereni? Where is it? It certainly must be in the lake somewhere?" (The word ezero in Macedonian means lake.)

"Ah, but they found you a bride, a very beautiful girl…" added Giurgia. "All you have to do now is hire the carriages so that you can take us all there because without carriages they will not receive you there."

"What do I need the carriages for if the place is inside the lake?" asked Kote. "Don't you think I will need boats?"

“No!” replied Stefana, “The village is near Resen and the bride will be delivered over land. And when she does she will change you. She will toss away your village clothes and dress you in city clothing. And then, who is going to shepherd the sheep?”

“Please Stefana, leave me alone and don’t tease me. What makes you think a city woman would even want me, a shepherd? A city woman wants to stay home, how am I going to convince her to work in the fields?” Petkana and Stefana took Kote by his hands and together they went inside the house and had a great celebration.

Late at night when the celebration was over, Kote lay down on his bed and tried to sleep. He just dropped into his bed without taking off his clothes or socks. His sweaty and unwashed socks became glued to his feet and they stunk. But he was accustomed to the bad smell and was not even aware that he stunk. He closed his eyes and began to imagine what Dinka might look like and what kind of person she might be. She would be beautiful and dressed in city clothes, of course, like Stefana had said. But not having seen Dinka and imagining that she would be a well dressed woman, frightened Kote and made him feel like a peasant. He said to himself: “When she sees me dressed like a peasant she won’t like me…” He tossed the bedcover off himself and flipped over in his bed. His strong heart began to hammer like a church bell. What will I do if she really dislikes my peasant clothes, like Stefana said? Stefana would not lie to me. This is probably what Mitre told her. Mitre saw her, I am sure he did. “How will it look when she is wearing beautiful city clothes on our wedding day and I wear peasant’s clothes? People will be looking at me like I am some kind of bear?” Kote thought to himself. When she goes to the spring to get water everyone will come out to look at her in her city clothes. Kote had difficulty getting around the idea that a city woman was even capable of living in a village like his and accepting to live with a family with so many people under one roof. Well she could wear her city dress for a while, and seeing so many girls in this house wear their village clothes, she could get used to that but what if she can’t or doesn’t know how to work in the fields? Then what do we do? Nothing! Nothing, thought Kote to himself. He pondered for a while and then he thought, I am a man and I will not allow her to wear city clothes

here because we have our own dresses and she will wear our clothes. She will dress like our women and will go to the fields like our women go and if she doesn't know how to work, she will learn. Petkana, Giurgia and Stefana did not know how to work but they learned. Kote uncovered himself, wiped the sweat off his forehead and went back to bed and tried to sleep.

Kote squeezed his eyes and struggled to sleep but he couldn't. There was Dinka in front of him dressed in her city clothing and the two were walking in the bazaar in Resen. Then he lost her because he loved Blaguna, whom he had known for so many years. He imagined himself standing in front of her door and saying: "I am sorry my dear Blaguna, it's not my fault; no one asked me what I wanted. Last evening after I passed under your windows I went home and I found out from Petkana, Giurgia and Stefana that I would be marrying someone else. And now who would dare go in front of Petre and say that I don't want Dinka and that I want you Blaguna, because I am in love with you? As I recall Mitre wanted Mara for his wife many years ago, but Petre himself went to Grazheno and married him to someone else. I will bring who I decide to bring into my home Petre told him. Mitre jumped up and down for a while but then settled down..." Kote tossed and turned all night long and did not fall asleep until dawn. Then his mother woke him up. "Get up," she called out, "its daylight and you are expected at the sheepfold. Your father is waiting for you to bring him his bread and take the sheep out to pasture!"

That day Kote took the sheep high up on the hill and spent the entire day looking towards Resen. He looked at the many villages, but which was Ezereni he did not know. He spent many sleepless nights thinking about Dinka and Blaguna and took his sheep high on the hill looking at the Resen villages. Then, during the evenings when he returned home, Petkana, Stefana and Giurgia teased him about the clothes he would wear in comparison to Dinka's beautiful city clothes and what he would look like compared to her when they got married. "But should you decide to wear city clothes yourself," they said to him, "you will need to become literate." Kote was not angry with his cousins because he knew they were only joking. One time when Kote returned from looking after the sheep he was carrying his

shepherd's staff over his shoulder. Petkana saw him and yelled out: "Hey you, no city people allowed here!"

Kote started to become more self-conscious and began to groom himself better and wear better clothes. He started washing himself with soap and wiping his face with a cotton towel. Petkana then took it upon herself to set him straight and told him that when he goes to the "city" he should not lower himself beneath the others.

Petre wanted to have Kote's wedding on Mitrovden because by then all the field work would be done and the wine and rakia would be ready. And once it was decided, Petre sent Mitre to Ezereni to inform Doichin and start making the wedding arrangements. Mitre was also asked to go to Resen and order several carriages to carry the wedding procession, and to Bitola to buy rings for the bride and groom as well as buckles, necklaces and other necessities required for the wedding. Kote wanted to go with Mitre, at least to Ezereni, to see Dinka but no one asked what Kote wanted.

Dinka sent the people who came to engage her to Kote in kindness, leading them to believe that it was a done deal but she did all this against her own will. Her mother, Doichinitsa, understood her dilemma but was powerless to help her. When they returned home after having said goodbye to Dimitia and Mitre, they were both in tears. Doichinitsa could see that her daughter was heartbroken and was terribly sad, but still she could not help her because it was her father's decision. Her father had engaged her against her will and had given her to a man she did not know. Dimitria's word alone was not enough for Dinka to be convinced that this was a good idea. Also, many times she had made it clear to her mother that she was not going to R'bi to marry a man whom she did not know. This engagement for Dinka was unacceptable. She told her mother that she was going to run away and elope with Martin and to cancel the engagement. She did not want them to think that she was going to go though with this. Doichin unfortunately was a man of his word and had difficulty with all this. He had always told her to look where her bread was buttered and not fall for the glitter.

Dinka finally decided to elope with Martin. She placed some clothes in a bag and waited until it was dark. She was expecting Martin to

pass by the small gate at her house and whistle a couple of times. When she heard the whistle she was to exit by the small gate and follow him. Doichinitsa suspected that her daughter was up to something and kept an eye on her. Then at the crucial moment, just before Dinka was about to exit the gate, Doichinitsa caught her and ruined her plans. Mother and daughter fought bitterly. Dinka decided that she did not want to live any more, left the house, ran and jumped into the lake in an attempt to drown. Doichinitsa and her brother Eftim ran after her. Eftim jumped into the lake and pulled her out. They brought her home in a wagon. Given what had just happened, Doichin relented a little and told her that he would return the money and cancel the engagement.

Early in the morning Mitre and Dimitria got on their horses and followed the road to Ezereni and Resen. They met Eftim at the Nakolets meadows. The two men got off their horses, shook hands with Eftim, crossed over the meadows, pulled out their boxes of tobacco, wrapped their cigarettes and lit them. The horses were left to graze on the green grass in the meadows. At this point Dimitria asked Eftim where he was headed with a bag over his shoulder on foot.

Eftim was headed for R'bi but did not know the way and kept asking everyone he ran into which way to go. In answering Dimitria's question, Eftim said he was headed for R'bi to return the money and cancel Dinka's engagement. Dinka doesn't want to get married he said. Eftim told the two men that she had been crying for a whole week and that his father had sent him to return everything and cancel the engagement. Dimitria listened calmly and when Eftim was done talking he said: "Get up and come with us, we will be having a wedding this Mitrovden and Dinka will know what is good and what is not good for her."

This is what Dimitria said and the three continued on their way to Ezereni.

In the early dawn on Mitrovden the godfather sharpened his razor on the fat belt, soaped up Kote and shaved the few hairs on his face. Petkana, Giurgia, Stefana and all the others sat around the groom and sang wedding songs. Petkana then brought the copper canteen

with warm water and poured it for Kote to wash his face. At that point Petkana teasingly said: “Now Kote, I will be seeing you in the “city” with those “city folk, eh?” Smiling Kote replied: “Yes you see me there Petkana, and they too will see me there…” A few minutes later several carriages left R’bi with the groom and the wedding guests and headed down the road towards Ezereni.

It was a 30 kilometre long trip but the panoramic view was beautiful and Kote was very excited. This was the first time he had ever ridden in such a carriage. The horses were dressed for a wedding procession and were wearing sparkly yellow bells that clattered as the horses moved. All the time Kote thought of Dinka. Will she be as beautiful as Mitre described her? Will she be more beautiful than Blaguna? How will she look wearing her wedding dress? These thoughts worried him and from time to time made him nervous. The younger wedding guests pretended to be drunk. They raised their empty wine jugs up high, pretended to drink and sang wedding songs. The music band and bagpipers played along all the way. The young children in the villages they passed kept waving their little arms.

The carriages with the wedding guests arrived at Ezereni and a big door opened wide for the wedding guests and for the groom to enter the courtyard. All the wedding guests from the bride’s side ran forward to see and greet the groom. Several young men with white towels over their shoulders encircled the carriages and welcomed the wedding guests. Some took the horses and escorted them under the porch and gave them hay and water.

Kote was dressed up in his brand new suit, especially tailored for him for his wedding by his uncle Risto. He looked very handsome. When he came out of the carriage the assembled wedding guests who were waiting to see him were in awe; their breath was taken away. Dinka’s friends marveled at him, thinking how fortunate Dinka must be to be marrying such a handsome boy. One of them said: “Take me, take me, I will go with you.” Kote was handsome and appealing and could have carried off any one of those girls.

The in-laws sat at the long head table. Petre and Doichin were given the customary pogacha (large circular loaf of bread) which they

were required to pull apart and break. The men each struggled to get a bigger piece. That was the tradition. Both sides of the in-laws were cheering for their own side as the two men wrestled the big bread. The brothers-in-law took the bag of bridal gifts and went towards the house to distribute them. As is the tradition, they were stopped at the door by the residents and, after some bartering, the brothers-in-law each paid a penny and the door was opened for them to enter.

Dinka's eyes were wet with tears. She was dressed in her bridal dress but she was doing this against her will. After one of her friends saw Kote, she rushed over to see her and said: "Dinka take off your wedding dress and give it to me, I will take your place, I will marry Kote. Don't cry, you can marry Martin and stay her in Ezereni. I don't much care for Ezereni. But I do care who I marry and I want to marry Kote and spend my life with him." When Dinka heard her friend say this she was shocked and did not know how to respond. "What are you waiting for, take off your dress!" demanded her friend. "Give it to me so that I can become a bride. I will take your place…"

Her friend's words gave Dinka some hope. And now, suddenly, this same Dinka who cried all this time and wanted to run away with Martin, and who had almost taken her own life, was about to face the kind of man she always wanted and with whom she would immediately fall in love. Dinka now wanted to see Kote for herself with her own eyes.

A large pogacha was set on a table in the courtyard and in its centre the women imbedded a glass full of wine. Then all the bride's closest relatives were invited to sit around the table. They each placed a coin in the wine glass, causing the wine to overflow. And while this was going on they were serenaded by the bagpipers and surrounded by the village bachelors who broke into a dance encircling the table. One by one the bride placed a gift on the shoulder of each of her relatives. The Koum (godfather/best man) picked up the wine glass and placed it in the bride's hand. Some of the coins were allowed to spill out and the little children rushed to pick them up. The Koum pulled a special coin out of his pocket and gifted the bride. She kissed his hand and was again serenaded by the bagpipers who now were playing the song "Kierka od maika se deli"

(Daughter separating from her mother). The Koum then ordered the bride to sit in the carriage while the in-laws clinked their wine glasses toasting her. The carriage left for R'bi.

All of Petre's friends in the various villages that the wedding party passed through came out to the road and toasted the wedding. Some followed the procession singing songs and drinking wine until it reached R'bi.

It was a long and winding road from Ezereni to R'bi, winding around the coast of Lake Prespa. On this seemingly endless road the carriage was carrying Dinka, who sat in the centre, Kote sat beside her on one side and Kote Germanski, Kote's pobratim (blood brother) sat next to her on the other side. It was a long and silent ride. It was an endless ride. Dinka sat there quietly wondering which Kote was the groom. The band played song after wedding song, as Dinka watched the calm waters of Lake Prespa. There were countless birds all along the coast and inside the water and sometimes they flew off, being startled by the music, causing ripples in the water. No matter what the band played, there was no song that could cheer Dinka. Her heart was now tight. She was feeling terrible. She was struggling to determine which Kote was going be her husband. She cautiously kept her eye on both of them under her veil and often thought to herself: "Perhaps he is the one on my right, or perhaps he is the one on my left…" She could not figure out which one.

For thirty kilometres Dinka kept peeking under her veil looking at Kote and his blood-brother trying to guess which one was the groom and hoping it would be the better looking of the two. She thought to herself: "If the better looking one is him I will be the happiest girl in the world." She couldn't help herself but turn her eyes towards the fairer Kote, without being seen, of course. She had fallen in love with him but at the same time she felt uneasy. She thought to herself: "What am I going to do if he is not the one, if he is the other one, then I would be the unhappiest girl in the world." She gained a bit of courage when she thought about what her girlfriend had told her. "If it's not the better looking one," she thought, "why would my friend want to take him away from me? Do we see them differently? Do we have different tastes in boys?" She took out her handkerchief

and wiped the tears from her eyes. Kote too kept secretly looking at her but Dinka's veil was covering her face and he didn't have much luck seeing her. Only if he was alone with her in the carriage he would have lifted the veil and would have taken a peek. Not knowing what she looked like was also causing him some grief. But then he thought: "I always wanted a woman like Dinka and I am wondering what I saw in Blaguna to have loved her for so many years. I am a lucky man to have Dinka." And in thinking that he already forgot that he had not yet seen her face. The horses picked up the pace. It seemed like they were moving downhill.

Standing on the road at Goritsa, about two kilometres away from R'bi, were a number of young bachelors and unmarried girls waiting to see the bride who they expected would be dressed in city clothing. But Dinka was not dressed in the type of clothing these boys and girls, including Kote, were led to believe, and neither was she wearing woolen village clothing the type worn by the brides in R'bi. She was wearing a jerkin (sleeveless jacket). The carriage carrying the bride stopped under the large mulberry tree at the entrance to R'bi. The bride's mother-in-law placed a white towel on top of the bride's head and kissed the bride on the forehead. All the carriages then stopped in front of the church door and everyone, including the bride, got off. There were many people waiting for them to arrive, who then joined them inside the church. When Dinka got off the carriage and first stepped on the ground, she crossed herself and thought: "I am going to be very lucky if the fairer one is my husband. Otherwise I don't want to live."

The wedding ceremony was performed by a priest named Dimitri and he did a fantastic job following tradition. First he took Kote and asked him to get his bride and place her next to him!

Kote took Dinka by the hand and placed her between his blood-brother and the Koum. When Kote took Dinka's hand, Dinka's body shivered and she felt like the happiest girl in the world. Her heart began to beat fast and she was full of joy. She then began to cry thinking to herself: "I will you love him, I will love him with all my heart. I will love him for a lifetime. I will love his mother, the woman who gave birth to him. I will be his forever. I will love

everyone who looked after him. I will love my sister Dolia who was the reason why I came to R'bi."

She then began to question her past decisions, wondering why she had behaved so irrationally. "Why did I cry all this time and cause so much grief for my parents? Why did I create so much friction between them and cause them to fight and not talk to one another for weeks?" This is what Dinka was thinking all during the wedding ceremony.

The wedding reception was conducted in the village square. A long table was set up with all sorts of food on it. Carpets were placed on the ground for the guests to sit on and in the centre of each carpet was a sofra (low lying table). And while most guests were sitting down the bride and groom were standing up at the lower end of the long table.

The Koum sat at the head of the table. In front of him was a large baked eel, wound all around in a large pan. The entire table was covered with a variety of roasted meats to which the guests helped themselves. The servers wore white towels on their shoulders and constantly filled the jugs with wine and passed them on to the guests.

The Koum pulled out a white handkerchief from his pocket, spread it open on the table, pulled out his oilcloth wallet from around his neck, took out a lira (gold coin), dropped it on top of the kerchief and said: "Congratulations and may this union be fruitful." All the guests then congratulated the couple and they too blessed the union. Then each took out their wallet and made their donations by dropping coins on the same kerchief.

When everyone had made their donation, the Koum counted the money, tied the ends of the kerchief together, got up and went over and gave it to groom. The bride then kissed the Koum's hand. After that the Koum took Kote by the arm and led him in a dance. The bride followed and after the bride followed Petkana, Stefana, Giurgia and the other cousins. The Koum led the first dance. The first dance is always the most popular dance which attracts almost everyone.

When the Koum had his fill of dancing and declared he had had enough, everyone headed for Kote's house. The helpers and a number of other men picked up the big table with the food on it, raised it over their shoulders and carried it home. The rest of the helpers collected the tables and carpets and also took them home.

When the bride entered Kote's courtyard both doors of the front gate were flung open. When they arrived at the front of the house, fifteen young children came out to greet them. The bride gave each child a pair of socks.

The mother-in-law (Kote's mother) also came out of the house and with one hand balanced the pogacha (large circular loaf of bread) and with the other she gave out candy and neblebi (roasted chickpeas). She circled the newlyweds three times and whispered something. The bride then took out a white handkerchief from her pocket, which was filled with candy and tossed the candy towards the guests. Everyone scattered to get some. The bride then crossed the door's threshold, kicked the jug of wine blocking the way and entered the house. At the same time two men stood in her way holding a yoke which she passed under.

More people arrived during the evening and joined the wedding celebration. Most were guests from the surrounding villages.

The younger men were responsible for looking after the bride and groom and the guests. They were responsible for delivering the food and drinks to the guests. Then after dinner was served the bride and groom were allowed to leave the table and go to the room especially prepared for them, as was the tradition. The young men were expected to guard the room.

The bed in the room was made. Dinka began to undress herself and was left only with her undergarments. Kote too got undressed and went closer to Dinka, looked at the face and eyes, hugged and kissed her and they both sat on the bed. They again hugged and kissed and hugged and turned it into a love game that lasted more than an hour.

But after an hour had passed the young men (sworn brothers) began to worry. Perhaps it was something to do with the bride's honour? One of them knocked on the door. Kote and Dinka got up, dressed and opened the door. The sworn brothers entered the room and demanded to see the bride's gown. Kote gave them the gown which had blood on it. Satisfied, they immediately called some of the closest relatives to also see it. It was rare that a bride in Prespa was not a virgin but if she wasn't, the next day she would be put on a donkey and sent back to her father. When dinner was over and all the guests had eaten the newlyweds came out of the room and went to the reception hall where they joined the Koum.

Immediately after they came back, the Koum grabbed Kote by the arm and took him to the dance floor. His bride followed. And though Petre was old, he too joined the dance and so did everyone else present and they all began to dance. They hung a large cowbell around Sterio's neck and hung garlands of onions, peppers and strings of small bells on the others. They took the mother-in-laws head kerchief and set it on fire. More food was brought to the table, including baked eel, roasted lamb, honey, apples and more. Another table was set with jugs of wine and rakia. The godfather became stern and took a rope out and said he would hang the cooks if he didn't get what he ordered. He ordered them to make him baked beans and take them to the village square. The sworn brothers brought him the beaked beans which they had roasted on a spit. That made him very happy and he ordered the celebration to move to the village square where it continued until dawn.

About the author

Kosta Mundushev was born in 1914, in the village R'bi, Mala Prespa (Greek occupied Macedonia) and belonged to an agricultural family. He completed primary school in his native village. From October 1940 to April 1941 he fought in the Greek Army against the Italian invasion at the Albanian front. In 1943 and 1944 he actively participated in the liberation movement against the Italian, German and Bulgarian occupation. He was badly wounded by a roadside bomb in 1944 and since then his right hand was disabled. He became involved in the Greek Civil War in May 1947 and actively participated in DAG's ranks until DAG was defeated. In August 1949 he, along with members of DAG, fled to Albania. Sometime later he was sent to Poland.

In Poland he initially worked on the farms. Then, during the fall of 1950, he was given a job in a factory that made mining machinery. This was in the city Vaubzhih. Here he also completed his secondary education in the mechanical department while working as a technologist. And, as a Macedonian, he always longed for his homeland.

He moved to the Republic of Macedonia, Yugoslavia, in 1956. He took a job in Bitola and worked at the "Georgi Naumov" refrigerator factory as a technologist. In 1962 he changed jobs and worked at "Metalec" - Bitola as head of technical preparations and production. Here he was awarded the "Order of Labour" with a silver wreath. In 1971 he moved to Struga and worked as head of the technology and production department in the "Boris Kidrich" enamel products factory. He retired in 1976.

Acronyms

AFZH - Women's Anti-Fascist Front
ASNOM – Anti-Fascist Assembly of National Liberation of Macedonia
BRP(k) – Communist Party of Bulgaria
CPG - Communist Party of Greece
CPM - Communist Party of Macedonia
CPY - Communist Party of Yugoslavia
CVG - Greek Civil War
DAG – Democratic Army of Greece
EAM – National Liberation Front
ELAS – National Liberation Army of Greece
EON – National Youth Organization
EPON – All Greek National Youth Organization
KOEM – Communist Organization of Aegean Macedonia
KOS - Counter-intelligence Sector of JAN
NKVD – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NOBG - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Greece
NOBM - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Macedonia
PLM – People's Liberation Movement
NOF - Peoples' Liberation Front
NOMS - Peoples' Liberation Youth Organization
OKNE - Communist Youth Organization of Greece
ONOO – Local People's Liberation Council
OZNA – People's Defense Division
PAO - Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organization
PDEG – Pan-Greek Democratic Union of Women
PDOG – International Federation of Democratic Women
POJ - Partisan Units of Yugoslavia
PRM – People's Republic of Macedonia
SID - Information Services of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs
SNOF - Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front
SKP(b) – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
UDBA - Directorate of State Security
USSR – United Soviet Socialist Republics

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