

MACEDONIAN CULTURE

Macedonian language, culture and art have been the basic factors which have established, moulded and confirmed the national identity of the Macedonian people over the centuries. Starting from the 9th century A.D. - when the creation of the Glagolitic alphabet and the literary standard language by Ss. Cyril and Methodius, based on South-Macedonian sub-dialects, marked the fateful moment of the civilized development of the Slav peoples - the Macedonian people, particularly with the activity of St. Clement of Ohrid and his Ohrid Literary School, developed a distinct culture, confirming their unique place among the Slav peoples and among the peoples in the Balkans and in Europe in general. During the last ten centuries, the Macedonian people lived under the domination of foreign empires - the Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian and the Ottoman Empires. In such circumstances, even though without any state mechanism and -care, the culture of the Macedonian people developed in several directions: through literature on the one hand, which, written in Old Church Slavonic, was cherished in the monasteries and churches, and into which more and more elements of the popular dialects penetrated, and, on the other, through the oral literature which developed in a vernacular language in the bosom of the Macedonian people, becoming, by its wealth of poems, tales, legends and traditions, proverbs and riddles, one of the richest popular literatures in Europe. The second direction is Macedonian building, as seen particularly in the numerous churches and monasteries, and frescoes and icons, which, originating from Byzantine art, increasingly affirmed the authentic features of the Macedonian people and its land. The third direction is the rich Macedonian folklore and culture of living, which are particularly apparent in popular customs and religious rites and in the great variety of folk costumes, embroideries and objects of everyday use. The nineteenth century, being the century of revival, greatly encouraged a cultural tradition which more and more developed the distinct national features of the Macedonian people. Influenced by

its own social processes and European cultural circumstances, the popular language began its affirmation as the language of literature. Although disputed, banned and persecuted by the Balkan monarchist regimes (the kingdoms of Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria), under which the Macedonian people found itself divided following the Balkan Wars, it became the language through which the Macedonian national thought was expressed and in which an advanced literature developed, taking its deserved place in the literatures of the modern world. We shall quote a few examples in order to illustrate the presence of a modern and developed culture on the spiritual scene of humankind and of a creative work which liberated, discovered and instigated the great potentials of the Macedonian people, which, following the establishment of the Macedonian state (1944), managed within a few decades both to fill the gaps and abysses of the past and to take part in the most modern world trends in culture and art. In the past decades, in addition to primary and secondary education which, for the first time in history, has been carried out in Macedonian and in the languages of the nationalities, there are two universities in the Republic of Macedonia (in Skopje and Bitola) with more than twenty faculties and the same number of institutes engaged in numerous fields, developing a lively educational and scholarly activity, and achieving a rich international cooperation and exchange. The Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences, as the highest institution in the Republic of Macedonia caring for the development and promotion of education, science and art, has taken part in these activities by developing its own programme of cooperation with a number of European academies. The institutions responsible for the national disciplines have been particularly active in this respect - the institutes of folklore, the Macedonian language, national history and literature, as well as the St. Clement of Ohrid University and National Library and the Archives of Macedonia. Bearing in mind the interest of a number of universities in the Macedonian language as a modern literary language and as a language whose old variant was taken as the basis for the first Slav literacy, it has been taught (periodically or continuously) in a large number of world universities. Thus, there have been rectorates or departments of Macedonian language and literature in the universities of Naples, Paris, Halle, Cologne, Bradford, Vienna, Budapest, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Prague, Krakow, Katowice, Warsaw, Moscow, Craiova, Istanbul, Sydney, Portland, Harvard, Toronto, Copenhagen, etc.,. The interest in the Macedonian language is also confirmed by the large participation of Slavist scholars, translators and students of Macedonistics in the

Seminar on the Macedonian Language, Literature and Culture which is held each year in Ohrid, as well as by the numerous articles, studies and publications on the Macedonian language issued abroad. Macedonian literature has for many decades affirmed the broad possibilities of the Macedonian language in modern literary expression, achieving an impressive development. This literature has quickly transcended the borders of its own language and, translated in several hundreds of volumes of anthologies and books into all the European and many other languages of the world, has become part of the rich mosaic of the literatures of modern humankind. On the other hand, a large number of classical and modern authors and works from world literature have been translated into Macedonian, starting from the Bible, Homer and the Upanishads, to Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Moliere, from Byron, Hugo, Goethe and Pushkin to Apollinaire, Lorca, Eliot and Kazantzakis. Macedonian literature is also actively associated with the world by way of three international literary events which, each year, for three decades now, have been taking place in the Republic of Macedonia - the Struga Poetry Evenings, Racin's Meeting in Veles and the International Meeting of Translators in Tetovo. The Struga event, gathering so far about 3,000 poets and critics from around the world, has opened paths for the mutual communication of poets from various language regions. Each year, poets from neighbouring Greece have taken part in this festival, while the Greek poet Iannis Ritsos is one of the winners of the Golden Wreath of the Struga Poetry Evenings, side by side with the poets Neruda, Montale, Sengor, Lundqvist, Daglarca, Guillevic, Alberti, Koneski and Krleza. On the other hand, more than 20 works of modern Macedonian poetry and prose, as well as Macedonian folk songs and tales, have been published in Greek in Athens and Salonica. Even at first glance it is apparent that modern Macedonia offers conditions for a comprehensive development of culture and creative activity. In this small country of just over two million people, there are ten active professional theatres staging classical and modern plays, a Ballet and an Opera organizing regional meetings and an event known as the May Opera Evenings in which orchestras and soloists from a number of European opera houses have taken part. The Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra and the rich programmes of the international Ohrid Summer Festival add to the international character of musical life in the Republic. The inventory of the rich and varied cultural life of the Republic of Macedonia is completed by lively artistic, musical and film activities, by the numerous museums, galleries and exhibitions, music ensembles and concerts, and also by the prize-winning

production of short and feature films. The cultural creative output of Macedonia, its mediaeval, popular and modern art have been presented to Europe and all other countries all over the globe through numerous publications, exhibitions, concerts, performances and film projections within the framework of the worldwide cooperation of Macedonian cultural institutions and authors. A culture and creative works which have established and moulded, over the centuries, the linguistic, cultural and national identity of the Macedonian people in a spontaneous manner and which have been incorporated through their modern achievements into a lively and fruitful interaction and association with world trends in culture, represent a part of the rich mosaic of humankind and reflect a people both deeply rooted in its culture and turned towards the future with all its creative potential. They are the best witness to the identity of the people and its best promoter and defense. Encouraged by this fact, a large number of artists, scholars and scientists from around Europe and the world have raised the voice of their conscience in favour, in support and in defense of the Macedonian cultural and national identity in the context of attempts at its repudiation, stating that the Republic of Macedonia should bear its historical and natural name which has existed for centuries in the consciousness and the life of its people. In this respect, we may cite the public appeals of writers from France, Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, Austria and other countries, as well as the commitment of the International PEN Club, which, by its resolutions adopted at the International Meeting in Bled and at the Balkan Meeting in Ankara, and especially at its last congress held in Rio de Janeiro, expressed its solidarity with Macedonian writers and the Macedonian people in the protection and defense of their linguistic, cultural and national identity and the name of their country, the Republic of Macedonia. This support by writers and intellectuals, as part of the conscience of modern humankind, is the best lesson as to how the world should treat the right of each people to decide alone about its fate and to take the place belonging to it in the modern community of countries and nations.