

From *La Macédoine et les Macédoniens*, by Edmond Bouchié de Belle [E.B.de Belle], published in Paris (Librairie Armand Colin), 1922, completed in 1918.

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Part I: Macedonia and the Macedonians Chapter 1: The disputed race: The
Macedonian peasant

1- The Macedonian nationality

In the entire countryside of Macedonia, one finds a race of peasants, speaking a Slavonic dialect, of Greek Orthodox religion, which presents most of the ethnic outward signs customary of the Slav peoples. These poor people have the unenviable privilege of being claimed by three different nationalities. - "The Macedonians", say the Bulgarians, "are Bulgarians. They have such a language and such a heart. It was the entire Christendom of European Turkey which comprised the 'Great Bulgaria' created by the Treaty of San Stefano. It is under the Bulgarian name that the victims of the Treaty of Berlin fought against the Turkish yoke". - "The Macedonians are Serbs", replies an equally ardent voice. "It is all of Macedonia which included the Empire of Dussan the Great. It is the Serbian name which the literature and monuments that traversed the Ottoman domination invoke. The Macedonian language is not Bulgarian, as the mal-intentioned ignorants say, it is old Serbian, Serbian arrested in its development. Moreover, have you ever seen Bulgarians celebrating the Slava? Yet, the Macedonians do celebrate it." Now come the Greeks who declare the Macedonians, if not Hellenes by origin, or even by language, at least hellenised by culture. "It is not blood," they say, "but the spirit which creates a race. The barbarian Slavs who conquered Macedonia were organized, and provided with law and order, by the Greek Empire, converted by the Greek Church. We can speak of them as Greeks the same way we speak of the French as Latin. The Macedonians would not have their own ethnic character except for the fact that the dispute of which they are the object had given them one, at least provisionally. One should not perhaps, in fact, take on-the-field part in the quarrel, but at least one fact is undeniable; that is, these people exist, and that one had better attribute a name to them. Being a 'contested people' forms, in sum, an international status equivalent to that of 'contested territory'. But, an observer of good faith will go a bit further. He will state easily that if the Macedonian has a lot in common with the Slavs of the Balkans, he has absolutely nothing in common with the Hellene. What's more, if by some customs, worship, and language traits he resembles a Bulgarian, by others, he resembles the Serb, and is not identified exactly either with the one or with the other. Besides, that which makes a Bulgarian, a Serb, a Greek is, more than any

ethnic or linguistic particularity, the conscience he has of his nationality and his participation in an organized national life. Yet, the people in question distinguishes itself from the three other peoples by the fact that it has neither national conscience nor national life. Ask a peasant from around Ostrovo or Monastir what/who he is! He will, nine times out of ten, reply 'Makedon'. But, this declaration does not at all have the character of a profession of patriotic faith. The questioned may equally simply have answered by "My name is Dimitri". He states that he is an inhabitant of Macedonia, and that's all. An observer of good faith will therefore set apart this population as that to which the name "Macedonian Slavs" or simply 'Macedonians' appeared to suit them best.