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Funerary Masks and the Geopolitical Use of Classical Archaeology in Nationalist Disputes

Abstract Funerary masks are a trans-cultural phenomenon that involves, in different ways and times, the whole ancient Mediterranean due to their particular power to showcase individuality, as concentrated in the face and head. The discussion on the origin of this custom in Ancient Macedonia during the Archaic Period has been strongly influenced by the identity narratives based on different national archaeologies. Previous and current interpretations are, indeed, deeply influenced by the quest for identifying the ethnicity of ancient Macedonians and their relationship to present nation states. Transformed into material evidence of ethnic identity, masks are involved in complex exegeses. On the one hand, Greek archaeology emphasizes an approach based on continuity theses, which can be summarized in the formula "memories of Mycenaean funerary customs" to emphasize a direct link between the Archaic and Mycenaean periods. On the other hand, masks played a key role in the construction of the modern Macedonian national myth and narrative, as proofs for Macedonian identity descended from the most distant past.

Keywords Funerary mask, ancient Macedonia, nationalist disputes

1. GOLDEN MASKS IN ARCHAIC MACEDONIA: INTRODUCTION[1]

Nearly one millennium after the famous examples of Mycenae, golden and gilded silver funerary masks were again used in burials, placed on the faces of individuals of high social rank in the necropoleis of ancient Macedonia. Most of these artefacts were recovered in northern Greece,[2] while a small group came from the area of ancient *Lychnidos,* near Lake Ohrid.[3] This body of water, together with the Prespa Lakes system, marks the western border of the Republic of North Macedonia. The modern state borders that cross Lake Ohrid divide Greece, North Macedonia and Albania, whose long mutual hostility during the Cold War has also influenced the current political situation, in particular the conflict between Greece and North Macedonia about the legitimate use of the name Macedonia and the set of ancient symbols related to the reign of Alexander III and his successors.[4] This conflict—known under the name of the "new Macedonian question"—emerged from the ashes of the Yugoslav conflict, when Bulgaria and Greece re-presented the question of the legitimacy of the existence of a Macedonian nation.[5] The name issue has been recently resolved with the Prespa Agreement, signed on 12 June 2018 between Greece and North Macedonia, so replacing the interim accord of 1995. It sees the country's constitutional name, formerly Republic of Macedonia, changed to Republic of North Macedonia *erga omnes.*

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1 I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink and Dr. Maja Gori for reading earlier versions of this paper and providing me with insightful comments and profoundly constructive criticism.

2 The oldest ones belong to four male and three female burials dated around 550–40 and 530–20 BC in the western necropolis of Archontiko, near Pella, see Chrysostomou (2016) 78–82. Between 1980 and 1982, one gilded silver and four golden masks were unearthed at the south cemetery of Sindos, near Thessaloniki, see Despoini (2016) 14–18, nn. 1–5 (with prev. bibl.). Four masks—from illicit excavations—could be associated with the area to the east of Axios River, see Adam-Veleni (2012) 41; Despoini (2009) note 15. See also Clementi (2018; 2019).

3 Four masks were found between 1918–1933 in the Trebeništa cemetery near the village of Gorenci, see Chukalev (2018). An additional mask was found in 2002 in a cremation burial from the first half of the 5th century BC in Ohrid, at the cemetery of Gorna Porta, see Kuzman & Ardjanliev (2018). Another golden mask, from ca. 500 BC, came from a female grave at Beranci, Petilep, further to the east, see Mikulčić (1966) 91, fig. 5.

4 Roudometof (2002) 27–50; Klok (2003).

5 Gori (2014) (with further bibliography).

Archaeology played a key role in this dispute. Indeed, archaeology is seen as "a discipline in the service of the nation with a duty to defend ethnic identity and its continuity, as well as guard and manage cultural heritage as a national commodity", especially in nationalist-identity disputes along border areas.[6] In this paper I will analyze how golden masks entered the frame of the debate over the ethnic identity of ancient Macedonians (particularly in pre-Classical contexts) and became deeply entangled in nationalist discourses. It is worth remembering that until recently the ancient Macedonian heritage held a rather marginal place in the Greek archaeological discourse and in the formation of Greek identity. At the same time as a Macedonian nationalist archaeology was emerging in North Macedonia, in Greece also an interest in the subject of Macedonian archaeology arose. Greek appropriation of the Ancient Macedonian heritage was a "response" to the North Macedonia nationalist and cultural policies following the Yugoslav conflict, when narratives, mostly constructed on arguments drawn from regional medieval and modern history, started focusing on Classical Antiquity.[7] The history of the studies of the golden funeral masks—especially in the last decades—offers a paradigmatic example of how conflicting interpretations of past material culture reflect present-day identity building processes deriving from nationalistic aspirations and policies.[8]

2. GOLDEN MASKS AND THE "QUEST FOR THE ETHNICITY OF ANCIENT MACEDONIANS"

Right after its discovery, the question of the origin of this sumptuous funerary practice catalysed the interest of the academic world. Solving the enigma about the people who made use of these luxurious objects as grave goods became one

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[6] Gimatzidis et al. (2018).

[7] Gori (2014).

[8] The use and misuse of archaeology in the "new Macedonian question" has been the subject of some studies that have addressed the problem mainly from a Greek perspective. See, among others, Kotsakis (1998) and Hamilakis (2007). Specifically dealing with North Macedonia, see Brown (1994); Klok (2003). Fundamental are Gori's studies about the use of archaeology in the southwestern Balkans in national and trans-national identity construction on an ethnic basis, see Gori (2012; 2014); see also Gimatzidis (2018).

of the main research focuses: the ethnic identity of those buried with golden masks remains at the heart of the debate. Scholars have provided different interpretations for these Macedonian objects; however, it is interesting to underline that in spite of the differences which concerned mainly ethnic attributions, the scholars tended to treat the burials in which these objects were recovered as a single, homogeneous phenomenon. The uniformity of certain aspects of the burial practice has stimulated a unitary interpretation not only of the meaning of the ritual, but also of the ethnic composition of the populations buried with golden masks.[9] Scholars have defined them as Illyrians, Pelagonians, Thracians, or Macedonians, depending on the ethnic characterization that was given to them. Yet a direct relationship between the material record and the notion of ethnic identity is a risky deduction, since the construction of ethnic identity can be based on different aspects that do not systematically include funeral practice or material culture.[10] The main currents in human and social science from the second half of the 1960s have brought forward a critique of the notion of ethnicity, leading to a radical deconstruction of the conceptions that established a "natural" connection of ethnic and cultural phenomena, and, on the contrary, revealing their composition as cultural constructions, produced by specific historical, social and political circumstances.[11] From an archaeological point of view the predicament concerns the possibility that material culture may in some cases convey ethnical-social meanings and that they are recognizable through archaeological methods. The most recent studies have also highlighted the inconsistency of a typological approach in reading ethnic expression into material data;[12] indeed, it is necessary to consider the relational and situational character of social identities and the potential effect of transformation or distortion played by ritual practice on the representation of identity.[13]

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9 Proeva (2006); Kuzman (2006a); Potrebica (2008); Del Socorro (2012) 13.

10 For an overview of recent discussions of ethnic identities and the role of archaeology in their investigation, see Müller (2014) and Hahn (2017).

11 Jones (1997); Dìaz-Andreu et al. (2005).

12 Morgan (2009) 20–21.

13 Meskell (2007); Fowler (2013).

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2.1 Searching for the Trebeništa people: a Yugoslav and North Macedonian perspective

The first two masks discovered in ancient Macedonia were found in the Trebe-ništa cemetery when this area was controlled by the Bulgarian army in the final year of World War I. Between 1930 and 1934, N. Vulić, an ancient historian and professor at the University of Belgrade, excavated two further golden masks (after 1918, Vardar Macedonia was annexed to Serbia).[14] Apparently unanimous was the interpretation offered by the Yugoslav scholars, at least until the begin-ning of the 1990s: in these territories, "Hellenized" as early as the 7th century BC,[15] the material culture of the 6th and 5th centuries BC would identify these societies as not dissimilar from the Archaic and Classical Age Greek ones,[16] or rather as local developments of a "Greek-Illyrian" culture.[17] The golden masks were to be connected with the king-priests of the Illyrian populations.[18]

As highlighted—among others—by I. Vranić, one of the characteristic aspects of the archaeological discipline in south-eastern Europe is the predominance of the cultural-historical theoretical framework, in most cases derived from the academic traditions of Central Europe and Germany.[19] This archaeological ap-proach is marked by a strong emphasis on material culture, which is used to trace distinct ethnic and cultural groupings. In this perspective, the main inter-est of local researchers is the reconstruction of chronological sequences and ar-

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14 Vulić (1934).

15 Vasić (1991).

16 Mikulčić (1966).

17 Theodossiev (2000).

18 N. G. L. Hammond attributes the Trebeništa graves to the Peresadyes, rulers of the Encheleis of Illyria, see Hammond (1967) 439, as does Garašanin (1992–97), who identifyes Encheleis as an Illyrian population (but he attributes the mask of Beranci-Petilep to the Pelagons). Filow in Filow & Škorpil (1927) 3, and Popović (1964) 33 propose to identify them as Dassareti; Theodossiev (1998, 347–349; 2000, 177–185) connects the burial of Beranci-Petilep to the Pelagons, while the Ohrid region is related to the Encheleis, who—in his opinion— would have migrated from *Bottiaia* and merged with the local Dassareti tribe, of Illyrian line-age. F. Papazoglou also supported in her early works the Illyrian origin of the Encheleis, see Papazoglou (1988) 178, n. 20. *Contra* Bouzek & Ondřejová (1988) 84, which attribute the masks from Trebeništa to the Pelagons. For a history of studies, see also Despoini (2009) 33–34.

19 Novaković (2011; 2012); Vranić (2014); Gori (2017); Gori & Ivanova (2017); Maran (2017).

chaeological cultures on the basis of the distribution of the spatial patterns of archaeological artefacts. These are often considered representative of different ethnic entities.[20] Culture and ethnicity are regarded as determinable and stable categories already from the Neolithic, and any useful reference to the definition of the ethnonyms and ethnic distinctions of peoples and tribes settled in the Balkan territory is sought for in the Classical written sources.[21]

According to a common approach derived from the importance generally ascribed to the ancient Greek culture in the intellectual tradition of Western Europe,[22] any cultural change of a specific material culture where a significant contribution of Hellenic elements is detectable has been interpreted as a form of "acculturation". Insofar, the semantic and functional transformations involved in any trans-cultural transfer of ideas, material forms and practices are not taken into account.[23]

The regular presence of products from southern Greek workshops (Attic pottery, Peloponnesian metalware, silver and gold jewellery and ornaments produced in the Thermaic Gulf area) in the Trebeništa necropolis has consequently led some scholars to include this phenomenon in the wider process of "Hellenization", and is generally understood as a unilateral acceptance of Greek culture by the "barbarian" local communities of the early Iron Age,[24] which would have particularly affected the *Lychnidos* region and the lower Vardar valley.[25]

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20 Kuzmanović & Vranić (2013). See Gori (2017) 131: "Priority was given to those aspects of the archaeological past, which were perceived as instrumental for explaining national history and ethnogenesis or ethnic history of a territory". See Gori & Ivanova (2017) and Gimatzidis (2018) 31–36.

21 Papazoglou (1978).

22 On philellenism and its influence on the German Academy (that in turn influenced Balkan archaeology), see Marchand (1996) and Marchand (2009).

23 Vranić (2014); see also Trigger (2006) 235–241. The debate on the interpretation of spatial patterns and identity in Pre- and Protohistoric archaeology and the role of migration and mobility to explain changes in material culture has been strongly influenced by the adoption of processual and post-processual approaches. Although different, both approaches have strongly downplayed the role of migration to explain cultural and ethnic changes. This theoretical turn influenced Greek archaeology but not the rest of the Balkans, where the cultural-historical approach—and its emphasis on migration to explain change—remained the predominant interpretative paradigm until the last decade. See Gori & Ivanova (2017).

24 On this subject, in particular as regards the Balkans, see Vranić (2014).

25 Sokolovska (1986); Mikulčić (1999).

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While in the 19th century, thanks to the Illyrian movement, southern Slavic peoples found in the narration about the Illyrians a fertile intellectual support for the construction of their national identities,[26] in the decades following World War II, Yugoslav scholars broke all connections with the previous "Pan-Illyric" approach.[27] Relegating the Illyrians to the territories where they were mentioned by Greek and Roman sources, they questioned the Illyrian descent of the Western Balkan populations.[28] In response to "the neighbouring Bulgarian and Albanian interpretations that favoured a strict division of the Balkans between the Illyrian West and the Thracian East",[29] in former Yugoslavia was established a narrative focusing on the Paeonians, a Daco-Moesian group inhabiting the major parts of the territory of Yugoslav Macedonia,[30] and some Macedonian scholars connected golden masks to Paeonian rulers.[31]

A few years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the declaration of independence (1991), the importance of archaeology became predominant in the Macedonian nationalistic discourse: the formative moment of the Macedonian nation was identified in the Iron Age,[32] thanks mostly to the work of D. Mitrevski.[33] Paeonian identity was first replaced by a "Macedonian-Paeonian symbiosis";[34] later E. Petrova recognized in the Bryges, an ancient Indo-European population who dwelled in both the Balkans and Asia Minor, as the direct ancestors of the Paeonians, identified in turn as the direct ancestors of the Macedonians.[35] As the scholar stressed, Paeonians and other Macedonian tribes represented sep-

26 Wilkes (1992) 5.

27 On the pervasiveness of Pan-Illyrism, especially in the 1930s and before the excavations of Andronikos in Vergina necropolis, see Hammond (1972) 420–423.

28 Garašanin (1988a) 87.

29 Vranić (2014) 169.

30 Sokolovska (1986); Petrova (1990–91); Garašanin (1991).

31 Sokolovska (1997) who tries to demonstrate (without any success or follow-up) the attribution of the Encheleis and Dassareti to the Paeonians. For a critique, see Proeva (2006) 568.

32 Danforth (1995); Jones & Graves-Brown (1996) 3; Kuzman (2006b).

33 Mitrevski (1990–91).

34 Mitrevski (1997).

35 Petrova (1996).

arate ethnic communities directly linked to Bryges/Phrygians, who were one of the oldest ethnic elements in the Balkans.[36] According to Lomonosov

> Macedonian historians find a relief in portraying ancient Macedonians as the descendants of the Bryges, who represent a relatively new "player" in nationalist historiography, and have not been yet "privatized" by any nation.[37]

Addressing the issue of the ethnic origins of the Trebeništa people, N. Proeva strongly criticized the theories portraying them as Hellenes, Thracians or Illyrians. According to the written sources, the oldest attested tribe who dwelled in the Ohrid region were the Encheleis/Engelanes, whose ethnic identity was matter of debate. Considering that funerary masks have been found only in ancient Macedonia and none have been discovered at any sites attributed to Greeks or Illyrian tribes, masks were taken by this scholar as a proof of the Encheleis' belonging ethnically to the Macedonians.[38]

The Macedonian Question is closely connected to the Albanian one: as argued by M. Gori, indeed, the Illyrian discourse was used to construct Albanian national identity—mainly in opposition to the Slavs of Yugoslavia—during the communist regime, and lately to support Kosovo's claims for independence. The idea of an unbroken and direct descent of modern Albanians from the Illyrians has been further utilized by the democratic Albanian state and by the Albanian minorities present in neighbouring states, including North Macedonia (where Albanians represent about one third of the entire population).[39] While Albanian intellectuals claim the only authentic and direct ethnic descent from Ancient Illyrians, and portray the present-day Macedonians as Slavic latecomers that have nothing in common with ancient Balkan populations, according to Macedonian scholars all the ancient tribes from Upper Macedonia placed under the domination of the Macedonian dynasty by Philip II were not Illyrians, but Macedonians

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36 See also Proeva (2007) 79: "And today we know that the Brygian tribes used to be the foundation/basis (substratum) in the ethno-genesis of the Ancient Macedonians".

37 Lomonosov (2012) 88.

38 "If we point out that the funerary ritual is one of the most significant elements of a religion, which, after the language, is the most important element in defining the ethnicity of the tribes, it is obvious that the Engelanes belonged to the group of Macedonian tribes", Proeva (2007) 80; Proeva (2018a).

39 Gori (2012); Gori (2017).

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in ethnic sense.[40] As maintained by N. Proeva, the obsession of the modern Macedonians with antiquity is a result of the autochthonist claims voiced by Greek, Albanian and Bulgarian elites: the increasing and expanding autochthonism, in her eyes, forced the Macedonian elites to construct a sort of counter-myth of a Macedonian ancient past.[41] While the various "Hellenized" settlements are used as evidence of the symbiosis and of the direct continuity between Paeonian and Macedonian identities, the legacy of Philip II and Alexander III has become an integral part of the mythopoetic process which supported the construction of the modern national identity in North Macedonia,[42] especially following the victory of the nationalist political party VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) in the general elections of 2006.

Widely criticized for its nationalist agenda, former Prime Minister Gruevski's project "Skopje 2014"[43] aimed at the "antiquization" of the capital within a few years through several monumental constructions and public acts, such as the naming of the airport of Skopje after Alexander the Great in 2006, and the erection of giant bronze statues of Alexander and Philip II in the city centre in 2010 and 2012 respectively. Gruevski's main goal was the creation of strong ties between the modern Slavic population and the ancient Argeads through a version of history that deliberately erases the memory of socialism. By celebrating the ancient Macedonian past and instilling into the citizens a sense of pride for their ancestors, the former Prime Minister wished to "build a strong sense of Macedonian national identity in a country where many still felt Bulgarian or Albanian".[44] This cultural policy also served to limit the Macedonians' sense of insecurity in the face of the continual denial of their national identity by their neighbours.

In the process of defending the name and the state identity, the increased interest in the ancient history of Macedonia was followed by intensive archaeological excavations funded conspicuously by the government and aimed at searching for material evidence concerning the continuity with the ancient

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40 Lomonosov (2012) 67–77.

41 See Proeva (2010); Proeva (2018b) 55 ff.

42 See Kuzman (2009).

43 On "Skopje 2014", see Grcheva (2019); Risteski (2016).

44 Taietti (2018) 817; on the the origins and the effects of the so-called "antiquization" in Macedonia, see Vangeli (2011).

Macedonian past.[45] According to the then director of the Bureau for Protection of Cultural Heritage, the archaeologist P. Kuzman, "Macedonia can only defend its name, if it proves that the Macedonian nation has Classical Antique and not Slavic roots".[46] Kuzman, the main promoter and the mastermind behind the grand "antiquization" campaign and one of the most convinced supporters of the VMRO-DPMNE, insisted on the continuity of the people from prehistoric times to the present, suppressing migrations and downplaying the Slavic component. He so stated that the only way for the Republic of Macedonia to win the dispute with Greece was to prove that present-day Macedonians are the descendants of the ancient Macedonians. The main archaeological sites and fortresses (e.g. Skopje fortress, Kozhle fortress, Stobi, Antigona, Demir Kapija and Isar Marvinci) situated near North Macedonia's main highway (re-named after Alexander the Great), leading to Greece in the south and to Serbia in the north, were explored and reconstructed. Kuzman authorised public display of historical artefacts found at Stibera, Stobi and Heraklea: several ancient statues, although from the Roman period, were placed in front of the government offices in Skopje, and there they remained, outdoors, for over three years, during the construction of the renewed Archaeological Museum of Macedonia.[47]

But it was the discovery in 2002 of the fifth golden burial mask and a golden burial glove near Ohrid that made Kuzman a celebrity:[48] his role now corresponded to that of Manolis Andronikos in Greece, who carried out the excavations at Vergina in the late 1970s.[49] This mask is the most recent in the series (5th centu-

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45 See Proeva (2009) 17.

46 See Georgievski (2009). In addition to his efforts in researching the tomb of Alexander III, in his opinion located on the border between North Macedonia and Greece, Kuzman denied (against all the archaeological evidence) the existence of Slavic settlements in North Macedonia. The presence of Slavs was central for the contruction of Yugoslav identity, as the Middle Ages were considered together with prehistory the crucial epochs for Yugoslav identity building. By emphasizing the Iron Age in respect to a Yugoslav presence, Kuzman was not an innovator: see e.g. Garašanin (1988b) or Srejović (see Carlà (2014) for Srejović's scientific activity in Serbia during the Milošević years and the construction of the scientific argument and its influence on the dominant political discourses).

47 See Proeva (2018b) 65–66, note 38; 119.

48 From 2013, he was no longer the head of the Cultural Heritage Protection Office, and in 2016 he was sentenced for abuse of power and wasting public money, see https://balkaninsight.com/2014/07/25/macedonia-jails-top-archaeologist/.

49 See Hamilakis (2007b) with further bibliography.

ry BC) and the only one of those discovered in North Macedonia to be housed there, at the Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum-Ohrid. Together with other finds from the same grave it was presented—both to scholars and to local media—as the evidence of the continuity of the Trebeništa culture in the Ohrid-Struga area from the 7th to the 4th/3rd centuries BC: the mask was used to support the idea of a Macedonian ethnogenesis and continuity since antiquity. Kuzman, like Proeva, linked this piece of attire to the Macedonians: rejecting the Illyrian character attributed by some scholars to the Encheleis/Engelanes, he believes that they belonged to the Brygian sphere.[50]

Furthermore, the discovery of the mask re-opened the long dispute for the repatriation of the four others previously found, spirited away by foreign occupiers and perceived as national Macedonian treasures (one of the Trebeništa masks is reproduced on the obverse of the 500 denars banknote).

2.2 Golden masks as symbol of Thracian Orphism: the Bulgarian perspective

Between 1980 and 1982, five golden masks were unearthed at the south cemetery of Sindos, near Thessaloniki (northern Greece); at the beginning these items, together with the *Lychnidos* masks, were linked to the Thracians,[51] mostly by Bulgarian scholars. A. Fol and V. Fol, key figures of Bulgarian ancient history and thracology,[52] promoted the idea of Thracian Orphism as a counter-balance to the

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50 "Le seule conclusion possible sur toutes ces manifestations archéologiques est que les véritables porteurs des masques funéraires en or ne sont pas ni des Grecs, ni des Peonàens ni des Thraces, ni des Illyriens, mais se sont les tribus de qui proviennent les Macédoniens". Kuzman (2006a) 547–548; see also Kuzman & Ardjanliev (2018).

51 Fol & Hammond (1988) 250 "The Thracian character of the richer burials [at Sindos] was apparent in the gold deathmasks, the thin gold plaque placed over the mouth and sometimes over the eyes of the corpse, the gold decorations sewn onto the clothing of the corpse, the fine gold and silver jewellery, and small models in iron of furniture and carts. [...] The burials at Sindos resemble those of the same period at Trebenishte [...] and we may attribute the resemblance to a Thracian element in each case." Hammond (1989) 43 recognised at this site a royal cemetery of the Thracian Edones; Bouzek & Ondřejová (1988) 85 identified it as of Thracian Mygdones; Theodossiev (2000) 191–192 identified them with Mygdones.

52 See Marinov & Zorzin (2017).

supremacy of Greek culture: it "was supposed to be the origin of the Greek miracle and a main component of Bulgarian heritage".[53] Both scholars have firmly supported the association of the funerary mask with the Orphic doctrine: assuming the existence of an Orphic cult orally transmitted and already existing in the Mycenaean age, they identified all the deceased buried together with either golden masks or golden *lamellae* as initiates, evoking thereby a *continuum* from Mycenaean Greece to "Mycenaean Thrace" that goes beyond any chronological and socio-cultural contexts.[54] The preservation of this custom for over a millennium in the context of a "Mycenaean Thrace"[55] was explained by a common "Thracian-Macedonian Aegean culture":[56] according to some Bulgarian scholars (B. Filow, A. Fol, M. Tačeva-Hitova), several elements of the Mycenaean culture remained in existence at least until the 6th century BC as a consequence of the local retention of a society of a Mycenaean type.[57] This account fits into the Pan-Thracian myth, according to which the Bulgarians are the direct successors of the Thracians and therefore the legitimate owners of the territories situated east of the river Vardar/Axios, settled in Antiquity by Paeonian tribes "whose Thracian origin has not been proved beyond doubt".[58]

2.3 North Greece masks: continuity theses and the "Mycenaean substratum"

Since the formation of the Greek state, archaeologists and historians have substantially contributed to the establishment of a direct connection between modern and ancient Greeks to substantiate political claims.[59] Particularly, in northern Greece, nationalistic rhetoric was reignited after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the declaration of independence by the Republic of Macedonia—now North

53 Gimatzidis (2018) 36.

54 Fol (2016).

55 Fol (1997).

56 Mitrevski (1995).

57 Konova (1995) 195, 199.

58 Proeva (2010) 217.

59 See among others the work of Hamilakis (2007) 39–41.

Macedonia: "the name dispute intensified Greece's archaeological hold over its past"[60] generating "a new period of ancestor worship in North Greece".[61] To put it in the words of S. Gimatzidis:

> Classical archaeology remains colonialist in north Greece, which is traditionally regarded as a periphery of the classical Greek world. Over time, a relationship was built on an old fashioned centre-periphery model according to which the Greek settlers come as civilising missionaries to a land without any prior historical record or even the ability to ever create one.[62]

Among Greek scholars we also observe the constant re-emergence of continuity theses that are usually expressed in formulas as "the existence of a Mycenaean substratum", or "memories of the Mycenaean burial customs", used by the historian I. Xydopoulos to explain the homogeneity of the burial practices in the wide territory between the Haliakmon river and the recesses of the Thermal Gulf during the Archaic Age.[63]

In her work on the Archaic funeral masks Ai. Despoini, who excavated the necropolis of Sindos, hypothesized that the inhabitants of Sindos—identified as Macedonians[64] or as Greek colonists[65]—may have learned of Mycenaean funer-

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60 Plantzos (2017) 69.

61 Gimatzidis (2018) 38.

62 Gimatzidis (2018) 39.

63 Xydopoulos (2017) 82, note 105. According Xydopoulos: "[...] Macedonia was inhabited by Mycenaeans who had emigrated to the region after the collapse of the Mycenaean world in the Peloponnese and elsewhere and their contacts with the indigenous populations may have resulted in mixed cultural schemes".

64 The first scholar who believed them to have been Macedonians was Andronikos (1987–90) 32–33. See also Saripanidi (2017) 92 note 133.

65 According to Despoini they should rather be Greek colonists, as testified to by some architectural elements reused in the necropolis perhaps pertinent to a temple building and the scarce evidence that suggests a Macedonian expansion east of Axios before the end of the 6th—early 5th centuries BC, *contra* see Saripanidi (2012) 243–244 note 1039. Some scholars place the event after 480 BC, i.e. after the departure of the Persians, see Hatzopoulos & Loukopoulou (1992) 15–25, or immediately after their arrival, i.e. between 510 and 505 BC, see Hammond & Griffith (1979) 58–59, 64, or before their arrival, without specifying exactly when, see Zahrnt (1984). Tiverios (1991) 242–243 hypothesizes an early annexation, as early as 700 BC.

al practices indirectly, through tales heard from the merchants from southern Greece or from the Euboean colonists, who had perhaps had the opportunity of personally observing the masks in Bronze Age burials.[66]

The interpretations of the golden masks offered both by Despoini and the excavators of the western necropolis of Archontiko, near Pella, are similar:

> the custom of employing gold funerary masks during the Archaic Age began on Macedonian soil (the oldest known masks come from Archontiko), and their adoption comprised part of an effort by the Macedonians to connect themselves with the pre-Doric past of the Argolid, which also supported the claim of the Temenids' descent from the Dorians of this region.[67]

Self-definition and self-legitimization would be at the heart of the revival of the Mycenaean practice according also to the most recent interpretation of the phenomenon by V. Saripanidi.[68] According to this scholar, the appearance of the masks, together with cauldrons, tripods, skewers and miniaturized reproductions of wagons—which evoke practices widespread in the so-called "heroic burials" of the early Iron Age in southern Greece—would have taken place at a time of profound change in funeral practices, linked to the emergence of the Macedonian kingdom. In particular, the masks contributed to "the construction and the promotion of a shared Macedonian identity": in her view, these elements would have functioned as signifiers of a particular aspect of the Macedonian identity, namely the "genealogical connection of this population with the Greek world".[69] We should observe that the scholar excluded the *Lychnidos* masks from this "shared Macedonian identity", since they speak of a distinctive funerary "idiom".

It is fundamental to consider the academic context in which these interpretations were elaborated: on the website www.macedonia-evidence.org, established in 2009 and promoted by a large group of international scholars who indirectly support the Greek nationalist position on the "new Macedonian question", the ancient Macedonians are presented as Greeks, connecting ancient and modern Greece by an unbroken line of racial and cultural continuity, and so

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66 Despoini (2009) 55.

67 Despoini (2009) 55; Chrysostomou & Chrysostomou (2012) 505.

68 Saripanidi (2016) 93–95; Saripanidi (2017) 112–114.

69 Saripanidi (2017) 117.

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concluding that only modern Greeks have the right to identify themselves as Macedonians.[70] As already pointed out by M. Gori, in the same year the website published a letter addressed to the then President of the United States, Barak Obama, signed by over two hundred representatives of the international academic world. He was asked

> […] to help—in whatever ways you deem appropriate—the government in Skopje to understand that it cannot build a national identity at the expense of historic truth.

In the appeal, various evidence from ancient sources was presented in support of the cause. In particular we should mention the following:

> […] even before Alexander I, the Macedonians traced their ancestry to Argos, and many of their kings used the head of Herakles—the quintessential Greek hero—on their coins.

Clearly, the position taken by the academics who signed the letter to President Obama has nothing to do with cultural dynamics and ancient identities but concerns rather present-day Greek and Macedonian identities.

In 2011, two international archaeological exhibitions—one titled "In the Kingdom of Alexander the Great: Ancient Macedonia",[71] the other "Herakles to Alexander the Great"[72]—opened at the Louvre and at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, respectively. Both co-organized by the Greek Ministry of Culture, the two exhibitions could be read as systematic attempts by the Greek state (and its supporters) to consolidate their *regime of truth:* "Macedonia is one, and only, and Hellenic, and Vergina is the capital of the Macedonians, where the Greekness of the Greek soil is documented".[73] Even if planned with a different agenda, other national and international exhibitions in the last decades have supported the Greek claims over Macedonian heritage, juxtaposing golden masks and the Archaic burials of Vergina, as for example the exhibition "Macedonian Treas-

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70 Gori (2014).

71 See Descamps-Lequime (2012).

72 See Galanakis (2011).

73 See Planztos (2017) 70.

ures".[74] The aim of the exhibition—which collected objects found during archaeological excavations in Macedonia in the last 25 years from the rich cemeteries of Aigai and Archontiko—was to show aspects of the Macedonian culture of the Archaic and early Classical times, and "help the visitor to get to know the ancestors of kings Philip II and Alexander the Great".[75] Numerous exhibitions were organized worldwide with the main objective of re-establishing the alleged historic truth, namely that Macedonia belongs exclusively to the Greek world. Within these expositions, together with some of the specimens from Mycenae, the Archontiko and/or Sindos masks have been associated with the rich funerary assemblage from the so-called tomb of Philip II, as proof of a form of continuity and, at the same time, demonstration of the power of the Temenid kingdom.[76]

3. CONCLUSIONS

In March 2019, at the National Institute of the Archaeological Museum of North Macedonia in Skopje was opened the exhibition "100 Years of Trebeništa", co-organized by the National Archaeological Institute with the Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the National Institute of Archaeology Museum of North Macedonia and the National Museum in Belgrade. The exhibition was of utmost importance, as for the first time almost all the finds from this necropolis were presented together; the exhibition was thus presented as a positive step towards the development and deepening of cultural cooperation between the

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74 The exhibition held at the Museum of Pella from September 2014 to September 2015, whose name refers, not accidentally, to the famous exhibition "Treasures of Ancient Macedonia", held in Thessaloniki in the aftermath of the discovery of the three tombs of the Great Tumulus of Vergina (1978), and then abroad in various American and Canadian museums. This was the first held on Greek soil to present an exhibition according to the context of origin and not by a class of materials, see Mouliou (2008).

75 http://history-of-macedonia.com/2015/02/05/archaeological-museum-of-pella-macedonian-treasures/.

76 For in particular the exhibition "The Greeks: Agamemnon to Alexander the Great" put on in various American and Canadian museums (2014–2016), see Andreadaki-Vlazaki & Balaska (2014).

three Balkan states involved—Bulgaria, Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia. In the catalogue the use of the name of the last country was avoided. According to N. Proeva:

> It is truly unfortunate that this cultural project was not used for a genuine reconciliation on Bulgaria's part[77] with Macedonia and for the establishment of cultural cooperation between the three states on a healthy foundation, with real and earnest mutual respect. This once more shows that politics contaminates the scholarship and that scholarship is still, unfortunately, more or less in the service of politics.[78]

In the same year, new golden masks discovered in Achladas, 22 kilometres northeast of the city of Florina, in Northern Greece, were presented on local media and blogs as

> further proof [that] Macedonians originated from Southern Greece […] reinforcing the literary version of a cultural affinity of the kings of the Macedonian kingdom with the Doric tribes, in the burial customs, in religion and in language.[79]

Acting as an explicit and direct evocation to a legacy of the past—the Macedonian past—golden funerary masks still contribute to the creation and maintenance of a collective identity both in North Macedonia and Greece.

On 12 February 2019, North Macedonia's name-change was officially promulgated and went into force, when the two countries notified the UN that the Prespa Agreement had been completed. It was welcomed by some international academic circles as a miraculous achievement and final solution of the conflict between two Balkan states. The Agreement included numerous forward-looking provisions towards the establishment of a strategic partnership between North Macedonia and Greece and the advancement of the region's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. It was meant to be a final solution to the name issue. Yet the dispute has never been only about the state's *name,* but has concerned also issues of ethnicity, nationality, culture, and language.

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77 The catalogue was printed in Sofia, and was largely financed by Bulgarian private and public sponsors.

78 Proeva (2019).

79 https://www.fort-russ.com/2019/09/major-archaeological-discovery-brings-further-proof-macedonians-originated-in-southern-greece/.

> Instead of being a final solution to a protracted identity conflict, the PA symboli-
> cally reconceives the old Macedonian Question into a new form with an old essence
> [...] Thus, the PA has not resolved any identity problem—because such problems
> cannot be resolved through imposition and by legally binding mechanisms.[80]

Article 7 of the Agreement attempts to delimit the meanings of the terms "Mace-
donian" and "Macedonia" recognizing that those terms are used in both sides of
the border and they refer to a different historical context and cultural heritage.
According to the Agreement, the history and culture of Greece and the Greek re-
gion of Macedonia, from antiquity to present day, are 'distinctly different', from
that of North Macedonia.[81] Article 7 declares Greek exclusivity for a continuity
narrative that links together the ancient Hellenic civilization with the modern
Greek identity. In other words, citizens of North Macedonia may call themselves
Macedonians and their language Macedonian but they may no longer claim to
be the 'heirs' of Alexander the Great: the PA deconstructs the irredentist claims
linked with the phenomenon of "antiquization" in North Macedonia. So, *de facto,*
North Macedonia lost the battle fought on the archaeological level.

The silence of the academic community (especially in the field of the histori-
cal sciences) is difficult to justify,[82] especially because the Prespa Agreement im-
poses state control over their scholarly work. Archaeologists, who play a crucial
role in the social and political lives of the Balkans, seem still unwilling to take
up the challenge of reshaping transnational consciousness and overcoming ar-
chaeological regional narratives.

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80 Vankosvska (2019) 279.

81 Vankosvska (2019) 273–274.

82 But see Proeva (2018b).

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