

Archaeology Behind the Battle Lines

The Macedonian Campaign (1915–19) and its Legacy

Edited by

ANDREW SHAPLAND and EVANGELIA STEFANI



BRITISH SCHOOL AT ATHENS

Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies

ARCHAEOLOGY BEHIND THE BATTLE LINES

This volume focuses on a formative period in the history and archaeology of northern Greece. The decade following 1912, when Thessaloniki became part of Greece, was a period marked by an extraordinary internationalism as a result of the population movements caused by the shifting of national borders and the troop movements which accompanied the First World War.

The papers collected here look primarily at the impact of the discoveries of the Army of the Orient on the archaeological study of the region of Macedonia. Resulting collections of antiquities are now held in Thessaloniki, London, Paris, Edinburgh and Oxford. Various specialists examine each of these collections, bringing the archaeological legacy of the Macedonian Campaign together in one volume for the first time.

A key theme of the volume is the emerging dialogue between the archaeological remains of Macedonia and the politics of Hellenism. A number of authors consider how archaeological interpretation was shaped by the incorporation of Macedonia into Greece. Other authors describe how the politics of the Campaign, in which Greece was initially a neutral partner, had implications both for the administration of archaeological finds and their subsequent dispersal. A particular focus is the historical personalities who were involved and the sites they discovered. The role of the Greek Archaeological Service, particularly in the protection of antiquities, as well as promoting excavation in the aftermath of the 1917 Great Fire of Thessaloniki, is also considered.

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Andrew Shapland and Evangelia Stefani

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Foreword

Archaeology Behind the Battle Lines

Michael Llewellyn-Smith

The streets of Salonica in 1916–1918 were a vivid pageant, impressing themselves on the memory of hundreds of soldiers, nurses and visitors from far away countries. A young VAD nurse noted in her diary the kaleidoscopic crowds

Russians, French, Serbs, Italians all in uniform, Alpini and Bersaglieri as well as infantry, Greeks in kilts, Turks, Jews in mediaeval gaberdines, and peasants in native costumes from all the Balkan states, Cretans in black tango knickers. The British uniform pretty well dominated the crowds, and there were Tars and French sailors, a few sepoys, Algerians, French coloured colonial troops, reverend Greek priests, and an occasional nun or sister with elaborate starched head-dress.¹

As well as the Allied armies – French, British, Greek, Serbian, Russian, Italian – each with its own uniform and language, the city swarmed with refugees and street traders, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. This bustling life of the city is well captured in contemporary photographs, drawings and letters.

The journalist G. Ward Price in his book *The Story of the Salonica Army* posed the question ‘What is the Salonica Army doing?’ and answered that fighting and other military transactions were a comparatively small part (Ward Price 1918, 1). Pantomimes, theatre and concert parties, field sports including hunting with beagles, horse shows, swimming, golf, football, botany, journalism, painting were others. And so was digging, which gave rise to Clemenceau’s description of the armies as the Gardeners of Salonica. The digging of trenches in early 1916, in the construction of General Sarrail’s vast entrenched camp, began to unearth pots, tools, seals and other evidence of daily life from the hills, fields and mounds of Macedonia. The story of battlefield archaeology, with its intriguing cultural and political dimensions, is unfolded by Greek, French and British scholars in *Archaeology Behind the Battle Lines*, which examines what material remains were discovered, how and where they were collected and stored, and what happened to them after the war.

The British and French landed forces at Salonica in October 1915, too late to save the beleaguered Serbian army under attack by Austria and Bulgaria. Stalemate soon set in. The entrenched armies of France, Britain, Serbia and

later of Greece, faced Bulgarian and German forces along a front running across the Balkan peninsula as far as the Struma river east of Salonica. The men of the Allied armies were forced back on their own resources to find interest and occupation in the long periods of inactivity. Alan Palmer (1965, 143) wrote that apart from malaria, the greatest menace to the well-being of the British forces was sheer boredom: 'weeks of inactivity, of passive waiting in the trenches and bivouacs beside Doiran or the Struma looking out at the same lines of enemy-held hills'.

Long periods of monotony, punctuated by short bouts of violence, encourage pastimes such as amateur archaeology, and no doubt many chance finds found their way home in soldiers' knapsacks. Less predictable was the way this theatre of war became a field for professional archaeologists, French and British, in cooperation and sometimes tension with the Greeks, whose Ephor of Antiquities was appointed immediately after the annexation of Salonica by Greece in autumn 1912.

The French approach was more systematic and organised than the British. General Sarrail, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied *Armée d'Orient*, established in May 1916 a professionally staffed Archaeological Service. The British adopted a more empirical approach. They did what they could with the resources at their disposal, in the margins of other military duties. Those principally responsible, including Ernest Gardner and Stanley Casson, had been professional archaeologists in civilian life. They were now intelligence officers, assigned to the supervision of archaeological work to the extent that their other duties permitted. Both the French and the British made good use of the expertise of scholars who had worked at their respective institutions in Athens, the British School at Athens and the *École française d'Athènes*. Gardner had been Director of the British School before the war.

Gardner and Casson and their French colleagues such as Léon Rey were anxious to work closely with the Greeks, and established rules and practices for excavation and collection that were consistent with the Greek laws on antiquities.² The Greek Ephors were understandably keen to assert their control and influence over the activities of foreign archaeologists in Macedonia. The territory had only recently been acquired by Greece, and it was important to assert its Greekness. But war time conditions and the dominance of the Great Powers made control impossible. Gardner hoped that the excavated objects, which he gathered in Salonica's famous White Tower, would be transferred in due course to a Greek archaeological museum. But this was not to be. By a series of transactions that involved General Milne, the commander of the British Salonica Force, Lord Granville, the British Minister in Athens, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Major Alexander Wade, the last curator of the British collection, it was packed up and shipped to Britain in 1919, finding a home at the British Museum. The Greek Ministry gave permission for the export. An instruction by Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, that the artefacts be passed on to the Greek authorities, seems to have been issued

too late to have effect. It is clear that the Greek Ephor of Antiquities, Pelekidis, was opposed to the transfer to Britain, but he seems to have reconciled himself to the *fait accompli*.

The fate of the materials gathered by the French was different. They were initially stored in a building in the courtyard of the Rotunda. In 1919 a part of the collection was passed to Pelekidis, and is now in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. The other part was sent in 1919 in two shipments to Paris, and is now in the Louvre.

Given the prevailing conditions, and the power relations between Greece and the two big Entente allies, these outcomes were not surprising. By now (1918–1919), after the period in 1917 of his ‘provisional government’ in Salonica, Venizelos was back in Athens, installed by the Entente allies as Prime Minister of a united Greece. He owed his position to France and Britain, and his policy was to stay as close to them as possible, in order to reap after the war the rewards of his loyalty to the Allied cause. The western allies were in a position to call the tune.

The chapters in this book, by Greek, French and British specialists in the archaeology of northern Greece, tell the story of the discoveries made during the war in Macedonia, and complete it with accounts of subsequent researches in the area and on the materials uncovered by the archaeologists. It is a significant chapter in the history of archaeology in Greece. The collections in Britain, France and Greece, ranging from prehistory to the Classical and post-Classical periods, are increasingly seen as an important and under-researched resource. *Archaeology Behind the Battle Lines* fills a gap in our knowledge of Macedonia and of the complex relations between three allied countries in time of war. It advances the story of the development of scientific archaeology in Greece and it adds a chapter to Greeks’ knowledge of their past.

Notes

- 1 Diary of Vivian Ross Crawford, a distant cousin of mine. Unpublished manuscript, private collection.
- 2 See the order issued by the *Armée d’Orient* staff on 21 February 1916, SHD/DAT 1916a (Descamps-Lequime, this volume), on what officers and men should do with any ‘finds’. This was the first of a series of orders issued by the staff on the excavation, collection, measurement, recording, deposit and preservation of antiquities.

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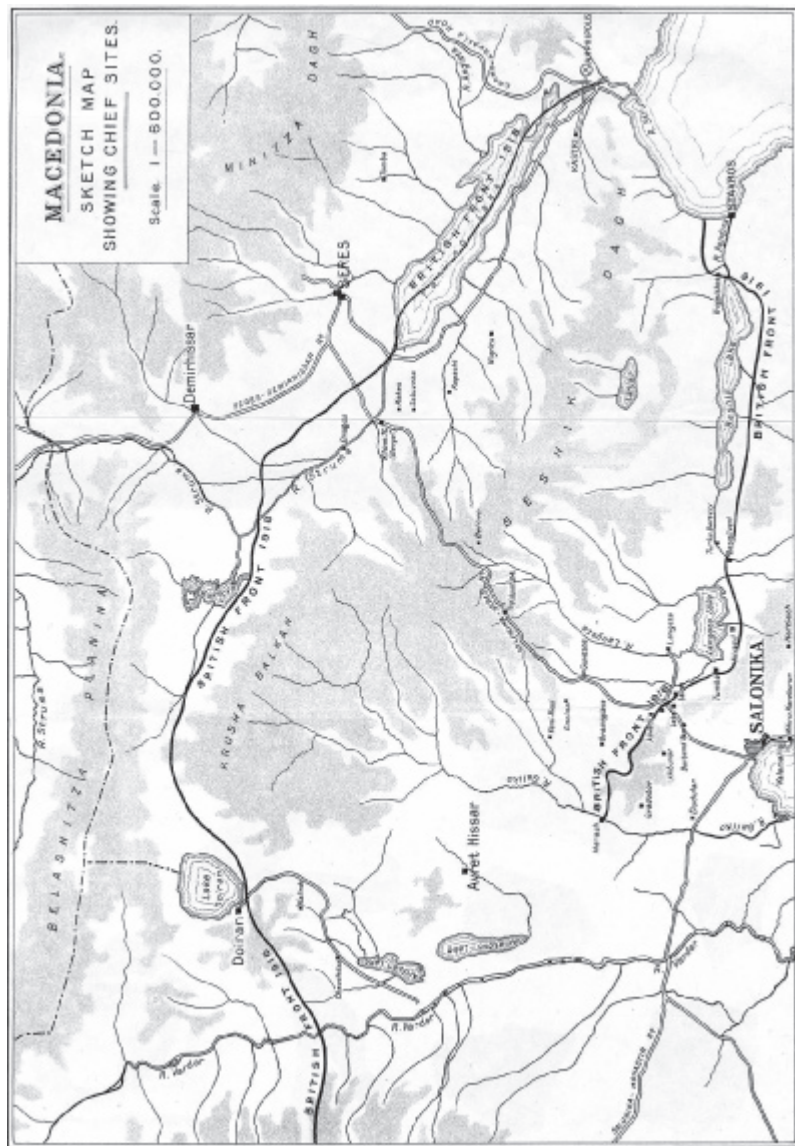


Fig. 0.1. Map of Macedonia published in the *Annual of the British School at Athens* 23, 1918–19 which shows many of the sites discussed in the papers in this volume. © British School at Athens.

Introduction

Andrew Shapland and Evangelia Stefani

The exhibition in 2012 at the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, 'Archaeology Behind Battle Lines', and the British Museum symposium of the same name that took place in November 2013 offered the opportunity to shed light on some important aspects of archaeological research during the twentieth century in northern Greece. The exhibition focussed on what the subtitle understatedly called the 'turbulent years' of 1912–1922 (Adam-Veleni and Koukouvou 2012). Here the First World War was not the only momentous event, but was part of a decade of shifting populations and borders. There were three basic historical milestones in this period which each had important effects on the way archaeology was practised. The first was the Liberation of Thessaloniki and the rest of northern Greece in 1912, part of the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars which doubled the territory and population of Greece. The second, in some ways a renewal of the Balkan Wars, was the First World War and the arrival of the *Armée d'Orient* in Thessaloniki in 1915 as part of the Macedonian Campaign. The third milestone, which brought an abrupt end to Greek national aspirations and resulted in an influx of refugees to Thessaloniki, was the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922. These events changed not only economic and social conditions in Greece but also shifted and redefined the national ideology. The modern Greek terms 'Liberation' and 'Catastrophe' give an insight into the way these events are still remembered.

Archaeologists are trained to study the material remains of the past. Through their study and interpretation they try to reconstruct images of ancient societies and, when possible, to contribute to the understanding of their historical characteristics. But when the focus is turned on the social and historical context of the archaeologists themselves and their finds, they become part of the puzzle of modern history. In this turbulent period, archaeologists were active agents in social change and archaeological research had far-reaching ideological effects. An exhibition and symposium dedicated to archaeological work in these crucial historical times had to be based on an understanding of the main aspects of this history, and here Clogg, Wakefield and Stefani set the archaeologists in their wider historical context. As all of the papers show in one way or another, it is impossible to disentangle archaeology from historical events.

The Liberation of Thessaloniki by Greek forces was a pivotal moment during the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars. 1912 was the year when northern Greece was liberated from the Ottoman Empire but also the year when the official, state

concern for Macedonian antiquities commenced, with the organisation of the Archaeological Service (Adam-Veleni 2012; Akrivopoulou 2012). The collection and cataloguing of finds and features, the listing and declaration of monuments in order to protect them and the systematic excavations in important sites and the rescue excavations within the city of Thessaloniki were all actions taken immediately by the Archaeological Service (Koukouvou 2012; Palli 2012). The first Greek Ephors (chief archaeologists), Georgios Oikonomos and later on Efstratios (Stratis) Pelekidis, were important personalities who produced significant scientific work, but their greatest contribution was in the protection of antiquities under extremely difficult conditions. This was despite both lack of staff and any kind of infrastructure, and even though they were responsible for an extremely large amount of archaeological material scattered in a large geographical area. Discussing the first instances of state care for antiquities highlights the symbolic use of antiquity and the significant part it played in the formation of national ideology at the time of, as well as prior to, the Liberation. This makes it possible to evaluate the work of Greek archaeologists of that era alongside the actions of the official Greek state in terms of both specific acts and the formulation of state ideology (Stefani, this volume).

A number of contributors explore the intersection of archaeology and Hellenic identity, both during this decade of conflict and later. The incorporation of Macedonia, the land of Alexander the Great, into the modern nation state of Greece was of great political importance. Of less political significance initially were the distinctive prehistoric tell sites, the 'tombas' of the region, whose reception is described by Kotsakis in this volume. These were often used as defensive points by the British and French forces which took temporary control of the area around Thessaloniki during the war. Although finds from all periods came to the surface as a result of the digging of defensive lines, the particular legacy of these wartime researches was the addition of prehistoric archaeology to the existing search for recognisably Greek archaeological remains. A strong tradition of prehistoric archaeology in Macedonia has followed, alongside the discovery of sites associated with the kingdom of Macedon, a history of research traced by Adam-Veleni.

The First World War had a great impact on Greece but cannot be viewed separately from the events that preceded and followed it. Greece was initially neutral, politically divided between those loyal to the King and the supporters of the statesman Eleftherios Venizelos. The country became split between Athens, centre of royalist feeling, and Thessaloniki, the city Venizelos had liberated in 1912. As the seat of the General Administration of the Allies and Venizelos' provisional government, Thessaloniki became the meeting place of diplomats and military figures, an important port and, increasingly, the destination of many immigrants. The presence of the Allied troops in the city brought important changes in many aspects (Dimitriadis 2012): infrastructure works were constructed and the local economy was stimulated because of the necessity to serve the daily needs of thousands of soldiers. The resulting carnival

atmosphere was dampened by the Great Fire of 1917, which destroyed much of the historic city and displaced thousands of its inhabitants, permanently changing the character of Thessaloniki.

The First World War Macedonian Campaign was conducted almost entirely within Greek borders and the finds either remained in Greece or were shipped to Britain and France. The symposium brought together representatives from the various museums where these finds were dispersed. The decade this volume considers is defined by the shifting of national borders but also by the movement of objects. Objects did not just move from Greece to foreign museums, but also from Asia Minor to Thessaloniki, familiar pieces of their homeland brought by refugees. The exhibition and symposium were an attempt to bring together some of these objects and consider the wider historical currents which resulted in their movements.

The Salonika Campaign began in October 1915 with the arrival of Allied troops in Thessaloniki. The complex history of this campaign is outlined by Wakefield (this volume) and need not be rehearsed here.¹ One of its most remarkable features was, as his title suggests, the cosmopolitan nature of the Allied army. By late 1916, 600,000 troops were stationed on the Greek side of the front line in six national contingents (French, British, Serbian, Russian, Italian and Greek), whose colonial reach meant that forces included soldiers from all over the globe. Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith in his foreword provides a glimpse of the effect of this multinational army on the already multiethnic population of Thessaloniki. The impression that Thessaloniki made on Allied soldiers is revealed by the postcards they sent home, as Diana Wardle's account shows.

Among the officers in particular were educated men who continued their studies in Macedonia in various branches of the arts and sciences. A focus of this volume is the effect that the war and its participants had on the archaeology of Macedonia. In early 1916, when the initial French offensive had failed and the Allied army was busily entrenching itself within the area around Thessaloniki, concern was growing in Athens about the safety of antiquities. Greece remained a neutral country and the authorities in Athens wanted to ensure that archaeological law was upheld. Descamps-Lequime and Shapland describe the resulting agreement, which meant that all soldiers were under orders to report finds, and collections of antiquities were gathered in Thessaloniki. As with many aspects of the campaign, the British and French activities remained separate. Whereas General Sarrail instituted an archaeological service which conducted excavations in the areas of French control, the British command delegated authority to the archaeologists who happened to be serving in the army and navy, mainly in intelligence roles (Gill 2011a; Clogg, this volume). Finds were kept separate throughout the war: the British initially established a museum in the White Tower on the harbourside, before later moving the finds to their headquarters in the Papapeion Orphanage, while the French kept archaeological finds in the Rotunda.

Experienced archaeologists were serving in both the British and French forces. The first curator of the British Salonika Force Museum in the White Tower was Professor Ernest Gardner, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of London, who had been Director of the British School at Athens until 1895. He was assisted by the Egyptologist T.E. Peet, who had also worked with Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson on excavations in Thessaly, and by other former Students of the British School at Athens including Stanley Casson (Gill 2011b). Wace, the Director of the British School at Athens during the war, remained in Athens; both Morgan and Clogg discuss Wace's role. Similarly a number of the directors of the *Service Archéologique de l'Armée d'Orient* were former member of the French School at Athens, including Charles Bayet, Gustave Mendel, Auguste Jardé, Fernand Courby and Jean Hatzfeld. Their role is discussed by Descamps-Lequime. Another member of the French Archaeological Service, the architect Ernest Hébrard, came to prominence following the devastating fire which destroyed large parts of Thessaloniki in August 1917, since he was appointed to the architectural committee responsible for its rebuilding. Not all of his plans were realized but the main boulevard (Aristotelous) is a tangible reminder of both the presence of the Allies and the destruction of the city during the First World War.

Papers in this volume describe both the intellectual and material legacy of these early archaeological activities. The material legacy consists of the collections of objects which resulted from the chance finds, casual diggings and systematic excavations of this period. Recording and collection of finds often depended on the particular interests of soldiers: a particularly important find of Early Neolithic pottery at Lete was reported by Lieutenant Archibald Don, who had just finished studying geology. Dimoula describes how these sherds, now in the British Museum, were the earliest known pottery from the region until the excavations of the twenty-first century. Maitland has traced the story of the finds of Robert Gaddie of the YMCA who was the first to discover the site of Chauchitza. The British, in particular, encouraged the activities of amateur archaeologists, and the final curator of the British Salonika Force collection, Alexander Wade, had no experience of archaeology in Greece: his important role in securing the export of the British Salonika Force collection is discussed by both Galanakis and Shapland.

A number of papers describe the primary collections of material from the Salonika Campaign, now in: the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (Adam-Veleni, Koukouvou); the Louvre (Descamps-Lequime); the British Museum (Dimoula, Morgan, Shapland); National Museums Scotland (Maitland) and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (Galanakis). It had been the intention of the Ephor, Stratis Pelekidis, to retain most of this material in Thessaloniki after the war (Vokotopoulou 1986). As Clogg (this volume) argues, political expediency was certainly involved in the decision by the Greek Government to allow the export of the British finds, with the exception of two inscriptions. This also went against Ernest Gardner's intentions in setting up

the Museum in the White Tower, and he made a point of noting after the transfer to London had happened that: 'It was our hope that the collection would be retained in Salonika, where it should form the nucleus of a local Macedonian museum, instead of being transferred to Athens or any other centre' (Gardner and Casson 1918–1919, 11). French finds were subject to an unfortunate part-age arrangement which resulted in tomb groups being divided between Paris and Thessaloniki; a recent exhibition at the Louvre allowed some to be seen together again (Descamps-Lequime 2011). Just as the archaeological law had to be applied flexibly to account for Allied archaeological finds in Greek territory, Galanakis describes how the provisions for the disposal of *ἄχρηστα* (useless) objects in the 1899 Archaeological Law made it possible for objects to leave Greece.

Because of the initial neutrality of Greece, the front line mostly followed its borders, except for the land to the east of the River Struma. The finds made by the Central Powers are not discussed in this volume but a small number were published after the war. An Iron Age cemetery was discovered near Serres in Greek territory, and the finds taken to Sofia (Popov 1922, see also Casson 1926, 172). Another Iron Age Cemetery was discovered at Dedeli, on the other side of the hills from Chauchitza (and across the border): some of these finds are now in the Ethnologisches Museum, Leipzig (Dragendorff 1919, 160; Casson 1926, 144, 172; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1979, nos. 1486, 1491, 1500, 1501). New excavations have also been conducted at the site (Mitrevski 1991). The German army, like the French, adopted a formal approach to wartime scientific research and established the *Mazedonische Landeskundliche Kommission* in 1917, a scientific mission which covered geography, archaeology and art history (Klute-Göttingen 1921, 103–4). The resulting archaeological research and discoveries, mostly Byzantine, appeared in the German publication *Kunstschutz im Kriege*, but this was largely outside the borders of Greece (Dragendorff 1919). The site of Makri in Thrace was also excavated during the war (Kazarow 1918) but was not part of Greece at that time. This research, because of the types of publications and networks of scholars involved, has remained part of a Central European archaeological tradition.

The significance of the activity of the British and French archaeologists, in comparison with the German and Bulgarian equivalents, is the effect their research had on the history of archaeological research in northern Greece. This legacy, which is central to the volume, started with the publication of wartime discoveries.² Some sites, such as Dikili Tash, were identified in this period and have become the subject of major research projects (Treuil 2012). After the war, Casson returned to excavate at Chauchitza (Maitland, this volume), where he was assisted by Walter Heurtley (and continued to work with Efstratios Pelekidis) (Casson 1919/20–1920/21, 1923/24–1924/25). Heurtley went on to excavate at a number of sites and published the authoritative *Prehistoric Macedonia* (Heurtley 1939). This built on the work of Léon Rey (1916, 1917–19) whose publications, appearing immediately after the war, were notable for

their pioneering environmental research. Together these scholars helped contribute to the pottery typologies and environmental considerations which continue to underpin prehistoric research in the region today. British involvement has continued at the site of Assiros (known as Guvesne when it was a railway terminus during the First World War). Ken Wardle describes how the excavation project begun in the 1970s uncovered not only prehistoric remains but also the wartime memories of the villagers and the First World War debris which had been recycled into barbecue equipment. It is a happier legacy than Casson's (1935, 275) melancholy account of digging through spent ammunition at Chauchitza to reach the weapons of earlier fighters below.

Those of the British and French soldiers who served in Macedonia who returned home found that the Macedonian Campaign was regarded as an unimportant part of the First World War; the nickname of 'the Gardeners of Salonika' denoted an army which was perceived to be at leisure, although the reality was much harsher, as Wakefield's paper illustrates. Nevertheless, this volume describes the fruits of their digging in Macedonian soil, both the material finds and the start of an intellectual engagement with the archaeology of the region which had only recently become part of Greece. Although the finds were scattered to a number of different museums, in line with early twentieth century archaeological imperialism, a tradition of collaboration between overseas and local archaeologists also began during the First World War which has proved an enduring legacy. As Kotsakis states at the opening of his contribution, which traces this legacy through twentieth century Macedonian archaeology: 'It all started with the Great War'.

The third milestone of the turbulent decade marks an ending rather than a beginning. The Asia Minor Catastrophe led to the end of the period when the Greek nation rallied around the national vision of the Great Idea, of a Greece spreading on 'two continents and five seas' as Eleftherios Venizelos said. In reality, the presence of Greek troops in Anatolia was the endgame of World War I as Venizelos sought to put his vision into effect, with the support of his wartime allies. The defeat and withdrawal of these troops signified the end of an age old history of the Greek cities and communities in Asia Minor, the uprooting of almost 1.5 million people but also the formation of completely new social, economic and political conditions in the Greek state (Llewellyn Smith 1998). Archaeology played a crucial part in this historical context as well, as the expedition of the Greek army in Anatolia from 1920 to 1922 was accompanied by numerous archaeological investigations that included excavations, documentation and collection of scattered artefacts (Kokkou 2009, 139, 142). Archaeological research in the large centres of Ionia did not just seek to legitimise the Greek presence there, but was also seen as a duty towards one of the cradles of Hellenism. The fact that the refugees carried antiquities and religious icons with them among their limited belongings shows their unbreakable bonds with their culture and at the same time highlights the distinctive way modern Greek citizens are attached to their past. Greek archaeological

investigations in Asia Minor came to an abrupt end, leaving behind only several pages of excavation diaries and reports. Some ancient artefacts that became refugees along with the people are now hosted in Greek museums. A characteristic example is the Raidestos Collection in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, which featured in the 2012 exhibition (Koukouvou, this volume).

The studies included in this volume cover a number of themes concerning archaeological research in northern Greece during the first decades of the twentieth century. The topics under discussion are varied: the initial state care for antiquities; the investigations of the *Armée d'Orient* both in the context of their wartime activities and as a trigger for the interest in otherwise 'neglected' prehistoric antiquities; the not always cordial relationships between foreign and Greek archaeologists; the formation of the archaeological collections, both in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki and in museums abroad where antiquities from Macedonia were transferred; and finally the course of archaeological research in Macedonia in later times. Three main themes emerge and the papers are organised in the following order: the genesis of the discipline and the conditions under which it developed in the early twentieth century (Wakefield, Stefani, Clogg and Kotsakis); the constitution of early collections, particularly those formed during the First World War (Descamps-Lequime, Shapland, Morgan, Galanakis, Maitland and Diana Wardle); the trajectory of the discipline in the later twentieth century and into the twenty-first (Koukouvou, Dimoula, K. A. Wardle and Adam-Veleni). The authors, through a variety of viewpoints, highlight both familiar and unfamiliar aspects of archaeological research in the early twentieth century, some dealing with the official declarations and actions of those involved and others with personal stories of people who lived in those difficult years around World War I. Some of them are part of the history of the archaeological discipline while others remained unknown, but they all left a part of their lives and knowledge in archaeological research behind battle lines.

Notes

- 1 Histories of the Campaign include Falls (1933–1935), Palmer (1965) and Wakefield and Moody (2011).
- 2 Initial reports (Casson 1916, Rey 1916, Mendel 1918) were followed by substantial contributions in volume 23 of the *Annual of the British School at Athens* (1918–19) by various scholars and volumes 41–43 of *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* (1917–19) by Léon Rey.

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Chapter 1

A most cosmopolitan front

Defining features of the Salonika Campaign 1915–1918

Alan Wakefield

Introduction

The Allied commitment to Macedonia began 5 October 1915, when an Anglo-French force began disembarking at the port of Salonika. This was a somewhat strange situation as Greece was neutral and would not officially declare for the Allies until mid-1917. At the time of the initial landing few Allied military and political leaders believed this would be a long-term deployment. However, what became known as the Salonika Campaign ran on for three years, involving troops from ten countries and the Empires of Britain and France. For the British this commitment quickly became an unwanted sideshow. By spring 1917 even 'Easterners' in the British government, whose strategy was based on finding a route to victory by avoiding costly attritional battles on the Western Front, had grown disenchanted with the campaign. Although the British Salonika Force (BSF) was scaled back, coalition politics and strategy did not allow Britain to withdraw from the complicated entanglement of war in the Balkans.

Origins of the campaign

The Allied rationale for sending troops to the Balkans was to deter Bulgaria from joining an Austro-German attack on Serbia. Like the majority of Balkan nations in August 1914, Bulgaria was happy to remain neutral whilst being courted by both warring alliance blocs. This diplomatic game had the aim of extracting the most favourable promise of territory before joining the war at a time when victory for the preferred alliance appeared a reality. For Bulgaria that time came in September 1915. Territorial losses to Greece, Romania, Serbia and Turkey following defeat in the Second Balkan War (1913) made overturning the peace settlement a cornerstone of Bulgarian foreign policy (Fig.1.1).

With Allied operations opening against Turkey in March 1915, the Balkans became a key strategic region. Britain and France hoped to draw Balkan states



Fig. 1.1. Map showing the borders after the Second Balkan War. Reproduced from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1914).

into the war in an anti-Turkish bloc. Indeed, Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos had already offered his nation's military forces for an invasion of Turkey. Similar hopes surrounded a possible Bulgarian attack on the Turks. Unfortunately for the Allies, Russian fears of losing out in the race for Constantinople and control of the Straits, blocked any chance of military assistance from the Balkan states being accepted by Britain and France.

Once the Allied land campaign on the Gallipoli peninsula began in April 1915, Germany stepped up attempts to win over Bulgaria. With Turkey desperate for munitions, a secure supply route across the Balkans was imperative. This position became critical when Romania banned the transit of war materials across her territory. The only alternative route for Germany to supply her ally was across Serbia and Bulgaria. Being already heavily engaged on the Western and Eastern Fronts, Germany could not provide adequate forces to support Austria-Hungary in a quick, knock-out blow against Serbia. To make certain of victory, the Central Powers aimed to involve Bulgaria in the coming offensive. At the same time, Britain and France worked to ensure continued Bulgarian neutrality by promising Turkish territory in Thrace. However, the land most coveted by the government in Sofia was Serbian Macedonia. This placed the Central Powers in the best position to fulfil Bulgarian aspirations. In return for joining the attack Bulgaria would gain a free hand in Serbia.

Despite attempts by the Allies to persuade Serbia to hand territory to her old Balkan rival, Britain and France were outmanoeuvred by Germany. In this the Allies were not helped by their lack of military success during 1915. Stalemate on the Western Front was coupled with failure to inflict a defeat on Turkey at Gallipoli. Of even greater importance was the defeat inflicted on Russia during the Gorlice-Tarnow Offensive in May 1915. A German-led victory appeared a serious possibility and on 6 September, Bulgaria committed herself to war by signing a secret convention with the Central Powers. Under its terms the Bulgarians agreed to provide a quarter of the military force assigned to invade Serbia and to begin offensive operations five days after Austro-German units attacked from the north.

Whilst planning for the invasion of Serbia gathered pace, Allied political leaders showed themselves completely out of touch with the developing situation. As late as 16 September, Maurice Hankey (Secretary of the War Cabinet) still believed that landing a token military force at Salonika would deter Bulgaria from going to war. On 22 September, as the Bulgarian Army mobilised, Greece and Serbia called for 150,000 Allied troops. This force equated to that laid down in the Greek-Serbian defence agreement of 1 June 1913, which promised mutual support should either country be attacked by a third power. At heart this was an anti-Bulgarian treaty established to maintain the favourable status quo in the Balkans for Greece and Serbia (Falls 1933, 39). However, in 1915, King Constantine and his military chiefs were able to remain inactive as Serbia was in no position to send 150,000 troops south to assist Greece in an

attack on Bulgaria as all her forces were needed to resist the Austro-German offensive in the north. Even Venizelos admitted his nation's forces could not make a stand alone against Bulgaria, hence his appeal to the Allies. In reply, British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, stated that only a small contingent could be sent quickly to the Balkans. With stalemate at Gallipoli, there were few in the British government or military who favoured active intervention. However, French pledges of support to Serbia, backing up her political and economic friendship, somewhat tied Allied hands. With Russia supporting the French position, Britain found herself locked into a policy of committing troops to the Balkans. Many in the War Cabinet hoped Hankey's assessment of the situation would prove correct with intervention being small-scale and of short duration. This proved to be a wildly optimistic assessment and by 15 October French troops had advanced into southern Serbia.¹

Until mid-November French forces attempted to keep a line of retreat open for the hard-pressed Serbs. When this proved futile, Serbian political and military leaders were left with two options: either to face annihilation in a final battle in Kosovo or attempt to go into exile and carry on the fight to liberate their homeland. Deciding on the latter course of action the Serbian Army began an epic winter march across the mountains of Albania, the survivors being evacuated by British and French warships to Corfu and Bizerta in Tunisia.

Following the defeat of Serbia, the Bulgarian 2nd Army turned against the weakened Anglo-French force. By 14 December all Allied troops were back on Greek territory and retreating towards Salonika. By this date the future of an Allied military commitment to the Balkans was already decided. At a meeting of British and French war leaders in Calais on 4 December, Britain's argument that defeat of Serbia removed the rationale for intervention appeared to win ground. However, two days later an inter-Allied conference at Chantilly found Britain isolated. France sided with Italy, Russia and Serbia, stating that a military presence in the Balkans ensured Greek neutrality and presented a firm military commitment to the region at a time when overtures were being made to bring Romania into the war. British involvement in this venture was sealed on 9 December following a visit to Paris by Sir Edward Grey and Lord Kitchener. The price for restoring harmony to the Anglo-French alliance was the sending of an additional four British divisions to Salonika.

Drawing in Romania

On paper the chance to bring Romania into the war looked likely to tip the military balance in favour of the Allies. Her army of 400,000 men and strategic geographic position threatened German supply routes to Turkey and offered lines of invasion into Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary. However, the path

leading to Romanian participation in the war was anything but straightforward. In August 1914, the country only remained neutral after German-born King Carol I was outvoted at a Crown Council meeting; otherwise a secret convention signed in 1883 would have resulted in Romania joining the Central Powers. Whilst Carol settled for neutrality the pro-Allied faction in Romania, headed by Prime Minister Ion Bratianu, realised the King would never declare war on his cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Carol's death on 10 October 1914 opened the door for Bratianu since the new monarch, Ferdinand, declared he would put Romanian interests above his German ancestry. The new King's inexperience also meant he was happy to hand direction of foreign affairs to Bratianu. Even so, Allied military setbacks in 1915 delayed decision making in Bucharest. Talks with both alliance blocs continued, although Bratianu never seriously considered offers from the Central Powers. Romania's position was the diplomatic inverse of Bulgaria in that the territory she most craved was Transylvania, then part of Austria-Hungary. This meant it was the Allies that could best satisfy the expansionist dreams of Bucharest.

A successful Russian offensive in Galicia and Anglo-French gains on the Somme during 1916 paved the way for Romanian entry into the war. On 17 August, after protracted negotiations, secret political and military conventions were signed, committing Romania to an invasion of Austria-Hungary ten days later.² Allied promises of an offensive in Macedonia to tie down Bulgarian forces formed part of the deal to negate chances of a counter-offensive by the Central Powers. Unfortunately for Romania, by the time her forces advanced into Transylvania, the Russian offensive had been contained. This left the Germans and Austro-Hungarians free to assemble a force of 33 infantry and eight cavalry divisions, including Bulgarian and Turkish troops, for use against Romania. Within three months the Romanian Army was swept aside losing 350,000 men and German-led forces entered Bucharest on 6 December 1916. The much heralded Balkan offensive by Allied forces at Salonika in no way aided Romania as the Bulgarians were able to contain the attack and contribute troops to operations in Romania.

The rapid defeat of Romania was a bitter disappointment for the Allies. In Britain the situation led to a serious confrontation between adherents of the opposing 'Easterner' and 'Westerner' strategies. A War Committee meeting of 9 October 1916 saw Lloyd George clash with Field Marshal Sir William Robertson. The former argued for strong reinforcements to be sent to Salonika, whilst Robertson stated British and French forces would be best used keeping up pressure on the German Army in France and Flanders, whilst Russia provided direct military support to Romania. With the Battles of the Somme and Verdun still raging in France, the 'Westerners' won the day. This in turn led to a renewed dispute between Britain and France over Salonika. At the Boulogne Conference of 20 October, French calls for seven new divisions for the Balkans were rebuffed by the British. Such Anglo-French arguments continued to dog the Salonika Campaign for the remainder of the war as Britain worked

to reduce her military commitment whilst France argued for troop levels to remain high enough to allow serious offensive operations to be undertaken.

The problem of Greece

Complicating matters further was the fact that the Salonika Campaign played out against a backdrop of deep political divisions in Greece. The First World War brought about the National Schism, which marked Greek politics for decades ahead. The crisis pitched supporters of Venizelos against those of King Constantine over possible Greek intervention in the war. Although both men wished to expand Greek territory, largely at the expense of Turkey, they had different ideas as to how this could be achieved. Venizelos was openly pro-Allied and had offered to place Greek forces at the disposal of Britain. In contrast, Constantine, married to Kaiser Wilhelm's younger sister Sophia, was a great admirer of Germany. Even so, Constantine was pragmatic enough to maintain Greek neutrality, keeping open the option of joining either side once a likely winner emerged. Matters reached a head during September 1915 as Venizelos made arrangements for British and French forces to land at Salonika and on 5 October, the Prime Minister resigned from office just prior to the first troops stepping ashore.³ Allied forces were now in the difficult position of operating in a neutral country ruled by a potentially hostile government.

Into this Balkan powder-keg the Allies sent General Maurice Sarrail. Until his replacement on 22 December 1917, this most politically active of generals made it his mission to interfere in Greek foreign and internal affairs. The objective of this intervention, sanctioned by the French government, was to make Constantine's position untenable, either forcing the monarch to abdicate or bring his country into the war on the Allied side.

From the initial landings in October 1915, Sarrail faced major operational problems. Firstly, as Greece was neutral, the consulates of Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany remained active, allowing agents to count men and *materiel* off ships in Salonika harbour and telegraph this intelligence information direct to Berlin. The Allies were also restricted in their activity by the presence of the Greek V Corps east of Salonika and large garrisons manning forts at the entrance to the city's harbour. Sarrail began to deal with these issues in December 1915, once the decision was taken to retain Allied forces at Salonika. Demands to be allowed to construct defences around the city and for the movement of the V Corps away from Salonika met with a conciliatory reply from the Greek government. On 30 December, Sarrail moved against the enemy consulate buildings, expelling consular staff. Being in no position to risk war with the Allies, the Greek government did little beyond issuing a diplomatic protest. A similar result followed in January 1916, when Sarrail forced the Greek garrisons from Salonika.

The next clash between Sarrail and Constantine came in June 1916, following a Bulgarian advance through the Rupel Pass into the Struma Valley. This violation of Greek territory went unchallenged by Athens. Declaring a state of siege in Salonika, Sarrail placed the city under martial law. From this point forward Salonika and the whole Allied area of operations came under military control. These moves were followed by demands to Athens for war *materiel* equivalent to that seized by the Bulgarians during their advance. Rejection of this demand allowed the French to escalate the situation by imposing a partial naval blockade of the Greek coast. The incident ended with the issue of a diplomatic note by Britain, France and Russia calling for demobilisation of the Greek Army, replacement of the government in Athens and new elections. Not wanting to risk war, the Greeks complied with Allied demands.

Relations between the Allies and Athens deteriorated further in August 1916 when a Bulgarian advance towards Kavalla in eastern Macedonia led to the establishment of the Committee of Public Safety by Colonels Mazarakis and Zimbrakakis. This pro-Allied group, based in Salonika, emerged in reaction to the apparent disinclination of Constantine's government to defend Greek territory. Openly welcomed by Sarrail, the Committee of Public Safety paved the way for the proclamation of the Provisional Government by Venizelos two months later. Once again the French government reacted strongly to apparent Greek collusion with the Central Powers, sending a naval force to Salamis Bay at the end of August. Although the stance of the government in Athens appeared to change once Romania entered the war, with hints of active cooperation with the Allies both Britain and France were increasingly disinclined to believe the sincerity of such statements. The most worrying factor from a strategic point of view was the failure of the Greek Army to move south of the Corinth Canal in line with terms of the demobilisation agreement. This left a major threat to the rear of Allied forces in Macedonia. Following the establishment of the Provisional Government in Salonika on 9 October, France again increased pressure on Athens by seizing the Greek fleet, despite a British protest against such action. Demands followed for Greece to hand the Allies war *materiel* equivalent to munitions and equipment seized by the Bulgarians from the garrison at Kavalla. Greek failure to comply culminated in the arrival of British and French marines in Athens. Fighting broke out as the Greek Army contested the seizure of key points in the city but it was in the interests of neither side to force war and a compromise was reached over the disputed military supplies. By this time the Allies had lost patience with Constantine and in May 1917 the decision was taken to force the king to abdicate. On this occasion the Allies were united in their actions, although the British feared the consequences of the use of military force to depose Constantine should he refuse to give up the throne. On 11 June, Allied High Commissioner in Greece Charles Jonnart demanded the king's abdication, stating that Britain and France could no longer accept Constantine's unconstitutional behaviour. The accession of King Alexander to the throne and subsequent return of Venizelos as Prime

Minister of an apparently united Greece removed the major diplomatic and military restrictions under which the Allies had been forced to run their campaign. Indeed the formal entry of Greece into the war on 30 June 1917, provided a much needed boost to flagging Allied fortunes following the failure of Sarrail's much vaunted spring offensive.

Military forces

In terms of military forces engaged, the Salonika Campaign was perhaps the most diverse of the First World War (Fig. 1.2). By late 1916 the Allies fielded around 600,000 men in six national contingents: French, British, Serbian, Russian, Italian and Greek (Venizelist National Defence Army). Within the British Salonika Force and *Armée Française d'Orient* were also found units from India, Indo-China and North and West Africa. For transport and construction work



Fig. 1.2. Allied soldiers in Salonika during 1916 showing the cosmopolitan nature of the forces available: Back row (l to r): British, French colonial, Indian, Italian, Serbian. Front row (l to r): French Senegalese, French, French Indo-Chinese marine. The troops on the front row are flanked by two Montenegrins. This photograph was taken prior to Greek forces joining the Allied cause. Courtesy of the Salonika Campaign Society.

behind the front line the British also employed volunteer units such as the Macedonian Mule Corps and Maltese Labour Corps. Canadian, Australian and New Zealand medical personnel were also part of the BSF and the voluntary Scottish Women's Hospital had units attached to the Serbian Army. From January 1916 Allied forces were designated the *Armée d'Orient* and placed under a French commanding officer. This situation reflected the primacy of French forces in this theatre of war and greater French interests in the Balkans.

Although appearing strong on paper, the *Armée d'Orient* suffered from a number of deficiencies that undermined its ability to undertake sustained military operations. First amongst these was lack of manpower. Both Britain and Italy refused to send new formations to Salonika. As already discussed, the British increasingly looked for opportunities to scale down their Balkan commitment. The sending of the 60th (London) Division in late 1916 was grudgingly undertaken following pressure from France and the formation only remained with the BSF for nine months before moving to Palestine. For the Italians, wresting control of Albania from the Austro-Hungarians was always more important than contributing to overall Allied success in the Balkans and no troops beyond the 30,000 strong 35th Division joined the *Armée d'Orient*. It even proved a struggle to replace losses from units already serving in Macedonia. The low priority of the campaign for the War Office in London led to desperate measures with the formation for front line service of the 228th Brigade from six garrison battalions in November 1916. Officers seconded to command the new formation were shocked by what they found: 'Physically the brigade was in a terrible state. They were splendid crocks. . . . Some were almost blind, some almost deaf, and the 22nd Rifle Brigade . . . had more than sixty men over sixty years old'.⁴ The accepted task of garrison battalions was, due to the age and medical rating of the men, simply to relieve fighting troops of duties behind the lines. However, 228th Brigade did provide BSF commander, Lieutenant General Sir George Milne with the chance to relieve front line formations on quiet sectors for more active operations.

For the Russians manpower problems were due to logistics, the only feasible option being to transport reinforcements by ship from Archangel to Salonika. With the outbreak of revolution in March 1917, Russian troops were withdrawn from the front line in Macedonia due to their growing unreliability. In addition, many of the limited reinforcements arriving were found to be pro-Bolshevik and only increased Allied difficulties. The solution to this problem was to transport all hard-liners to North Africa, whilst more reliable men served on in labour battalions. For the Serbian Army, exiled from its occupied homeland, the lack of a population from which to recruit seriously affected numbers in combat units. It was not until 1918 with the arrival of two divisions formed from ex-Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war that losses suffered during the 1916 and 1917 offensives were made good.

The manpower crisis was exacerbated by the withdrawal of British and French troops during 1917 and 1918. The first significant reduction came

during summer 1917 when the British 10th (Irish) and 60th (London) Divisions moved to Palestine. This downsizing was followed during summer 1918 by the movement of twelve British battalions and over 10,000 French troops back to the Western Front to make good losses suffered during the German spring offensives. Although such a loss of trained manpower was impossible to make good, Allied forces benefitted through Greece joining their cause. By July 1918, some 250,000 men of the Greek Army were in the field, mainly attached to British and French forces. For General Milne, this new source of manpower allowed his depleted army to concentrate forces for the Second Battle of Doiran in September 1918. Even so, the Greek Army was never employed to its full potential during the campaign as many Allied senior officers, including the then Commander-in-Chief, General Louis Franchet d'Esperey, viewed the force with suspicion, preferring to use Venizelist volunteer units whenever possible (Falls, 1935, 190).

Coupled with the manpower crisis was a general shortage of ammunition, equipment and supplies. For the British a particularly serious deficiency existed in terms of artillery. To create a barely sufficient bombardment force for the First and Second Battles of Doiran, General Milne was forced to strip the majority of guns from formations not actively engaged. A call for 8-inch howitzers, made by Milne prior to First Doiran in 1917, resulted in the arrival of a single four-gun battery a year later. The British commander also suffered from a shortage of gas shells for the preliminary bombardments of both battles. Making matters worse was the need for the British and French to supply other national contingents in Macedonia. The rejuvenated Serbian Army was totally re-equipped by the French in 1916 and continued to receive weapons and ammunition throughout the campaign. In addition, motor transport and medical services for the Serbs were largely provided by the British Army. Both the British and French shared responsibility for equipping of Venizelist forces with artillery, transport and medical units. In addition, the two Russian brigades arrived without artillery, which had to be supplied from French sources.

Facing the Allies in Macedonia were around 400,000 troops representing all four members of the Central Powers, with the overwhelming majority being Bulgarian. Even the so-called German 11th Army was an overwhelmingly Bulgarian formation, with only senior command positions held by officers of the Kaiser's army and a limited number of infantry battalions of German origin. Additionally, specialist German units including heavy and mountain artillery, machine-gun companies and engineers were assigned to the Bulgarian 1st and 2nd Armies to improve firepower and combat efficiency of these formations. As with her other allies, Germany supported Bulgaria with major reinforcements at times of necessity. During Sarrail's 1916 offensive, two German divisions were sent to the Balkans. Such deployments were always dependent on the immediate strategic situation and priorities elsewhere. By September 1918, few German troops remained in Macedonia and reinforcement of the

Bulgarian Army by German divisions from the Ukraine failed as the Franco-Serbian advance was so rapid as to afford no time for the reinforcements to arrive before defeat was inevitable.

Whilst Germany provided significant forces for the campaign, Austro-Hungarian involvement was limited to specialists, such as machine-gun and assault companies. Already heavily committed on the Eastern and Italian Fronts and in Albania, little more was available from the Habsburg Empire. Finally, between October 1916 and July 1917, the Turkish XX Corps (46th and 50th Divisions) faced elements of the BSF in the lower Struma valley. This 40,000 man force was reinforced on arrival by large numbers of volunteers from the Muslim population of the valley.

The Bulgarian Army, which formed the Allies' major opponent in Macedonia was generally solid, especially in defence. The majority of officers and men had gained active service experience in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913. Initially well-equipped the army encountered problems as the war lengthened due to the country's limited industrial base, which made it impossible to manufacture weapons, ammunition and other war *materiel* in sufficient quantities. This made the Bulgarians increasingly reliant on what Germany was willing to supply and on captured munitions. By mid-1918 the Bulgarian Army and nation had grown war weary. Food shortages were blamed on the Germans shipping agricultural produce out of the country. This led many Bulgarians to increasingly view the Germans as an occupying force rather than an ally. These attitudes spread to front line soldiers and, coupled with shortages of rations, munitions, boots and uniforms, caused morale to plummet and undermine the army's ability to resist the Allied push in September 1918.

Terrain

The Salonika Campaign was fought along a front of 250 miles, running from Albania to the mouth of the River Struma in Greece (Fig. 1.3). Here were found wide open valleys and plains, tangled masses of hills and ravines such as those at Doiran and the towering Beles and Moglena Mountains. A number of large lakes were also a feature of the region. This mixture of terrain called for different styles of warfare both in terms of offence and defence. At Doiran the Bulgarians turned the area into a veritable fortress. Trenches were blasted from solid rock and dugouts were constructed in a similar manner and roofed either with solid rock or concrete. Ammunition stores, observation posts, artillery and machine gun positions were constructed so as to withstand hits from heavy howitzers. The effectiveness of artillery and support weapons was ensured through expert positioning and the existence of accurate ranging tables coupled with an efficient communications system enabling fire to be brought to bear quickly in aid of the defending infantry. These were men of the 9th (Pleven) Division, Bulgaria's premier military formation. They knew their