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Protagonists and Networks of Bulgarian 'Kunstschutz'

The aim of this paper is to highlight the key role played by the two centres of archaeology and art history, in Sofia and Varna, in supporting Bulgarian territorial claims during the Balkan Wars and World War I. While Bogdan Filov, Director of the Archaeological Museum in Sofia, was mainly involved in expeditions to Macedonia and Thrace; Karel Škorpil, operating from Varna, had a strong oversight of the scholarly explorations to the Dobruzha region. Both men were, however, accompanied and supported on their expeditions by a large group of interdisciplinary specialists from areas such as archaeology, ethnography, and philology; whose involvement in such 'Kunstschutz' campaigns has thus far not been studied. Of special interest was the participation of artists and practitioners who contributed to the ideological underpinning of such undertakings as being paramount to shaping a territorial, material, and historical 'Bulgarian identity'.

I highlight that the first of these expeditions took place as early as 1912, during the First Balkan War, and that it was, interestingly, financed by the Ministry of National Education. Subsequent campaigns during World War I, and as late as 1917, were commissioned by the Bulgarian Military. As a result, the different motivations and agendas, as well as the shifting in focus of national interests, will be central to my analysis of this material over the course of this project.

The paper also pinpoints the close networks of Bulgarian scholars to Viennese specialists and key figures in 'Kunstschutz' debates. As such, Filov looked to the guidance of Josef Strzygowski and the Viennese colleagues in Art History; Škorpil, on the other hand, was in close and continuous contact with the Austrian Archaeological Institute, whose members were involved in Austrian World War I expeditions to the Balkans in their own right. Filov's and Škorpil's networks with German and Russian scholars were also identified as fruitful future avenues of research.

The last part of the paper identifies numerous relevant archival institutions and collections in Bulgaria and Austria. It became apparent that rich holdings exist in a wide variety of contexts from the State Military Historical Archives, the Central State Archives, the archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the various Ethnographical and Archaeological Museums; to the archives of the corresponding archeological and art historical institutes in Vienna. The overall goal of my involvement in this project will be to examine and synthesize these various sources and bring to the fore the mechanisms of Bulgarian 'Kunstschutz' during the Balkan Wars and World War I.