

# Commemorating Liberation Struggle and Statehood



**T**he period from August to October is marked by a number of dates important for the Macedonian struggle for liberation and statehood.

From August 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Ilinden, marking both the day of the 1903 uprising against the Ottoman rule and the day of the proclamation of the first modern Macedonia nation state as part of Yugoslavia in 1944, through 8<sup>th</sup> September when in 1991 the country gained its full independence, to 11<sup>th</sup> October, when the antifascist war for the liberation of Macedonia started in Prilep and Kumanovo in 1941. Monuments commemorating these crucial dates in the country's history have been erected throughout the country. They are all of a monumental scale and were created

by some of the best Macedonian and Yugoslav artists, sculptors and architects. Some are in good condition and others in a state of disrepair due to the negligence of the local communities or authorities. But the two most significant monuments in Prilep and Krusevo are in a perfect shape, recently renovated and serving both the local communities and visitors.

The monument in Prilep is dedicated to the first partisans who attacked the police station and prison in the town on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1941 thus starting the uprising which led to the liberation of the country and creation of the Macedonian state. The monument is called the Mound of the Undefeated and is part of the Park of the Revolution. The monument and the memorial complex were built in 1961. One



of the most famous Yugoslav architects, Bogdan Bogdanovic, is the author of the memorial honouring all the fighters fallen in the Liberation struggle. One part of the complex consists of eight memorial urns and a common graveyard for the fighters. The urns reminiscent of ancient vases with ashes are carved of marble. Eternal flame burns in the ninth and biggest urn. The other part of the complex houses a crypt with the remains of over 460 fallen freedom fighters, whose names are inscribed on marble slabs. The landscape is decorated with high pine trees and low evergreens. The mound has a semicircular shape, and the entire inner vertical surface is tiled with white marble slabs. The Park of the Revolution was declared a cultural heritage site in 1989.

Ilinden Monument in Krusevo was opened on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1974 marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Antifascist Assembly in 1944 and 71 years since the 1903 uprising. It was designed by the artists Jordan and Iskra Grabuloski and spans the area of 12 hectares. The monument is also known as Makedonium by the name of the company that executed the artistic vision. The futuristic shape of the memorial however reveals many symbolic layers lucidly

connected to various historical themes of Macedonian statehood. The memorial complex is divided into a series of stages each telling its own important story.

The entrance is marked with large white shapes of discarded broken chains standing for the Macedonian liberation from all the oppressors throughout history. The next stop along the visitor's path is a circular area paved with cobblestones called the Crypt. Vertical concrete walls shape the space with metal-tipped horizontal cones resembling the famous cherry cannon that was made by the 1903 fighters. Each metal top is labelled with a name of a person, family or place important in the history of the liberation struggle. The names are left without any explanation. Only dates are attached to some of them. Abstract and minimalistic, this part fits in with the overall modernistic vision of the monument.

After the claustrophobic Crypt the next stage of the monument is a plateau called Amphitheatre. The whole complex lies at 1320 meters above sea level offering spectacular views in all directions. The amphitheatre is actually a brightly coloured mosaic of ceramic walls representing the small squad of Krusevo defenders who bravely faced the numerous detachments

of the Ottoman army. This mosaic construction was designed by the artist Petar Mazev. The tiles form peculiar geometrical shapes, squares and triangles in vivid colours – green, blue, yellow, purple and red. They are part of the overall poetics of the artist but yet, for the time constructed they seemed very progressive and innovative, even futuristic. Concrete chairs are arranged at a lower level making this space suitable for all kinds of open air public events.

The white Dome built above the Amphitheatre dominates the plateau. It is roundish in shape with oval windows and completely futuristic if not science fiction inspired in its appearance. There are three sets of four oval windows giving the object a strange symmetry. The biggest four horizontal nodules end in glass windows facing four places around the area important for the Krusevo uprising. Another set ends with stained glass windows. The highest set of nodules is directed up towards the sky. The entrance doors are made of wood in the shape of the letter M which stands for Macedonia. The monument has a spacious interior

looking like a fictional space craft, in which all museum style exhibits are arranged discretely. The display consists of a selection of traditional Macedonian costumes, Ottoman officers’ uniforms and a series of painted portraits of resistance fighters on easels. The memorial cradles the grave of Nikola Karev, the leader of the uprising. Abstract but very expressive reliefs symbolize different periods of Macedonian history. The stained glass signifying the four seasons, but also the four stages of the country’s history – Antiquity, Middle Ages, Liberation Struggle, and Foundation of the Independent State – was designed by the country’s biggest muralist, Borko Lazeski. Eternal flame burns in the centre of the floor. There is a glowing floor installation in the shape of the Macedonian flag. The most recent addition to the monument is the bust of the famous singer from Krusevo Tose Proeski.

The Memorial House of Tose Proevski and the town cemetery with the tombs of many famous persons lie nearby. This memorial area is not to be missed on any tour of Krusevo.

