

The Maenad of Tetovo

One of the most important archaeological findings in Macedonia is a small bronze statue of a young dancing woman. It is so beautiful and significant that the National Bank of Macedonia decided to put it on the banknote of 5000 Macedonian denars issued in 1996. It also features on the coat of arms of Tetovo, the town where it was excavated. The famous Maenad of Tetovo, 9 cm long and 4 cm wide, used to decorate a large bronze cup. Alongside the golden masks, terracotta icons, and fresco paintings the Maenad of Tetovo has become a trademark of Macedonian rich cultural heritage. The figurine represents a character playing and dancing with her partner, a satire, in honour of the cult of the God Dionysus. The cup was used for mixing wine and water during Dionysus rituals. The maenad dates back to the last decades of the 6th century B.C. It was the time when Greek culture exerted a strong influence on this part of the Balkans changing the way of living of the local population. It was these changes that marked the beginning of the Archaic period and the transition from the age of Prehistory to the age of History and Antiquity. On the archaeological plane these transformations are visible through the new materials, such as new types of pottery, jewellery and other handicrafts and new spiritual practices such as cults of Greek gods and cremation instead of grave burial. In the beginning these practices were embraced by elites – the statuette from Tetovo was found in princely crypt

- and later they spread to the whole population.

Until the 3rd century BC the entire area of Southern Serbia, Eastern Kosovo and Northern Macedonia including the Polog Valley was inhabited by the northern Paionian tribe, the Agrianians (lat. Agrianes). This tribe had its own kings of which the most famous was Langarus who helped the Macedonian King Alexander III in 335 BC in his campaign against the Tribales (lat. Tribaloi) to the North. Agrianians followed him also through Asia where they got the reputation of some of the most notorious fighters in many key battles and became famous in the whole ancient world. It was in the tomb of an Agrianian Prince that the Maenad was





excavated in 1932. The statue is now part of the Museum of Macedonia collection. The tomb, actually a funeral chamber, is an impressive architectural accomplishment. The scientists have proved that the statue was made in the Southern Italian Greek colonies and is a proof of the intensive trade that went on in those times. It testifies to the might of the Polog princes who guaranteed safety of traders from around the ancient world.

In Greek mythology maenads were female followers of Dionysus. Their name literally translates as «the raving ones». Often the maenads were portrayed as inspired by Dionysus into a state of ecstatic frenzy, through a combination of dancing and intoxication. During these rites, the maenads would dress in fawn skins and carry a *thyrsus*, a long stick wrapped in ivy or vine leaves and topped with a pinecone. They weave ivy-wreaths or bull helmet in honour of their god, and often handle or wear snakes. They danced



to the sound of loud music and crashing cymbals, whirling, screaming, getting drunk and inducing one another into ever higher levels of ecstasy. The goal was to achieve a state of enthusiasm in which the celebrants' souls were temporarily freed from their earthly bodies and were able to commune with Dionysus and gain a glimpse of and thus be prepared for what they would someday experience in eternity. The rite climaxed in a performance of frenzied feats of strength and madness, such as uprooting trees, tearing a bull (the symbol of Dionysus) apart with their bare hands, an act called *sparagmos*, and eating its flesh raw, an act called *omophagia*. Having symbolically eaten his body and drunk his blood, the celebrants became possessed by Dionysus. The frolicking of maenads and Dionysus was a common theme on Greek craters used to mix water and wine. And one such cup ended up in the treasury of the Polog Agrarian Prince.