

The Vast and Wide River



Vardar is Macedonia and Macedonia is Vardar. This river is so important for the country that it is no wonder that the popular name of this part of the larger region of Macedonia, distinguishing it from Pirin Macedonia (named after the magnificent mountain), and from Aegean Macedonia (named after the beautiful sea), is Vardar Macedonia, after the River Vardar. Vardar Macedonia covers two thirds of the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. The Vardar originates in the north-eastern part of the country in the foothills of the border Shara Mountains at the altitude of 683 meters. It flows into the Aegean Sea west of Thessaloniki forming a gorgeous delta just 44 meters above the sea level. Vardar has 37 major tributaries out of which 15 are on the right and 22 on the left side. The most important ones are: Pena, Treska, Lepenec, Pcinja, Bregalnica, Markova Reka, Topolka, Babuna and Crna Reka. It drains the area of around 25,000 km². The maximum depth of the river is 4 metres.



Vardar has two historical names. Vardar as it is exclusively called in Macedonia and Axios in Greece. Although the name became an issue of difference between the two countries both names have similar meaning, "black, or dark, waters". One is of Thracian and the other of Ancient Greek origin. The history of the civilized life along the Vardar is very old. It is mentioned

in the Iliad by Homer, under the name of Axios, as the home of Paeonians, allies of Troy. The river is there referred to as vast and wide with high banks. But even more significantly, fragmented Mycenaean vessels from the Bronze Age were found in the Vardar and its tributaries near Govrlevo. It shows the ambitions of the ancient mariners who travelled to remote lands like the mythical Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. Archaeologists believe the ancient seamen came here searching for gold in river beds.

Vardar has been very famous since the Ottoman times. Many Macedonian, Greek and Turkish folk songs were inspired by it. The Vardar valley was very important for communication between Central Europe and the Middle East, because roads and a railway passed through it. Today's Greek National Road 1, Macedonian M1 and M4 and the European E75 and E65 routes run in the valley along the river's entire length.

The Vardar River has been the inspiration for some futuristic projects. One which gains attention from time to time is the proposal to connect it with the neighbouring Morava River through a channel that would become navigable, thus connecting the world of the Danube countries with the Aegean Sea.

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