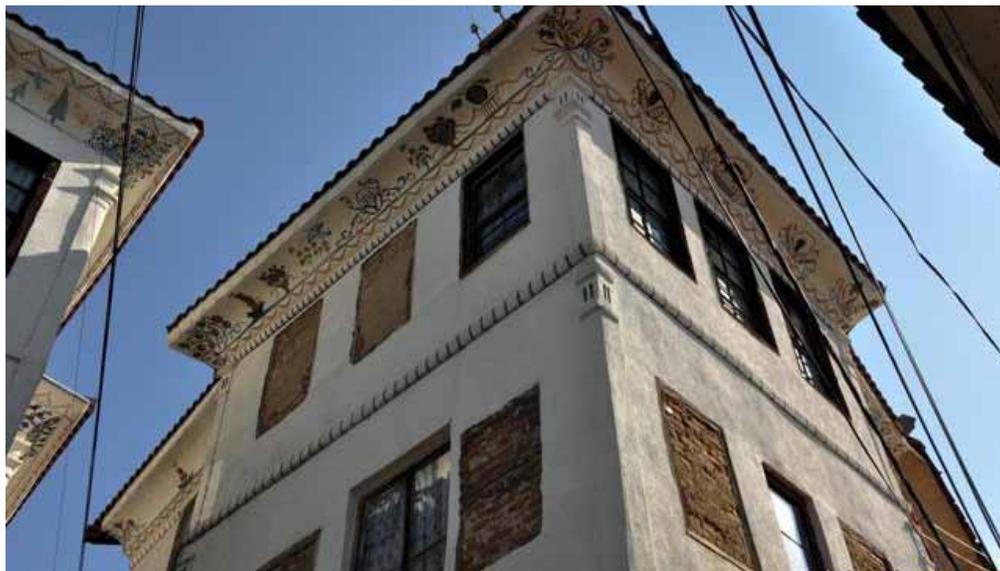


Veles Firsts: Architecture, Culture and Revolution



Just over 50 kilometres south of Skopje, on the banks of the River Vardar, lies Veles, one of the most important towns in the recent history of Macedonia. In the new millennium this former industrial centre faces the challenge of coming out from the shadow of the nearby capital and creating a new identity while embracing its history.

Veles has changed its name a few times, and each new name marked an important historical period. Thus, in the pre-historic times, when it was one of the most important cities of the legendary tribe of Paionians who inhabited Eastern and Central parts of Macedonia, its name was "Bylazora". During the Ottoman times it was named Köprülü, the town of bridges. The city shared its name with the Köprülü family of Albanian origin that gave six Grand Viziers and several other

high officials to the Ottoman Empire. After the Second World War, Veles carried the adjective "Titov" after the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito in recognition of the important contribution of Veles to the anti-fascist movement and the socialist revolution. After Macedonia declared its independence and a liberal democracy was introduced, "Titov" was removed and in 1996 the town reverted to the name which it had held for longest in the recent history.

Veles flourished thanks to its privileged geographical position at the intersection of important routes, the ancient Via Ignatia and Via Militaris. Called "the town of bridges" in the Ottoman times, Veles served as a bridge between the vast territories of Eastern and Western Macedonia. Ottoman travellers described the beauty of the bridges in Veles. A





19th-century act allowing for equal rights for Muslim and Christian populations enabled Veles merchants to trade all over the country. They established trading posts all over the Empire and beyond, in Vienna, Trieste and Leipzig. They traded in typical Macedonian articles such as fur, tobacco, poppies and wool. From Veles small boats travelled along the River Vardar up to the Thessaloniki port on the Aegean Sea. Wealthy city merchants built many monasteries and churches around the city as well as big houses for their families, which form the basis of what is now known as traditional Veles architecture. The houses were made of stone and timber, they had large windows and terraces called *cardak*. Many of these houses were ingeniously built into the river banks and featured unusual shapes which even today look like construction wonders. Some of these buildings are fully preserved to this day. They house various cultural institutions and are tourist magnets.

As a developed town, Veles was one

of the strongholds of the revolutionary and, later, workers' movement. Mile Pop Jordanov, Aleksandar Martulkov and Panko Brasnarov were among the legendary fighters against the Ottoman rule. Pop Jordanov died heroically in 1901. When ambushed, he killed himself in order not to be captured alive. He became the inspiration for one of the best-known folk elegies 'Bolen mi lezi Mile Pop Jordanov', today's anthem of the City of Veles.

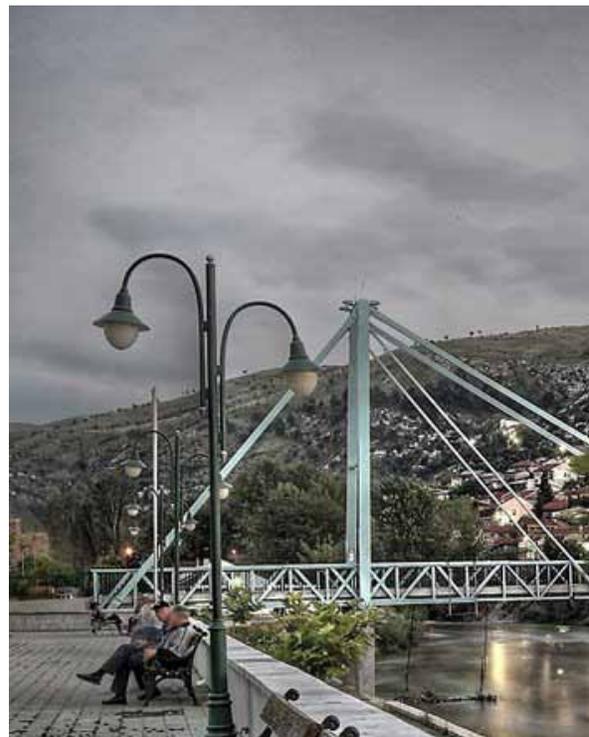
When the Yugoslav Communist Party was formed, Veles gave it its most prominent leaders such as Dimitar Vlahov, Panko Brasnarov and Koco Racin. Many of them first joined the revolutionary movement during the Ottoman times and then became prominent in the socialist movement. Thus, Panko Brasnarov was one of the legendary leaders of the revolutionary movement who exemplified the continuity between VMRO, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, and the new, communist and partisan, movement. He was the first Speaker of the Anti-fascist Assembly which lay the



foundations of the modern Macedonian state at St. Prohor Pcinški Monastery on August 2, 1944. Later, unfortunately, he came in conflict with the Yugoslav authorities over certain ideological issues and was imprisoned in the notorious Goli Otok prison, where he died in 1951.

Vasil Glavinov, also originating from Veles, was one of the first socialists under whose leadership the first social-democratic group in the Ottoman Macedonia was formed. They supported Macedonian autonomy inside a federation of Southeast Europe. The first Conference of Macedonian Socialists was held in 1900 near Krusevo where the activities of Vasil Glavinov's political group defined the principles of the creation of a Macedonian Republic as part of a Balkan Socialist Federation with equal rights for all its citizens.

As a rich city with its own bourgeois class, Veles has many other firsts in recent



Macedonian history. The first cultural institutions, such as museum, theatre, and library, the first photograph, and the first written text in contemporary Macedonian language were all created in Veles. One of the most prominent intellectuals from Veles was Jordan Hadzikonstantinov-Dzinot. He was a teacher, publicist and an important figure of the national Revival movement during the 19th century. Yordan Hadzikonstantinov devoted all his life to the cause of secular public education and actively promoted the idea of the enforcement of vernacular language and application of modern pedagogical practices in the schools. He established the first theatre group and the first library in Veles. He was persecuted and exiled for his pedagogical and revolutionary work. Rajko Zinzifov was another figure of the Revival movement. Understanding the importance of the native culture he even changed his Graecized name Ksenofont Dzindzif to the Slavic Rajko Zinzifov.

Kole Nedelkovski was one of the

founders of modern Macedonian poetry and member of the famous Macedonian Literary Circle. He published two books of poetry in Veles dialect, thus contributing to the later codification of Macedonian literary language. He ended his life by jumping out of a window while escaping police in Sofia in 1941. His colleague and compatriot Koco Racin was also a famous revolutionary and a leading intellectual. His collection of poems, "White Dawns" is considered to be the harbinger of the modern Macedonian literary language and literature. He also died in the Second World War.

In the age of Socialism, thanks to its revolutionary tradition, Veles became an industrial centre, but at the end of the 20th century it faced a major crisis due to the collapse of many of its factories. The town's ecological activists managed to close down the dirty industry which polluted the city, but this led to mass unemployment. Today the town is in search of another historical revival.

