



Minerals at a Glance

Lava from Vesuvius, amethyst from Brazil, amazonite from Mariovo, and volcanic stone balls from Kratovo - these are just some of the highlights of the recently established mineralogy collection in the small town of Probistip in the Eastern part of Macedonia. It is a unique example of local cultural initiative and a remarkable way to boost the heritage of this extraordinary town. The collection is permanently exhibited in a big hall of the House of Culture in Probistip. Alongside the minerals, the exhibition features mining tools and equipment from different periods, including Roman diggers and a Saxon helmet. The collection has over 250 items and also contains old lamps, axes, leather bags and wooden casks. Especially impressive are the examples of barite, calcite and quartzite crystals from the nearby mine of Zletovo, excavated some forty years ago, at the level of 150 meters below the sea surface. The curator of the exhibition says these minerals are a rarity as they are hard to

find in this form. Paradoxically it is almost impossible to find them at a deeper level, so that the mine galleries spreading to over 350 meters below the sea level do not yield such finds.

Although created over the period of fifty years, this collection had been made accessible to the public for the first time. Owned by the state mining company, it was reserved for exclusive visitors, such as government officials and trade partners. The still active local mines such as Sasa and Dobrevno are rich in different crystals and minerals, and representatives of the House of Culture hope that this minerals collection will grow and become a museum. It is hoped that the success of this initiative will foster the establishing of similar exhibitions in other mining towns and municipalities.

Macedonia is rich in minerals. Most of them are of a volcanic origin, but some are formed by sedimentation or external influence. The crystals are usually found in the caves or other cracks within the rocks. The geological map of Macedonia

has already been created but many extraordinary minerals are still to be exploited. At the old minefield of Alsar near Kavadarci, thallium, one of the rarest minerals in the world, can be found. Although thallium containing mineral lorandite, was first discovered there in 1894, it is not mined, and has only captured the popular imagination for its connection to the sun due to the use of this mineral in the detection of solar neutrinos. Another rare mineral is macedonite, lead titanate, found in 1974 in Alinci, near Prilep. The pink Macedonian ruby is another rare and precious mineral found in Prilep mines.

Historically speaking, the town of Probistip and its surroundings belong to the Ancient Paieonian kingdom. The ancient Macedonian kingdom of Philip and Alexander also exploited the mines in the area. Later, the Romans established a mining settlement here as well. In the Middle Ages mining experts from Germany, the Saxons, also came to the area to advance the industry. But the story of modern Probistip is a unique testimony of the building enthusiasm of the socialist era. Although settlements existed on this site since antiquity, the modern town was planned there only after the Second World War and intensively built between 1950 and 1955, thus being the only modern mining settlement in this part of the world. It was built for exploiting the nearby lead and zinc mines. In its heyday the town had one of the highest local incomes in the whole Yugoslavia, which enabled the construction of contemporary apartments, hotels, sports facilities and the big cultural centre called the "House of Culture" which recently took the initiative to put up the mineralogical exhibit. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the so-called transition meant the end of the big enterprises and mining industry. Traditional markets collapsed, leaving many people without work. Depression and unemployment became the byword of the town. Twenty



years on, the industry is rising again, and the town is looking for new opportunities to put itself back on the cultural map. The rich history and heritage of Probistip have ample opportunities for raising its profile both locally and nationally.