

Daniel Baric

Archaeology at War: French and Austrians on the Field of Science

From a global military perspective, compared with the Western and Eastern fronts, the Balkans do not appear as a crucial battlefield during most of the First World War. Whereas the long lasting hostilities on the Western and Eastern fronts concentrated the bulk of the belligerents' forces, the military operations in the Balkans seemed of lesser relevance. The form of confrontation on the ground was also somehow different. Positions changed more rapidly than on the other main frontlines, alternating between swift movements of troops and comparatively long periods of truce, forsaking also large pieces of land from military operations. But like on the other fronts (especially in Belgium under German occupation), a form of total war took also place in those regions that were either occupied (Austrians and Bulgarians in Serbia), or just hastily crossed by escaping armies (Serbs in Albania), which meant that military targets were not exclusive. The massive local dispersion of civilians and destruction of patrimony coincided with military campaigns that aimed at transforming profoundly the cultural landscape for the sake of a new order that was yet to come. Notwithstanding the erasure of cultural traces that took place in the Balkans in the wake of the war, cultural policies took shape contemporarily in Vienna and Paris as a defence of specific, national values. The term « civilization » was put forward in order to justify initiatives that made the role of archaeologists instrumental in that stance. While there was a fierce and destructive war going on, some trenches were dug throughout the Balkans not to protect military positions, but to herald an intellectual message of tolerance and enlightenment. Austrians as well as French (and British) armed forces incorporated scientists in different ways, but with the same apparent paradox of waging a severely damaging war in terms of monuments and simultaneously assuming the role of cultural protector of ancient civilizations.

I. Austrian archaeology in the Balkans and the hopes for cultural preeminence

After a first unsuccessful phase of march on Serbian lands, the Austrian-Hungarian army gained strong positions at the end of 1915, with the substantial support of the German and Bulgarian allies; Serbian, Montenegrin and Albanian territories adjacent to the territory of the Habsburg Empire would be eventually seized. The incorporation of those newly conquered spaces in the Balkans was considered in the commanding spheres of the Austrian-Hungarian army at the turn of 1915/1916 as a possible goal for the ongoing war, even at the price of an internal reorganization of the whole Danubian empire, and growing dependency on German policy. The project of German domination over Central Europe had been precisely described in 1915 by

Friedrich Naumann in his essay *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, Reimer). In Austria, the concept reached by 1917 the project of a further expansion, in the Orient [Marchetti, 57-62]. The stabilization of the frontlines with a demarcation of the Austrian-Bulgarian occupation areas in April 1916 allowed intellectual projections to be made, in which the newly conquered territories became enticing arguments for scholars, among others for archaeologists looking for *terrae incognitae*. In April 1915, the geographer Eugen Oberhummer still complained that the war had come as a surprise to many scientific expeditions with the imprisonment of most of their heads and had made impossible the preparation of new field trips in the foreseeable future¹; but this was true only until new and largely unknown territories were taken into possession by the Habsburgs' armed forces. The Spring of 1916 heralded a new period of scientific journeys, greatly facilitated by the Austrian military and civilian authorities, which stand in harsh contrast to the previously prevailing times of sedentary activities during the first months of the war. The largest and most complex scientific operation that was organized by Austria-Hungary during WWI was the Balkan expedition that dealt with art history, archaeology, ethnography and linguistics, which lasted from May until August 1916 [« Die Kunsthistorisch-Archäologisch-Ethnographisch-Linguistische Balkanexpedition », Marchetti, 153-186].

As was later stated by the leading archaeologists involved in that operation, « already in the days, as the imperial and royal troops were victoriously marching from the Montenegrin mountains down to Albania, and in doing so they broke the spell of seclusion, that until recently surrounded the land, the project matured to investigate scientifically the newly acquired lands »². From 30 November to 20 December 1915, a scientific commission was in charge, under the aegis of general staff officer Hugo Kerchnawe, to inspect all archives, museums and other collections, to inform in plenary sessions about their situation, in some cases to make an inventory. There were representatives of Viennese museums and ministries, like Carl Patsch (1865-1945), who stood for the interest of the provincial government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the institution he had recently established in Sarajevo, the Institute for Balkan Studies [*Das Institut für Balkanforschung*]. He pleaded for the attribution to Sarajevo of parts of the collections stemming from the occupied regions if they had to be transported to Vienna. In January 1918 the *Landesmuseum* in Sarajevo received indeed at least 449 volumes from the general government in Belgrade [Marchetti, 155], even if in January 1916 another commission had been formed, which included as a member Emil Reisch (1863-1933), the director of the Austrian archaeological institute, which defended the principle of the Hague convention, hence strictly

¹ Oberhummer Eugen, « Der Krieg und die Wissenschaft », in *Fremdenblatt* Nr. 94 (4.4.1915).

² « Schon in den Tagen, da die k.u.k. Truppen in siegreichem Vormarsch von dem montenegrinischen Bergland südwärts nach Albanien vordrangen und damit den Zaubergürtel der Abgeschlossenheit, der bis vor kurzem das Land umgab, zerbrachen, reifte der Plan, die neuerschlossenen Gebiete wissenschaftlich zu durchforschen », Praschniker Camillo, Schober Arnold, *Archäologische Forschungen in Albanien und Montenegro*, Wien, Albert Hölder, 1919, p. III.

forbidding any confiscations. The first drafts developed a scientific program explicitly along the lines foreseen in the international regulation of the Hague, that is to protect artefacts from destructions that could occur because of the war and to prevent any displacement of them; furthermore, in order to avoid even the appearance that the Austrian authorities were carrying off cultural treasures, any acquisition of artefacts through purchase was forbidden. The production of science had to prove to the local population and the public opinions that coping with archaeology was an act of civilization, not of deprecation³.

For archaeological issues, the Academy of Sciences in Vienna nominated in the name of the *Balkankommission* Camillo Praschniker (1884-1949) who had served as a volunteer soldier in 1915 in South Tirol, Montenegro and Albania, and another assistant of E. Reisch at the chair of archaeology, Arnold Schober (1886-1959). Praschniker was still formerly attached to the army, whereas Schober had been exempted, since his pedagogical duties at the university in Vienna had been classified as indispensable. Because of the poor weather conditions, it was decided to start the expedition in May, so that only three months after Austrian soldiers had marched into Albania, the participants of the scientific mission arrived via Budapest and Sarajevo, where they all visited the *Landesmuseum*, and then took the train to Cattaro, where they were taken on motorized vehicles supplied by the military forces to Cetinje, and then further on to Podgorica⁴. The archaeologists identified the site of Medun, nine kilometres away from Podgorica, as the Illyrian settlement of Meeon. Lake Scutari was crossed in motorboat and in Scutari they took photographs of the collection of antiquities in the gymnasium held by Jesuits. The journey proved to be physically more exhausting in the following sequence towards the South, since roads tended to disappear in a landscape all the more devoid of human habitat showing traces of villages burnt down by Serbian soldiers on their flight to the Adriatic. On horseback and on foot, they looked for the actual situation of ruins described by ancient travellers (J. G. Hahn), but also by Carl Patsch. In Berat, that Patsch had extensively described after his stay in 1900, but where he remained under Turkish observation at all times, Praschniker could move freely and spot remnants of antique fortifications. Not every part of the coast however, was open to his inquisitive treading. For « military reasons », as he was informed, he was not allowed to investigate the area around the port of Antivari/Bar. And the southernmost point of Apollonia gave a view on Italians occupying the bay of Valona. The initial surveying project, very extensive in its scope, included an extension to Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia, following first the Via Egnatia. But those territories were occupied by the Bulgarians who, however fighting as allies, even after an intervention of the Austrian ministry of Foreign Affairs, refused to allow the

³ The Academy in Vienna expressed the conviction that the troops would soon in the new territories « make possible the cultural penetration by our state » [« der kulturellen Durchdringung durch unseren Staat zugänglich gemacht werden müssen »], 26.3.1916, in Marchetti, 167.

⁴ Praschniker, Schober, 1.

Austrians to compete with a Bulgarian team from the National Library in Sofia already planning to set up a collection of artefacts from that same region. From March to the End of November 1917, a Hungarian expedition took place in Serbia, Kosovo, Northern Albania and Bosnia, organized by the Hungarian Academy, which cultivated minimal exchanges with the Viennese institutions. Árpád Buday (1879-1937) from the Transylvanian Museum in Kolozsvár represented in the Hungarian team the prehistoric and archeological investigations: there was not only a scientific competition in the domain of antiquities with the Bulgarian allies, but also within the Habsburg monarchy as well. Praschniker experienced the enthusiasm of a discoverer, as did Carl Patsch who had preceded him; he could see rich finds that could fill up museums, but he was left in a field hospital installed by the army to cure the infection of dysentery he contracted. He nevertheless resumed the campaigns with Schoper as soon as the Autumn of 1916, in an expedition commissioned by the Ministry of Cults and Education, in order to explore in Montenegro and Northern Albania places yet unnoticed or superficially taken into account. The development of archaeological missions struck Carl Patsch, who himself instituted such expeditions from Sarajevo: in October-November 1917, he was invited by the civil representative in Albania August Kral, and in late Summer 1918, the commanding staff of the army commissioned a scientific journey aimed at preserving antique artefacts in Albania. He had his own archeological agenda, but was very much interested in the solid implementation of his Institute and his collaborators for future missions in the Balkans, for which the military support was necessary⁵. After visiting the Pojani monastery he had described in his monograph in *Das Sandschak von Berat in Albanien* (1904), with lieutenant Georg Veith, himself a scholar of Caesar's period, it was decided that antique artefacts had to be surely kept *in situ* (not brought to Sarajevo, as Patsch initially planned). In November 1917, Praschniker was sent back to Albania again, where he was in charge, for the newly formed *Orientalabteilung* within the Ministry of War, of cataloguing the antique vestiges scattered over the Albanian soil, preserving them, by issuing protective measures, and also conducting new excavations. He recorded some years later that his work on the Albanian front as an archaeologist was characterized by an amalgamation of « soldiery with scientific work »⁶. Those remnants were in danger because of artillery. From the South, there were Italian and French troops trying to progress, and the Austrian soldiers of

⁵ He noted the development of collecting artefacts in the occupied regions as an epidemic, that made them lost for science: « schier epidemisch gewordene Sammelwut [durch die] alles des Sammeln Werte – aber nicht bloß dieses – leicht den Eigentümer wechselt, ausgeführt und der Wissenschaft zum größten Teile entzogen wird. » [Patsch, Report, Autumn 1917, ABH, ZM]

⁶ « Die Monate, die ich an der albanischen Front verlebt habe, werden mir in unauslöschlicher Erinnerung bleiben, in ihrer ganz eigenen Verquickung des Kriegerhandwerks mit wissenschaftlicher Arbeit. Vermerke wie « Grabung wegen Alarm eingestellt » oder « Unterbrechung wegen feindlichen Feuerüberfalls », dürfen in Grabungstagebüchern nicht zu zahlreich sein und die wiederholten Streifzüge in dem zwischen den beiden Fronten gelegenen Gebiet waren von Patrouillegängen oft kaum sehr verschieden. » Camillo Praschniker, « Muzakhia und Malakastra », in *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien* 21-22 (1922/24), 5-223, here 14-16.

occupation were also eager to provide themselves souvenirs in the form of authentic antique artefacts. Praschniker could trace back pieces that went to private hands thanks to the accurate description of Patsch, even some that had been sold by an Austrian officer to the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna. To leave those antiquities in Albania was the idea of Kral, who elaborated with Patsch the idea of a National Museum. Praschniker received the mission to collect, order and describe antique and other important artefacts relevant for the history of culture⁷. Antique objects were considered as valuable in the commanding circles in Vienna not only for the occupying force, but also for the local population, through an ideal of education that Austria alone had to accomplish.

The last Austrian archaeological mission in the Balkans put an end to any hope that such a grand design could be ever realized. Adolf Mahr (1887-1951), a scientific collaborator at the Museum of natural History in Vienna, specialist of the Hallstatt period, planned an expedition to Albania in the last year of the war. It eventually became an odyssey that made him a witness to the *Finis Austriae* in Albania and Dalmatia in the Autumn of 1918. He could just work in late July on some tumuli, but could not pay the locals, who demanded a high retribution, and resorted hence to soldiers detached for that purpose. The finds were on the whole disappointing: most of the tumuli were void, and he dug up, instead of prehistoric elements, recent skulls – of the Balkan wars. In a situation of utter flight from Albania, he tried to find a way to secure the transportation of finds from Scutari through insurrectional provinces, as the military commando was disaggregating. On his way back, half of his baggage was forcefully taken in Split by the National Committee, the other half of it he could save, thanks to the intervention of Museum director Frane Bulić [Marchetti, 184-186]: in times of political turmoil, there was still a scientific collaboration between archaeologists that was able to resist new powers, at least for a short time.

2. Mobilizing French hellenists and archaeologists on the Oriental front: from soldiers to scientists?

As the war was going on, a change occurred in the mobilization of intellectual forces on the Oriental front in the Balkans. Until Spring 1915, nothing distinguished the specialists of Balkan antiquity from the other intellectuals who were called to occupy various functions on the Western front. With the opening of a secondary front on the Dardanelles, a convergence appears in the fate of intellectuals trained in Archaeology and especially in Hellenic Studies. The group of former students at the French School of Archaeology at Athens exemplifies the phenomenon. Between the landing on the Dardanelles on 25 April 1915 and the demobilization in Spring 1919, all of them (a group of almost 40) joined the field of operations for a period of at least some months, whether on the Gallipoli peninsula, in Macedonia, or on both places. A considerable proportion served as interpreters and organizers of archaeological investigations

⁷ Marchetti, 225.

[Gustave Mendel (1873-1938), Jules Chamonard (1865-1936)]. General Gouraud had given orders for operation of excavations on parts of the Dardanelles battlefield itself in late June 1915, since remnants of a necropolis had surfaced, as the soldiers were digging trenches. In a report to the French Academy it appears clearly that archaeological survey in the midst of a battle was an act of « fidelity to an already secular tradition »: « It was important for the reputation of French science to let a part of the army, even reduced because of the circumstances, study the antique traces that the pick of our soldier had just exhumed during their military work » [BCH, 1915, 39, 135]. As in Austrian Albania, the work of unearthing was carried out directly on the front line, with a permanent danger of counter-attack, here from the Ottoman side. But the workers who were employed under the direction of the French scholars were not locals, nor soldiers who could have at least a faint understanding of the cultural prestige of an ancient Greek city dug up so close to Troy. They were Senegalese infantrymen, to whom obviously the scholars did not try to explain the significance of their activity. A part of Elaeus was thus unearthed, which eventually led to the transport of sarcophagi and other spolia to the Louvre, whereas the rest of the area was heavily shelled on, so that a subsequent destruction of most of the ancient city took place. The soldiers converged to Salonica after the failed landing on Gallipoli ended in evacuation.

From 6 January 1916, Macedonia remained the only field of action in the Balkans for the French. A Service of Archaeology was created to cope specifically with occasional findings during the war operations, as well as to organize excavations. The SAAO [Service archéologique de l'armée d'Orient] was active from Spring 1916 to February 1919. As Mendel suggested in retrospect, Macedonia from the beginning of archaeological surveys « had become and remained a French province ». He thus put his work into a larger historical perspective, within a series of continuous interests of the French military hierarchy for Mediterranean archaeology, since the 18th century⁸. This was true to some extent, but the Army was not the only convenor of excavations, quite often it was the conveyor of soldiers reconverted to archaeologists who worked with the financial support of the Academy [Rey, BCH, 1916, 40, p. 17]. The practical framework was clearly demanded by the situation: no exhaustive excavation was intended, but rather a very extensive survey in space, as to gather ceramics which was supposed, as states the document signed by General Sarrail, to best reconstruct « the history of civilization in the most remote times » [BCH, 269]. The archaeologists all became officers while they served on the front, where their specific knowledge came to fruitful use, especially of modern Greek, which they had mastered during their long previous stay at the French School at Athens. After November 1915, none of them was anymore in a combative unit, they all had been assigned to work at the staff

⁸ « Toutes les armées françaises qui, depuis la fin du XVIII^e siècle, ont porté nos couleurs en Orient, ont toujours considéré comme un devoir, venues sur ces terres historiques, lourdes d'un passé illustre, de réserver une place, à côté des opérations militaires, à la recherche scientifique ». Mendel, 9-10.

headquarters. A peak was reached in 1917, as they represented a noticeable percentage (for instance at the Postal control, 3 out of 13). This was not self-evident, since those services should have been run by trained officers, not reservists. That integration of intellectuals into the very centre of the war machinery, from combatting to operational and commanding units, shows on the one side the personal implications of those intellectuals who accepted or even asked for those functions about which subsequent official reports praise their efficiency. On the other side, the headquarters reacted after some months of war in a way that considerations of belonging to the army proved to be less important than recognized skills, especially badly needed fluency in modern Greek. It was a wish of most of those learned soldiers to be sent to Greece in order to be useful there with their knowledge of the country. The authorities of the Army (General Sarrail) asked Gustave Fougères (1863-1927), director of the French School from 1913 to 1919, to name ancient members able to understand and write in Greek. The director of the French School himself was appointed « director of the French propaganda in Greece » in April 1916 and played an active role in supporting the objectives of the French government in the period of Greek indecision as for the engagement in war. From that perspective, his role as an archaeologist was consciously that of a representative of his government, even if he did not directly deal with belligerence. He managed to obtain the nomination of scholars members of the French School, which was certainly due to the fact that he could prove that they would be most useful for the interests of the French government in a highly volatile Greek political environment.

Charles Picard (1883-1965) and Jérôme Carcopino (1881-1970), who both had prestigious professional careers that led to a chair at the Sorbonne, exemplify a tendency which begun in the war years to merge scholarly with public implication. While exploring with Charles Avezou and Adolphe Joseph Reinach (1887-1914) Macedonia, Thessaly and Albania, Charles Picard also headed the intelligence service of Franchet d'Espérey's headquarter. Picard however could really be an archaeologist only in his spare time, during which he could survey and inform the service of archaeology of the army what vestiges he had seen, but his major task was not primarily that of an archaeologist. Fougères wrote in 1914 in an appraisal the qualities that an archaeologist had to develop and that he could easily use in time of war, from the trenches he dug to those of combat⁹. The useful knowledge they had was that of the terrain: during years as members of the French School, they had prospected and excavated in Greece and Asia Minor, even in the regions of Macedonia that had been aggregated to Greece in the wake of the Balkan

⁹ « Nos archéologues, tous mobilisés, ont obéi avec entrain à leur devoir patriotique. Cette vigoureuse sortie hors de leur tour d'ivoire n'était pas pour prendre au dépourvu des jeunes gens déjà aguerris par leurs expéditions scientifiques. Rompus aux privations et aux fatigues par leurs rudes randonnées en des régions inhospitalières, préparés au commandement et aux promptes décisions pour le métier de chefs de chantier, ces savants de plein air se sont trouvés tous entraînés pour l'action ; il leur suffirait de militariser leurs qualités pour être aptes à passer sans transition de la reconnaissance exploratrice à la reconnaissance armée, et de la tranchée où l'on fouille à celle où l'on se bat. » G. Fougères, report on the activities of the French School, 1913-1914 (20.12.1914).

wars. Moreover, they were trained in compiling informations and comparing them, a work they constantly carried out for the intelligence service. In that sense, as wrote Jérôme Carcopino remembering his days in the services of the French Army of the Orient, their work was similar to that of « scholars who succeeded in elaborating the battle order of the Roman army under the reign of Trajan or Septimus Severus ». The archaeologists, trained as they were in comparing data from various sources, proved indeed to be instrumental in the preparation of some important operations at the French headquarters in the Balkans, like the one which led to the armistice with Bulgaria 29 September 1918. They did not rely on one single source (aerial photography that showed important artillery potential), but compared them in time and understood they were removed from one to another emplacement. On the whole their knowledge as scholars was less in demand during the war than the skills they had previously developed in order to become scholars. This means that they accepted to put them in use, beyond the scientific demands. In that respect they mirror the stronger nationalization of archaeology as a field of knowledge in the interwar period.

Conclusion

Archaeology grew in importance from the point of view of civil and military powers during the war, both on the French and the Austrian sides, as part of a politics that was anticipating the situation after the war, with a strong regional influence expected in Albania for Vienna, in Greece and Serbia for Paris. But the role given to archaeologists in the Army of Orient was decidedly more operational than that experienced by their Austrian counterparts. In that sense, the difference in experiences prepared the path for interwar evolution: Charles Picard assumed in the 1920s and 1930s a continuous twofold activity. As a scholar, he was appointed director of the French School at Athens from 1919 to 1925 and in 1939 he was in Athens again as a military attaché, gathering information on the war preparation on the German side. Such developments were not registered in the Austrian case. The Austrian school of archaeology was deprived after WWI of much of its contacts and fields of direct investigation in the Balkans, whereas the French continued to investigate and excavate in the region. Furthermore, Ernst Hébrard (1875-1933), one of the archaeologists who worked in the last phase of the war and in the years afterwards, under Generals Guillaumat and Franchet d'Esperey, could extend his activities after the armistice towards the exhaustivity that was not expected during the war [Hébrard, BCH, 1920, 5]. Hébrard also played a preponderant part in the reconstruction of Salonica after the devastating fire of August 1917 took as an urban planner. Since the pre-war years, as he was dealing with the architecture of Diocletian in Split under Austrian rule, he had constantly managed to assert French archaeological scholarship in the Balkans, with full support of

academic and diplomatic milieux in France, in front of the hitherto strong Austrian and German schools of archaeology, and thus his multiple activities during and after the war mirror the new political situation which seemed to offer a new stronghold for French scholarship and diplomacy in the Balkans after WWI.

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