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BULGARIAN-ROMANIAN CONFRONTATION IN 1916 AND CONCERN ABOUT SOLDIERS' GRAVES IN BOTH COUNTRIES

Abstract: In 1916 Bulgaria and Romania turned into enemies, as being members of the two opposing military powers. The Central powers- Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (later Italy withdrew from the war, Turkey joined) and the Entente. Consequently, both countries entered into armed conflict, as the military actions for the most time had been carried on territories of Southern and Northern Dobrudzha and north Romania. The casualties for Bulgaria in that conflict exceeded 10000 killed. No less was the number of Romanian killed soldiers. After the war, according to clauses in the 1948 Versailles system of treaties and later in the Geneva Convention it was envisaged the relevant provisions to be taken with respect to killed soldiers, in order to be respected and maintained the cemeteries and graves of soldiers buried in these territories. It has also been envisaged for the graves of prisoners of war to be properly maintained. In his communication the author reveals what measures have been taken in this respect up to the present in both countries.

Keywords: conflict, military, cemeteries.

On 15 (or 28 new style) of July, 1914 the beginning of World War I was set. Bulgaria and Romania declared that they would remain neutral but both countries hoped to manage in accomplishment of their half-finished reunification during the war and that was the reason for both of them to initiate intensive preparation for military operations. Up to the end of 1914 and the first half of 1915 they held active negotiations with representatives of both the Entente (the Triple Entente Powers) and the Triple Alliance (Central Powers). The Dobrudzha issue was a constant subject for discussion during negotiations. As the Entente was reluctant to provide Bulgaria with guarantees in respect to regaining of its lands, including Southern Dobrudzha, on September 6 Bulgarian government signed a secret agreement with Germany, which definitely allied Bulgaria with the Central Powers in World War I. Annex 2 of the Treaty reads: '...In case of attack on the part of Romania in the course of this conflict, being by no means inflicted by Bulgarian government, its allies or Turkey, Germany will agree upon for Bulgaria to annex the ceded to Romania by virtue of the Bucharest treaty territories, as well as alteration of Romanian-Bulgarian boundary set by the Berlin treaty to be performed...' ¹ In this way regaining of southern Dobrudzha had been placed in a state of dependency on the war outcome for the Central Powers, also on the actions

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which Romania would undertake. The promise in respect to the boundary was obscure.

The main military and political goals of Romania in the forthcoming war were: territorial expansion in westward direction at the expense of Austria-Hungary and retention of annexed in 1913 southern Dobrudzha. In order to retain it, Romania prepared a special, third army, the main strength of which had been localized in Tutrakan, Silistra and Dobrich. Commanding officer was Gen. M. Aslan. After the Romanian general hypothesis in respect to the course of conducting the war against the Fourfold Union (the so called hypothesis Z), Romania had to concentrate its basic forces against the Austria-Hungary. In Dobrudzha it had to cover the railway line Cherna voda – Kyustendzha, as the main point in respect to defense was given to the fortresses in Tutrakan, Silistra and Kubadin. On the eve of war Romanian Commanding Staff specified hypothesis Z with a view to the military actions in Dobrudzha. They had to be conducted in two phases: defensive and offensive. The first phase was to last for 10 days. Romanian garrisons in Tutrakan and Silistra as well as Dobrich 19th division had to repel the attacks of Bulgarian troops, also to cover the debarkation of Russian troops in Dobrudzha. Upon the arrival of Russian troops started the second phase-offensive actions by means of which Bulgarians had to be repulsed from southern Dobrudzha thus leading to seizure of Ruse – Razgrad – Shumen – Varna zone.²

Third army, comprising of 1st and 4th divisions, 2nd brigade comprising of 6th division, 1st mounted brigade, Varna mobile reserve and Danube cohort, altogether 60 battalions, 54 batteries and 24 squadrons, commanded by Lieutenant – General Stefan Toshev was localized along the Dobrudzha border with Danube River to the Black sea. The confronting Romanian army, led by General M. Aslan comprised of 136 battalions, 135 batteries and 39 squadrons – twice as large power and the battle outcome seemed predetermined. As a matter of fact, according to some records provided by Bulgarian army intelligence General Toshev had had information that there were 48 battalions, 50 batteries and 18 squadrons only against his army.³ Romanian army's armament was identical to that of Bulgarian as it had been supplied mainly from Germany and the Austro-Hungary Empire. Infantry was armed with 1893 full-stock carbine Manlicher, calibre 6,5mm, Maxim German machineguns, 1910, and St. Etienne 1896 French machineguns; artillery: 37 and 57 mm Krupp heavy guns cal. 75 mm, 87 mm and 105 mm, castle cannons, howitzers – 120 mm, long cannons - 150 mm, as well as non q.f. field guns etc.⁴

By the end of August 1916 Romanian commanding in Dobrudzha relied on the West group armies under the leadership of General Valyanu (16th and 18th divisions, 2-Kalarash mounted brigade), providing the guarding of the border from the outfall of Olt river to Gryaka lake. East group, commanded by General Zayonchkovskiy (47th Russian corps, which entered Dobrudzha on 27th of August, two hours prior Romania had declared war to Austria-Hungary) on the strength of: 61 Russian division, Serbo-Croatian division, 64th artillery brigade, one mountain artillery cohort, 3rd mounted division, Black sea mounted regiment, 56th pioneer battalion, 6th aircraft detachment. 19th division commanded by General Argirescu

and 5th Kalarash mounted brigade guarded along the Dobrudzha border from Gryaka late to Ekrene (now village of Kranevo), therefore they moved to the region of Dobrich in order to cover the concentration of Russian forces. 17th division, commanded by General K. Teodorescu- defended the bridgehead fortress of Tutrakan as a point of closest proximity to the frontier, from where it could take the offensive by crossing the Danube river against Bulgaria. 9th division – led by General Basarabescu – defended the bridgehead fortress of Silistra from where enough forces could be launched during the forthcoming offensive actions.

These troops constituted the 3rd Romanian army, commanded by General M. Aslan, with headquarters in Bucharest.⁵

On August, 17, Romania signed a military convention with the Entente countries and on 27 of August at 10 o'clock in Bucharest the Council of State was summoned and was attended by representatives of the government and chiefs of all political parties; at 21 o'clock they declared war on Austria-Hungary. Thus Romania turned to be on the enemy's side which assumed a military conflict with Bulgaria. On the next day Germany declared war on Romania and invited its Bulgarian allies to do the same, in order to manifest Central powers' unity in actions. The war between the two countries became inevitable. That day Romanian batteries fired at the Austria-Hungarian monitor "Bosnia" at Ruse.

On 28 of August 1916 Romanian artillery fired at Ruse 30 shells which hit the customs house, the Secondary School for Boys, the bank, Military club and the surrounding area of Bristol hotel as a result of which two soldiers and a civilian had been killed, one more soldier and six civilians wounded. The casus belli was provided. General staff of the acting army ordered the 3rd army commanded by Lieut. Gen. Stefan Toshev to be ready for action and "no attacks to be launched until Bulgaria formally declared war on Romania."⁶ That very day Third Bulgarian army was submitted under the command of German Field Marshal Alfred Von Mackenzen. Initially his plans were for Bulgarian troops to take the possession of Tutrakan and Silistra after which to take defensive positions. The main combats against Romanian units had to be provided by the unified Austria-German forces on the Vlashka lowlands. The Chief of Staff of Bulgarian acting army (SAA) General Zhekov as well as General Toshev sharply opposed to this plan.⁷ On this occasion in Gorna Oryahovitsa a harsh dispute burst out between Field Marshal Mackenzen and General Toshev. The opinion of Bulgarian officer that "Tutrakan had to be taken up as soon as possible prevailed, at that it had to be done by the time of Russian reinforcement arrival".⁸ Mackenzen adopted this plan and countermanded his previous instruction.

Military actions in Dobrudzha were conducted in four stages: 1. Liberation of Dobrich, Tutrakan and Silistra (2-10 September, 1916); 2. Liberation of entire Dobrudzha and reaching the fortified Kubadin position (10- 19 September, 1916); 3. Position battles at Kubadin front (19 September – 20 October, 1916); 4. Liberation of northern Dobrudzha (21 October, 1916 – the beginning of January, 1917)⁹

This publication is not intended to describe in details the military actions- these facts shall be noted only, but rather to reveal what has been done for the memory of thousands of Bulgarian and Romanian soldiers killed in this war to be preserved and respected.

On first of September, the Head of the State Tsar Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg-Gotha issued a Manifesto, declaring war on Romania, signed by all of the Ministers.¹⁰ On the same that day Commander-in-Chief General Zhekov issued an order for the military actions against Romania to begin. On 1st of September an Operative order No 16 of the commanding officer general Toshev was sent to outfits of 3rd army, by means of which it was ordered the powers of 4th Preslav division, 1st brigade of 1st Sofia division together with detachments of Colonel Von Kauffman from Ruse Tutrakan fortress to be attacked, and 3rd brigade of 1st Sofia division was directed to Silistra in order to provide cover for the main actions- “ to be able to interfere in both the battle for Tutrakan, also against a try on the part of the enemy; to hit from Silistra, in the rear our forces, while they are making attacks on Tutrakan”.¹¹ First mounted division had to act on the left flank of the enemy, the sector between Silistra and Dobrich while the garrison of Varna fortified point had to attack by its reserve in order to beat off the forces of the enemy, which would attack from the line Dobrich – Balchik. Brigade’s 6th division had to provide for the end right flank of the army onward from Dobrich.

Commanding the 3rd Romanian army General Aslan, under whose commanding was the garrison of the Tutrakan fortress declared, that Tutrakan was to him as the little Verdun and anyone who would try to capture it would have been pricked.¹² To grater extent he was right, as for the construction of Tutrakan fortress had been used the latest achievements in fortifying- a new fort was established with concrete covertures and turreted cannons provided with concrete platforms for the batteries, some of them with a shelter. It has to be noted for the purposes of comparison, that the mightiest fortresses- 150 in total during the First World War, the number of fortresses of the same type was as follow: in Osovetz- 4, in Metz- 5, in Brest-Litovsk- 6, in Namur – 9, in Liege- 12, in Pshemisl – 15, in Novogeorgievsk /Modlin/ - 18, in Verdun 23. Long lasting fortifying outfit /forts/ had been skillfully provided with field equipment /trenches and ditches/. Also, the fiery system was well organized, which provided for firing of pre-positional areas, as well as for passing between the forts and surrounding walls. A very broad combined surrounding area was established- measuring a hundred meters. The Field Marshal Mackenzen reasonably named Tutrakan “The near East’s Verdun”.¹³ The defense of the fortress was provided for by 17th infantry division, consisting of 19 battalions, and the garrison was supplied additionally with 4 monitors, 8 patrol vessels, 4 gun-boats and 8 torpedo boats from Romanian Danube Fleet. There were 27621 people, 214 cannons (54 provided by the river fleet) and 66 machine-guns. The defense of the west sector (I) was provided for by 5 battalions, the central (II) – by 3 and the east sector (III) – by 4 battalions.

Bulgarian attack on the fortress began on 5 of September in the morning and, notwithstanding the advantages of Romanian garrison due to a number of mistakes

made by the commanding staff, it fell in 33 hours only.¹⁴ At 15.30 on 6 of September, 1916, Col. Marashescu offered the Commanding General Panteley Kiselov for his troops to surrender.

After the utter defeat of Romanian army at Tutrakan and the epic battles around Dobrich Bulgarian troops undertook offensive actions. Romanian commanding gave Silistra with no combats and fortified positions at the Kubadin position. Fierce battles were conducted there between the two countries for a month and a half and after its occupation on 21st of October, 1916 just for a couple of days Medzhidie and Babadag, Harsovo, Kyustendzha and Cherna voda had been taken by Bulgarian troops, thus gaining full control over the railway line Cherna voda – Kyustendzha. Romanian troops left central northern Dobrudzha and passed to the left bank of the Danube River, and the Russian army withdrew northward in Dobrudzha. On 6th of December Bulgarian and German troops, under the command of Field Marshal Mackenzen entered Bucharest.

For the following stage, the main Bulgarian forces' counterpart was the Russian army as the battles continued till 5th of January, 1917. Heavy battles were led near Tulcha, Isakcha, Cherna, Machin. Upon their seizure Bulgarian troops took positions on the Siret river in Moldova.

The total number of Bulgarian soldiers, killed on the northern (Dobrudzha) front amounts to 11 500 people. Although the information is quite poor, and the approximate figures are not known, none the less is the number of Romanian casualties. After the war, according to Art. 16 of the Treaty of Neuilly from 27 of November, 1919 „The Allied and Associated Governments and the Bulgarian Government will cause to be respected and maintained the graves of the soldiers and sailors buried in their respective territories...”¹⁵ . Art. 117 takes into consideration the issue of prisoners of war and their graves.

Right after the battle for Tutrakan fortress all the soldiers killed on the battle field- Bulgarian, Romanian, German soldiers and Bulgarian Moslem soldiers had been buried in fort No 7 on the main fortifying line in southern Dobrudzha, and by the end of 1918 Bulgarian Ministry of War and the garrison in Tutrakan took the necessary cares for its initial establishment and maintaining as a military cemetery. After the second occupation of Romania, Romanian Government has also taken the proper measures. An arch has been erected in the centre of Tutrakan in memory of the heroes of war and commemorative activities were conducted annually there. After the mounting of the obelisk in 1922 the military cemetery was almost neglected. The cemetery has been reconstructed three times- in 1941, 1986 and 1996.

The situation in Dobrich is some different. Special attention was taken on the part of Romanian country in respect to its maintenance and it was kept in very good condition during the entire period of occupation till 1940.

In northern Dobrudzha, near the small railway station Mircha voda, 50 km far from Kostantsa, 12 km away from Medzhidie and 17 km- from Cherna voda, a military cemetery is situated which was reconstructed in 1928 and 1932, last in 2007.

Today, when our both countries are members of the common European family and all the forms of antagonism and nationalism have been overcome long ago, concerns about the fallen soldiers belonging to both countries remain to us, to undertake the proper measures and the due honor to be attested to them.

What is the situation now. Nowadays, there are three cemeteries on the territory of Bulgaria, where Romanian soldiers are buried. The largest is the Memorial complex „Military cemetery-1916”, situated 10 km southward from Tutrakan, near the village of Shumentsi (the old name is Daydar). There are about 8000 people buried in the Memorial Complex, 6000 of them Romanian. The number of casualties during the battle for Tutrakan amounts to 1764 Bulgarian and 7742 Romanian soldiers.¹⁶ The number of 34 Kyustendzha regiment amounted to 68 officers and 3481 soldiers in the beginning of the war; its losses at Tutrakan were: 31 killed and missing officers and 17 wounded; soldiers- 2570 killed and missing, 440 wounded. Out of service as a result of war were 48 officers and 3260 soldiers. 20 officers and 221 soldiers only remained in service. The regiment was completely destroyed.¹⁷ Every first Sunday of September a National Commemorative meeting is organized there, memorial service is held, wreaths are laid in memory of killed Bulgarian, Romanian and Turkish soldiers. National flags of Bulgaria, Romania and Germany are hoisted. There is an obelisk within the Memorial Complex with inscription in Bulgarian, German, Romanian and Arabic: “Honor and Glory of all those who knew how to die like heroes for their mother country.” A chapel “Saint Georgi” has been built for anyone who wants to light a candle in memory of killed soldiers. Victors and vanquished have been buried in common graves.

The other large graveyard is the Military Cemetery – Museum in the town of Dobrich. More than 3000 soldiers – Bulgarian, Romanian, German, Turkish, Serbian, and Russian are buried there. Every year, on 25 of September commemorative events take place in memory of soldiers killed during the war. There is a chapel built up there- St Michael the Archangel, where every first Saturday of November – (the Day of Archangel Michael) a memorial service is held in memory of the killed soldiers. In 2006 a museum collection was exhibited, representing scenes of the Dobrich Epopee. These two cemeteries are very well maintained by the good offices of museums and municipalities in both cities of Tutrakan and Dobrich.

1241 people, Romanian prisoners of war have died from their wounds and diseases (number of those who took part in battles for Tutrakan only amounts to 28 000 people). In 1941 a Charnel house was built up in Sofia Cemetery by the Romanian Association Cultul eroilor for which is taken good care of. Most probably, there are other places existing where Romanian soldiers are buried but this is a matter of future common concerns of Bulgarian Ministry of Defense and Association “Cultul eroilor”.

After a report provided by the Department of the Ministry of War, which is responsible for military monuments and graves, the number of Military cemeteries in Romania where Bulgarian soldiers are buried as well, amounts to about 320, as

in the end of 1925 through the mediation of Bulgarian Legation there, the Ministry sent to Bucharest a request for information to be provided in respect to the number and location of Bulgarian graves on Romanian territory. In reply to this, in a letter No 346 dated 10 of March, 1926 the Legation reported that 21 excerpts containing information about the location of graves and lists with the names of buried soldiers were sent.¹⁸ No answer has been received, but in the end of 20s, bones of all Bulgarian soldiers buried in the regions of Kyustendzha and Tulcha had been dug up and transported to the railway station of Mircea Voda.

In a letter dated 11 of July, 2005, Cultul eroilor Association informed, that soldiers' graves had been found in Bucharest – the graveyard “Pro Patria”, where 163 Bulgarian soldiers were buried in Bulgarian lot and 136 Bulgarian and Russian soldiers buried in the city graveyard of Buzau, 9 soldiers in the city graveyard in Alexandria, in the village of Mircha voda – railway station, Memorial Cemetery “Mircha Stari” buried 82 soldiers on the territory of Bulgarian lot and 28 in Bulgarian-Russian lot. It is reported that in the village of Cherna, Tulca region there was a monument – a sort of an obelisk with names of killed soldiers. (see the Appendix).

In autumn, 2007 a research expedition was organized by the management of museums in Tutrakan and Dobrich in cooperation with the Military Monument Department at the Ministry of Defense, aiming at visiting the memorable places in northern Dobrudzha – with in the regions of Kostantsa and Tulca.

“Mircha Stari” Memorial which is situated near the village of Mircha Stari, after its reconstruction and opening ceremony on 3 of November, 2007 is one of the best notable places established in memory of heroes-soldiers of different nationalities. All this is evident from the well-shaped lots, the chapel and the magnificent monument in the middle of the complex.

Besides the Memorial “Mircha Stari”, 25 settlements have been visited and 8 gravestones of killed Bulgarian soldiers were found – most of them in village graveyards. We could not find the gravestone-obelisk in the village of Cherna as it was noted in the letter, but found two more graves in the local graveyard. In the cities of Konstantsa, Babadag, Medzhidie, Tulca, Brail – in the common city graveyards there were lots where Romanian, German, Turkish and Russian soldiers had been buried. There were no Bulgarian soldiers buried there, though some had died there. In Manchin we did not find the gravestone of 47th regiment in spite of the fact that we had a picture of it at our disposal as well as its exact location. In the village of Pietreni (Kokardzha), there is a splendid memorial – a Charnel-house within the yard of the church, but Bulgarian names are missing on the stelae, though there epic battles have been led there in the view of the fact that Kokardzha was a part of the reinforced Kubadin position and there were near 400 Bulgarian soldiers killed there. At the meeting at the prefecture in Constance a particular commitment was accepted for all the soldiers' names sent by us to be written.

This year our expedition will continue its exploration work. We rely on Cultul eroilor Association for its support, as well as on prefectures in Constance and Tulcha. We are intended to visit the rest of the villages in connection of which data

have been provided about buried Bulgarian soldiers and the results from investigation will be published.

Regardless of their nationality, all the killed soldiers have done it for their countries and not with standing the fact that their bones are far from their birth places they have to be honored and to be given the due respect as they deserve it for the sacrifice they have done for their countries and for us to live.

NOTES

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LISTA PROVIZORIE CU LOCALITĂȚILE ÎN CARE SUNT ÎNHUMAȚI MILITARI BULGARI

LOCALITATEA	CIMITIRUL	PARCELĂ/ MONUMENT	NUMĂRUL MILITARILOR ÎNHUMAȚI	Conflictul în care și-au pierdut viața
București	Cimitirul german „PRO PATRIA”	Parcela bulgară	163	Primul război mondial
Buzău	Cimitirul civil	Parcela militară	Groapă comună cu 136 de militari ruși și bulgari	Primul război mondial
Alexandria	Cimitirul civil	Parcela militară (în curtea bisericii)	9 militari bulgari (în groapă comună cu alți 285 de militari din diferite armate)	Primul război mondial
Comuna Mircea Vodă, județul Brăila	-	-	Număr necunoscut	Primul război mondial
✓ Satul Mircea Vodă Gară, comuna Mircea Vodă, județul Constanța	Cimitirul de onoare al eroilor din 1916-1918	-	82 în parcela bulgară (cunoscuți și necunoscuți) 28 în parcela ruso-bulgară	Primul război mondial
Satul Garvan, comuna Jijila, județul Tulcea	-	Obelisc (între localitățile Garvan și Zaclău) în memoria sublocotenentului Evghenii Vasiliev	Pe monument se află și o listă, în prezent ilizibilă, cu nume ale unor militari bulgari (probabil îngropați acolo)	Războiul din 1877- 1878
Comuna Cerna, județul Tulcea	-	Obelisc ridicat în 1916 în amintirea unui ofițer (posibil general) bulgar	Pe monument se află înscrisă o listă, în prezent ilizibilă, cu nume ale unor militari bulgari (probabil îngropați acolo)	Primul război mondial



 11.07.2005



Fig. 1: Memorial – Charnel-house in the village of Pietrene, Konstantsa Region.



Fig. 2: German Cemetery, village of Kubadin.



Fig. 3: A Monument in memory of killed soldiers during the wars, village of Kubadin.



Fig. 4: A Pyramid in memory of killed Serbian soldiers in the city of Babadag.



Fig. 5: Konstantsa Cemetery.

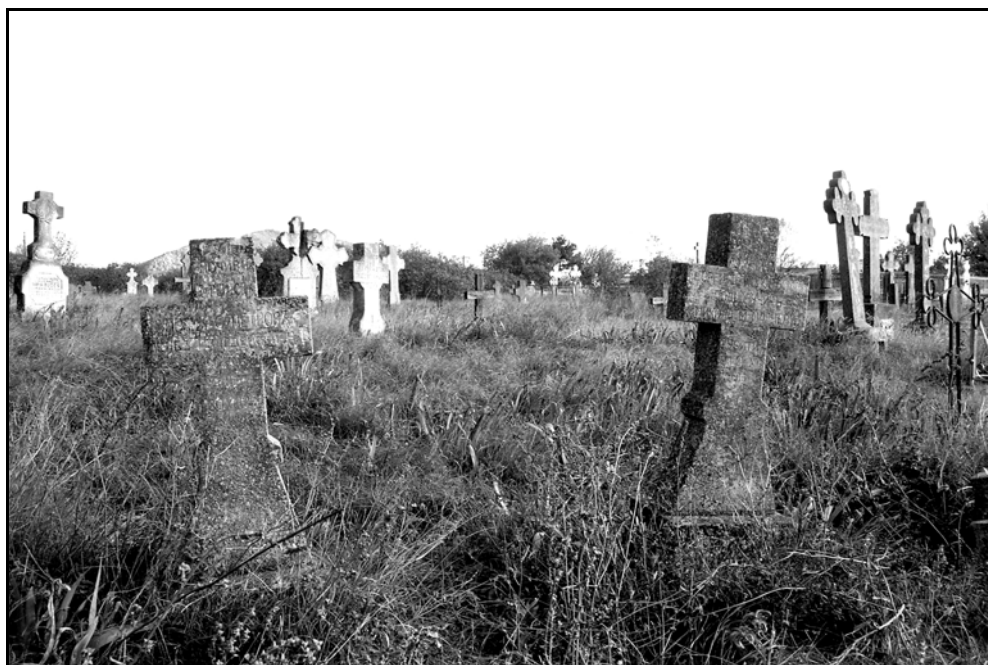


Fig. 6:Bulgarian soldiers' gravestones in the village of Cherna.



Fig. 7: Military Memorial in the city of Tulcha.



Fig. 8: Braila Cemetery.



Fig. 9: "Mircha Stari" Cemetery - Opening ceremony in the village of Mircha Stari on 3rd of November, 2007.



Fig. 10: “Mircha Stari” Cemetery - Opening ceremony in the village of Mircha Stari on 3rd of November, 2007.



Fig. 11: “Mircha Stari” Cemetery - Opening ceremony in the village of Mircha Stari on 3rd of November, 2007.



Fig. 12: Cemetery – Dobrich.

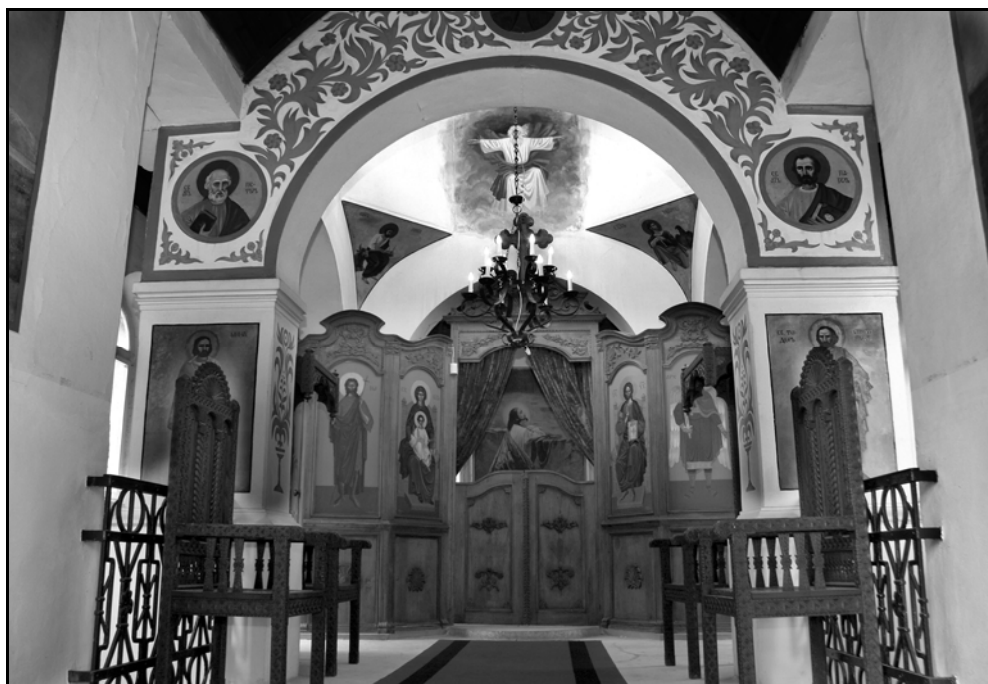


Fig. 13: The Chapel – Charnel-house „St Archangel Michael” at the Cemetery - Dobrich.



Fig. 14: Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916”, Tutrakan.



Fig. 15: Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916” , Tutrakan.



Fig. 16: Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916” , Tutrakan- Path of Glory



Fig. 17: Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916” , Tutrakan Monument – obelisk with inscriptions on bulgarian, romanian, german and turkish
 ”Honor and glory to those, who know how to die for they countries”



Fig. 18: Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916”, Tutrakan.



Fig. 19: Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916”, Tutrakan.



Fig. 20:Chapel “Saint George Pobednosec” at Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916”, Tutrakan.



Fig. 21: Inside on Chapel “ Saint George Pobednosec” at Memorial complex “Military tomb-1916”, Tutrakan.