

# Macedonians

**M**acedonia is a mountainous region located in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula.

Located at the crossroads of important commercial routes, Macedonia was exposed to many different civilisations and religions. Paeonians, Phrygians, Thracians, Illyrians, ancient Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, Goths, Slavs, Huns, Normans, Byzantians, Turks and others have left a mark on the region's cultural and ethnographic complexion.

Macedonia's strategic position, so favourable for its early development, made the country an essential possession for those who wanted control of the Balkans. This is the root cause of its rich, but often tragic, human history, with neighbouring countries eagerly competing for ownership always causing chaos and devastation. It is a history marked with frequent economic depressions, human oppression, exploitation, forced assimilation, genocide and massive migrations.

Today, the geographical region of Macedonia is partitioned among a number of States. To the south, approximately 50 per cent of its territory lies within the borders of the modern Republic of Greece, called Aegean Macedonia. To the east, about 10 per cent is integrated within Bulgaria. In the west, about 1 per cent is part of modern Albania. The rest, approximately 38.5 per cent, constitutes the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. The current official policy of the Greek Government, formed on highly politicised interpretations of the classical period of history, is to deny the existence of a Macedonian identity anywhere. It contests the right of the Macedonian people to call themselves and their State by that name. On different historical grounds, the Bulgarian State has recognised the legitimacy of the Republic of Macedonia, but insists on Macedonians being Macedonian Bulgarians.

However, there is the latent fear that the old adversaries within and without the country will rise again to threaten its precarious existence. There is the fear that the fast-growing Albanian population, presently a minority, may soon become the majority. (Predictions suggest that this may happen well before 2020.) Traditionally, Albanians

have never been supportive of Macedonian statehood. They have always aspired for some form of territorial independence and, ultimately, for integration with a Greater Albania. At the time of going to press, the Macedonian State was under armed attack by extremists, openly stating the above objective. One can only guess the consequences if this situation gets out of hand. Perhaps another Kosovo and a final Macedonian emigration?

The troubled history of the region has long been the driving force for the emigration of people from Macedonia, the specific factors being poverty, insecurity and political oppression.

In the twentieth century, the most significant migration waves were caused by catastrophic events such as the Balkan Wars, two world wars, the civil war in Greece, and the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation. The traditional destinations for the Macedonians emigrants were the United States and Canada. However, by 1922, owing to the industrial downturn and a restrictive US immigration policy, some Macedonian emigrants changed course and migrated to Australia. At that time there were limited prospects for work, there was little support for them when they arrived and there were problems in being accepted by the new host society. Despite that, the flow of Macedonian migrants to Australia continued to grow.

Initially, Queensland seems to have held little attraction for the Macedonian migrants, who arrived here much later than in the other States and in comparably insignificant numbers. The first group of migrants came from the Aegean region and arrived in Queensland in 1924. They were Mirce Kocovski, Kole Cinkovski, Kime Bogoyevich, Todor Gagachis, Petre Cinkovski and their families. They settled mainly in Brisbane and the Redland Shire, and worked as carpenters or farm hands. Most of the settlers in the Redland Shire region subsequently bought their own land and have become very successful farmers.

The influx of Macedonians remained slow, with only about 50 people settled by 1924. Their numbers rose to 200 in 1961, to 602 in 1996 and

to approximately 1400 in 2000. However, because of inconsistent statistical procedures used in the registration of the ethnicity of people coming with Greek or Yugoslav passports, these figures are approximate.

In 1945 a considerable number of Macedonians settled in northern New South Wales. They were farmers, almost exclusively growing bananas on their own plantations. These people have the distinction of being the first to organise their own Macedonian Social Club in Australia and to build the first Macedonian church/hall on the land donated by the Pazov family. Religious services were conducted quite infrequently by a visiting Russian priest. (No Macedonian priest was available at the time.) Since this church provided for the spiritual needs of the local Macedonians, as well as for the Macedonians living in Brisbane, the society was registered under the name of Macedonian Social Club for New South Wales and Southern Queensland.

At that time two Greek clubs and a church were operating in Charlotte Street, Brisbane. One of the clubs was reserved for Greek members only, but the other was open to most of the Orthodox Church communities – Russians, Serbians, Albanians and others, including the Macedonians. This was the first public meeting place for Macedonians in Brisbane.

The first Macedonian society in Brisbane, called the Macedonian Social Club, was organised in 1968. At a meeting celebrating the tenth anniversary of the club's existence, a group of people, led mainly by the Pasovski family members, decided to split and form another club that would be more focused on the promotion of Macedonian folklore and literacy. The club was named the Macedonian Cultural Club – Kitka. The split, in fact, was the result of substantial political tension within the Macedonian community. The members of the community that became associated with Kitka were, in general, supportive of the existing political circumstances in the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The political position of the leading members of the other club reflected different views and values.

In 1980 the members of the Macedonian Social Club, with the support of the whole Macedonian community, purchased an old, beautifully designed and constructed Presbyterian church. The church was consecrated in 1982 and has been the heart of the spiritual and social life of the Macedonian

Community ever since. In 1981 the club was re-registered and incorporated as the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Community St Mary (Sv Bogorodica), the traditional dancing group 'Tanec' was organised, and classes in the Macedonian language commenced in earnest.

In 1983 the soccer club Brothers United was formed, and is still successfully competing in the first Division Amateurs League of the Queensland Soccer Federation.

In 1992–93 attempts were made to reconcile the differences between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Community St Mary and the Macedonian Cultural Society – Kitka, but reunification of the two groups failed. The latter club ceased to exist in late 1996 when it ran into serious financial difficulties after building a club facility without financial support.

On the Gold Coast, a well-organised Macedonian community of approximately 70 families has set the foundation of the second Macedonian society in Queensland. On 3 December 1989, the Church Society 'St Nedela' was constituted. In March 1993 the society successfully purchased a large piece of land on the corner of Smith and Banyula Drive in Gaven with the intention of building a church dedicated to the patron saint of the society, St Nedela.

The building of the church was completed successfully, mainly by donations and voluntary work. The best feature of the church's interior is a beautiful altarpiece brought from a Macedonian Church in Melbourne. On 7 May 2000 the first wedding ceremony was conducted for Paul and Bridget Jazevski.

## Well-known Macedonians in Queensland

The best known political migrant to Queensland after World War II was Dr Nikola Andonov. He held a degree in medicine from the University of Graz, Austria, specialising in gynaecology. Throughout his life he was actively involved with the Macedonian question, working for the idea of a united Macedonia. Being a multilingual medical doctor meant his practice was well attended by people of different ethnic backgrounds. He established very strong connections with the Macedonians from New South Wales and, later, with the newly arrived migrants in Brisbane.

He was considered to be a person of exceptional generosity.

Another important, though more recent migrant from Macedonia, is the internationally acclaimed conductor Vanco Cavdarski. Born in 1930 in the Republic of Macedonia, he was educated in Skopje, Zagreb, Belgrade and Hamburg.

In 1962 he won the second prize at the Liverpool International Competition and in 1964 was a recipient of a Ford Foundation Scholarship in the United States. His illustrious career from 1960 to date is impressive, with key positions and achievements: from being Musical Director/Principal Conductor of the Macedonian

Philharmonic Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra and Opera and Ballet company, and of the Australian Opera Company, Sydney; to Chief Conductor of the Pusan Philharmonic Orchestra and the Seoul Grand Symphony Orchestra, Korea. His career also includes guest appearances worldwide with 80 orchestras and 12 opera companies. Vanco Cavdarski has a repertoire of over 100 symphonies, overtures and concertos and 50 operas. He has been a citizen of Australia since 1992. When not overseas, his home is in Brisbane.

**George Ilievski**