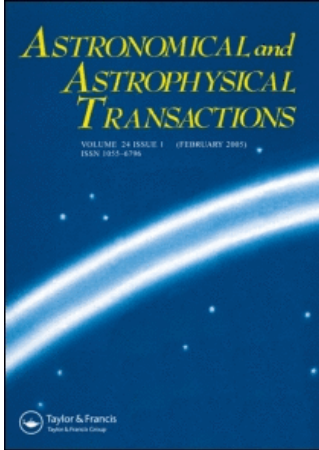


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Astronomy in the republic of macedonia

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ASTRONOMY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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A brief history of astronomy in the Republic of Macedonia is given.

KEY WORDS History of astronomy, observatories

According to the information I possess, the first person concerned with astronomy inside the limits of the present Republic of Macedonia (the city of Kichevo), was Maxim Trpkovic (1864–1924). Trpkovich graduated from the Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics of the Belgrade Philosophical Faculty. The name of Maxim Trpkovic is connected with proposing a project to modify the Orthodox calendar (Milanovich, 1952). Between 1900 and 1921 Trpkovich published seven articles giving his ideas of how to reform the Julian calendar so as to make it more accurate than the Gregorian one. His idea (far from new) was that seven days should be cut out of the calendar over nine centuries, to make the average length of the tropical year equal to 365 days 5 hours 48 minutes and 48 seconds, that is, only two seconds more than its actual length. Trpkovic's project was officially brought to the All Orthodox Churches Council (Tsargrad, 1923) by the Serbian Orthodox Church and read (with some modifications) to the audience by the well-known astronomer Milutin Milakovic. The calendar was approved unanimously by the Saint Synod, but adoption was postponed by most of the churches (including the Serbian Church).

Higher education in Macedonia started in 1920 when the Skopje Philosophical Faculty, an affiliation of the Belgrade Philosophical Faculty, was created. All the lectures were given in the Serbian language. The students were taught philosophy, history, foreign languages, and amongst all the natural sciences, geography. The lectures by Anastasija Uroshevic (1898–1991), a subsequent member of the Academy of Science, introduced pupils to the principles of astronomy.

The Philosophical Faculty was reopened after the end of World War II, in 1946. Classes were given in the Macedonian language. The Faculty then had a Department

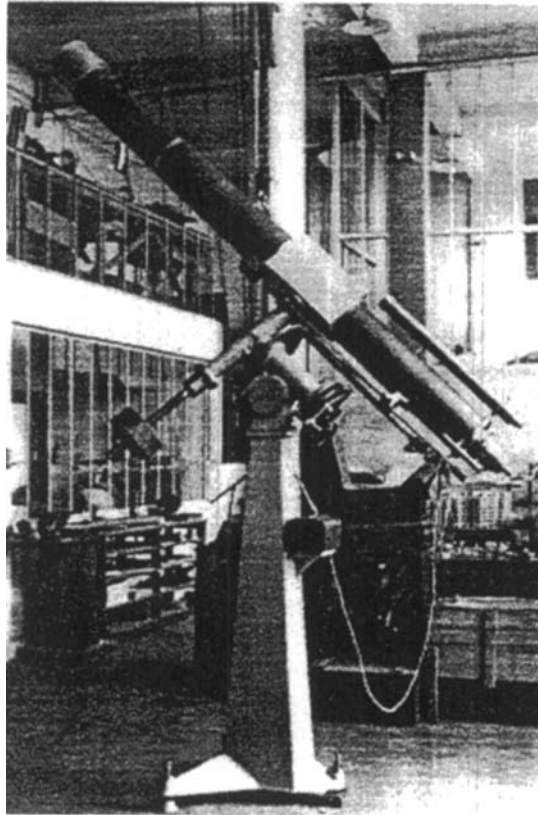


Figure 1 200-mm refractor of Skopje University.

of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; in 1958 the department became the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Skopje University was organized in 1949; since 1969 it has been called St Cyril and Mythodius University.

The Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics of the Skopje Philosophical Faculty took a great interest in the development of astronomy. The major contribution was that of the Chair of Physics, Marin Katalinic (1887–1959), who, in 1953–1955 also held the Skopje University Rectorship. Katalinic was very active: thanks to him two students (Kovi Mioshevic and Pascal Sotirovski) went to Meudon to study astronomy. In 1955 he ordered from the French company Secretan a 200-mm refractor (see Figure 1) with Lyot filters for solar photography.

At that time, Katalinich enjoyed a close collaboration with Dr Georgi Nikolic, Colonel at the Geographical Institute of the Yugoslavian Army, who in 1952–53 lectured in astronomy to a number of groups of undergraduates. A number of papers in astronomy (in Esperanto?) were published in the *Newsletter of the Society of Physics and Mathematics of Macedonia* (Popovic, 1956). Pirofessor Katalinich initiated the construction in Skopje of an astronomical observatory where the newly

purchased instruments were to be deposited. After the relevant officials were appealed to repeatedly and favourable resolutions adopted, the construction started on top of the Zaichev Rid Mountain, right on the outskirts on the city. But the terrible 1963 earthquake at Skopje completely destroyed the unfinished building. That was the end of the epoch of pioneering astronomy in Skopje, and 30 years were to pass before any new initiatives were taken.

Meanwhile amateur astronomy kept developing. In 1972 the city of Skopje was awarded an object of importance: a planetarium equipped with a Zeiss apparatus was built as a gift from the governments of the Soviet Union and Algeria. Each year the planetarium is visited by more than 5000 students, and has become the favourite place for amateur astronomers to contact each other. In the framework of the "Science to the Young" programme, the Olympics in astronomy for pupils of secondary and higher secondary schools are held annually at regional and republican levels. The *handbook in astronomy* by Gere Tsenev (Cenve, 1986) was published in 1986.

Since 1986 new attempts at raising the profile of astronomy in the Republic of Macedonia have been made. For a start a half-year course in astronomy and astrophysics taught in the framework of the "2 + 2" system has been introduced in the Institute for Physics of the Skopje Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. The secondary education reform project has suggested the introduction of astronomy as a non-compulsory subject.

In 1995 the annual *Astronomical Almanac* was started. The almanac contains, together with astronomical tables, articles on actual problems of astronomy.

In 1996 the Astronomical Society of Macedonia was created, serving professional and amateur astronomers and aimed at the development of astronomy as a science and an important social discipline. Apart from the Society, two regional societies also exist: that of Bitolsk (created in 1996), and that of Skopje (created in 1998). All the societies are active, organizing different workshops and schools and expeditions for amateur astronomers.

Macedonian astronomers actively collaborate with astronomers from neighbouring countries: the United Republic of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. The Astronomical Society of Macedonia is an associate member of the Euro-Asian Astronomical Society that has its headquarters in Moscow. In 1998 Macedonia was adopted into the International Astronomical Union.

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