

ALEXANDER BOZHINOV'S CREATIVE WORKS AS WAR CORRESPONDENT AND CONTRIBUTOR TO OTECHESTVO MAGAZINE

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Abstract: *World War I (1914-1918) is the third war fought from the beginning of the XXth century in which Bulgarian people participate in order to achieve their national unification. The Ministry of War of the Tsardom of Bulgaria takes good care of a better coverage of the military operations by using the advances in technique and technology at the time. As the war photographers are not always able to reach the front line and cover the key moments in the operations of the Bulgarian army, war painters are also mobilized. Among them is the "father" of the Bulgarian caricature Alexander Bozhinov who is also sent to the front. The present article represents his war works published in Otechestvo magazine during World War I.*

Keywords: *World War I, War Artists, Paintings, Propaganda*

ТВОРЧЕСТВОТО НА АЛЕКСАНДЪР БОЖИНОВ КАТО ВОЕНЕН КОРЕСПОНДЕНТ И СЪТРУДНИК НА СПИСАНИЕ „ОТЕЧЕСТВО”

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Introduction

On 1 October 1915 by issuing a Manifesto to the Bulgarian Nation (Anonymous, 1915a: p. 1) and Active Duty Armed Forces Order № 5 (Anonymous, 1915b: pp. 1-2), Bulgaria declared war on Serbia. In that way the Tsardom of Bulgaria committed to the Central Powers and that was the beginning of its involvement into World War I (Krasteva, 2021).

In his memoirs Alexander Bozhinov acknowledged that the Ministry of War constituted the position of a "War artist" to the headquarters of the divisions immediately after Bulgaria intervened in World War I. At the time of the First and Second Balkan Wars, Bulgarian artists and photographers were not mobilized to cover the war operations. During 1912-1913, Bulgarian creative artists were fighting at the front line. In 1915 Bulgaria intervened a third armed conflict – World War I, hoping to achieve its national and territorial unification. Due to the wars fought in the period of 1912-1913, Bulgarian people were devastated and enfeebled. In order to motivate them and make them participate in the global armed conflict, Vasil Radoslavov's government took measures to intensify the

nationalist propaganda. Publications of war photographs and war paintings were as well among the means used for raising the morale of the Bulgarian army.

Materials and Methods

The author sets himself the task of studying the activities of cartoonist Alexander Bozhinov as a military correspondent. At the moment, there are no published sources in this direction.

As a result of in-depth work with the Bulgarian periodical press from the beginning of the 20th century, evidence was found of Bozhinov's active correspondent activity in the magazine "Otechestvo".

The following complex of methods was applied: systematization and analysis of published information sources, synthesis of the received information.

Results

Alexander Bozhinov is deeply connected with war as a phenomenon in international relations. He was born on February 24, 1878, on the eve of the restoration of Bulgarian statehood. His early childhood was marked by the Serbo-Bulgarian war (1885), and his most fruitful creative period was overshadowed by the mobilization in the period 1912 - 1918.

During the two Balkan wars, the cartoonist was a military medic. During the two Balkan wars, the cartoonist was a military medic. In the First World War, the role of artists was rethought by the top military leadership. Alexander Bozhinov was appointed as war artist at the headquarters of the First Sofia Division. For three months – October, November and December 1915, he travelled with the supply train of the division through the territories of former Serbia (now Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Kosovo, Republic of Serbia). He was entrusted not only with the artistic depiction of the settlements and natural landmarks, but also with the photographing the territories through which the Bulgarian army were advancing. In December, Alexander Bozhinov fell seriously ill and returned to Sofia. After his recovery, he was appointed at the editor's office of the literary and art magazine Otechestvo to administer the pictorial section of the war edition (Bozhinov, 2017).

Otechestvo magazine was a literary and art edition of the Ministry of War. During World War I it was publishing poems, stories, paintings and photographs on the subject of war. For five years (from 15 July 1914 to 13 October 1918), circulation varied from 1,500 to 2,200 copies (Ivanchev, 1966). The military edition was printed in the Royal Court Printing-press and was consistent with the political interests of the official Bulgarian authorities.

Among the names of the contributors to Otechestvo magazine are distinguished authors such as: Ivan Vazov, Stoyan Mihaylovski, Kiril Hristov, Elin Pelin, Anton Strashimirov, Dobri Nemirov, Yordan Yovkov, Nikolay Raynov, Stiliyan Chilinguirov, Hristo Borina, Atanas Ishirkov, Mihail Madzharov, Alexander Teodorov – Balan, Andrei Protich, Dimitar Podvarzachov, Rayko Aleksiev, Petar Morozov, Vladimir Dimitrov – Maystora, Alexander Bozhinov, etc.

Alexander Bozhinov's own publications can be traced through the pages of Otechestvo magazine from January 1916 to May 1918. Bozhinov's first publication after his official appointment to the editor's office of Otechestvo magazine was a caricature of the Bulgarian soldiers' winter uniform (APPENDIX 1). The caricatures were drawn at the front line in November 1915 while Bozhinov was residing in the vicinity of the village of Guilyane (now the town of Gnilyane, the Republic of Kosovo) (Bozhinov, 1916e: p. 11). As a result of the conducted military operations, Bulgaria gained an advantage over Serbia and captured the territory of Kosovo.

The purpose of the presented images is to reveal the ongoing propaganda in favor of Bulgarian participation in the First World War. The problems in the Headquarters of the Bulgarian Army are significant and Bozhinov tries to point them out in an accessible and eloquent way. With his mastery, he directs his readers to reflect on the critical situation.

After the failure in the two Balkan wars, Bulgaria did not have enough money to provide warm clothing for all the soldiers.

While the First Sofia Division was still deployed at the vicinities of Gnilyane, Alexander Bozhilov depicted Bulgarian soldiers at Christmas in one of his pencil drawings (APPENDIX 2) (Bozhinov, 1916c: p. 7).

This cartoon has a special symbolic meaning. Immediately after the outbreak of the first world military conflict, soldiers subject to mobilization were assured that they were defending a worthy cause and would be with their families by Christmas.

The father of the Bulgarian political cartoon successfully shows the problems of the following 1915. A few months after Bulgaria joined the Central Powers, men of active age were placed in extremely difficult conditions at the front. It also becomes clear that there is no chance of them going home to their loved ones for Christmas.

This parallel between the same type of propaganda messages sent to the Eastern and Western fronts of the First World War exposes the impasse in which all the belligerents find themselves. For the Bulgarian army, the situation is further complicated, because the financial resources in the state treasury are insufficient.

Undoubtedly, Alexander Bozhinov understands the problems at the front and successfully illuminates them in front of the public with his creativity. On the one hand, he does not support armed conflict as a means of resolving international conflicts. On the other hand, as a direct participant in the wars for the unification of the Bulgarian people, he knows well the difficulties that the mobilized soldiers have to deal with. These

circumstances make Bozhinov an inconvenient person for conducting a successful national propaganda campaign in favor of the war.

In order not to be accused of working against Bulgarian national interests, the cartoonist does not always and at all costs strive to point out the problems in the military command. In this sense, it can be summarized:

As a war correspondent during World War I, Alexander Bozhinov mapped the important settlements, which had a key role in planning the Bulgarian attacks. Among them can be distinguished places such as Lebane (now the town of Lebane, the Republic of Serbia), where the river Yablanitsa joins with the river Shumanska. Bozhinov made a pencil drawing of the Bulgarian bivouac, erected near Lebane during the winter of 1915 (APPENDIX 3) (Bozhinov, 1916b: p. 14).

With his creative works, the father of the Bulgarian caricature relieved the monotony of the daily routine of Bulgarian soldiers. He represented in a humorous way their Entente opponents. Bozhinov was subtle in capturing the moods in Bulgarian troops and drew a caricature of the Montenegrin king Nicholas and the Serbian king Petar (Bozhinov, 1916d: p. 16). The Bulgarians felt hatred towards both the monarchs because during the war conflicts from 1912-1913 they turned from Bulgarian allies against the Ottoman Empire into their chief opponents.

The caricatures representing the opponents from the Entente, are a key element of Alexander Bozhinov's portfolio. He depicted in a humorous way the British army, which experienced some impediments in the first stage of World War I (Bozhinov, 1916f (26-27): p. 16).

Besides his pencil drawings from the front line and the witty caricatures, Alexander Bozhinov's own poems also contributed to raising the Bulgarians' fighting spirit. As an illustration, his short poem "At the French Front Line", published in the beginning of March 1916 was in unison with the actual events at the Western Front (Bozhinov, 1916a (8-9): p. 16).

In 1917, Alexander Bozhinov was not actively publishing his own pieces of art, as he was receiving and processing materials from witnesses of the war operations. In his memoirs, he tells how in the editor's office of Otechestvo magazine all day long "visitors were coming and going, bringing materials for the editions – photos of the battlegrounds, poems and stories with war plots, entire volumes of manuscripts, prose and poetry, and they all pleaded their works to be quickly revised and be published as soon as possible... without any corrections and abridgement. Thus, in the office was established certain order - in the mornings we worked there and in the afternoons one of us stayed on duty to receive the visitors. The rest of the contributors at the editorial office were working at home" (Bozhinov, 2017).

During the last year of the battles – 1918, the most prominent author's article by Alexander Bozhinov was "The Art Exhibition of the First Army". It re-created the atmosphere of the charity exhibition at the Military Club in Sofia, organized by the war artists who had served in the First Army. The income from the sales of the art works was

donated to the fund for the orphans of the Bulgarian soldiers who died in the war. Alexander Bozhinov showed some of the significant art and sculpture works, while expressing his expectations of the war to be over soon and the talented masters to have the opportunity to work in more creative environment (Bozhinov, 1918).

Conclusions and summary

Alexander Bozhinov's employment at the editor's office of Otechestvo military magazine and his close relationships with some prominent writers and artists from that epoch, had a beneficial influence on his creative works after the end of World War I.

Otechestvo magazine was widely popular among the soldiers due to the illustrative materials. The graphic representation of strategic war objectives helped the high level of illiteracy among mobilized people to be overcome. At the same time, the paintings, representing territories populated with Bulgarian population, increased the fighting spirit of our army.

Alexander Bozhinov's work in the editorial office of the military magazine "Fatherland" and close contacts with prominent writers and artists of the era had a favorable effect on his work after the end of the First World War.

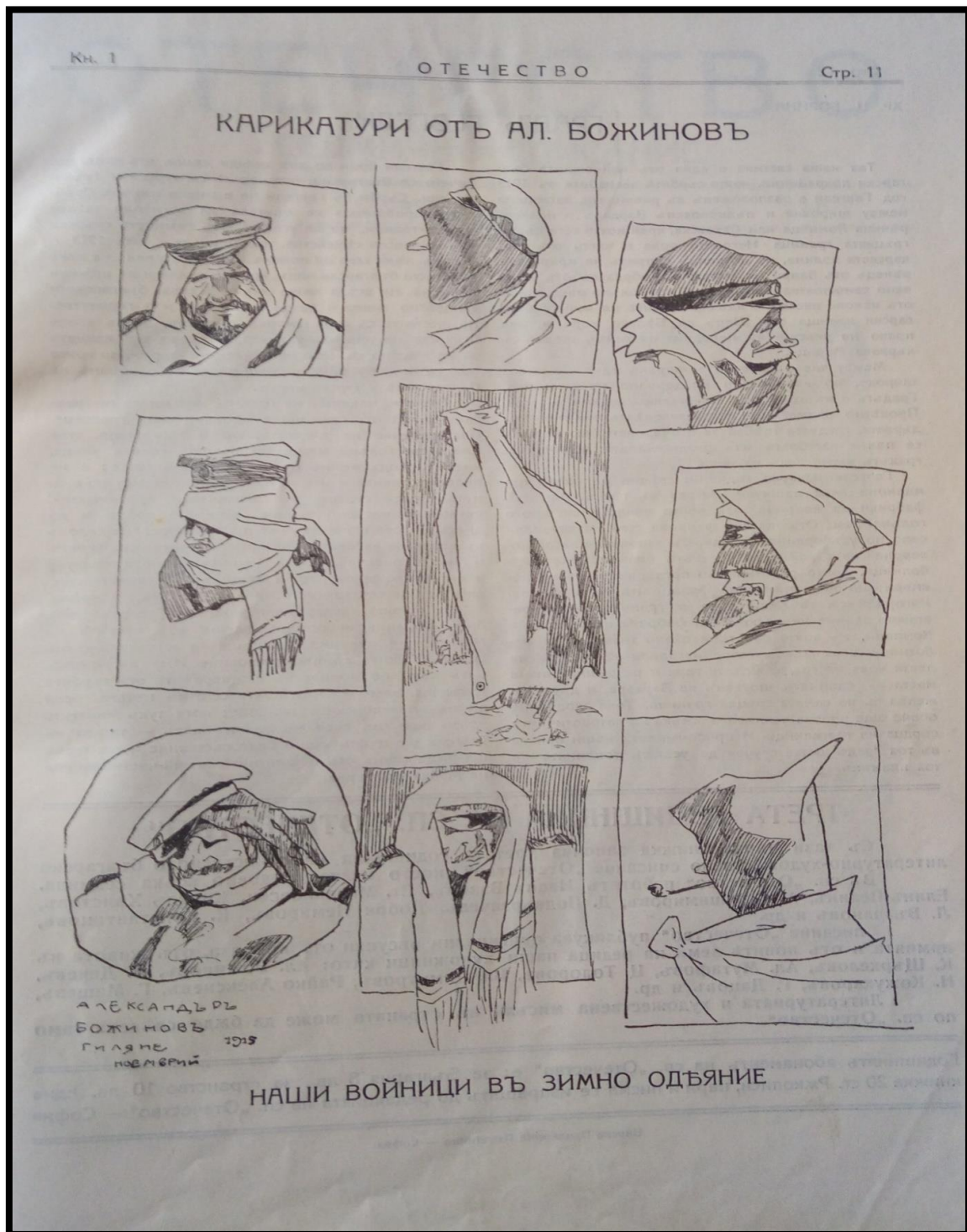
In his mature period, Bozhinov ridiculed the unsuccessful Bulgarian foreign policy. His advanced age did not allow him to observe the everyday problems of the soldiers, and yet he did not remain a silent witness to the events of 1941 to 1944.

Acknowledgement

The research is part of a research project "Between the comic and the tragic - Alexander Bozhinov (cartoonist, military photographer and writer)" under Contract № KP-06-H40 / 2 of 10.12.2019 funded on the basis of a competition for basic research, Humanities from the Fund „Research”.

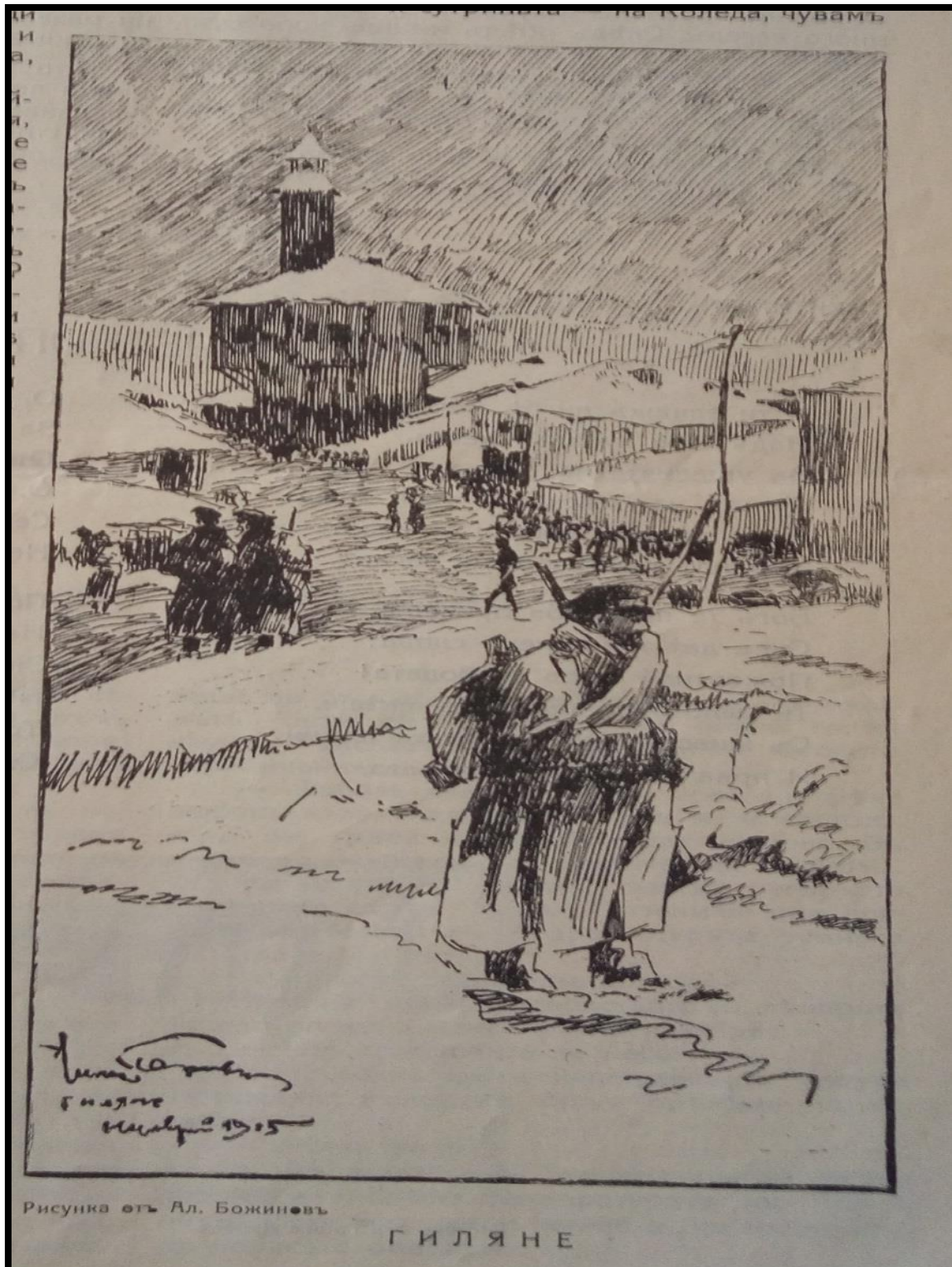
APPENDIX 1

Alexander Bozhinov's caricature, representing Bulgarian soldiers in their winter uniform, November 1915.



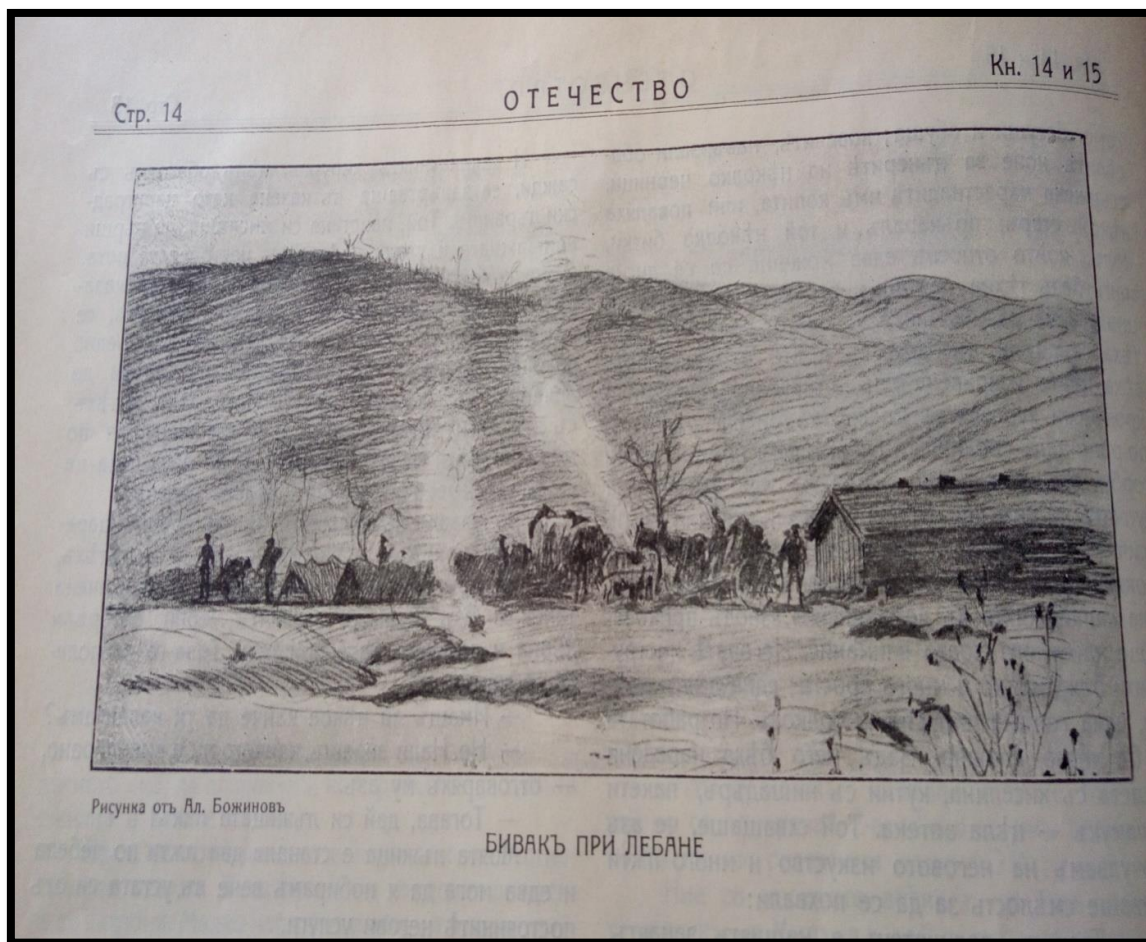
APPENDIX 2

Bulgarian army at Guilyane in December 1915.



APPENDIX 3

Bivouac at Lebane; Alexander Bozhinov's drawing, 1915 .



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Received: 02 December 2022
Accepted: 29 August 2023
Published: 08 December 2023
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55630/KINJ.2023.090209>

Abstract and keywords in Bulgarian

Резюме: Първата световна война (1914-1918) е трета война за национално обединение на българския народ от началото на XX век. Министерството на войната в Царство България полага грижи за по-доброто документиране на бойните действия в периодичния печат като използва напредъка на техниката и технологиите. Тъй като военните фотографии не могат винаги да достигнат до „първа линия“ и да отразяват ключовите моменти от сраженията на българската войска, са мобилизирани и военни художници. Сред тях, на фронта е и бащата на българската карикатура – Александър Божинов. Настоящата статия представя неговото военно творчество, публикувано в списание „Отечество“ по време на Първата световна война.

Ключови думи: Първа световна война, военни художници, картини, пропаганда.

KIN Journal, 2023, Volume 09, Issue 2

Science Series Cultural and Historical Heritage: Preservation, Presentation, Digitalization

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Published by *Издание на*

Institute of Mathematics and Informatics

Институт по математика и

at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

информатика при Българска академия на

Sofia, Bulgaria

науките, София, България

<http://www.math.bas.bg/vt/kin/>

ISSN: 2367-8038