

The Aromânians: an ethnos and language with a 2000-year history

NIKOLAI KYURKCHIEV

Abstract

The Aromânians are one of the small ethnic groups in Bulgaria: an ancient Balkan people which, as a result of migration and the vicissitudes of history,¹ dispersed across the Balkan Peninsula, creating diasporas in Macedonia, Greece, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. In the course of migration, the Aromânians preserved traditional trades, the majority employed in nomadic sheep and horse breeding, which eventually evolved into transhumant and Alpine. Another part practiced trade, crafts, industry and inn-keeping. All are Eastern Orthodox Christians. The Romanian origin of the Aromânian language is undisputed and universally acknowledged; however, scholars are divided over the question of the origins of the Aromânians. The existing theories may be classified in two groups: the first group, the Aromânians are descended from Roman colonists (legionnaires, veterans, administration) from the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire; the second holds that they are Thracians, Illyrians, Paeonians, Epirotes and other Balkan peoples Romanized during the military campaign of the Roman consul, Paullus Aemilius, in 168 B.C.E., who routed the Macedonian phalanxes of the last Macedonian king, Perseus, in the battle at Pydna. Scholars also acknowledge another undisputable fact; at the time the Aromânians first attracted academic interest, in the late 18th and early 19th century, they were a relatively compact group in the mountainous regions of present-day northwestern Greece, southwestern Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus. and southeastern Albania.

1. Historical evidence on Aromânians and Aromânian migrations up to 1878

The German historians, Gustav Weigand and Johann Thunmann, as well as the Romanians, Theodor Capidan and Nicolae Jorga, prove that the

Aromânians are descendants of Romanized Thracians, Illyrians, Paeonians, Epirotes and Thessalians. On 22 June, 168 B.C.E., the Roman legions commanded by Paullus Aemilius won the crucial battle against King Perseus, the last Macedonian ruler, marking the beginning of Romanization of the Balkans, which lasted until the arrival of the Slavs in the 5th and 6th centuries.

The Aromânians originally appeared in what is now northern Greece, southern Albania and Macedonia. In 1774 Johann Thunmann wrote:

None of the peoples of Europe is as little known, in terms of their history and modern language, in the West European countries as the Armânians and the Albanians. And these are no ordinary peoples, peoples that are ancient and important, which every historian ought to know, whose history could fill a gap in the ancient and more recent history of Europe. Today they do not have a significant role; they are peoples deprived of freedom, peoples of ill fortune, and the historian is often as unfair as any person who underrates those who are unfortunate. (n.p., n.d.)

According to an outstanding expert on the Macedonian question, Vassil Kânchov (1970), after the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans, the larger settlements of the Aromânians were: Mecovo in Greece, Nikulica, a town on the Devol River at the northern foot of Grammos, while to the south of this mountain, Aromânian centers such as Linotipi, Vurteni and Fusa flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the 17th century, the Aromânian metropolis, Moschopolis, flowered as an industrial, cultural and trade center, not only as a city but an industrial region in Southern Albania. The city itself had twenty churches and an Academy of Sciences. By the beginning of the 18th century, Moschopolis had a population of 60,000 and was the second largest, most important city on the Balkan Peninsula after Constantinople. At that time, the population of Athens was 25,000, of Belgrade, 5,000. A publishing house was founded in Moschopolis around the mid-18th century. The city's academy and schools used three languages: Greek, Aromânian and Albanian.

This city-state's blossoming culture and crafts, as well as the excellent organization of the 14 *esnaf* or guilds and its spiritual culture and economic structure, advanced social activities to an exceptional level, evidenced by the existence of homes for orphans and elderly people: this in the Balkans in the 17th and 18th centuries. Yet just as every center whose high material culture attracts the attention of other peoples, the Aromânian metropolis was doomed. The Turks and Arnauts, led by Ali Pasha of Janina, looted and destroyed Moschopolis in 1789.

The Aromânians dispersed across Macedonian towns and regions, where the Bulgarians welcomed them as their brethren and offered hospitality. Numerous historians have concluded that the Aromânians are a tough, hardy ethnicity who did not wish to convert to Islam; on 22 May, 1905, Sultan Abdul Hamid signed an *irade* or decree whereby the Aromânians were recognized as a separate ethnic community within the Ottoman Empire.

The first reliable evidence about the settlement of Aromânians in Bulgaria dates from the 19th century. The Aromânians came from the highlands of Epirus, Thessaly, Southwestern Macedonia and South-eastern Albania (the mountains of Epiros, Pindus and Grammos, and their extensions to the west and east) where in the 17th and 18th centuries, they created wealthy urban centers (Moschopolis, Linotipi, Vurteni, Fusa, Grammosti, Mecovo, Vlachoklissoura, etc.), with thriving trade based on well-developed livestock breeding (nomadic and transhumant), crafts and cartage. Their migration from those lands was due to various economic (increased number of cattle, liberalized trade between the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in the early 18th century, impeded commerce with Venice in the mid-18th century, etc.) and political reasons (the anarchy in the Ottoman Empire from the second half of the 18th to the early 19th century, arbitrary acts of Muslim Albanians, as well as the despotic rule of Ali Pasha Tepelene, Lion of Janina, etc.). The populace of ruined Moschopolis, Nikulica, Linotipi and other centers emigrated to towns in the Austrian Empire, as well as to present-day Greece, Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria (Jireček 1978, 489–491, 605; Kânchov 1970: vol. 1, 46–487: vol. 2, 29–195, 400–403; Weigand 1899: 8–288; Weigand 1998: 84–88: 98, 101; Weigand 1907: 50–58; Capidan 1926: 60–62; Djuvara 1989: 97–105; Peyfuss 1994: 15–16).

The earliest Aromânian colonies in Bulgaria were in the towns of Melnik, Gorna Djoumaya (now Blagoevgrad), Doupnitsa, Tatar Pazardjik (now Pazardjik), Plovdiv, Asenovgrad, Peshtera, and Stara Zagora. Aromânians from Moschopolis, as well as from Castagna and Neveska, settled in Peshtera. Weigand believes that Aromânian colonies were also established in Etropole, Panagyurishte, Teteven, Kotel. This first wave was of sedentary urban residents. Around the mid-19th century, it was followed by another from Korce, Seres, from Aromânian villages around Bitolya, Gopesh, Molovishte, Magarevo; in Nevrokop (now Gotse Delchev), Razlog, Sofia, Samokov. (Zahariev 1870: 19–27; Jireček 1899: 137–138; Kânchov 1970: vol. 1, 46, 100, 165, 235; Ilkov 1903: 113; Ishirkov 1914: 3; Medzhediev 1969: 42; Popov 1973: 82–83; Genchev 1981: 64–67, 100; 1907: 50–58; Bandu 1992).

Along with urban population, nomadic Aromânian sheep and horse breeders also started migrating in the late 18th and early 19th century, mainly from the Grammos and, in more limited numbers, from the Pindus mountains. They first settled in Thessaly and Macedonia, from where separate groups moved into the Eastern Balkans around the mid-19th century and settled in Maleshevo, Belassitsa, and along the lower Strouma and Mesta rivers, from where separate groups eventually reached the mountain pastures of Pirin, Rila and Western Rhodopi; some advanced to the heart of Sredna Gora Mountain, and on to the plains at the foot of the southern slopes of the Central Balkan Range (Kânchov 1970: vol. 1, 108–171; Mladebov 199: 19–20; Rakshieva 1996: 54–55; Weigand 1907: 50. Capidan 1926: 62–67).

The new settlers adapted rapidly, integrating into economic, social and everyday life in the Bulgarian lands. This presupposed the development of particular stereotypes of relations with the Bulgarian population and of mechanisms safeguarding their own identity. Urban Aromânians were employed in trade, inn-keeping and crafts; some were wealthy, important and highly respected citizens. The Bulgarians were tolerant, calling them *Tsintsars* (singular: *Tsintsar*, plural: *Tsintsari*) because of their language and certain group character traits.² Relations between Bulgarians and urban Aromânians were also influenced by when they settled, the Bulgarian National Revival, characterized by a strong movement for modern Bulgarian education, ecclesiastical and political independence.

The majority of the newcomers had Greek education, a prerequisite for conflict; still there was actual conflict of interests in only some towns. In population centers with small Aromânian colonies, there were no powerful pro-Greek parties, and Aromânians were comparatively fast at overcoming Hellenism, learning Bulgarian, acquiring a Bulgarian education and, as a result of intermarriage, were easily Bulgarized, for example, in Stara Zagora, Teteven, Kotel and elsewhere (Mladenov 1995: 19). The situation was different in towns with larger Aromânian colonies, where there were strong pro-Greek parties supported by a Greek population. Even though they learned Bulgarian and married Bulgarians, some became devout supporters of Hellenism and the pro-Greek party, causing some acute conflicts between the Bulgarians and pro-Greek Aromânians in Plovdiv, Tatar Pazardjik, Peshtera, Melnik, Nevrokop and elsewhere.

Things were somewhat different for Aromânian nomadic herders, the Bulgarians calling them by different names: Vlachs, Kutso-Vlachs, Karakachans.³ They remained virtual strangers, lived in isolation within their own endogamous community adhering to their traditional laws and language, organized in kinship-based shepherd communities (*filkari*, *taifa*) headed by the wealthiest, most enterprising and authoritative member,

called *chelnik* or *kehaya*, their representative in contacts with the authorities in the Ottoman Empire and in business with the local population. Encounters with Bulgarians were confined to the period of transhumance between the mountain pastures in summer and the Aegean in winter, caravans of nomadic shepherds arousing well-intended curiosity among the Bulgarians.

2. Changes in the life of Aromânians in Bulgaria after 1878

After the 1878 Liberation, important changes took place in the life of the Aromânians in Bulgaria. First, their community was enlarged by a new wave of migration in the late 19th and early 20th century, associated with milestone events in Bulgarian history: the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878); the Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia (1885); the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising (1903); the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). This wave was made up of urban and nomadic Aromânians from Macedonia: Bitolya, Krushevo, Kochani, Pehchevo and their vicinities, as well as from the area of Xanthi and Dhidhimotikhon, the newcomers settling in population centers and areas already populated by Aromânians.

Second, the structure of their livelihood changed. In the towns; former grocers, inn-keepers and craftsmen went on to become merchants, industrialists and hotel proprietors. Some settled in northwestern Bulgarian, too: Pleven, Berkovitsa, Vratsa and elsewhere. The community also branched out into new professions such as medicine, architecture and engineering. The changes in the political map of the Balkans as a result of the national liberation movements and wars compelled the Aromânian herders to gradually limit their movement to boundaries of the newly created Balkan states or to regions still associated with the erstwhile Ottoman Empire. The obstacles posed by the borders to free movement between seasonal pastures, the complicated customs procedures and the intensive demographic changes (emigration of the Muslim population), led to the establishment of permanent places of residence. This process involved purchase of land and reorientation towards commerce and timbering; however, land purchase did not yet entail conversion to agriculture. In most cases, the land was leased. At this first stage, Aromânians settled in towns and villages in the Pirin, Rila, and western and northern slopes of the Rhodopi Mountains, close to the areas where they usually spent summer with their herds. According to G. Weigand, Aromânian shepherd families from the Rhodopi and Rila Mountains settled in some villages around Vratsa and Pleven, where they had occasionally spent winter.

Notwithstanding the nascent process of settlement, the majority of Aromânian herders continued to live by nomadic and transhumant sheep- and horse-breeding, supplemented by cartage and seasonal work during the harvest. The purchase of pastures resulted in the establishment of permanent summer hut villages. Along with the Western Rhodopi, Rila and Pirin, Aromânian shepherd groups also lived around Koprivshitsa in the Balkan Range: Mount Sredna Gora, around Zlatitsa, Pirdop and Godech, and seldom crossed Mount Vitosha.

Third, part of the urban residents in the new wave of Aromânian migration had Romanian education, a result of the Aromânian national revival based on the self-awareness of Romance origins, which distinguished Aromânians from the Greeks and the Bulgarians, affiliating them with the Romanians. With active support of the Romania, Romanian schools opened in Gorna Djoumaya and Sofia (in 1896). An Aromânian association (*Unire*) registered officially in Sofia in 1895, with the purpose of developing Aromânian education and culture (Njagulov 1995: 68; Ghiulamila 1928: 28; Hristu 1931: 86; Bandu 1992).

Emigration of Aromânians to Romania started in 1928/1929 and lasted until 1940. The reasons were both economic and political: the ongoing afforestation of Bulgarian mountains, which limited opportunities for free grazing of sheep and horses, the shrinking land market, the arbitrary acts of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO)⁴ in Pirin Macedonia (especially forcible fund-raising for the organization). Romanian propaganda, designed to turn Southern Dobroudja (ceded to Romania after World War I) into “Romanian land,” also played a role.

3. Organizations, education, religion

Emigration left permanent marks on the Aromânian community in Bulgaria, the community decreasing tangibly. Clans were divided; one part resettled in Romania, the other remained in Bulgaria. The break-up of kinship networks had the strongest impact on the inner world of Aromânians who remained in Bulgaria.

The activity of Romanian schools and Aromânian organizations intensified in the 1920s. financial and political support from Romania playing a major role; the Romanian legation in Sofia was directly in charge of the Romanian schools in Bulgaria. The school in Gorna Djoumaya remained primary, but that in Sofia became a secondary school in 1924 and, ten years later, a high school. Later, a Romanian Institute was established in Sofia and went on to become a center of promulgation of

Romanian culture and education and of the unification of Romanians in Bulgaria. To intensify the spiritual bonds with “the motherland” — Romania — a Romanian church was built in Sofia in 1923. Romanian priests also conducted services at the Aromânian church in Gorna Djoumaya, consecrated in 1906. Regardless of Romanianization, the Romanian Institute and Lyceum in Sofia played important parts in Aromânian self-identity. Romanian education introduced the Aromânians to European culture, including Romanian literature on their origins, language and lifestyle, leading to an increasingly manifested aspiration to uphold Aromânian identity, to preserve the Aromânian language, to learn and reproduce Aromânian traditions and customs. This aspiration also constituted one aspect of the Aromânian Youth Association, established in 1923. Despite Romania’s political ambitions, the Sofia Lyceum and church continued to cater foremost for the Bulgarian Aromânian community until 1948, when the Lyceum was closed and the Aromânian organizations were disbanded. Until 1960, the Aromânians were identified in their ID cards as “Vlachs” and, subsequently, as “Bulgarians.”

Christianity is an important aspect of Aromânian self-identification: “We were born on the road and died on the road, but we live here and are very old Christians” (Kirilova 1998: 25). In proof, they cite the custom of tattooing crosses on the foreheads and hands of the women in nomadic shepherd communities as a sign of faith, origin and identity. The Aromânians are devout; belief in God is the ideological framework of the rational experience of Aromânian nomadic herders, the life and calendar ritual cycle of their traditional culture reflecting knowledge of a way of life in harmony with the laws of nature, the attainment of harmony and the adjustment of human activities to the natural rhythms on the biological, solar and lunar planes.

Tsintsar-Aromânians were received very well in Sofia, and the colony rapidly grew to 300 families, after the new wave of refugees following the suppression of the Ilinden Uprising (1903). This year was especially tragic for Aromânians from Krushevo, who, together with Tsintsars and Miyaks,⁵ declared the Republic of Krushevo. After the uprising was quelled, many Aromânians fled their burned homes and brought their families to Sofia. The participation of Tsintsars in the construction of Sofia’s landmark buildings is undisputed, the Central Market Hall (designed by architect Naoum Torbov), in perfect harmony with the Central Bath (by Petko Momchilov), the mosque designed by the Turkish architect, Hadji Mimar Sinan, the Synagogue and the Romanian Orthodox Church (by Friedrich Grunnanger of Vienna), the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (by Pomerantsev), and others.

4. The Aromânian language and its distinctive grammatical features

Aromânian is a Romance language, one of the oldest in the Balkans, spoken and written by ethnic Aromânians populating different parts of Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Greece, Albania and Serbia, and by emigrants in countries such as Germany, France, Italy, the US, Canada and Australia.

In linguistic terms, Aromânian is close to Romanian both languages emerged and developed from Latin, on one hand; on the other, Aromânian differs significantly from Romanian at the phonetic, lexical, morphological, dialect and syntactic levels. In addition to its Latin roots, Aromânian has been strongly influenced by Greek as a result of the direct contact over the centuries, distinguishing its lexical stock from Romanian. Also noteworthy is that the language is a unique symbiosis of the two classical languages: Latin and Ancient Greek. In fact, Aromânian is the neo-Latin language spoken in the Balkans today, and only Greek is older. Aromânian abounds in Turkish, Albanian, Italian and Slavic loan words, resulting from contacts, an important condition for the wealth of this language and a main reason for the emergence of the dialects (from Kroushovo, Grammos, Farshir, Epirus, Pindus, etc.) of the different compact ethnic Aromânian communities. Ancient origins of Aromânian have also been established by studies: (a) the first Aromânian grammar, *Gramatică aromană ică macedonovlahă*, by Mikhail Boyadji, was published in Roman script in Vienna in 1813; (b) the first Bulgarian grammar was written by Neofit Rilski in 1835; (c) Cyrillic was the official alphabet in Romania until 1848.

The Aromânian language textbook, *Limba Armânjlor* by N. Kyurkchiev, published in Sofia in 1996, is based on the dialect spoken in the town of Krushevo, southwestern Macedonia, whose people mostly came from the famous Aromânian metropolis Moschopolis (now in Albania) destroyed in 1789, the Krushevo dialect surviving virtually intact for the past centuries. The textbook draws on the following sources: *Etymological Dictionary of Aromânian Dialects* by Professor Tache Papahagi (1963); *Gramatică armânească: simplă și practică* by Professor Yanku Yanakievski; *Gramatică aromană ică macedonovlahă* by Mihail Boyadji and *Latin-Bulgarian Dictionary* by Mihail Vojnov and Alexander Milev (1990). Aromânian has standard spelling, approved by the congresses of Aromânian language, literature, history and culture held in Freiburg, Germany, in 1984, 1986, 1987 and 1988. The contemporary orthography has been proposed and approved by Aromânian linguists, historians and ethnographers, most notably Tiberius Kunja of Syracuse University, New York, Aureliu Ciofecu of Florida State University, Prof. Dr. Vasile Barba

from the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg, President of the World League of Aromânians, and Nicolae Saramandu, a Romance linguist from the University of Bucharest. The Aromânian language is currently taught at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Aromânian phonetics is similar to Italian and Romanian. The vowel *â* sounds like the jer-vowel *Ѣ* in Bulgarian. The vowel *Y* is aspirated and close to the Bulgarian consonant *X*. In Aromânian, the following sounds and combination of sounds are specific and typical: *ce, ci* [tshe, tshi], for example, *celnic* 'leader', *cicior* 'step', 'foot'; *che, chi* [khe, khi], for example, *cheptu* 'chest', *chicută* 'drop'; *ghe, ghi*, for example, *ghen* 'gender', 'sex' *ghilimele* 'inverted commas'; *dz — dzinire* 'son-in-law'; *ge, gi* [dzhe, dzhi] *genitiv* 'genitive', *gione* 'youth', 'hero'; *-ts* [ts] — *tsinâ* 'supper'; *sh — shopot* 'tap', 'spring'. In words of Greek origin, *th* and *dh* are pronounced as in the Greek dental consonants *theta* and *delta*. The clusters *nj* and *lj* are palatalized. The diphthongs are represented as *ea, oa, ua* and *ia*. There are two kinds of stress in Aromânian: variable free and fixed, found in words with homophonous grammatical forms.

There are nine parts of speech in Aromânian morphology: (a) grammatically changeable: article, noun, adjective, pronoun, verb; and (b) grammatically unchangeable: adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection. The article is either after or before the noun and, depending on the position, is definite or indefinite. The definite article is in post-position and enclitic. The indefinite article is *nu* for the masculine and neuter singular, and *unâ* for the feminine singular. The article has no form for the plural, this grammatical function materialized by the plural form of nouns. The indefinite article is in pre-position, before the noun. Adjectives are qualitative and attributive (demonstrative, possessive, interrogative, indefinite and numeral); they agree with the noun in gender and number. There are adjectives with four, three, two and single forms, with three degrees of comparison: positive, comparative and superlative. Aromânian has six types of pronouns: personal, demonstrative, possessive, relative, interrogative and indefinite. Aromânian also has the grammatical categories of gender (masculine, feminine and neuter), person (first, second and third person), number (singular and plural) and five cases: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative and vocative, which means that Aromânian is a synthetic language.

There are four verb conjugations and seven moods: four with personal verbal forms: arrative or indicative, subjunctive, conditional and imperative; and three nominal: indefinite form, participle and descriptive mood. There are six tenses in Aromânian: present, past imperfect, past simple, present perfect, pluperfect and future. There are 23 irregular and three auxiliary verbs. Adverbs are classified as adverbs of place, time, manner,

quantity, confirmation and negation. There are two types of conjunctions: coordinates and subordinates.

In syntax, there are simple and complex sentences. Simple sentences are declarative, negative, interrogative, negative-interrogative and exclamatory. Complex sentences are: (a) complex compound, made up of two or more independent clauses, linked without a conjunction; (b) complex coordinated, consisting of two or more main clauses linked by coordinator conjunctions; (c) complex subordinate, consisting of one main and one or more subordinate clauses. A large number of subordinate clauses are linked by subordinate conjunctions, relative or interrogative pronouns. Word order is subject-verb-object (direct, indirect)-adverbial.

5. The Vlachs south of the Danube and their dialects

The existence of a Vlach population south of the Danube has been recorded by travellers, historians, geographers and linguists, this population believed to be immigrant rather than indigenous. To substantiate that Vlachs immigrated south of the Danube, many scholars cite the fact that most Vlach villages have Bulgarian names. In the Middle Ages, the term “Vlachs” referred to nomadic populations, irrespective of ethnic identity, who had particular obligations to the central government of the Byzantine or Ottoman Empire. A Vlach population south of the Danube was recorded by Felix Kanitz and Marin Drinov in the last quarter of the 19th century. Vlachs were on Bulgarian territory between the Danube and the Balkan Range in the Vidin eparchy, in Dobrich and along the central part of the rivers Vit, Iskâr and Ossâm (Drinov 1971: 326–327).

The Vlach population south of the Danube was studied thoroughly by the German linguist, Gustav Weigand. In 1905, he conducted a special field study in Bulgaria to identify Vlach villages and describe their language, one of the earliest studies on Vlachs south of the Danube. Weigand noted this population settled in the Bulgarian lands a hundred years ago and felt very well in their new home since they enjoyed the same rights as Bulgarians. The largest immigration wave was in the 1830s, when the Statute Organic, under which all males were subject to conscription, was introduced in Romania.

Also citing the 1900 census in the Principality of Bulgaria, the German scholar notes that 86,000 Vlachs were on record, of whom 11,708 (about 15%) were born north of the Danube, which meant they resettled south of the river in the second half of the 19th century (Weigand 1907: 104).

Today most scholars assume that emigration from the north to the south of the Danube started in the second half of the 18th century and

was intensive in the first half of the 19th century. The long and steady flow of emigration was due to both economic and political reasons: flight of groups of rural populations from feudal exploitation, especially during the Phanariot regime, as well as from conscription introduced in the Principality of Wallachia in 1831. Migrations continued throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries (especially to the Oryahovo region and Dobroudja).

There is evidence suggesting that part of the Danubian and Timok Vlachs have Bulgarian origins. One of the oral versions of their origin, popular within the group, confirms this. On the other hand, the Romanian versions uphold the thesis of their autochthonous origins on the territory south of the Danube even in the age of colonization by Roman Emperor Trajan in the 2nd century C.E., when his legions conquered and Romanized the Dacians and when Romanian ethnicity was formed. This Vlach version of their own descent was recorded by researchers from the Institute of Folklore in Bregovo and Gumzovo in 1994.

The language is the most clearly recognized distinctive feature of the community's identity. Most Vlachs from around Vidin and Oryahovo define it as "Vlach" in accordance with self-identification, and regard it as their mother tongue. The community cites the Vlach language as a cultural value inherited from ancestors, important in maintaining group integrity. Vlachs recognize their language is vernacular, neither literary nor official, and has not been taught at school. The Vlachs note the similarities with and differences from the Romanian language, and admit that some do not know the Romanian alphabet.

The Vlach dialect in all population centers is the main marker of self-differentiation, drawing the boundaries of the group in both ethno-cultural and territorial terms. Romanian is the standard of "purity" of the Vlach language. The frequent contacts with relatives, friends or business associates from across the Danube, as well as watching Romanian television and listening to Romanian radio, serve as a basis for comparison and a corrective of fluency. Many of the Vlachs are proud of their command of both spoken and written Romanian, a universally acknowledged marker of high literacy.

6. Aromânian self-identity and contemporary organizations

However, the Aromânians differ from the Vlachs, who settled in Bulgaria later, by both their origins and history, even though the two ethnonyms are frequently confused. Wedding customs and rituals are particularly rich in meaning as one of the most important events in the Aromânian

community, with a fixed place in the calendar, from *Petrovden* (St. Peter's Day, 29 June) to *Krâstovden* (Holy Cross Day, 14 September), adjusted to "a good and a bad time" to get married, depending on the lunar cycle. The major festivals are Christmas (a family holiday) in winter and *Petrovden* (St. Peter's Day, the community's holiday) in summer, with Easter and *Gergyovden* (St. George's Day) in between (marking the end of one and the beginning of the other semester, as well as the overlapping of the solar and lunar calendars). Along with the worship of God and Jesus Christ, the cults of the Holy Virgin and *St. Petka* are also very powerful.

The memory of the stages of their "dispersal across the world" has survived in the Aromânian folk mind. The first stage was ancient, after the defeat of King Perseus. The second overlaps with the anarchy in the Ottoman Empire, prompted, according to the Aromânian legends and songs, by confrontation with the rich *Kahya* Hadji Stere and Ali Pasha of Janina. Migration started from the Grammos Mountains, and the bonds with them are evident in the herders' self-identification as "*Grammostyani*," from *Grammos*. The descendants of the old urban population know that they came from Moschopolis.

The Bulgarian Aromânians identify themselves by two ethnonyms: "Vlachs" (*Vlasi*) and "Aromânians" (*Armâni*). At the same time, they invariably note that Bulgarians call them Vlachs and when they are speaking Bulgarian, they say they are Vlachs and their language is Vlach, but that they are really Aromânians and their language is Aromânian. According to them, "Aromânian" (*Armân*) means 'free person', 'a person who has remained in one place', 'survivor', 'non-Romanian'. "Vlachs" also means 'free people', but also 'former worshippers of the pagan god of herders': Volos (Kirilova 1998: 29). In addition, "Vlachs" means shepherds, peasants. Urban Aromânians call the Aromânian herders "Vlachs," while they identify themselves as Tsintsars, the Aromânian herders also calling urban Aromânians "Tsintsars." This distinction, which is social, does not rule out a sense of community: "Vlachs and Tsintsars, we are all Aromânians."

An important indicator of recognized identity and distinction is acknowledgment of certain typical character traits: diligence, kindness, honesty, thriftiness, abstinence from alcohol, love for the family, merry-making and singing, virtues; all are also confirmed by Bulgarians: "The Vlachs are hard-working people, they are good, they are Christians." Any deviance from traditional norms is frowned upon, regarded as an abuse of the Aromânian "self," as becoming like others. Drinking, overspending and dishonesty are considered especially loathsome.

The Aromânians note their traditional understanding with the Bulgarians, based on common religion and similarity of customs. In the last

census, 5,159 people identified themselves as “Armânians.” According to the President of the Association of Aromânians in Sofia, Toma Kyurkchiev, the number of people with Aromânian self-identity in Bulgaria approximates 6,000. They live in the following regions and population centres: Mount Rila: the cities of Blagoevgrad and Doupnitsa; the Rhodopi Mountains: the village of Dorkovo and the towns of Velingrad, Rakitovo, Peshtera and Bratsigovo; the Balkan Range: the village of Anton and the town of Pirdop. There is an Aromânian colony in Sofia, and individual families in Plovdiv and Pazardjik. To slow down the process of unintended assimilation, the Aromânian Association was restored in 1992, its main goal related to the Romanian school, which has opened in Sofia, offering also a course in the Aromânian language. The particular purposes of the Aromânian Association are safeguarding the language, customs, songs and dances, as well as maintaining contacts with Aromânians in the neighboring Balkan countries. The Association is a member of the Federation of Ethnic European Communities, based in Flensburg, Germany. It abides by Bulgarian law, and, as an organization of Bulgarian citizens, does not seek support and assistance from foreign states. It seeks the assistance of the Federation, which is a consultative body of the Council of Europe. The Association is an active participant in the forums organized by the Aromânian Balkan communities; in the debate on issues related to the codification of Aromânian language, the compilation of dictionaries and teaching aid. Bulgarian Armânians are working intensively on the matters of the Aromânian language. *A History of Aromânians in Bulgaria* has been published, along with dictionaries, a grammar, phrase books, books of poetry, anthologies, etc.⁶

St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

Notes

1. The ethnonym “Aromanians” (*Aromânii*) is used by the academic community in Romania, the Bulgarian transcription being *Aroumuni* or Arumanians. The only correct ethnonym, which is also used by all Aromânian scholars, is *Armân* (singular) *Armâni*, (plural) as the Armânians identify themselves.
2. This ethnonym means people who use the *ts* sound extensively in their speech, especially in connection with the frequently used form of the word ‘five’ *cince* instead of *chinche*; but it also means ‘miser’ or ‘skinflint’ — Aromânian thriftiness was proverbial.
3. According to some theories, each of these groups, especially the Karakachans, are different ethnically; with non-Aromânian origin and history. Proofs might be found in the folklore and the language; Karakachans are users of a specific Greek dialect.
4. IMRO is a Bulgarian revolutionary organization (most of the historians in Skopje consider IMRO as a specific Macedonian movement, which does not correspond to

- historical facts), created in 1891 and with a dramatic history. IMRO played an important role in Balkan history.
5. The pejorative ethnonym, Miyaks, (singular, *Miyak*, plural, *Miyatsi*) comes from the repetition of *mie*, in terms of Standard Bulgarian, a wrong form of the 1st person singular personal pronoun: *mie* instead of *nie* 'we'.
 6. It is interesting to list here the Aromânian periodicals published in the world today: *Armânlu* [The Armanian], a newspaper published by the Center of Aromânian Language and Culture, Sofia, Bulgaria; *Bana Armânească* [Aromânian life], a monthly magazine about Aromânian culture, Bucharest, Romania; *Deshteparea* [Awakening], a monthly newspaper about Aromânian language and culture, Bucharest, Romania; *Fenix* [Phoenix], the newspaper of the World League of Armânians, Bitolya, Macedonia; *Grailu Armânesc* [Aromânian speech], magazine published by the Association for Culture of Armânians in Macedonia, Skopje; *Dimândarea* [Duty], a monthly newspaper about Aromânian language and literature, Bucharest, Romani; *Zborlu a Nostru* [Our word], a monthly magazine of the Unifying Center of Armânians in the World, Freiburg, Germany. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe — 1997 Ordinary Session — in Recommendation 1333 (1997) recognized the Aromânian culture and language (24 July 1997); see also Doc. 7722, Report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur Mr. de Puig, for further comments on Aromânian culture and language.

References

- Atanasova, K. (1998). Armânite. Istoriografski pregled [The Armânians. Historiographical review]. In *Armânite v Bâlgarija* [Armânians in Bulgaria], I. Georgieva (ed.), 7–23. Sofia: IK Vasil.
- ; and Tjankova, I. (1998). Zhiznen I kalendaren obreden cikâl na armânite [Life and calendar ritual cycle of the Armânians]. In *Armânite v Bâlgarija* [Armânians in Bulgaria], I. Georgieva (ed.), 119–312. Sofia: IK Vasil.
- Bandu, Gh. (1992). Aromânii din Sofia. *Deşteptarea* 12.
- Capidan, Th. (1926). *Românii nomazi*. Cluj.
- Dimitrov, G. (1895). *Knjazhestvo Bâlgarija v istorichesko, geografichesko I etnografsko otmoshenie* [The principality of Bulgaria in its historical, geographical and ethnographic aspects]. Plovdiv.
- Djuvara, N. (1989). La diaspora Aroumaine aux XVIIIème et XIXème siècles. *Cahier. Centre d'étude des civilisations de l'Europe Centrale et du Sud-Est* 8, 95–127.
- Drinov (1971). *Marin Drinov. Izbrani sáchinenija* [Selected works]. vols. 1 and 2. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo.
- Genchev, N. (1981). *Vâzrozhdenskijat Plovdiv* [The revival of Plovdiv]. Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov.
- Ghiulamila, I. G. (1928). Românii macedoneni din Bulgaria (Aromânii). *Grailul românesc* 2.
- Hristu, V. (1931). Aromânii din Bulgaria. *Grailul românesc* 6–7.
- Ishirkov, A. (1914). *Statisticheski belezhki vârhu naselenieto v Sofia* [Statistical notes on the population in Sofia]. Sofia.
- Jireček, K. (1899). *Knjazhestvo Bâlgarija* [The principality of Bulgaria]. Plovdiv.
- (1978). *Istoria na bâlgariite* [History of the Bulgarians]. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo.
- Kirilova, A. (1998). Rodovata pamet na armânite [Genealogic memory of the Armânians]. In *Armânite v Bâlgarija* [Armânians in Bulgaria], I. Georgieva (ed.), 24–49. Sofia: IK Vasil.

- Kânchov, V. (1970). *Izbrani proizvedenija* [Selected readings]. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo.
- Marinov, V. (1965). Podvizhno pastirstvo v Bâlgarija I na Balkanskija poluostrvo [Nomadic shepherds in Bulgaria and on the Balkan Peninsula]. *Izvestija na Etnografskija institut I muzej* [Proceedings of the ethnographic institute and museum] 8, 69–86.
- Medzhediev, A. (1969). *Istorijata na grad Stanke Dimitrov (Dupnica) I pokrajninite mu ot XVI v. do 1912–1963 g* [History of the town of Stanke Dimitrov (Dupnitsa) and its surroundings from the 16th century to 1912–1963]. Sofia.
- Milev, N. (1994). Aromânskata kolonializacija na Juzhna Dobrudzha I aromânite v pirinska Makedonija [The Aromânian colonization of South Dobrudzha and the Aromânians in Pirin Macedonia]. *Sbornik Dobrudzha* [Dobrudzha collection] 11, 134–141.
- Mitev, P. (1998). Vlashkoto naselenie v Peshtersko prez perioda na osmanskoto vladichestvo [The Vlachian population in Peshtera region during the period of Osmanic domination]. In *Armânite v Bâlgarija* [Armânians in Bulgaria], I. Georgieva (ed.), 95–118. Sofia: IK Vasil.
- Mladenov, M. (1995). Vlashkoto naselenie v Balgarija (razprostranenie, proizvod, toponimija). [Vlach population in Bulgaria (spread, origin, toponymy)]. *Bâlgarska etnologija* [Bulgarian ethnology] XXI, 7–26.
- Nikolov, G. N. (1998). Vlasite v Srednovkovna Bâlgarija [Vlachs in medieval Bulgaria]. In *Armânite v Bâlgarija* [Armânians in Bulgaria], I. Georgieva (ed.), 89–94. Sofia: IK Vasil.
- Njagulov, B. (1995). Problemat za vlasite v Bâlgarija mezhdu dvete svetovni vojni (politicheski faktori i aspekti). [The problem of the Vlachs between World War I and World War II (political factors and aspects)]. *Bâlgarska etnologija* [Bulgarian ethnology] XXI, 52–74.
- Papahagi, Tache (1963). *Dictionarul dialectului aromin general si etimologic* [General and etymological dictionary of Aromânian dialects]. Bukarest: Acad. RPR.
- Peyfuss, M. D. (1994). *Chestiunea aromânească* [The Aromânian question]. București: Enciclopedica.
- Pimpereva, Zh. (1998). Nomadskata obshtina na vlasite: armâni I karakachanite v Bâlgarija [The nomadic society of the Vlachs: Armânians and Karakachans in Bulgaria]. In *Armânite v Bâlgarija* [Armânians in Bulgaria], I. Georgieva (ed.), 313–341. Sofia: IK Vasil.
- Popov, I. (1973). Peshtera do Osvoobozhdenieto [The town of Peshtera until the liberation]. In *Stranici iz minaloto na grad Peshtera* [Pages from the past of the town of Peshtera]. Sofia.
- Rakshieva, S. (1996). Pastirite ot Gramos [The shepherds from Gramos]. *Bâlgarska etnologija* [Bulgarian ethnology] XXII: 1, 53–64.
- Rilski, N. (1835). *Bolgarska grammatika. Segi pervo sochinena* [Bulgarian grammar. First completed now]. Kraguevac: Bratja Mustakovi.
- Thunmann, J. (1774). *Untersuchungen über die Geschichte des ostlichen europäischen Völker*. Leipzig: Crusius.
- Vojnov, M.; and Milev, A. (1990). *Latinsko-bâlgarski rechnik* [Latin-Bulgarian dictionary]. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo.
- Weigand, G. (1899). *Aromâne. Etnograficheskoto-fologicheskoto-istoricheskoto izdirvane na tât narechenija narod makedono-romane ili cincare* [Aromânians. Ethnographic-philological-historical investigation of the so-called people Macedono-Romanians or Cincars]. Varna.
- (1907). *Rumanen und Arumunen in Bulgarien*. Leipzig.
- (1998). *Etnografija na Makedonija* [The ethnography of Macedonia]. Sofia: IK Riva (phototype).
- Zahariev, S. (1870). *Geografiko-istoriko-statisticheskoto opisanie na Tatarpazardzhishkata kaaza* [Geographical-historical-statistical description of the Tatarpazardzhik kaaza region]. Vienna: Sommer.

