

The Vlachs of Greece and their Misunderstood History

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January 2004

Abstract

The Vlachs speak a language that evolved from Latin. Latin was transmitted by Romans to many peoples and was used as an international language for centuries. Most Vlach populations live in and around the borders of modern Greece. The word 'Vlachs' appears in the Byzantine documents at about the 10th century, but few details are connected with it and it is unclear it means for various authors. It has been variously hypothesized that Vlachs are descendants of Roman soldiers, Thracians, diaspora Romanians, or Latinized Greeks. However, the ethnic makeup of the empires that ruled the Balkans and the use of the language as a lingua franca suggest that the Vlachs do not have one single origin. DNA studies might clarify relationships, but these have not yet been done. In the 19th century Vlach was spoken by shepherds in Albania who had practically no relationship with Hellenism as well as by urban Macedonians who had Greek education dating back to at least the 17th century and who considered themselves Greek. The latter gave rise to many politicians, literary figures, and national benefactors in Greece. Because of the language, various religious and political special interests tried to attract the Vlachs in the 19th and early 20th centuries. At the same time, the Greek church and government were hostile to their language. The disputes of the era culminated in emigrations, alienation of thousands of people, and near-disappearance of the language. Nevertheless, due to assimilation and marriages with Greek speakers, a significant segment of the Greek population in Macedonia and elsewhere descends from Vlachs.

Tra s'dzic tut tsi-am pri suflit, o Pirovole dzîni
To say all I have in my heart o Perivoli tell me
La cari s'ni aspun eu dorlu, la tini i la Armâni?
To whom shall I tell my pain to you or the Arumans?²

There is a small hotel in Perivoli, a village of Pindus, ensconced above the national forest that has the name **Valia Calda**.³ **Virgil Perdichi**, an immigrant to the US spent all his savings to build it. He hoped that the hotel would give some life to the village that had been almost emptied by emigration and wars. When the hotel formally opened around 1973, Virgil arrived in Greece to attend, but the military junta government blocked his exit from the airport. In 1983, aged about 86, he died in Waco, Texas; then I went to his house to help out with the acceptance of inheritance. I thought that I would read easily the correspondence that he had with his brother about the hotel, but to my

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² "Pervolea di unã oarã" (Perivoli of another Time) by George Perdichi (1912-1966), p. 80

³ «The warm valley». It is the Valia Calda hotel, www.valiacalda.com.

surprise, the letters were completely unintelligible. The decedent was not a dangerous communist, as one might have expected given the junta's treatment. The crime was that the Perdichi siblings, like their mother, had attended Romanian-language schools in Pindos when Macedonia was part of the Ottoman Empire.

Years later, a young economist who worked at an international organization told me that her name was Papahagi. Initially I thought that a Romanian priest had gone for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the years that the Christian hajj was common. But all those who have dealt with the 'koutsovlach issue'⁴ know that the surname Papahagi belongs to a family of distinguished 20th century philologists from the village Avdela of Pindos. Their works, unknown in Greece, are connected to a road that some people followed towards an Ithaca that bitterly disappointed them.

Few people now know this story in Greece, but some diplomats knowledgeable about Romania say that the issue of the Vlachs who live there is difficult and 'taboo'. During a trip to Romania in 2002, I understood the reason. When I mentioned to Romanians that a great-grandfather might have been a Vlach, they told me smiling that I was also a distant relative. They explained that the Vlach language is old-style Romanian, about like what the Pontus dialect is for Greeks, and that the Vlachs are diaspora Romanians. They asked me why in Greece they are forced to Hellenize their names and why Greece does not allow the use of the Vlach language in television and radio.

Until that time, my relations with the Vlachs were limited to a vague memory that some relatives and friends descended from them. I decided to find answers to the questions I had heard. I read much of the voluminous material that exists on this issue in books and on the internet and spoke to many Vlachs of diverse political persuasions.⁵ This article summarizes the issues as were understood by a multilingual Greek educational psychologist.

The Paradoxes of Vlachology

The students who enter the Metsovion Polytechnic Institute in Athens would not normally imagine that the benefactors of an engineering school would be Vlachs. This word brings to the mind of many Greeks the image of an uneducated shepherd with a glitsa and tsarouhia on some mountaintop, and of women with long embroidered skirts and kerchiefs carrying buckets of dairy products (e.g. the brand of condensed milk, 'Gala Vlachas' and the song 'in your embroidered apron you Vlach woman') In the 21st century most Greeks may not remember the Vlachs as anything distinct. By the 12th

4 Koutsovlach sounds negative in Greek, but the term may be derived from Turkish. Ciuchuk (small) were often called the Vlachs of the Balkans in contrast with the buyuk (big) Vlachs of Molodvlachia. At times, however, Thessaly and south Macedonia were also considered 'Great Vlachia', whereas 'small' Vlachia was Aitolokarnania. Pindos was called Upper Vlachia (Tega, p. 73).

⁵ The author thanks the families Papahagi, Perdicchi, and Zoumetikou as well as the specialists who helped with the research (Asterios Koukoudis, Constantine Dinas, Ahilleas Lazarou, Matilda Caragiu, Dumitru Garofil, Nicos Siokis, Georgios Padiotis, Charalambos Papastathis, Despina Tsourka-Papastathi, Thomas Winnifrith, Tasos Karanastasis, and the biologist Constantinos Triandafyllidis)

century the name already had a general meaning of a transhumant or shepherd.⁶ Many Greeks think that “Vlachika” is the ‘northern dialect’ of Greek, which pronounces e as i, o as u, and s as sh.⁷ One reason is that nothing sets the Vlachs apart as a race or a distinct minority. They have the same religion, appearance, the same pronunciation in Greek, and about the same names. (Many Vlach surnames are meaningless in Greek but so are Albanian and Turkish surnames.) The only difference is that they or their grandparents knew a language which belongs to the Balkan Latin family.

In Romania it is easier to tell who is a Vlach. Many are recognized by their Greek surnames (e.g. Papadima, Papacostea, Caranika) and first names, which sometimes are still written with the Greek diminutives (e.g. Athena, Perikles, Zoitsa, Steliu, Nacu, Lambrache, Tache). The faces that go with the names often look like those that one sees in Greece.

Some Romanians ask why the Vlachs are not recognized as a minority in Greece. However, historically the members of this ‘minority’ have acted as the backbone of Hellenism: fighters against Ottoman occupation, like Rigas Feraios, Giorgakis Olympios, and possibly Theodoros Kolokotronis;⁸ leaders of leftist resistance against the Germans (EAM), such as Alexandros Svolos and Andreas Tzimas. Distinguished writers like Kostas Krystallis and Christos Zalokostas were Vlach, as were contemporary composers like Apostolos Kaldaras, Kostas Virvos, Babis Bakalis, and Mitropanos. Many became rich Balkan merchants during the 18th and 19th centuries and many Greek national benefactors were Vlachs, such as Nikolaos Stournaris, Georgios Arsakis, Michael and Georgios Tositsas, Georgios Sinas.⁹ Simon Sinas financed the construction of the Academy of Athens, while Georgios Averoff contributed to the first Olympic games.¹⁰ There was at least one Vlach prime minister, Ioannis Kolettis (1773-1847), ministers (like Evangelos Averoff), and countless senators. Without the majority realizing it, the government of Greece was many times under the control of this ‘minority’.

How are the contradictions reconciled? The topic is extremely politicized, and the publications of the last 100 years reflect that. Some authors analyze Byzantine documents and travelogues of foreigners, songs and traditions for differences or similarities. Specific events are generalized, and the historical hiatus is filled and interpreted according to the political ideology of each writer.¹¹ In general, the Greek publications leave no doubt about the Greek origin of the Vlachs, while others leave no doubt about their particular identity and non-Greek origin.

6 According to Anna Komnini (Exarhos 2001, p 2, p. 31). According to Weigand it meant shepherd (p. 17, 306) In the 20th century it also means uncouth, savage (Dimitrakos, p. 284)

7 Kopidakis 1999..

8 He was called ‘King of the Vlachs, “Vlachovasilias” (Exarhos 2001, vol. 2, p. 408), but perhaps ‘Vlach’ was used generically.

9 Papathanasiou p. 69.

10 Exarhos p. 237, vol. 1, 2001.

11 E.g. A song from Metsovo referring to the wedding of a plains girl with mountain Vlachs is considered to ‘show clearly the chasm’ between Greeks and Vlachs (Padiotis p. 49), while arguments regarding the Vlach vocabulary are based «on the fact that Macedonians were not Greek» (Capidan, p.15). On the other side, the argument that Vlachs are Greeks is presumably strengthened by the existence of the Vlach tribe «vineti», a name that is mentioned in the early Byzantine years. (Exarhos, p. 269, 2001, vol. 1).

There also are long debates about the name of the Vlachs. In Vlach they call themselves Armân or Arumân.¹² “Hii Armân?” Are you a Vlach?¹³ As with the Greek word ‘Romios’, it derives from Romanus and denotes a citizen of the Roman or Byzantine empire, which was called Romania. In the Byzantine literature usually the term ‘Vlach’ is used. Similar to this word are the ancient German ‘Valah’ (Volcae in Latin), which refers to a Latinized Celtic tribe that settled in the Roman Empire. The Germans called some Latin-speaking people Valah or Wallach.¹⁴ The term Vlach may be German or Slavic, but is used as Blachi in medieval Latin as well. The word is related to others that refer to Latin or Celtic speakers, like the Walloons of Belgium, Welsh in English, Wloch in Polish, Olasz in Hungarian, Volokh in Russian.¹⁵ This article uses the word Vlachs.

Distinct Figures in the High Mountains

Nu-ñi ti arâde feată ñica sh-nu yinu la noi
Don't deceive yourself, young girl, and don't come to us

La noi are munts-analtsi sh-nu va s-potsî sa tretsî
We have high mountains and you will not be able to pass
Pitruniclle va-ñi mi facu sh-eu la voi va yinu
I will become a quail and I will come to you

La noi are balta mare sh-nu va s-potsî sa tretsî
We have a large river and you will not be able to pass¹⁶
Pescu mare va-ñi mi facu sh-eu la voi va yinu
I will become a big fish and I will come to you

La noi are soacră arauă sh-nu va s-potsî sa tretsî
We have a bad mother-in-law and you will not be able to pass
Soacră arauă nveastă bună duaăle va tritsemu
Bad mother-in-law, good daughter in law, both of us will pass
Si eu la voi va yinu¹⁷
And I will come to you.

Traditionally, Vlachs lived in the southern Balkans. Areas with considerable Vlach population exist in central and southern Albania (e.g. the destroyed Moschopolis) and the area that was earlier called Pelagonia and is now in FYROM, with cities such as Krusovo and Monastir (Vitolia). However, most Vlach habitations appear to be in

12 The term Aromanians was used extensively by the German balkanologist Gustav Weigand and the linguist Nikolaos Andriotis (Exarhos 2001, p. 237, vol. 1). The Meglenites called themselves Vlau (singular) and Vlasi (plural). The arvanitovlachs call themselves Ramani rather than Armani. This nomenclature may have created problems for some, because people thought they considered themselves Romanians.

13 The â is a sound between a and ou that dis not pronounced in Greek or English.

14 Babiniotis, p. 377.

15 Hanks and Hodges p. 558 (cited in <http://www.istrianet.org/istria/linguistics/index.htm>).

16 “Balta” is like the Greek “valtos-marsh”, tretsî like the Greek trefxo.

17 Padiotis p. 50-51.

Greece. The mountain villages form a line from Rome to Istanbul. At the sides of Pindus, from Grammosta to Pertouli there are about 80 mountain villages, despite the extensive demographic changes of the 20th century. Traditional groups in the plains still exist from Xanthi to Corfu and from the mouth of the river Acheloos to the mouth of Sperchios,¹⁸ and also in Evoia.

At the end of the 19th century, there were about 150,000 Vlachs in the southern Balkans,¹⁹ and about half the Greek population of Thessaloniki in fact consisted of Vlachs.²⁰ After 1912-13 about 100,000 (2/3 of them) became Greek citizens.²¹ Since then, they have been much reduced due to emigration and assimilation. The 1951 census, the last time that minorities were counted in Greece, recorded 39,385 Vlachs. Around 2003, there may be 20,000 people in Greece who consider themselves Vlach.²²

Traditionally, there was a broad spectrum of living conditions and thought among Vlachs. They ranged from isolated and illiterate mountain dwellers of Albania to cosmopolitan merchants and directors of Greek schools. However, the groups that attracted the most attention were the transhumant shepherds. Many foreign visitors were impressed by the picturesque nomads and semi-nomads they saw in Macedonia, with their dresses, occupations, languages, and ability to manage in difficult conditions.²³

Most interesting were three shepherd groups: The Arvanito-Vlachs (Farsarotes), Vlachs, and Sarakatsani. Despite the unclear meaning of their name,²⁴ the Sarakatsani spoke Greek in the 19th century, so their Greekness was not disputed. The Arvanito-Vlachs, whose women often wore long hats, had Albanian names that indicated long cohabitation with Albanians.²⁵ Travelers also wrote a lot about the 'generic' Vlachs. The northern type was considered light colored and with features different from neighboring groups, while the southern types were shorter and darker.²⁶ (Geographically, however,

18 Koukoudis, 2000, vol. 3, p. 40-41. Some Vlach villages are in FYROM and Albania: Krusovo, Megarovo, Tyrnovo, Monastir, Milovista, Gopesi, Beala, Ohrida, etc. (Nikolas Siokis, personal correspondence, 2/2003)

19 Estimates by Weigand around 1890.

20 Koukoudis, 2000, vol. A' p. 87-90, 118-120. Weigand (p. 256) considered the Greeks of Thessaloniki, hellenized Vlachs and Bulgarians. These were people who were from Vlacholivado, Moschopolis, and Vlachoklisoura. In 1890 he heard the language often in the parishes of St. Nicholas, St. Athanasios, St. Theodores. Thus, some of the most important families of Thessaloniki have Vlach ancestors (e.g. Floka, Mandrinou, Tsoureka, Galina, Tahiaou, Bozi, Totti, Liani, Pisioti, Zoumetikou, Boutari.). Nevertheless, Greeks in 1912 constituted only about 14% of the population.

21 Estimates are difficult due to a lack of census information and political bias. Weigand (1895) concluded there were about 100,000 in Greece and another 500,000 in the Balkans, and Winniffrith (2002) agrees with the larger number.

The Romanian propaganda mentioned 1,200,000 (Romanos, p. 14). After the union of northern Greece, of the approximately 160,000 Macedonian Vlachs, 102,000 ended up in Greece, 30,000 in FYROM, 13,500 in Albania, and about 10,000 in Bulgaria, Kosovo, Serbia, and Bosnia (Koukoudis, 2000, vol. 3, p. 40).

22 Winniffrith, p. 113.

23 Tega 1985.

24 Sarac means poor in Romanian (saracacios = in bad condition), and sarcin means weight, bundle. Some people hypothesized that they descend from hellenized Vlachs (Exarhos 1994). A biological study has shown that the Sarakatsani are genetically similar to other Greeks (Kouvatsi, Triandaphyllidis, and Peios 1994).

25 The Arvanitovlachs lived around Moschopolis in southern Albania, spoke Vlach and Albanian; sometimes they knew Greek, other times not (Exarhos 2001, vol. 2 p. 58). They call themselves Ramâni rather than Armâni, and the similarity with the word Romanian may have convinced Greeks that they considered themselves Romanian.

26 Weigand p.289-90.

northern and southern dialects are mixed.²⁷) They lived free on the mountaintops, were considered hard-working and smart, and many chelniks (goat-herding chiefs) had considerable flocks and wealth. The women who set up households in different places every day when the flocks moved, had more social freedoms than Greek women. These mountaineers were something different and enviable as is shown in the song ‘Nu-ñi ti arâde feată ñica’, where a girl wants to marry a mountain Vlach.

The plains Vlachs may have been more numerous than the shepherds. Among them were the Meglenites around the Pangaio mountain, who were farmers, spoke a separate language, and had extensive relations with Bulgarians. Others settled in urban or rural areas and had occupations similar to those of non-Vlachs.

Much has been written about the educated urban elites of Moschopolis and Pelagonia, who were often Vlach traders traveling as far as Hungary, Romania, and India.²⁸ At least as far back as the 17th century, urban Vlachs cultivated the Greek language and literature during the darkest periods of the Ottoman empire with translations and printing presses.²⁹ Records show that they considered themselves Greek, usually had Greek names,³⁰ and several became national benefactors. Evidence includes 24 letters of Moschopolis merchants, the printing press of Moschopolis, and the records of commercial fraternities of Transylvania.³¹ ~~Examples of Greek scholars were Rigas Velestinlis (Feraios) and Konstantinos Mertzios. The latter was a rich merchant of the 18th century, who discovered and rescued the Greek archive of Venice and later became a Greek Academy member.³² The archive of the Greek high school in Monastir during the 19th and 20th century shows that almost all the students and teachers were Vlachs, often from poor families.³³ Several people maintained the Greek conscience in modern FYROM, despite the passage of 90 years since Pelagonia became Serbian.³⁴ These families maintained a simultaneous use of Greek and Vlach languages for centuries.~~

²⁷ Katsanis and Dinas 1990, p. 12.

²⁸ Exarhos 1998, Zafeiris 1998.

²⁹ Greek knowledge among the poor may have been due to the efforts by the monk Kosmas Aitolos (1714-1779) to open a school in every Epirus village so that the Vlachs, Arvanites, as well as those speaking various Greek dialects could learn Greek.

³⁰ According to the Serbian professor Dusan Popovich (Zafirir, p. 201). Many Vlachs were named Socrates, Achilles, Homer, Agamemnon, Cassandra, Antigone (Zafirir, p. 140). These names also became fashionable among the Greeks during the same period.

³¹ Papastathis, 1972, 1999. Tsourka-Papastathi 1982.

³² Papathanasiou p. 80. Other examples were: Miltiadis Garbolas from Olympus founded a Greek printing press in Athens in 1839 with Greek dictionaries and educational treatises as well as the first printing press of Thessaloniki in 1850. (Papastathis 1968). Iosipos Moisiodax in 1760, who studied in Padova, translated the ‘Ethical Philosophy’ due to a lack of Greek books and was looking for a donor for the printing.

³³ Boys who studied in the 6-grade high school of Monastir came from many Vlach villages. E.g. Milovista had 1092 orthodox and 506 Romanizers, Megarovo had 2416 Vlach speakers and 100 Moslems, Neveska had 1092 Orthodox Greeks and 60 Romanizers (data by Chalkiopoulos, in Iliadou 2003, p. 84). The principal in 1897-1906 was Alexandros Zoumetikos, subsequently last principal of the Greek high school of Adrianoupolis.

³⁴ Research by Kahl (2001). **In all areas of Pelagonia, the Greek population consisted basically of Vlachs.** E.g. in Resna, at the end of the 19th century there were 660 Hellenes of whom 650 were Vlach and 10 Greek. (Papastathis 1974, referring to the book by Chrysohoou, ‘Vlachs and Koutsovlachs’. Athens 1909, p. 36).

Apparently, during the 18th century a large number of Ottoman subjects spoke Vlach at home, but its use gradually diminished. Linguist Gustaf Weigand who studied the Vlachs extensively around 1980 mentions that “a large number of the ‘pure Greeks’ of Thebes, Serres, and Thessaloniki’ are pure Vlachs.³⁵ There were Vlach speakers from the south of Karditsa to the west, Agrafa mountains and Eurytania province who lost their language in the 19th and 20th centuries.³⁶ In Peloponese, where Vlachs had emigrated from northern points, the Vlachs also were assimilated in the local population. (Sometimes Vlach place names remind us of the earlier language.)³⁷ Some Meglenites were converted to Islam in the 18th century and went to Turkey, while others identified with Bulgarians and went to Bulgaria. The people who still spoke Vlach in the 20th century were mainly isolated mountaineers who married among themselves.

Historical Data About the Vlachs

The defenders of various positions base their arguments on some historical data. Below are the basics.

The Balkan Latin languages developed from a Latin (or a proto-Balkan version) that was a lingua franca (language of communication for different peoples) during the Roman empire. (Similarly in the west, Latin evolved into Italian, Spanish, French, etc.) The Balkan Latin languages share many grammatical and lexical features but differ enough among them to be considered separate languages. In the beginning of the 21st century there are four: Aromanian of the south Balkans, Megleno-romanian, that are spoken only by 2000-3000 people around Gevgeli, Daco-Romanian of Romania, and Istro-Romanian. The latter is spoken by only about 500 people at the Croatian part of the Istria peninsula.³⁸ Further south in Croatia and along the Dalmatian coast the Morlachs or Black Vlachs also spoke Balkan Latin, but their language disappeared around 1890.³⁹ The languages have local dialects.

Ancient Greece was conquered by the Romans in 146 BC and became a Roman province.⁴⁰ In the 3rd century AD, the capital of the eastern Roman empire was moved to Constantinople. During the German invasions of the 4th century, Rome was sacked, and the Roman empire continued as “Romania”, known later as Byzantine empire. It is unknown who spoke Latin at various times. Many nationalities lived in the Byzantine Empire (e.g. Armenians and Goths) and at least some Byzantines spoke a Latin-derived language during the 6th century AD.⁴¹ Ioannis Lydos, a contemporary of the Latin-

35 p. 313. Educated Vlachs of Serres belonged to the Greek party and lost the language (p. 261).

36 Winnifrieth 2002. The word is used in last names: Vlachos, Vlahopoulos, Vlahakis, Vlahoulis. Sometimes the word may be used generically, referring to shepherd ancestors.

³⁷ Papahagi p. 19 Eg. Mouresi in Pilio may mean a mulberry grove.

³⁸ Parts of Istria belong to Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy (www.istrianet.org/istria/linguistics/index.htm).

39 Koukoudis 2000. There may have been Vlachs in Vlassko of Czechia who were assimilated at the end of the 30-year war in 1648 (www.angelfire.com/tx5/texaszech/Valachs/Who%20are%20the%20Valachs.htm)

40 Dacia, roughly contemporary Romania, was conquered after Greece by emperor Traianus in 107-105 AD but was abandoned in 271.

41 Mentioned by Theofylaktos Simokattis, a 7th century historian. During a Byzantine expedition against the Avars in Thrace (579-582 AD) there was a danger that the load might fall of a mule. Then the voice of the mule driver was heard speaking in the ‘father’s tongue’. «Torna, torna fratre.» And though the mule driver did not hear the voice, the soldiers heard it and thought that the enemies were telling them that and they ran away shouting ‘torna torna’ («τη

speaking emperor Justinian (527-565 AD) mentions that Latin was used extensively among Greek-speaking people, particularly for official reasons.⁴² Ultimately, Greek predominated and became the official language of the empire about 618 AD. From the 6th to the 10th century, the Byzantine Empire lost control of its western provinces to Slavs and other invaders, and the knowledge of Latin was reduced.

The name 'Vlachs' is mentioned for the first time by the Byzantine Georgios Kedrinos, who wrote that the brother of the subsequently Bulgarian emperor Samuel was killed in 976 by 'odites Vlachous' between Kastoria and Prespa lakes.⁴³ Documents from Athos show that there were Vlachs in Chalikidi peninsula around 1000.⁴⁴ The Armenian historian Kekavmenos, who wrote a treatise called 'Stratigikon' described warlike Vlachs around Trikala and Larissa, who in his opinion were "Dacias and Vesi" who had had been expelled from the regions around the Savos and Danube rivers because they were bandits.⁴⁵ Anna Komnini, historian and daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexios Komninos, repeatedly mentions the Vlachs of Thessaly, whose chief named Pudilos rushed during the night to notify Alexios Komninos that the Koumani had crossed the Danube.⁴⁶ Benjamin of Tudela, a 12th century Jewish rabbi, visited in Thessaly in 1173 and mentioned that the Vlachs descended from the mountains like deer, committed robberies, were invincible, and did not keep their word.⁴⁷

In 1183, the Vlachs of Thessaly rebelled against the heavy taxation imposed by the emperor Isaakios Angelos for the wedding of his daughter and created the Bulgarian-Vlach empire of the Asenids.⁴⁸ Ioannis Asan declared himself "Imperator omnium Bulgarorum et Blacorum". (Emperor of all Bulgarians and Vlachs). When Frederico Barbarosa passed by that place, Ioannis Asan was mentioned as 'Emperor of Vlachs and most Bulgarians', 'Emperor of Vlachs and Koumani', or 'Emperor of Vlachs and Greeks.'⁴⁹ Military expeditions against the Asenids were mostly unsuccessful. Byzantine armies were defeated in Veroia and Serres around 1190-1195. Finally around 1318, this empire was divided between the Byzantine Empire and the Catalan duchy of Athens.⁵⁰

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottomans considered the Greeks and Vlachs one nation (milet) until 1905, although some early references differentiate among

πατρώα φωνή. Τόρνα, τόρνα φρατρε, and ο μεν κύριος του ημιόνου την φωνήν ουκ ήσθητο, οι δε λαοί ακούσαντες and τους πολεμίους επιστήναι αυτοίς υπονοήσαντες, εις φυγήν ετράπησαν, τόρνα-τόρνα μέγισταις φωναίς ανακράζοντες. (A. Lazarou «The Aromanian language» p. 162, Exarhos, 1994, p. 60).

42 «...καίπερ Greeks εκ του πλείονος όντας την των Ιταλών φθέγγεσθαι φωνή, and μάλιστα τους δημοσιεύοντας». Although they are mainly Greek, they speak the voice of the Italians, particularly when dealing with public issues («About the principles of the Roman government», 261, 68. A. Lazarou, 2002, p. 60).

43 Winnifriith, p. 115. Indirectly, the name Vlach may be commemorated by the wall of Vlachernai, that was built in the 6th century.

44 The Athos monks ate Vlach cheeses and meats and had orgies with the women, who dressed like men to get in (Exarhos 2001, vol. 2, p. 53). They are referred to as Vlachorynhinii, (Bujduveanu 2002) but Rynhini were some 7th century Slavic tribes (Parharidou, p. 173).

45 Exarhos 2001, vol. 2, p. 32. Lazarou (2002) presents arguments against the views of Kekavmenos.

46 Exarhos 2001, vol. 2, p. 50.

47 Weigand, p. 262-263. Adler, p. 18

48 Lazarou p. 68, 2002

49 Vasiliev, p. 442.

50 Tega, p. 73.

them. The villages of Pindus date from the 17th century⁵¹ and were possibly founded for safety from persecutions. From that time there is some evidence regarding the relations between Greeks⁵² and Vlachs. During the 18th century, Greeks and Vlachs coexisted abroad; documents and references of associations in Hungary, Vienna, or Romania do not differentiate between the two. But there were disputes in 1790-1810 in Hungary regarding the language in church. The negative reaction to the request that the mass be chanted in Vlach as well as in Greek split the community of Pesti (Hungary) in 1809.⁵³ In 1905, when disputes in Macedonia increased, the Ottoman Empire declared the Vlachs a separate nation, partly to divide the Christians.⁵⁴

Older writings in the Vlach language are very few. The earliest texts date only from the 18th century and are brief verses: on an icon of Virgin Mary, above a church doorway, and on a jug. (See pictures.) A Greek-Vlach gospel was printed in 1822 and a sanctification ceremony in 1816.⁵⁵ Secular texts were meant to teach Greek to Vlachs, like grammars and dictionaries.⁵⁶ The voice of the Vlachs is only heard through tales and folk songs.

Where Could they have Come From?

The Vlachs themselves have no traditions that they came from some other part of the world, and no songs or tales have survived regarding some Roman general or the green pastures of a distant country that they lost during the Slavic invasions. All Macedonian Vlachs whom Weigand consulted around 1890 indicated that they lived pretty much in their ancestral country.⁵⁷ Populations had moved but over relatively short distances.

However, the Vlachs speak a language that has no close relation to the area languages, so many people assumed that they must have come from somewhere else.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Winnifrith 2002.

⁵² Aristotle mentions the term 'Grekos' in his *Meteorologica*, and so did other ancient writers, as an older name for Hellenas. The Romans used it extensively (Christou, p. 105).

⁵³ Siokis 2002a.

⁵⁴ P. Rizal (Joseph Nehama, 1914, p. 185 Greek translation) «Greeks and Serbs unite against the Turks.. Hilmi Pasha strengthens an old adversary, the Koutsovlachs, who protected by the Sultan and strengthened by the Bucharest government stop calling themselves Greek and fight ferociously against the Greek influence.»

⁵⁵ Siokis 2002a, The first texts are in the Greek script, but later the Latin script was used that helps pronounce it better. There is a reference to a Greek-Vlach New Testament printed in 1693 through the sponsorship of Ioannis Constantiou, regent of Vessarabia.

⁵⁶ Siokis 2002a. Some, like the monk Daniel, wanted to wipe out the Balkan languages. Daniel composed his dictionary so that the children of the Moesiodacians could get used to the Greek language («δια να συνηθίσουν οι των Μοισιοδάκων παίδες την Ρωμαϊκήν γλώσσαν»). Rigas Fereos, like Kosmas Aitolos, believed that all the Balkan people should learn Greek.

⁵⁷ Weigand, p. 330 (Greek translation)

⁵⁸ The beginning vowels e and i are pronounced ye and yi in both languages, a fact that shows common Slavic influence that is rarely found in Greek. «Οι Γέλληνες να φουρά ήταν ανδρις θηρία» (Kontosopoulos, p. 203). However, all Balkan languages share certain characteristics, such as postposited articles or use of particles to form the subjunctive and future tenses. This is called the “Balkan Linguistic Union” (Sprachbund)

There are many Greek words in Vlach,⁵⁹ but they are mainly modern Greek.⁶⁰ Finally, Vlachs share some traditions with Greeks (e.g. the Kalikantzaroi spirits) but not others, such as the prohibition of unmarried women from going to church.⁶¹ Briefly, theories about their origin have been:

Roman legions. Greeks and foreign travelers of the 18-20th centuries⁶² expressed the opinion that the Vlachs are descendants of Roman legions who stayed on to guard the narrow mountain passes and eventually became shepherds. The various versions of the theory do not take much account of the women's nationality, though women were needed to father children.

Thracians - Diaspora Romanians. Romanian historians hypothesized that between the 6th and 10th centuries, the Vlachs left their country north of the Danube and descended in the southern Balkans, possibly where the grasslands were better. Pro-Romanian authors (e.g. Tache Papahagi) considered the Vlachs relatives of the Romanians, parts of Pelasgian and Thracian tribes that were Latinized. According to this view, the Thracians inhabited the area from Romania to Macedonia, but the Slavic invasions that started in the 6th century fragmented it.⁶³ (See picture.) Today this theory makes little sense. The Pelasgians were a historical anachronism,⁶⁴ and ancient Macedonians have been rather conclusively shown to be a Greek tribe.⁶⁵

Partly Slavs. The Slavs moved to the Balkans during the 7th century, influenced the Vlach-speaking populations, and maybe displaced some.⁶⁶ Although there was no specific effort to prove that the Vlachs were Slavs, this argument was used to prove that the Vlachs were not Greek.⁶⁷

59 Exarhos, 1994, p. 57. Of the Vlach words, 52% were considered of Greek origin (8% in Romanian), 0.26% were of Slavic origin (17% in Romanian), and 2605 of Latin origin (3562 words in Romanian). However, many 'Greek' words were actually of Turkish or other origin. If 1233 Turkish loan words are deducted, the Greek words are 1457 (Society of Aromanian Culture, press release no. 82, 1998).

⁶⁰ Exarhos 2001, vol. 2 p. 29.

⁶¹ Wace and Thompson 1914, Nicolau 2001. Also the Vlach women had the habit of pulling their hair back and wearing diamond earrings. Old pictures show women showing their ears instead of covering most of their face. Dowry was not as important for the Vlachs. (Balamaci - unpublished and undated manuscript).

⁶² Siokis 2002a.

⁶³ The Romans moved population from Romanian Dacia, but a segment moved back again to Romania (Thomas Winniffrith, presentation at the 8th Macedovlach Congress in Trumbull, Connecticut, USA, July 4-6, 2003).

⁶⁴ It has been known for a while that the Indoeuropeans moved westward from Caucasus and reached Greece around 2500 BC through Asia (Mallory 1989). Nevertheless, Romanian schools taught that the Pelasgians were the originators of modern Romance languages. However, the pre-Greek Pelasgians were assimilated before the classic era and spoke an unknown non-Indoeuropean language whose sounds survive in the many place names that are meaningless in ancient Greek (Olympos, Corynthos, Larissa, etc). People assimilated about 2500 years ago have become everyone's ancestors by the 20th century.

⁶⁵ Though uncivilized and often disliked, the Macedonians at least of the 6th century BC spoke a Greek dialect with some Thracian-Scythian features and other Greeks generally considered them Greek. The 1978 Vergina grave inscriptions have helped settle this debate, which hardly exist if it were not for Balkan politics. (For detailed linguistic and historical data see Babiniotis 1992.)

⁶⁶ Someone named Bonkoes is called servarvanitobulgarovlahos (Winniffrith 2002)

⁶⁷ E.g., Capidan 1909, Romanski 1996.

Jews. Benjamin of Tudela, a 12th century Sephardic rabbi suspected that at least the Vlach bandits of Thessaly had Jewish origin because although they robbed Jews, they called them brethren and did not killed them as they did others.⁶⁸

A distinct local ethnicity. More recent Romanian historians consider that the Vlachs are a specific nation possibly descending from Pelasgians, Illyrians, Thracians, Macedonians (they consider the latter non-Greek) and other groups that were Latinized. This position is explained in the ‘Dodecalog of the Vlachs’ that has an almost religious fervor.⁶⁹ The adherents of this theory get support from the observations of foreign travelers who perceived the mountain Vlachs as different from Greeks.⁷⁰ The tendency of many Vlachs to identify with Greeks is attributed to religion,⁷¹ adoption of Greek names that implied a higher social status,⁷² and a tendency of becoming easily assimilated in local populations.⁷³ Some people call themselves Macedono-Vlachs and focus on the Vlach presence in the greater Macedonia of Ottoman times.⁷⁴

Latinized local inhabitants. Some contemporary Greek historians think that the Vlachs are main Latinized Greek populations.⁷⁵ According to this theory, the Vlachs of the Greek peninsula and cities in the north where Greek communities also lived are originally Greek. By the same theory, Vlachs who lived beyond the borders of Greek communities are probably not Greek. **Indeed, many Vlachs of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Albania do not consider themselves Greek and have traditionally lived north of the Greek borders.**⁷⁶

Emigrants from the northern Balkans. The Vlachs’ place of origin may have been the northern or northwestern Balkans,⁷⁷ from where the Byzantine emperor Justinian also hailed. (His ancestral home was Prima, possibly Caricin Grad in south Serbia.)⁷⁸

⁶⁸ Adler p. 18

⁶⁹ Caragiu 1996, «Twelve irrefutable and historical truths about the Aromans: (1) the Aromans exist today and for the last 2000 years, (2) They originated south of the Danube and are a continuation of latinized European populations (Macedonians, Greeks, Thracians, Ilyrians), (3) They all spoke proto-romanian (staroromâna), (4) The place where Aromanian was spoken was divided through the Slavic invasions, (5) Proto-Romanian was divided in four dialects-languages, (6) Aromanian is the mother tongue of the Aromanians and gives them their ethnolinguistic conscience, (7) There are two categories of Vlachs, indigenous and in diaspora, (8) The position of the indigenous Aromans who live in the Balkan countries is quite different from that of the diaspora Aromans. (9) The diaspora Aromans have a particular position – they went to Romania by choice. (10) They should be called Aromans and Macedono-Vlachs, (11) The Aromans are Orthodox Christians. (12) The Aromans must have one goal, to cultivate their language and their traditions.

⁷⁰ "The Vlachs, this very interesting people are not Greek at all but a race of nomads, who come down from the Balkan lands in the winter with their flock and pass the cold months in Greece. They are shepherds by business, and their tribal name has become a sort of synonym for an ancient profession." (.A. Wigram D.D. - Hellenic Travel, Faber and Faber Ltd., London 1947, p.109-11) Mentioned in www.vlachnet.gr

⁷¹ Lambru. <http://institutulxenopol.tripod.com/xenopoliana/pagini/7-1.htm>

⁷² Tambozi p. 10

⁷³ Balamaci 1995

⁷⁴ Papanace 1996. The summary of this position is in the bastian.freeyellow.com/littlevlachcorner.html.

⁷⁵ Lazarou 1999b, Exarhos 2001, Mertzos 2002. Some particularities in the pronunciation of the words show use since the Roman years. (Lazarou 1999a, p. 17)

⁷⁶ www.farsarotul.org. Around 1990, hordes of Albanian Vlachs arrived in Greece who did not know any Greek at all (Winniffrith 2002).

⁷⁷ Winniffrith 2002.

⁷⁸ According to Achilleas Lazarou, the position of Prima is still unknown and ought to be in FYROM between Krusovo and Istip (personal communication 1/2003).

The Roman presence was strongest near the two large roadways of the antiquity, the navigable Danube river and Via Egnatia (towards Constantinople). The Balkan Latin languages must have developed around these two axes that cut transversely across the Balkans: Daco-Romanian and Istro-Romanian around the Danube, Aromanian and Megleno-Aromanian around Via Egnatia.⁷⁹ The separation becomes clearer in contemporary Albania and south Serbia, where ancient inscriptions in Latin are more numerous than those in Greek. The dividing line (Jirečec line) constitutes a border between the western (Latin speaking) and eastern (Greek speaking) Roman empire. Some ancient burials in Albania indicate that the inhabitants were Christians with Latin names. Today the Jirečec line is further to the north than most Vlach habitations, but the inhabitants may have been pushed south in the 7-10th century by the invading Slavs.⁸⁰ The use of the definite article at the end rather than the beginning of the word, a feature of Balkan Latin as well as Albanian and Bulgarian, lends some linguistic support to this theory.

Each of these theories leaves some aspects about the Vlachs and their language unexplained. Given the generic use of the word to imply shepherd or nomad, it is unclear whom the Byzantine writers called Vlachs and what languages those spoke. Did the Vlachs come from Romania or some remote place? Certainly populations fled due to Slavic invasions, and some probably moved away from the Jirečec line. But the obviously large number of now assimilated Vlach speakers and presence in many parts of the Ottoman Empire suggests that thousands must have come from the north, and there is no historical record suggesting such a move.

The Vlachs could indeed descend from Roman soldiers, but they are not the only ones. Roman legions (including Greek and other recruits) were stationed in Macedonia for centuries, and they must have left descendants, whose genes 20 centuries later are scattered widely. Endogamy was established at some point among Balkan Latin speakers, but it is unknown when. It is conceivable that a caste would be established of Roman soldier descendants intermarrying among them early on, particularly among those guarding the mountain passes, but there is no evidence of such a caste.⁸¹ Geographic isolation clearly played a part in language retention, and Balkan Latin has been for centuries connected to transhumant shepherds, even in the Istria peninsula which is close to Italy. But if the ancestors of the Vlachs lived only around mountain passes, their descendants might have been relatively few.

The biggest problem with the theories of separate ethnicity is that they attribute national origin to speakers of a lingua franca. National origin and language often coincide,⁸² but many times in history a lingua franca evolved into a mother tongue.⁸³

⁷⁹ Katsanis and Dinas, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Thomas Winnifrith, presentation at the 8th MacedonoVlach Congress in Trumbull, Connecticut, USA (July 4-6 2003). The Romans displaced population from Dacia, and later populations moved back to contemporary Romania. However, When Kekavmenos wrote about Dacians, he might be referring to Dacia Mediterranea and not to the Romanian Dacia, or perhaps to another place, because place names were often confused.

⁸¹ Some Brahmins in India are indeed isolated populations different from other Indians (Cavalli-Sforza 1994), but this endogamy had a strict religious enforcement.

⁸² Cavalli-Sforza, 1994.

During the Roman empire, probably very different people spoke Latin. When soldiers had children where they were stationed, most would have probably spoken the local language, since the language of the women often prevails in children. Latin may have survived outside the areas where it was spoken customarily because it was a high-status language⁸⁴ and was cultivated for some centuries (as English is cultivated in contemporary India.) Nevertheless, the Balkan population conquered by the Romans was predominantly Greek and reverted to that language once the Byzantine government established its use. Standard Latin eventually died out. Unfortunately, no written record survives to show the development of Latin into proto-Balkan and subsequent languages and who continued to speak it.⁸⁵ Historians mention only two words dated from 586 (torna torna fratre).⁸⁶ Thus, it is unclear how the Vlachs of the 10th century are related to the Latin speakers of the 6th century. It is hard to prove the origin of Vlachs just through language.

Perhaps a single theory cannot account for the origin of all Vlachs, and different scenarios may have happened to different groups. At least some sixth-century Byzantines spoke the ‘voice of the Italians,’ so they could communicate and intermarry with people fleeing the Slavs from the north (particularly the ‘akrites’ guarding the borders). The language may have thus been strengthened, forming new dialects. It may have also been strengthened during the two centuries of Asenid reign, so some Aromanian speakers of the 20th century may have been speaking since the 12th rather than the 6th century. Groups, such as many Arvanito-Vlachs who did not move southward may indeed be continuing the Roman language depicted in the inscriptions of the Jirečec line. The existence of ‘northern’ and ‘southern’ Vlach dialects and physical appearance suggests that there may be a genetic and historical variability.

The origin of Vlachs could be clarified through comparisons of DNA samples (deoxyribonucleic acid) of various populations. The various Vlach groups could be compared among themselves and with Greeks, Romanians, and Albanians. However, no genetic studies have been done on the Vlachs. The existing DNA studies on Greeks (which include some Vlachs as part of the general population) show that Greeks are quite homogeneous⁸⁷ and that the populations of Macedonia and Epirus are more closely related.⁸⁸ Greeks are different from Turks and Bulgarians but quite similar to other Europeans,⁸⁹ particularly to Italians.⁹⁰ So, even if the Vlachs are descendants of (male) Romans, they are a genetically related population. Hopefully, more research will take

⁸³ Worldwide this is happening right now in record numbers. Historically, many Hellenistic era Jews spoke Greek, although they were not allowed to marry pagans. The African slaves of the 16th century lost their languages in one generation because they could only communicate among them in English. Jamaicans are not related to the inhabitants of Samoa, though both peoples use Creole or pidgin English. There are also example of remote populations who conserved a language, such as Gaelic among some Scots and Irish. The Vlachs may be such an example.

⁸⁴ This is shown in the excerpt by Ioannis Lydos regarding ‘δημοσιεύοντες’, publicly speaking men who used the language of the Italians.

⁸⁵ The first sample of Romanian is a letter dated 1521.

⁸⁶ The words are common and coincide with standard Latin. The people who pronounced them could be speaking proto-Balkan or another form of Latin.

⁸⁷ Kouvatsi et al. 2001.

⁸⁸ Koudourrou et al. 1999.

⁸⁹ Kouvatsi et al. 2001.

⁹⁰ During the proto-Roman period, possibly one in 10-13 inhabitants was Greek (Triandafyllidis 1993).

place later on, though political repercussions may raise obstacles. Without it there is simply not sufficient evidence regarding the origin of various Vlach groups.

Nations get created, and one could argue that the language made Vlachs into a nation regardless of origin. Discussions with contemporary Romanians show that the Vlach language received much attention in the 19th century. Some people were moved by this idiom that was so far and so near and wanted to protect it and to preserve it. In the conflicts that followed, the Greek authorities and writers emphasized the Romanian political motives and seemed to consider Aromanian as a negligible peasant language. They did not understand its emotional appeal to the Romanians, similar to the appeal that the Pontus dialect has on Greeks. And the forgotten Vlachs finally found someone to pay attention to them and were flattered that some people valued their language. The lack of understanding for the feelings towards a mother tongue had disastrous consequences for many Greeks and Vlachs.

National Identity Decisions

The majority wants to be considered Greeks, not Aromanian.⁹¹

..Greeks are mainly the ones who share our education rather than our common nature.⁹²

As the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire approached, the Vlachs became the focal point of political intrigue. Their nationality would determine the land demands by various countries after the death of the 'great ill man'. Without the Vlachs, the Greeks constituted fewer than 50% in Macedonia. For the Bulgarians it was important not only to make some Vlachs Bulgarian but also to avoid identification with the Greeks. So the Vlach identity became an important issue.

However, ethnic identity had little meaning in earlier centuries. The empires that appeared after the fall of the Greek city-states were multiethnic: Rome, Byzantium, Ottoman empire. Homogeneous countries based on nationality appeared in the southern Balkans only after the end of the Ottoman empire, and people suddenly had to decide irrevocably where they belonged. Groups often have had to make such decisions, but language was only one of many criteria. Other factors were religion, security, economic interests, geographic roots, kinships, and personal interests of leaders. These factors also determined which language the next generation would speak, as in the case of islamization and identification with the Turks.

It is unknown what the various tribes of the Balkans considered themselves to be, if anything, during various times in history. But Vlach and Greek speakers coexisted at least since the 12th century. According to Anna Komnini, there were Vlachs in the

⁹¹ Weigand, p. 313 (Greek translation).

⁹² Τοσοῦτον δ' ἀπολέλοιπεν ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν περὶ τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ λέγειν τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, ὥσθ' οἱ ταύτης μαθηταὶ τῶν ἄλλων διδάσκαλοι γεγόνασιν, καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὄνομα πεποίηκεν μηκέτι τοῦ γένους, ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας δοκεῖν εἶναι, καὶ μᾶλλον Ἑλληνας καλεῖσθαι τοὺς τῆς παιδείας τῆς ἡμετέρας ἢ τοὺς τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως μετέχοντας. (Ισοκράτης – Πανηγυρικός – 50 στον G. Mathieu 1995 σελ. 72)

Byzantine army during her father's reign.⁹³ In principle, Greek learning and education was available to Vlachs at least since the Byzantine times. But even less educated and more isolated populations had contact with the language through the ancient Greek they heard in church.⁹⁴ Extensive knowledge of Greek may have been the reason why literate Vlachs did not often write in their language.⁹⁵

Whether due to old kinships or to available education, many or maybe most 18th century Vlachs considered themselves Greek.⁹⁶ This may also have been due to the fact that Vlachs in each place were few. (Moschopolis in southern Albania that could have been the nucleus of a Vlach civilization, was destroyed by Albanian Moslems in 1769 and 1778, and its inhabitants were scattered.) Because there were no marriage obstacles with other orthodox people, Vlachs could and did intermarry with Greeks, particularly in urban areas.

The Jirečec line theory implies that some Vlachs were compatriots of the renowned emperor Justinian. Whatever his national origin, the emperor was a Roman citizen in a multiethnic empire. Modern Greece has narrower borders. But perhaps due to the multiethnic background of southern Balkans since the ancient years, it is language rather than national origin or ethnic purity determines who is Greek (See citation of the famous Isokratis text in Paniygrikos.) None of us knows who our ancestors were during the 6th, 11th, or 15th century and what languages they spoke.⁹⁷ If the Vlachs who were described in the 10th century as savage bandit shepherds spoke Greek in the 19th century (like the Sarakatsani bandits) no identity issue would arise. Also, no one questions the identity of assimilated and partial Vlachs. Therefore, the Vlach speakers of contemporary Greece are as Greek as everyone else.

How did the people reconcile the Greek and Vlach identities? Clearly, the urban educated Vlachs had no problems with a dual identity. This was made easier by the disappearance of the term Hellenes until about 1827. Even less educated Vlachs expressed the view that the Greeks and Vlachs together constituted the Hellenes.⁹⁸ *"The Greeks are not any more Hellenic than we are. We may be Vlachs and they may be Greek, but together we make up the Hellenes"*.⁹⁹

However, the Latin-derived language and unclear origin made the Vlachs a convenient target for various special interests: Catholics, Romanians, Italians. Those interested competed for the loyalty of anyone they could convince.

⁹³ Exarhos, 2001, vol. 2 p. 33.

⁹⁴ Just like the Greeks, they probably did not understand ancient Greek well (Weigand, p. 345).

⁹⁵ Vlach-language education has never really existed until Romania opened bilingual schools in Constanza. To write, each Vlach had to adapt the Greek or Latin letters to suit Vlach, and this task requires some effort. Contemporary Africans studying in French do not easily understand how to write in their languages.

⁹⁶ Winnifriith, p. 117. Many Vlachs of Serres during 1890 supported the Greeks, spoke Greek, and some were inspectors of Greek schools (Weigand, p. 273).

⁹⁷ Although some know something about one ancestor, they do not know the tens or hundreds of ancestors that they had at the same time.

⁹⁸ The poem attributed to Rigas Feraios states that Napoleon was going to save « la Armâname sh la Grecame sh la tuta Crishtiname» (the Vlachs, the Greeks, and all of Christendom - Exarhos 1994, p. 355)

⁹⁹ Asterios Koukoudis (2000, p. 33, vol. 3) cites Mr. Zioga from Perithori of Nevrokopi, Serres.

Romanian Propaganda

The Roumanians are not so quite inured to blood as the Greeks and Bulgarians, and they have always conducted their propaganda by the clean and benevolent method of bribery.¹⁰⁰

No brother, I am not a Romanian nor do I have Romanian interests, as many fanatical Greeks maintain; nor have I separated myself from Greeks in anything... Why do all now call us Vlach and Koutsovlach, go away from here, we don't want you at our church, we don't send priests to your house, and many other things against us. Are we not, today's Vlachs those Greeks who suffered so many horrors for this poor country and religion?¹⁰¹

Romania was under a strong influence of Fanariote Greeks when the "koutsovlach issue" started. Possibly to tempt the west to fight against the Turks, a group of Macedonian Vlachs, supported by Anastasios Panou, regent of Moldavia, sent in 1836 a letter to Napoleon the Third asking for the formation of a Latin country in the Balkans that would be supported internally by Vlachs and externally by France.¹⁰² France then sent a Catholic priest to convert them to Catholicism.¹⁰³

Balkan traders traveled or lived in Moldo-Vlachia for centuries and surely understood the similarities between Romanian and Vlach. People from Epirus lived and traveled there. But national tradition in Romania says that Averkios from Avdela of Pindos, a monk in the Iviron Monastery of Athos, went to newly independent Romania in 1860, heard people speak, and said «shi γιο hiu Armân» (I am also a Vlach). With the support of the local church authorities he sent a group of children from Pindos around 1865 to study there.¹⁰⁴ Another inhabitant of Avdela, the teacher Apostolos Margaritis, took the initiative to open Romanian schools for the Vlachs. The first school opened in Vitolia (Monastir) around 1876, supported by Greek-led churches in Romania.¹⁰⁵ Quickly Romanian-language schools opened in many Pindos villages and Macedonian cities. Around 1900, at the apex of the movement, there were around 106 such schools in the Balkans as well as a post-secondary commercial school of Thessaloniki.¹⁰⁶ These schools were not for the general population, like French or English schools. Essentially only Vlachs attended.

¹⁰⁰ 'Macedonia, its Races and their Future' by Henry Noel Bransford. Mentioned in Tega, p. 54.

¹⁰¹ Declaration by the allegedly pro-Romanian Apostolos Hatzigogas to Seraphim, bishop of Sisano and Siatista (Koukoudis, p. 150, vol. 4).

¹⁰² The writer Neophytos Ducas wrote: «Που όνομα έθνους καν τοις πλησιεστάτοις γνωστόν; Που μέρος εστί το οποιόν κατάταξεν αυτούς η γεωγραφία; Ουδαμού. Εις τι λοιπόν καυχώνται αυτοί να συστήσωσιν έθνος χωρίς εν ω δεν έχουσιν ουδέ τόπον;» (Who knows of this nationality? Where has geography put them? Nowhere. How are they trying to create a country when they have no place? - Siokis 2002a)

¹⁰³ Siokis 2002a

¹⁰⁴ Koukoudis, vol. 4, p. 121.

¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the city was chosen because the Vlachs of Serbia were being assimilated (Papathanasiou, p. 88) Perhaps the Romanian-speaking Fanariotes considered Romanian a modern form of Aromanian, particularly after many Slavic words were tossed out around 1850. By contrast, the Greek taught in schools was ancient and incomprehensible to the uneducated.

¹⁰⁶ Romanian sources (www.vlachophiles.net) mention six high schools and 113 primary schools, but perhaps the number is too high. Kahl (2001) mentions 4000 students and 300 teachers.

Surely some Romanians took a humanitarian interest in the Vlachs and offered them opportunities that raised their standard of living. Graduates of Romanian schools usually got scholarships for studies in Romania, so some sons of shepherds became engineers or even Romanian Academy members. To study in Romania at that time was equivalent to studying in the US in later years.¹⁰⁷ But along with humanitarian effort, the Romanian government tried to convince the Vlachs that they were diaspora Romanians. Romania was too far from Macedonia to demand a portion, but it wanted population and if possible control of a small principate in Pindos.

Archives in the Romanian ministry of external affairs document the government efforts to win the Vlachs' allegiance.¹⁰⁸ Around 1890 a serious propaganda started in towns and villages where many were pressured to receive Romanian teachers.¹⁰⁹ The families received subsidies to send their children to Romanian schools, where also food was served.¹¹⁰ Many people's huts were replaced with stone houses.¹¹¹ But the propaganda had limited success because Vlachs considered themselves Greek and preferred Greek schools. It failed completely in eastern Macedonia and around Olympus, where the inhabitants did not feel different from other Greeks.¹¹² It had more success in the north, at the villages of Pindos. There, Greek schools were non-existent or of low quality, and Romanian education was a good solution.¹¹³

Romanization included church mass in Romanian and efforts to ordain pro-Romanian priests and bishops.¹¹⁴ The Greek patriarchate reacted negatively, did not allow mass in Romanian and did not recognize the ordained priests.¹¹⁵ But Vlachs were not just pressured by the Orthodox Church. Uniate Catholics (who merely expected allegiance to the Pope) also tried to convert them,¹¹⁶ and French Lazarist monks opened a high school in Monastir in 1880.¹¹⁷ At the end of the 19th century, the Bulgarians also pressured them to become members of the Bulgarian church through threats and assassinations.¹¹⁸ Some Vlachs of Ochrida in 1870 did so, because the latter allowed

¹⁰⁷ One positive outcome was that the Greek authorities opened schools in the Vlach villages as well. Thus, the Vlach villages had more teachers than all of France, and around 1890, the Vlachs were almost all literate (Weigand, p. 343). The letters of the Perdichi family show that women who attended Romanian schools around 1900 could write in practiced calligraphic writing. The sentences were mainly in Romanian with some Vlach words.

¹⁰⁸ Romanos 1983. An important propagandist was Ion Caragiannis, who around 1881 tried to convince the Vlachs of Thessaly not to agree to a union with Greece (Achilleas Lazarou, personal communication, 2/2003).

¹⁰⁹ Koukoudis, p. 341, vol. 4. As a result of the Romanian influence, children were baptized with Latin names, such as Virgil, Valerio, Matilda. Others continued to receive Greek names. Frequent among Vlachs is the name Stergios (Tega) meaning that the child should live and be 'solid'.

¹¹⁰ Zafiris p. 206. Because of the food subsidies, a few non-Vlach children would also attend.

¹¹¹ Koukoudis, p. 368 vol. 4.

¹¹² Peyfuss p. 84. After 1913, 88% of Vlach children attended Greek schools (Mertzos, p. 100).

¹¹³ Koukoudis p. 233- vol. 4.

¹¹⁴ As is apparent from many names, there were many Vlach priests. An issue of ordaining Vlach bishops per se was never raised.

¹¹⁵ A Vlach dies in Monastir in 1904, and his brother wanted to bury him under the care of a Vlach speaking priest, whose ordination the Patriarchate did not recognize. A crowd of people took over the hearse and did not permit the burial. The Turkish authorities embalmed the body and postponed the burial until they received instructions from the Sultan, who finally decided that he should be buried without priests (Tega, p. 55).

¹¹⁶ Papathanasiou, p. 87. According to John, son of Virgil Perdichi, some people from Perivoli had become Uniate Catholics.

¹¹⁷ Peyfuss p. 71.

¹¹⁸ Koukoudis, p. 262, vol. 3.

mass in Vlach. Some pro-Romanian Vlachs collaborated with the Bulgarians in the battles that preceded the dissolution of Turkey.¹¹⁹

An important factor in people's nationality decisions was the behavior of the people who represented them and the consequences of the choice. Unfortunately, the Greek authorities and the Patriarchate showed little sensitivity to Vlach issues. The bishops pressured them to pay church taxes, while the Bulgarians relieved them.¹²⁰ Sometimes the Greeks were as violent as the Bulgarians.¹²¹ For example, they killed in 1904 12 pro-Romanian Vlachs from Houma, near Gevgeli.¹²² Kapetan Akritas, a local Greek leader, demanded in 1905 that the communities close the Romanian schools and burn the books, oblivious to children's education needs. Such conflicts are described in detail in Romanian books and probably incited some people to take the side of Romania.¹²³ The conflicts were considered persecutions and created the impression that the Vlachs of Greece should be saved from oppression. For years later, some Vlachs pressured the Romanian government to take measures for the protection of their compatriots.¹²⁴

After the liberation of Macedonia from the Turks, the Romanian schools continued to function through the 1913 treaty of Bucharest. Perhaps the government of Eleftherios Venizelos did not want to put at risk the schools of the large Greek communities in Romania. Agreement on the Romanian schools also paved the way with better relations between Greece and Romania; the latter notified Bulgaria that if it would send its armies to Sofia if Bulgaria did not withdraw its occupation army from Thessaloniki.¹²⁵

The cooperation policy with the Romanian government benefited Greece, but not necessarily the Vlachs. The relatively few schools went on for about 50 years until 1945, and in some villages like Perivoli three generations of people attended. The Romanian high schools perhaps had a more modern curriculum than Greek schools because they taught French, which was useful for commerce. The Commercial School of Thessaloniki was considered very good.¹²⁶ However, primary schools taught no Greek, and secondary schools very little (e.g. two hours a week).¹²⁷ Thus, graduates did not learn the literate language or spelling and were not prepared to work in higher-level jobs or even submit applications for various services. The diplomas of the Romanian schools were not recognized in Greece, and graduates could continue their studies only abroad. Many immigrated to Romania, USA, and Australia. Of those who stayed, some were stigmatized as communists or reactionaries and had a hard life, unable to find a good

¹¹⁹ Koukoudis, p. 354, vol. 4.

¹²⁰ Weigand p. 264.

¹²¹ Peyfuss, 1994, p. 86.

¹²² Koukoudis, p. 298, vol. 3.

¹²³ Tambozi 1996. For example, Constantin Papanasi's grandfather was a priest who wanted to chant the mass in Romanian and was murdered by Greeks in 1906.

¹²⁴ Tambozi 1996.

¹²⁵ Papathanasiou, p. 90. Thus the price paid for the Greek control of Thessaloniki was the Romanization of some Vlachs.

¹²⁶ George Padiotis, personal communication, 2/2003.

¹²⁷ Personal communication by four former students to the author.

job.¹²⁸ In an effort to convince Vlachs that they were diaspora Romanians, the curricula taught that Vlachs descended from Pelasgians, Thracians, and ancient Macedonians who were not Greek.¹²⁹ These beliefs sometimes created personal problems, and some people spent their lives obsessed with the Vlach language or not feeling anywhere at home.¹³⁰ Given the traditional belief that Greek is the one who partakes of Greek education, ironically the Romanian schools succeeded in taking many Vlachs out of Hellenism.

The Dream that Became a Nightmare

Romania's effort to claim the Vlach population finally bore fruit. In December 1918, the government acquired southern Dobrogea, a square part of northeastern Bulgaria with four prefectures that the Romanians called Cadrilatér. Romanians constituted only 2.3% of its population,¹³¹ so the government called on the Vlachs of Greece and neighboring countries to move there and thus increase the Romanian-speaking population. The government promised 50,000 drachmas and 100 stremmata of land to those willing to go. The Greek government had no objection; to the contrary, it encouraged the immigration of Vlachs. The condition was that those moving to Romania had to abandon their Greek citizenship. Through an agreement with Romania, the emigrants were declared non-Greeks and their descendants lost the rights to Greek citizenship.

In general, those who agreed to go were the poorer transhumant shepherds of central Macedonia, not the urban populations or those living around Olympus and southern Greece. In some places like Veroia, the Romanian adherents exploited the economic competition of Greeks and Vlachs,¹³² and 30-35% of the Veroia Vlachs left, around 500 families. The immigration was encouraged by people who organized the journeys and benefited from the sale of estates.¹³³ The immigrants had to pay a ticket of 1500 drachmas and another 1000 for travel expenses.¹³⁴ In 1925-36, about 2000-2500 families (total of 10,000-18,000 people) sold their belongings and left by boat from Thessaloniki to Constanza.

In Cadrilatér, the colonists did not find things as promised. They did not get 50,000 drachmas, just land that often did not have water. The transformation from shepherds to farmers in marshlands was painful. Besides malaria, they suffered from deadly tuberculosis.¹³⁵ And they had to deal with Bulgarian guerillas, who tried to take

¹²⁸ Papathanasiou, p. 77. The Greek government could have aligned their curricula with the Greek curricula and allowed only the instruction of Aromanian or Romanian languages, but apparently there was no such effort.

¹²⁹ These beliefs were repeated during the 8th Macedono-Vlach Congress that took place in Trumbull, Connecticut, July 4-6, 2003.

¹³⁰ In his poem "Terra Vlacorum" the emotionally troubled poet George Perdichi wrote that the Vlachs went to Macedonia 2000 ago and mentions Petros and Ioannis Asan as his heroes (p. 36-37).

¹³¹ Suciu p. 45. Until 1938, the Romanians (mainly Vlachs) grown to 29% of the population.

¹³² Koukoudis, p. 44-46 vol. 3; p 236, vol. 4

¹³³ Koukoudis, p. 358, vol. 4

¹³⁴ Koukoudis, p. 237, vol. 3.

¹³⁵ Bedivan 2003, p. 41-443. Like the Sarakatsanoi, the mountain Vlachs may not have the genes to resist malaria.

back Cadrilatér.¹³⁶ Some realized that Romania wanted them to ‘pull the snake out of the hole’. (See insert.) Some tried to return to Greece, but they had lost their citizenships and their estates had changed hands. Despite the difficulties, they did what they could in their new country, building schools and houses. But peace did not last long for them. In 1940, at the insistence of Germany and through the treaty of Craiova, Romania returned southern Dobrogea to Bulgaria. Suddenly one day the Vlachs lost everything and became homeless. There was a population exchange, and they ended up as refugees in Constanza and other parts of Romania.

After the loss of Cadrilatér, Romania did not need them, and the Vlachs became a problem. They adhered to royalist or right-wing politics and (as discussed below) created political problems in the country. The communist government that came in power in 1947 closed many in concentration camps. For the next 45 years, these people suffered many deprivations. They suffered from poverty and hunger when Ceausescu sold the food of the country and from forced childbearing. To visit Greece, six months of paperwork and waiting were necessary; they could go only after their relatives invited them and offered to pay all expenses. They could not even request political asylum because they had to leave family members behind. Several became academics and scientists and did well, but most of their descendants live in modest conditions. In 1930, their relatives in Greece considered them fortunate, but since 1947 they felt sorry for them.

When the Vlachs immigrated to Cadrilatér, some women had a different opinion. One person related to me that his mother did not want to acquire Romanian citizenship, even though she had given up the Greek one. She remained stateless for many years and finally acquired the citizenship only because the government refused to admit him in school without that change. Another woman was coerced into going by being told that she would never again see her teenage son, who had already been taken there. Yet another refused to board the ship to Cadrilatér and had to be brought on by force. And she was sick for days afterwards...

From Roman Legions to Fascism

The duty calls on us, as descendants of the ancient Roman Legions and our free brothers beyond the Danube to fight on the side of Italy and Germany. »¹³⁷

The Roman legions had been dissolved centuries earlier, but the name continued to haunt the Vlachs. **In the 1930s, legionnaires (legionari) were the fascists of Europe. Many Vlachs in Cadrilatér became members of right-wing nationalistic organizations,** like the Iron Guard and some participated in political upheavals and pogroms in Romania. Ion Duca, the prime-minister of Romania and leader of the National Liberation Party declared the organization illegal and arrested some of its members. On December

¹³⁶ Suciú 2002, Koukoudis, p. 238, vol. 3. About 30,000 Vlachs moved to Cadrilatèr, but most were from Bulgaria (Tega, p. 74) and were not necessarily Greek.

¹³⁷ Declaration to the newspapers of Thessaly in 1942 by presumed representatives of the Vlachs of Greece (Mertzos, p. 110).

21, 1933, Ion Caranica, Doru Belimace, and Nicolae Constantinescu (the first two being Vlachs) assassinated him as he descended from a train.

The desire of various countries to exploit the Vlachs' language did not end with Cadrilatér. The next suitor was Italy, who in 1917 took over Epirus for a while and declare the 'Principate of Pindos', hailing the Vlachs as 'lost brothers'. This act was repeated in 1942. Alkiviadis Diamantis, who was from Samarina and lived in Romania, appeared as the 'prince of Pindos'. Accompanied by Italian soldiers, he declared at a time of famine during the World War II, that Romania was sending a shipment of a million okades of wheat for distribution only to Vlachs. Although the wheat did not arrive, the police confiscated flour that people bought for their homes, creating strong remonstrance and accusations that Greece was trying to kill off the Vlachs.¹³⁸ Violent conflicts erupted, some Vlachs were sent to remote islands and others were mistreated. General George Tsolakoglou, who served as a prime minister during the German occupation, gave a secret order to local authorities to treat Vlachs better. The Vlach community in Romania was also worried about the persecutions and new tribulations of the Vlachs and pressured the government again to intervene.¹³⁹

In 1942, Diamantis founded the Roman Legion of Larissa, which admitted even some communist party members. He tried to win the allegiance of educated Vlachs in Larissa. The 'Legionnaires' mainly turned against the Vlachs who resisted their goals and tortured them, imprisoned them, sent them to concentration camps in Italy, or robbed those who organized the national resistance against the Germans.¹⁴⁰ After the end of the war, several 'legionnaires' were convicted as criminals and collaborators. Some escaped to Romania, where the communists arrested them. The borders of Romania closed, and many never appeared again in Greece. The Romanian schools and churches of Greece that aided the occupation forces were also closed in 1944-45.

The majority of the Vlachs who stood by Greece did not have much better fate. Countless were killed in 1940-41, fighting against the Germans and Italians, and many Vlach women help in the battles of Pindos. Subsequently many were leaders in the resistance.¹⁴¹ For this reason, most Vlach villages of Pindos were burned down by the Germans in 1943-44, and the inhabitants were executed en masse.

Assimilation and Oblivion

Fudzi haraua di la Armân
O gione o xinite
s-pri fâtsa cură fântâni
di lacriâni upărite
ca si au maratsîl i –n cheptlu –alor
un dor té treaca nu are
s-kirire asteapta un popor

Gone is the happiness of the Vlachs
o young man o immigrant
on the face like a faucet run
hot tears
because the poor people have in their chest
a pain that does not go away
and loss awaits a people

¹³⁸ Mertzos, p. 105-106.

¹³⁹ Tambozi 1996, p. 25. Papanace 1996.

¹⁴⁰ Averoff-Tositsas Evangelos. «The Political Side of the Koutsovlach Issue», p. 121 (mentioned in Mertzos, p. 108).

¹⁴¹ Mertzos, p. 106-111.

After all the disasters of two wars, the safest thing for the surviving Vlachs was to hid and forget the language that got them into so much trouble. It is as if they all decided that its use was a problem.

Thus, Aromanian is taught very little and is not officially used anywhere in Greece. There is no radio program in Aromanian, no Vlach newspaper, just as there is none in Albanian or Serbomacedonian.¹⁴³ There are many Vlach associations, and an All Greece Association of Vlach Cultural Organizations. However, they do not actively teach or promote the language. For example the web page of the folkloric association of Veroia Vlachs (www.vlahoi.gr) lists as activities the conservation of national attires, dance, singing, collection of folkloric and historic material, and old pictures. But there is no language instruction, despite one mention that it is disappearing. The relatively few Vlachs who know it well seem to be afraid to transmit it for fear of being branded anti-Greek.

The language had been struggling for a while. After the Asia Minor catastrophe of 1922, the government needed space to settle the refugees, and many Vlachs lost their grazing lands and wintering places after 1923.¹⁴⁴ Gradually, more settled in urban areas, where many were assimilated by their Greek neighbors.¹⁴⁵ Occupations, social structures, and geographic isolation disappeared, and the people's particular code was lost with them.¹⁴⁶ In a Greek-speaking environment, a second language did not serve any special purpose. Also, because of their relationship to villages, Vlach was often considered a language of low social status. The families that rose abandoned it. Perversely, the Romanian schools and the beliefs of the Legionnaires accelerated the loss of the language. The cultural capital of the Vlachs was lost when thousands of people left or were killed, i.e. the older people who knew the language well and could teach traditions to the younger generations. The language survived better in places where there had been no political problems, as in Metsovo. There, the Romanian school closed in 1913, and few people left for Cadrilatér.¹⁴⁷

Under these conditions, it is hard to maintain the language, even in villages where Vlachs live among themselves. Middle-aged Vlachs may remember the grammar but have a limited vocabulary, while the young speakers do not know how to create derivatives of words or understand idioms used a few years earlier. Unfortunately, the literate younger generation cannot learn either from books or from mass media. Most Vlachs in contemporary Greece are hostile to Romanian leadership, and they refuse to adopt the spelling and style of the Romanian-educated people who wrote Vlach literature,

¹⁴² Attributed to the Zicu Araia, poet from Samarina (1877-1948) according to George Padiotis. Such songs were considered propaganda by some (Lazarou, 1999a, p. 265).

¹⁴³ Even the Greek dialects like those of the Pontians and the Tsakonika are not taught.

¹⁴⁴ Koukoudis p.. 270, vol. 3

¹⁴⁵ Koukoudis, p. 34, vol. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Katsanis and Dinas, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ http://www.farsarotul.org/nl8_1.htm.

poetry, and dictionaries.¹⁴⁸ Instead, the speakers of the 21st century say that the language has traditionally remained unwritten, so they do not use it for reading and writing. It is even hard to agree on a script and spelling that make sense for Greeks. **The method of Katsanis and Dinas, that combines the Latin and Greek alphabets, seems to be gaining acceptance. But there is no Vlach Academy to decide on uses and set standards.**

Along with the script, there is a need to modernize the language. Aromanian has a large and poetic vocabulary, but it expresses better the needs of the villagers than those of contemporary urban people. To express contemporary topics, those living in Romania use Romanian words (usually of Latin origin) but in Greece these words are not commonly known except through foreign languages (e.g. university, checks, bank, hotel). One opinion is that local words should be used, even if these are Greek, eg. ‘xenodohiul’ rather than ‘hotelul’. But rather than conjugate Greek words in Vlach, it is easier to switch the code and use Greek grammar. The result is expressions such as ‘zeci hiliade lire metrisiasasi pano sto trapezi, multi dihonia, multi fagomara.’¹⁴⁹

The language is also declining in Romania, where it is considered a dialect. The grandchildren of the Cadrilatér immigrants rarely know enough about the specific conjugations and vocabulary. There are associations that try to preserve the culture, and some schools in Constanza teach Aromanian to the children. In Romania there is a Vlach press, publishing poetry, prose, and some journals with Vlach topics.¹⁵⁰ Elsewhere, the activity is limited. In the US and Germany there are organizations such as Societatea Farsarotul (www.farsarotul.org) and Union für Aromunische Sprache und Kultur. Often created by persons who studied in Romanian, they tend to propagate the theory of a separate identity. Even so, few people spend much time on Vlach issues. After 30 years, very few in the world will remember this language.

Intermarriage with the surrounding population is also depleting the people who identify themselves as Vlach or who know enough about the culture. Until the middle of the 20th century, the rural Vlachs typically married among themselves.¹⁵¹ Endogamy was important for keeping properties in the same groups, that also needed brides skilled in the needs of transhumant shepherds. Vlach brides were sought after, but marriage with Greeks was condemned;¹⁵² a folk song describes a father who refuses to give his daughter to a Greek and who says that Greeks and Vlachs do not intermarry.¹⁵³ The Vlachs who went to Cadrilatér continued the endogamy. Their children married among themselves, but their grandchildren have overcome this taboo as well.

Recent Developments

¹⁴⁸ An example was George Perdichi from Perivoli, who wrote sad poems while he was a night guard at a university in New York in the middle of the 20th century. Marcu Beza wrote novels such as *Doda*, where Greece is not mentioned at all.

¹⁴⁹ Recollections of Paris Zoumetikos from his relatives’ conversations.

¹⁵⁰ Such as the *Caleidoscop Aromân* (Editura Fundatiei Culturale Aromâne, "Dimândarea Părintească"), *Manduearea Armanescă- Vlach Thought*, *Bană Armanescă-Vlach Life*).

¹⁵¹ Mertzos, p. 174.

¹⁵² A verse from Pisoderi says «Hiliulu al Vreta mâna s’li seaca s’isusi pi feata Greaca» (The mother of the son of Vreta may her hand wither, engaged him to a Greek girl – George Padiotis, personal communication, 4/2003).

¹⁵³ «All the Vlachs are one family» Exarhos, 1994, p. 136.

The Koutsovlach issue has been long forgotten in Greece and is a topic mainly for a few old men. The partition of the Vlachs took place three generations ago, and only a few old people survive from the original Cadrilatér immigrants. Now that Greece faces a low birth rate and immigration of completely foreign people, the decision to encourage thousands of Greek citizens to move to Romania seems unfortunate. But it is hard to judge the politics of that time with today's criteria. In the beginning of the 20th century, it was important to form a country without populations of hostile and irredentist beliefs. If the Vlachs who went to Cadrilatér had stayed in Greece, there might have been more pro-Italian 'legionnaires' during the German occupation.

The combination of Greek and Romanian politics proved disastrous for the Vlachs. Perhaps few other populations have been disrupted so much because of a language. Greek authorities up to the mid-20th century behaved in a narrow-minded and undiplomatic way toward the pro-Romanian Vlachs, while they took care of the Asia Minor refugees, even those who spoke only Turkish.¹⁵⁴ The authorities rarely tried to win the Vlachs' allegiance or offer constructive alternatives to the Romanian propaganda. With their behavior they scared some people into conformity but lost many others and were internationally accused of oppressing minorities.¹⁵⁵ Many problems would have been avoided if the Patriarchate allowed mass in Vlach (not in Romanian) instead of pushing people into viewpoints that they often did not believe in. The narrow-mindedness and attentiveness to appearances have repeatedly caused the Greek people and the Orthodox Church to lose friends and adherents.¹⁵⁶

Over the years, Greece has maintained its homogenizing policy, which is credited by some as helping avoid the Balkan conflicts that exploded since 1990. The country has to maintain a difficult balance between the rights of citizens to believe whatever they want and the need to avoid any possible rise of violent irredentism. In fact, its policies towards Vlachs as people have been kind. The Vlachs of Albania have been accepted as Greeks from northern Epirus and have received residency. Thus thousands of Arvanitovlachs immigrated, who did not know a word of Greek but who got jobs and have been supporting their families back home.

But the 1990s disputes with FYROM about the name of Macedonia have echoed the old Romanian teachings on origins of ancient Macedonians. Perhaps also the spectre of Pindus Vlachs fighting for independence or 'legionnaire' terrorism somehow remains, because the Greek government continues to be suspicious of those who espouse the old pro-Romanian or separatist beliefs. A citizen was convicted in 2001 because he circulated a pamphlet of the Council of Europe regarding minority languages.¹⁵⁷ An old man's

¹⁵⁴ Papathanasiou, p. 43.

¹⁵⁵ Papanace 1996.

¹⁵⁶ For example, in 1750 some Catholics from Galata wanted to come to the Orthodox Church. Instead of being happy and take advantage of the opportunity, the Holy Synod and the Patriarch ended up in a great dispute because they did not agree on whether these 'heretics' should be baptized again (Apostolopoulos, p. 16-27). Around 1780-1820, several Greeks of Bengal abandoned the Orthodox Church because of a quarrel between the Patriarchate and the Monastery of Mt. Sinai.

¹⁵⁷ http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/greek/articles/pr_03_07_01.html. Reportedly the distribution disrupted a ceremony in 1995. The conviction was rejected on appeal. (<http://www.iospress.gr/letters/letter20010223.htm>)

citizenship was taken away without his knowledge because he published a magazine that promoted the old arguments.¹⁵⁸ Hooligans burned books from FYROM during a book fair, which included Vlach books. (Surely no one knew enough to tell them apart.) Unfortunately, such actions bring back to life an issue forgotten long ago and create a cause for sarcastic articles abroad that mock the presumed democratic ideals of Greece. Even the website of the Turkish Ministry of External Affairs (www.mfa.tr) mentions that the Vlachs enjoyed greater freedoms under the Ottoman Empire.

Likewise, the government has remained very cool towards the descendants of the Cadrilatér emigrants. The Greek embassy in Bucharest that teaches Greek to interested people could approach the Vlach organizations and invite them to participate, but it has not. Normally, persons who can prove a Greek origin are entitled to Greek citizenship, but this group is not because of the old bilateral treaty. Citizenship applications by persons born in Romania are screened to find out whether their forefathers abandoned their citizenship under the treaty. (The old records are incomplete, and not all cases are found.) Nevertheless, time is healing this issue. In preparation to enter the European Union, Romania has rescinded its old position that Vlachs are diaspora Romanians and in need of special protection. After Romanians receive the right to move freely in the European Union, the descendants of the Cadrilatér Vlachs will be able to live in Greece if they so desire.

The Vlach language has attracted the interest of the Council of Europe, which tries to conserve minority languages. On June 24, 1997, the Council adopted decision 1333 (1997) that recommends measures for the maintenance and dissemination of the language, and its use in television, radio, and churches.¹⁵⁹ **During a subsequent visit to the Metsovo area, Mr. Stephanopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic, encouraged the inhabitants to speak and teach their language.**¹⁶⁰ But the Council of Europe recommendations have yet to be implemented. Some people might indeed try through mass media to convince Vlachs that they are minorities, even when their grandparents thought otherwise. Nevertheless, a strong record of civil rights may do the most to convince people that it is worthwhile being Greek. History has shown that governmental and church rigidity may create bigger problems than any foreign meddling.

The European emphasis on minority languages has increased the interest in the Vlachs of Greece. A four-volume research by a teacher named Asterios Koukoudis received an Academy of Athens prize in 1998, and several other books have been published since 2000. But an effort to teach Aromanian at Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki stopped due to limited student interest and cancellation of funds by a Vlach organization. Thus, Aromanian is taught in Freiburg, Germany (and by people who believe that Vlachs are not Greek), but continues to be neglected in Greece. The challenge for all who love the old language and its songs is to preserve it and cultivate it while avoiding political pitfalls.

¹⁵⁸ He was allowed to return to Greece after the intervention of the US government (www.vlachophiles.net).

¹⁵⁹ www.coe.fr/cmline (farsarotul.org).

¹⁶⁰ Relevant article is in the 'Research of Trikala', «Ερευνα Τρικάλων», 8/11/1989.

It is unknown whether the Vlachs are a distinct ethnicity, but the mixed marriages have scattered their genes in the general population of Greece. The issue is no longer whether the Vlachs are Greek. It is we, the Greeks, at least the inhabitants of Macedonia, Thessaly, and Epirus, who have become a little Vlach. Maybe we should give more respect and attention to the forgotten heritage shared by some of our ancestors and relatives.

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[translation of insert]

The Romanian
Instrument of National Propaganda

Romanian Colonizers

Welcome to the chest of the mother country.
You are finally here, at the chest of the mother country, who is accepting you with the great love of mother and who will never forsake you in the critical moments of your life.

Colonizers !

If thus far you have only heard the story of the rich land of the mother country, you will then taste her fruits and feel that it is the Mother Country.

Colonizers !

Remember here all the places that were dear to you there in the great GREAT PLAINS OF MACEDONIA, from its hills to the plains of MEGLENA, of relatives and friends at the GANDACIA mountain your dear mountains, the great river VARDARI, the streets you walked listening to birds singing, think of your flocks of sheep, your communities, the GREAT PLAINS, your church, your cemetery where your parents, siblings, ancestors rest, your villages.

You must quickly forget all these things, however, when you step on the land of GREAT ROMANIA. You must forget when you start a new household, and you must be proud that the Mother Country receives you with pleasure, and you can rely on her for anything you need, because we know that you will even give your life and that you will not leave unpunished the enemies who try to bother her.

For whatever the Mother Country has to give from now on, you also have to give. You should have deference and faith in her and in His Majesty the monarch Michael A'.

Colonists !

From today you carry on your shoulders a big burden with much responsibility. Aside from your duties as colonizers, do not forget that you have another duty, to maintain peace in this corner of the country. Be vigilant every moment and be united with all.

Welcome Livadiotes to the Mother Country.

« The Romanian »

Special edition of the organization of national propaganda 'The Romanian' (I, no. 7, 21 May, 1928), towards the MacedonoVlachs who colonized Cadrlatér (Suciu p.. 32). Aside from its last sentence which is in Aromanian, the entire text is in Romanian.

