

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DISPUTES ABOUT THE AROMANIAN PROBLEM (19TH-20TH CENTURIES)

Abstract: The presence of Aromanians in the Balkans has sparked numerous controversies about their autochthonous character or the origins of their spoken idiom. Their identity as a Romance people has been challenged, on countless occasions, by more or less biased researchers. The emergence of the Megali Idea project of the modern Greek State has exerted a considerable impact on the group of Balkan Aromanians, as attempts have been made to integrate them into the Hellenic national grand narrative. Our study aims to inventory and analyse some of the reflections encountered in the Balkan historiographies from the second half of the 19th century until the dawn of the 21st century.

Keywords: Aromanians, ethnogenesis, language, Greece, controversy

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Far from proposing a definitive elucidation of one of the most intriguing ethnic questions of the Balkans - the origins of the Aromanians -, this study provides an introduction into this issue through an inventory of the main interpretations produced in the Greek, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Albanian historiographies relating to the subjects of our study.

Today most historians agree that the Romanian people was formed on a territory that stretched both north and south of the Danube, a territory that obviously went far beyond the present-day borders of Romania. From a single common trunk, the branches that subsequently got separated included the Daco-Romanians, forming the so-called North Danubian Romanianness, and the Aromanians, the Megleno-Romanians and the Istro-Romanians, forming South Danubian Romanianness. The three groups constitute, to this day, the testimony of Eastern Romanness in a part of Europe that underwent radical changes over time, which modified almost entirely the Roman legacy in the area. The Romanic element (called *vlah*, meaning Vlach, Wallachian, in the chronicles) registered a continual withdrawal from the path of the successive Slavic-Turanian invasions towards the highland areas, which were less exposed to the adversities of the time, and where this element could be found in the modern era.

Without a thorough political organization, a Church of their own (they were subordinated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, of Greek rite) and a written culture, the South-Danubian Vlachs probably had, up until the end of the 18th century, a prevalently oral culture. This situation determined the absence of direct testimonies on the image that the Vlachs had about their own identities, most of the information about

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them coming along Greek or South-Slavic channels. Because of this, the image of the Vlachs often appears to be rather subjective, distorted through Byzantine or South-Slavic lenses, as it is well known that the Byzantines made notable efforts for cultural assimilation and unification, as did, perhaps to a lesser extent, various other state entities belonging to the Slavs.² The Romanic population appears in documents under the ethnonym of Vlachs, but the name they had adopted for themselves, since time immemorial, was inherited from Latin: *Romanus*. The most widespread version today is *Aromân*, *Armân*, *Arămân* (Aromanian), with a specific prosthetic (especially in front of the sounds *r-* and *l-*), with an unstressed *o* closed to *u*, whose syncope is not absolutely mandatory. The Aromanians in the Northern Pindus (especially the *fârșeroți*) still preserve the old form without an *a-* *Rumân*, *Rămân* (the latter with his de-labialization of *o* after *r*). The groups of Aromanians in the area of Albania designate themselves also as *rrămâni* or Southern Romanians.³ The only South-Danubian Romanians who have adopted the name of Vlachs, imposed by the cohabiting populations, are the Istro-Romanians and the Megleno-Romanians (along the Vardar River) - groups that are incomparably smaller numerically and territorially speaking than the group of Aromanians or *armân*. There are also a series of nicknames given to them by the neighbouring peoples, such as: the Greek *Kuțovlahi*, i.e. *Vlahi șchiopi* (Kutsovlachs, Limping Vlachs – a sobriquet that is difficult to explain),⁴ the Serbian-Croat *Cincari*, *Țânțari*, at the origin of which, as some scholars maintain, there lies the frequent repetition of the sound *ț* [ts] in the Aromanian dialect, while others claim that it comes from *quintanus*, making reference to the Fifth Roman Legion in Macedonia.⁵ Dușan Popovici indicates that at the turn of the 16th and the 17th centuries, *țânțarii* formed the backbone of the fairs and towns in Serbia,⁶ the word *țânțar* designating in Serbian the same thing as the word *econom* (thrifty), while *țânțariti* meant the same thing as *a se tocni* (to bargain).⁷ These *țințari* fall into two distinct groups, *păstori* (shepherds) and *pecealbari* (those who earn their living abroad), especially merchants and craftsmen.⁸ *Gog* is another nickname given by the Muslim Albanians to the Orthodox Aromanians.⁹ The Aromanians in Southern Albania call

² Gh. Zbucea, Stelian Brezianu ed., *Românii de la Sud de Dunăre Documente* (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1997), 7.

³ Victor Lazăr, *Die Südrumänen der Türkei und der angrenzenden Länder* (Bukarest, 1910).

⁴ In *Cronica polonă* of 1684, Miron Costin found the following explanation: “The Greeks call them *cuțovlahi*, that is, Limping Vlachs, because the lame and the sick in the Roman army were left there” [in Macedonia], Miron Costin, *Opere* (București, 1958), 208. Generally, the name given especially by the Greeks has a strong pejorative meaning, since *Koutso-Vlach* also has the connotation of someone who is dirty, uneducated or wild, Birgül Demirtaş Coşkun, *The Vlachs: a forgotten minority in the Balkans* (London, Portland, 2001).

⁵ Achile Lazarou, *L'aroumain et ses rapports avec la grec* (Salonic: Institute for Balkan Studies), 78.

⁶ Malcolm Noel, *A short history of Bosnia* (Macmillan: London, 1994), 72. The author researches the presence of the Vlachs in present-day Bosnia and underlines their crucial role in the spiritual life of the Eastern Church throughout history.

⁷ Dușan Popovici, *O Țințarina* (București: Editura Dorneanu, 1934), 41.

⁸ Popovici, 9.

⁹ Cicerone Poghiric, “Românizarea lingvistică și culturală în Balcani” in Neagu Djuvara, ed. *Aromânii: Istorie, Limbă, Destin* (București: Editura Fundației Culturale-Aromâne, 1996), 15. According to

themselves *fârșeroți*, a denomination with origins that are still unknown (they were either the descendants of the Romans who took part in the battle of Farsala, or the name refers to a settlement inhabited by the Aromanians to this day, called Frășari, situated 36 kilometres north of Premeti). Other names of the Aromanians are those of *copăciari*, a linguistically assimilated group found today in about 45 villages from the Grebena area (Greece) and *vlăhutsi* - for the Vlachs who are converted to Islam.¹⁰ In Albania we also encounter the group of *karaguni* (from the black *sigunea* - an item of clothing) who call themselves, just like the *fârșeroți*, *Remeni-Rmeni*.¹¹ There is also the group of Aromanian *grămoșteni* (with origins in the Grammos Mountains), scattered throughout Macedonia, but also in South-East Bulgaria, known as *cipani* (*tsipunea*- an item of clothing).¹²

The first mention of the Vlachs dates from the year 976, in the Chronicle of the Byzantine Kedrenos, which recounts the death of Prince David, brother of Tsar Samuil, under the blows of some Vlachs. It is possible that these Vlachs guarded and supervised the pathway of Via Egmatia: the raid undertaken by David and the rebellious Bulgarians will have forced them to defend it with their weapons. If we admit this hypothesis, it follows that these were Vlachs in the service of Byzantium, who probably lived in that part of Macedonia.¹³ Shortly afterwards, from the writings of the Byzantine General Kekaumenos, we find that in 980 the Byzantine Emperor Basil II gave his reign over the Vlachs in Elláda (this was the Elláda *thema*¹⁴ that comprised Northern Greece, along with Thessaly and Euboea, without Etolia and Acarnania) to Niculiță, whom he appointed strategist (governor) with the residence in Larisa. This gives us an important political and geographical clue about the special position held by the Aromanians in Byzantium.¹⁵

After that date, even though the testimonies about the Vlachs were not numerous, they did proliferate; thus, in 1019, Basil II issued a Charter whereby the Vlachs living inside the territory ruled until recently by Tsar Samuil - *the Vlachs living within the borders of Bulgaria* - were to become ecclesiastically subordinated to the Archdiocese of Ohrida.¹⁶ In 1027, according to the *Annales Barenses*, the Vlachs took part in a military expedition led by Constantine VIII against the Saracens in Sicily.¹⁷ The same Byzantine General Kekaumenos recounts in detail the 1066 revolt of the Vlachs, led by Niculiță the Young, an uprising that broke out because of the excessive fiscality imposed by Constantine X Doukas. The extent of the revolt

Malcolm Noel, *A short history of Kosovo* (Macmillan: London, 1998), 205, gog could be translated as "stone mason."

¹⁰ Asterios Koukoudis, *The Vlachs* (Salonic: Ed. Zitros, 2003), 197-198.

¹¹ Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 271.

¹² Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 373.

¹³ Petre S. Năsturel, "Vlahii din spațiul bizantin și bulgăresc până la cucerirea otomană," in Neagu Djuvara, ed. *Aromâni*, 54.

¹⁴ Byzantine military province.

¹⁵ George Murnu, *Istoria Românilor din Pind-Vlahia Mare 980-1259 - Studiu istoric după izvoarele bizantine* (București: Editura Europa, 2003), 8-11.

¹⁶ Murnu, *Istoria*, 33-34.

¹⁷ Murnu, *Istoria*, 35.

attributed prevalently to the Vlachs attests both their presence on a vast territory and their high degree of organization.¹⁸ Another information about the Vlachs dates from 1165-1166, when Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela was travelling from Spain towards Jerusalem. Arriving in Lamia, he declared, “this is the beginning of Vlachia, whose inhabitants occupy the mountains, and they bear the name of Vlachs. Nobody can attack them by war, no emperor can subdue them.”¹⁹

The most notable event of the 12th century for Southern Balkan Romanness was, of course, the uprising that broke out in Tarnovo, in 1186, against the Byzantine Empire. It was led by the brothers Peter and Asen, also known as the founders of the Bulgarian Tsarate. Their successor, Ioniță Caloian (1197-1207), received the ecclesiastical sovereignty of the See of Rome, but was recognized as Tsar by Pope Innocent III, being crowned in the Cathedral of Tarnovo on 8 November 1204. The Tsarate reached its maximum expansion under Ivan Asen II (1218-1241), after which it decayed gradually.²⁰ A series of testimonies left by medieval chroniclers attest the existence of some areas with probably compact Aromanian population, since they appear in documents under the name of *Vlahii* (Wallachias). These included Thessaly and a part of Macedonia that received the name of Greater Vlachia (Megali Vlahia), Aetolia (Smaller Vlahia), Epirus (Upper Vlahia), and the Haemus area - White Vlachia.²¹ The chronicle of an anonymous writer dated 1308 speaks of the Vlachs seated between Macedonia, Achaia and Thessaloniki as representing a very large nation. During the same period, the Byzantine historiographer Khalcondillas testified that the Vlachs had once spread from Dacia to the Pindus.²²

In the late 14th century and the early 15th century, the largest part of the Balkan Peninsula came under Ottoman rule, so the self-assertion possibilities of the Christians and, implicitly, of the Aromanians in the political-cultural realms became extremely low. On the other hand, the political installation of the new empire brought about for the Aromanians a much less dramatic situation than we would be tempted to believe today. The English historian Douglas Dakin speaks of a quasi-independent state of the Vlachs in the area of the Pindus Mountains, up to Kastoria, which survived for about 300 years after the Turkish occupation.²³ Following the chronological line of the testimonies recorded about South-Danubian Romanness, we should mention the statement made in 1470 by the Byzantine historian Laonic Chalkokondyles: “just like the people living from Dacia to the Pindus, that which stretches across Thessaly, they are called Vlachs, both they and the others. And I would not be able to explain and say which of them came to whom. [...] And those on Mount Pindus - Vlachs inhabit it - speak the same language with the Dacians and are like the Dacians from Istros.”²⁴

¹⁸ Murnu, *Istoria*, 41.

¹⁹ Hristu Căndroveanu, ed., *Caleidoscop Aromân*, vol. I, (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Aromâne, 1998), 94, the manuscript is housed by the British Museum in London.

²⁰ Petre S. Năsturel, “Vlahii din spațiul bizantin și bulgăresc,” 81.

²¹ Murnu, *Istoria*, 142.

²² Theodor Capidan, *Macedo-românii* (București: Editura Fundației Regale, 1942), 25.

²³ Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913* (Salonic: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966), 8.

²⁴ Laonic Chalcocondyl, *Historiarum Demonstrationes*, 35 apud. Gh. Zbucea, *Românii*, p. 127.

Sultan Murad II (1422-1452) issued a capitulation relating to the Aromanians, which was then confirmed by subsequent sultans. Its first point specifies: "High justice will be distributed in the country through the person of a *cadi*, under Wallachian law. Wallachians will be able to travel in utmost freedom, throughout the whole empire, exercising any profession they deem to be good."²⁵ These facilities granted to the Aromanians were not fortuitous, because by the 15th-16th centuries the Aromanians had become suppliers of the conquering armies, which had embarked on full expansion and whose maintenance demanded meat, butters and clothing, beasts of burden, etc. Hence the importance of *celnics* - owners of large herds, the tradition propelling them to the positions of leaders of the Aromanian communities. The *celnic* was always the richest among all the shepherds he was in charge of. He was the representative of the *fumiali*, not elected, but *Dei gratia*. He was their judge and the executor of sentences, overseeing all matters, and his decisions were complied with without exception. Several *celnics* in a settlement formed the tribunal of the village and the general staff that settled any disputes in the community.²⁶ *Celnics* played an active role in the accumulation of wealth and in ensuring a relatively thriving economic situation for the Aromanian population in general. Ever since the Middle Ages, *celnics* had formed the noble class in Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, holding considerable fortunes as regards both their movable (herds) and their immovable assets (extensive land properties).²⁷

Another institution that was specific to the Aromanians and was closely related to their pastoral way of life was military in nature and was known as captaincy.²⁸ Captaincies were military areas led by a chief of their own, called Captain, whose subordinates were designated through the Latin term of *armatoli*, i.e. armed men. They were required to maintain order and peace in villages and towns, as well as to guard the mountain passes (*dervenele*). In exchange for their services, they were exempt from taxes, yet forced to pay an annual *peshkash* to the Valid Sultana, the Sultan's mother, as a sign of vassalage.²⁹

At the beginning of the 18th century, after the reorganization of the Ottoman military system, some of these *armatoli* lost the privileges previously granted to them, being thus forced to find a new occupation. It appears that the foremost position in their economic and social structures was taken by the so-called *călători* (travellers, *Kielatori*), leaders of caravans and of merchants, as this occupation required, of course, military skills; thus, the transformation of an *armatol* into a *cărăvănar* (caravan master) came as naturally as possible.

²⁵ *Aravantinos, Chronographia tis Ipiru*, 1856, vol. I, 57, apud. Anastasie Hâciu, *Aromânii* (Constanța: Editura Cartea Aromână, 2003), 35.

²⁶ Ioan Caragjani, *Studii istorice asupra românilor din Peninsula Balcanică* (București, 1929), 50.

²⁷ Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 286.

²⁸ Ion Arginteanu, *Istoria Românilor Macedoneni* (București, 1904), 224. In 1537, acknowledging a *de facto* situation, Sultan Suleiman divided Southern Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus into 15 constituencies, called captaincies, namely 5 in Epirus and Acarnania (Malacaș, Tzumercu, Xeromeru, Lidorichi, Venetic), 5 in Thessaly (Olimp, Agrafa, Casia, Mavrovuni, Patragic) and another 5 in Macedonia (Veria, Serfige, Alasona, Grebena and Milia).

²⁹ Demetrie Abeleanu, *Neamul Aromânesc din Macedonia* (București, 1916), 21.

The Aromanian settlements of Kleisoura (Arom. Clisuri), Șiatista, Linotopi (the valley of the Aliakmon River), Mëcove (Arom. Aminciu), Călarli, Șipisca, Gramoște, Moloviște, Siracu, Samarina, Malacaș and, last but not least, Moscopole, developed in the 16th-18th centuries and became important centres of trade. Aromanians merchants distinguished themselves in international trade by land and at sea, particularly on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, conducting business with the Italian states and especially with the *Serenissima Repubblica*.³⁰

The Aromanian merchants' exports consisted of wool and woollen fabrics (thick cloth, abas, blankets, bedspreads, carpets, *velnițe* - Aromanian shirts), to which were added leather products (maroquin, saffian, cordovan), cotton, tar, coffee, wax, tobacco, honey, oil, etc. Imports comprised mostly fine fabrics: broadcloth, velvet, brocatello, glass objects, paper, books, weapons, metals (lead, copper and bronze alloy, tin), indigo, sugar, Italian tiles, etc.³¹

The situation of the Aromanians in the Balkans during the 17th-19th centuries is largely known to us from the writings of several West Europeans: W. M. Leake, Ami Boue, E. M. Counsinery, Iacob Falmerayer, F. Pouqueville, F. Kanitz, Johann Thunmann, G. Weigand, R. Stuart, etc. They travelled throughout the Ottoman Empire for various purposes and depicted, in their works, all the aspects of the Aromanians' life, taking an interest in their commercial activities, industry, shepherding, customs and, last but not least, language.³² For example, in his work entitled *Voyage dans la Grece*, published in Paris in 1820, Francoise Charles Pouqueville (1770-1838), Consul of France at the Court of Ali Pasha of Ioannina during the reign of Napoleon I, emphasized the commercial activity and the vast distribution of the trade houses established by the Aromanians in Naples, Livorno, Genoa, Sardinia, Venice, Trieste, Ancona, Ragussa, Vienna, etc.³³ The starting point for this intense trade was the Aromanian city of Moscopole, which reach maximum prosperity in the mid-18th century. This city appeared in the documents of the time as *urbs amplissima*, boasting over 12,000 houses, 22 churches and a population of around 50,000 inhabitants. It was probably the second-largest city after Constantinople in the entire Balkan peninsula. For the same period, Pouqueville estimate only 10,000 souls living in Athens, most of them Albanians and Turks.³⁴ Moscopole had several schools, a printing press, an Academy inaugurated in 1750 and an important library. Against the background of the Russo-Turkish (1768-1774) and Russo-Turkish-Austrian wars (1787-1792), Moscopole was sacked twice, in 1761 and in 1769. In 1788 it was plundered and completely destroyed along with the surrounding Aromanian settlements: Șipiska, Bitcuchi, Niculița, Linotopi, Nicea,

³⁰ Matei Cazacu, "Vlahii din Balcanii Occidentali," in Djuvara, *Aromânii*, 97.

³¹ Gh. Zbucea, *O istorie a Românilor din Balcani*, București, Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 1999, p. 31.

³² Evidently, I have used these "sources" in full awareness of their limitations, as they are travelogues and bear the mark of subjectivism or of *a priori* conceptions.

³³ See Papahagi, *Românii din Peninsula Balcanică după călători apuseni din secolul al XIX-lea* (Roșiorii de Vede, 1928), 8.

³⁴ Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 154-155.

Lânca, Grabova and Birina.³⁵ A good portion of the population that was uprooted on account of the barbarousness of the Muslim Albanians, the authors of the city's destruction, settled, over the course of time, in Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, the German states, the Danubian principalities, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, etc. In their new homelands, the Aromanians, although perceived as Greeks - a primarily religious perception, attributed in fact to all of the Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire - distinguished themselves among the commercial and financial bourgeoisie, foremost among whom were the Aromanian families Sina, Dumba, Tirca, Curti, Tricupa, Kapra von Zsuppa, von Mitta, Zotta, Şaguna, Mocsonyi, Gojdu ori Manno: they established charitable foundations and engaged in the patronage of arts, by way of the old Aromanian custom of *lasământ* (endowment) and thus came to enjoy, in their new homelands, special consideration, often receiving noble titles.³⁶ Analysing their rise in the territories they settled in, the British scholar Ronald Matthews appreciated that these *kutsovalahii* were recognized as the *Jews of the Balkans*.³⁷

Another favourite destination of the Aromanians included the Romanian principalities, their presence north of the Danube being undisputed throughout history. Speaking about the importance of Aromanians, Take Ionescu showed at the end of the 19th century that "Our bourgeoisie was and is chiefly composed of them and it is beyond any dispute that the Aromanian element played a larger role than we might have thought 30-40 years ago, when we mistook them for the Greeks, in the leavening of the modern Romanian society."³⁸

Predictably, Aromanian merchants were, most of the times, assimilated with the Greeks in the business environment, the pro-Hellenic atmosphere in the Western countries providing them, not infrequently, with sympathies and advantages. Culturally, however, for some of the Aromanian intellectuals in the diaspora, Rome and the idea of their Roman origins would become a magnet that would urge them to set up their own national movement. Thus, in Vienna in 1797, twenty years before the undertakings of Gheorghe Lazăr, the work entitled *Noua pedagogie sau Abecedar uşor spre a învăţa pe copiii tineri carte aromânească* [*The New Pedagogy, or A Simple Primer for Teaching the Aromanian Alphabet to Children*] saw the light of print in the printing press of the Aromanian Marcu Puiu. The author was Constantin Ucuta, the Orthodox archpriest from Posen, a Moscopolean by origin. This was a textbook that attempted for the first time to lay down the rules of speaking in the Aromanian dialect. Ucuta introduced, in fact, the term *româno-vlahi* (Romanian-Vlachs) instead of the one in use, Wallachians. After Ucuta, the second advocate of the national movement in the Central European space was Gheorghe C. Roja (1786-1846), a physician working for the University Hospital in Budapest, who published two works in 1808-1809, namely *Cugetări despre românii denumiţi vlahi care locuiesc dincolo de Dunăre* [*Thoughts about the Romanians Who Are Known as Vlachs and Live*

³⁵ Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 164.

³⁶ Max Demeter Peyfuss, *Chestiunea Aromână* (Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994), 16.

³⁷ Ronald Matthews, *Sons of the Eagle Wanderings in Albania* (London: Methuen, 1937), 234.

³⁸ Gh. Zbucea, *O istorie a românilor din Peninsula Balcanică secolele XVIII-XX* (Bucureşti: Ed. Biblioteca Bucureştilor, 1999), 41-42.

across the Danube] - in Greek and German - and *Măiestria ghiovăsirii* (citirii) românești cu litere latinești care sunt literele românilor cele vechi. Spre polirea a toată ghinta românească ce-i din coace și cei din colo de Dunăre [The Skill of Reading in Latin Script, Which is the Romanian Script of Old. For the Enlightenment of all the Romanian Nation This Side and across the Danube].

Mihail Boiagi carried out his activity in Vienna during the same period. In 1813 he published *Gramatică aromână sau macedono-valahă* [Aromanian or Macedono-Wallachian Grammar], this being the first scientific grammar written in the dialect of the Aromanians using Latin script. In addition to rich elements of alphabet, morphology and syntax, Boiagi added dialogues, as well as a series of fables and stories, becoming the first known author of literature in the Aromanian dialect.³⁹

The significance of Boiagi's book is naturally revealed if we place it in the context of the scientific pursuits in the domain of linguistics in Southeast Europe during those times. For example, in 1808, B. Kopitar had published a grammar of Slavonic. In 1816, Vuc Karadzic published a grammar of the Serbian language, and much later, in 1835, a grammar of the Bulgarian language was printed.⁴⁰

For the Aromanian intellectuals in the diaspora the Latin origin and the attractiveness of Rome proved strong enough to give rise to a consciousness of their own individuality. Based on this, they were to aspire, in the near future, to forge a modern national consciousness. While in the diaspora Aromanian intellectuals were able to cultivate and assert their identity, in their native lands that were under Ottoman suzerainty and Byzantine influence of Greek rite they had sinuous and sometimes contradictory manifestations of self-identity. For the Aromanian elites in the southern areas of the Balkan Peninsula, their political and cultural ideal was largely related to the revival of Byzantium. This was the case of the Aromanians' generation from the late 18th century and the early 19th century, whose members turned the Greek cause into their own.⁴¹ The great Greek revolution, as V. Berard writes, was begun by the *armatoli* herdsman.⁴² The statement is not at all unfounded, because Aromanians made a significant contribution on both the organizational and the military level.

The signal for battle was given by Riga Fereu (who came from Veleștinul Tesaliei) in Bucharest, by composing the famous poem that is considered even today the Greek people's Marseillaise. He founded Hellenic literary societies with revolutionary goals in Vienna and Trieste, whose members were mostly Aromanians. From the beginning of the battles, there were Aromanian commanders of armies such as Teodor Colocotroni, Generalissimo of the revolutionary armies in Peloponnesus, celebrated in the people's songs as Vlaho Vasileas or Vasileas ton Vlahon (King of the Vlachs), probably because the core of his army consisted of Aromanians. Ianis Colleti had a significant, if not determining contribution to the foundation of the

³⁹ V. Berard, *La Turquie et l'Hellenisme contemporaine* (Paris, 1893), 248, apud. *Caleidoscop aromân*, vol. 2, (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Aromâne, 1999), 329.

⁴⁰ Peyfuss, *Chestiunea aromână*, 26.

⁴¹ Stelian Brezeanu, Constantin Jordan, ed., *Relațiile Româno-Elene* (București: Editura Omonia, 2003), 164.

⁴² Berard, *La Turquie*, 248.

modern Greek State, and so did Odiseu Andruțu Moceană, Commander of the troops in the North of the Peloponnesus, Vlaho Cionga, Caraischachi Commander of the troops in Rumelia. The defence of the city of Missolonghi (later decreed to be the Holy City of Greece) was carried out with the supreme sacrifice of a few hundreds of *armatoli* led by Sturnari, Chițu Geavela, Marcu Bociari, Razu Coțea, Noti Bociari, etc.⁴³ Cesare Cantu highlights the fact that in 1821 “the Greeks managed to turn the war of capitulations in the Pindus into a war of independence for Greece. Thus, the ranks of Aromanian *Armatoli* provided soldiers to the Greek revolution and their captains became the most glorious generals of this war of independence.”⁴⁴

It should be noted that until the 1821 Revolution, the anti-Ottoman fight was led by Aromanian captains across the Southern Balkans. For easily understandable reasons, Greek historiographers falsified their ethnicity, referring to the Aromanians as *blahofonoii ellines* (Greeks who speak Romanian) or *oresibioii ellines*,⁴⁵ a name that was taken over by foreign historians, that of *highland Greek warriors*.⁴⁶

These deeds of arms against the Ottoman occupant could be seen as a religious manifestation, as this contributed substantially to the Aromanians' rapprochement to the Greeks, given that the flag of Christianity was the flag of the Greek Church itself.⁴⁷ The religious character of the struggle for the Holy Cross, with which the Greek Megali Idea was very firmly entwined, resulted in the destruction of many thriving Aromanian settlements in time (Moscopolea, Grămostea, Niculița, etc.). This led to population dislocations, a massive exodus and the leaders' alienation, worsening the schism between the elite and the masses, so harmful for the Aromanians' existence as an ethnicity. On the other hand, the establishment of an independent Greek State led to the consolidation of a secular opponent, all the more dangerous as it had appropriated the aura of Christianity and used a language which, in religious terms, represented an irresistible access gateway. In the euphoria of the common struggle, Greek, the language of the Church, spread also outside the places of worship.⁴⁸ Thus, particularly in this way, many Aromanians began to feel bewildered by their alleged *Hellenic descent*, which would generate in time the phenomenon of Greek-Romanism, steeped in the complex of the renegade.⁴⁹ According to the Greek historian Michalopoulos, the moment the Aromanians adopted Greek was when they became merchants, because this was the lingua franca of the time. The same renowned academic highlights that “One truth that needs to be heard is that the modern Greek elite was composed mainly of Aromanians.” Michalopoulos gives examples, such as Iannis Kolletis (1780-1847) - Prime Minister,

⁴³ Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 555.

⁴⁴ Cesare Cantu, *Histoire universelle*, vol. XIX, (Paris, 1894), 215, apud. Constantin Papanace, *Mică antologie aromânească* (București: Editura Scara, 2001), 23.

⁴⁵ Ion Deboveanu, “Căpitănată și Aromâni,” in *Revista de istorie militară*, no. 2/(1992): 26.

⁴⁶ Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *Formarea statelor naționale 1804-1920* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1999), 65.

⁴⁷ Tache Papahagi, *Aromânii (curs universitar), litografiat-Grai-Folclor-Etnografie*, București, 1932, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Constantin Papanace, *Geneza și evoluția conștiinței naționale la macedo-români* (București: Editura Brumar, 1995), 217.

⁴⁹ Papanace, *Geneza*, 334.

Michail Tossitza (1787-1856), A. Valaoritis (1824-1879), Spyridon Trikoupis (1788-1873) - statesman, diplomat and historian, his son Harilaos Trikoupis (1832-1896), Prime Minister of Greece, both of them having their origins in Moscopole, etc.⁵⁰

Their massive involvement in public life was to facilitate this process that would later lead to actions of fratricidal struggle amidst the Aromanians who rose against the assimilationist policy adopted by the Government in Athens.

In modern times, the name Aromanians, which made its debut in the scientific world thanks to the research conducted by Gustav Weigand, was generalized to encompass the entire Balkan Romanness. We will focus, in what follows, on the way in which modern historiography has approached the origin and the language of the Aromanians, after this necessary historical overview of the community analysed here.

Along time, several theories have been set forth regarding the origin of the Aromanians: 1. An older theory, dating back to the time of the chroniclers, which claimed that Aromanians came from north of the Danube, whence they had been displaced and moved south of the Danube. 2. The second theory of non-autochthony (Kekaumenos, G. Weigand, Densuşianu, S. Puşcariu, Al. Phillipide, etc.) supports the idea that Aromanians came from the north of the Balkan Peninsula, where there had been a Romanized population until the arrival of the Slavs; this Romance population descended southwards down to the Jirecek line (the demarcation line of Balkan Romanness). The advocates of this theory argue that those who escaped from Slavicization travelled north, south and west, where they gave rise to the Aromanians, the Meglenites and the Histrians; 3. The third theory, proposed by Theodor Capidan and Tache Papahagi, upholds the Aromanians' autochthony. According to this theory, Aromanians are the descendants of the Romance population from the south of the Balkan Peninsula, the area of Macedonia, Epirus and the Pindus Mountains. This theory is supported by Greek researchers of Aromanian origin (Liakos, Lazarou, Katsoughiannis), but according to them the Aromanians are the descendants of Greeks who were Latinized during Roman times.⁵¹ Achile Lazarou published in 1986 his PhD Thesis, entitled *L'Aroumain et les rapports avec le Grec*, under the auspices of the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki. His study, though one of the comparative linguistics, fixed some theoretical benchmarks, especially as regards the ethnonym "Aromanian." Thus, according to this author, the major difference between the terms *Romanus-Aromânu-Armânu*⁵² and *Romain-Romios* is that while the former designates a bilingual subject, speaking both Greek and Aromanian, the latter relates only to a Hellenophone. The researcher believes that the key to identifying the originary area of the Aromanians is offered by the Slavic influence: whereas in Greek this influence is very weak, in Romanian it is much more consistent, and in Aromanian it is almost entirely absent. These conclusions disprove any

⁵⁰ Dimitris Michalopoulos, "Aromanians and Tsakonians: similarities and differences" in Ewa Nowicka, ed., *The Politics of Culture, Perspectives of stateless nationalities ethnic groups* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2012), 65-66.

⁵¹ Dana Jitcov, *Portret identitar aromân* (Bucureşti: Editura Bren, 2006), 103-104.

⁵² N. Andriotis imposed the term Aromanian in the Greek language, Lazarou, *L'aroumain*, 11.

interpretation as to the Aromanians' descent from the areas north of the Danube to the regions of the Pindus. Achile Lazarou reviews in his work all the theories about the origin of the Aromanians in the Greek space, from those that are scientifically verified to the most speculative (according to M. Chysochoos, the word Vlach allegedly comes from *fellah*, which meant a small owners in Egypt!!!). Obviously, since the Greek research is reviewed here, the main theses mentioned above are included in the by now classical panoply of this historiography: in terms of their ethnicity, Aromanians are Greeks, while in terms of their dialect, they are Latinized Greeks.⁵³

From the perspective of the Romanian philologist Theodor Capidan, the Macedo-Romanian dialect has the same structure with Daco-Romanian, having had an identical historical evolution as regards the constituent element. This linguistic unit is detectible also at an analysis of the Latin element in the two dialects, which had undergone the same changes. The issue is demonstrable both practically, by comparing a phrase in Aromanian with its transposition into Daco-Romanian, and scientifically, if we attempt to understand the structure of the Macedo-Romanian dialect.⁵⁴

The Canadian professor of Macedonian extraction Andrew Rossos, when referring to the Romance population south of the Danube, uses both the ethnonym *români* (Romanians) and that of *vlahi* (Vlachs), a symptomatic expression for the entire Macedonian historiography, which does not call into question the existence of this ethnic element in the peninsula and its kinship to the branch of North-Danubian Romanianness. The stakes of this historiography continue to be, even at present, the recognition of the statehood of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and not the denial of the status and existence of a minority of Latin origin in Balkan area.⁵⁵ The famous Serbian historian T. R. Georgevitch believes that the former Roman settlers who remained in Macedonia survive only in Thessaly and in Southern Macedonia (he calls them *tânțari* or Macedo-Romanians), and north of the Danube (Romanians).⁵⁶ The British Henry Brailsford, a member of the International Commission for the investigation of the atrocities committed during two Balkan Wars, deemed that the Vlachs or Wallachians were the descendants of the Roman colonists. Brailsford was of the opinion that they were the most ancient townspeople who had survived to that day (our note, 1904), speaking a Latin-Romanian dialect, but also Greek and Slavonic, which they had learned in church and in school.⁵⁷ The great Russian Byzantinist Dimitri Obolensky also catalogues the ascendancy of the Vlachs and their language as being of Romance origin, this nation being recognized, ever since Byzantine times, after their pastoral way of life, the cheeses and the garments they produced and were

⁵³ Lazarou, *L'aroumain*, 14.

⁵⁴ Theodor Capidan, *Macedo-românii* (București: Litera Internațional, 2000), 160-163.

⁵⁵ Andrew Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians. A History*, (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2008), *passim*.

⁵⁶ T.R. Georgevitch, *Macedonia* (London, 1918), 12.

⁵⁷ H.N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: its races and their future* (Methuen: London, 1906), 85.

highly appreciated by the population of Constantinople, but also for their resistance to paying taxes and their incurable disobedience to the Byzantine authorities - all of these being elements that complete the Aromanians' group portrait.⁵⁸

The Turkish historiography is probably the one that regards the matter of the Vlachs least impassioned, as a distinct ethnic element within the Orthodox millet in the Balkans. Demirtaş Coşkun, a researcher at the Institute for Eurasian Strategic Studies in Ankara, believes that the Vlachs⁵⁹ in the Balkans have *the same common origin and speak a similar language as the Romanians north of the Danube*.⁶⁰ Coşkun analyses the Byzantine and the Ottoman periods, demonstrating that the Vlachs were a separate ethnic group even in the army from the rest of the Greek and Bulgarian soldiers - a very important argument against the Greek and Bulgarian theses that the Vlachs allegedly have Greek or Bulgarian origins. Both the Byzantine and the Turkish sources (Evliya Çelebi and Kâtip Çelebi) confirm the assertion above.⁶¹

The book of the Bulgarian historian J. Ivanoff, a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and a University Professor at Sofia - *La Question Macèdonienne*, published in Paris in 1920, at the time of the Peace Congress - presents a well-documented overview of the Bulgarian stance on the issue of the nationalities in the Balkan area known as Macedonia. Ivanoff admits that the Vlachs are of Thracian-Illyrian descent and that they were Latinized during the Roman domination, implicitly accepting their autochthonous roots in the Balkans. The inventory of ethnonyms under which they are known in the area is as follows: *cuțovalahi, țințari, sârăcaceani*, etc., depending on the name given to them by the cohabiting populations. The name they use for themselves is *aromâni, adică români*⁶² (Aromanians, that is, Romanians), the author suggesting thus their direct filiation with the branch of North-Danubian Romanians. Since the Middle Ages, there were significant numbers of Wallachians in Macedonia, as attested in countless Byzantine sources or on various maps drawn at the Byzantine, Serbian or Bulgarian courts. The author believes that the largest portion of the present-day Wallachian population in Macedonia derives from an 18th-century immigration, as the Wallachians of the past were assimilated by the Bulgarian-Greek population, most of them taking refuge in mountain areas that were more conducive to an unrestrained pastoral lifestyle. The regions where the Wallachians have maintained an unbroken continuity over the course of centuries are Thessaly, Epirus and the Pindus Mountains. During the destructions and the Albanian-Muslim uprisings of the 18th and early 19th centuries, groups of Wallachian population were dislocated and emigrated both to Macedonia and to the far north of the Balkan Peninsula.

⁵⁸ Dimitri Obolensky, *Un Commonwealth medieval: Bizanțul, Europa de Răsărit 500-1453* (București: Corint, 2002), 227.

⁵⁹ Throughout the paper the term Vlachs is used for Aromanians, as it is thought to be the most widespread in scholarship.

⁶⁰ Birgül Demirtaş Coşkun, *The Vlachs a forgotten minority in the Balkans* (London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2001), 2.

⁶¹ Coşkun, *The Vlachs*, 8 and passim.

Greek historiography is by far the most impassioned in terms of the attempts to elucidate the origin of the Aromanians' ethnicity and language, being much more willing to discuss these matters polemically. The most obvious approach in this regard aims to empty the denomination Vlach of its ethnic sense and to present strictly the professional mark underlying it, that of shepherd.⁶³ Informed answers against the truth-value of these theories have been given by reputed scholars, such as Adolf Armbruster, Gh. Brătianu, etc., and, more recently, this issue has been debated extensively in the reception speech to the Romanian Academy by Professor Ioan Aurel Pop. The Cluj-based historian believes that the terms *vlah*, *valah*, *voloh*, *blac*, *olah*, *vlas*, *ilac*, *ulac*, etc. are denominations of one and the same ethnicity, the lexeme Vlach representing an exonym in this context, while *rumân* or *român* is an endonym. The theories that place the Vlachs prior to the Romanians and those that distinguish between the two in ethnic terms represent, according to the opinion of the academician, "biased ideas, with a political subtext but without any scientific basis."⁶⁴

Returning to the Greek historiography, Stilpon Kiriakides explains the origin of the Vlachs as the result of the Greek merchants' and travellers' frequent voyages, during which they acquired the way of life and the customs of the Romans, becoming Latinized. These descendants of the Latinized Greeks are, according to the historiography of the Greek State, "the Helleno-Vlachs the Romanians are claiming."⁶⁵ In a paper delivered in 1939, entitled *What are the Koutsovlachs*, Keramopoulos, President of the Greek Academy, stated very adamantly that "the Vlachs are perhaps the purest of the Hellenes."⁶⁶ His theses were in fact those drawn thirty years before in Athens by M. Chrysochoos, who had firmly established the idea of the Aromanians' originary *Greekness*, a theory that was to acquire the status of unquestionable evidence for many of the Greek historiographers.⁶⁷

Starting from such premises, the use of the Vlach/Aromanian language in Greece was to be considered a sign of backwardness and lack of propriety, the members of the Vlach community being forced to hide their true identity especially in the cities.⁶⁸ Hellenic historiography claims that those *Vlachs are actually Greeks who speak an unusual dialect with a considerable number of words from Greek*. Modern Greek writers call Vlachs *pure Greeks* who adopted the Latin language during military service for the Romans. Demirtaş Coşkun, the analyst cited above, notes that these *irrational theories* have been adopted and assumed by the majority of the Vlachs for reasons of security or out of opportunism. Greece declares itself even

⁶³ Gh. Zbucea, C. Buchet, *Români din afara granițelor țării* (București: Fundația România de mâine, 2008), 122.

⁶⁴ Ioan Aurel Pop, *Semnificația istorică a unor nume: român și România*, reception speech delivered on 29 May 2012. http://www.acad.ro/com2013/pag_com13_0529.htm, accessed on 10.09.2013.

⁶⁵ Kiriakides Stilpon, *The Northern ethnological boundaries of Hellenism* (Salonic, 1955), 17.

⁶⁶ *Ti enai oi Koutsovlahoi*, Athens, 1939 apud C. Papanace, *Pro Balcania și Fermentul Aromân (macedo-român) în Sud-Estul European*, București, Societatea Academică Moscopolitană, 2004, p. 244. This theory is, in fact, supported also by Lazarou, who considers that the Aromanians are Greeks, Lazarou, *L'Aroumain*, 103.

⁶⁷ Nicolae Trifon, *Aromânii, pretutindeni, nicăieri* (Chișinău: Editura Cartier, 2012), 290.

⁶⁸ Trifon, *Aromânii*, 31.

today against independent observers, any studies on the Vlachs' situation, even of the journalistic type, being rigorously obstructed; the authorities resort even to expulsions and prohibitions of the right to enter the country.⁶⁹ For Demirtaş Coşkun, these are but reflexes of a *nationalist chauvinist neurosis* that Greece is responsible for. The Ottoman period is highlighted as the most open in terms of the protection afforded to the Vlachs, since they were granted the right to education in the Romanian language, the best way in which the Vlachs could maintain their identity.⁷⁰

In recent years, however, we have noticed in Greece a reconsideration of the role played by the Aromanians or the Vlachs. One of the works that gave the tone of the new trend belongs to Asterios Koukudis with his *Studies on the Vlachs. The Vlachs: Metropolis and Diaspora*, published at the prestigious Zitros Press in Thessaloniki in 2003, English Edition. The work has more than 500 pages and was printed in outstanding graphic conditions, under the aegis of the Hellenic National Defence Ministry. In 1998, the book was awarded the Prize of the Hellenic Academy for Literature and Art. The study received the approval of the high state authorities, through President Konstantinos Stefanopoulos, and of the ecclesiastical authorities, through His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, both writing prefaces to the work and thus giving special weight to the volume, which, we might say, encapsulates the official position avowed by both the Greek State and the Church, through the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Whereas other studies insist considerably on the Aromanians' origin and language, this time such data are classed as unimportant, even superfluous. What is acknowledged, however, is the particular importance of the Aromanians in the history of Greece: "For various historical reasons from the mid-period of Turkocracy, the leadership and authority in the central and northern parts of Greece were concentrated in the Pindus Mountains and the surrounding areas, where the descendants of the Romans and Latin-speaking Byzantines had survived. Thus, the Vlachs entered recent history as a class of large herd owners and prosperous merchants, but also as *klefçi* and *armatoli*. From their ranks come the great scholars of the nation and warriors in Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia, as well as a large number of merchants and industrialists who represented the pillars of the Orthodox communities in the urban centres of the Balkans. The Vlachs cannot be regarded as a mere museum piece, as the remnant of a long extinct pastoral life in the highlands or of an easily manipulable minority of *keen patrons*. *The Vlachs are not a minority dressed in fustanella who speak Vlach. They are, above all, the craftsmen of the cities, scattered everywhere on Greek land, where they had an enormous contribution to our country's construction. The evidence is everywhere, from the impressive buildings of Athens to the schools in the Macedonian boroughs, from Premier Kolletis to the Maecenas of the Hellenic homeland or to heroes from the Wallachian villages who sacrificed themselves during the Macedonian struggle and during the occupation of the Nazi Axis.*"⁷¹

⁶⁹ Trifon, *Aromânii*, 34.

⁷⁰ Trifon, *Aromânii*, 56.

⁷¹ Asterios Koukudis, *Studies on the Vlachs. The Vlachs Metropolis and Diaspora* (Salonic: Zitros, 2003), 15-16.

The Greek President's statements are of particular importance because they confirm from the "adversarial" camp certain realities that are known and reiterated in the universal historiography about the Aromanians, but have often been catalogued as exaggerations on the part of Aromanian authors, marred by a high degree of subjectivity. This is fundamentally contradicted by *historical evidence*, as President Stefanopoulos asserts beyond any doubt. In the second foreword dated 14 September 1999, authored by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I himself, we find, among others, that: "We are glad that you show very clearly in your research that the Vlachs are descended from the Greeks."⁷² The intransigent position expressed by His Holiness does not surprise us, for it is consistent with the perception of most all of the occupants of the ecumenical seat, who have not limited themselves to making allegations without a historical basis, but have acted accordingly, supervising, through their hierarchical authority, actions that targeted the suppression of any non-Hellenic identity dissidences within the Aromanian communities.

A well-nigh singular voice amongst Greek analysts belongs to the linguistic researcher Nikitas Vantsias, who states that Aromanian is one and the same language as Daco-Romanian. The two idioms feature the same peculiarities, standing apart in the context of Romance languages.⁷³ The similarities at the level of the base layer and of the substrate are the main reason why strictly linguistically, the four idioms are considered to be dialects of the same language. The most important differences between the dialects in question appeared with the influence of the languages of the ad-stratum. The difference between Romanian and Aromanian lies in the much larger number of Greek elements in the latter. As Vantsias contends, the myriad words of Greek origin from the fabric of the Aromanian idiom are typical for the category of lexical borrowings. Although they are numerous, few of these have the frequency and importance of some words in the main lexical fund.⁷⁴ His opinion is endorsed by British researchers such as Oxford Wace and Thompsons,⁷⁵ by Professor Peter Mackridge from Oxford and by Eleni Yannakakis, from King's College University.⁷⁶

From the perspective of Mathilde Caragiu Marioțeanu, the thesis that upholds the independent status of the South-Danubian dialects and the necessity to approach them as separate languages⁷⁷ is a political thesis that was imposed by the Soviets with direct reference to Bessarabia. At stake was the dismantlement, the erasure of the *străromân* layer (Ur-Romanian, also called common Romanian) from the history of the Romanian language and the derivation of its four present-day branches from Carpathian-Danubian Latin. For the esteemed philologist, all the

⁷²Koukoudis, *Studies*, 17.

⁷³N. Vantsias, *Fondul principal lexical al aromânei* (București: Semne, 2010), 25-26.

⁷⁴Vantsias, *Fondul lexical*, 31.

⁷⁵A.J.B.Wace, M.S.Thompson, *The Nomads of the Balkans* (London: Methuen, 1914), 2.

⁷⁶Peter Mackridge, Eleni Yannakakis, *Ourselves and Others. The development of a Greek Macedonian Cultural Identity since 1912* (Oxford, New York: Ed. Berg, 1997), 5.

⁷⁷This was the point of view upheld by Alexandru Graur and Ion Coteanu, who spoke about a language of the Aromanians.

historical Romanian dialects have, therefore, a common Romanian denominator and a specific note: Dacian, Hystrian, Macedonian, Meglenian.⁷⁸

The language continues to be viewed as the most powerful agent of unification by all the national and cultural leaders of various propagandas;⁷⁹ hence, the fervour of the experiments that are at stake with regard to linguistic issues. The problem of the Aromanians' origin and language has therefore been confiscated by the various national propagandas developed in the Balkans of the modern age. Linguists have made no exception from scientific faux pas prompted by national motivations. In the absence of a framework of debate anchored exclusively in scientific objectivity, the Aromanians' matter continues to stir heated debates. While for and against theories (dialect or language) are dissected in the philological laboratories, the language is dying in the field, re-editing, somehow, the destiny of Dalmatian, another Romance dialect spoken for the last time in 1898.

⁷⁸ Matilda Caragiu Marioțeanu, *Aromânii și Aromâna în conștiința contemporană* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2006), 60-61.

⁷⁹ Maria Todorova, *Balcanii și balcanismul* (București: Humanitas, 2000), 276.