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THE ETHNIC CODE OF THE VLACHS AT THE BALKANS

Abstract: The ethnic code is a basis for ethnic identification of each community, that separates it from other ethnic groups. Vlachs are one of the communities that have been analyzed from different aspects, with a tendency to be related to the identity of another ethnic group, without taking care about the possibility of their separate ethnic identity. They are, for example, related to the Romanians, Romans, Greeks, Thracians, Ilirians and others. However, if one takes into account the fact that all communities emerged in different historical periods and under different historical conditions, then the most suitable definition of the ethnic identity of the Vlachs would be: Vlachs are a community that has a separate ethnic code - a name, a language, anthropological features, folk costume, typical professions, mentality etc. In this sense we will try to reflect upon the specificities of the Vlachs, according to which they identify themselves as a distinctive community in the ethnic context of the Balkans.

Key words: Vlachs, Aromanians, Tzintzars, Karaguns, Fasherlots, Meglen Vlachs, ethnic origin, language, ship herding, trade, craftsmanship, religious identity, distribution.

In the historical records Vlachs can be found under the name *Arămăni*, *Armăni*. The name *Aromani* is based upon folk self-naming, introduced into scientific literature by Goustav Weigand (g. Weigand, 1899), who by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century conducted intensive field research among the Vlach population in Greece, Albania and South parts of Macedonia. This term is a derivate of the term 'romanus' - that stems from the name of the town of Rome, and later on appears as a ethnic name of the Vlach ethnic community: *Romăni*, *Rumăni*, *Rumări*, later on adding 'a' in front of the noun - characteristic form of Aromani language - obtaining the terms *Aromăni*, *Arumăni* etc. According to Niko Popnikola, all these terms are exonyms, since the most suitable term for naming the Vlach community is the term *Arm'n* (plural *Arm'nj*) (N. Popnikola, 2006: 200).

In literature the exonym *Vlach* (pl. Vlachs) can be also found for their collective identification. In this sense the issue rises: what is the etymological meaning of the term Vlach?

Commonly accepted is the opinion according to which the etymology of the term Vlach (pl. Vlachs) stems from the Celtic tribe *Volcae* that lived in South-Eastern parts of Gallia (today's France) (T. G. E. Powel, 1958: 81, 141). This tribal community was divided into two branches: *Arecomici* and *Tektosogesi*. The former lived between the rivers of Rhone and Garonne, while

the latter between Rhone and the Pyrenees (Н. Вучичевић, 1981: 318). Caesar speaks about them as *Volcae*, while Strabon and Ptolemy as *Ouólkai* (Victor A. Friedman, 2001: 1). On the other hand, traditional etymology relates the attribute *Volcae* to the Welsh word *golchi* (washes himself), Irish *folk* (baths), naming this tribe river people - if one takes into account that the tribe *Volcae* lived once near antic river Volcos after which it got its name. A number of researchers, connoisseurs of Celtic history, agree that the name of the tribe Volcae is a derivate of the Welsh word *gwalch* (falcon), comparing it to the Gallic personal name Catuulcus, Welsh *cadwalch* (hero), or literally translated military falcon, although some prefer to translate the Gallic *uolko* as wolf, and with a semantic extension fearless warrior - wanderer. But then the question remains unanswered: how did a term that contained a valley (river, rive people) and an aggressive-military connotation (wolf, falcon) become an identification code for a nomadic-wandering community. The answer to this question may be found in another interpretation of the word *Vlach* (plural Vlachs). In this sense Von Glick finds that the term *Volcae* is a derivate of a word related to the ancient Irish word that means fast, laborious, clever, energetic - epithets that among other are characteristic for the sheep herding ethnic communities (Henry H. Howorth, 1908: 417–433). But at the beginning this terms was not related to the ship herding communities, but it became an identification code for members of different ethnic communities that lived outside their original territory.

It is well known that by the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century B.C. the Celts migrated to the Balkans, in two waves. The first one was in 280th BC towards Macedonia and Ilyria, while the second one included the invasion of Celts to Delphi in 279th BC. These two invasions happened at the territory of Dardany and Macedonia. Tit Livius wrote on the second invasion: "A big and powerful migration of Gals, initiated by the poverty of their land, as well as the desire to steel, believing that there is no other ethnic group that equals then in number and military power, leaded by Bren, arrived in Dardania. Here there was conflict and separation: twenty thousand people leaded by Lenorius and Lutarius separated from Bren and went to Thrace" (T. Liv. 16:1). Other continued to Greece. In spite of the divide and the military defeats, still part of them remained at this territory, while another part, leaded by Bathanat, penetrated the Danube area, where they settled under the name of Skordians (F. Papazoglu, 1969: 209–298).

It is well known that the ancient Germans named the Celtic tribes *Walha*, *Wlach*, *Welsch* - accenting them as foreign terms (И. Скок, 1918: 294). With the Romanization of Celts (second century BC), Germans started to use the term *Walha* for the Romans but also for the whole Romanized population - in the sense of foreigners, people that speak another, Romanic language. Even today the German population in Switzerland uses for their French and Italian co-patriots a term *Welchen*. The Romanian population that lies in the region of today's Eastern Belgium accepted the term *Walha* as their ethnic name in the form of Valonians (Walons), while the Italian population in Poland is named

Wlochy (Victor A. Friedman, 2001: 1). At the beginning of the middle ages the Slavs from Eastern Europe have taken from the Germans the term *Walha* (ancient Germanic variant of the term *Walah*), as a name that denotes the whole Romanian and Romanized population in the form *Vlakhi*, i.e. *Vlasi* in the South-Slavic languages, *Volokhi* in the Eastern-Slavic languages and *Wlochy* in Poland. Later on, through the Balkan Slavs, this term was domesticated in Greek language as well. Lately it is considered that the term *Vlach* entered Greek language directly through the Germanic i.e. the Scandinavian personal guards of the Byzantium tsar (Z. Merdita, 2007: 257).

In South-Eastern Europe the Romanized population, searching for salvation from the invasion of the barbarians, started to escape in the mountains, where they commenced with nomadic ship herding. Thus, somewhere from the 11th century the term *Vlach* is related to the ship herding ethnic communities, no matter the ethnic group to which they belong. Thus, for example, in Greece this term included all sheep herding nomads, no matter if they were ethnic Vlachs, or members of another ethnic community, so in this sense the word *Vlach* means stock-breeder, shepherd (Д. Антонијевић, 1982: 21). In Albania the word *Vlach* is a synonym of shepherd (Victor A. Friedman, 2001: 1). A similar opinion is shared by the Greek researcher Hrispou who says that the name *Vlach* denotes a shepherd. However, he thinks that this name is phonetic and created on the territory of Greece. It was created by people from the mountains that settled there as military guards, but became shepherd due to an emerged need. *Maybe due to the every-day contact with the sheep that make the distinctive sheep sound 'bee' which in Greek is noted as blēchē, that is blēchōmai, or current terms belagma, belasō wherefrom the words blēchos or blachos stem from, which means imitating the sheep voices by the shepherds in order to return the lost ship from the mountain. This is where the name Vlachos came from - shepherd. Antonios Karamopoulos finds that this term stems from the word fellachos - name by which the Felasi were called, members of the pre-anthis Pelasgians, that lived at the Balkans. This opinion did not gain support with other scientists, so that the author himself corrected himself in relation to this thesis (taken from: B. J. Трпкоски, 1986: 13). According to Tomashek, the name *Vlach* was first registered at the Balkans in the 7th century, in a note found in the monastery of Konstamonitou on Mount Athos, Halkidiki, where the name *Vlach* was related to the *Rinhins - blachorynchioi* – settled around river Rinhos (taken from B. J. Трпкоски 1986: 24). Later, this terms gained a certain pejorative connotation. For example, during Turkish rule in Bosnia (1459-1878), Muslims called the Orthodox Serbs *Vlachs*. The Croatians - Catholics called the whole Orthodox population *Vlachs*, especially when they wanted to humiliate it - in the sense of shepherds (Ст. Станојевић, 1929). Thus we can conclude that the name *Vlach* is an exonym, with a changeable philological and ethnological meaning.*

However, if we start from the data of travelers (mostly F. C. H. L. Pouquevilla, 1826: 333–397; A. J. B. Wace, M. S. Thompson, 1972; W. M. Leake, 1835: 274–311 and others), that traveling through *Vlach* territories got to

know their life, the social structure, economy, spiritual and material culture, but also the fact that Vlachs comprise of different tribal communities that differ between each other, not only according to their character but also their mentality, then one should not be surprised by the great number of names related to this ethnic community.

Thus, for example in Greece, i.e. in Acarnania, we note the name Pistiki, that refers to a smaller group of Aromanians from Aetolia and Akarnania. The same name is noted in Asia Minor, where its carriers became Greeks, as with the example of Aromanians in Boeotia that call themselves Bomi (Z. Merdita, 2007: 250).

In Athica and Beotia, the name Vlach, no matter if it refers to an Albanian or an Aromanian, means *villager*. Another name is used for both communities, and that is *Vlachipimenes* (Z. Merdita, 2007: 250). Greeks called them also *Vlachs* and *Kucovlachs*¹, and the term *Cipani* is also used, especially concerning those Vlachs whose women wear big scarves reaching to the shoulders. However, a Vlach tribe with such a name does not exist (Z. Merdita, 2007: 251). The name Kopashtars refers to those Vlachs that retained their customs, the laws and the costume, but instead of speaking Vlach they speak Greek language. Although these Vlachs without any doubt have Vlach origin, still they are hated by other Vlachs and in pejorative sense are called "Vlach bastards" since they have forgotten the Vlach language.

The Vlachs in Albania are known under different names: ArvanitoVlachs, Kogs, Romers and Dots, since they often use the word dot meaning 'nothing', while for the same word the Karaguns use the word *hič* „nothing“ or *dip* with the same meaning. The Vlachs shepherds from Thessaly that as a tribe belong to the Fasherlots call them *Katshauns* and *Boi*, while the ones that deal with agriculture are called *Mocens*. Fasherlots in South Epirus are called *Kambus*, since they spend the winter West from Arta in Kamposi, while the *Gura* and *Tzuli* that lived in Southern Albania also belong to this community (Z. Merdita, 2007: 250). The Vlachs in Albania are known in Albanian as

¹ Spiros Papageorgiou finds that the name Kucovlachs is a mixture of two elements: first, as a diminutive, comprises of the word 'kuc' meaning 'imperfect, wounded, broken, something that limps', and the second - Vlachs, that refers to the Vlach ethnic community (S. Papageorgiu, 1909). According to another theory, exonym Kucovlachs stems from a group of Vlachs that participated in the Crusades. As crusaders they carried a cross that is pronounced in Vlach language as 'kruce', and thus gained the name KrucoVlachs. According to a folk legend, when Vlachs were called upon to serve the Roman army, they agreed to limp on one leg so that they would not be recruited in the Roman army corpus, and thus gained the name Kucovlachs (Б. Кочишка, 2004: 23). Another variant of the name Kucovlachs relates it to a person that spoke bad, incorrect Greek, thus being handicapped, limping, ignorant. Bladacci finds that the term Kucovlachs originates from the times of Turkish conquests. Namely, calling them Kucovlachs or Small Vlachs, the Turks wanted to make a difference between them and the inhabitants of Romania - Big Vlachia (A. Baldacci, 1932: 36).

Rëmeri - term stemming from the Latin *Romani*. In Albania Vlachs are named as „*Llaciface*“ - term with a pejorative connotation.

In Serbia the city Vlachs are referred as *Tzintzars*.² In Bulgaria they are named *Vlachs*, *Vlachi*, *Vlai*, while in Turkey they are known as *Vlach*, *Olah* and *Chobani*, and the Romanians use the terms *Aromanians* or *Macedoromanians* for the Vlach ethnic community.

Vlachs in the middle ages are found under the name *Mavrovlachs*, term that is often mentioned in the Dalmatian sources from the 13th century, together with the terms *Vlach* and *Blah*³, while in the North-west part on the territory from Rieka to Trieste, around mountain Uchka in the region of Chicherija as *Chici* or *Chiribirici*.⁴

Depending on the geographic origin, Vlachs from the Balkan also have different names. Vlachs from Albania are known as *Muzakiri* (Vlachs from Muzakia), *Farsheriots* (Vlachs from the area Farsheri) and *Moskopols* (Vlachs from Moskopole). In Greece we find the terms: *Pindens* (concentrated around mountain Pindos), *Gramostyans* (Around mountain Gramos), *Epiriots* (Vlachs from Epirus), *Olympians* (around mountain Olympus) and *Megleni* (Vlachs from Meglen). In Macedonia they are known as *Krushevjani* (Vlachs from Krushevo),

² Instead of the name *Tzintzar* that has a pejorative meaning and stems from the way number five is pronounced - *tzintzi*, i.e. *chinch*, as it was pronounced by other Romanians (Д. Ј. Поповић, 1937: 8–16). Winnifrith says that the name *Tzintzars* is derived from the word *quintani* - people who served five years as legionnaires or from the Vlach word *tzintzi* and the squeaky way it is pronounced (Б. Кочишка, 2004: 24).

³ The Byzants, due to the black costume of the Vlach shepherds in Dalmatia, called them Black Vlachs or *Mavrovlachs* (*Negri Latini*), they are mentioned in the archive documents as *Moroblachs*, *Morolachs*, and from 1420 as *Morlaks* (К. Јиричек, 1922: 112). These Vlachs wore a rain-coat called *morlak*, made of black goat's fur, that was water-resistant (Х. Д'бово, 1992: 295). The name *Marvovlachs* is a composite of the Greek word *mauros* - black and Vlachs, so the term *Mavrovlachs*, *Negri Latini* (Н. Вучичевић, 1981: 321), or in a vulgar sense *Morlaks*, later on following the example of Turks *Karavlachs* (Ст. Станојевић, 1929, s.v. *Karavlas*).

⁴ In literature they appear as *Chichivis*, *Zistzen*, *Tshitshen*, *Zitzen*, *Zutzen*, *Chichi* etc. (*Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* VI, 1965: 32). The terms *Chici* and *Chiribirici* do not have the same origin. It is supposed that the name *Chici* was based upon the pronunciation of 'ch', when the word *tzintzi* was pronounced, while *Chiribirici* from *tzire-bire*, that should mean *hold tight*, but these are only legends. Their language has been lost today, but there are data that at the beginning of the 20th century they were still using it (*Hrvatska enciklopedija* IV, 1942, s.v. *Ćićarija*, *Ćići*; *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* II, 1956, s.v. *Ćići*). The *Chici* or *Chiribirici* are mentioned for the first time at the end of the 14th century, and one of their main settlements *Zejane*, is mentioned in 1395. Still, the major part of the Vlachs or *Chici* are mentioned by the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. They moved here first at the island of *Krk*, while at the beginning of the 16th century their settlement on *Istra* begins. They brought along their language that is still spoken around *Chepichko Pole*, where the population is still referred to as Vlachs, *Chici*, *Romuns* or *Chiribirici*.

Gopeshani (Vlachs from Gopesh), *Ambeloti* (Vlachs from Gorna and Dolna Belica) etc.

According to Merdita, the area in which the term Vlach is most present is important for the definition of the ethnic origin of the Vlachs. Namely, this is an area that is located on the line Thrace, Macedonia and Dardania, i.e. the ecumenical territory of the tribe Besi. One should add the fact that in Mesia, Thrace and Macedonia other skyth tribal communities settle, among which *Pevks*, *Grutungs*, *Austrogoths*, *Virtings*, *Zigipeds*, *Celts*, *Goths* and *Huns*. All these participated in a process of mixing between the ethnic groups and gave their contribution to the ethno-genetic processes. It is widely known that this was a long-term process, followed by integration and disintegration of different ethno-cultural elements, when new ethnic elements are formed, as the concrete case of Volcae, i.e. the Vlachs. No doubt an important role in this process was played by colonists from Italy who carried Roman culture and civilization, of Latin language and mentality. Contrary to urban centers, the village and mountain areas stayed out of this cultural circle. A proof for this is the absence or weak presence of Latin outside the urban ecumena. Only in this spirit one could understand the fact that Vlachs are autochthon Paleo-Balkan Romanized population created at this territory (Z. Merdita, 2007: 256). Surely, although some Byzantine authors (Kekavmen, Halkokondil, Z. Merdita, 2007 : 256) speak about migrations from north to south, still based upon toponyms and other linguistic material one cannot conclude that there was a migration of Vlachs from North to South. Thus, no matter the polemics concerning their origin, it can be concluded that Vlachs are separate and independent people that has never lived in a community with Romanians north from Danube (Z. Merdita, 2007: 256).⁵

⁵ Surely there are also other theories on the ethnic origin of Vlachs at the Balkans. The first one says that they stem from native Greeks that settled at mountain crossings and canyons in the South-Western part of the Balkans. After the occupation by Rome this population was engaged as keepers of Roman borders in high mountain areas. In time they learned the folk Latin, so a Latin-Vlach oral idiom was created, ie. Vlach language. This theory is supported by authors with Greek origin: M. Chrisouh, E. Kurilas, S. Papageorgiou etc.

Other historians inform us that Vlachs are native Tracho-Ilirians, localized in the central parts of the South of mountain Pindus, Albania and Greece, where they formed a vast belt of an old ethnic element. Papahadzi finds that Vlachs are of Thracian and Ilirian origin. German scientists J. Tunmann agrees with the theory that Vlachs are native population with Thracian and Iliric elements and separates them from Dakoromanians (J. Thunmann, 1774: 147). According to Beuermann, Vlachs are descendants of Ilirs that were Romanized during Roman domination of the Balkans (A. Beuermann, 1964). Karamopulos says that Vlachs are Latinized Thracians. Thompson and Weis, in the book *Balkan nomads*, set the theory that Vlachs are descendants of Romanized Balkan hill tribes. They set another brave hypothesis according to which Vlachs are maybe an Asian tribe whose motherland was some Asian highland wherefrom a number of nomadic tribes arrived in Europe (A. J. B. Wace, M. S. Thompson, 1972). Voislav Stojanovic in

In historical sources Vlachs appear periodically. From the pronunciation of the historical 'torna torna frate' Vlachs almost disappear from the historical scene for almost four hundred years. Although a group of Vlachs under the name of *Lachmienses* is mentioned even at the time of Justinian I (527-565), still until the 10th century the name Vlachs is not mentioned. The reason should be sought in the fact that Vlachs with the Caracalla edict from 212 AD were known under the Greek term *Rhomaioi*, that referred to the free population of the empire that enjoyed Roman civil legislation and spoke Latin. Short after the Caracalla edict the Greek texts start to make a difference between *Rhomaioi* and *Hellenes* (Z. Merdita, 2007: 256).

When Vlachs separate from the community of *Rhomaioi*, the name Vlach appears in the works of the Byzantine authors as a consequence of their individualization. This marks their definite entrance into history of Europe (Z. Merdita, 2007: 256).

In Byzantium sources Vlachs as ethnic group are mentioned for the first time in 976, when David, brother of Samoil, was killed in the region of Ubavi Dabovi between Castoria and Prespa by nomads Vlachs (Б. Панов, 1985: 524). It is important to mention that Byzantine chronicles use the name Vlach with an ethnic meaning, during the whole rule of the Byzantium Empire. Thus, for example, Ana Komnina, in her work "The Alexiad", speaking about the recruitment of the Pechenezi in 1091, among other things says that besides Bulgarians the army also included "those who led nomadic life - in folk language known as Vlachs" (Т. Капидан, 2004: 38). Kekavmen gives us detailed description of an uprising of Vlachs from Thessaly in 1066, organized by Roman leaders Verivoj and Slavota, and led by the great Nikulica, against the exploratory regime of tsar Constantine X Duka (Т. Капидан, 2004: 38). This description is the oldest data on the known annual movements of Vlachs from the mountain areas to the valleys and vice versa (*Византиски извори...*, 1966: 114; С. Антољак, 1985: 50).

At the beginning of the 10th century Vlachs are mentioned also as inhabitants of the Ohrid Archbishopric in the frames of its dioceses (Б. Панов, 1985: 189). In the following century the rabbi Benjamin from Tudela, who died in 1173, gives us the following details about the area where Vlachs lived: "Here

his book *Ethnogenesis of the Vlachs*, presents the variant according to which Vlachs are a symbiosis of Roman colonists (legionnaires, veterans, administrators etc.) Karamopulos rejects the theory that Vlachs are colonists from Italy. He says that it is not believable that citizens of Italy (with special privileges and Roman status) would be colonized in mountain areas at the Balkans.

Teodor Kapidan places another theory. He thinks that Vlachs are the South branch of the Roman people. They kept their habitat South of Danube from the time of Roman conquests. Still, until 10-11th century their history remains closely tight with the one of Roman people. However, from that moment on and as a result of historical events, they remained isolated South of Danube and started living separately from their brothers from Dacia, among other Balkan people (Т. Капидан, 2004: 29).

is where Vlachia starts, whose inhabitants live in the mountains and themselves carry the name Vlachs. Running as fast as dears, they go down to the land of Greeks to steal and devastate. Nobody can win a war against them, no ruler can beat them." (Т. Капидан, 2004: 38). Vlachs are mentioned also in the movement of Petar and Asen (1185 during the Second Bulgarian Empire). Nikita Honijat in his text does not however speak about Bulgarians, but only about Vlachs (Острогорски, 1992: 484). Vlachs are mentioned at the territory of Monte Negro in a text dated 1220, where there is a long list of Vlach personal names (Б. Кочишка, 2004: 44). In the correspondence of Innocent III with Kaloyan, Bulgarian ruler, in the letters to the Pope, calls himself the ruler of the Bulgarians and the Vlachs (Б. Кочишка, 2004: 44). Important data on the Vlachs are given in the codex from the time of knez Marko Geno (October-August 1278), where Vlach shepherds are mentioned as servants of Serbian monasteries inside the Balkan Peninsular (Зборник К. Јуричека, 1959: 193). The Dubrovnik texts mention Vlachs for the first time in 1280, in Croatia they are mentioned in 1322, in Bosnia in 1344 and in Dalmatia in 1375

In the period 13-14th century the situation with the Vlachs has been changed. However, the utilization of the name Vlashka, as an alternative name for Thessaly, and Vlashka in Romania, north from Danube river, is a problem that concerns the separation of one Vlach community from another. According to Winnifrieth, Vlachs are maybe the key that should pen the door on the Romanian problem, and when this door is opened the key of the Vlachs would be also found. Still, even if a solution is found based upon convincing arguments, this would not completely solve the problem, since there are big differences between the Vlachs from the middle ages and the contemporary Vlach ethnic community, not to mention the characteristics of the name Vlach that as we have already seen has a changeable ethnological and philological meaning.

During the whole time of the Byzantium and Turkish rule the Vlachs had special obligations and privileges, i.e. a so called Vlach status. When Turks penetrated the Balkans, Vlachs were organized in separate stock-herding groups led by their own authorities: *knez*, *promikjur*, *kjaja* or *chief of katun*. Vlachs were also military organized and well equipped and thus were often engaged by different heads of armies. In order to use this organized half-military formation of Vlachs, Turks engaged them as 'martolozi' or 'dervendzis' and in return they gave them certain privileges, as for example tax deduction and acknowledgement of the Vlach status (В. Ј. Трпкоски, 1986: 33).

The first news on the acceptance of Vlachs by the Turkish military system, as army assistance, dates from the time of the battle of Marica. Balkan Vlachs from the middle ages in 1375 were accepted in the regular units of the Turkish cavalierly. In documents from the middle of 15th century it is visible that there were many high officials with Vlach origin in the frames of Turkish army (Б. Ђурђевић, 1947: 78; 1950: 37; G. Palikruševa, 1983: 131–134). In this way Vlachs avoided Turkish terror and kept the relative freedom of movement, and

thus easily moved towards the north areas of the Balkans (Hungary, Vlachia). By the end of the 18th century the central Turkish authority is in decline, and as a result there was a separation of certain soldiers such as Ali-pasha of Yannina, that established his own rule and regime that led towards mass migration of Vlach population towards north. This is why it is considered that the Vlach population was among the first that migrated in direction North-North-west up to Croatia and Istria (A. Матковски, 1985: 15). This is a proof that Vlachs that migrated temporarily or for good towards north have imposed the name Vlachs to the whole stock-herding population even during the Middle Ages.

During this period the Slavic chronics that cover the late Middle age and the early period of the new century create even bigger confusion about the Vlachs, using their name when it comes to the whole stock-breeding population, and the least for the Vlachs themselves (C. Антољак, 1985: 696).

The 19th century is a period of weakening of the Ottoman Empire when revolutionary and liberation movements appeared at the Balkans. These movements have culminated with the formation of the Balkan nationalistic states: Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Albania. With their formation the Vlach ethnic identity gains another connotation. Their historians try to devaluate the Vlach identity at their territories, in spite the Romanians that try to present the Vlachs as their own, native population.

Serbian historical sources seem not to have settled the issue of the ethnic identity of the Vlachs. According to some authors, during the First Serbian uprising from 1804 there were many Vlach army leaders and fighters participating in it. Many Serbian historians wrote on the role of Vlachs in the Second Serbian uprising, as well as concerning their role in the liberation of Serbia, where they appeared as politicians, diplomats or tradesman with an important influence on the formation of the Serbian civil class and the bazaar (B. J. Трпкоски, 1986: 35). On the other hand, one can notice that when Vlachs on Serbian territory are mentioned, then they are often treated as ethnically not defined, they are presented as a social and professional structure, or are treated as Serbs, which is contrary to the Serbian middle-age sources (Z. Merdita, 2007: 143–182).

Greek history negates the existence of Vlachs as a separate ethnic community. The first Greek author that negates the separate identity of Vlachs is Hrisokos. According to him Vlachs are descendants of Greek border keepers set along the Macedonian border after the fall of Macedonia under Roman authority. These are Greeks that have accepted the Latinized Vlach language. However, it is well know that during the Roman period Greek culture keeps its dominance in a certain sense. It was more vital and continued its development even during the Roman Empire. However, as Merdita says, an important role in the negation of Vlach identity was played by certain historians with Vlach origin. Namely, it was only in this way that they could integrate into Greek society and create scientific and political carrier (Z. Merdita, 2007: 83–92). The data that Winnifrith mentions in his book "Vlachs" is interesting - he says that one of the

first and the best President of the Greek government was Vane Koletis - Vlach who dressed himself as Turk, and before that was a court doctor for Ali-pasha of Yannina (Б. Кочишка, 2004: 46).

When it comes to Vlachs in the Albanian historical sources, one should emphasize that the Albanian authors (Sami Frasheri, Faik Konica, Ismail Kadare etc.) negate the Vlach-Albanian symbiosis. However, it is a fact that Vlachs in Albania have to be related with at least three historical moments: they, together with Albanians and Greeks participated in the uprising against the Nikea Empire, as participants in the civil war between Paleolog and Katakuzen, on the side of tsar Dushan. Besides, Vlachs are mentioned as dominant population the town of Voskopole, that is called by the Vlachs Moskopole, near Korcha in South-Eastern Albania, and in the historical sources there is often mention of Vlach ethnic names that exist even today in Albania, facts that are supported by latest ethnographic and linguistic research, that support the thesis that the Vlach-Albanian symbiosis existed (Z. Merdita, 2007: 59–72).

Bulgarians also negate the existence of Vlach element at their territory. But facts tell a different story. Let's remind ourselves of the correspondence of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) with the Bulgarian tsar and archbishop of Trnovo where there is a clear mention that in the empire of Asen, besides Bulgarian Slavs there are also Latins, i.e. Vlachs, that corresponds to Bulgarian-Vlach symbiosis, i.e. cohabitation (Z. Merdita, 2007: 73-82). Vangel Trpkoski thinks that Vlachs participated in the *komitadji* and *ajduti* outlaw troops in Bulgaria, even though Bulgarian historians negate that (B. J. Трпкоски, 1986: 38).

On the other hand, Romanian historians (G. Murnu, T. Kapidan and others) try to prove the native nature of Vlachs at the territories north from Danube and at the same time negate the thesis on the origin of Vlachs south of Danube. For the Romanian historians Vlachs are Romanians that between the 6th and the 10th century separated from the major line of the Romanian ethnic corpus. For them Vlachs are Romanians but they are careful in equating Romanians with Vlachs.

Basic profession of Vlachs was sheep herding. This developed around the mountains of Pindos, Gramos, Olympus, and south Epirus etc., and then spread to Shara, Bistra, Osogovo to Serbia and Croatia (B. J. Трпкоски, 1986: 22).

Sometimes they moved with their herds along the Balkans leading nomadic life. Later on, when they settled in the areas where they live today, they exchanged nomadic with semi-nomadic life. In the summer they went to the mountains, and in winter they returned to the valleys where they could provide enough food for their herds. Thus, shepherds from Pindos during summer went with their herds to Thessaly valley: earlier they went to Akarnania, Aetolia, Attica to Peloponnesus. Vlachs from Gramos moved with their herds even further: some of them reached east to Thrace, others continued north to Macedonia and mountains of Bulgaria. Vlachs from Albania moved towards

south in Akarnania and Aetolia, north to Serbia and after few months trip arrived at the Dalmatian coast (Т. Капидан, 2004: 54–55).

Sheep herding was well developed during the Turkish rule. Turks stimulated sheep herding since they had needs related to Turkish army. Due to this reason Vlachs were free from different taxes, and in this sense sheep herding as economy was quite profitable.

The sheep herding families of Vlachs were organized in bigger groups that consisted of a number of families called *fălcăru*, i.e. *celnicati*, led by a head of the family called *flkar* whom they called with the Slavic word *chelnik*, with an etymological meaning of chief. He executed all important functions of the community: chose a place where the stock should be grazed, employed the *kjai*, made agreements for placing the products, and was a kind of judge in solving potential conflicts (В. Ј. Трпкоски, 1986: 22).

With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire the Vlachs start to lose their privileged position. Instead of being free shepherds and soldiers, with a special social and economic status, Vlachs started to deal with other professions.

Each family, besides owning sheep, had a certain number of horses and donkeys, that were used for transport of products and people. This profession emerged when Vlachs started to sell their products themselves: yellow cheese, oil, wool and wool products, so in fact they became caravan leaders. In this way they transported even the post of the population, since there was no other transport except for the caravans. Transport was profitable and brought them considerable revenue (Т. Капидан, 2004: 61).

As caravan organizers they had a chance to visit cit centers and see the possibilities that they offer, so a major part of Vlachs started to deal with trade. At the beginning Vlachs were traveler tradesman. They traded with salt, oil, fat, cheese and yellow cheese. They traveled all over the Balkans and carried horse-shoes, nails and other objects for sale (В. Ј. Трпкоски, 1986: 22). Through trade Vlachs had the possibility to learn different crafts. As craftsman they were well known for their metal products but were also appreciated as tailors that use homespun cloth, tinsmiths, inn owners etc. Vlachs were famous as being masters for wool products as well as producers of the famous Vlach 'yambolii' (thick woolen blankets), called *flucati*. They were also good masons, wood-carvers and wall painters. In time they formed their own oasis where craftsmanship and trade were flourishing on the highest level. Such was the town of Moskopole.

The 18th century is a golden age of trade. After the peace treaties of Karlovac (1699) and Belgrade (1739) trade started to develop swiftly. However, the new trade regulation, imposed by the citizens of Mljet, that referred to imported goods from the Ottoman Empire, created an economic collapse of many tradesman from Moskopole, Ohrid and other cities. As a consequence overseas trade through Drach died out and a new trade road towards Belgrade, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia, etc. was paved. This is the start of a new era, of big migrations of the Vlachs at the Balkans.

In some Balkan countries Vlachs played a major role not only in the development of interior trade but also in the formation of civil class. D. J. Popovic says that more than one century ago, Vlachs tradesman from Belgrade were so numerous that the whole part of the city where the market was located whole streets were populated by them; in one word, the biggest part of trade was in their hands (Т. Капидан, 2004: 60–69). Their presence in the Balkan cities marked city life and has influenced the urbanization and development of many cities at the Balkans such as Bucharest, Sophia, Belgrade, Bitola etc. (Д. Ј. Поповић, 1937).

Vlach language, as other languages from the Romanian language family stems from the folk (vulgar) Latin. The process of Romanization of the Balkans started after the Roman conquest. Roman colonists from the Apennine Peninsular were mixed with the natives, with the Iliric and Thracian tribes. This symbiosis resulted with one of the variants of the Roman language, that we meet at the beginning of the middle ages at the territory of current Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. This language at the Balkans developed under the heavy influence of the local Iliric and Thracian basis. What was the phonetic structure of this language is hard to say due to the lack of written sources upon which the reconstruction could be made. This Vulgaro-Balkan Latin language in time started to differentiate itself so it could be said that a Western Balkan-Romanian language was created (now totally extinct) as well as an Eastern Balkan-Romanian language. From the latter the current Romanian, Aromanian and the language of the Meglen and Istria Vlachs were created (Б. Насрев, 1980: 9).

The earliest written document on the utilization of the Vlach language at the Balkans is given by the Greek writers of the 4th century, Prokopius and Theophanous. In the list of places surrounded by fortresses Prokopius presented few typical Vlach names such as sceptecases (impressive wood barracks) and gemellomuntes (mountain twins). Theophanous mentions the first words he heard in Vlach during his description of a battle from 579, that was fought between the Avars and the Byzants. Two Byzantine generals Kometeolos and Martinus had established positions in a forest where the army of the Avars should pass, leaded by their general Hogan. Avars passed quietly and carefully when the load mounted on a donkey started to slide. A soldier that spoke his own dialect exclaimed: *torna torna frate!* (return, return brother) - aiming to warn his friend. Since these words were not well understood by the Byzants and the Avars, the two armies started to flee in different directions. These words, as noted by Theophylact were spoken in Vlach language (Н. Попникола, 2004: 115).

As a consequence of the social conditions and the historical events, Vlach language did not develop permanently and in a systematic way, and thus the strong influence of the Greek, Albanian and the Slavic languages can be felt. Having in mind that the Vlachs have never created their mother-state, they also speak the languages of the neighboring people at the Balkans. In this sense one could say that Vlachs are bi-lingual.

When it comes to religious affiliation, Vlachs belong to Orthodox religion. It is well known that Christianity of the nomadic people is mixed with pagan elements. Pope Grgur IX (1227-1241) in his letter to king Bela IV from 14.11.1234 says that "Vlachs, although consider themselves Christians, have customs that are not friendly towards Christianity" (Z. Merdita, 2007: 256).

On another occasion, the Byzantine author Kevkamen calls them infidels, i.e. pagans. Thus, Basil II called Bulgar-slayer, aiming to put them under his control in 1020 forms a separate episcopate for Vlachs with the center in Vranje, that was under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric. This Vlach episcopate was dedicated to all Vlachs at the Balkan. Besides, in the 14th century other episcopates were formed, such as the ones in Florina and Prilep (Z. Merdita, 2007: 256). However, if one takes into account their closeness to Aryanism and semi-Aryanism, then their tendency to transfer from one confession to another becomes understandable, more precisely their convert to Bogomilism and later on to Islam. Sometimes the introduction in Islamic religion happened through force, as in the case with Vlachs in the village of Nokje (Meglen) where in order to save their lives Vlachs had to convert to Islam.

Vlachs are spread all over the Balkans, and especially in Greece where they are a compact mass.

In Greece they are located in the central area of Pindus mountain up to 1000 m height. Their south border followed the rivers Arta, Astropam and Salavria, i.e. the areas of the mountain peaks Karkadice (2.488m), Agoa (2.148 m) and Lupate (2.038 m) (Д. Антонијевић, 1982: 2–20). One of the biggest Vlach municipalities, Samarina, is located on mountain Smolika, as well as Furka, Breaza, Armata, P'zh and Paliseli. Towards south on the mountain Vasilica, Kulo, Oi and Mavrovuni the following municipalities are located: Avdela, Perivol, Tura, Smiksi, Labanica, Ameri, Paltin etc. Further south, in the area that is located between the upper flow of sprotopam and Salamvrija is Metsovo, the biggest Vlach centre. Further there are municipalities located down the river Arta: Kiare, Vitunosi, Siraku, Kalari and other smaller places (T. Kapidan, 2004: 10).

Another area inhabited with Vlachs is Zagora, west from river Rasinit, inflow of Arta. Bigger Vlach areas are: Laishta, Palihori, Dobrinovi, Makrini, Flamburari, Cernesh, Grebeni, Dragari, Dolijani etc. (T. Kapidan, 2004: 10).

A compact mass of Vlachs exists in Thessaly. There, almost all Vlach villages are grouped around the city of Trikala. In this area Vlachs on the east reach Larissa, Trnova and Elasona (T. Kapidan, 2004: 10).

On mountain Olympus biggest Vlach settlements were: Vlaholivada, Fteri and Kokonopouli. Around Thessaloniki Vlachs are settled on mountain Negosh and in a number of villages such as: Selija, Doljani, Hirolivada, Volada, Marusa, Kastanija, Tarkovani etc (T. Kapidan, 2004: 11).

Vlachs also lived near Edessa in the villages: Kandrova, Gramatikovo, Fetita, Paikana, around Florina, Pisideri, Neveska, Vlacho-Klisura, Hrupishsta etc. In the South-Eastern part in Greece Vlachs were

populated in: Seres, Kavala, Drama, Ksanti and other smaller places (T. Kapidan, 2004: 11).

In Meglen area Vlachs are located in: N'te, Luganci, Borislavci, Huma, Lumnica, Kupa, Oshani, Barovica, Konsko and Sermenin.

In Albania Vlachs were located in almost all bigger places such as: Korcha, Elbasan, Berat, Tirana etc. Besides the cities they also occupied villages in the area of Muzakia, and Moskopole.

Vlachs in Bulgaria were not so numerous. They were populated especially in Western Bulgaria, in the Shopi area. Besides Sophia they could be found in Plovdiv, Kotel, Pazardzik, Samokov, Pleven, Kustendil, Viden, Svishtov and Ruse (B. J. Трпкоски, 1986: 119–121).

In Macedonia in the past and today Vlachs are located in Nizopole, Magarevo, Trnovo, Gopesh, Malovishta, Gorna and Dolna Belica, Krushevo, Shtip, Kochani, Bitola, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Veles, Resen, Skopje and other places.

Today the number of Vlachs at the Balkans is difficult to estimate. There are few objective reasons. Besides Macedonia, Vlachs in other countries are not acknowledged as national minority and thus the state administrations register Vlachs in the censuses as domicile population. On the other hand Vlachs declare themselves as members of the dominant population in order not to feel handicapped in social life, a part of them is assimilated by the domicile population. An important number of Vlachs, in different historical periods, have left the Balkans and settled in the West-European and overseas countries, where they are integrated in the state systems as their citizens. This is why the assessment on their total number is approximate and in relation to the objective or subjective attitude of the researcher. For example. Thompson and Wace (A. J. B. Wace, M. S. Thompson, 1972: 10) find that in Greece (before the political turbulences) there were around 600.000 Vlachs. Gustav Weygand who dealt with the Vlachs 25 years before them calculates with a number of 373.520 persons. According to Jovan Cviic (J. Цвијић, 1906) their number does not exceed 150.000-160.000 people. T. Kapidan (2004: 17) thinks that their number in Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania is 300.000-350.000 people. Saramandu provides other data. According to him in Greece there are 250.000-300.000 Vlachs, in Albania 70.000-100.000, in Bulgaria from 10.000-15.000 and in Romania from 80.000 to 100.000, or in total 400.000-600.000 (N. Saramandu, 1984: 423). Some Romanian researchers increase the number of Vlachs on purpose mentioning 5.000.000 persons.

In Macedonia, according to the census from 2002, there were 9.695 persons that declared themselves as Vlachs or 4% of the population. The census of 1981 registers 6.384 Vlachs or 3.311 Vlachs less. But if one makes a comparison with the data from 1953, when 10.751 declared themselves as members of the Vlach community, then the phenomenon of ethnic mimicry becomes quite clear and thus it is not realistic to give any prognosis on the correct number of Vlachs at the Balkans.

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