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FORGOTTEN VOICES: AROMANIANS IN MACEDONIA (1900-1941)*

Abstract: This study examines the demographic and cultural transformations of the Aromanian population in Macedonia from the early 20th century through the interwar period. It explores how the Aromanians navigated their complex identity amidst the pressures of Greek and Romanian influence while adapting to the changing political landscape. The research also assesses the impact of the Balkan Wars and World War I on their community.

Keywords: Aromanians, Demographics, Identity, migration, Wars, deportation

At the turn of the 20th century, during a conversation with the French scholar Victor Bérard, the Aromanian Apostol Mărgărit – General Inspector of Romanian scho-

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* This article focuses solely on the Aromanians residing in the central and northern regions of Ottoman Macedonia, corresponding to present-day North Macedonia. It does not address the Aromanians who remained in the areas of former Ottoman Macedonia that were annexed by Greece and Bulgaria following the Balkan Wars.

ols in the Ottoman Empire – remarked that the Aromanians’ foremost concern was the preservation of the Ottoman Empire. “An Eastern Crisis today”, Mărgărit continued, “would leave us at the mercy of the Serbs, Greeks, or Bulgarians – Christian and civilized nations who, already connected to us through shared religion, would seek to further bind us through a common language, close our schools, and disperse our communities...”¹

About 40 years later, Dušan J. Popović, one of the first historical sociologists in Serbia and an Aromanian himself confirmed Mărgărit's prophetic insight with a sense of regret. He observed, “The days of the Tzintzars [Aromanians] as a distinct ethnic group are numbered. Even now, this issue is one for academic study. They might endure for another 40-50 years, but no longer.”²

Numerous studies have examined the arrival of the Aromanians in Macedonia and their lives under Ottoman rule. Many 20th-century scholars, same as Dušan Popović, have observed that the Aromanians were on the brink of extinction and that their existence as a distinct ethnic group was either over or rapidly dwindling. Despite this extensive scholarship, no comprehensive study has yet connected their arrival, their enduring presence, and their eventual departure from Macedonia. The critical question remains: How did the Aromanians, who once played a prominent role in every aspect of social, cultural, econo-

1 Victor Bérard, *La Turquie et l'Hellénisme Contemporain*. Troisième édition, (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière et Cie, 1897), 259.

2 Душан Ј. Поповић, *О Цинцарима: прилози питању постанка нашег грађанског друштва*. Друго знатно допуњено издање, (Београд: Штампарија Д. Грегорића, 1937), 290.

mic, and political life in Macedonia, come to the verge of near extinction?

The Arrival

The Aromanians, also referred to as Vlachs, Koutsovlachs, Tzintzars, and Macedo-Romanians, are an Orthodox Christian Eastern Romance ethnic group native to the Balkans. Prior to the Ottoman conquest, medieval Vlachs were dispersed across various regions of the Peninsula, including Macedonia,³ but were largely assimilated into Slavic or Hellenic cultures over time. By the late 18th century, the Aromanian population was predominantly concentrated in the mountainous regions of Albania and Epirus, as well as the lowlands of Thessaly, with only a minimal presence remaining in Macedonia.⁴

The migration of Aromanians into Macedonia began in the last three decades of the 18th century, driven by the decline of prosperous Aromanian communities such as Moscopole in southeastern Albania and Grammousta in

3 Томо Томоски, “Записи за Власите во Македонија во Средниот век”, *Документи* 2/2008, 63-73.

4 According to the Bulgarian ethnographer Vassil Kanchov, the Mogenite Vlachs are descendants of the medieval Macedonian Vlachs. This view is supported by Aromanian writer and politician Nicolae Batzaria, who noted that Gopeš and Malovište were two other Aromanian settlements that existed before Turkish rule. In contrast, Aromanians in other parts of Macedonia were believed to have migrated from Epirus, southern Albania, and Greece. See: Васил Кънчов, *Македонија. Етнографија и статистика*, II фототипно изд., (София: Проф. М. Дринов, 1996), 100-101; N. B., “Cum eram”, *Frățiia* 5/1901, 65.

the Gramos Mountains. *Moscopolitan* Aromanians settled in urban centers and established villages focused on commerce and crafts. In contrast, other Aromanian migrants, including those from Grammousta, concentrated on stock-breeding, establishing pastoralist villages. Some *Grammoustian* Aromanians practiced transhumant shepherding between summer pastures in Macedonia's mountainous regions and winter quarters in the low-lying areas in Macedonia and Thessaly. Other *Grammoustians* and most of the *Farsherot* Aromanians, originating from the village of Frashër in Albania, were nomadic cattle breeders.⁵

The Vlachs of Mount Paiko, in the Moglena region in central Ottoman Macedonia, had lived in these areas since the Middle Ages, developing a distinct ethnogenesis, linguistic traits, and identity compared to other Vlach (Aromanian) groups. They were primarily agriculturalists, engaging in farming. Their language was closely related to Romanian, and they referred to themselves as *Vlași* (Vlachs), in contrast to the Aromanians who called themselves *Armânj* or *Rrâmânj*.⁶ Due to political developments in the late 19th century, the Vlachs of Moglena were often categorized within the broader Aromanian group.

Most Aromanians in Macedonia claimed origins from Moscopole and its surrounding villages, becoming known as *Moscopolitans*. By the 18th century, Moscopole experienced significant demographic, economic, and cul-

5 Asterios I. Koukoudis, *The Vlachs: Metropolis and Diaspora*, (Thessaloniki: Zitros, 2003), 192-411.

6 Thede Kahl, "The Ethnicity of Aromanians after 1990: the identity of a minority that behaves like a majority", *Ethnologia Balkanica* 6/2002, 145.

tural growth, with estimates suggesting a population between 30.000 and 70.000 by around 1760.⁷ Despite occasional claims of Moscopole being the second-largest town in the Ottoman Empire, this is likely an exaggeration.⁸ It may, however, have been the largest town with a predominantly Christian population.

Moscopole's prosperity was fueled by its commerce and craft trades, establishing extensive connections with Europe, especially Venice and other Italian ports.⁹ The town began to decline after 1769 due to conflicts between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, local anarchy, and exploitative practices by Albanian usurers. The wealthiest families emigrated to Habsburg territories, while others relocated to various parts of the Balkans, including Macedonia.¹⁰

Simultaneously, following attacks by Albanians from Kolonjë in August 1760, Aromanians from Grammousta began migrating to Macedonia.¹¹ This migration expanded after 1769, with Aromanians from other Gramos settlements, such as Nikolicë and Linotopi, also relocating. While Grammousta still exists, the term *Grammoustians* now specifically refers to transhumant or nomadic pastoralist groups who dispersed throughout Macedonia in the late 18th and 19th centuries, extending east of the Vardar

7 Anastase N. Hâciu, *Aromânii, Comerț, Industrie, Arte, Expansiune, Civilizație*, (Focșani: Tipografia cartea putnei, 1936), 152.

8 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 331.

9 Valeriu Papahagi, *Aromânii Moscopoleni și comerțul Venețian în secolele al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea*, (București: Editura Societății de Cultură Macedo-Română, 1935), passim.

10 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 342.

11 Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 139.

River, to the Rodopi Mountains in Bulgaria and southern Serbia. In Macedonia, they were known as “karavlahs” or “black Vlachs”, distinguishing them from the “white Vlachs”, who were traders and craftsmen.¹²

Following the Greek War of Independence in 1821, pastoral nomadic Aromanians, known as the *Farsherots*, migrated to Macedonia. Prior to this conflict, their traditional range included Epirus and central and southern Albania. After 1821, they established new settlements outside their original territories. In North Macedonia, their numbers were relatively few compared to the *Moscopolitan* and *Grammoustian* Aromanians and were concentrated in a few villages in the far southwestern regions.¹³

Upon migrating to Macedonia, some Aromanians settled in urban areas, while others moved to mountainous regions, creating new settlements and establishing Aromanian colonies in towns where they had previously been absent. Conversely, this mobility resulted in a decline or abandonment of some of the original Aromanian settlements in Macedonia.

In the 19th century, Aromanians in Macedonia were most numerous in the northern and central parts of the Monastir Vilayet, especially in the Kaza of Monastir. The Moscopolitans established a major center in Bitola, becoming the largest urban Aromanian community in the Balkans.¹⁴

12 Јован Ф. Трифуноски, *Кочанска котлина: сеоска насеља и становништво*, (Скопје: Ј. Трифуноски, 1970), 50.

13 Тодор Трајановски, *Влашките родови во Струшко: прилог кон историјата на народностите во Македонија*, (Скопје: Просветен работник, 1979), 29.

14 Gustav Weigand, *Die Aromunen. Ethnographisch-Philologisch-Historische Untersuchungen über das Volk der sogenannten Makedo-*

Other notable towns established by Aromanians include Kruševo, which evolved into a significant commercial and craft hub.¹⁵ Smaller groups settled in neighboring villages such as Trstenik, Borino, and Arilevo.¹⁶

The villages of Gopeš and Malovište near Bitola, also saw considerable Aromanian influx.¹⁷ The villages of Magarevo, Trnovo, and Nižepole on Mount Pelister were essentially established following migrations after 1769.¹⁸

Romanen oder Zinzaren, Erster band, (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth [Arthur Meiner], 1895), 4-5, 281-294; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Битољу”, *Балканика - Годишњак Балканолошког института* 1991, 239-240.

- 15 Νικόλαος Μπάλλας, *Ιστορία Του Κρουσόβου*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών σπουδών, 1962), 17-19; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, “Варошица Крушево: Прилог проучавању варошица у Н.Р. Македонији”, *Гласник етнографског института Српске академије наука* 1955-1957, 193-196; N. Bațaria, “Din trecutul nostru - Istoricul fundărei orașului Crușova”, *Lumina* 5/1904, 147-150.
- 16 Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 181; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, “Расељена влашка села у околини Крушева”, *Гласник Српског географског друштва* 1/1957, 78-79; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, *Заборављени старобалканици; Цинцари у Републици Македонији*, (Београд; Луѓина-Мида спес, 1994), 71-72.
- 17 G. Zuca, “Comuna Gopeși”, *Lumina* 7-8/1905, 196-200; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, “Гопеш: ранија цинцарска варошица у околини Битоља”, *Годишен зборник на Филозофскиот факултет на Универзитетот во Скопје, Природно-математички оддел* 1957, 259-271; Nico Popnicola, *Muluvishiti: monografia a hoărârljei*, (Bituli: Ligă Mundială a Armânjlor, 2008), passim; I. Χριστίδης, “Η Μηλόβιστα”, *Μακεδονικό Ημερολόγιο* 1910, 1909, 65-67.
- 18 Τηλέμαχος Αγγέλου, *Μεγάροβον και Τύρνοβον: τα δύο ελληνικά φρούρια της πόλεως Μοναστηρίου και φαλέα του ελληνισμού της Δυτικής Μακεδονίας*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: n.p., 1954), passim; Γεώργιος Κίζας, “Μεγάροβον”, *Μακεδονικό Ημερολόγιο* 1910, 1909, 239-250; Α. Κ. Γ., “Τύρνοβον-Μεγάροβον”, *Μακεδονικό Ημερολόγιο* 1908,

In Resen and the nearby village of Jankovec, Aromanians were the second-largest ethnic group.¹⁹ The summer settlement of Călivili Istoc, founded by transhumant Aromanians from Perivoli on Mount Pindos, was located on the Petrina mountain between Resen and Ohrid.²⁰

In the kaza of Ohrid, Aromanians lived in Ohrid, Struga, and the villages of Dolna Belica and Gorna Belica. They established Upper and Lower Village, which became neighborhoods in Ohrid known as Gorno Vlaško Maalo and Dolno Vlaško Maalo.²¹ Migration from Niçë and Llëngë led to new Aromanian villages on Mount Jablanica: Gorna Belica, high on the slopes, and Dolna Belica, in the foothills.²² Aromanians in Struga were mainly traders and

1908, 224-232; Παντέλης Γ. Τσάλλη, *Το δοξασμένο Μοναστήρι, Ήτοι ιστορία της πατριωτικής δράσεως της πόλεως Μοναστηρίου και των περιχώρων από του έτους 1830 μέχρι του 1903*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Τύποις Οδυσ. Θεοδωρίδου, 1932), 82-85; Nico Popnicola, *Tărnova: monografia a hoărăljei*, (Bituli: Herakli komerc, 2009), passim; Dimitrie Nicolescu, "Tărnova și Magarova", *Lumina* 6/1904, 183-186.

19 C. Zografu, G. Mihci, "Orășelul Resna și Comuna Iancoveți", *Lumina* 7-8/1904, 222-223; J. Ф. Трифуноски, "Цинцари у варошици Ресну", *Гласник етнографског института САНУ* 1985, 115-116.

20 A. J. B. Wace - M. S. Thomson, *The Nomads of the Balkans: An Account of Life and Customs Among the Vlachs of Northern Pindus*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1914), 176.

21 Јован Ф. Трифуноски, "Цинцари у Охриду", *Гласник етнографског музеја у Београду* 1987, 227-230; Тодор Трајановски, *Краток осврт за потеклото на името на Власите: Власите во Охрид*, (Охрид: Влашко друштво Светлост, 1999), 27-29.

22 Војислав. С. Радовановић, "Горња и Доња Белица у струшком Дримколу: пример постанка сезонских влашких сточарских насеља и њихова преобраћавања у стална насеља", *Гласник географског друштва* 1936, 22-25; Αναστασιός Τοπάλης, "Τα χωριά Άνω και Κάτω Μπεάλα. Λιμνολεκάνη Στρούγκακ-Αχρίδας",

craftsmen who commuted to town from their villages.²³ Smaller groups also settled in the Drimkol area near Struga, in the villages of Drenok and Modrič, while some Farsherot groups from Gorna and Dolna Belica later moved to the villages of Vevčani, Višni, Podgorci, and Labuništa.²⁴

In the Prilep kaza, Aromanians were present in Prilep and the Mariovo villages of Gradešnica, Bešišta, and Budimerci.²⁵ Aromanian traders from Kruševo also settled in Kičevo.²⁶

In the Salonica Vilayet, Moglenite Vlachs were most numerous in the Gevgelija kaza. However, only three Moglenite villages were located in North Macedonia, and by the end of the 19th century, Vlach was still spoken in only one of these villages, Huma. The villages of Konsko and Sermenin had undergone significant Slavicization.²⁷ A

Македоника 1972, 425-430; Costică St. Ciolache, "Comuna Beala-de-Jos", *Lumina* 4/1908, 25-28; Pericle Papazisi, "Beala de sus", *Lumina* 9/1906, 265-267.

- 23 Јован Ф. Трифуноски, "Цинцари у Струги", *Гласник етнографског института САНУ* 1986, 136; Hâciu, *Arômâniî*, 113, f. 3.
- 24 Јован Ф. Трифуноски, *Охридско-Струшка област: антропогеографска проучавања*, (Београд: Српска академија наука и уметности, 1992), 176; Трајановски, *Влашките родови во Струшко*, 13-30.
- 25 Кънчов, *Македонија*, 244, 247.
- 26 Ѓорѓија Сајкоски, "Власите во Кичево во почетокот на XX век", *Зборник на трудови од Меѓународниот научен симпозиум "Власите на Балканот"*, одржан на 7-8 ноември 2003 во Скопје, ур. Димо. Н. Димчев, (Скопје: Институт за национална историја - Унија за култура на Власите од Македонија, 2005), 84-85.
- 27 Gustav Weigand, *Vlacho-Meglen: Eine Ethnographisch-Philologische Untersuchung*, (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1892), xxvii; Pericle N. Papahagi, *Megleno-Româniî, Studii etnografico-filologic*,

small Aromanian colony in Gevgelija included Aromanians from Kruševo, Prilep, and Vlacho-Meglen.²⁸

In the Strumica kaza, Aromanians and their herds ascended the Ogražden and Belasica mountains, migrating to fields around Salonica and Langadas during winter.²⁹

In the latter half of the 18th century, approximately 200 Aromanian families settled in Veles to enhance trade, with some also establishing themselves in Bogomila.³⁰

In the Kosovo Vilayet, Aromanians, particularly traders from Kruševo, settled in Skopje, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Tetovo, and Kočani.³¹ By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, around 200 Aromanian families from Moscopole settled in Novo Selo, near Štip. By the end of the 19th century, most had moved away, while the remaining families became Slavicized.³² Other Aromanian groups occupi-

Partea I, Extras din Analele Academiei Române, Seria II, Tom XXV, Memoriile secțiunii literare, (București: Institutul de arte grafice Carol Göbl, 1902), 17-24, 44; Th. Capidan, *Meglenoromânii, Istoria și graiul lor*, Vol. I, (București: Cultura Națională, 1925), 25, 27; Αστέριος Ι. Κουκούδης, *Οι Ολύμπιοι Βλάχοι και τα Βλαχομουλενά*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ζήτρος, 2001), 297-301.

28 Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 241.

29 Миленко С. Филиповић, “Номадски Цинцари на Ограждену”, *Гласник географског друштва* 1938, 59, 63.

30 Миленко С. Филиповић, “Цинцари у Велесу”, *Јужни Преглед* 3/1936, 173-175.

31 Јован Ф. Трифуноски, “Гостивар”, *Гласник географског друштва* 1947, 102; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, “Кочане: прилог проучавању наших варошица”, *Географски преглед* 1964-1965, 140; Јован Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Тетову”, *Гласник етнографског института САНУ* 1982, 75; Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 207-217.

32 Јован F. Trifunoski, “Štip – glavno središte Istočne Makedonije”, *Geografski Horizont* 1-2/1964, 36.

ed pastures on Mounts Osogovo and Plačkovica with their herds, establishing summer hut settlements.³³ Aromanian stock breeders were also documented in the Polog region of northwestern Macedonia.³⁴

Enumerating all Aromanian settlements in Macedonia would be extensive. It is sufficient to note that Aromanians were present in nearly all regions of Macedonia, though they did not constitute a significant majority in any of these areas. Where their numbers were greater, they lived near other Christian communities.

Estimating the number of Aromanians who settled in Macedonia during the late 18th and 19th centuries is challenging. By the end of the 19th century, approximately 120,000 Aromanians resided in Ottoman Macedonia, Eastern Thrace, Bulgaria, and Kosovo.³⁵ It is therefore reasonable to estimate that over 60,000 Aromanians migrated eastward from their traditional settlements in Epirus and Albania during the 18th century. However, the exact

33 Трифуноски, *Кочанска котлина*, 51; Jovan F. Trifunoski, "Ovčepoljska kotlina", *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* 1964, 644; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, "Цинцари у овчеполској котлини: примери сталног насељавања номадских сточара", *Етнологишки преглед* 1/1959, 36-37; Jov. F. Trifunoski, "Današnji cincarski stočari na Pljačkavici", *Geografski Horizont* 1-2/1961, 44; J. F. Trifunoski, "Cincarski stočari na Osogovu", *Geografski Horizont* 3/1962, 41; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, „Данашњи влашки катуни у Македонији“, *Симпозијум о средњовековном катуну одржан 24. и 25. новембра 1961 г.*, ур. Миленко С. Филиповић, (Сарајево: Научно друштво СР Босне и Херцеговине, 1963), 173-176.

34 Кънчов, *Македонија*, 213.

35 Никола Минов, *Влашкото прашање и романската пропаганда во Македонија (1860-1903)*, (Скопје: Арс Либрис, 2013), 72.

number of people who settled specifically in Macedonia remains undetermined.

Between Greece and Romania

During the final decades of Ottoman rule in Macedonia, many travelogue writers noted that a significant portion of those identifying as Greeks were, in fact, of Aromanian origin. Until the late 19th century, the Aromanian population in Macedonia was deeply integrated into Greek cultural and religious practices. Many Aromanians spoke Greek and attended Greek churches, reflecting an immersion in Greek culture that often exceeded that of many Greeks themselves.³⁶

The roots of the Aromanian-Greek symbiosis can be traced back to Byzantium, but Greek cultural influence among the Aromanians peaked in the 18th century with the prominence of Moscopole. An organized Greek school existed in Moscopole before 1700, staffed by highly educated and influential teachers. By 1743, the school, known as the “New Academy”, offered advanced subjects and established Moscopole as a significant center of the Greek Enlightenment.³⁷ The town also housed a notable printing house, established around 1730, which was the second Greek printing house in the Ottoman Empire, following Constantinople.³⁸ Con-

36 Далибор Јовановски, “Грчки дипломатски погледи за Ароманците во Македонија (Ароманците во грчките дипломатски документи”, *Документи* 3/2006, 10.

37 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 334.

38 Max Demeter Peufuss, *Die Druckerei von Moschopolis 1731-1769: Buchdruck und Heiligenverehrung im Erzbistum Achrida*, (Wien-Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1989), 47-93.

sequently, Moscopole earned the designation “New Athens”. Additionally, a robust educational tradition developed in Nikolicë, Linotopi, and other Aromanian settlements in Epirus and Albania, where Greek schools had been established as early as 1720.³⁹

Following the 1769 upheaval, when residents of Moscopole, Nikolicë, and neighboring Aromanian settlements were forced to migrate, they carried with them Greek cultural influences and a strong affinity for Greek traditions into Macedonia. Wealthy Aromanians contributed substantial funds for the establishment of Greek schools and churches, as well as for advancing the Greek *Megali Idea*.⁴⁰ In various Macedonian centers, these Hellenized Aromanians played a central role in Greek communities and were instrumental in promoting Greek national interests, particularly in areas with sparse Greek populations. In towns like Bitola, Kruševo, Prilep, Veles, and Skopje, Aromanians made up a significant portion, and in some cases, the entirety, of the Greek community.⁴¹ The influence of Greek culture also extended from the wealthiest Aromanian class, whose economic power and political interests aligned with Greek objectives in Macedonia. These Aromanians not only held economic superiority but also served as key carriers of Greek influence.

39 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 334.

40 Antonis M. Koltidas, *Greek Education in Monastir-Pelagonia: Organisation and Operation of Greeks Schools, Cultural Life*, (Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis Bros Publishing House S.A, 2008), 35-72, 185-190.

41 Nicolas Papahagi, *Les Roumains de Turquie*, (Bucarest: Imprimerie des Arts Graphiques “Eminesco”, 1905), 74.

The alignment between the Aromanians and the Greeks was disrupted in the 1860s when the newly formed United Romanian Principalities discovered the Aromanians. During their travels in Thessaly, Epirus, and Macedonia, several Romanian intellectuals, such as Dimitrie Bolintineanu, encountered people speaking a language closely related to Romanian. They subsequently published works introducing the Romanian public to these distant brothers, the Aromanians.⁴² In 1864, Romania financed the establishment of the first Romanian school in Macedonia.⁴³ By the end of the century, approximately one hundred additional primary and secondary schools had been opened in Macedonia, Epirus, and Albania, where young Aromanians were educated in both Romanian and Aromanian⁴⁴ and taught to view themselves as part of the greater Romanian nation.

Despite these efforts, the success of the Romanian schools did not align with the resources invested. The majority of Aromanians in Macedonia continued to send their children to Greek schools and remained loyal to the Hellenic idea.⁴⁵

42 Max Demeter Peyfuss, *Chestiunea Aromânească. Evoluția ei de la origini până la pacea de la București (1913) și poziția Austro-Ungariei*, (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994), 33-35.

43 Dimitrie Atanasescu, "Cum s'a deschis prima școală română", *Lumina* 10/1905, 326.

44 In the first two grades of Romanian primary schools in Macedonia, instruction was conducted in Aromanian. From the third grade onwards, instruction transitioned to Romanian (Минов, *Влашкото прашање*, 87).

45 By comparing the number of students attending Greek and Romanian schools in Aromanian settlements in Macedonia at the turn of

Romanian influence predominantly reached the more impoverished segments of the Aromanian population. This Greek-Romanian rivalry for dominance among the Aromanians not only complicated relations between Bucharest and Athens but also led to discord within Aromanian communities, where residents and even relatives began to divide themselves into “Greeks” and “Romanians”.⁴⁶

Under the departing Turk (1900-1912)

The conflict between Greece and Romania over the influence on the Aromanian population in European Turkey was primarily fought on educational, religious, and diplomatic fronts. However, some of the most intense disputes occurred in academic and journalistic circles, where the numbers of Aromanians were often exaggerated or minimized for political purposes. Romanian sources claimed up to 800.000 Aromanians in the Ottoman Balkans,⁴⁷ while their Greek counterparts in

the century, it is evident that, with a few exceptions such as the villages of Gopeš, Malovište, Lepopelci, and the town of Ohrid, in all other Aromanian settlements, or settlements with a larger Aromanian population, the number of students in Greek schools was at least double that in Romanian schools. For Greek schools, see: D. M. Brancoff, *La Macédoine et sa population chrétienne*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1905), 114-195. For Romanian schools, see: Mihail Virgiliu Cordescu, *1866-1906: Istoricul școalelor Române din Turcia, Sofia și Turtucaia din Bulgaria și al seminariilor de limba Română din Lipsca, Viena și Berlin*, (București: Tipografia Curții Regale, F. Göbl Fii, 1906), 282-310.

46 Минов, *Влашкото прашање*, 408.

47 *Ibid.*, 67.

Athens insisted that the region contained barely 12.000.⁴⁸ In addition to these politically motivated estimates, neutral statisticians also sought to calculate the Aromanian population out of purely academic interest. One such figure was the German linguist Gustav Weigand, who personally visited most Aromanian settlements in the Balkans between 1889 and 1890, estimating that 149.520 Aromanians lived in the region.⁴⁹ However, concerning the territory of Macedonia, which is the focus of this study, Weigand does not provide a precise figure. He entirely excluded the Vlachs of Moglena, whom he considered a distinct group from the Aromanians, as well as the Aromanian pastoralists in Eastern Macedonia and those residing in the larger towns of the Kosovo Vilayet, such as Skopje.

At the turn of the century, Bulgarian geographer and ethnographer Vassil Kanchov provided more specific data in his 1900 publication *Macedonia: Ethnography and Statistics*. As the chief inspector of Bulgarian schools in European Turkey, Kanchov estimated that 31.102 Aromanians lived in Macedonia, accounting for 3.2% of the population, with 44.8% in urban areas and the rest in villages and scattered pastoral settlements in the mountains.⁵⁰

48 Giovanni Amadori Virgilj, *La questione Rumeliota (Macedonia, Vecchia Serbia, Albania, Epiro) e la politica Italiana*, Volume Primo, (Bitonto: Prem. Casa Editrice – Tipografica N. Garofalo, 1908), 254.

49 Weigand, *Die Aromunen*, 294.

50 Кънчов, *Македония*, 151-254.

The number of Aromanians in Macedonia in 1900

Monastir (Bitola) Vilayet:	25.700
Bitola (town)	7.000
Nižepole (village, near Bitola)	1.590
Magarevo (v, near Bitola)	2.400
Trnovo (v, near Bitola)	2.400
Malovište (v, near Bitola)	2.300
Gopeš (v, near Bitola)	2.460
Kruševo (t)	4.000
Trstenik (v, near Kruševo)	95
Resen (t)	570
Jankovec (v, near Resen)	180
Prilep (t)	480
Gradešnica, Budimerci, Bešišta (v, near Prilep)	265
Ohrid (t)	460
Gorna Belica (v, near Struga and Ohrid)	850
Dolna Belica (v, near Struga and Ohrid)	650
Salonica (Thessaloniki) Vilayet:	2.272
Gevgelija (t)	120
Sermenin (v, near Gevgelija)	480
Konsko (v, near Gevgelija)	560
Huma (v, near Gevgelija)	490
Veles (t)	500
Kavadarci (t)	32
Negotino (t)	90
Kosovo Vilayet	3.130
Skopje (t)	450
Kočani (t)	150
Kumanovo (t)	50
Gostivar (t)	25
Mavrovo (v, near Gostivar)	25
Kriva Palanka (t)	20
Hut settlements on Plačkovica and Osogovo	2.410
TOTAL	31.102

Source: Vasil Künchov, *Makedoniya, Etnografiya i statistika*, II fototipno izd. Sofiya: Prof. M. Drinov, 1996, 151-254.

Given the relatively small number of Aromanians in Macedonia, one might logically assume that they

were marginalized and absorbed into the larger populations of Muslims and Slavs. However, the Aromanians were far from invisible; they were particularly influential in the economic, cultural, and social spheres. In fact, in many Macedonian towns such as Bitola, Kruševo, and Skopje, Aromanians played a pivotal role as agents of Westernization, key members of the urban elite, and central figures in social and cultural life. This influence was especially pronounced among those Aromanians who aligned themselves with Greek cultural and national sympathies.

In Ottoman Macedonia, secondary education represented the highest level of formal education available. The crown jewel of all secondary schools in Macedonia was the Greek boys' gymnasium in Bitola, which stood out not only for its high-quality and meticulously selected teaching staff, including several Ph.D. holders educated in Western Europe, but also for offering its students the unique advantage of enrolling in several European universities, including the University of Paris, without the need for entrance examinations. The majority of the gymnasium's students were Aromanians from Bitola and surrounding Aromanian settlements, who, upon graduation, continued their studies in Paris, Berlin, or Vienna. These individuals often returned to their hometowns as professionals – doctors, lawyers, industrialists, bankers, composers, and more – thus facilitating the rapid penetration of European cultural norms, from worldviews to fashion, literature, and entertainment. This affluent Aromanian bourgeoisie began to challenge traditional religious authorities, establish schools and newspapers, and

promote the dissemination of European languages, education, and ideas.⁵¹

In several larger towns across Macedonia, it was these wealthy Greco-Vlachs who drove economic activity and dominated the market.⁵² They held a significant presence in the *çarşı*, and between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they also played a crucial role in fostering cultural life. In Bitola alone, they founded several influential societies, including the Lyra Music Society, the Friends of the Arts Society, the Philharmonic Society, the Drama Society, and the Gymnastics Society.⁵³ Theatrical performances became a regular feature of local cultural life, and they even established their own football club around 1904.⁵⁴ In December 1910, prominent Aromanians from Bitola began publishing *To Fos* (The Light), a newspaper dedicated to politics, philology, and economics, which was in circulation until May 1912.⁵⁵

However, this cultural and economic activity was heavily imbued with a Greek flavor. The numerous plays and theatrical performances were conducted in Greek, and *To Fos* was published by the “Greek Club” in Bitola. According to its subtitle, it was a “Greek newspaper for

51 Koltsidas, *Greek Education in Monastir*, 37, and *passim*.

52 Basil C. Gounaris, “From Peasants into Urbanities, from Village into Nation: Ottoman Monastir in the Early Twentieth Century”, *European History Quarterly* 1/2001, 45-46.

53 Koltsidas, *Greek Education in Monastir*, 166-173.

54 *Ibid.*, 171; Државен Архив на Република Северна Македонија (ДАРСМ), одделение Битола, фонд Коста Догу, “Битолски фудбал од 1896-1920”.

55 Koltsidas, *Greek Education in Monastir*, 181-183.

politics, philology, and economics”, with all news, prose, and poetry published exclusively in Greek. Even the football club was named *Ellinikos podosfairikos syllogos* (Greek Football Club). Although Aromanian was the language spoken by these wealthy Aromanians in their homes with their families, in schools, churches, and all other domains of public life, Greek was the dominant language.

The treatment of the Aromanian language differed significantly among those Aromanians who received their education in Romanian schools in Macedonia. While many Romanian politicians and intellectuals asserted that the Aromanians were brothers and compatriots of the Romanians, in need of support to preserve their ethnolinguistic identity,⁵⁶ Romania's primary motivation for engaging with the Aromanians in the Balkans was largely political, aimed at advancing territorial ambitions in Southern Dobruja.⁵⁷ Despite this political agenda, Romanian educatio-

56 Stoica Lascu, “Problematika românilor balcanici în viziunea șefilor de partide și a liderilor de opinie, 1878-1914”, *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX*, Vol. IV, coordinator Vasile Ciobanu-Sorin Radu, (Sibiu: Techno Media, 2009), 13.

57 Romanian plans for expansion in Southern Dobruja and the use of Aromanians as leverage in negotiations with Bulgaria were an open secret, and sometimes Romanian politicians did not hide their intentions in this context. For example, in 1901, the French diplomatic representative in Bucharest, M. Henri, reported on a conversation between the former Romanian Minister of Education and future Minister of Finance, Minister of the Interior, and Prime Minister of Romania, Tache Ionescu, and the Austro-Hungarian Prime Minister, Count Goluchowski. When asked what benefit Romania would gain from a Romanian group in Macedonia, Ionescu's response was brief and clear: “They, when the time comes, will serve as a compensatory element for us.” See: *Documents diplomatiques Français (1871-1914)*,

nal institutions in Macedonia served as an important platform for the promotion of the Aromanian language and the advancement of certain national aspirations among the Aromanians.

By the early 20th century, the Romanian Boys' Lyceum in Bitola, established in 1880, had produced a substantial intellectual class, leading to the development of a distinct "Romanian" intelligentsia in Macedonia, similar to that of the "Greeks". In contrast to the Greco-Vlachs, among whom the Greek language dominated all aspects of public life, the Romanized Aromanians were permitted, and at times even encouraged, to use the Aromanian language in education, religious services, and cultural activities.

Since 1868, Romania has been publishing journals and newspapers dedicated to the Aromanians, which included texts in Aromanian. At the turn of the 20th century, there was a notable increase in the production of Aromanian periodicals, both in Aromanian and bilingual formats (Aromanian and Romanian). For example, in 1898 and 1899, the monthly magazine *Revista Pindul*, under the motto "Wake up, Aromanian", was published in Bucharest and distributed among Aromanians in Macedonia. This publication featured prose, poetry, and plays written in Aromanian by authors from Prilep, Gopeš, and Magarevo. From February 1901 to March 1903, *Frățilia - Revistă Aromânească* was published in Bitola, Thessaloniki, and Bucharest. Edited by Aromanian authors from Macedonia, it included poetry, prose, anecdotes, and articles on

2e serie (1901-1911), Tome Premier, 2 Janvier-31 Décembre 1901, (Paris: Ministère des affaires étrangères, 1930), 352.

Aromanian history, all in Aromanian. In January 1903, *Lumina* (Light) began publication in Bitola. Despite including texts in both Aromanian and Romanian, *Lumina* was the most successful Aromanian publication of the Ottoman period due to its longevity and impact. The magazine was predominantly edited by professors from the Romanian Lyceum in Bitola, and its contributors came from various regions of Ottoman Macedonia and Epirus. It featured articles on Aromanian history and settlements, as well as Aromanian prose, poetry, and plays.⁵⁸

In 1904, the founders of *Lumina* established the “Aromanian Popular Library – Lumina”, which published works by Aromanian authors in Aromanian, including Nicolae Batzaria’s *Stories* and Costa Cosmu’s *Fables*.⁵⁹ This revival of the Aromanian language, further encouraged by certain scholars who argued that “Aromanians are too few to translate works of world literature into their dialect”,⁶⁰ motivated young Aromanian intellectuals to translate works by prominent European authors. Costa Cosmu, for instance, translated several of Molière’s comedies into Aromanian and founded a theater troupe to perform these comedies for his compatriots.⁶¹ In Bitola and

58 Maria Pariza, *Presa aromână în date*, (s.l: Biblioteca culturii aromâne, s.a.), 3-6.

59 *Lumina* 11/1905, 353.

60 Ch. O(tto), “Dialectul nostru”, *25 ani de luptă în Chestiunea Macedoneană: jubileul Societății de Cultură Macedo-Română*, (Galați: Tipo-Litografia Moldova, 1904), 59.

61 Кирил Патриарх Български, *Българската Екзархия в Одринско и Македония след Освободителната война (1877-1878), Том Първи (1878-1885), книга втора*, (София: Синаodalно издателство, 1970), 82.

Kruševo, theatrical performances in Aromanian became common, featuring both translations from French and Romanian as well as original Aromanian plays, which were premiered for local audiences.⁶²

The influence of Romanian educational institutions in Macedonia extended to Aromanian semi-nomadic shepherds, who, for the first time, had the opportunity to attend school and gain literacy when a Romanian school opened in January 1900 in the village of Lepopelci, serving the children of Aromanian shepherds from nearby villages.⁶³

The most significant achievement of Romanian diplomacy regarding the Aromanians occurred on May 9/22, 1905, when, on Romanian initiative and with German intervention, Sultan Abdulhamid II issued a decree (*Irade*). This decree granted Aromanian subjects the right to elect their own mayors, to have their representatives in the local councils, and to independently appoint teachers and inspectors in their schools. The following day, the text of the *Irade* was published, and the Sublime Porte instructed the Ministry of the Interior to notify the General Inspector of the Rumelian provinces, Hilmi Pasha, and the governors in European Turkey that, in addition to implementing these provisions, Aromanians (cal-

62 N. Bațaria, "Amintiri din cariera de actor", *Lumina* 3/1904, 88-92; Iotta Naum Iotta, "Romana", *Lumina* 9/1904, 252-259; *Ibid.* 10/1904, 283-289; Ицро 11/1904, 317-325; "Mișcarea culturală la noi", *Lumina* 5/1904, 151; "Mișcarea culturală la noi", *Lumina* 6/1904, 191-192; I. Bucuvalla, "Amintiri și reflexii", *Lumina* 2/1905, 35; I. D. Arginteanu, "Cum s'a serbat jubileul", *Lumina* 10/1905, 292-293.

63 Cordescu, 1866-1906: *Istoricul școalelor Române*, 91-92.

led “Ullah” in the Irade) should not be prohibited from conducting religious services in their native language.⁶⁴ Although the Irade did not establish an Aromanian millet (nation) – since there was no independent Aromanian church – it granted nearly all the rights enjoyed by other millets in the Empire. This decree was understood in Romania as an official recognition of the Romanian people within the Ottoman Empire and was perceived similarly by the Greek government, exacerbating Greek-Romanian antagonism in Macedonia.

Prior to 1905, a small segment of the Aromanian population had been involved in revolutionary activities in Macedonia, serving as active members and even leaders of the bands associated with the Secret Macedonian-Adriopolitan Revolutionary Organization (SMARO), which fought against the Ottoman authorities.⁶⁵ Following the Ilinden Uprising of 1903, organized by SMARO, the town of Kruševo was bombarded by Ottoman artillery, leading many wealthy Aromanian townsmen to permanently relocate.⁶⁶ Despite this, most Aromanians remained uninvolved in the revolutionary struggles up to 1905. However, after the proclamation of the 1905 Irade, revolutionary in-

64 *Documente diplomatice, Afacerile Macedoniei, Conflictul Greco-Român 1905*, (București: Imprimeria Statului, 1905), xxxi, 5-6; Peyfuss, *Chestiunea Aromânească*, 87-91; Elçin Macar, “The Recognition of the Vlachs as a Millet in the Ottoman Empire, 1905”, *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 1/2022, 87-112, datum pristupa 14.07.2024, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2022.2125696>

65 Минов, *Влашкото прашање*, 365-382, 388-400.

66 Γεώργιος Ν. Δήτσιας, *Η καταστροφή του Κρουσόβου: Θηριωδία Βουλγάρων και Οθωμανών εναντίον των Ελλήνων*, (Αθήνα: Τυπογ. Σ. Βλαστού, 1905), 62-103.

volvement spread across all layers of the Aromanian population. Greek armed bands, dispatched to Macedonia to counter Bulgarian influence and SMARO, began attacking pro-Romanian villages and targeting prominent pro-Romanians.⁶⁷ These bands included numerous Aromanians from Nižepole, Magarevo, Trnovo, Bitola, Kruševo, and other Macedonian areas.⁶⁸ In retaliation, in 1906 and 1907, Aromanian nationalist bands were formed, which targeted Greek villages and pro-Greek Aromanians. Although these Aromanian bands operated in regions not central to this study, their leaders, Gheorghe Muchitano and Alexandru Coshca, and many of their fighters, were from Kruševo, Gopeš, and Malovište.⁶⁹ The frequent violence significantly strained Greek-Romanian relations, leading to a rupture in 1906.⁷⁰

The hostilities experienced by the Aromanian communities had devastating effects and were on the brink of causing the complete destruction of several settlements.

67 ДАРСМ, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe a României, fond: Problema 21-Rapoarte politice de la Constantinopol, m-4424, vol. 45, Georgescu către A. Lahovary, 30.06.1904, 75; *Documente diplomatice*, 13-55.

68 Κωνσταντίνος Α. Βακαλόπουλος, *Εθνοτική διαπάλη στη Μακεδονία (1904-1908) (Η Μακεδονία στις παραμονές του Μακεδονικού Αγώνα)*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Αντ. Σταμούλη, 1999), 344; Τσάλλη, *Το δοξασμένο Μοναστήρι*, 83, 85; Koltsidas, *Greek Education in Monastir*, 201.

69 Никола Минов, “Романските’ чети на Македонската Революционерна Организация (1906-1908)”, *Историја/Journal of History* 2/2018, 37-53.

70 Constantin N. Velichi, “Les relations Roumano-Grecques pendant la période 1879-1911”, *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, 3/1969, 536-538.

This grim prospect was averted by the Young Turks Revolution of 1908. This revolution, which aimed to modernize and reform the Ottoman Empire, temporarily ceased the ongoing animosities and reinvigorated Aromanian cultural activities. One of the significant outcomes of this period was the increased visibility and representation of the Aromanian community in the Ottoman political sphere.

In the initial elections to the Ottoman Parliament following the revolution, the Aromanian Philip Misha was elected as a deputy. Misha actively used his position to address Aromanian issues within the parliament, advocating for their rights and interests.⁷¹ Additionally, Nicolae Batzaria, a prominent writer from Kruševo, was appointed as an Ottoman senator. Batzaria played a crucial role in sustaining and promoting Aromanian culture during this period. His efforts included the founding of the newspaper *Deșteptarea* (Awakening) in November 1908, which was printed in Thessaloniki and widely distributed across Macedonia. The newspaper aimed to preserve and promote Aromanian identity through its publications, which were exclusively in Aromanian. The focus of *Deșteptarea* was to reinforce cultural cohesion among Aromanians and to assert their unique identity within the broader Ottoman framework.⁷²

The Aromanian community, educated in Romanian institutions, continued to enjoy the privileges extended by the Young Turks, who recognized them as loyal Ottoman

71 *Македонското прашање во османлискиот парламент: 1909*, ред. Драги Ѓоргиев, (Скопје: Државен Архив на Република Македонија, 2009), *passim*.

72 M. Pariza, *Presa aromână în date*, 7-8.

citizens. This period saw a concerted effort to introduce the Aromanian language at all educational levels in Romanian schools throughout Macedonia. These initiatives were part of a broader movement to elevate the status of the Aromanian language and integrate it more fully into educational and cultural practices.⁷³ The culmination of these efforts was marked by the formation of a working group in September 1912, composed of 34 intellectuals, primarily professors from Macedonia. This group was tasked with translating the Bible into Aromanian, a project that symbolized both the religious and cultural aspirations of the Aromanian community.⁷⁴ This translation was intended not only to enhance the cultural and religious life of Aromanians but also to serve as a significant step toward the preservation and formalization of their language. It was not to be.

The Balkan Wars and the First World War

Less than a month after the formation of the working group tasked with translating the Bible into Aromanian, the Balkan League member states declared war on the Ottomans. The Aromanians in Macedonia faced a dilemma: should they remain loyal to the Empire, or align with their fellow Christians?

73 Кочо Сидовски, *Народот со многу татковини: Историја на Ароманците од Средниот Век до 1918*, (Скопје: Арети Сидовска, 2013), 297-310, 314-320.

74 Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, Maria Petre, *Școli și biserici românești din Peninsula Balcanică – Documente - (1864-1948) – Volumul I*, (București: Editura Universității din București, 2004), 239-241, 244-246.

Some Aromanians, particularly those educated in Romanian institutions, believed that the potential partition of Macedonia among the Balkan states would deal a fatal blow to Aromanian national aspirations. They openly expressed their joy at every Ottoman military success and supported the Empire.⁷⁵ Others, affected by the decision to conscript 25% of the army from Christian subjects, found themselves mobilized into the Ottoman forces.⁷⁶

However, the majority sided with the Empire's enemies. Many of those conscripted deserted at the first opportunity and joined the nearest allied armies, while others volunteered to fight against the Ottomans. In the Macedonian-Adrianopolitan Volunteer Corps, which fought alongside the Bulgarian army in Thrace during the First Balkan War, records list 65 volunteers from purely Aromanian villages and settlements in Macedonia – a number likely higher in reality.⁷⁷

75 *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903-1914*, књ. V, св. 3, 5/18. октобар - 31. децембар 1912/13. јануар 1913., приредио Михаило Војводић, (Београд: Српска академија наука и уметности, 1986), 479-480.

76 Исмет Кочан, *Битка за Македонија: турската историографија за Балканските војни 1912-1913, со посебен осврт за Македонија*, (Скопје: Бата прес, 2010), 125-126; Peyfuss, *Chestiunea Aromânească*, 111.

77 The names of all the volunteers appear in a Slavicized form, which allows us to infer that those from purely Aromanian settlements were likely of Aromanian origin. However, among the volunteers were also residents from towns like Bitola and Kruševo, where there was a significant Aromanian population. Due to the Slavicized nature of their names, we cannot confirm with certainty whether these individuals were Aromanians. See: *Македоно-Одринско Опълчение 1912-1913 г. Личен Състав по документи на Дирек-*

With the victorious campaigns of the allied armies, euphoria swept through the Aromanian population. In Kruševo, Aromanians dressed in festive attire, carrying flags, and led by priests investments warmly welcomed a detachment of Serbian soldiers. Their enthusiasm grew when they discovered that many of the soldiers were Romanian-speaking troops from Eastern Serbia.⁷⁸ Similarly, other Aromanians were pleasantly surprised by the favorable attitude of Bulgarian soldiers toward them.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the Greco-Vlachs of Bitola and Kruševo eagerly awaited the Greek army, already envisioning themselves as citizens of the beloved Kingdom of Greece.⁸⁰

However, the Second Balkan War and the Treaty of Bucharest, signed in August 1913, brought a sobering reality. Before the war, Romania entertained ideas of an autonomous Macedonia or a joint Aromanian-Albanian state. From February 13 to April 5, 1913, a three-member delegation from Bucharest's Society for Macedo-Romanian Culture visited Vienna, Paris, London, Berlin, and Rome, seeking support from the Great Powers for an autonomous Macedonia modeled after Switzerland, where all peoples would enjoy full religious and linguistic rights. When this idea was rejected, the delegates proposed an Albanian-Aromanian federation, with the Pindus Mountains – a predominantly

ция „Централен Военен Архив“, (София: Главно управление на архивите при министерския съвет, 2006), *passim*.

78 N. Batzaria, *România vazută de departe*, (București: Editura “Viața Românească”, 1920), 162-163.

79 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 252.

80 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 466.

Aromanian region – as a canton.⁸¹ However, *realpolitik* prevailed over aspirations. The Aromanians were not even mentioned in the Treaty of Bucharest. The only acknowledgment was in an annex, where the Prime Ministers of Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria agreed to grant autonomy to the schools and churches of the Koutsovlachs in their respective future territories and to allow the creation of an episcopate for them.⁸² One of the delegates from the Society for Macedo-Romanian Culture who advocated for Aromanian interests in the European capitals, George Murnu, lamented that Romania had cowardly abandoned the Aromanians.⁸³

The disappointment was even greater among the Greco-Vlachs. Most of them from Bitola, Kruševo, Trnovo, Magarevo, and Nižepole found it unimaginable that their towns and villages would become Serbian rather than Greek. Many blamed Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos for allowing the Serbian army to reach Bitola before the Greeks. Up until the Treaty of Bucharest was signed, they held onto the hope that Bitola and its surroundings would eventually be ceded to Greece. It was a bitter blow when Venizelos, returning from signing the treaty, reportedly stopped in Bitola to inform the Aromanians that their town would remain under Serbian con-

81 Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, “Chestiunea aromânească între diplomație și utopie”, *Perenitatea vlahilor în Balcani. Istorie și civilizație aromânească*, III-a/1997, 15-16.

82 *Românii de la sud de Dunăre: documente*, coordinatori Stelean Brezeanu-Gheorghe Zbucea, (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1997), 238-239.

83 Tanașoca, “Chestiunea aromânească”, 23-24.

trol. The only consolation he could offer was the suggestion that those who wished could move to nearby Florina, on the Greek side of the border, where the state would help them establish a “New Bitola”.⁸⁴

In stark contrast to the Greco-Vlachs of Western Macedonia, the Moglenite Vlachs could not fathom their villages becoming part of Greece. Educated in Romanian institutions and having recently fought against Greek bands as members of SMARO, the Moglenites justifiably feared Greek reprisals. Just before the Peace Treaty was signed, a delegation from the Moglenite villages approached Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić in Bucharest, pleading with him to ensure their villages would belong to Serbia.⁸⁵ Their efforts were in vain, as most of the Moglenite villages ended up on the Greek side of the border.

While emotions influenced some Aromanians’ decisions to move from Macedonia to Greece after the Balkan Wars, economic reasons were the decisive factor. The Treaty of Bucharest divided the Ottoman territories where Aromanians lived among four states, and the new Greek-Serbian and Serbian-Albanian borders had a devastating impact on the businesses and way of life of Aromanians in Western and Eastern Macedonia. Bitola, once a thriving center, lost its hinterland. The new border with Greece,

84 Τηλέμαχος Μ. Κατσουγιάννης, *Περί των Βλάχων των ελληνικών χωρών*, τ. Β: *Εκ του βίου και της ιστορίας των Κουτσοβλάχων επι τουρκοκρατίας*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών σπουδών, 1966), 78.

85 *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903-1914*, књ. VI, св. 3, 1/14. јули - 31. децембар 1913/13. јануар 1914., приредио Климент Џамбазовски, (Београд: Српска академија наука и уметности, 1983), 292-293.

just 15 kilometers away, disrupted the free flow of people and goods, and Albania was no longer accessible as a market. As a result, the wealthy Aromanians from Bitola, Kruševo, and nearby villages were the first to react. Prominent members of the Greco-Vlach communities carefully planned their gradual relocation to Florina, Thessaloniki, Edessa, and Athens. The elite of the Aromanian communities in Pelagonia – community leaders, wealthy merchants, capitalists, bankers, scholars, teachers, and professionals – transferred their activities to Greece. They were followed by less privileged members of the community, who hoped that promises of organized resettlement would be fulfilled.⁸⁶ Some Aromanian merchants from Nižepole and Trnovo moved their businesses to Romania,⁸⁷ while others, fearing conscription into the Serbian army, fled to Greece, and from there to the United States.⁸⁸

The new borders fundamentally altered the lives of the Aromanian pastoral nomads, who could no longer descend with their livestock to the warmer coastal areas and were forced to seek new winter habitats within the Serbian state. As a result, some of them abandoned the nomadic way of life and became transhumant, while others even began to engage in agriculture. In search of new wintering grounds for themselves and their livestock, these former

86 Αστέριος Ι. Κουκούδης, *Η Θεσσαλονίκη και οι Βλάχοι*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ζήτρος, 2000), 110-112.

87 Stoica Lascu, *Românii Balcanici în Dobrogea*, (București: Editura Etnologică, 2016), 86-87.

88 Глигор Тодоровски, *Просветната политика на Кралството Србија во Македонија по Балканските војни 1912-1915 година*, (Скопје: Просветно дело, 1975), 97.

nomads began settling in 1913 and 1914 in villages near Kočani (the villages of Banja and Istibanja), Štip (Sofilari and Bekirlija), and Ovče Pole (Erdželija), where there had previously been no Aromanian population.⁸⁹

If the Treaty of Bucharest represented a major ethnic upheaval for the Aromanians in Macedonia, then World War I proved to be their *coup de grâce*.

On October 14, 1915, Bulgaria declared war on Serbia, and by the end of November Macedonia was occupied by Bulgarian forces. One of the initial priorities for the Bulgarian military authorities, following the establishment of the Macedonian Military Inspection Area on December 8, 1915, was to eliminate perceived internal threats. Many Macedonians, accused of being Serbian agents, were either killed or deported to Bulgaria.⁹⁰ Until the autumn of 1916, the Aromanians were largely unaffected by these measures, with only about fifty Aromanians from Kruševo being deported to Pirdop and subsequently to various locations in Old Bulgaria.⁹¹ Aromanians who relocated from Bitola, Kruševo, and the surrounding region to Greece between 1914 and 1916 did so voluntarily and with the approval of both Serbian and Bulgarian authorities.⁹²

89 J. Трифуноски, В. Нетков, “Денешни села и население во долниот слив на Брегалница”, *Зборник на штипскиот музеј* III/1964, 40, 49; Трифуноски, *Кочанска котлина*, 98-99, 105-107; Trifunoski, “Ovčepoljska kotlina”, 757.

90 Тодор Поп Антоф, *Спомени*, (Скопје: Државен Архив на Република Македонија, 2002), 191.

91 Архивско одделение на Институтот за национална историја – Скопје (АО ИНИ), Бранко Благовески, Крушевска хроника, Сл. IV.1202/II, 407-408.

92 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 469.

However, from the autumn of 1916 onward, the Bulgarians began viewing the Aromanians as the fifth column. The Macedonian Front traversed Aromanian villages on Pelister, Bitola, and in the Vlach villages of Moglena. When the Allied forces launched the Monastir offensive against the Central Powers in September 1916, Aromanian settlements found themselves on the front line. Romania had joined the war on the side of the Allies a few weeks earlier, driven by its own territorial ambitions rather than direct interests in Macedonia.⁹³ Nonetheless, the involvement of Romania led to the deportation of Romanian-educated individuals in Macedonia, who were seen as potential enemies. Former professors, teachers, priests, and students from Romanian schools in Bitola, Malovište, Trnovo, and Magarevo were deported to Bulgaria under the pretext of deporting them for safety reasons.⁹⁴ The Moglenite Vlachs from Huma were sent to Aleksinac in Serbia, which was then under Bulgarian control.⁹⁵ Additionally, Aromanians from Gopeš, Kruševo, Gorna Belica, Dolna Belica, Ohrid, and Eastern Macedonia were

93 Laurențiu-Cristian Dumitru, "Preliminaries of Romania's entering the World War I", *Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University* 1/2012, 167-168.

94 Constantin Belemace, *Dimândarea Părintească*, (Constanța: Editura Cartea Aromână, 1990), 65; Јован Ф. Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина. Антропоегеографска проучавања*, (Београд: Српска академија наука и уметности, 1998), 230, 232.

95 Virgil Coman, "Scurtă privire asupra Meglenoromânilor până la sfârșitul secolului al XX-lea", *Aromâni, Meglenoromâni, Istro-români – Aspecte identitare și culturale*, coordinator Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, (București: Editura Universității din București, 2012), 138.

also deported to Bulgaria.⁹⁶ Given that these areas were distant from the front lines, it is likely that these people were not relocated for their own safety, but rather, the primary motive was to clear the area of pro-Romanian population groups.

The scale of deportations expanded significantly in the summer of 1917, following Greece's entry into the war on the side of the Entente on June 30. By mid-July, nearly all remaining Aromanians from Trnovo, Magarevo, Bitola, and Malovište were deported to Bulgaria due to fears of their potential cooperation with the Allies.⁹⁷ Similar actions were taken in Kruševo on July 13, where Bulgarian authorities deported the Greco-Vlachs,⁹⁸ as well as in Dolna Belica, Gorna Belica, and Gopeš.⁹⁹ In many cases, those deported included women, children, and the elderly, whose husbands, fathers, and sons had already fled to Greece.¹⁰⁰

96 T. J. Winnifrith, *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People*, (London: Duckworth, 1987), 145-146; Трифуноски, “Данашњи влашки катуни”, 175; Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 468; Трифуноски, “Топеш”, 259-266; Трајановски, *Влашките родови во Струшко*, 82; АО ИНИ, Крушевска хроника, 408; Iana Mihailova, “Deportarea a Armănjlor dit Machidunia di Dat”, *100 di anj di proclamarea a Prinsipatului armănescu Pindu shi 100 di anj di deportarea a Armănjlor*, eds. Jana Mihailova, Maria Nicolova (Scopia: Integra Nau, 2017), 207-211.

97 Сидовски, *Народот со многу татковини*, 348-349.

98 АО ИНИ, Крушевска хроника, 408-409.

99 Ѓорѓи Димовски-Цолев, Борис Павловски, *Непокорени*, (Битола: Развитие, 1982), 223; Jordan Trtsa, “Internatsia a Armănjlor di sud-ascapitatlu ali Machidunii tu Vărgării (1916-1919/20)”, *100 di anj di proclamarea a Prinsipatului armănescu Pindu shi 100 di anj di deportarea a Armănjlor*, eds. Iana Mihailova, Maria Nicolova (Scopia: Integra Nau, 2017), 170-171.

100 АО ИНИ, Крушевска хроника, 408-409.

In the village of Nižepole, the only Aromanian village in the Bitola region on the opposite side of the front, the Italians and French deported all residents to Florina and Katerini in Greece.¹⁰¹ Once emptied of Aromanians, the villages were looted and subsequently destroyed. Magarevo, Trnovo, Huma, and two-thirds of the Aromanian neighborhoods in Bitola were razed, while other villages like Malovište were completely looted by Bulgarian soldiers.¹⁰²

The deportees were held in Bulgaria until the end of the war, and reports about their experiences there vary. In a memorandum to the Greek Government and Parliament, former residents of Bitola, Magarevo, and Trnovo, described enduring severe hardships and grueling labor imposed by Bulgarian authorities, leading to many deaths.¹⁰³ Conversely, others, such as Teano Gaju from Kruševo and Anastasia Uca from Dolna Belica, reported relatively good treatment, including decent provisions and work opportunities.¹⁰⁴ However, all deportees faced restrictions on their movements, had to report to the police daily, and were confined to their homes from 6 PM to 8 AM.¹⁰⁵

Following Bulgaria's armistice with the Allied Powers on September 29, 1918, the deported Aromanians were permitted to return home. Many chose not to return

101 Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 226; Κουκούδης, *Οι Ολύμποι Βλάχοι*, 187-188.

102 Κουκούδης, *Οι Ολύμποι Βλάχοι*, 300; Popnicola, *Tărnova*, 192; Popnicola, *Muluvishhti*, 164; Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 230, 232.

103 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 472.

104 АО ИНИ, Крушевска хроника, 409; Trtsa, "Internatsia a Armănjlor", 174.

105 Belemace, *Dimăndarea Părintească*, 114-116.

to their villages, as Romanian schools in Macedonia had been closed with no assurances of their reopening. Former Romanian educators thus migrated to Romania, where they were absorbed into Romanian educational institutions.¹⁰⁶ Some villagers from Gopeš and Malovište opted to remain in Bulgaria with relatives who had settled in Sofia during the Ottoman period.¹⁰⁷ The largest group of deportees, however, traveled through Greece back to Macedonia. Along the way, some decided to stay in Greece, such as a group from Kruševo that settled in Drama, and a group from Magarevo and Trnovo that settled in Florina.¹⁰⁸

During their journey, many deportees were ravaged by typhus and the Spanish flu.¹⁰⁹ Upon returning, they found their villages devastated, with houses looted or destroyed.¹¹⁰ Aromanian pastoralists from Eastern Macedonia returned without their livestock, which had been requisitioned by the Bulgarian army, prompting some to abandon their nomadic lifestyle in favor of settling in lowland villages in the Štip region and Ovče Pole.¹¹¹

The extent of the devastation led many returnees to resettle in Greece. Others, such as the Nižepole villagers who had

106 Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, Maria Petre, *Școli și biserici românești din Peninsula Balcanică – Documente - (1918-1953) – Volumul II*, (București: Editura Universității din București, 2006), 125-128.

107 Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 68; J. F. Trifunski, “O cincarskim selima na Peristeru”, *Geografski Horizont* 1-2/1957, 54.

108 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 470, 472; Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 230, 232.

109 Трајановски, *Влашките родови во Струшко*, 82.

110 Сидовски, *Народот со многу татковини*, 348; Popnicola, *Muluvishtii*, 164.

111 Трифуноски, “Данашњи влашки катуни”, 175; Trifunski, “Ovčepoljska kotlina”, 693, 725, 754.

been deported to Greece during the war, chose to remain there upon learning of the destruction of their native villages.¹¹²

Estimating the number of deported Aromanians during World War I is challenging. Claims that 50.000-60.000 Aromanians were deported are exaggerated.¹¹³ Based on the number of residents who returned to Gopeš and Malovište, it appears that about two-thirds of the villagers were deported, and this number is probably higher in the villages that were located right on the front line.¹¹⁴

Taking into account the migrations during and after the Balkan Wars – when a third of the Aromanian population from Bitola and the surrounding region moved to Greece,¹¹⁵ and others relocated to Romania, Bulgaria, and further north to Serbia – as well as the fact that some Aromanians perished during the wars or succumbed to typhus and the Spanish flu, we can affirm Jovan Trifunovski's observation that the wars of 1912-1918 had a fateful impact on nearly all Aromanian settlements.¹¹⁶

The Interwar Period

On January 31, 1921, a census was conducted in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, revealing significant demographic losses among the Aromanian populati-

112 Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 226.

113 Trtsa, "Internatsia a Armănjlor", 171.

114 Димовски-Цолев, Павловски, *Непокорени*, 174, 223; Трифуноски, "Гопеш", 266.

115 Koukoudis, *The Vlachs*, 473.

116 Jovan F. Trifunovski, "Cincarska naselja u Makedoniji", *Geografski Horizont* 3/1959, 23.

on in Macedonia following the Balkan Wars and the First World War. This census recorded inhabitants by religion and mother tongue rather than ethnicity. Aromanians were categorized as Romanians/Tzintzars based on their mother tongue. However, it is evident that in Macedonia, there were no Romanians listed under the “Romanians/Tzintzars” category; all registered individuals were Aromanians and Moglenite Vlachs.

According to the census, 9,087 Aromanians were residing in Macedonia, constituting 1.13% of the region’s total population.¹¹⁷ Of these, 50.14% were urban dwellers.¹¹⁸ This figure represents a 70.8% decrease compared to Vassil Kančov’s 1900 statistics. The decline was most pronounced in Bitola (83.6%) and in Aromanian villages within the Bitola region (89.7%), where the impacts of migration during the wars and the Macedonian front battles were felt most acutely.

Despite their reduced numbers, Aromanians in Macedonia continued to contribute to the region’s economic and cultural life. Prominent Aromanian families in Skopje, such as the Papatheodosi and Dicea families, were influential industrialists and wholesalers.¹¹⁹ In Bitola, the Manaki brothers, Yanaki and Milton, established their reputation during the Ottoman period as leading photo-

117 Дефинитивни резултати пописа становништва од 31. јануара 1921. год., (Сарајево: Државна штампарија, 1932), 88-123.

118 Борче Илиевски, *Демографските карактеристики на Вардарска Македонија меѓу двете светски војни (анализа на југословенските пописи од 1921. и 1931. година)*, (Скопје: Филозофски факултет, 2017), 207.

119 Hâciu, *Aromânii*, 212.

graphers and cinema pioneers in the Balkans. They opened the Manaki Cinema in 1921, which became a center for social and cultural activities in the town.¹²⁰ However, Aromanian involvement in the economy and cultural-social life was on an individual basis, rather than as members of an Aromanian, or even Aromanian-Romanian or Greco-Vlach, collective that could have had its own theater groups, newspapers, sports and music societies, and parliamentarians advocating for Aromanian rights in the national assembly.

In the Kingdom of SCS and later Yugoslavia, Aromanians no longer had the opportunity to receive education in their mother tongue, which had been available in Romanian schools during Ottoman rule. Despite persistent Romanian demands to the Belgrade authorities to honor Pašić's commitment in Bucharest to grant autonomy to "the schools of the Koutsovlachs", the Belgrade Government argued that the Treaty of Bucharest was invalidated because Romania did not enter the Great War when Serbia was attacked, thus failing to fulfill its obligations. Additionally, Romanian diplomats in Bitola and Skopje noted that even if the Serbian authorities had been willing to reopen Romanian schools, staffing would have been problematic as former teachers had relocated to Romania.¹²¹

Following the First World War, Aromanians continued to emigrate from Macedonia, primarily on an indivi-

120 *Творештвото на браќата Манаки*, уредници Александар Крстевски et al, (Скопје: Архив на Македонија - Матица Македонска, 1996), 37.

121 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. II*, 360, 377.

dual basis. Migration to Thessaloniki, Florina, and Edessa was ongoing, and many enterprising Aromanians also moved to the capital of the Kingdom, Belgrade.¹²² Some Aromanians from Bitola and Kruševo sent their children to Romanian schools in Greece. After completing their education there, the students had the opportunity to pursue higher education in Romania, from where they seldom returned to Macedonia.¹²³ There were also instances of reverse migration, such as among former residents of Nižepole who had settled in Greece and, when the Katerini area was flooded by Greek refugees from Anatolia after 1923, decided to return to their native village.¹²⁴ However, most migration was from rural areas to towns within Macedonia itself. Aromanians from the villages around Bitola moved to Bitola and Skopje, those from Gorna and Dolna Belica relocated to Ohrid and Struga, and some transhumant shepherds abandoned stockbreeding and settled in Kočani, Štip, and Sveti Nikole.¹²⁵ Upon moving to these towns, they quickly assimilated into the larger Slavic population, increasing their susceptibility to losing their national identity and language. Before 1918, mixed marriages between Aromanians and Macedonians were rare. However, after the First World War, such marriages beca-

122 Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Битољу”, 245; Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 69, 230, 232; Трифуноски, *Охридско-Струшка област*, 104.

123 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 446, 537.

124 Κουκούδης, *Οι Ολύμπιοι Βλάχοι*, 188.

125 Трифуноски, *Охридско-Струшка област*, 104; Трифуноски, *Битољско-прилепска котлина*, 69, 239.

me more common, and once an Aromanian married a Macedonian, Macedonian was spoken in the family.¹²⁶ Consequently, during the interwar period, Aromanians in Tetovo were nearly completely assimilated through such marriages, and in Ohrid, due to their small numbers and mixed marriages, the Aromanian language was scarcely spoken.¹²⁷ Education also contributed to this assimilation, as instruction during the interwar period was exclusively in Serbian.

A different type of migration involved nomadic shepherds. The redrawing of borders after the wars restricted their movement and hindered the marketing of their dairy and wool products at the Thessaloniki port. In the competition for fertile land, some pastures were converted into agricultural fields, reducing grazing areas for their livestock. Consequently, there was a shift from a nomadic to a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Around 40% of these nomads, particularly between 1924 and 1928, purchased houses from departing Turks in Eastern Macedonia, abandoned nomadism, and transitioned to transhumance. They spent winters on their land in the village and moved to the mountains with their livestock in late spring and summer.¹²⁸ As a result, approximately 200 nomadic families settled in the Ovče Pole valley, with a slightly smaller number in the Ko-

126 Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Битољу”, 244-245; Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Охриду”, 229.

127 Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Тетову”, 77; Трифуноски, “Цинцари у Струги”, 138.

128 Филиповић, “Номадски Цинцари на Ограждену”, 64; Trifunovski, “Ovčepoljska kotlina”, 645; Трифуноски, “Данашњи влашки катуни”, 176.

čani valley and the regions of Štip, Kumanovo, Pehčevo, Radoviš, and Kratovo.¹²⁹ The remaining nomads continued their traditional lifestyle, moving between the Osogovo and Ogražden mountains in the east and Mount Nidže in southwestern Macedonia.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, livestock farming remained the primary occupation of Aromanians in Eastern Macedonia. In 1929, during the summer in the Macedonian mountains, Aromanians grazed about 100.000 sheep,¹³¹ translating to 10-11 sheep per person based on the Aromanian population in Macedonia.

The migrations of the Aromanian population from Macedonia after the First World War were not on a large scale, as confirmed by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Census conducted in April 1931, which recorded Aromanians as Romanians. According to this census, 10,981 “Romanians” lived in Macedonia in 1931, representing an increase of 20.8% in the Aromanian population compared to the 1921 census.¹³² This increase was due to natural population growth but likely also to the continued settlement of Aromanian nomads in the villages of Eastern Macedonia and their more accurate registration.

129 Trifunovski, “Ovčepoljska kotlina”, 669, 700, 748, 754, 757, 759; Трифуноски, *Кочанска котлина*, 51, 98-99, 108, 126-129; Трифуноски, Нетков, “Денешни села”, 42, 48, 51; Филиповић, “Номадски Цинцари на Огражду”, 61.

130 Филиповић, “Номадски Цинцари на Огражду”, 63.

131 Миливоје М. Савић, *Наша индустрија, занати, трговина и пољопривреда*, VII. део, (Сарајево: Државна штампарија, 1929), 148.

132 *Die Gliederung der Bevölkerung des ehemaligen Jugoslawien nach Muttersprache und Konfession nach den unveröffentlichten Angaben der Zählung von 1931*, (Wien: Staatsdruckerei, 1943), 308-351.

The final wave of Aromanian migration from Macedonia during the interwar period was directly linked to events in Greece and Romania. Following the signing of the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations on January 30, 1923, approximately one million refugees from Anatolia settled in Greek Macedonia. Many of the pastures previously used by Aromanian shepherds in Greece were divided into smaller plots and offered to the refugees for farming. At the same time, Romania struggled to establish firm control over the newly acquired Southern Dobruja, which had a predominantly Turkish and Bulgarian population. Additionally, bands of the Internal Dobrujan Revolutionary Organization, a Bulgarian nationalist group, frequently crossed the Romanian southern border in 1924 and 1925, attacking gendarmerie headquarters and Romanian administrative representatives.¹³³

In September 1925, an agreement was reached where Greece consented to the emigration of 1,500 Aromanian families to Southern Dobruja, while the Romanian government authorized their settlement as border keepers. Each family was promised 15 hectares of land if they settled near the Bulgarian border or 10 hectares if they settled further inland. By April 1926, 1,500 Aromanian families from Greece had relocated to Dobruja. However, news of Romania distributing free land to Aromanians led thousands of Aromanian shepherds from western Bulgaria to

133 Nikola Minov, "Cursed in Heaven: the Colonization of the Aromanians in Southern Dobruja", *Borders, Boundaries and Belonging in Post-Ottoman Space in the Interwar Period*, eds. Ebru Boyar, Kate Fleet, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2023), 58-65.

migrate to Dobruja with their livestock. Subsequently, Aromanian nomads and transhumant shepherds from Macedonia also decided to migrate.¹³⁴

In the summer of 1928, approximately 100 Aromanian families, likely nomads from Eastern Macedonia, sought permission from the Plenipotentiary Minister of the Romanian Legation in Belgrade to migrate and receive land in Southern Dobruja.¹³⁵ They argued that, due to the agrarian reform in the Kingdom of SCS, the lands they had purchased from the Turks in the mountains had been confiscated.¹³⁶ Their request appears to have been granted, as around 50 families of Aromanian shepherds from Mount Ogražden relocated to Romania that same year.¹³⁷ Between 1930 and 1938, about 50 additional shepherding families from villages around Kočani and Kumanovo were settled in Southern Dobruja. These families, belonging to the poorest Aromanian strata, soon regretted their decision due to the harsh conditions, including flat, arid terrain, unbearable heat, insects, dust, lack of roads and drinking water, and frequent attacks by Bulgarian bands. Some attempted to return to Macedonia, but their requests were denied.¹³⁸

Throughout the interwar period, Romania continued to position itself as the sole defender of Macedonian Aromanians' interests. Correspondence between Romanian

134 *Ibid.*, 65-69.

135 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 446.

136 *Ibid.*; Minov, "Cursed in Heaven", 60.

137 Филиповић, "Номадски Цинцари на Огражду", 63.

138 Трифуноски, *Кочанска котлина*, 51, 100, 115-118; Minov, "Cursed in Heaven", 78-81.

diplomatic representatives in Bitola, Skopje, and Belgrade and their superiors in Bucharest consistently highlighted the issue of former Romanian schools and churches in Macedonia. Despite Romania's persistent demands for the reopening and restoration of these institutions, the issue remained unresolved. While the building of the former Romanian primary school in Skopje was eventually returned, the school did not resume operation. The Church of St. Konstantin and Elena in Bitola was the exception, where Aromanian priests were allowed to conduct services in their native language from 1919 to 1939. In contrast, other churches were served by Serbian priests, and the school buildings were requisitioned.¹³⁹

Romanian diplomatic documents are replete with accusations against the Yugoslav authorities for orchestrating the assimilation of Aromanians. According to V. Papazi, the Romanian Consul in Skopje, the authorities prohibited young Aromanians from speaking their mother tongue in public.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, M. Petrașiu, the Chancellor of the Romanian Legation in Belgrade, claimed that the authorities systematically altered Aromanian surnames. For instance, if someone named Ion D. Dabija requested a passport, he would be renamed "Jovan Dabižić." To make it sound more Serbian, the surname "Dabižić" might be removed, and the father's name added, transforming it into "Jovan Dimitrijević."¹⁴¹

139 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 334-336, 341, 358, 445, 485, 536; Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. II*, 166.

140 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 536.

141 *Ibid.*, 447.

These actions by the Yugoslav authorities toward the Aromanians should be viewed within the broader context of Yugoslavia's minority policies. The creation of Yugoslavia occurred against the will of most members of national minorities, and from the outset, the Yugoslav authorities adopted a hostile stance toward these groups. Minorities were perceived as a necessary evil whose numbers needed to be reduced through emigration and assimilation, or at the very least, rendered politically powerless, culturally weakened, and economically marginalized. To achieve this, a series of measures were implemented, including the prohibition of native languages in official communication with authorities, restrictions on political activity and organization, the increased use of the "state language" in education, and other similar policies.

Although the Aromanians were not *de jure* a minority, they were distinct from the majority and spoke an unintelligible language which undermined the image of a mono-national state the Yugoslav authorities aimed to project internationally. Moreover, they had a protector – Romania, which sought to present them as Romanians. As a result, in most cases, the authorities treated requests for Romanian schools and churches in Macedonia similarly to those made by other minority groups. Until 1915, Serbia allowed the operation of Romanian schools in Macedonia, but after World War I, the existence of such schools became problematic. Following the Aromanians' example, Albanians, Turks, and pro-Bulgarian factions within the Macedonian population could also demand separate schools or cultural autonomy, which clashed with the assimilationist agenda of the Serbian elite and,

therefore, had to be prevented at all costs. A similar approach was taken toward demands for reopening Aromanian churches and conducting services in Romanian. According to the Yugoslav authorities, the Romanian clergy was imbued with Romanian nationalism, which complicated close relations between Romania and Yugoslavia. Therefore, the free operation of these churches could not be permitted.¹⁴²

Romanian diplomats also observed another significant development among the Aromanian population during the interwar period. Following the establishment of the first Romanian schools in Macedonia in the second half of the 19th century, the Aromanians became divided into “Greeks” and “Romanians”, and over the subsequent decades, these groups increasingly viewed each other as adversaries. The “Greeks” refused to forgive what they saw as a betrayal by their former compatriots and launched a campaign of persecution against the “Romanian” intruders. Locally, it was preached among the rural population that the Romanian language was the language of the devil, spreading “an offensive and foul odor”.¹⁴³ Greek clergy delivered sermons condemning the “unworthy, impure, and evil Romanian race”, urging their followers to sever all ties with the “Romanians”.¹⁴⁴ Parents of children attending Romanian schools were cursed, and priests refused to

142 Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, (Beograd: INIS, 2005), 18, 107, 138, 216-217, 225, 373-374, 445.

143 Минов, *Влашкото прашање*, 124.

144 Arthur Savaète, “Soirées Franco-Russes”, *Revue du monde catholique* IV-1/1904, 442, f.1.

baptize infants or perform marriages for families identified as Romanians.¹⁴⁵ During Easter, the Gospel was read in all languages except Aromanian and Romanian.¹⁴⁶ Even the dead were not spared, as they could not be buried unless their immediate family members declared themselves Greeks.¹⁴⁷ According to Italian diplomats in Bitola, Greek priests and consuls ordered local “Greeks” to stop speaking Aromanian, even within their families, and to avoid marrying “Romanians”.¹⁴⁸

In response, the “Romanians” quickly embraced this division. Proud of their Roman heritage,¹⁴⁹ young “Romanians” severed ties with their “Greek” parents, whom they considered racially inferior to the Romans. When Apostol Mărgărit passed away in October 1903, the site of his burial in Bitola became the center of a new “Romanian” cemetery, marking the official division of the dead into “Greeks” and “Romanians”.¹⁵⁰ During the Macedonian Struggle (1904-1908), the conflict between the two factions escalated into armed violence. Even the

145 Gușu Papacostea Goga, *In zilele redeșteptării macedo-române (memorii)*, (București: Atelierele grafice SOCEC & Co., Săciatate anonimă, 1924), 16, 24.

146 Кирил Патриарх Български, *Българската Екзархия в Одринско и Македония след Освободителната война (1877-1878)*, Том Първи (1878-1885), книга първа, (София: Синодално издателство, 1969), 385.

147 Savaète, “Soirées Franco-Russes”, 442, f.1.

148 Silvano Gallon, *Rapporti politici dei regi consoli d'Italia a Monastir (1895-1916)*, (Bitola: Associazione di amicizia macedone-italiana di Bitola, 2004), 131-132.

149 Минов, *Влашкото прашање*, 270-271.

150 *Ibid.*, 340-341.

Bulgarian occupation authorities during World War I categorized the Aromanians as either “Romanians” or “Greeks”, deporting them to Bulgaria at different times based on these divisions.

However, after World War I, the threat of assimilation and denationalization led the former “Greeks” and “Romanians” to set aside their differences and unite. In a report from March 28, 1937, the Romanian consul in Skopje, V. Papazi, wrote: “In the face of the threat of denationalization by the Serbs, the Romanians present themselves today more united than ever”. He further noted that the policies of the Yugoslav authorities “have worked wonders in prompting the *graecomani* Romanians to return to their true national sentiments and unite against the common danger, as seen among the Romanians in Bitola, who, despite great sacrifices, remain closely united around the church, as well as those from Kruševo, Skopje, and other areas”.¹⁵¹

Nevertheless, the Aromanian population in Macedonia was too small and dispersed to effectively resist assimilation. Throughout the interwar period, Romanian diplomats and politicians cited figures ranging from 50.000 to 300.000 Aromanians in Macedonia.¹⁵² However, confidential reports from Romanian representatives in Yugoslavia, such as those from Emil Opreșanu, the Romanian Consul in Skopje, acknowledged that there were barely more than 16.000 Aromanians.¹⁵³

151 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 537.

152 Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 80; Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. I*, 485.

153 Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre, *Școli și biserici românești – Vol. II*, 493-494.

The gradual loss of the Aromanian language, which began in the towns, soon spread to the villages. Hence, in the summer of 1935, when Serbian ethnologist Milenko S. Filipović visited Aromanian nomads in the Ogražden region, his conclusions strongly echoed Apostol Mărgărit's fears from the early lines of this study:

“[Once these nomads transition to transhumance], it will not be difficult for them to shift from a semi-nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary one and to agriculture, which will lead to the Serbization of these Tzintzars. The beginnings of this process are already evident. Not only did all the men in the hut settlements of Ogražden and Pehčevo know Serbian (the local dialect), but many women and even children also spoke Serbian, despite the fact that the women of Ogražden had limited interaction with the broader population. Children of Tzintzar shepherds regularly attend our schools.”¹⁵⁴

While Apostol Mărgărit's concerns were validated, Filipović's prediction that the Aromanians would undergo Serbization did not materialize. The establishment of the Second Yugoslavia in 1944 and the subsequent introduction of Macedonian as the language of instruction in the Democratic Federal/People's/Socialist Republic of Macedonia, led more to a partial shift towards Macedonian identity among the Aromanians rather than Serbization.

Similarly, Dušan Popović's 1937 prediction that the Aromanians “will not endure for another 40-50 years” did not come to pass. In Yugoslav censuses from 1948 to 1991, the Aromanian population in Macedonia ranged from

154 Филиповић, “Номадски Цинцари на Ограждену”, 64.

6,384 to 9,511. Aromanians were classified as “Vlachs” in these censuses, as well as in the censuses conducted in the independent Macedonian state.¹⁵⁵ According to the most recent census in 2021, 8.714 Aromanians reside in the Republic of North Macedonia, constituting 0.47% of the resident population. However, despite their survival against the odds, the Aromanian language in Macedonia appears to be nearing extinction, as only 36% of those counted (3,151) identified Aromanian as their mother tongue.¹⁵⁶

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155 Nikola Minov, “The Vlachs in Macedonia in the 19th and 20th Centuries”, *Balkanica Posnaniensia* 1/2021, 220-222.

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