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Born to Assimilate?
Thoughts about the Vlachs

Nick Balamaci

Foreword

I was born in The Bronx, New York. My father was from Albania, my mother was from Greece. In our apartment, we spoke Vlach; on the street, we spoke English; and in Church, we spoke Romanian. When my parents wanted to keep a secret, they spoke Greek or Turkish.

Does that sound like a recipe for an identity crisis?

Now, children famously do not deal well with ambiguity. Plus they desperately want to belong. So I made a choice – I decided to be American, listen to rock-and-roll, play baseball, and speak English.

And for the next 25 years I was as American as can be. When my mother spoke to me in Vlach – and she always spoke to me in Vlach – I told her in English not to talk to me in “that language.” Going to our Romanian Orthodox Church was like visiting another planet – I had no idea why we were there, the people weren’t at all like us, they

just had a language that sounded like ours, except for some reason they thought theirs was better and they seemed amused when, in my younger years, I spoke Vlach with my parents in front of them. As soon as I was old enough to resist my mother's authority, I cut church out of my life, too.

I was totally American. And I stayed that way until my father died in 1977.

Why do we sometimes have to lose something in order to recognize its value? I had taken my father and his incredible legacy for granted: born in the Ottoman Empire in 1902... received just three years of education... survived the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and the chaotic, bloody birth of Albania in 1914... crossed the ocean to come to America in 1916, braving U-boats and a world at war... worked day and night in restaurants and bars for decades (and in Speakeasies during Prohibition)... lived with other Vlach bachelors in cramped apartments... sent most of his earnings overseas, as the eldest son, to his struggling family – and then at the age of 50 went back to the old country to find a bride and finally have a life of his own.

I was in my early 20s when he died, and it changed my life in two profound ways:

First, I was overwhelmed by the vast numbers of people who came to pay their respects – the funeral home could not contain them all, and I don't think I've ever seen a longer funeral procession. I realized that he may have been poor and uneducated, but he was a truly good man who was loved by many people, and I decided then and there that that was the best legacy any person could have.

The second change was set into motion a few months later when I received a letter from my cousin Bob Nicola, who served with my father on the Board of the Society Farsarotul, the oldest and largest Vlach organization in America. In the letter, Bob described how much the Society had meant to my father as well as the significant role he'd played in its survival and success. That led me to decide, as a tribute to my father, not only to join the Society Farsarotul but also to take over my father's longtime role on the Board as Secretary.

Perhaps more important than the letter, however, were the two books Bob also sent me: *Nomads of the Balkans* by Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson (1913), and *Macedonia: Its Races and their Future* by Henry Noel Brailsford (1906)

I had never read an impartial word about the Vlachs before. I had always accepted the story with which I'd grown up: that we were Romanians who just happened not to come from Romania. I was utterly fascinated to discover that the wisdom I'd received was not true.

These two books were, for me, something akin to two atoms fusing in my brain – they unleashed in me an extraordinary energy, a desire to learn that remains with me even today, 36 years later. Almost every page I turned caused scales to fall from my eyes.

First amazing discovery: Nearly a century ago, learned Englishmen had felt my people were important enough to write books about. They summarized the history of the Vlachs to date, even mentioning the native villages of my mother and father. They also put together an elementary grammar and vocabulary that described exactly the language I'd grown up speaking.

Second amazing discovery: I was not a Romanian – I was a Vlach, a word I'd never heard before in my life! I learned that in the 19th century, emerging Balkan nationalism had driven the Vlachs, who were too small and fragmented to form their own state, to seek the shelter of one or another national identity, with Greeks and Romanians the main competitors for our souls. Most had chosen Greece, but a minority sided with Romania, which ended badly for them and led to a global migration that included my father and many relatives.

That I had missed these facts about my people and history, though they had been sitting on library shelves throughout the world for the better part of a century, gave me a deep desire for more context. I wanted to understand exactly how the world had come to be as it was in my own time, so I decided to go to college and find out.

What an incredible transformation: For me, ironically, not only did my father's life lead to good things, but so did his death.

I wrote a few papers on the Vlachs in college, but I wanted to share the knowledge I had found with friends, family, and other interested parties outside of the academic world – I was fairly bursting with the desire to let others in on the truths I'd discovered. I had always enjoyed writing, so I started writing and editing *The Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul*, which has now been published

Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul, which has now been published for more than 20 years. I also began to write for other publications that might have an interest in the Vlachs.

By far the most important of these was *The GreekAmerican*, an English-language weekly which, under the editorial and publishing leadership of Peter Pappas and Fannie Petallides, respectively, had become much more than a source of the usual ethnic news, but rather a dynamic, innovative, active participant in the dialogue that has described and defined all aspects of the American experience. *The GreekAmerican* brought a well-defined point of view, one that was not only willing to go “Against the Grain,” the tag line for many of Peter’s essays, but seemed determined to do so. For a few golden years that coincided with the candidacy of the first Greek-American for President of the United States, Michael Dukakis – whose mother Euterpe was of Vlach ancestry – *The GreekAmerican* fearlessly spoke truth to every mythology it perceived, from the tenets of right-wing American extremism to the cornerstone beliefs of hardcore Greek nationalism.

I was privileged to play a small role in this era of political progress and intellectual ferment, and I will never forget the incredible opportunity Peter and Fannie gave me. I wrote articles about the Vlachs – previously a taboo subject in the Greek press; about Orthodoxy in America; and about the Dukakis campaign, and the work I did back then in those three topics opened doors that I never dreamed I would walk through.

The articles about the Vlachs are the basis of this volume. Together with articles I wrote for other publications and the new writers and points of view for which *The Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul* finally provided an outlet, the *GreekAmerican* articles helped create a community of people who understood that the Vlachs were neither Romanian nor Greek but rather simply Vlachs who over the centuries have chosen to be Greeks, Romanians, Albanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Macedonians, and Turks – much as my generation of Vlachs in the US had chosen to be Americans. That work continues. My writings on the Vlachs led to many other wonderful things: I met and developed an enduring friendship and collaboration with Tom Winnifrith, a British scholar who in 1987 published the first major English-language book on the Vlachs in the nearly three-quarters of a century since Wace and Thompson. I was in Albania in early 1992 for the first meeting of the Vlachs in that country after the fall of its hard-line Communist regime, and returned a year later in a project sponsored by The Soros Foundation to help President Sali Berisha establish a western-style press office. I also became a prime

point of reference for anyone in the English-speaking world seeking information about the Vlachs, and this in turn has led to decades of fascinating correspondence and several lifelong friendships.

My *GreekAmerican* articles about Orthodoxy led to a long and productive collaboration with my good friend Father Alex Karloutsos that produced speeches, Op-Ed pieces, essays, and other work in support of a more inclusive and ecumenical Orthodoxy, both in the US and – through His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, with whom I also had the good fortune to collaborate – throughout the world. That work continues to be an important part of my life as well.

Finally, my *GreekAmerican* articles about politics, especially those about the Dukakis campaign, also opened doors I never anticipated. Most of those articles were written while I was a newly-married graduate student working towards a PhD in European History. After several years, I found myself enjoying the academic world less and longing to get back into the flow of events in the real world, so I suggested to my wife Caryn that we try to have a child and if we didn't succeed, I'd continue in the PhD program, but if we did succeed, I would leave academia with my Master's degree and get a full-time job.

Caryn became pregnant with our daughter Julie almost immediately, I began my job search, and the very first job I heard about was a minor writing position in the office of Manhattan Borough President David N. Dinkins. As it happened, Dinkins had strongly supported Michael Dukakis's presidential bid, and the many clippings I was able to produce about the Dukakis campaign demonstrated that I grasped politics and could write about it. I was offered a position that would launch an entire career for me, first as a writer and speechwriter for Dinkins as Manhattan Borough President and later as Mayor of the City of New York, then as a speechwriter and Special Assistant to US Securities and Exchange Chairman Arthur Levitt in the Clinton Administration, followed by several fascinating and rewarding communications jobs in the private sector.

And so again I come back to the fact that, as much as my father gave me in life, he gave me much in death as well. His passing set me on a trajectory to a life I never dreamed I'd have. I am grateful to my father and mother (the subject of another book, I hope); to all those who gave me hope and opportunities along the way, too numerous to mention; and to Alexandru Gica, a bright young Vlach from Romania who first suggested this volume. Last,

but very far from least, I thank Caryn and Julie and Andrew for sharing this journey with me and making it sweeter than I can express in words.

Nick Balamaci

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Cultural Forum:

A New Tone for Our Cultural Discussions

The Newsletter, volume I, Issue 2, July 1987

As we know from modern anthropological research, language is by no means the only component of a culture, nor even a necessary part of it. It is just one of many aspects of culture--an important one, no doubt--yet it is quite possible to have an Arumanian identity without knowing the language (beyond the several dozen key words we always seem to know, such as pita, maia, apa, tsi fatsi, ghini, Dumnidzau, etc.). There are families all over central Europe, from Vienna to Skopje, from Tirana to Bucharest, who have not spoken Arumanian for two or three generations and yet who retain Arumanian identity and culture. At the same time, there are others who know Arumanian but who do their best to adopt another culture wholesale, in the mistaken belief that more developed cultures are somehow "superior"-- they are not, and it is perhaps this realization more than any other which is leading people back to older cultures in search of values which might be longer-lasting than those offered by "modern" civilization.

This description seems to fit our American community particularly well: We are certainly losing the language, but we retain enough of our culture and ethnic identity to be able to return to them when we sense it is needed.

This is a different approach from that of the generation of Arumanians who were born in Macedonia, many of whose lives were permanently and painfully marked by a political struggle between Greece and Romania for our allegiance. In those old days, it was felt that the language was absolutely crucial, even sacred.

Even though we know now that language is not the only issue, nevertheless some old ideas have persisted even to this day; a good example is the so-called "Arumanian Anthem," a poem by Constantine Belimace entitled Parinteasca Dimandare ("Will of the

Forefathers"), which, however appropriate it may have seemed 100 years ago, has an extremely discomfoting ring to it in this day and age. A rough translation follows:

Parinteasca dimandare	The will of our forefathers
Na sprigiura cu foc mare	Commands us with a great flame
Fratsi di muma si di-un tata	Children of the same parents
Noi, Armani di eta toata.	We, the Arumanians from time immemorial.
Di sum plocili di murmintsa	From beneath their gravestones
Striga a noshtri bun parintsas:	Our good parents cry out:
"Blastem mare s-aiba n-casa	"We curse you if you have at home
Cari di limba a lui si-alasa.	Someone who leaves his language.
Cari-shi alasa limba a lui	For whomever leaves his language:
S'lu arda pira focului	Let him be burned by flames
Si s-dirina yiu pri loc	Let him be destroyed alive where he stands
Si lli si friga limba n-foc.	Let his tongue be burned in flame
El 'n vatra-lli parinteasca	Before his ancestral hearth
Fumeallia s-nu shi-hariseasca	Let him not enjoy a family
Di fumelli curuni s-nu bashe	Let him not see a family get married
Nat 'n leagan s-nu nfashe.	Let him not rock a child's cradle
Cari fudzi di a lui muma	For whomever leaves his mother
Shi di parinteasca-lli numa	And his ancestral name:
Fuga-lli doara Domnului	Let him ever lose God's grace
Shi dultseamea somnului!"	And the sweetness of sleep!"

At a recent "Congress" dealing with our people, objections were at last registered by some who were repelled by the deep curse this poem invokes upon all of us here in America and around the world who do not speak Arumanian--as if that were all that counted.

There are alternatives to this bitter poem as a focal point for our culture, such as the sensitive, graceful poem by George Murnu entitled Grailu Armanescu ("The Arumanian Word"); it is not so much concerned with rote language as it is with the entire cultural milieu--the mountains, the home hearth, a natural environment, freedom, occasional strife, and family. I hope the hasty translation below conveys some of the images the poem has in the original version:

Grailu a meu di muma,	Sweet word of my mother,
grailu a meu di tata,	sweet word of my father,
Vatra mea iu ñi-ardu	Home hearth where the years burn
añilli tsi am banata.	with the logs upon the fire.
Graiu picurarescu	Sweet sounds of the shepherds
di padri shi n-lee	in the woods and on the hillside

di paduri shi plae,	in the woods and on the hillside,
Sbor tsi avdzai dit gura	Words spoken by father's father,
a paplui shi ali maie,	words spoken by his young bride;
Sbor di budza vruta,	Words from lips beloved,
dumnidzeasca nila--	speaking holy mercy--
Niurisma di franga	Scent of rose and berry,
shi di trandafila.	cure for all that hurts me.
Lava di cashare,	Noises of the sheepfold,
boatse di caliva,	voices from straw houses,
Sufle vindicare	Borne by gentle breezes,
a ta dultse liva.	soothing as they rouse us.
Bana ni cutreamburi	Playing for me my life,
ca una flueara	like the air of a flute which
Tsi di dor pitrunde	With its pain can pierce
noaptea tu pundie,	the wilds in blackest night,
Inima-ni ti canta,	Making my heart sing you,
mana-ni tut ti scrie.	making my hand write.
Stau, ts-ascultu plangul,	Wait--sounds of your tears come,
jalea shi niholu,	grieving, singing slowly,
Ved ncrutsiliata	Visions of my own kin
soia-ni ca Hristolu	crucified, made holy,
Shi mizie lli-si-avde	And then barely a whisper--
sborlu a tau dit gura.	the breezes stop blowing.
Scumpa mea fantana	Dear and friendly fountain,
tse anarga cura,	always gently flowing,
Mani, poati mani	Next time, maybe next time
di dushmani biuta,	to quench a foe, one violent,
Va si-armani tu eta	But you'll remain through ages,
ponda shi tacuta.	placid and silent.

The difference in tone is marked; which do you prefer?

We cannot afford to devote ourselves here in America to an idea which simply excludes perhaps 90 per cent of us. It is plain to see that, like all other immigrant groups in this country, our language is mostly lost by the third generation, which is the generation whose responsibility it is to carry on the Society Farsarotul now. The fact that most of us cannot speak Arumanian does not mean that we haven't got a feeling for our community and for our cultural background--quite the contrary, as shown by our membership in the Society and our interest in its affairs.

We must face these facts maturely and change the tone of our cultural discussions to one which is more inclusive of all who feel an Arumanian identity, no matter what language they speak or what church they attend. To reject the actual, living community --

our sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, our cousins and godparents, friends and compatriots -- over the language question is like throwing out the baby with the bath water: a hugely misplaced importance.



1927, 20 Jul.

A typical straw hut (caliva) built by nomadic Farsarotsi in their travel through the Pindus Mountains. Such houses are rarely found anymore.

Arumanians: One View From The Diaspora, Part I

The GreekAmerican, September 12, 1987

Who are the Arumanians and What Are They Doing in My Country?

Sometimes there is an advantage to growing up away from the old country. You might see things back home more clearly. So it has been for me, at least the way I see it now. I grew up within a relatively large northeast American community of Arumanians (known to the Greeks as Vlachs) which had detached itself from Macedonia before and just after 1914, when the Balkan Wars and the whims of the Great Powers ended up dividing the Arumanians between four states: Albania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Especially since that time, our people in the old country have not only become assimilated, they have even in many cases come to believe that they were never anything but Albanian, Greek, Yugoslavian, and Bulgarian. The various Balkan governments have encouraged this belief, for obvious reasons. But in the United States, such a retroactive identity is virtually impossible - every American

such a retroactive identity is virtually impossible - every American knows he started out as something else - and so we have somehow preserved our original Arumanian self-image. Of course, by now we are as assimilated as any other group which has passed through two generations here without much replenishment, but we do know we are not one of the other Macedonian ethnic groups.

The problem is that almost no one else knows it, and this can be rather frustrating. Not in dealing with Americans; whether you tell an American that you are from Macedonia or Mesopotamia, he will usually not know the difference but will smile and say, "Oh, that's so fascinating!" It is when dealing with our fellow Balkaners that we Arumanians are most baffled.

For example, we are known by a different name to each of our four neighbors: *Chobani* to the Albanians, *Kutsovlachoi* to the Greeks, *Tsintsari* to the Yugoslavians, and *Vlasi* to the Bulgarians. And to make things more complicated, we use none of these names to describe ourselves: roughly half of our people in Macedonia, especially in the northern regions, call themselves *Rumani*; the other half (in the south) call themselves *Arumani*, simply because of a dialectal preference for an "A" at the start of a word. When we in America call ourselves "Rumanians" (the English translation of *Rumani*), we are confused with the Rumanians north of the Danube who, though their Romance language is quite like our own, have a rather different culture from ours. The word "Arumanian" makes it clear that we are not talking about those Rumanians, and that is why most scholars now use "Arumanian."

But that was not much help to me in speaking with Greeks or Bulgarians. I did not learn the word *Vlachos* until I was 23. I was fluent in Arumanian but not in any other Balkan language. If people from the Balkans asked me what I was and I told them "Arumanian," they would look at me with a blank expression. If I told them "Rumanian," however, they would smile in recognition and ask no further questions, thus encouraging me to think that that was the right answer. Yet it was not the right answer, because they thought I was the kind of Rumanian from north of the Danube, when in reality I was the kind of Rumanian from Macedonia, Thessaly, and Epirus. As I mentioned earlier, however, there is quite a cultural difference between the two peoples, as I knew from having attended both Rumanian and Greek Orthodox Churches.

I thus got around the problems of belonging to a unique, small ethnic group by telling people I was something they could recognize: Rumanian. I was able to remain fairly complacent about this for a long time, until my first trip to Greece at the age of 27. The question of my ethnic identity then virtually exploded in my face, much to my shock and dismay.

I noticed that my relatives hesitated to speak Arumanian in public, and that people would look at us strangely when we did. I dismissed it at the time, but soon had several ugly experiences in major cities wherein I was cursed and chastised for speaking that "stinking" language of mine. Having come from the United States, I was completely shocked that such deep discriminatory sentiments could exist in a nation which prided itself on the torch of enlightenment it had once passed on to Western Europe, in a nation which so jealously enjoys the opportunity offered by pluralistic Western societies to preserve the culture of Greek emigrants.

That was in 1980. I later learned that things had been much worse for us under the dictatorship, when Arumanians were being threatened with imprisonment for speaking their own language. Now in 1987, things are clearly better, and Greece for the first time can boast of a government which is ideologically capable and mature enough to actually acknowledge the plurality of Modern Greek society and not try to suppress what little diversity still remains. I say this simply because since World War II, the strong cultural pride of the Arumanians did not blossom into a cultural movement of any kind - indeed, it was considered blasphemous even to admit that any other culture existed in Greece besides Greek culture. But in the 1980s, such a movement has indeed blossomed and grown, with no apparent censure or opposition from the government. In spite of this progress, however, much more needs to be done; it is with the hope that Modern Greece can at last grow into an truly pluralistic society through the open discussion of its ethnic groups that this series is being written.

The Future for the Arumanians

Perhaps I ought not begin at the beginning, but rather at the end, as it may make my purposes clearer. I feel that the Arumanians will have disappeared within the next two generations, that is, by somewhere near A.D. 2050, and that there is virtually no way to avoid this; it seems to me somehow a necessary consequence of the general trend of European (and lately, World) History, as more and more consolidation and homogenization occurs within the framework of nation-states. One look at any historical atlas of Europe will show that where there once were hundreds of states, now there are relatively just a handful; one look at any historical writer sensitive to different cultures will show that where there were once hundreds (if not thousands) of different "tribes" or "bands" or "peoples," now there are at most a few dozen. At the turn of the century, the number of the Arumanians in Macedonia, Epirus, and Thessaly was estimated between 350,000 and 600,000; recent estimates give only about 120,000 in Greece and Yugoslavia, where most Arumanians are concentrated. I find this lamentable; in many ways, no one will miss Arumanian culture more than I; but I am rather convinced for

miss Arumanian culture more than I, but I am rather convinced, for reasons that will become obvious, that it will disappear.

There are only two things I believe can be done for the Arumanians at this point, and neither will save them: We should gather up as much information about their unique culture and language as we can, in the usual humanistic hope that somehow this will prove of benefit to all people, that we will learn something from the Arumanians that we could not quite have learned elsewhere; and we should permit them to die (as an ethnic group) with dignity, with a minimum of misinformation, harassment, or discrimination. After all, what threat do they pose now to the Balkan states? Any threat has long since passed.

Such an appalling state of affairs exists regarding the Arumanians that many people, including many Arumanians, hardly have a clue as to who they are. And besides those who simply do not know who they are, there are others who assert that they do not even exist. Perhaps, then, before we speak any more about the Arumanians, we ought to clarify as best we can who they are.

What is an Arumanian?

People used to define other people by such things as the language they spoke, the religion they practised, or the history they were thought to have had. In the twentieth century, for various reasons, these ways of identifying other people have proven themselves unequal to the task; nowadays, the approach to who a person is is likely to occur by way of that person's "culture," a much more general, but also much more flexible concept, one which takes into account our diversity. Culture includes language, customs, religious and other beliefs, shared historical experiences, songs, foods, and a host of other things.

What it does not include, and it is something hardly anyone will even try to discuss anymore because one of the last persons to take it truly seriously was Adolf Hitler, is "race." As it turns out, so much mixing has occurred over the millenia that it is impossible to assert that anyone in the world is exclusively of a certain biological descent, especially in Europe and the Balkans. To put it bluntly, the popular ideas created in the nineteenth century to the effect that the British descended from an Anglo-Saxon race, or the French from a Gallic, the Greeks from a Hellenic, the Rumanians from a Roman - these are now seen as myths; the Englishman is just as likely to be Norman French in descent, the Frenchman to be German, the Rumanian to be Hungarian. We can never know a person's "racial" background.

But whatever our biological descent, we do have culture, and that is something which can be defined enough so that a group of people can sometimes even agree on what it is.

The Arumanians are the people who share the cultural

characteristics which are distinctively Arumanian. It is, of course, as impossible to list all these characteristics for the Arumanians as it is for the French or any other group - and there are also many differences *within* broad groups - yet some things can be stated here as exemplary for the Arumanians (those who wish a more complete listing are referred to Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson's classic work on the Vlachs, *The Nomads of the Balkans*). The Arumanian language is one broad characteristic, though it is by no means the sole criterion - I know people who speak it whom I would yet classify as more American or Albanian than Arumanian, and by the same token there are thousands who do not speak it yet who identify themselves as Arumanian. The lack of a word for "yes" is probably a continuity from Latin, which also lacked such a word, and it flavors our conversation in distinctive ways. We used to lack a dowry system, except where we had become Hellenized. Our idea of marriage is different for males and for females, as reflected by the different verb used for each. Females marrying into a family are forever known as "brides" (*nveasti*) within that family. Our shepherding, nomadic habits are rather unique; not just the shepherds but *all* classes used to migrate seasonally. The cultural differences between mountain peoples in general and those from the coasts and plains (where literate civilizations have tended to develop) have been noticed by such observers as the great French historian Fernand Braudel, who mentions the Arumanians in his work on the Mediterranean; in fact, the often-discussed cultural difference between northern Greece, centering on Thessaloniki, and southern Greece, centering on Athens, may have part of its explanation in a synthesis of Vlach and Greek elements in the north, with a third element added in the 1920s from Asia Minor and the Pontic region. The relatively more privileged and respected position of women in Arumanian family life (as compared to other Balkan women) has often been remarked by foreign travelers; this, too, may be a Roman continuity, as students of the Ancient World will recognize.

I mention these possible Roman characteristics because I find them intriguing, not because I wish to stress the Roman side of our background at the expense of all the other influences which have acted upon us over the millenia. In fact, Rome is only one of the two greatest influences on Arumanian culture; the other influence has been Greece, especially through the vehicle of Eastern Orthodoxy, which has for most of these centuries been dominated by Greeks and Greek culture. To state that because we speak a Romance language we are a "Latin" people is really to tell a sort of a half-truth; there is no denying our Romance language, but there is also no denying the profound influence of

Greek Orthodoxy upon our lives. Other major influences, not as deep as the Roman or Greek but still important, have been Turkish

(sometimes called "Oriental"), Slavic, and, more recently, Western European and even American.

So the Arumanians, too, have their own peculiar combination of cultural characteristics, and they, too, are a distinct, identifiable group (though we don't always reveal ourselves to outsiders as such; see the fascinating article by Muriel Dimen, "When Is an Ethnic Group?" in *Ethnology* 14, January 1975). Why all the ignorance about who they are, even amongst Arumanians themselves? Why would anyone go so far as to even deny that they exist? Perhaps now is the time to engage in a brief historical discussion in order to better comprehend how it is that the two types of individuals I hold responsible for most of the problems - I call them the *hyperhellenes* and the *superromani* - came to disrupt things so thoroughly and lastingly.

Arumanians: One View From The Diaspora, Part II

An Extremely Brief History of the Arumanians

The GreekAmerican, September 19, 1987

In preclassical times, there were three main groups of people in the Balkan Peninsula: Greeks, especially along the coasts; Illyrians, to the west; and Thracians, the most numerous, to the north and east. All three spoke languages descended from a common ancestor, Indo-European; the languages of the Germans, Persians, Gauls, Indians, Celts, and most of the Europeans of today are also descended from this same language. Classical Greece blossomed without influencing the northern hinterlands much, except that the Macedonian Kings adopted Hellenic culture, and they pacified many of the Illyrians and Thracians; nevertheless, this culture seems only to have penetrated the Macedonian aristocracy, and not the common Macedonians, Thracians, or Illyrians. Though scholars have been divided for centuries over whether the Macedonians were Greek, there now seems to be somewhat of a consensus that they were a Greek tribe speaking a northwest dialect unintelligible to the other Greeks (see, for example, J.R. Hamilton's brief but reliable *Alexander the Great*).

In 168 B.C., the Romans conquered Macedonia and shortly thereafter the areas beyond it, beginning a process of several hundred years of Romanization. This in turn created a large group of people in the Balkans who spoke vulgar Latin. No one really knows who

became Romanized, i.e., whether this new Latin population consisted of Thracians or Illyrians or Macedonians who had intermarried with the Roman garrisons and colonists. (It is also quite likely that these Romans were themselves often Romanized Syrians, Gauls, Italians, Celts, Iberians, *et al.*) The very slim evidence which exists would seem to indicate (to me and to most Western scholars I've read) that the Thracians and Illyrians formed the bulk of the Romanized population, but perhaps the safest assumption is that all three northern peoples were Romanized to a greater or lesser degree.

Based on linguistic evidence, it is known that this Romanized Balkan population was converted to Christianity in its early days, and was in steady contact with the Italian peninsula until the sixth century A.D. In fact, Thracians and Illyrians provided much of the manpower of the Roman army during this period, and as the army came more and more to determine who became emperor, emperors more often came from the Latinized Balkans, starting with Maximinus the Thracian in A.D. 235, including Diocletian and Constantine the Great, and ending with the reign of Justinian, who came from a Latin-speaking village near modern Nish (Yugoslavia) in the sixth century.

The western part of the Roman Empire fell in the fifth century; the eastern part, also known as the Byzantine Empire, went through a huge crisis in the seventh century with the Slavic invasions and the Arab conquest, but it survived these. About this time, a new word emerged for the European Romance-speaking population, "Vlach," a Gothic word meaning "Roman"; it was transferred to the Byzantines through a Slavic medium (in Poland, they still call Italy "Wlochy" and an Italian "Wloch"). These Vlachs prospered over the centuries, so that Thessaly, for instance, was called by Greeks *Megali Vlachia*, and a short-lived Vlach empire created with the Bulgarians in the twelfth century ended up crushing the armies of the Fourth Crusade (which had been turned against the Byzantines), enabling the Byzantine Greeks to recapture Constantinople from the Crusaders more easily.

When in the fourteenth century the Ottoman Turks conquered the Balkan Peninsula, some of these Vlachs resisted as part of organized armies, while others not only surrendered or fought for the Turks as mercenaries but also obtained extraordinary privileges from the Sultans. This was perhaps the "golden era" of the history of the Vlachs; for the next five hundred years they seem to have gotten along extraordinarily well with the Turks, usually without converting to Islam. By now, the Vlachs were clearly divided into two main geographical groups, one north of the Danube river, ancestors of the modern Rumanians, and one south of the Danube, ancestors of the modern Arumanians; the history of the two groups from here on is quite different. The northern group largely became

peasants under local nobles, while the southern group continued its age-old occupations of shepherding and transport of goods by land on caravans. These professions naturally led into commerce, and so in the eighteenth century when Ottoman commerce with western Europe rose to incredibly profitable levels, the Arumanians controlled overland trade while the Greeks dominated sea trade. Many Arumanians settled in merchant communities in the major cities of Europe (especially Budapest and Vienna) and became vastly wealthy; some measure of their wealth can be gained by noting that Baron Sina of Vienna actively competed with the Rothschilds in European financial markets in the nineteenth century, while George Averoff of Alexandria supplied the Greek Navy with its one destroyer during the First World War.

On the heels of the rise of Ottoman commerce came also the emergence of the modern European nation-states and of nationalism. Prior to this, Europeans had identified themselves by village, clan, district, religion, and in some instances by rank (noble or not). Since Greek culture predominated in the Orthodox Church under the Turks, many Eastern Orthodox had come to think of themselves as "Greek Orthodox," whether they spoke that language or not. The Arumanians were faced with a particularly interesting dilemma: While they were often the bearers of the new Western ideas about "nations" into the Balkans, they had no high (literary) culture of their own with which to create an Arumanian nation; like the Balkan Slavs, the only native culture they had was a popular culture, not a scholarly, "refined" culture - the only such high culture available in the Balkans was that preserved by the Greek Orthodox Church. Thus, an early Arumanian thinker such as Rigas Feraios planned for a sort of Balkan Federation of Greeks, Turks, Vlachs, Albanians, and Slavs, all using Greek as the *lingua franca* for trade, government, and education. But this was in the 1790s; with the end of the Napoleonic Wars nationalism took firm root in Europe, and Arumanians had to think seriously about which road to take. Their intelligentsia, having received Greek culture in Greek schools, came to think of themselves often as Greek. Many of them, such as Ioannis Kolettis, simply threw in their lot with the emerging Greek state; indeed, this was perhaps the simplest course of action, given their recent but steady Hellenization. A few of them, however, caught wind of the early national movement of the Rumanians in Transylvania; the Rumanian intellectuals included the Arumanians in their scholarly works, and it was obvious to both that their languages, while they had grown in different directions over hundreds of years of relative separation, were still rather closely linked. The efforts of these Arumanians to have Orthodox church services and school lessons in their own language were resisted strongly by the Greek Orthodox hierarchy, so that only by separating from the Greek

Church were they able to achieve their cultural program.

This Arumanian movement had started out largely on its own, but soon the rising Rumanian state took the lead in sustaining it by allocating funds for the creation of Rumanian schools and churches in Macedonia. Children were taught in Arumanian in the lower grades, and then in Rumanian, on the "logic" that Rumanian was a literary language but Arumanian was not (a notion which has still not disappeared, and not just for the Arumanians; witness the instruction of Pontic Greeks, for example, in the Athenian dialect of Modern Greek). The Rumanians no doubt had the fraternal, benevolent motivations that the naive nationalism of the day made possible; however, the Arumanians were also viewed by certain Rumanian politicians as a pawn of sorts in the constant intrigues of Balkan power politics. Specifically, as the Ottoman Empire withered away in Europe, the Eastern Question became the major concern of the Great Powers: Who would gain control of the territories lost by the Ottomans? Macedonia was one of those territories, and the realists in Rumania could not help but see an advantage in having a say in the eventual partition of Macedonia (Rumania could not realistically hope to gain land in Macedonia, but it could, for example, gain Dobrudja or Silistra from Bulgaria as part of a deal including Macedonia, which Bulgaria desired).

The Arumanians soon came to be divided into two bitterly opposed camps, the pro-Greek and the pro-Rumanian, in most of their settlements throughout the Balkans. This division is probably what spelled the end for the Arumanians; it pitted *hyperhellenes* on the one hand against *superromani* on the other, and the dust still has not settled. Unfortunately, almost all the casualties have been Arumanians, rather than extremist Greeks or Rumanians. Where once the Arumanians had gotten along extremely well with their Greek neighbors, chauvinists on both sides incited one group against the other (in fact, all subjected Balkan peoples seem to have gotten along excellently before the entry of nationalism from Western Europe). One particularly ugly fact which has long been suppressed is the use of brute force by the *hyperhellenes* to keep the Rumanian movement small. Force achieved its purpose, but at great cost: When the struggle between Greeks and Bulgarians for control of Macedonia escalated into a guerilla war in the 1890s, the Greeks were also ordered to turn on the unarmed Arumanian nationalists (see, for example, Wace & Thompson's *The Nomads of the Balkans* for details on this). Massacres soon followed, as did burnings of churches, schools, homes, and villages; Arumanian efforts to defend themselves were feeble and futile against this onslaught.

The violence subsided in 1914 with the final settlement of the spoils of the Balkan Wars; in fact, in 1913 Prime Minister Venizelos signed an agreement with the Rumanians to officially

Venizelos signed an agreement with the Rumanians to ultimately allow the Rumanian schools and churches on Greek soil without any interference. The territory inhabited by the Arumanians was divided between Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. The Arumanian nationalist movement continued under the aegis of the Rumanians, but it had been crippled by the violence of the prior century and would never recover. Also, those involved in it often left as the political state of affairs in the Balkans deteriorated and hardened in the 1930s and 40s; some were desperate enough to join up with various fascistic forces, both from Rumania and from Italy, which promised them help with their nationalistic goals. One such fanatic, by the name of Diamandi, went so far as to proclaim an autonomous "Principality of the Pindus" at this time. (This is a sad aspect of minorities and marginal groups; they are often manipulated by charismatic movements which promise them finally some respect and position rather than the denigration and abuse they are accustomed to.) The Rumanian schools and churches were maintained through much of the Second World War, when the new regime in Rumania chose not to continue them. Since then, the Arumanians have all but disappeared from view. All four Balkan countries inhabited by Arumanians have more or less vigorously sought to assimilate them, perhaps understandably so; from the viewpoint of power politics, minorities can cause problems (witness the Albanians in Yugoslavia, the Greeks in Albania, and the Slavs and Turks in Greece). In fact, in Albania and in Bulgaria, there has been no official recognition that the Arumanians even exist, so that information is hard to come by.

Arumanians: One View From The Diaspora, Part III

The Arumanian Cultural Revival of the 1980s

The GreekAmerican, Saturday, September 26, 1987

A curious legacy of the Rumanian period has emerged. Some theoretical background: In modern society, each nation-state disseminates a standardized "high" (literary) culture – much of it invented, but that is another story - to all its members through its educational, military, religious, and other systems. Once people partake of that culture, they acquire a consciousness of belonging to that group, and in that way the group assimilates them. Many Arumanians had already acquired a Greek consciousness before the late nineteenth century, when the Rumanians tried to assimilate the Arumanians to a new high culture combining Rumanian and Arumanian elements (Arumanian culture - like demotic Greek - had been largely a folk or popular culture until then, not a literary one). Until 1914, the Greeks and the Rumanians were the main competitors in the assimilation of the Arumanians; then, suddenly, Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia entered the picture and disseminated *their* literary culture to the Arumanians.

This process went fairly smoothly amongst the autochthonous Arumanian communities; those who refused to give up their Arumanian identity simply left for Western Europe, Rumania, or America. People who felt very strongly about their Arumanian identity thus predominated amongst those who left the homeland over the decades as the situation grew intolerable for them. For instance, a large impetus for the emigration to America was the emerging threat that these Arumanians would have to serve in the Greek or the Turkish army; those with a strong Arumanian identity were simply unwilling to fight and die for what they saw as someone else's nation-state.

Somehow, these emigre communities managed to keep their primary identity as Arumanians; this is probably because – unlike the Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, and Yugoslavians – the Rumanians allowed us to develop a literature and thus a high culture that was at least partly our own. Whereas almost all other Arumanians the world over, when asked what they are, now will give as a first answer "Greek," "Albanian," "Serbian," etc., members of these diaspora communities will often say "Arumanian" (or a comparable word which signifies the same thing; having grown under Rumanian influence, these Arumanians will often give the Rumanian term, "Macedo-Rumanian"). I have no hard figures on the size of these communities; there might be 2,000 families in the United States and

20,000 families in Rumania.

Another legacy of this Rumanian diaspora, however, may have even wider repercussions than preserving an Arumanian identity in several emigre communities. For some reason, in the late 1970s the Western world seems to have witnessed an ethnic revival of sorts, a valuation of ethnic diversity and a renewed interest in ethnic origins. Somehow this large trend managed to breathe a last breath of life into the diaspora, which had essentially been inactive since the final shock of World War II, and some individuals began to try again to revive the homeland community through periodicals written in Arumanian and through cassettes recorded in the language. Most of these people had no special feeling for Rumania whatsoever. Some of their writings were intelligent, others pathetic and childish, but together they have finally had an effect in the Balkans: At first, *hyperhellenes* denounced them with the usual charges, "foreign propaganda," "paid political agents backed by unlimited funds," "enemies of the nation," etc. But next, the Arumanians in Greece began to organize themselves village by village and to develop a position and articulate a response through their own societies and periodicals.

This has had fascinating ramifications for them. The diaspora press essentially charged them with having long been cowed before an extremist Hellenist ideology which would not let them be what they were, i.e., Arumanians. Thus, the new "Vlach Cultural Societies" of Greece were caught between their revived feelings of ethnic pride on the one hand, and the old taboo against a Greek national admitting that he or she is not also an ethnic Greek. Their solution? Alongside ever-increasing cultural activity (including since 1984 a huge annual outdoor festival for all the Arumanian villages of Greece), some of them have dutifully adopted an old – and questionable - biological thesis that "the Vlachs are actually the oldest Greeks around," i.e., that the Arumanians are Ancient Greeks and Macedonians whose Romanization and mountain lifestyle have actually worked to keep them more pure-blooded as Greeks than all the rest, even the Athenians. What else can they do? They are trapped within a contradiction which will not go away; cultural pride is the basis of the renewed activity in Greece, yet built into the system they are working within has been a mechanism which allows for only one culture in Greece: Greek culture, not Arumanian.

If this sounds like a potential scenario for low comedy, well unfortunately it is. I don't mean just the "biological descent"; I think a lot of people still believe in race and this type of thing, and right now only scholars disregard it. I mean the comic scenario of an impossible situation; for example: Yugoslavia recently issued a commemorative stamp in honor of the Manakia brothers (Miltiade and Iannachi) the first Balkan cinematographers. The Manakia

and Iannaki), the first Balkan cinematographers. The Manakia brothers were Arumanians from the village of Avdhella, but they had their business in Bitolia (also known as Monastir), and they settled down there. Both Avdhella and Bitolia were once part of one country, the Ottoman Empire; and it was not the fault of the Manakia brothers that after the bloodshed of the Balkan Wars, Avdhella ended up in Greece and Bitolia in what is now Yugoslavia. At any rate, when Yugoslavia decided to commemorate these two "Macedonian" (i.e., Yugoslavian) celebrities, Greece was up in arms over the Yugoslavs' theft of two "Greek" celebrities! The Greek Press has had a minor print war with the Yugoslavs over whether the brothers were Yugoslavian or Greek. Already this is low Balkan comedy; what does it become when one notes also that the Manakia brothers were involved in the Rumanian-nationalist movement and did not think of themselves as anything but Arumanian? For me, it becomes pathetic.

I am afraid that I have seen too many opportunities for reconciliation pass by now. Both the diaspora and the native cultural movements have grown steadily more bitter in their publications and more insistent about their preconceived notions, on the one hand that we must not at any cost say that we are Greek, on the other hand that we must not at any cost say that we are not Greek. The fact that we are culturally Arumanians who happen also to be completely devoted citizens of Greece (as well as of several other countries) is somehow not acceptable. We must either be *hyperhellenes* or *superromani*.

Like the majority of the diaspora, those involved in the cultural movement in Greece are not extremists. Yet the *hyperhellenes* amongst them induce them to expend terrific amounts of time, money, and energy publishing testimonials to their ancientness as biological Greeks (much as *superromani* have pushed an equally ridiculous "biologically Roman" thesis in the diaspora), waving their patriotism in the faces of these "foreign troublemakers" (the diaspora) but especially for the benefit of their fellow citizens of Greece, who force them into a Greek mold just as surely as Americans forced Europeans to Americanize under Teddy Roosevelt; and then incidents occur in which the Arumanians feel insulted by their fellow Greeks, for example: At a recent soccer game, Greeks began to chant in unison, "Get the Vlachs out of Greece, Get the Vlachs out of Greece . . ." Their pride wounded again by a Greek population which has never quite understood them - largely because they have never themselves *made sure* they were understood by the Greeks - the Arumanians of Greece go back to their printing presses and shout still louder that they are the oldest Greeks, and not just Rhigas Feraios and Ioannis Colettis, who between them practically founded the Modern Greek state, but because Theodore Kolokotronis himself was also a Vlach! The *hyperhellenes* will just tell them the same thing they tell me all over Greece: "Stop speaking that stupid,

stinking language of yours, will you already?"

Their position has a built-in contradiction, and they must now either back off the entire ethnic pride organizing effort, or carry it through all the way and show the Greeks at last just who the Vlachs are. This should not be so difficult to do at this point; you will not find anyone more loyal to the Modern Greek state than these Arumanians - they see that many of their cultural values have been incorporated into that state and are preserved there. Like the Greeks in America, some of them simply wish to assert both of their cultures side-by-side for a while, until the older one is itself transformed, without their being degraded for it.

My attempts to keep in touch with my family in Greece, and my constant contacts with Greeks in this country, have both forcibly exposed me to the anti-Arumanian debris that is the main legacy of the *hyperhellenes*, and which many Greeks carry around with them without even knowing that it is simply the debris of a bitter but long-passed war. (There is also much anti-Greek debris passed on to Arumanians by *supperromani*, which is now being questioned in our own literature.)

I am too fond of the land that is Greece to simply stop going there because of this misunderstanding; yet when I go there, or when I tell a Greek here what I am, I am forced to put up with first, surprise or amusement that anyone should call himself "Vlachos" and second, that person's ignorance of what "Vlachos" really means yet his equal conviction that he knows.

Probably the most common misconception is that it means "some kind of Greek hillbilly." (Here is an interesting parallel from the New York Times Magazine of March 1, 1987, p. 28: ". . . the Turks assert that there are no such people as Kurds, just 'mountain Turks.'") There are at least two reasons for this: For most of our known existence in the Balkans, we have lived in the mountains and been engaged in the rearing of livestock. Actually, we have never been *exclusively* livestock-breeders (shepherds, muleteers, etc.), but livestock-breeders have always been an important segment of our population. We are just as likely to be woodcutters, transporters, builders, craftsmen, weavers, soldiers, and merchants, as well as several other trades. However, we so predominated in mountain shepherding that the Gothic word which identified us as "Roman" came to mean also "mountain shepherd," simply because most shepherds were *Vlachoi* and most *Vlachoi* encountered by Greeks were shepherds engaged in their seasonal long-distance migrations southwards.

To confuse things just a bit more, there are shepherds who are culturally Greek, the *Sarakatsanoi*, and they have come to be called "*Vlachoi*," too; this once led *hyperhellenes* to say that the Arumanians were Greeks, too, and *superromani* to say that the

Sarakatsans were Arumanians. Neither was correct; see, for example, the unraveling of the problem in the first six pages of J.K.Campbell's *Honour, Family and Patronage*. The *Sarakatsanoi* are the Greek mountain people, while the *Aroumanoi* are the Arumanian mountain people; to call all Arumanians "Greek" is about as accurate as to call them "American" or "Turkish." They have been heavily influenced by Greek culture, even more so than by American or Turkish culture perhaps, but that does not make them "Greek" or "American" or "Turkish" except when their Arumanian culture has practically disappeared and evolved into another. With any Arumanian who is still traveling to the mountains, or identifying himself as a *Vlachos* even in America, this is surely not the case.

There is another important distinction to be made here: since just after the turn of this century, when they came to be divided among several nation-states, Arumanians *have* become Greeks, Albanians, Americans, etc., as citizens of these nation-states. This, however, does not necessarily wipe their cultural slate clean, just as it does not do so for, say, Greeks coming to America, who remain (if they wish) culturally Greek citizens of America. In the same sense, then, there are culturally Arumanian citizens of Greece.

Another common misconception in Greece is that we are "Rumanians who came to Greece not too long ago." That is simply incorrect on both accounts, and I don't think I need belabor it. Perhaps I should note, however, that as part of their attempt to hold on to Transylvania, the Rumanians claim that they were in that region before the Hungarians, and to support that, some extremists have even asserted that we, too, came from north of the Danube; this may be the source of the misconception.

Many of these misconceptions, however, are due simply to the stifling of ethnic questions by extremist nationalists in Greece. There are advantages to ending their taboo on Greek pluralism and the degradation and submissiveness it imposes on the Arumanians and others. Examining some of these advantages may help make this clearer.

Arumanians: One View from the Diaspora. Part IV

The GreekAmerican, Saturday, October 3, 1987

The Advantages of Greek Pluralism for the Arumanians

Note: The case for Greek pluralism is admittedly more easily made for the Arumanians than for other ethnic groups, as the Vlachs are extremely devoted to Greece and have no links to any of the former adversaries which share a border with Greece. Recently there has been an attempt to assert that as Orthodox Christians and longtime

been an attempt to assert that as Orthodox Christians and longtime philhellenes, the Vlachs, Albanians, and Slavs in Greece do not constitute minorities, but rather "form a vital part of the Greek people," as if one could not do both. This is one more way *not* to confront the issue at hand; if the question of ethnic groups has come back to life in Greece because of a broad change in outlook all over the world, it would seem to the advantage of the Greek nation to confront the issue and declare itself for patriotic pluralism, rather than try to pretend that people aren't producing records in Albanian and Vlach or that these groups are not organizing themselves on the basis of an ethnicity that is not primarily Greek.

The characteristics that make the Arumanians visible as a distinct group are not physical characteristics, they are more selective. A Black cannot do much to hide the characteristic which leads people to treat him poorly, but an Arumanian *can*: He can simply stop speaking his language and stop claiming a Vlach identity. When he does not do this, but rather attempts to assert a Vlach identity, language, culture, and literature, he is clearly the object of discrimination by extremists in Greece. Of course these extremists should be ignored, just as we try to ignore the hatred espoused by the Ku Klux Klan here in America; but nevertheless, they often reflect taboos which are held more broadly, if more moderately, throughout a society. I hear deprecating remarks about Blacks regularly; who can deny that when Arumanians assert their culture in Greece, they, too, are deprecated? Does this make them a minority, or is it perhaps better to call them a sub-culture? I don't know the answer, and I'm not even sure that it is important; after all, it is only a *word* that is in question ("minority"), but not the actual *thing* that the word may or may not be the right label for (the taboo on speaking, writing, and reading Arumanian). Call the Arumanians whatever technical term you will, but please let us begin to do away with the cultural bias against them.

Once again, there is much to be learned from our common experience here in America. It is not a sin of any kind to assimilate; in fact, after two generations in the modern world, it is almost impossible not to do so. The members of our Arumanian community here in America, though aware at least of who they are *not*, are now becoming Americanized, like many (most?) second-generation Greeks in America; what happened to some of our compatriots in Greece long ago with Greek culture is happening now to us and to Greeks with American culture. There is no crime in this. But just as Arumanians and Greeks in America are not oppressed for asserting their ancestral culture alongside the American for a time, so should the Arumanians in Greece be allowed, even encouraged, to assert their ancestral culture alongside the Greek for a time, without harassment by Greek counterparts of the Ku Klux Klan (which, by the way, is still active in the East Office, Department of Justice, New York

the way, has opened a Post Office Box here in Astoria, New York, "home" of the city's Greek American community - watch out, "non-Americans").

The Advantages of Greek Pluralism for the Arumanians

The first and greatest advantage may just be that it would defuse completely the extremists of both sides, by taking their arguments out from under them. By the same token, the Arumanians who are organized into societies of ethnic pride will be spared both the indignity of arguing from difficult positions and the indignity of being treated as inferiors by other Greek citizens whom they are every bit as patriotic as.

The rest of us will be spared the indignity of being told we are any of several things we are not, something which hurts us all the more when we consider how very much we as a people really *have* helped Greece, along almost every step of its existence. And, just as important, we will be spared the indignity of being told by the occasional remaining *hyperhellenes* not to speak our language in public. People were once traumatized over speaking Arumanian; they need to be told by an official source that it is o.k. to do so, that it is even encouraged in a Modern Greek pluralistic society. Indeed, why shouldn't there be an occasional television program in Arumanian, or a documentary on our vanishing lifestyle, etc.? Greece might even take the lead and institute a chair in Arumanian Studies at the University of Thessaloniki; I am sure there are people who would gladly endow such a chair. This would certainly do much to dispel many of the degrading notions about the Arumanians and their language.

In fact, there are so many misconceptions about the Arumanian language, I couldn't even begin to cover them all. Do you know that people in Greece *routinely* tell me that Arumanian "can't be written"? And this, despite the fact that I have been writing to my family in it all my adult life, and that it has been common knowledge in the West for at least a century that *any* language can be written? This is appalling. People in Greece are often shocked to know that Arumanian is a Romance language; why is this such a secret? Some scholars have even remarked its conservative nature and its occasional remarkable phonetic resemblance to the original Latin. The reason they find this so remarkable is that Arumanian never had an official program, in modern times, of "Latinization," that is, of taking words from Latin and putting them into Arumanian, as has been done with the other Romance languages (and, of course, as has been done with Modern Greek, from the Ancient version). Also, like Greek and most other languages, Arumanian has been deeply influenced by the surrounding languages over the ages since Rome; this once led *superromani* and *hyperhellenes* to engage in a

numerical count of the words in Arumanian to see what percentage were Latin, Greek Turkish, etc., to prove "who had more influence, Rome or Greece." They proved nothing besides their own ethnocentrism; English, for example, is one-third French, one-third Latin and Greek, and one-third Germanic, yet it is classified in the Germanic family, where it comes from structurally (and note that this has never prevented the English from going to war to defend their homeland, if needed, against their German "cousins").

Our language and culture need to be studied before it is too late; they have influenced Greeks and others in profound ways, and it would be good for all of us to understand ourselves better. (One thing that is much to Rumania's credit is that it has by now issued hundreds of books and records documenting Arumanian culture in some detail; whereas Greece, with a much larger Arumanian community which is native, not emigrant, has a pitiful record of setting down for posterity the attributes of this vanishing culture.)

I hope we have come a long enough way from the days when Arumanian teachers in Greek schools in Arumanian villages, teachers who themselves spoke Arumanian at home, would suspend children from school if they caught them speaking Arumanian there. The language is almost gone; there is no need to hasten it or to degrade its speakers. Knowing the Arumanian language is a boon to children in their education. As a Romance language, it opens the door to learning all the other Romance languages rather easily. I can attest to this, too: I have learned Spanish and French with great ease, and learning Latin was made substantially easier. Perhaps more importantly, it is a fact that most western languages have turned to Ancient Greek or Latin roots when they have had to coin new words; many of these roots still exist in Modern Greek and in Arumanian, and so bilingual Arumanian-Greeks have a clear advantage in most other western languages as well.

Of course, one other obvious benefit is that the language of one of Greece's neighbors, Rumania, is so similar to Arumanian that anyone fluent in Arumanian can pick up Rumanian's conventions while in high school or college and begin to read it with a dictionary at hand in short order. This has advantages for education, for commerce, for diplomacy, and for communications. I hope that the days are gone when it was forbidden to mention that Arumanian and Rumanian are dialects of the same language; there is no longer a threat to Greek national security posed by Rumania. The similarity between the two languages cannot be hidden forever: I was on the subway with my mother a few months ago, and we were speaking Arumanian; a woman who was next to us understood us and joined in our conversation in Rumanian. We probably could not have gone much further had my mother not also known Rumanian, but the point is that the two languages are so closely related as to be recognizable

is that the two languages are so closely related as to be recognizable by an educated speaker of either language; why hide this any longer? (This could never have happened with Greek, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, or Albanian, by the way.)

Acceptance of pluralism in Greece would also eliminate the chances for leveling charges against Greece within the European community of mistreatment of this ethnic group, as has been done in the past; Greece surely does not need these distractions and the damage they might do to Greece's case against Turkey, Albania, and others regarding mistreatment of ethnic Greeks. In fact, it would establish Greece once and for all as the protector of the Arumanians (pre-empting other countries which have attempted to play this role), something which would compel recognition as a humanitarian act in keeping with the best ideas of our common Western tradition. And something which would earn Greece the staunch support of the Arumanian diaspora - not a huge group, but certainly large enough to be an asset to Greece in its struggle for survival in the global economy and power politics of modern times. Indeed, Greece might very well turn the tables and start making inquiries about the treatment of the sizable Arumanian population in Rumania!

This would obviously benefit the Arumanian populations outside of Greece. People act as interest groups; beyond the family level, there is the nation-state which is supposed to help us, to act in our interests. But the Arumanians lack a nation-state of their own, and so they lack a voice in the United Nations and other international forums; there is simply no one else interested in the Arumanians besides the Arumanians, at least for now. To whom can they turn when in trouble - economic, political, or otherwise? For instance, I have found out recently from refugees who have arrived in the U.S. from our community in Bulgaria that they are being forced to renounce their Arumanian ethnic identity there, even forced to sign declarations changing their names to Bulgarian versions and stating that they did so "under no duress." Now while it is true that perhaps half of the Arumanians currently reside in Greece, most of the rest of them never even learned to speak Greek, and so any protests by Greece on behalf of Greeks, for example, would miss these people altogether. Who will protest? Who will stand up for these people? Or will they just be left to be abused and disgraced?

Even if we Arumanians organize and act as advocates for our people, supporting refugees, encouraging academic research, engaging in publicity campaigns, etc., there will be a limit to what we can do without the help of a nation-state. We should do everything we can now, but I have a hope for the future, and that hope lies in Greece. If the situation is such that we are not being degraded or prevented from speaking our language in Greece, then our strong cultural links make it our logical modern home, our focal

point in Europe. We are culturally closer to the Greeks than to the Slavs, the Albanians, or the Rumanians; indeed, we feel quite comfortable in Greece, at home in a way we don't feel in the other countries unless we come across a settlement of our people. The popular music, the food, the dances, and the traditions are relatively close to our own (and for those of us who have become Hellenized, they *are* our own). In an important way, many of our cultural values are also the national values of the Greek nation, they are preserved there. And as has been noted on many occasions, we played a key role in creating and maintaining the modern Greek state.

In my view, this would be the best possible ending for this two-thousand-year-old story: to finally live in peace and in unity in our homeland. But only if we can rid ourselves of the destructive legacy of the *superromani* and the *hyperhellenes*.

Postscript:

One of the few efforts made in Greece to record our language, folk poetry, and songs was published recently and created an uproar. Why? Because the writer had had the nerve to actually write the songs in Arumanian, using an alphabet adapted from the Rumanian - the main alphabet used for perhaps 95 per cent of our literature in the past. The same tired old cliches were dragged out of the closet again: "Rumanian propaganda," "foreign agents," "big money behind it," etc. All this writer wanted to do was to record a beauty she saw in her own language for posterity, for her children and ours. Probably out of respect for the past problems between *hyperhellenes* and *superromani*, as well as for the benefit of those in Greece who do not know Arumanian, she actually went through the great trouble and time to translate the songs and poems into rhythmic Greek versions as well. But even this was not enough to appease the *hyperhellenes*. If they so much detest the Rumanian-based alphabet, if its connotations are so intolerable to them, might they not have suggested a new one which is just as phonetically accurate and put it into broad use through their own efforts, in schools, etc.? If they don't care enough to have done even that, then they have no business criticizing someone for doing the best that she could with the tools that she had. Instead of being attacked bitterly, this writer should be praised in the highest terms. But unfortunately, even in the 1980s the *hyperhellenes* are still not ignored as they should be.

All languages, like all cultures, are equal in the sense that it is impossible to say objectively that one is better than another. No language had a word for "automobile" before such a thing was invented; after the thing is invented, the word is invented, too, but only if there are schools to look after the language. It is only because Greece has had schools that there is a Greek word for automobile, and that Greek has been "purified" of hundreds (if not thousands) of

and that Greek has been purified of hundreds (if not thousands) of terms from Turkish, Latin, Italian, and elsewhere. It is unfair to discourage Arumanian literature and schools on the one hand, and on the other to laugh at that language for not having its own words for things that would have to have come from schools in the first place.

I am tired of being laughed at. I hope I have not offended anyone, though in such an endeavor it is perhaps inevitable. Our position is impossible, it is full of contradictions, for me as for anyone else. Can we not do something about them finally?

Brief Reviews

The Newsletter, volume II, Issue 1, February 1988

The Houses of Belgrade, a novel by Borislav Pekic. Translated by Bernard Johnson. Published in 1978 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York & London. Hardcover, 212 pages, \$9.95.

The bumbling protagonist of this witty novel is a once-wealthy old Arumanian gentleman and landlord in Belgrade, Arsenie Negovan. It is June 1968; Arsenie is 77 years old and is writing his will. He hasn't been out of his house in 27 years, and he decides to take a walk so that he may at last see his many beloved buildings again. Unfortunately, his wife and lawyer have been deceiving him for some time, and his buildings have been either bombed out or confiscated by the postwar Yugoslavian Revolution.

The gifted novelist Borislav Pekic, winner of a major Yugoslavian literary prize for his first novel, *A Time of Miracles*, manages to weave this unlikely scenario into a story that is both amusing and sad, using a sort of fast irony to lock the stitches together. For the purposes of this review, however, we will leave the further literary merit of the work to the reader's judgement and concentrate instead on just a few aspects of the book of interest to us as Arumanians.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the center of Arumanian culture and commerce (and, interestingly enough, of Greek culture as well) was the town of Moscopolis, located in what is now Albania. It was probably the most prosperous town in the Balkans at the time, and it boasted the only printing press outside of Istanbul. Unfortunately, Moscopolis was sacked by Albanian marauders in 1769 and again in 1788, and, as Wace & Thompson put it, "Finally the harsh rule of Ali Pasha brought about its complete ruin and its inhabitants were dispersed to the winds of the Balkans."

inhabitants were dispersed throughout the Balkans."



Ali Pasha

This great dispersion may actually have been a boon for the Balkans, as the cultured and wealthy Moscopolitans joined other Arumanians in providing a viable Christian middle class throughout the Peninsula which stimulated Balkan economic, social, and political development. And for some 200 years, this class has formed a sort of "ruling caste" throughout the Balkans.

How does this tie in with our story? In the 18th century, Belgrade was little more than a fort, a Turkish garrison, a few Serbian peasants, and some Sephardic Jews. The Moscopolis diaspora arrived in Belgrade and helped develop it into a major city. Arsenie's grandfather, Simeon Nago, once a potter in Moscopolis, became a land speculator who built up Belgrade, and the family has been prominent in Serbian and Yugoslavian politics and commerce ever since.

Now of course this is a novel and the characters and events are not all real--yet it is based on the solid historical reality of our once-dominant position in Balkan commerce and politics. The historical facts are available in the works of Popovich and of Murvar, for example; but for those of us who find simple historical facts too dry or too dull to read, we can gain a valuable perspective through this essentially accurate, wonderfully crafted story by Pekic. We can also learn much about modern Balkan politics and about the ways in which many aspects of our culture (some of them unflattering) have continued to this day.

Although Arsenie's Moscopolitan origins are not mentioned until page 34 (and thereafter only briefly), one could honestly say that much of the book is about Arumanian culture as reflected in the

Negovan and Turjaski families (the latter is Arsenie's wife Katarina's family, presumably named after the town of Turia, now called Krania, in Greece). In fact, only once in the book is the families' ethnic origin explicitly mentioned, and even so it is in a form which most of our people in America would not recognize: Arsenie notes, (p.59) "I was embellished...by that conqueror's, nomad's, and traveling merchant's constancy of purpose which brought my ancestors, still bearing the Graeco-Tsintsarski name of Nago, from the backwoods of Aegean Macedonia..." (The Yugoslavians call us *Tsintsari*.)

The Tsintsar ruling caste was finally destroyed and dispossessed by the Yugoslavian Communist Party, a fact that is poignantly referred to in Arsenie's Will where he charges his heir to remember "in his blackest hour that once before, under the name of Nago, the Negovans lost all their possessions and were scattered to the four corners of the earth; that they started once again from nothing and by their stubbornness and ability again attained the uppermost heights of commercial, social, and political life; that although more than two hundred years have elapsed from that first downward plunge of our breed... we are now once again in a position from which many people have tried to dislodge us."

Pekic has written a not altogether unsympathetic book about an eccentric member of this ruling caste; indeed, he seems to have the insight into our culture that we would expect only from an insider, from one of us. His Montenegrin origins make it unlikely that he is Arumanian, though he does enter the text of the book at the end as a cousin of Arsenie's wife Katarina; whatever the actual case is, however, it is enough to note that he has written this enjoyable book with an obvious understanding of some important aspects of our culture.

(I would like to thank Dr. Socrates Asteriou for bringing this book to my attention and for supplying pertinent details of modern Yugoslavian history.)

La Musata Armana, a record album by Cristian Ionescu. Made in Romania.

Electrecord ST-EPE
02420, N.I.I. 433/77.

Until now, the recordings of Arumanian songs coming out of Rumania have been of music carried there by the older generation and largely preserved in its original form, as it was sung in our homeland. This album breaks with that tradition and shows that a new culture has arisen, a fusion of Arumanian and Rumanian elements. The new songs do not stir one the same as the old ones do, but the album is worth owning at least to keep track of the changes occurring in our diaspora community in Rumania.

CULTURAL FORUM: HISTORY AND FOLK-SONGS

The Newsletter, volume II, Issue 1, February 1988

Though folk-songs are sometimes used as sources of historical information, they are not always reliable and should be balanced by some other historical information about the period they deal with. This poses a problem for us, in that we Arumanians do not have much of a written historical record in comparison with other peoples. We must therefore rely on other types of historical records more heavily--such as traditions, clothing, language, archaeology, dance, foods, and even songs--in order to make some sense of our past. But still we should use whatever is available from the written historical record in order to help us interpret these other records more accurately. As an example of how this might be done we can take three fairly well-known Arumanian folk-songs from three different times and places and try to locate them within their contexts.

1. A Farsharot Song

Voi Rumani di aua shi aclo	You <i>Rumani</i> from far and wide
Nu avdzatsi tsi s-fatsi	Don't you hear what is happening in Almyros?
Armiro nu avdzatsi tsi s-fatsi?	In Almyros don't you know what's doing?
Sh-isusescu Rumanilli	Our men are getting engaged to
Greatsi.	Greek women.
Kiru Rumanamea ntreaga	Our entire people has lost out
Ta s-loatsi voi una nveasta	So that you might take a Greek
Greaca?	bride?
Shi tine, lai Pleasa marata,	And you, poor, sad Pleasa,
Nu si-afla una laie feata?	Can't even one girl be found?
Nu si-afla una laie feata	Can't even one girl be found

Ta si ili datsi alu Nisi nveasta?	For you to give to Nisi as a bride?
Lai Nisi, si-tsa ncllida dera,	And you Nisi, they should shut you out,
Va-tsa greasca hilliu "patera"!	Your son will be calling you "patera"!
Ma loai una di isnafe Ta si-tsa greasca feata "tate."	You might have taken one of our own So that your daughter would call you "tate."

[Note: "patera" and "tate" mean "father" in Greek and Arumanian, respectively.]

For perhaps several hundred years, the nomadic Farsharotsi from the area of Pleasa-Korche-Dishnitsa had migrated to winter pastures in Thessaly, especially around Almyros, Volos, and Tyrnavos. This worked out as long as both areas were within the Ottoman Empire; in 1881, however, Thessaly was ceded to Greece by the Turks, despite serious protests by Arumanians from all parts. The new Turco-Greek border hampered the freedom of these people to migrate, and some of them decided to settle year-round in Thessaly and began to take Greek wives. Thus, this song can probably be dated to this period, about 1881.

2. A Song from Verria

Aide lo padurea frandza s- da	One spring, deep in the woods
Cuclu nu s-avdza iuva	Not a cuckoo to be heard anywhere
Nitsi cuc nitsi cupii	Not a cuckoo nor a flock
Nitsi picurar s-aurla	Nor a shepherd to shout
Nitsi oaie tra s-asghera	Nor a sheep to bleat
Nitsi cani tra s-alatra.	Nor a dog to bark.
America, s-nu erai aflata!	America, I wish you had never been discovered!
America cu trenuri multi, Iu sunt cupiili ditu munti?	America, with your many trains, Where are our mountain flocks?

This song obviously dates from the massive migration to the United States starting just after the turn of this century. The Ottomans' Balkan lands were in turmoil then, the years 1897-1918 witnessing almost continuous anarchy and war (both undeclared and declared). Economic, social, and political prospects seemed bleak to many, and some decided that the trauma of emigration to America was worth the chance it gave them to move into a better situation. Thousands of Arumanians came over, usually settling in the factory towns and cities of the Northeast (Bridgeport, Woonsocket, Worcester, New York) and Midwest (Detroit, St. Louis). The Society Farsarotul was founded in 1903 by Nicolae Cican largely in order to

help these people make the often painful transition to a completely new world. This song most likely dates from the period of heaviest emigration, 1900-1920.



A rare photo of the founder of the Society Farsarotul, taken shortly before his death in World War I.

3. A Song from Migideia

Migidei vruta,	Beloved Migidei,
Tsi erai una haraua,	You were once a joy,
Le, le, le, le, lai dunia!	Poor, unlucky people!
Patruzatsi ni a-	1940, for me,
Spune, moi, multu urata,	Holds much disaster,
Le, le, le, le, lai dunia!	Poor, unlucky people!
Aeroplani multi,	Many airplanes.

Soarli l'anvilira,	They blocked out the sun,
Le, le, le, le, lai dunia!	Poor, unlucky people!
[...]	[...]
Na vini Italianlu	The Italians came,
Ma napoi shi Ghermanlu	And after that the Germans,
Le, le, le, le, lai dunia!	Poor, unlucky people!
Horli na li-asparsi,	They broke up our villages,
Pazarli na li-arsi,	They burned our marketplaces,
Le, le, le, le, lai dunia!	Poor, unlucky people!

The Italians attacked Greece in October of 1940, and despite the fact that the invaders outnumbered the Greeks in men and weapons, the Greek army heroically pushed them back into Albania by November, humiliating the Axis Powers and inspiring the rest of the world in those dark hours. Hitler was forced to invade Greece with German troops and aircraft in April of 1941 in order to salvage the operation. The Germans were particularly fond of the tactic of burning mountain villages, which obviously hit our mountain-based population particularly hard. Many of these villages did not recover until the 1970s; fortunately, the shepherds kept returning to them and gradually more and more people went along--the mountains seem to hold a strong attraction for us. This particular song provides its own date; this is rare. We might make one further observation: Songs seem to be (amongst many other things) one way of dealing with or responding to stressful or threatening situations. All three songs reflect a perceived threat to a village, a cultural group, or even a way of life, but nevertheless, each song carries with it also a small victory: People survived to tell the tale. As long as we hear new songs, then, even if they record a threat to the old way of life, the culture continues; it is only when those songs stop coming that the culture truly faces its demise.

BOOK REVIEW

The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People, by Tom J. Winnifrith.

New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. Hardcover, 180 pages, \$37.50.

The Newsletter, volume II, Issue 1, February 1988

Whatever the merits and faults of this book, it could not have come at a better time:

We Arumanians are on the verge of extinction yet we are hardly doing a thing to prevent our demise. Until very recently, even our own leaders have been doing their best to get us to become Greeks or Rumanians or something in between. Only in the 1980s do

We seem to have realized that we are none of those other groups but rather a unique group of our own; one can but hope that it is not too late. Since our sole chance to survive is to see clearly that we constitute a unique, distinct ethnic group, this book may be the best thing to have come our way in a long time, because it respects our uniqueness and lets us know that we do indeed have our own distinct history.

Tom Winnifrith says he "first became interested in the Vlachs at the age of about seven when I studied brightly coloured ...linguistic maps of the Balkans, noticing scattered dots of Latin-speakers in the high mountains." He did not meet his first Vlach until 1974; in 1975 he began writing this book, and in 1985, after much research and several trips to all four of the countries in which we are found, he completed it. He does not view the book as definitive, but rather as a start, a pioneering attempt to fit together all the major pieces of the puzzle posed by our continued existence; nor does he intend to stop now that the book is published--he hopes to do more work on the Vlachs.

Mr. Winnifrith is concerned about the threats posed to our survival by the modern world; some idea of the danger we face can be gained by comparing his population figures with those cited by Zbigniew Golab in his 1985 book about the Arumanian dialect of Krushevo. Golab estimated that in 1961 there were some 130,000 of us; Winnifrith believes there are only 50,000 left. The situation is disastrous.

One might note, however, that the Vlachs will not be the first group to disappear from the face of the earth; why is it so important that they now be taken seriously and studied? Winnifrith proposes at least one convincing reason: Study of the Vlachs has the potential for filling in the large gaps remaining in Balkan History. Like the Albanians, the Vlachs have been in their regions for a long time; but whereas the Albanians stayed in their remote areas, the Vlachs were often in the midst of the great changes, beginning with the Roman conquest itself. Right now the Vlachs are almost completely ignored in most histories of the Balkans; they are a small group, without a state or even a printing press, and the ethnocentric histories of their neighbors have not left much room for them. Yet the Vlachs were once a key element in the Balkans; thus only by making sense of Vlach history can we hope to make better sense of Balkan history.

This insight is not only striking but it is also quite bold, considering the major controversies and ethnic trouble spots that abound in the Balkans. What gives Winnifrith strength is his impartiality: He has no interest in seeking anything but the truth. Because of this, he is not afraid to jump right into the Balkan free-for-all (even though he is not a historian-- he is a scholar of classics and literature) and suggest probably the most sensible picture of the

origins of the Vlachs ever offered: The Roman colonies in Macedonia and Epirus were later reinforced by immigration southwards by the Latinized indigenous population of what is now southern and central Yugoslavia.

One of the key ideas in this book is that the groups surrounding the Vlachs all have an axe to grind concerning their own history, and because of that each one of them has done violence to Vlach history. Rumania fights Hungary over Transylvania by pretending we came from north of the Danube. Bulgaria fights Yugoslavia over Macedonia by pretending we don't exist. Greece fights Albania over Northern Epirus by pretending we are Greek. Each group gains something by sacrificing the Vlachs, except us--we *always* lose. But after all, what is to stop us from losing? We don't have a state, we don't have universities, historians, libraries, politicians, and diplomats looking after *our* interests and *our* history, so what is to prevent the others from sacrificing us? Indeed, it seems a miracle that we've even made it to 1988 without such supports.



But we certainly won't make it much beyond 1988 without those supports. And that is another reason why this book is so important: Here is an "outsider" taking up our position in the world and defending it for us. The same thing has happened in France and Germany, where scholars are defending our position because we have so far failed to do so --we have been too busy hating each other for being pro-Greek or pro-Rumanian to notice that none of us is pro-Vlach! It is one more credit of Winnifrith's book that it includes a sincere plea for reconciliation between all former factions in disputes over the Vlachs; let us hope it is heeded.

With all this said, one might think that this is a perfect book--actually, as the author freely admits, it has its problems. The approach is from political history, in many ways one of the least promising approaches to the Vlachs (as opposed to social or economic history, or even linguistics)

economic history, or even linguistics).

The theoretical framework is weak (e.g., "My work has no special claim to make..."), and outdated concepts are used (such as "race"). I was also struck by the omission of several key English-language works on the Vlachs; but these flaws can probably be explained by the fact that Winnifrith is not a historian by profession. What seems to me a more serious problem is his carrying over from the field of literature its tendency to judge the achievements of other cultures by standards outside of those cultures, such as when he says that Arumanian is not a good vehicle for poetry--he has obviously never heard George Murnu's *Grailu Armanescu*.

Still, this is a very important book, and it comes at a crucial time; whether it is a milestone or a tombstone is ultimately up to us.

Modernization and Traditional Balkan Communities

Part I: Typical Effects of Modernization

The GreekAmerican, May 21, 1988

A prime concern of modern historians and social scientists has been the huge change in the qualities of human life between what are called "traditional" and "modern" societies. Whereas our

relationships were once largely face-to-face and conducted with people whom we knew, nowadays many of the people with whom we come into contact remain anonymous; whereas most people once lived in a rural environment, nowadays we are more and more urban (and suburban) dwellers; whereas human interaction was once governed by custom, now it is increasingly ordered by formal laws and contracts; whereas most people were once illiterate, now most are literate; where once kinship was the most important relation and the family was one's primary identity, now relations are voluntary and one is first and foremost an individual – an important prerequisite of "the me generation."

One way to observe "modernization" is to live in a country over the period it takes for it to modernize; but this can take decades, even centuries, and it is by no means certain anyway that all countries will achieve it. A short cut, however, is to move from a traditional society to a modern one - the difference is then stark and sometimes overwhelming. This is what many of our forefathers experienced when they came from the Balkans to America, with the added complication that even *traditional* American culture would have been completely foreign to them. Despite the fact that the Balkan Peninsula was one of the earliest regions to be pulled into the Western European system, it has only recently been forced to modernize in earnest, especially the communist countries. Even in the 1980s, however, traditional elements remain in Balkan society, though they are clearly on the wane. Is this good or bad? No one really can answer that. All we can say is that things are changing, and that our ancestral lands over the generations seem to be going through many of the changes we immigrant communities have had to go through usually in just one generation. Can this teach us anything?

I believe that it can and, perhaps more importantly, that it can also provide a lesson for our compatriots in the old country, one which they may interpret however they choose. What happens to a traditional Balkan society when it undergoes the various processes lumped together under the rubric of "modernization"? My observations are based on the small Vlach community of the Northeast United States, comprising just four parishes of the Rumanian Orthodox Church here. This community is if anything *more* traditional than the typical Greek community, so the changes it has been through will be more marked and might make the point better, because they will emerge as exaggerated versions of what much of the Greek community has experienced. The Vlachs came at the same time as the Greeks, settled in many of the same places, and worked in the same trades, so their experience has been parallel in more ways than one. I am not writing this as a scholar, but rather as a member of this community who has seen it change yet who loves the

member of this community who has seen it change yet who loves the new as fiercely as the old.

The Old

A basic belief of Vlach culture is that one should live elsewhere in summer than in winter, and that the summer home should have three qualities: it should be away from civilization, it should be cool, and it should be a place where you can simply enjoy festivities and fun. It takes a lot of money to be able to do this in America, more than the first generation to arrive here could manage. But children were not tied down to jobs in the *campu* (lowland - a derogatory term), so I was sent every summer to live with my aunt in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, a factory town with such a large Vlach community that I thought it was a Vlach village named "Oonsocka," as my aunt Sia used to call it.

Now this may seem amusing, but as a five-year-old I took it quite seriously. The two broadest entities we are raised to perceive in the world are *a nostri* (our own kind) and *xeñi* (everyone else). I could easily maintain this belief as a child because I was always under family supervision, and because, in the 1950s, our community still more or less kept to its incredible old-world social system of the *casa dishclisa* (open house), wherein everyone's house is always open to everyone else in the community to come by for a visit. The flow of our visitors seemed never to end! When it did, we were usually on our way to visit someone else.

Due to work schedules the better visiting days were on the weekends, but even these were minor when compared with the crowds on name days. It was a point of honor for as many people as possible to visit as many celebrants as possible on the name day, but the numbers were just too much. There had to be some way to set priorities, so two organizing principles were used: *soi* (kin) and *oaspitsi* (guest-relations). Kin were obvious and were kept track of up to 3rd and 4th cousins; guest-relations were ancient alliances between families which were, like so many other things, never questioned.

One thing that amazed and amused me was the computer-like knowledge of family that the women seemed always to have - they had several *generations* memorized up to third and fourth cousins. To keep the computer up-to-date they had to visit each other often and exchange the latest news, which required global contacts because our community was spread between America, Greece, Albania, and Rumania. Once the updating process began it was impossible to interrupt it: words flew quickly and incredibly concisely between the women - covering all noteworthy births, deaths, baptisms, and weddings within 7,000 miles - until all were satisfied that they were completely updated. There would be a

noticeable pause and only then would they look beyond each other at the other people in the room again.

Another great use of this genealogical knowledge was in our "genetic psychology": personality traits were seen as strictly inherited, and whether one was an alcoholic or an angel there was always an old woman around who knew one's family tree well enough to find the ancestor, sot or saint, whose existence would account for one's behavior.

The building block of this society was the *fumealia* (family), not yet the individual. One thought in terms of the family's needs rather than one's own needs. And the family extended beyond the household to include uncles, aunts, and first cousins. Marriages were often (but not always) arranged, and they created still larger alliances. If more support were needed for any undertaking, such as the endowment of a church, it would come from the wider family or clan, usually those with the same *numa* (name). The clan was also mobilized as needed in running the affairs of the one "cultural and benevolent society" we have had in America since 1903, the Society *Farsarotul* (typical of this was the battle over the name of the Society, which started out with the safe abstraction *Sperantsa* (Hope, borrowed from literary Rumanian) and ended up with the very concrete *Farsarotul*, the name of a particular northern tribe, in spite of the fact that Vlachs from all tribes and villages were supposed to be welcome in the Society!

In other words, things were not exactly run by rational and democratic methods. Instead, the basis of our society was honor, family, and patronage (and it is no coincidence that those three words form the title of J.K. Campbell's famous book about the Sarakatsans, whose pastoral society parallels our own in so many ways). The young always listened to the old, and clients always listened to their patrons. In a situation such as this, is it any wonder that one very well-known trait of mountain cultures like ours, a trait we ourselves have an endless number of jokes about, is what we call *capu grossu* (a thick head)?

If anyone did not follow the rules they were simply moved into the mental category of *xeni* (outsiders) and were ostracized. There was no question of having a different "opinion" or "party"; you were either *with* the people you were supposed to listen to, or you were against them, period. The idea that you could enter into a real corporate grouping with institutionalized dissent built into it was as foreign to them as the moon and sometimes seemed twice as impossible to reach. But they were in a modern society, America, and they felt they had to have a corporate group for all, regardless of family, so they tried it. Somehow the Society lasted, though when I hear the stories of shouting matches and fistfights and complete fission of the community into two groups I wonder how it did

mission of the community into two groups I wonder how it did survive.

In fact, the immigrants could not help what they did, it was part of their culture - they were almost completely unprepared for a modern pluralistic, democratic, rational society on the Western model. Though by now the Society Farsarotul has passed into the hands of those of us socialized in America, there is a sizeable body of immigrants who joined our community after World War II, and when these people occasionally try to organize groupings in which there must be some disagreement they almost always fail - the groups inevitably degenerate into shouting matches or factions. Are they "wrong" or "stupid" because of this? I think not; there is a clear parallel to Nicos Mouzelis's account of what happened in Greece when modern Western parliamentary institutions were imposed on traditional Greek social structures in the nineteenth century; Greece has been wavering between the two systems ever since.

Even today I can't help but smile to myself once in a while at the seeming clumsiness of some members of the older Greek right within the parliamentary system; both the younger people on the right and most of the left seem far more comfortable in that system. It is I think fairly well-known that some of the old-timers on the right come from Vlach and other traditional backgrounds, and I know both the (traditional) way they were raised to think and the (modern) way they are trying to think. Though neither system is necessarily "better" than the other, the two are clearly *different*, and so the transition from one to the other is likely to be fraught with problems.

The New

These days it seems as if everything has changed and our old world no longer exists. The greatest symptom of our "modernization" (or "Americanization" - one can view it either way) is the breakdown of our old community. The open-house calling system has given way to notions of privacy (which have existed in the West as early as the sixteenth century). We still visit, but nowhere near as often, and when we do we call first. The only occasion where a call is still not needed is on a name day, but the capacity crowds of yesteryear are greatly reduced, and anyway the name day has lost ground steadily to the birthday.

This breakdown is partly a reflection of the changes in the family. Kinship is no longer supreme; what matters most now is friendship by choice and group membership by voluntary association. Another aspect of this is marriage by choice: Most now marry outside the group, to people who were once considered *xen'i* (Italians, Greeks, Rumanians, and Albanians primarily, though Blacks, Hispanics, and Moslems, too, most recently). The old-timers sometimes get upset about this, but these marriages often turn out

just as well as the old forced kind and at any rate are notoriously hard to compare with them; each marriage type may be suited to its own era.

Few of us any longer know our kin beyond second cousins, if even that far; we seem to be moving towards the casual Western view that family is a sort of biological accident. Our psychology now tends to be post-Freudian, though every so often I find myself explaining someone's behavior to myself by the fact that that behavior has been known to exist in that particular family. Old ways of thinking die hard, it seems.

We are losing the language, which is not surprising considering that there has not been even so much as a school here to preserve it (what is surprising is that it has lasted even this long). This has had the further ramification of putting us almost completely out of touch with the old country, because we no longer share a common language (and even those of the first American-born generation, who know the language, like many of their Greek counterparts, never had the benefit of learning how to write it). As far as church goes, where once the older generation half-understood the literary Rumanian used in the service, very few now do, and we are making the transition to an English liturgy. Of course our ancestors would have argued, "Who needs to understand the liturgy anyway? You just attend, follow it, believe, and be a good Christian." Nowadays this is no longer enough: People want to understand the liturgy, to really get the meaning of its words and symbols. Eastern Orthodoxy in America once sacrificed so many of us to its stubborn use of the old languages; it is finally moving, albeit slowly, to reclaim us.

By now, corporatism has by now been almost completely reduced to the nuclear family, though I still note such curiosities as an officer of the Society *Farsarotul* trying to ensure that the new slate of officers has an even number of members from the two largest remaining clans, the Balamacis and the Fatsis. Individualism has swept us away and self-interest has begun to seduce us. If we face a choice wherein the family's wishes might conflict with our own, we feel freer now to follow our own perceived needs. Just as it did in the West, though, this breaking-down of local loyalties and fragmentation of society has made it easier for us to develop broader loyalties and work within the framework of a larger group within which there might be people who disagree - thus are larger groups built now, from fraternal societies to nation-states. In fact, I would say that the main differentiation in our community now is along the lines of class more than of kinship and clan.

Modernization and Traditional Balkan Communities

Part II: What We Are Losing

The GreekAmerican, May 28, 1988

The Neapolitan linguist-historian Giambattista Vico said in 1744 in his *New Science*, "We find that the principle of [the] origins both of languages and of letters lies in the fact that the first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters." This grand discovery enabled Vico to outline the development of civilized society; nowadays it is a sort of truism amongst lovers of languages, one almost taken for granted by those of us who were raised in societies which still have many traditional elements - and that includes much of rural America as well as the Balkans. We know that everyday language is losing its poetry because we can compare our speech with that of our parents and grandparents and hear the difference. Modern language is more precise, while traditional language must make much more use of metaphorical extension of meaning. Modern language is more formal and has been doctored to remove vulgarities, while traditional language can be blunt and hard-hitting. Modern language strives for ever-increasing standardization over the widest possible sphere, while traditional language was tenaciously local.

In short, whereas today we can feed our language into computers which can discern the various parts of speech, understand the meanings of the words, and even translate them into dozens of other more or less standardized human languages, in the past language was much more anarchic, impossible to tame, and thus much more beautiful.

The language I learned and heard my elders speak was Arumanian (Vlach), but I know from my language-hobby that real modern Greek (i.e., *dhimotiki*, especially before being polished up, standardized, and taught in schools) and the other Balkan languages were and are equally colorful. (In fact, linguists see all the Balkan languages - whether Albanian, Slavic, Greek, or Rumanian - as one unit, as they have certain "deep" structural features in common.) In their earthiness and humor, Vlach and rural Greek remind me most of Yiddish. It is ironic that not long ago we all ran as fast as we could from the "backward" speech of our parents; now some of us would give almost anything to be able to really sing the language the way they could. What virtuosos!

Especially when it came to threats. My mother could spell out a warning or a curse that would make my brain send out hormones that screamed surrender and made my hair bristle as my body temperature plummeted. The language she was using may have been particularly suited to our ancestors' nomadic mountain lifestyle of the last 2,000 years, but I am here to tell you that the words still work just as good as they ever did. It's obviously risky to try to translate such language-bound expressions into another language, but if even one of them reveals its magic to you I'll feel as if I have made my point.

Note On Ortography: Since Arumanian orthography is still not standardized I will add n' (ny) and l' (ly) to a simplified English alphabet and hope for the best. Some peculiarities of Vlach: 1) The attachment of the definite article to the end of a noun, as in Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Rumanian; eg., (masc.) *lupu*, "wolf," *lupulu*, "the wolf"; (fem.) *cale*, "road," *calea*, "the road." 2) Certain regular sound changes from the original Latin, such as *p* becoming a *k* sound and vice versa (eg., *pinus*, "pine tree," becomes *kinu*, while *aqua*, "water," becomes *apa*) and vowels becoming diphthongs (eg., *hospites*, "guests," becomes *oaspitsi*). 3) More and more borrowings from Greek as the years go by (eg., *xen'i*, "strangers," or *capitalismo*, "capitalism.") This seems to be a natural tendency of less developed languages unless they are tightly controlled, which Arumanian is not. I hope I don't sound too defensive if I note that Greek would experience an invasion of Western words without this control; just this morning I was walking down Broadway and heard someone say, "*Dhen boroume na to agorasoume* because *einai* semi-detached."

Expressions of Death

The pedestrian way to say that someone is dead is simply *easti*

mortu. In his monumental 1974 etymological dictionary of Arumanian, Tache Papahagi lists some 25 metaphoric ways to say the same thing, including: *lo calea mare* = he took the big road; *li deadi cleili*= he turned in (his) keys; *l'i macara granlu* = they ate his *kollyva* (wheat dish made for memorial services); *l'i adusira habarile* = they brought him the news (that his time had come); *u arupsi chioara* = he tore (his) yarn (the one the Fates were spinning for him, I imagine); *aruca topa* = he fired (his) cannonball. In a special category are two expressions concerning beheading, which was a popular way to die in the Ottoman Empire: *l-featsira una palma ma shcurtu* = they made him shorter by a palm; *l'i loara Ayiu Ian* = they took his St. John.

Threats

va-ts dau una di va-ts ascapira ocul'i = I'll give you one (slap) so hard that your eyes will sparkle (see stars); *va-ts dau una di va-ts hiba tuta ta* = I'll give you one so well-aimed that it will be totally yours; *va matsi shi va jotsi* = you'll eat and you'll dance besides (ie, you'll do whatever I tell you to do).

Disgust or Put-downs

n'i sta tu coasti = it sticks in my craw (lit. "ribs"); *nu li avea patruli* = he didn't have the four (meaning all four hundred drams in a Turkish *oka*, ie, he's not all there); *ari capu di Gheg* = he has the head of a Gheg (a northern Albanian tribesman, ie, he is stubborn, thick-headed); *ca unu paru easti* = he's like a stake in the ground (he's useless, he does nothing but stand there); *u ai shcrumata* = you've had it burnt to a crisp (your brain).

The Devil (*Draculu*)

mi бага Draculu = the Devil made me do it; *nu ari Dratsi* = he has no Devils (ie, he is good); *candu mi veadi, fudzi ca Draculu di thimeama* = when he sees me, he runs away like the Devil from incense (ie, he avoids me).

Curses

s-ti agudeasca topa = a cannonball should strike you; *si-ts creapa hearia* = your gall bladder should burst; *s-ti agudeasca kicuta* = the drop should strike you (this one is extremely common but a bit of a mystery; my uncle George, who has an active imagination, maintains that ubiquitous Vlach merchants even found their way to China, where they learned about the Chinese method of torture by water-drops...).

Forget It

va u facu la Fashitile calitor = I'll do that when horses celebrate Easter (ie, never); *va u facu candu va-n'i vedu io ureacilia* = I'll do that when I can see my own ear (ie, never); *ahatu s-armana di tini* = you should be so lucky (lit. "so much should remain of you"); *urbarea tsi ts-u deadi* = the blindness that gave that (idea) to you (ie, forget that stupid idea); *pri atsea mana s-ti badzi* = you should be so lucky (lit. "you should sleep on that hand," because every one of us has a favored hand to tuck under our heads when we go to sleep); *fatsi guva tu apa* = you're making a hole in the water (you're trying something impossible).

Expressions from Mountain Life

These will probably need a bit more explanation: *tuti lucri esu tu pade* = all things come out into the meadow (ie, the truth will eventually come out. In the forested mountains, you can only see things when they're in a meadow.); *deadi capu fumealia alu Profenza* = Profenza's family has arrived in the village for the summer (lit. they "gave their head" because the first thing you see when a family is rounding the bend of a mountain road is their heads as they lean forward to get a good look at their native village); *sh-aspindzura tambaria* = he hung up his cape (he came for a visit and now we can't get rid of him); *scoati cutsurile* = he's taking out logs (he is moaning and groaning a lot).

Livestock

These, too, will need some explanation: *u adutsi di varigala*= he brings her around (based on the way a rooster seduces a chicken, so this really means "he's flirting with her" or "he's trying to get his way with her"); *tsi stai ca gallina uda?*= Why do you stand there like a wet chicken? (meek, quiet); *ca capra easti*= he's like a goat (lively, energetic); *s-culca cu gallinili*= he goes to sleep when the chickens do (early); *nu n'i-u canta cucotlu*= the rooster isn't singing it for me (i.e., I don't have the energy to do this today); *cari nu ari tihi la calli, nu ari nitsi la ghumari*= he who has no luck with horses has none with donkeys, either (I must confess that I am not quite sure what this means, but if anyone figures it out please don't hesitate to write to me).

The Human Condition

nu am intratu tu kefi = I'm not in a gay mood (lit. "I haven't entered a good mood"); *lu adrai caplu* = I got drunk (lit. "I did my head"); *va un napoleon si-zbureasca* = he requires a gold piece in order to speak (ie, he doesn't talk much); *cu Vangheliu tu mana* = with the Gospel in hand (said of a person who is extremely holy, honest, prudent, etc.); *nu moashi ma sufrusita* = not an old lady yet wrinkled (used

nu mocasi, ma sajrasia = not an old lady, yet wrinkled (used mockingly when someone denies being something he obviously *is*); *l'i-u aflashi pandica* = you found her stomach (you got her pregnant); *poala u ari unflata* = she's had her apron inflated (she's pregnant. Used only for pregnancies out of wedlock; otherwise the regular word *greaua*, from Latin *gravida*, is used.)

Degree

laie sh-corba= black as a crow; *era mortu ca di dzatsi aña* = he was so dead it was as if he had been dead ten years; *nu easti pani cu cashu* = he's not just bread and cheese (ie, he's really something). Here's one that is so context-bound it would only be understood in my mother's village, Avdhella: *n'i li scrisi di la Ayiu Thanas pana la Ayiu Nicola* = he wrote me about everything (lit. "he wrote me from St. Thanas to St. Nicholas." Vlach villages are almost always on the side of a mountain, and in Avdhella before the war, the church of St. Thanas was uppermost and that of St. Nicholas was lowest. The whole village thus lay between the two churches, and so this expression became another way to say "everything.")

Dying

This and the first category above, "Death," are definitely my favorites, strange to say. People's attitudes towards death are receiving much attention lately, at least partly under the inspiration of the book by the French historian Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*. Aries discerns an attitude which lasted in the West until the Early Middle Ages which he calls "the tame death," wherein people knew when they were going to die and were not afraid of it - they accepted it. Whereas Western Europe (during what some would call its "modernization") went on to see this attitude towards death change several times until the present, it has been observed (by Professor Traian Stoianovich, for example) that the "tame death" existed in the Balkans until very recently. This attitude sees death in its context as quite natural (as long as it is not sudden), and this strikes me as a rather healthy outlook. There are so many ways to say in Vlach that a person is dying that I couldn't even begin to list them all. But I hope that the expressions below show that the inevitability of death was both accepted and deflected with a bit of humor.

l'si disclisi usha shi a lui = the door has been opened for him, too; *u aduna chioara*= he is gathering the yarn (of the Fates?); *nu ari multa pani* = he hasn't got much breadleft; *poarta apa a mortilor* = he's bringing water to the dead; *s-ari scoasa tiketlu, ma nu shtii candu va fuga* = he has taken out his ticket, but he doesn't know when he'll be leaving

Conclusions

What does this tell us? That our ancestors' languages were hilarious?

Maybe. That we should be talking like this? I wonder whether it's possible any longer. Then what?

I think that all we can safely conclude is that we are losing something as well as gaining something as we move along in this modernizing process. There are in fact many things we are losing, some of which I hinted at in the first article in this series, and many things we are gaining, some of which I will mention in the next. I have gone somewhat into detail here on language because it is a passion of mine. Older languages seem to express themselves more poetically, that is, they use the same devices poets use - I don't mean that the expressions quoted above can be compared to actual poetic work, nor are such expressions the monopoly of Vlach or Greek. Other languages have them, too; I just happen to know Vlach better. I think we can agree, however, that all languages seem to be moving away from this colorfulness of expression towards increasing standardization and precision.

There are actually two different themes to this series on modernization: traditional versus modern society, and American versus Balkan culture. America has taken its own path to the modern world, and there is no changing that. But Greece and the Balkans are still on their way there, and it is hoped that they can learn from America's experience by observing what happens to us transplanted Balkanites after a generation or two in America. We can never preserve traditional Balkan society here - but the Balkan countries still have a chance to preserve some desirable aspects of it within their borders. I hope they do.

Modernization and Traditional Balkan Communities
Part III: What We Are Gaining
The GreekAmerican, June 5, 1988

I don't mean to imply that all of the experiences I've

mentioned which are tied with modernization are inevitable for every immigrant group in America, nor that every nation must follow in the precise footsteps of the West; each culture deals with the problems raised by the modern world in its own way. But there does seem to be a pattern, doesn't there? As far as I know, every other ethnic group in the U.S. has had an experience parallel to ours. Later waves of migration can sometimes obscure the process by taking attention away from the earlier, more assimilated generations, and in fact the newcomers are an important stimulus to community preservation. Yet even with steady replenishment, how long can a diaspora community stay alive? Even more important, perhaps, is the larger question: How long can Balkan culture withstand on its own soil the standardization and modernization of culture - dare I say "Westernization" - that seem to be the order of the day?

I believe that some progress toward an answer can be made by studying the Balkan diaspora communities and how they have responded to the often "instant modernity" forced upon them. I, for one, was not given a choice about growing up in America. Having grown up here, however, I have grown to love it and its modern way of life - I could hardly have done otherwise. Yet there is no doubt in my mind that we have lost a great deal, too. Some of the things we have lost here still exist in the Balkans, and we should encourage their preservation back home.

Should we return to the good old days? We couldn't even if we wanted to, and besides, they weren't so good anyway. We must go forward, but we ought to know what we are getting into and try to shape it as much as is possible. We should not simply throw everything out the window just because it is past. As far as I'm concerned, the quality of life in Greece today, for example, is superior in many ways to the quality of life here. Perhaps the most obvious and devastating evidence is a comparison of crime rates; one statistic that has remained in my mind over the years is that in New York, a city of some 8 million, there were 1,733 homicides in 1979, while in Athens, a city of some 4 million, there were only 30. But they are also better off in more subtle ways: we have more material wealth, but they have a real sense of community; we have a more active sexual life, but they hardly know the loneliness of so many urban singles; we have more things to do, but what a lack of hurry they have - there seems to be time for everything in Greece. Yet I am too American to think I could ever move to Greece and live there.

I should stress again that there are two processes at work here; one we may call "modernization," the other "Americanization." I must confess that I have a hard time differentiating the two. Some things - such as the standardization and increasing precision of language - are international, and can be seen as part of the modernizing process. Other things - such as extreme individualism,

economic and otherwise - may be rather more Anglo-American, and thus may not necessarily pose a threat to societies which are still largely steeped in tradition (as those of the Balkans) because those societies can simply choose to reject such foreign cultural influences. I don't know, so I cover them all to be on the safe side: these are some symptoms to look out for in the Balkans, these are the things to guard against, in my opinion.

But there are also aspects of modernity to be welcomed with open arms, I feel. And for those of us who find ourselves in America, there are many things we might be grateful for.

I should make it clear from the outset that I see assimilation ahead for virtually all of us here in America. As the decades go by, I believe that our individual languages will disappear along with many other aspects of our specifically national cultures, but that what will then remain will be our Orthodoxy. Not that we'll all be devoutly Orthodox fifty years hence; just that it is much easier to change one's language and other similar cultural routines than it is to change one's religious affiliation, even if one only goes to church to be baptized, married and buried. Thus I view the Orthodox Church as being charged with a peculiar responsibility for the future of our Balkan community, regardless of what language we speak. It hasn't been living up to that responsibility so far because it has remained too bogged down in a stubborn nationalism - but that is another story altogether, one which I hope to address in a future article.

One Thing We Are Gaining: Tolerance

Traditional society is by nature rigid and intolerant of much deviation from its norms. It demands a conformity that we now would find too stifling. It limits the acceptable range of experience to one that we now would find neither stimulating nor creative enough. It calls for a certain narrow-mindedness, a pettiness, arrogance, and intolerance towards others who are different. Considering that we are, after all, in the modern world whether we like it or not, and that due to various technological and social developments that world is so interconnected that some refer to it as a "global village," we can only benefit by shedding the intolerant aspects of the traditional mentality.

For example, a bias seems to exist in more traditional societies against such things as AIDS. I hear the most disgusting attitudes and jokes about AIDS amongst the people I know from the Balkans. When I hear things like that I am grateful for having been raised here, because it helped me develop a different attitude. The same applies to the taboos based on sex or on sexual preference, on religion, on language, on national or ethnic origin, and on skin color; they seem to be fading here first (though Lord knows they are slow to fade even here), and I am grateful for that. That Greece will also

follow this course seems inevitable, as there are within its borders people with AIDS, feminists, homosexuals, Jews, Moslems, Vlachs, Slavs, and Gypsies.

And now Black Africans and Americans, too. I'll never forget the day I hopped on a bus in Salonica and saw a Black construction worker on his way home from downtown. His presence made me feel more at home but I could see that it did not have the same effect on some others in the bus. Soon an old woman boarded with her unruly young grandson in tow, and to get him to behave she threatened, "*Tha se faei o mavros!*" (The Black man will eat you!) The Black man immediately replied in perfectly accented Greek, "*Dhen tha se fao, paidhi mou.*" (I will not eat you, son.) The grandmother almost fainted in embarrassment and she got off at the very next stop.

Another Gain: Equality as an Ideal

Traditional society also tends to reinforce its hierarchy strongly; the conception of "social betters" runs deep and mobility is notoriously difficult (though not impossible). An important way of changing one's situation and of getting things done in general is through patronage, a system of reciprocal personal obligations. Here in the U.S., though there is much more of a social hierarchy than most people think, the notion that we are all somehow equal is still alive and well. One example of how deep this democratic ideal runs: Though I have learned foreign languages which have "polite" forms of address to one's superiors, I just have not been able to get used to those forms and I often simply use the familiar. And as far as patronage is concerned, despite the fact that it is probably as much an American as a Balkan phenomenon, here at least we have a strong cultural ideal against patronage in favor of merit and other impartial ways of determining who gets what share of the pie. I appreciate it when I am first in line at the Post Office, for example, and the clerk tells someone who tries to jump in front of me to get back in line. By the same token, I dislike the use of ethnic favoritism to obtain an advantage over someone else; thus, when I go to my favorite Greek restaurant, I stand quietly in line for a table and do not try to endear myself to the owners by speaking Greek or by dropping names, and I detest it when some big spender pulls up, double parks his Cadillac, walks in and pushes ahead of everyone else with his flashy entourage and pressures the owner in Greek to let his party get the next table. I must admit I prefer the democratic ideal.

Cultural Integrity

I said earlier that Western-style tolerance (and even encouragement) of minorities of all kinds "seems inevitable" for Greece, too, but of course I don't mean to say that Greece has no other choice but to

course I don't mean to say that Greece has no other choice but to follow the West. There are aspects of the West that seem good, and others that do not. That Greece can maintain its cultural integrity and choose what to accept and what not to is perhaps illustrated by comparing responses to clothing and music. Western dress is now just about universal in Greece; somehow Greeks chose to accept it. Even in the remote Vlach mountain villages, the men stopped wearing *fustanelli* around the time of the Second World War (save in Metsovo/Aminju, where traditional dress is subsidized locally). Not everyone went along immediately: My mother tells me of one of *her* mother's unsuccessful suitors who wore his *fustanella* to the very end; he used to tell my mother and her brother that *he* would have been the husband chosen by Evanghelia (my grandmother) "if it hadn't been for that guy who came around wearing those tight things," i.e., the Western clothes that my grandfather used to wear, which this suitor apparently held responsible for seducing his intended bride away from him. In the end, though, "those tight things" did take over almost all of Greece.

But when we look at music, I think we can see Greeks taking a successful stand on behalf of their own cultural achievement. Western music (both classical and rock) has certainly made inroads into Greece, but it has not become universal in the way that Western dress has. Greek bouzouki and rebetic musical traditions, for example, seem to have made the transition to modernity safely. Unfortunately, one can't say the same for the folk music, *dhimotika*. It seems that most Greeks do not regard the late twentieth century and *dhimotika* as compatible; I wonder why? It is such incredibly beautiful music, and if the lyrics are somewhat unsophisticated still they often grab you and tickle you by their very simplicity. Besides, most modern lyrics tend towards simplicity, anyway; I am thinking here of Broadway show tunes as well as rock-and-roll and especially the Blues. *Dhimotika* is for me the Balkan version of the Blues, a wry and folksy attempt to tame life by putting it into words. When I hear the brilliant art of a Blues lyric like, *My baby's gone and left me/ And now my mind's tryin' to leave me, too*, I think of things like the plaintive voice of the Vlach singer who is mourning the passing of the old way of life as if it were one of our huge caravans passing right there before his eyes; when he gets to the most absolutely tearful part of the lament and is crying out to God himself for help (*Adjuta, adjuta!*) and has apparently got His attention through these antics, somehow it turns out that his request to the Creator is simply for a small comb he has been dying to have, with which he can comb his mustache. Very funny. I hope God liked it.

At a certain deep level it seems that folk culture is folk culture, and it doesn't make a huge difference whether it is Balkan or American Black. Anyone looking for something comparable to our

Balkan belief in the truthful content of dreams would do well to see some of the plays of August Wilson. How about a comparable religiosity and abiding deep faith? Again, American Blacks are, it seems to me, an excellent parallel. In fact, American Blacks are experiencing most of the woes and pleasures of modernization only now, i.e., at the same time that Balkan societies are trying to come to grips with the same radical disjuncture. Both cultures are still somewhat traditional, and both have retained social values that are more group-oriented and more compassionate than the individualistic, every-man-for-himself ideologies associated with the West. Is it mere coincidence that a Greek American and a Black American are the two prime Presidential candidates of the party that tries to stand for old social values? It seems to me that Michael Dukakis and Jesse Jackson are proof that assimilation by the dominant culture is never complete, and that certain traditional values *can* be retained in a modern society, much to its benefit.

And that, I would say, is one of the most important lessons that our Balkan compatriots might learn by studying our experience here in America: that "modernity" is not a juggernaut that must inevitably wipe out the old and create a miniature version of the West and of Western man everywhere. Some things will change for the better, and some things for the worse; but which things and how much better or worse will have much to do with the particular culture undergoing the changes and the stand it takes. Often by the time a traditional culture is overtaken by modernity it is too late to take clear steps to maintain cultural integrity and to find its own synthesis of old and new while also avoiding undesirable changes. The Balkan cultures, which still have so much that seems worth retaining for ages and ages to come, at least have our experience in addition to their own to learn from, for whatever that is worth.

RESURRECTING ARUMANIAN CULTURE

The Newsletter, volume II, Issue 2, August 1988

Whom are we kidding when we speak of preserving Arumanian culture for posterity?

There are two ways to preserve a culture for the future: *alive*, in schools, factories, mass media, government, trade, science, literature, and art; and *dead*, in a history book or a hermetically-sealed museum display of old colorful costumes.

When was the last time you watched an Arumanian television show? saw Arumanians protesting against nuclear war? Bought something from an Arumanian store? wore Arumanian clothing to go out to your favorite Arumanian restaurant and then to see a stunning play written by an Arumanian playwright, or went to a museum and saw a world-class abstract expressionist piece by an Arumanian artist? Think of the possibilities for the future.

Arumanian painter which drew from or successfully translated his or her own culture, or went to Carnegie Hall (or tuned in to MTV) to hear Arumanian or Arumanian-influenced music, or completed a crossword puzzle based on clues from everyday Arumanian life?

I can answer most of these questions in a word: Never. Our culture long ago gave up most of its creativity, and in the 1980s it stands almost completely extinguished. In this essay I'd like to look at both the results of our cultural exhaustion and whether anything can be done about it. This is not a scholarly approach but a personal one, based on my own experiences.

For most of my life, I have wanted very little to do with my ethnic community. I kept in touch only with my own family. It seems safe to assume that most of the other members of my generation have felt this way, too, simply because the majority of them pulled away from the community as soon as they reached maturity, and haven't come back.

Of course this loss of newer generations happens with every ethnic group, but I suspect that somehow it has been worse for ours than for others. Why is this?

I came back only by a series of accidents: my father's death led me to join the Society Farsarotul because I knew it had meant a lot to him, and then my cousin Bob Nicola loaned me some books about our people, which made me realize I was terribly uninformed about my own ethnic group, and made me want to learn more. I was surprised by what I read—first, that we are neither Greek nor Rumanian in origin, and second, that we are really—literally—truly on the verge of extinction.

Now when I get a flier in the mail that tells me that the striped bass is faced with extinction but that with a little effort on my part this might be avoided, I *do* something—I give a few dollars, write my congressman, and join a conservation group working to save the striped bass. Thus you can easily understand that when I realized—at the late age of 25 or so—that my *own* "species" was on its way out, there was no question in my mind that I ought to *do* something to prevent it. So I became more active in the Society Farsarotul and re-entered the community —something that more and more members of my generation are also doing.

But even now I have a nagging feeling that we'd rather not be involved, that we somehow don't belong in this very traditional culture of ours, no matter how much we'd like to keep it from disappearing. And indeed there is a very good reason for this: It is because we *don't* belong in this traditional culture of ours. What I mean is simply that *we are in the modern world, yet no one has bothered to update our culture in order to reflect that and to make it suit the modern world.* Apparently some people feel that either our culture remains exactly the way it has been for 2,000 years, or else it

is not our culture anymore. Nonsense! Our culture, like any other traditional culture in this world, will survive modernity if it is changed in order for it to fit in with that world.

I'll give you an example of the kind of backwards thinking that is keeping our youth away from our culture as if it were some kind of disease—the same thinking that threatens to keep our culture from making it into the 21st century: I heard of a cultural event planned by a small group of Vlach emigres from Romania in New York and I went, taking along a cousin. A fellow wearing a beret, a horrid green suit, yellow socks, and sandals got up and began a teary recital of a poem he wrote about how wonderful it used to be up in the Pindus Mountains when men had complete authority over their families and went out every day and guarded the sheep and fought off ethnic enemies...

I tell you, I wanted to die, to crawl into a hole somewhere, and if anyone asked me what I was, I would point to the little man in the green suit and say, "*Anything but THAT!*" It wasn't just the way he was dressed that bothered me, although that was bad enough. What was worse is that he was extolling the things that, once upon a time, a teary-eyed Adolph Hitler would ponder about his own beloved German nation—the "good old days" of autocratic patriarchy, of racial separatism, and of manual labor on the sacred land.

And this is supposed to appeal to us in 1988? Personally I would rather fight *against* such ideas than on behalf of their continued survival. I'd like to see equal rights for women someday, and contact, understanding, and tolerance between all ethnic groups.

Another example: Not long ago, I went to a function which was billed as a "scholarly discussion" about our people. Most of the people there were not scholars. Of those who were, most did not make a presentation in their own field. Of those who made presentations, most were in Rumanian, not in Arumanian or in English. A few ethnic slurs and threats of armed violence were made. When the time came for discussion, there were shouting matches instead of civilized dialogue; there was breast-beating instead of critical understanding of others' views; there was finger-pointing instead of serious group-wide self-examination and reflection. It was a mess; it was chaos.

This is supposed to attract and excite *our* generation? In 1988? I think I would have enjoyed a 3-day weekend in Tehran more than this. I can't tell you how embarrassed I was, nor how hopeless I felt about our future as an ethnic group. There were almost no other young people there besides me, and the two people I dragged along. The average age was high enough to necessitate help in negotiating the steps to people's seats. Who had made the wiser choice that day—I or the hundreds of our youth who stayed home or went to the

beach? I think maybe it was they.

So you can understand that—while I am motivated to do whatever I can to help our culture survive if at all possible—I often feel as if my generation does not quite belong in this very traditional culture. Either *we* are wrong—and this applies to Europe as well as to America—or the *culture* is wrong. The old guard says *we* are wrong; I say it's the culture. No one can expect a culture perfectly suited to nomadic mountain life away from civilization from 100 B.C. to about 1820 A.D. to be suited also to urban, literate life in 1988, in the age of high technology and global economy. It has to be updated, it must undergo *drastic* modification and modernization, if it is to interest us at all.

I tell you, I like American culture, and the Western culture of which it is a part. I enjoy listening to almost every kind of music, from jazz to new wave, from the blues to rock-and-roll, from country to classical. I like our movies and television, documentaries and dramas, comedies and street performances. I love the American system of government and education, as well as our theater and museums, painting, sculpture, dance, and other arts. Further, I am fond of many aspects of African culture, Hispanic culture, Greek culture, and many, many others.

Why can't I love my own culture in quite the same way? Because it's somehow "deficient" in relation to the others? Absolutely not. Our culture was in roughly the same position as other traditional societies were in the 1800s. *It just hasn't been translated into a modern idiom.* All the others (the ones that have survived, anyway) have changed to suit the modern world, which is very different from the traditional world. Far from changing our own culture, we have instead been trying to "preserve" it—with the result that very shortly we will have a culture that is locked forever in a jar of formaldehyde instead of one that is living and breathing fresh air.

We don't have a modern culture, one capable of surviving long in the modern world. It has to be *made*: We need artists, businessmen, writers, politicians, actors, lawyers, performers, doctors, singers, administrators, sculptors, computer programmers, et al. *These* people can choose to create or transform our culture—or not. We've produced many of them, but so far they have overwhelmingly chosen to work within the framework of other cultures, which somehow seemed more promising to them (Greek, Yugoslavian, Rumanian, Albanian, and even Western European and American).

We never had a modern culture created *by* us, *for* us. Our first and only high cultural tradition occurred under the aegis of the Rumanians: For the first time, our language was deemed worthy of being written and used as a vehicle for literature and culture. Much was written—mainly poetry in the vernacular. History and science

was written in mainly poetry in the vernacular. History and science were perhaps considered too serious for our language, however, and were written in Rumanian.

But this lasted less than 100 years. It affected only a tiny fraction of our people. And anyway, it was largely *a traditional culture being recorded and "preserved," not a modern culture being created and publicized*. It has sustained only a very few generations of Rumanian-educated Vlachs, who themselves still lived largely in a traditional society and had traditional tastes.

As a result, this poetry consists overwhelmingly of sentimental odes to mountain life and to sheepherding, along with some heroic ballads about our famous outlaws. There is little in this that can resonate amongst a postwar generation that has grown up with television, the atomic bomb, the Cold War, advanced computer technology, men on the moon, and a cultural life that has moved even light-years beyond Modernism. There is not much here for us. It is almost a complete zero— and *not* because it was in any way inferior to other cultures, but only because we and our forefathers did not take the raw material of our folk-culture and transform it as other cultures did.

This is one key reason why postwar efforts to revive our ethnicity have largely failed. There is nothing there to interest and appeal to our youth, and our youth are our future.

Try this simple experiment: Pick up any of the diaspora periodicals published in the 1980s. Look at the photographs of the "Congresses": You will see mostly heads of white hair—and even those are mostly male. Women, when included at all, are often there to greet people or to cook (unless they are highly educated). Young people—when present at all—often have the sort of lost look on their faces that many of us recall from when we were children and were prodded to be somewhere not quite willingly. Do they really know what is going on? One can't help thinking that, if they did, they wouldn't be wearing *fustanelli* as proof that their culture will survive into the future, but would also be wearing \$500 suits or T-shirts and faded jeans, and taking elements of their traditional folk-culture and translating them into modern buildings, works of art, books, plays, businesses, political theories or styles, etc.

If you think that the point I am raising here is brand-new and revolutionary, read this: "Constantine Ucuta, a native of Moscopole and an Orthodox protopope in Posen, then part of Prussia, was deeply distressed by the failure of his countrymen to cultivate their language and make it an instrument of "modern enlightenment." Instead, he complained, they had relegated it to the family circle and in society they preferred to speak Greek or some other language. In *Noua Pedagogie*, a small book of texts in Macedo-Rumanian published in Vienna in 1797, he implored his readers to teach their children to honor their mother tongue and warned that negligence

children to honor their mother tongue and warned that negligence would result in the decay of their national life and eventual assimilation by the overwhelmingly foreign populations amongst whom they lived.”

This excerpt is from Keith Hitchins's book *Orthodoxy and Nationality*, published in Cambridge, Mass., in 1977. This book, by the way, is one of a very few in English which use the term "Macedo-Rumanian."

What is true of the language is true of the culture in general: Who is out there creating the elements of a renewed, modern culture for us? Very, very few people—a mere handful. I can think of an architect in New York, George Zdru who designed a house inspired by our history and culture—an intelligent, inspiring work, and proof that it can be done. I can think also of two poets—one in Greece, Zoe Papazisi-Papatheodorou, and one in Germany, Kira Iorgoveanu—who have transcended the usual pastoral-mountain genre to achieve serious works which attempt to grapple with such complexities as love and human society.

Of our earlier generation of poets, now mostly deceased, George Murnu and George Perdichi stand out as having achieved a modern poetry. An actor in Rumania, Ioan Caramitru, is well-known there but the influence of his ethnicity is not as well-known. There is also one popular singer I know of in Greece, Sterio Dardaculi, who is creating new songs in Arumanian, and one, Taki Mousafiri, whose compositions draw on his Vlach heritage. Finally, I can think of a painter in America, Gus Moran, who has tapped his ethnic background for themes for his work.

While there are undoubtedly more than just these few, these are the only ones that I can think of, and there aren't likely to be many more that I have missed. We have many other talented people, *but they have chosen to perform their social activities wholly within the boundaries of other cultures*—usually Greek, Rumanian, Yugoslavian, Albanian, and sometimes even Western European and American—instead of their own, much as Constantine Ucuta's countrymen chose to speak socially in another language and thus not look after and cultivate their own.

That leads us back to our original question: Who are we kidding when we speak of preserving Arumanian culture for posterity? We are only kidding ourselves, because right now there is very little of an Arumanian culture which is capable of surviving into the future—at least one which holds any real appeal for people living in the late 20th century. It has to be created. But how can a whole generation which seems so unimpressed with its culture be expected to pick up this challenge, suddenly to see something worthwhile in the old culture and to regenerate it? I really have no idea, and I must admit it doesn't seem too likely.

But it is certain that it is *possible*. Look at the recent phenomenon of the Bulgarian women's vocal groups. Traditional Bulgarian musical forms were combined with Western classical styles and the result was so appealing that American music critics loved it, famous rock musicians and composers attended the New York concert, and local record stores can't keep the album in stock. One of our own musical styles—vocal polyphony—is quite similar to that of the Bulgarians; why hasn't anyone deemed it worthy of being updated for modernity?

The task is not such a hard one. It consists of having a body of professional people in all walks of life, which we do have; turning to our Balkan heartland for guidance, information, and inspiration; recognizing the influences that our culture has had upon our work; learning more about our culture and using it as a resource in our work; and then simply acknowledging the link between our work and our Arumanian culture.

A 20th-century writer might still incorporate motifs from stories we have been telling for millennia. Clothing designers might draw on the handsome cut of certain of our past clothing styles, or fabric designers on our weaving patterns. Food connoisseurs and chefs have a ready-made resource in our excellent cuisine. Political aspirants have our tradition of social action and compassion to draw on, while the humor and earthiness that are central to our culture and language act to clarify and smooth our endeavors in most any realm in which we involve ourselves.—And so on.

These are the facts: We are here. We are a handful of the last representatives of a dying culture. We have a few choices, including:

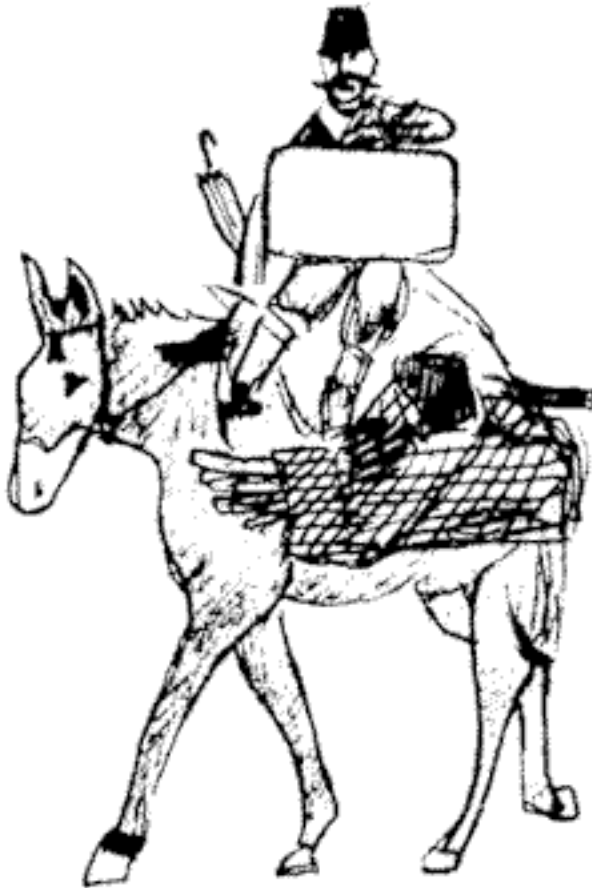
1. Run away from it completely and uncritically (as most of us have done).
2. Embrace it completely and uncritically (as our most fanatical nationalists have done).
3. Try to figure out what aspects of it we ought to keep or might be worth preserving, and how to bring those things into the 21st century.
4. Pretend that there is no problem.
5. Figure out some other way to approach this.

At the very least, we ought not kid ourselves. Every one of us is now facing these choices, whether we like it or not, and every one of us has made or is making one of these choices. It is not a great moral question, and none of these choices is clearly "right" or "wrong." Though none of us asked to be born into Arumanian culture, we were—and that is what imposes this choice upon us.

As far as I'm concerned, I can't get too excited anymore about poems extolling patriarchal, ethnocentric mountain life. I maintain my membership in the Society Farsarotul, however, and try

to help the culture along in whatever little way I can, while anxiously awaiting other signs of its regeneration so that I may support them, too.

But only if they appeal to me and inspire me—here and now, in the late 20th century.





Coca-Cola



P.T. Daukas, Jr.



Drawings by P. T. Daukas, Jr.

Ethnic Identities. Euterpe Dukakis's Vlach and Greek Background

The Greek American, November 12, 1988

It never ceases to amaze me how small a world it can be and how a transplanted Balkan community can reproduce its intimate contacts on completely new soil under completely new and different conditions. First, a cousin of mine - an anthropologist living in Connecticut - approached me and said that she had heard from a reliable contact that Euterpe Dukakis (*née* Boukis) was partly of Vlach ancestry. Next, another cousin - a lawyer, also from Connecticut - called me and related that when his aunt had once met the elder Mrs. Dukakis, she had spoken proudly of her Vlach background and had even said that Vlach had been the language of her youth in Greece. I called the aunt in Worcester, Massachusetts, to confirm this, and she did. Next, I received a copy of the periodical of my mother's village in Greece, *Avdhella*, and sure enough, there on page 1 was that unbounded Balkan pride (in translation from the Greek): "Mike Dukakis - A Vlach at the Threshold of the White House." It went on to mention the family's village of origin in the Zagori district (Leshnitsa, Hellenized as Lisinitsa, and changed in this century - as has been done with so many other Vlach villages - to a new name altogether, Vrisochori). "How exciting," I thought, "that Michael Dukakis is a product of Vlach culture as well as of Greek and American culture," and I managed to insert a brief Special Bulletin to this effect in the Newsletter published by the main society of the Vlachs in America, the Society Farsarotul.

Well that Special Bulletin was picked up by The New York Times, which ran a tiny but rather positive piece on October 17th simply mentioning "the Vlach, or Arumanian, heritage " of Euterpe Dukakis. A few days later, I had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Dukakis for *The Greek American* and *Proini* in her Brookline home, and we spent much of the interview speaking about the Vlachs and about Euterpe's Vlach roots. And today, as I sit and compose this article a few days after the interview, a friend of mine - an investment banker also Vlach - calls me from Providence Rhode

investment banker, also Vlach – came to me from Providence, Rhode Island, and tells me that in fact his father (once the "village doctor" for most of our northeast U.S. Vlach community) had been buddies with Panos Dukakis since medical school and that they often got together with their wives and when they did, this fellow's parents and Mrs. Dukakis would inevitably speak a few simple, sentimental words in Vlach. Small world!

I found the elder Mrs. Dukakis charming and full of energy, though it was obvious that the vicious tone of the campaign had both angered and frustrated her, as it has the rest of the Dukakis family and, indeed, the entire country. Further, she has not kept abreast of recent developments amongst the Vlach communities in Greece and in the United States – understandably so, I think, given her age and her preoccupation with her family's concerns in America - and therefore much of what I discussed with her was absolutely new to her. For instance, the only framework she had ever been exposed to concerning the Vlachs' ethnic identity was the old Rumanian-Greek dichotomy, i.e., one is either a pro-Greek Vlach or one is a pro-Rumanian. This has changed quite a bit within the last 10 years, and now finally there is a fledging movement in Greece and America which is simply pro-Vlach and which would like to preserve the culture and language of the Vlachs but only as the very loyal citizens of the various countries the Vlachs inhabit. This was completely new to Euterpe; she thought it sounded like a good idea but also an extremely difficult one considering the Vlachs' lack of a real written literature.

Another thing that was completely new to Mrs. Dukakis was the word "Arumanian," which has come into use amongst English-speaking scholars and librarians only in the last 10 years or so as an alternative to "Vlach," a word that has some derogatory connotations. "Arumanian" is simply an English translation of the Vlachs' self-designation, *Aruman* (pronounced in some areas more like *Ruman*, which in English would yield "Rumanians" and would thus confuse us with the real Rumanians). Mrs. Dukakis has been out of practice in Vlach for a long while, and she did not recall these self-designations; she recalled only the Greek term for us (*Vlachoi*, derived from a Germanic root meaning "Roman"). She did not wish to use "Arumanian," a term she'd never heard of, to describe herself or her family - most reasonable, under the circumstances - so out of respect for this, I will use the word "Vlach" throughout this article.

From the outset, let it be said that since the early nineteenth century, this has been a world of nation-states and that the Vlachs, not having their own nation-state, have eagerly become Greeks, Albanians, Serbians, Bulgarians, Rumanians, and even Americans; these were the choices open to them. By far the great majority was incorporated into the modern Greek state, the very creation of which

was deeply assisted by many Vlachs including such central figures as Rigas Fereos and Ioannis

Kolettis. The Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, and Serbians assimilated only the Vlachs within their own borders, but the Rumanians took over a newborn Vlach nationalist movement and tried to assimilate Vlachs in Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian areas, leading to much friction. The Rumanian movement touched only a minority of the Vlachs, and it ended in 1945.

The great British authorities on the Vlachs, Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson, passed through the Boukis family's village between 1910-12 and said, "North of Dobrinovo [now renamed Heliochori] is the last Vlach village of the Zaghori, Leshnitsa, a small village, but outwardly more prosperous than either Laka [now Laista] or Dobrinovo. By race and language it is Vlach, but in politics and religion Greek." Euterpe's father Michael Boukis had already been educated in Smyrna when he was approached by the Rumanians and offered further education in Bucharest; his sentiments were completely with the Greek nation-state and he rejected the Rumanians out of hand. He took a wife from Skanneli, a nearby village that was purely Greek, and soon after entering Michael's household Chrysoula Boukis learned to speak Vlach fluently because it was the language of Michael's parents and thus of the household.

This was a common occurrence in those days, though by now the phenomenon has almost disappeared because even the old people have learned to get along in Greek. As late as 1860, however, a Greek doctor visiting Metsovo - one of the more accessible Vlach villages - required an interpreter. My own grandmother's family had moved to the *campu* (lowlands, a derogatory term) amongst Greeks and Turks, where she promptly forgot much of her Vlach; but when she married my grandfather and moved back to the mountain village with him and his parents, she learned the language again. Nowadays such stories are rare and Vlach is fast giving way to Greek. Metsovo (*Aminju* in Vlach) is bilingual for the most part, and according to my cousin George Moran, who has probably visited more Vlach villages than any man or woman alive, Vlach has almost completely disappeared in Leshnitsa-Vrisochori.

Euterpe does not speak Vlach now, though when she was young, her grandmother and grandfather spoke to her in Vlach and she would answer in Greek. She adds that "My older sister could speak it, but the rest of us, the younger ones, couldn't." This is also fairly typical, as we know from our experience in America: the first children tend to learn the old language but by the time the younger children are growing up the parents or grandparents have learned to understand the new language well enough. To this day my mother speaks to both me and my younger sister in Vlach, but whereas I

usually answer in Vlach, my sister tends to answer in English. Mrs. Dukakis notes that her parents spoke to her in Greek while her grandparents spoke to her in Vlach, and she drew the same analogy: "It's like the American family that has a grandmother from Greece."

I told Mrs. Dukakis that the Vlach villages of Greece have now organized themselves into a Pan-Hellenic Vlach Cultural Society in order to try to reverse this trend towards loss of the language and culture; though she was totally surprised to hear this, she is quite perceptive and she began at once to think about and describe the problems this Society faced and their ramifications. Once I reassured her that this was not a Rumanian-connected movement at all but rather a local Greek one which repudiates the old Rumanian movement, she said of it, "It's good. But they are going to have difficulty, because as I say it's not a written language and there is no literature, no history other than word of mouth." Herself trained in literature and history, Mrs. Dukakis well knows the important role they play in the preservation of a culture. Though the Vlachs do have a huge body of written history - a recent attempt at a bibliography listed some 4,000 books and articles, and is still incomplete - almost none of it is in Vlach, and it is to *this* fact that Mrs. Dukakis's analysis speaks most cogently. Thousands of books in English, French, Rumanian, Greek, and German about the Vlachs will not save the language; but a few dozen in Vlach might have a chance of helping to do so. Without them, she asks, "How do you preserve it? There's no literature to go back on...a language cannot be preserved unless there's a written language and a literature tradition and also schools."

When I informed Mrs. Dukakis that the main stumbling block to a Vlach literature nowadays was the seemingly minor question of what alphabet to use, she seemed surprised that this was a problem; her first impression was, "It's got to be Latin since so many of the derivatives and roots are." The more serious problem seemed to her to be the lack of literature and schools, and she stressed this repeatedly. She was quite interested in some of the other developments amongst the Vlach villages in the 1980s, for instance, the annual festivals where representatives of each village perform traditional dances in full costume. "Like they do here," she commented, "when the Greeks do that."

But this analogy has its less propitious side, too. Her experiences with Greek culture in America lead Mrs. Dukakis to be somewhat pessimistic about the chances of preserving Vlach culture in Greece and elsewhere. She asked if this movement was taking root at all in the United States; when I told her that there was not much interest here as yet, she said, "Yes, in the second and third generations it goes." We spoke a bit about the toll taken by

modernization on many different languages and cultures, and she commented, "Of course with us here in the United States we see a perfectly good example of the situation among our Greek people. Once they've intermarried, after the second, third, fourth generation, they disappear." When I told her that I was grateful that I at least knew the language, she asked me point-blank, "How will it be with your great grandchildren?" Of course I had no answer. She later told me that while her three grandchildren had visited Greece and loved it, they do not speak Greek and have not yet shown a strong interest in their ethnic background.

I wondered why she thought the Greek and American press had focused so much on the village of origin of her late husband's family and not at all on that of her family. Euterpe attributed this to a traditional bias towards the male - the carrier of the family name - in such matters, not to any conscious attempt to avoid mentioning her family's village of origin, and in fact, she said, "I always say I was born in Larisa of Epirote parents." She went on to note, "That [background] doesn't mean anything to Michael or the children or my sister's children, but I always specify that...I'm very happy about my Epirotic background." She and Kitty accompanied Michael on his first visit to Greece in 1975, where they met some of the relatives in Larisa. I showed Euterpe the issue of *Avdhella* which announced the Vlach background of the family and carried some photographs of the visit to Larisa; she recognized her relatives there and named them. She said again of the family's Vlach background, "I doubt that Michael ever knew he had that, or if it made any impression on him. He never had any language or anything like that."

One of the things that some British and American scholars have called attention to as characteristic of Vlach culture is the unusual amount of independence granted women. These scholars talk of the "elevated" status of women in Vlach households. When I first heard about Mrs. Dukakis's Vlach background and also read in a book review that she "benefited from unusually liberal Greek parents who allowed her to attend college," I was intrigued by the possible connection between the two. "It was my father who encouraged it," Euterpe says of her unusual chance to go to school, "because my father was an intellectual who had gone to school in Smyrna and been affected by very progressive people, and it made no difference to him whether it was a boy or a girl, he encouraged it." Mrs. Dukakis also acknowledges the influence of her cultural milieu. "One thing about this heritage of ours. I've come across so many of the women who are from the *Vlachika* villages who are very strong; they've always had to take care of the family, you know, the men have always left, there's nothing to hold the men there...so the women take over, the men go, start a baby on the way and off they

go to various places to earn a living. And they send money to their families...the women are quite independent." Actually, she sees this strong position of women as characteristic not just of Vlach villages but also of many of the villages in Epirus.

I was fascinated by this unique, energetic, and extremely intelligent woman, and could have listened to her for hours more; she seemed to enjoy herself, too, speaking about both her ancestors and her descendants. But with only two weeks left in this very trying race for the presidency, there was no extra time to tell stories - Mrs. Dukakis is one of the hardest campaigners in the family, and she had to prepare for her trip to the Midwest where in a matter of hours she would begin her final round of rallies and speeches before election day. I presented her with copies of the two definitive English-language books on the Vlachs, Wace & Thompson's *Nomads of the Balkans* (1913) and Tom Winniffrith's *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People* (1987), and bade her goodbye and good luck. But whatever the results of this election, in the eyes of the world all Greeks and Vlachs can stand a bit taller for the incredible achievements of this one family.

Postscript: *There will no doubt be some confusion generated for the Dukakis family by the fact of its Vlach background becoming more widely known at a time when many people still think of the Vlachs as either Greeks or Rumanians but not as Vlachs who are Greeks, Vlachs who are Rumanians, Vlachs who are Americans, etc. Therefore let me reiterate that, not having had a high cultural tradition and a nation-state of their own, the Vlachs have had to choose between those available to them. Most of them long ago chose to be Greeks in high culture and in citizenship, as did Euterpe's family, and are among the most loyal of Greek citizens. Others, fewer in number, chose to be Albanians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Serbians, and even Americans. It would be a comical error to call Euterpe Dukakis, as one Rumanian priest apparently did recently, a "Rumanian" or "Macedo-Rumanian" (the Rumanian term for the Vlachs), as she and her family have been as solidly a part of the modern Greek nation as Ioannis Kolettis and the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras were, and as tens of thousands of Vlachs continue to be. They identify thoroughly with Greece, while at the same time taking pride in their Vlach heritage. For them - as for us in America - there is no conflict whatsoever between the two.*

CULTURAL FORUM:

The Poet George Perdichi

The Newsletter, volume III, Issue 1, February 1989

George Perdichi was born in 1912 in the village of Perivoli and studied literature in Rumania. The fortunes of Hitler's war brought him to America, but he was never happy here; it seems that the impersonal, materialistic aspects of our lifestyle offended his poet's sensibility. I was fortunate enough to have known *Giugica*, as we called him, for he visited our house often. As a child, I rarely saw his deep sadness because the one antidote for it was being around his compatriots; thus, I remember him full of life and laughter. This

compatriots--and, I remember him full of life and laughter. This poem, however, shows the heavy heart that lay behind those brief moments of joy.

Giugica died here in 1964, far away from his beloved Perivoli. The quality of his poetry was somewhat uneven, but the following is one of my favorites. Its title, *Dipartarea*, is difficult to translate; I prefer the simple word "Leaving." (*Note*: Since the Arumanian alphabet is still not standardized I have used a modified English alphabet and hoped for the best.)

Tricu un anu di candu azbuirai di acasa.	A year has passed since I flew from my nest.
Disfechiu a meali peani Tra s-yinu aua tu xeani S-ni ascapa suskisarli dit inima handoasa.	I spread my wings wide, Took a strange land as my bride, Fleeing from anguish locked in my own breast.
Voi muntsa 'naltsi, voi plaiuri, paduri shi scumpa hoara, Voi locuri mult musheati Iu ni trapshiu a meali niati... La voi nu va mi tornu s-va vedu ninga-na oara.	You tall mountains, you hill-sides, dear village and glen, You most beautiful of all places Cradle of children with bright red faces... I'll not be returning to see you again.
Tu dipartari apusit cu tineretsli a meali. Mirakili ni si ngrupara, Mi dipartai di hoara, Di sotsi, parei, di numtsa sh-di feati ca steali.	You set with the sun of my youth as I watched from afar. My passions were buried In your dust as I hurried From home, friends, and weddings, from girls pretty as stars.
Cum liai si-aruki lilichea sh-u alashi apoia theama S-maranghiseasca ghini, Turlia 'tsea sh'cu mini... Maranghisitu—maratlu—tu nfaracata xena!	Just as you reach to tear up a flower, then leave it awhile To wilt and decay So I, too, have wasted away... O miserable withered me, drinking the poison of exile!
Cand eu beam apa, Pinde, dit Izvurli-ts ca sherki, Ni parea ca ni creashti geanelu Iar oclili yii c'aslanlu Ascapira ca truplu lu aveam ca di chiuleki.	O Pindus, when I drank from your serpentine fountains, It seemed my life's spirit grew 'Til I became a dashing hero whose Eyes flashed lightning, whose steeled body moved mountains.

Tu inima atumtsea purtam haricupie.	In those days I bore only joy in my heart
Nvirnari asandz portu, Canda jilescu var mortu; Jilescu Armanamea araita ca cupie.	Now like a pallbearer, forlorn, Wherever I walk, I mourn; I mourn a plundered flock: My own people torn apart.
Mi doari, ca, pri plaiuri iu alagam 'na oara, Nu am s-mi priimnu lailu Tu muntsi cand yini Mailu Apoia toamna candu mi dispartsamu di hoara.	My pain is on the hillsides where I used to run, On roads I cannot walk today Up, up, into the mountains in May And down again in autumn, when cold rains come.
Aua, u-adutsi oara, tra s-dau di var di a nostru Azbuirat di atseia Cu el s-ni facu pareaa... Habari cand nas ni-adutsi ca marmura stau mprostu.	Here now, it's time I ran into one of our own who Has flown away from there We'll make such a pair... When he brings me news from home I'll stand proud as a statue.
Ni si deapina tu minti iconili fichiureshti: Mi ved fichior tu muntsa, La muabetsi, la numtsa, Trag cor cu picurarli tu porturi armaneshti.	The icons of lost youth go 'round in my mind: I emerge from the woods and am heading Now to a party, now to a wedding, Now to pull kilted shepherds as we dance hand-in-hand all in line.
Aleapta geanlui vruta, livenda- arushcuvana, Cari dau di u aduc aminti Tsiva nu ved nainti... Ved mashi un harishu anghil tu harisha icoana.	Dear rosy-cheeked beloved, chosen of my heart, When I would bring her to mind The only image I find Is of a graceful angel in a golden icon's art.

From the Editor... How Are We Doing?

The Newsletter, volume III, Issue 1, February 1989

We have been publishing for two years now; it is a good time for a glance at our achievements and at the position of our people at the start of the year 1989.

The Newsletter has turned out to be an extremely popular

and effective means of keeping in touch with our far-flung community and of informing members and non-members alike of who the Arumanians are. Three years ago, the Society Farsarotul had almost disappeared due to its failure to find a way to interest newer generations of our people in our culture, language, and history. With the arrival of a new Administrative Council and Board of Directors and the implementation of such fresh ideas as the Newsletter and dance classes, etc., the Society has not only been reborn but it has experienced its most rapid growth since World War II: We have gained 60 new members in just two years, increasing our active membership by some 50 per cent. The key factor in this incredible success has been the Newsletter.

But the best news of all is that most of these new members are from among our younger generation, without whom the Society will go nowhere. The Newsletter has found a way to speak to these people because it is completely open to new opinions and ideas, and this is plain for all to see. Instead of repeating the same old mythical praise of the "morality and purity of customs" of our ethnic group and "its sagacity of mind and its national pride," we have finally come down to earth and realized that not only are we as gifted and as flawed as any other ethnic group, we have somehow been less effective than most of them as we are threatened with imminent extinction.

Which brings us to the other question: What is the position of our people at the start of 1989? Well, the bad news is that according to the most recent scholar to study the Vlachs, Tom Winnifrith, there are only about 50,000 of us left in the world today, and though the majority enjoys freedom and democracy in America and Greece, the rest are at the mercy of more or less repressive regimes interested chiefly in assimilating us.

But aside from that, the news is quite good--in fact, it may be the best ever. A grass-roots movement to revive our culture has begun in the 1980s in America and in Greece amongst a new generation of our people. Whereas older generations once believed that the Arumanians had to align themselves either with the Rumanian state or the Greek state, finally it has been realized that the Arumanians are a distinct ethnic group like any other, and are subject to the government of the land in which they reside. It is no sin today for Vlachs interested in their own ethnicity to be loyal Greek or Rumanian citizens, just as it is no sin for them to be loyal American citizens.

The old prejudices and hatreds are fading fast, and the screaming voices and pounding fists of past nationalist fanatics are now usually impotent and ignored. Throughout the world--in the Middle East, in Africa, and even between the two superpowers -- peace is in the air, and perhaps we, too, have been caressed by the

same warm breeze. Whatever the reason, we can only win by shedding the dogmatism of the past and instead being objective and open-minded about our ethnic identity.

The change is a subtle one; rather than think of ourselves narrowly as Greeks, Rumanians, Albanians, and Americans, we simply give the matter a bit more thought: We are Vlachs who are Greeks, Vlachs who are Rumanians, Vlachs who are Albanians, and Vlachs who are Americans. As much as our political alignments may differ, we all agree on certain very basic things: the Arumanian cultural tradition from which we all come, its influence on us, and the desirability of figuring out a realistic way to draw on that tradition into the 21st century.

The Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul exemplifies this new attitude, which is evident in Beverlee Dacey's striking essay about our ethnic identity; in George Moran's groundbreaking article concerning the relation of our diaspora community to our homeland in Thessaly, Epirus, and Macedonia; in George Zdru's work in relating our cultural past to the present; and in Dr. Steve Tegu's excellent, informative pieces about various key aspects of our cultural and material life in the old country.

One other issue any ethnic publication must constantly examine anew for its readers is the question of what it means to be a member of that ethnic group. There are certain characteristics inherited from one's ancestors, and there is the way we approach those characteristics at different points in our history. What is an Arumanian in 1989?

Well, the answer for us, as with all others, must remain incomplete. But there is a constellation of traits that do seem to go along with our particular ethnic group. These traits are a pool, a grouping of possibilities. There is no such thing as a stereotypical "national character" for any group. Individuals make choices about their identity and behavior--but those choices are always from amongst the set of possibilities offered by the culture within which they reside. To put the question another way: The possibilities presented by an American or Greek heritage are fairly well known; with what possibilities does an Arumanian background present us? Here are some.

Probably the most central aspect of our ethnic identity is our unique Romance language; though one can retain that identity for some time even without the language, the key problem we face now is whether our language can indeed make the transition from a vernacular to a modern idiom which can stand on its own to describe all aspects of the human experience. Even in its informality, however, our language imprints us; it is a warm, unpretentious, and deeply personal idiom more suited to face-to-face contact than to transmission by computer, and in this regard, it bears a striking

transmission by computer, and in this regard it bears a striking similarity to Yiddish. Also inherent in the nature of our language is a preference for the concrete over the abstract; this imparts a practical, down-to-earth flavor to our speech and thought.

A further trait associated with the Arumanians is that we seem, like our nomadic ancestors, to have an extreme love of mobility; we enjoy being able to travel and to move around whenever and wherever we please. Related to this is the belief--obviously far from unique, but particularly strong with us--that we must get away from urban life and renew ourselves by going to the country (often the mountains) for part of each year.

Many of us like to take risks (limited risks, that is), which often as not inclines us towards entrepreneurialism as well as other sorts of gambling. Also promoting entrepreneurialism amongst us is a passionate love of freedom and an absolute hatred of domination by another person or government. The Arumanians have played a key role in Balkan commerce and politics in the last few centuries, though paradoxically they almost never strove for their own state. We sometimes have a self-confidence and persistence (some might call it arrogance and stubbornness) that know few limits, and while such traits often lead to success at a personal, familial, or even a tribal level, they also can make organized efforts requiring cooperation rather difficult.

Quite some time ago, we were known for the advanced position of women in our society; though lately much of the world has made great advances in this regard, women once had more freedom and were treated with more respect in Vlach society than in many others, and the self-respect this imparts no doubt continues to help many women of Arumanian descent reach for higher education and a better position in society today.

Another characteristic which many of us seem to share is our "passion," by which I mean the burning desire that seems to overtake us once we get an idea of something we ought to do, and that drives us mercilessly to do it immediately and to allow no barriers or slows to get in our way. Ideas or plans left unexecuted are as intolerable to us as huge debts or other onerous obligations: We feel them as a great burden which we must discharge as soon as humanly possible. In fact, the way to express in Arumanian that one is fulfilling a task is to say *u scotu naparti*, literally, "I am getting it out and away," as if the task were a demon to be exorcised.

Finally, I would have to add our clannishness as a central feature of our culture. Having been unconquered nomadic warriors for many centuries--the lords of our own dear mountains--has left us accustomed to thinking of ourselves as a special, "chosen" people, and to looking down at times (consciously or not) on other groups as somehow beneath us. We often prefer to be amongst our own kind

(or those with similar notions), with whom we can compete and measure ourselves because we at least respect them.

It is this characteristic and our language that are being tested most by modern society, which tells us that no one culture is best but that nevertheless the minority must also speak the language of the majority. We can already see that we are different from our forefathers: We accept a pluralistic society more readily than they while we speak our language less. What will the result of all this be? Will we be assimilated, will our language survive, or can we never quite be assimilated, even if our language disappears, because our image of ourselves as somehow "special" keeps us apart from the mainstream regardless of anything else?

Stay tuned. Our transition into the 21st century promises to be fascinating, and that is one story the Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul intends to stay right on top of.





Book Review

The Newsletter, volume III, Issue 2, August 1989

Paravulii, by Nicolae Batzaria. Editura Cartea Aromana, 1989.
\$18., paperback.

We Arumanians have a very small body of literature, most of which appeared under the auspices of the short-lived Rumanian nationalist movement (1860-1945). If I had to pick one out of this handful of writers to reprint in 1989, it would be Nicu Batzaria, for he is probably the only one of them to have achieved a modern sensibility. The rest often were content to write sentimental odes to the old shepherding and mountain way of life, and such work holds very little appeal in the late 20th century. Batzaria, however, was far from a 19th-century Romantic; the wellspring that feeds the river of his poetry is not sticky-sweet emotion but a fast-paced, rollicking humor.

There is something amazing in this achievement. The hallmark of our pre-literate folk-culture (like most others) is that it had a genre of serious songs, poems, and stories and a genre of comical ones. For some reason it was mainly the serious genre that our own literary figures took seriously -- until Nicu Batzaria. Batzaria obviously reveled in the colorful, humorous aspect of Arumanian life, which doesn't always show us in a good light because it is crude, rude, and sometimes lewd, and he decided it was worth his effort to try to convey some of that humor to a modern audience. A culture that cannot laugh at itself cannot change, and a culture that cannot change cannot survive long in this fast-paced world. Nicu Batzaria was one writer who tried to preserve our old tradition (and saving grace) of laughing at ourselves.

Despite all this, however, there is much to criticize in this particular edition. Though it is published in America, most of the text is written in Arumanian, which most members of our community no longer understand without at least an accompanying translation to help them along. There is no English translation.

Further, the alphabet used for the poems is the newfangled one created recently by a few Arumanian intellectuals in Germany and it is unfamiliar to the vast majority of our people. It was created in an effort to show that the Arumanians are different from the

Rumanians. It is easy to show these differences without going so far as to create a new alphabet; at the same time, the great majority of our literature was written with the Rumanian alphabet and no amount of tampering or rewriting or regret is going to change that fact. What was written in the Rumanian alphabet should probably be respected and left as it was written; as for what alphabet present and future Arumanians will use, well, that is a matter to be decided by the majority of them when they see fit to do so.

The only English in this book is stilted and not idiomatic; it is to be found in the editor's brief introduction, which includes a historical preface and an explanation of the editor's decision to use a new alphabet. But whereas the alphabetical essay is rather helpful, the preface is quite disappointing. The editor, Dr. Tiberius Cunia, is a specialist in forestry -- a far cry from linguistics and history. When a specialist writes in another field, he obviously runs the risk of making errors. Dr. Cunia prepares us for linguistic errors by acknowledging that "Not being a linguist myself, I might have made wrong decisions..." But we receive no such warning concerning historical errors.

In a mere two pages, the preface commits two major historical blunders, errors so basic that it is hard to imagine how they might be excused. The first is when Cunia asserts that Batzaria's home town of Krushevo (now in Yugoslavia) was "inhabited exclusively by Aromanians." This is part of the mythology fed to a Rumanian-educated generation that has rarely set foot in our actual homeland, much less conducted serious research on the subject. Even Metsovo (*Aminju* in our language), the prototypical Vlach town which is often touted as "exclusively Vlach," has a community of gypsies who -- though they have resided there from time immemorial and speak Arumanian fluently -- do not consider themselves Vlach.

In the case of Krushevo, Dr. Cunia could easily have gotten his facts straight by consulting Dr. Zbigniew Golab's 1984 book, *The Arumanian Dialect of Krushevo*. Any scholar who seeks to write about the Vlachs should be familiar with the basic books written about them, and Golab's book is certainly basic, especially if one wishes to learn about Krushevo. In its pages we find that Krushevo, since its founding in the 18th century, has had a settlement of Albanians; they were soon joined by Slavs. In Batzaria's day, the population was roughly one-third Slavic and Albanian and two-thirds Arumanian.

The other major error is when Cunia asserts that in the Balkan states formed upon the demise of the Ottoman Empire (1918), the Arumanians lost "all their cultural rights." In fact, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia (then known as The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), and Greece signed an agreement with Rumania in 1913 to allow schools and churches for the Vlachs in

Rumania in 1913 to allow schools and churches for the Vlachs in order to preserve their culture. While Bulgaria and Yugoslavia did not live up to their end of the bargain, Greece did, and the schools and churches in Greece lasted until World War II, when *the Rumanian government itself* decided to discontinue them.

These errors are serious, and combined with the strange new alphabet and the lack of translations, they take away enormously from the value of this edition. Yet they do not negate it completely. For future editions, I would advise Dr. Cunia to locate a second editor, one who specializes in linguistics and history and who can write and translate well in idiomatic English. Such knowledge and abilities, combined with Dr. Cunia's burning desire to publish Arumanian literature at any cost, should result in some useful editions of the works of our favorite writers.

CULTURAL FORUM:

The Women of Nizhopoli

The Newsletter, volume III, Issue 2, August 1989

Our community represents a golden opportunity for oral

history. Not only do we preserve some of the language and customs that have been lost in the old country over the last 75-100 years, but we also have recorded the history of the immigrant experience in America. Here is just one example, a song that used to be sung by women from Nizhopoli and Magarova who ended up working together in a factory in the American Northeast:

Di cu noaptea-noaptea	It is still night-time
Fabritsli zghilescu	When the factory sirens blow
Milioani di oamini	And millions of people
La lukru nkisescu	Off to work do go
La shasili satia	At six o'clock P.M.
Lukrulu s'alasa	When work is done
S'toarna lukritorli a casa.	The laborers return home,
A casa di s'ntreaba	At home they ask
Unu di alantu,	Each one of the other,
"Alasatsi-mi, sotsi,	"Don't bother me, friends
Nu mi cartitsi.	Leave me alone,
Amu yinati mari	I am very angry
Pri a melli parintsi.	With my parents back home.
Cati ori lliau carti	Every time I get a letter
Di la parintsi	From my parents
Nu s'fatsi	They never fail
S'nu ni cafta paradzi."	To ask me for money."

There are hundreds (if not thousands) of such songs waiting to be recorded before the last members of that generation pass on. What we need is a committed effort to record and catalogue this oral history. Beverlee Fatse Dacey was the pioneer in doing this for our community, and Dr. Tom Winnifrith will be coming over from England next year to conduct similar research. But there is much more to be done. Fortunately, there are many types of grants available in the United States for projects of this kind, but qualified persons must apply for them and then see the projects through. Anyone interested in coordinating such a project should contact the Society Farsarotul for initial support and guidance.

"Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about." (*G.K. Chesterton*)

From the Editor . . . The Wizards of Freiburg

The Newsletter, volume III, Issue 2, August 1989

We hope this issue of our Newsletter finds you in good health and good spirits. We have an exciting issue this month. About a year ago I received a call from a fellow in Stow, Ohio who was kind of amazed that there was actually a society specifically for the *Arumani*, as he put it. This person is of Arumanian ancestry but had not been in contact with our community until quite recently. The story of how he came to discover his ethnic background is of interest especially since it is typical: Only by attending American schools have most of us learned the real facts of our ethnic identity.

Also in this issue: an essay by Tom J. Winnifrith, the leading scholar of the Vlachs, who discusses the enormous bias to be found in works by Greek, Rumanian, and other Balkan writers concerning our people; and an article by Steve Tegu which continues his informative series on the symbolic and material culture of his home town, Baieasa. Relax and enjoy the reading!

The Wizards of Freiburg

In one of the classics of the American motion picture industry, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her motley crew (the brainless Straw Man, the Tin Man who lacks a heart, and the Cowardly Lion) brave a number of perils in order to find the Wizard of Oz, who they believe can solve all their problems with one wave of his almighty hand. But alas, when they find the old Wizard they

discover that he is all smoke and mirrors, living in a world of make-believe and pretending he is a god within it.

Nevertheless, the Wizard redeems himself by displaying not magic but wisdom in the advice he gives the four seekers: that they really already had the very things they sought from him.

There is a tiny handful of Arumanian Wizards in Freiburg, West Germany, who somehow feel that they are in a position to send orders from up high down to the rest of us. They believe they understand the situation of our generation better than we do, and so they pontificate on what we should or should not do in our communities -- communities about which they know very little.

There is a simple fact of life we Vlachs of the late 20th century are forced to live with: For whatever reason, our forefathers did not take the time and attention to make our ancient language into a modern one. There are no words in our language for most of the material objects and abstract ideas with which we in the late 20th century come into contact every day. We do not even have an agreed-upon alphabet.

When our generation here and in Greece became interested in our culture again in the 1980s, the language question was one of the key problems we ran into. Though no one has solved this problem, we have kept the issue alive in a series of popular and informative periodicals published in English and Greek -- this Newsletter is one of them (we began publication in 1987).

One of our forerunners in Greece, the newspaper *Avdhella*, began publication in 1984. Hardly a year had passed when the heavens parted and the Wizards of Freiburg pronounced *Avdhella* guilty of not writing in Arumanian.

The eloquent reply of the folks at *Avdhella* exposed the Wizards of Freiburg as mere men using smoke and mirrors to maintain a fantasy about the state of our language and culture. But instead of learning something from the experience -- instead of showing wisdom by truly understanding the situation of those of us who reside not in magical Oz but in real-life America -- the Wizards keep impersonating gods and pretending to give directives.

The latest orders, in a 1988 edition of the Wizards' own periodical, *Zborlu a Nostru* (Our Word), chided us, too, for not using more Arumanian. To which we respond, but only this one time, with our position:

1. It is equally a tragedy for us to be Americanized as it is for us to be Hellenized like our compatriots in Greece or for us to be Rumanianized like our counterparts in Freiburg and Rumania. All three constitute assimilation of our own genuine culture to a more dominant culture that is not our own. We may not have much choice in all this. But the one thing we *can* do is drop any pretense that it is "better" to be Rumanianized than Hellenized or more "righteous" to

better to be Rumanianized than Hellenized or more "righteous" to be Americanized than Rumanianized -- we are all in the same boat, no one of us any better than the other. Let us drop any pretense and holier-than-thou attitudes. The race for righteousness is over and has been lost by all of us.

2. Like the protagonists of *The Wizard of Oz*, we have discovered there is nothing really wrong with us, that all along we have had what we thought we lacked: the desire to remain actively involved with our culture. Unfortunately, as things stand, the formal use of our language is not an option for us at the moment, much as we would like it to be.

3. Finally, to echo our compatriots at *Avdhella*, we suggest that you include an English translation in your own writings so that we here will be able to understand you.

We don't intend to bicker. We are facing our linguistic and cultural problems honestly and trying to address them, not pretending they don't exist. We don't live in Oz.

How an Ethnic Group Disappears

Arumanians: A Second Look. An Update on the Vlachs

The GreekAmerican, Saturday, August 26, 1989

It has been almost two years since *The GreekAmerican* published my series on the Vlachs ("Arumanians: One View from the Diaspora," September-October 1987). At the time, it seemed a great

innovation to print anything concerning the ethnic minorities in Greece; now it seems routine, which is a tribute to *The GreekAmerican's* willingness to ignore taboos and break new ground on any subject of concern to Greece, from its resident Jews, Vlachs, Slavs, Moslems, and Albanians to critiques of the Church and of Greek cultural attitudes toward women.

It is time for an update on the Vlachs. In the last two years much has happened, though little has been accomplished. Despite the deadlock, the history of the Vlachs' extinction unfolds every day, and there is real drama in this. Moreover, the lessons to be drawn may be of wider value: How exactly does an ethnic group disappear? There is also the possibility that by learning of the Vlachs' slow agony as it is happening, people will be moved to avert it or at least to make the end more humane and comfortable. Finally, it is my conviction that the path to a truer Greek identity lies, paradoxically, in a clearer understanding of the identity of the Vlachs.

Two years ago I tried to introduce Greeks to the Vlachs' self-designation, *Arumani*, which is in use in English as "Arumanians." There is more dignity in this name than in the word *Vlachos* (a designation imposed from outside the group), which stands to *Aruman* roughly as "negro" stands to "black." One hundred and fifty years ago, there were two groups in the Southern Balkans which called themselves "Romans," the Vlachs and the Greeks. The Greeks, in an attempt to forge a closer link with their classical past, switched to "Hellenes" for their own use but the rest of the world has kept calling them "Greeks." The Vlachs still call themselves *Arumani* but the rest of the world continues to know them as "Vlachs," and thus far "Arumanians" has achieved only secondary status as a designation. I bow to this reality and use both terms as needed.

This update may well be more controversial than the first series, which was a polite introduction to a presumed innocent readership. It had little concrete effect, however; people were happy to be informed and simply discarded the series or filed it away. But the situation has deteriorated, and there is no longer any way to avoid airing our dirty laundry - and by "our" I mean that of the Vlachs, Greeks, and Rumanians, the three protagonists of this little drama. More journalist than Arumanian this time, I will mention names and be more forthright; if some are a bit disturbed, so be it. It is a disturbing situation.

The tragedy plays on three stages now: Western Europe, Greece, and America. In this update I'll review each separately as well as offer an introduction and conclusion. I assume the reader's knowledge of my earlier series, but I will begin with this thumbnail sketch of the structure on which that series was built: People who feel insecure about a certain identity overcompensate for it by exaggerating that identity. This is most obvious in the case of

conversions as, for example, when ethnic Greek janissaries became more fanatically anti-Greek, anti-Christian, pro-Ottoman, and pro-Muslim than the Turks themselves. The greatest period of conversion the world has seen in over a millenium has been that of 1800 to the present, when human beings, who everywhere had been organized on a local village or tribal basis, changed their loyalties to a brand-new entity of northwest European invention, the Nation. Great Britain and France were the innovators, subsuming Scots, Irish, Welsh and Bretons, Basques, Provencals, respectively, to the new national idea, and the world has been following since. The greatest devotees of the new religion of nationalism, as always, have been converts: Kossuth the Slovak, Codreanu the Pole, Hitler the Austrian, and scores of others.

This new national idea coincided with additional changes of enormous impact on society: commercialization, urbanization, industrialization, and a host of other phenomena usually grouped together under the rubric of "modernization." The new form of human society everywhere creates great upheaval initially and a rise in extremism (whether apocalyptic or utopian), as it did in nineteenth-century England and France. By the twentieth century it had made inroads into Central and Eastern Europe, where the threat it posed to traditional life in town and country elicited a violent reaction which included, among many other things, anti-Semitism, fascism of every stripe, and the sheer butchery of two World Wars. The outcome of World War II decided that Europe would move forward into modernity, not backward to the more austere traditional life so dear to Hitler and millions of other bewildered Europeans who felt uprooted by modern society.

Enter the Vlachs, who numbered a half-million at the turn of the century and who constituted one of the last European ethnic groups to retain some of the strong tribal structure and traditional mentality of a true nomadic pastoral-military society. Modern nations are the products of an intellectual class, but the first Vlachs to become educated in modern European society seem to have agreed that they were too few to constitute their own state. Only one Vlach, Rhigas Feraios, rose above the national idea to suggest a multicultural re-creation of the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires. The rest scrambled to adopt a national identity, and six main choices emerged between 1820-1920: Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Rumanian, Serbian (later Yugoslavian), and, of course, American. In fact, the Vlachs were the most fanatical disciples of whichever national culture they adopted, often outdoing the members of the actual ethnic group that formed the basis of the new nation; the Croatian-American sociologist Vatro Murvar has called the Vlachs "two-hundred-percent Serbian," and some of the most zealous

Greeks (Megali Iada exponent Ioanis Colettis), Albanians (Communist leader Naku Spiru), Rumanians (Iron Guard strongman Constantin Papanacea), and Yugoslavians (partisan General Koca Popovic) have been Vlachs. Those who are new to or insecure in an identity tend to overcompensate. Most Vlachs adopted a Greek or Rumanian identity; the former because the Vlachs had grown organically out of GrecoRoman civilization alongside the Greeks, with whose culture therefore the Vlachs had much in common; the latter because Vlach and Rumanian are dialects of the same language, and the Rumanians respected the Vlach language while the Greeks discouraged its use.

These two main camps were dominated by extremists whom I call the *hyperhellenes* and the *superromani*. Rumanian schools and churches competed with Greek schools and churches for the political loyalties of the Vlachs starting around 1860, the Greeks resorting to violence at the turn of the century to limit the size of the Rumanian movement, while some pro-Rumanian Vlachs collaborated with Italian and German fascists during World War II. The end of that war brought a new regime to Rumania which discontinued the schools and churches in Macedonia.

The Rumanian-Greek division was still a very traditional tribal split; for millenia, tribes have expanded until their consensus breaks down, at which point they usually regain a limited consensus by simply splitting in two, one faction for each of the two conflicting points of view. This was not a modern political left-right split, as for example formed the basis (if not the reality) of Greece's *ethnikos dichasmos*, a rift between republicans of the left and royalists of the right; this was a right-right split, in which each side claimed to be more conservative of the group's true identity than the other. No modern opposition party of the left had appeared nor was it ever created; Vlachs who wished to progress and participate in modern life had to do so from outside Vlach society, which remained rigidly traditional no matter whether it called itself "more Rumanian than the Rumanians" or "more Greek than the Greeks."

With no structure created to integrate Vlachs into the modern world as Vlachs, those who wished to modernize simply adopted a culture which *was* modernizing. In other words, to modernize was to adopt a non-Vlach identity; to retain a Vlach identity was to preserve the traditional order while calling oneself one of "the oldest Rumanians" or "the purest Greeks." Thus, the Vlach response to the dislocation caused by the modern world was curiously one-sided: those who accepted modernity were by that very fact no longer really Vlachs, and they brought their vision of progress to their adopted societies. This left only the Rumanian and Greek factions of conservative Vlachs to preserve Vlach culture while fighting off both modernity and each other in the name of saving "the most truly

Rumanian" or "the most authentically Greek" culture.

And there the matter has long remained. Conservative pro-Greek Vlachs fight off conservative pro-Rumanian Vlachs and vice versa as they try to hold off the present. They are the only ones who care about Vlach culture because there is no room in Vlach culture for non-conservatives. A modern, progressive loyal opposition party - which could have evolved a viable modern Vlach culture as, for example, Constantine Ucuta suggested in the 18th century - was never tolerated. As a result, there was no Vlach left to win out eventually over the Vlachs who wish to return to an old order, as the left of most other European ethnic groups won out over the right after World War II had discredited the latter.

Until the 1980s the Balkan countries were ruled with a strong grip which had little patience for ethnic minorities. Political ideology mattered little: the silence was enforced by the right in Greece as well as the left everywhere else. In the 35 years after the war, however, a new Vlach generation arose in Greece which for the first time was conscious of being Vlach yet unquestionably wished to enjoy the benefits of modernity, including true democratic government. The first breakthrough came when the entire Greek postwar generation rid itself of the 1967-74 junta and then threw off all the trappings of the right with the new socialist government (PASOK); Vlachs of that generation began also to question the suppression of Vlach identity that had been an axiom of the Greek right as early as the prewar fascist Metaxas regime. At the same time, an international ethnic revival was underway as the West grew more tolerant of minorities - a new pluralism for which the world is most immediately indebted to the American civil rights movement of the 1960s and particularly to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

This new pluralism breathed a last breath of life into the moribund Vlach diaspora of Western Europe and America, and publications and cassettes in Vlach began to appear there and in Greece. At the outset (circa 1980) there was Nacu Zdru's *Frاندza Vlaha* (Vlach Leaflet) out of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Iancu Perifan's *Tra Armanami* (For the Arumanians) published in Paris. Strange as it seems today, I first found out about these periodicals in Greece - many Vlachs there were initially quite enthusiastic about the new efforts. I, too, was swept up in their enthusiasm; when I passed through Paris later I made an unplanned stop at the offices of *Tra Armanami*, where I mentioned that several of my friends and relatives had expressed interest and might like to be on the mailing list. The response in Greece soon soured, however, and on my next trip, some of the very same people who had earlier expressed interest now denounced the Western Europeans to me as "troublemakers" and placed me and all American Vlachs in the same camp. In fact, I was even given a vivid threat to convey personally to the publisher of one

even given a vivid threat to convey personally to the publisher of one of the periodicals. Of course I did not deliver the message, but the incident did disabuse me of much of my youthful naivete concerning the Vlachs.

The pro-Rumanian extremist faction has been holding "Congresses" every so often in an unsuccessful attempt to revive Vlach culture. They purport to be scholarly but in fact they are a sorrowful travesty of the impartial, objective academic method. The best method I have found to check their excesses slightly is to sit in on the "Congresses," take notes, and offer comments and questions when things get too out of hand. But one person is not enough, and frankly I am tired of being screamed at; for this reason I welcome all interested persons who wish to join me at the "Third Congress of Macedonian-Romanian Culture" on September 1,2,3,& 4 of this year at Sacred Heart University on Park Avenue in Bridgeport, Connecticut (an hour and a half's drive from New York City). If past experience is any indication, extensive use of Rumanian and excessive chauvinism will make this a daunting experience for those not in the pro-Rumanian faction - it is not for the weak-willed, for the extremist members of the pro-Greek faction, nor for those easily drawn into shouting matches. For details and travel directions, contact Dr. John Mahar of Sacred Heart's Ethnic Studies Center at (203) 371-7945.

A Note on the Nature of the Debate

The lively debate that has emerged internationally concerning the Vlachs has, on the whole, been healthy if a bit heated. Unfortunately, one tendency has emerged which has no place in such a debate and I will mention it up front with the hope of discouraging its further use and of inoculating people against it. It is an old trick of human debate, so old it is still known by its Latin name: *ad hominem*, "against the person himself."

Ad hominem means that rather than take seriously the point of view and arguments offered by one's adversary in a debate, one attacks the person himself. Instead of attacking the argument on its own merits, one attacks it by attempting to discredit the person making that argument. In the long run such a tactic rarely works, as a point of view is often held by many people and it is impossible to slander or defame every single person with that point of view. But in the short term, in a particular argument, *ad hominem* can be destructive.

Here are a few examples of actual *ad hominem* trash generated so far in this debate (I won't mention names in this case only because I do not want to propagate these slanders): A pro-

only because I do not want to propagate these slanders). A pro-Rumanian Vlach leader in America not long ago found a group of unaligned Vlachs disagreeing with him; he soon began to tell people in the community that his chief opponent was a Mason. This was a poisonous charge in an Orthodox community and, still worse, one that was untrue; even had it been true, however, of what use would it have been? Would it automatically have meant that his points of view were invalid? Of course not. In Greece, conservative pro-Greek Vlachs have been called "fascists" and they have countered by calling the leaders of the young Vlach generation in Greece "foreign agents," "Rumanizers," or "communists," implying that they sympathize with a hostile foreign power. One fellow who happens to have been educated in Rumania (as many Greeks have been in the last few decades) has been particularly tainted with this damning label, simply because he is outspoken in preserving Vlach culture - he repudiates the Rumanian movement as much as anyone.

While the West is not free of arguments *ad hominem*, at least there is a cultural ideal against it; it is possible to shake off the mud and carry on with the real argument. In the Balkans, however, it is still very often a matter of "anything goes," and this can only hurt things or at least slow them down. (I shudder to think of how easily attention could be turned from the merits of my own arguments to a vilification of my sometimes rocky past.) I urge all involved in this debate, whatever their ethnic background, to keep to the issues and to cease attempting to discredit their adversaries personally. It is possible to argue forcefully without it becoming personal. Let us not provide the world with yet another Balkan comedy.

Arumanians: A Second Look

Update on Western Europe: The Will of the Forefathers

The GreekAmerican, September 2, 1989

A new Vlach periodical has arisen which, if it does not live up to its scholarly pretensions, is yet of much higher quality than any before it. *Zborlu a Nostru* (Our Word) is published in Freiburg, West Germany, by a small group headed by Prof. Vasil Barba. When I first saw it, I was excited by the possibilities it presented as a vehicle for the creation of a modern Vlach language and culture. Vlach has remained in a primitive, localized state and has not yet made the transition to a uniform, modernized language; there are no standardized words for many abstract ideas (such as "uncertainty" or "emotion") or for various modern institutions and objects of material culture (such as "president" or "automobile"). Instead, Vlachs have been borrowing these terms from more developed neighboring languages for some time now; thus we have a different word for "automobile" among Greek Vlachs (*aftokinitu*) Rumanian Vlachs

automobile among Greek Vlachs (*επιβιομητι*), Rumanian Vlachs (*mashina*), American Vlachs (*caru*), and Lord knows what word they use in Albania and Yugoslavia. *Zborlu a Nostru* had the potential to standardize an alphabet and language for Vlach in the late 20th century.

Unfortunately, it has not lived up to that potential because, instead of adopting the living language, usages and preferences of the majority of Vlachs - which happens to reside in Greece - it has attempted to impose its own artificial language on all Vlachs, one which uses a new Latin alphabet and is based on Latin roots. The tiny handful of the Union for Arumanian Language and Culture (ULCA), the group behind *Zborlu a Nostru*, is dogmatically and uncompromisingly Latinist in its orientation, and this has starkly alienated Vlach leaders in Greece, who are understandably concerned about relating themselves to the wider Greek community and who argue that since they constitute the majority of Vlachs, their usages and alphabetical preferences should carry the most weight in crafting a standardized language. In other words, the Greek Vlachs would say that when we speak of a general secretary of a Vlach organization, he should be referred to as the *geniko grammatikolu* rather than as the *secretar general*, and his title should be written in Greek characters.

Zborlu a Nostru has not come up with a viable response to this criticism, and so the matter remains in deadlock for years now. Any reasonable person viewing the matter will probably agree that the Greek Vlachs have a valid point and deserve at least an equally valid answer; the best that the ULCA has come up with is that "this is the age of global networks of computers, most of which use a Latin alphabet; it would be too difficult to use a Greek alphabet." Of course it may be difficult for some, but since most Vlachs reside in Greece, they would find it extraordinarily easy to use the Greek alphabet - end of argument. The real problem seems to be that the ULCA's *raison d'etre*, rather than "to save the Vlach language at any cost," is "to ensure that only a Latinized Vlach language survives." They have a different priority, and thus they refuse even to consider that our language can adopt Greek words and a Greek alphabet. They parade this view in every issue, not just in constant editorials explicitly on this subject, nor even solely by the Latin-based words they create and use, but also through subliminal icons such as their logo of a Roman coin with Caesar's portrait and Latin inscription.

There are, in turn, reasons for this extreme Latinism. *Zborlu a Nostru*, like *Frاندza Vlaha* and *Tra Armanami*, grew out of the old pro-Rumanian movement, and its circle consists almost exclusively of Rumanian-educated intellectuals. Some of them - perhaps most of them, though there is no easy way to verify this - still feel strongly that the Vlachs are actually Rumanians who happen to live in

Macedonia and thereabouts. In fact, it is quite possible to view the ULCA as a continuation of the pro-Rumanian movement with only minor changes (changes are required because the pro-Rumanian movement was badly discredited by the World War II collaboration of some of its members with the fascist occupiers of Greece). The attempt to distance itself from the Rumanian movement is most evident in the new alphabet *Zborlu a Nostru* proposes and uses; it is not the old Rumanian alphabet, though it is still Latin. But at the same time, when *Zborlu a Nostru* adds a new word to its lexicon, most often the word is taken directly from Rumanian. The changes are few indeed.

Zborlu a Nostru's great breakthrough was to recognize that the effort to preserve the Vlach language would benefit by abandoning the Rumanian alphabet; unfortunately, the periodical seems unable to go any further than this. In fact, even its abandonment of the Rumanian alphabet has caused great consternation among the old diehard pro-Rumanian crowd, which has objected loudly to *any* reduction of the tie with Rumania. These hard-liners have even picked up momentum recently, and *Zborlu a Nostru* with its newfangled Latin alphabet is now stuck between the Scylla of the Greek alphabet and the Charybdis of the Rumanian alphabet.

In actuality, as I said in last week's introduction, all these factions are hard-line members of the old guard with only a few clear differences between them. The *hyperhellenes* are not even happy to see Vlach written down; they would prefer that it remain a patois used only in the home until it dies out altogether. The *superromani*, in both their overtly pro-Rumanian and Latinist incarnations, would like Vlach to be a written language, but only on their own terms - with Rumanian or at least Latin characters.

The old-guard nature of the Freiburg group is evident in several other manifestations. The poetry and stories they publish in Vlach are as old-fashioned, unexciting, and irrelevant as can be. The only aesthetic standard most of them meet is that they are written in a mother tongue which has an emotional appeal for all Vlachs - not much of a criterion for artistic excellence, and as a result, the overwhelming majority of the work published is not at all memorable, published only because it is written in Vlach. They do not seem to realize that Vlach is just as capable as any other language of producing literature suited only for the rubbish bin. Sometimes I feel that if I read just one more carefully rhymed ode to a dusty village, to sheep, to our language, to patriarchy, or to the Pindus Mountains, I will shrivel up and die of old age myself.

A more obvious clue to the generational nature of the Freiburg Vlachs is their photographs in *Zborlu a Nostru*. Heads of snow-white hair predominate, and usually they are male. When

show white hair predominate, and usually they are male. When young people are shown, they are often made to dress up in *fustanelli* (kilts) and *tsarouchi* (pointed shoes of wood or stiff leather) and they have the same lost look on their faces I used to have when my parents forced me to be somewhere I did not want to be. Still worse, these youths - usually visitors from Yugoslavia (who take a summer course in Vlach) or refugees from Rumania - are made to learn and sing the hateful poem which the old pro-Rumanian hard-liners have tried to dub "the Arumanian National Anthem." I personally have never heard a more violent, ill-tempered, ill-willed poem than "*Parinteasca Dimandare*" (The Will of the Forefathers - see insert). It has been set to a dull, monotonous, emasculated music that naturally clashes with the violent words and spirit of the poem, giving it an effect that would be comical if it weren't so bizarre.

Here is the text of "The Will of the Forefathers," written in the last century by Constantin Belimace:

Parinteasca dimandare	The will of our forefathers
Na sprigiura cu foc mare	Commands us with a great flame
Fratsi di muma si di-un tata	Children of the same parents
Noi, Armani di eta toata.	We, the Arumanians from time immemorial.
Di sum plocili di murmintsa	From beneath their gravestones
Striga a noshtri bun parintsas:	Our good parents cry out:
"Blastem mare s-aiba n-casa	"We curse you if you have at home
Cari di limba a lui si-alasa.	Someone who leaves his language.
Cari-shi alasa limba a lui	For whomever leaves his language:
S'lu arda pira focului	Let him be burned by flames
Si s-dirina yiu pri loc	Let him be destroyed alive where he stands
Si lli si friga limba n-foc.	Let his tongue be burned in flame
El 'n vatra-lli parinteasca	Before his ancestral hearth
Fumeallia s-nu shi-hariseasca	Let him not enjoy a family
Di fumelli curuni s-nu bashe	Let him not see a family get married
Nat 'n leagan s-nu nfashe.	Let him not rock a child's cradle
Cari fudzi di a lui muma	For whomever leaves his mother
Shi di parinteasca-lli numa	And his ancestral name:
Fuga-lli doara Domnului	Let him ever lose God's grace
Shi dultseamea somnului!"	And the sweetness of sleep!"

The people who sing this hate-song actually curse their own children, for many of them - quite often the very children of the leaders themselves - either cannot or will not speak Vlach. The

parents do not see that they are cursing their own flesh and blood, and that is natural: they no longer care (if they ever did) what the words say, they value this hate-song as a *symbol*, like a prayer during the liturgy. One does not usually think about the important spiritual ramifications of stating, say, that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father" (as opposed to "from the Father and the Son," as in the Catholic version) when one recites the Creed. It means what it *means*, not what it says – it is an article of faith, solid proof that one belongs to the Orthodox Christian religion and no other. In the same way, "The Will of the Forefathers" is an article of faith among the pro-Rumanian crowd, an important credential for inclusion within that faction.

The ULCA seems to have established good contacts with the German government at the municipal level and with certain universities, and it sponsored "International Congresses for Arumanian Language and Culture" at the University of Mannheim in 1985 and at the University of Freiburg in 1988. These "Congresses" purport to be open, scholarly forums but in reality they are dominated by the old pro-Rumanian crowd and have failed utterly to involve the great majority of Vlachs the world over; nevertheless, they pretend to take votes on how our language should be developed - more a political than a scholarly question under these circumstances, as their very own plans to "vote" on it demonstrate - and there is no deviation at these "Congresses" from the clear party line: to brook no change more radical than the new Latin-based alphabet. Essentially, then, these "Congresses" consist of the same people saying the same things to one another and believing it all the more for the repetition. Almost nothing *real* gets accomplished, though predictably the organizers assert "great breakthroughs" and "huge successes." As evidence, they reproduce articles in the local German press which show a teenage Vlach couple in traditional costume, as if this were a sign of the revival of our culture - can you see it: a Vlach businessman in a *fustanella* (woolen pleated kilt) cutting a deal on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange? Echoes of Kolettis.

In the final analysis, the criterion for judging the ULCA's success must be how many Vlachs it involves in the effort to save the ethnic group. By this criterion, it is failing miserably, as the Vlachs of Greece - again, a majority of the world Vlach population - are not only not involved, they have become alienated by the presumptuous attempt of a mere handful of aging intellectuals in Western Europe to dictate to them as if the Latinizers were somehow more moral or righteous than they.

I realize I have been harsh on this group, but it is an honest harshness - in fact, things would never have deteriorated to the point where only strong criticism would do if this older generation had, in

where only strong criticism would do if this older generation had, in the first place, sought the advice and attempted to incorporate the views of young Vlachs the world over. Instead, it has merely tried to dictate - a strategy which has worked for older men in traditional cultures for thousands of years but which has by now almost completely lost its effectiveness, as much among the Vlachs as among the French. Nevertheless, to be fair, I must include an assessment of the positive impact of the German Vlachs (I call them "German" because most of them are based in Germany; very few remain in France, Italy, and elsewhere in Western Europe).

First and foremost, they have kept alive the issue of the survival of the Vlachs; they have made it more difficult to ignore our disappearance or to be complacent about it. This is important.

Second, they have stimulated a certain amount of scholarship concerning the Vlachs. Although it is often one-sided, yet *any* scholarly work is bound to catch the attention of impartial scholars sooner or later and to elicit their criticism. One excellent work which has arisen from the German community of Rumanian expatriates (closely connected to the Vlachs there) is Petre Nasturel's *Bibliografia Macedo-Romana* (the Rumanians call the Vlachs "Macedo-Rumanians," in keeping with their thesis that the Vlachs are merely Rumanians who happen to reside in Macedonia, and in blatant disregard of the many historic and thriving Vlach communities in Epirus, Thessaly, and Thrace). This book lists some 4,000 works on the Vlachs in several languages, and though its Rumanian slant is evident, it at least strives for impartiality and is now the required starting point for anyone who wishes to study the Vlachs in any depth.

Third, the ULCA has managed to educate a handful of youngsters in Vlach; if even a few of these youths retain an interest in their language and culture, they could constitute the seeds of a modern Vlach intelligentsia by the year 2000.

Fourth, the German Vlachs have recognized that the European Community can be an effective force with which to turn the screws on official Greece if the latter does not become more generous on its own in the preservation of its rich repertoire of minority languages and cultures. Specifically, the ULCA has discovered the European "Charter for Regional or Minority Languages" (Greece is a signatory) and has paraded Greece's inactivity on the Vlachs before the Council of Europe. Unfortunately, it has done this in an authoritarian style - that is, rather than attempt to conciliate the Greek Vlachs or locate the moderates among them, draw them into a coalition and compromise with them, the ULCA has issued their party line (written Vlach must use Latin characters; Hellenisms must be replaced with Latinisms; the Vlachs are an oppressed minority in Greece and must - in spite of themselves, if

necessary - be granted autonomy) and then hoped to use the Council of Europe to get the Greek Vlachs to agree. Of course the Greek Vlachs, with Evangelos Averoff in the vanguard sighting anti-Greek conspiracies in every corner, have objected most strenuously to this attempt from outside Greece to dictate what ought to be happening *inside* Greece; and so what might have been a tactful initiative to nudge Greece into line with its European partners has been botched and turned into a polarizing question of Greek sovereignty vis-à-vis Europe.

The situation in Greece, of course, has its own history as well, and that is the subject of next week's installment of this update on the Vlachs.

Arumanians: A Second Look

Update on Greece: To Be or Not to Be

The GreekAmerican, September 9, 1989

As I have noted, Vlach culture began to revive internationally around 1980. The revival seems to have begun in the diaspora and was signaled by the appearance of periodicals and cassettes in Vlach. Though these were published in Western Europe and America, their target was the vital core of Vlachs still in the homeland of Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly, and Thrace; the only hope of truly reviving the culture would be to fire up this nucleus and expand outward from there. The *hamartia* or tragic flaw of all the Vlach periodicals in the West was present right from the start: a poorly thought-out yet uncompromising devotion to Latinism (replacement of Greek neologisms with Latin, use of a Latin alphabet, belief in a Latin - or at least a purely non-Greek - "racial" origin).

The early periodicals (*Frandza Vlaha*, which is still published but rarely taken seriously, and *Tra Armanami*) simply adopted the Rumanian alphabet used by the prewar pro-Rumanian movement, while *Zborlu a Nostru*, which seems to have supplanted *Tra Armanami* in the last 5 years, had the sense to recognize that the old pro-Rumanian movement was now so universally detested and repudiated by Greek Vlachs that any use of the Rumanian alphabet would be suicidal. The small group behind *Zborlu a Nostru*, the Union for Arumanian Language and Culture (ULCA), decided to create its own alphabet in order to get around this problem and yet at least ensure that a Latin-based alphabet was available to the Vlachs to be adopted instead of the dreaded Greek.

At any rate, despite these periodicals being published in an alphabet understood only by a limited number of Greek Vlachs - many of whom have never even seen Vlach written and hardly

believe it can be done - *some* Vlachs in Greece were obviously able to understand them as there was a strong positive response and then a reaction.

There is a long history behind this reaction, and it centers on the bitter hatreds created during Greece's bloody struggle for Macedonia between 1893 and 1913. Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos came to power in the wake of that guerilla war and brought a certain maturity to Greek statecraft; he welcomed anyone who felt himself part of the Greek nation, but he was capable of being quite reasonable about those who wished to remain outside the Greek national consensus. Venizelos formally acknowledged (in 1913) the right of the Rumanian government to maintain schools and churches in Greek Macedonia to preserve the culture of the Vlach minority, and he honored this agreement as long as he was in government; but with the fascist Metaxas regime came repression and a revival of xenophobia. Because of the Greek Communist Party's equivocation between 1924 and 1935 concerning an independent, communist Macedonia, any manifestation of non-Greek identity, especially in Macedonia (where ethnic Greeks may even have been a minority before the region was colonized with Asia Minor refugees), came to be equated with communism, national disloyalty, and a so-called "Slavophile" attitude. Such sentiments were greatly exacerbated, obviously, during the Greek Civil War; my mother (who has been strongly anti-communist all her life) tells me that when ELAS forces came through the mountain villages, they encouraged people to speak Vlach and defended their right to do so, while the nationalist army brutally repressed the use of the language. Further, in 1949 the Greek communists returned to their earlier advocacy of an autonomous Macedonia, cementing the equation "communism equals national disloyalty equals any admission of a non-Greek ethnic identity in Macedonia equals Slavophilism."

In between these two communist-oriented episodes came the outrageous fascist misadventure of Alcibiades Diamantis, a Vlach opportunist from the well-known village of Samarina. After leaning toward the Rumanian movement for a while, Diamantis noticed Mussolini's growing power and conceived the plan of an autonomous Vlach homeland in Thessaly, Epirus, and Macedonia under Italian sponsorship and protection. He acquired a small following of fanatical nationalists (mostly recruited from the pro-Rumanian movement) and Vlach brigands and ne'er-do-wells when the Occupation began and created a flimsy "Principality of the Pindus" with himself as Prince; his strongmen called themselves "Roman Legions." These opportunists went about their disgusting business roughing up both Greeks and Arumanians who wouldn't cooperate in their plans to dominate the local political and economic structures. Besides the strictly human damage done, this movement caused

Besides the surely human damage done, this movement caused tremendous local ill will against *any* future Arumanian assertion of a separate ethnicity (a state of affairs that has lasted into the 1980s). Thankfully, most Vlachs (both pro-Greek and pro-Rumanian) resisted those fascists, and Rumania managed to undo the movement by getting Diamantis to that country and keeping him there - but only because it had realized that Diamantis favored Italy over Rumania as the power to dominate the Vlachs. (Unfortunately, to this day the only reliable source we have on the Diamantis escapade is *The Political Aspect of the Koutsovlach Question*, a 1948 monograph in Greek by Evangelos Averoff, Greek conservative party leader and patron of the conservative Greek Vlachs; recent evidence seems to indicate that this fascistic movement was neither as large nor as ferocious as its adversary Averoff portrayed it, but the entire episode still awaits an impartial, patient scholar.) Diamantis was not alone in antagonizing Greeks to Vlach nationalism; I have heard of a town or two where pro-Rumanian Vlach delegations welcomed the Nazi officers of the occupation (Rumania was Germany's ally).

The war of resistance and the Greek Civil War were fought largely in the Vlach regions, devastating scores of villages, disrupting the economy, and destroying the delicate web of traditional life. Massive migrations of Vlachs whom the Greek nation had not yet been able to assimilate had already occurred in two phases: 1900-20, to America, and 1920-40, to Rumania. After the war, it looked as if the Vlach population might never recover, and anyway, people were too busy just trying to survive from one day to the next - there was no time for such luxuries as cultural renewal until the prosperity of post-junta Greece.

This, then, was the context into which the diaspora periodicals were injected around 1980; with this background sketched, one can easily understand both why the ULCA felt it had to distance itself from the Rumanians by creating a new alphabet and why there was bound to be a reaction in Greece sooner or later to *any* sort of Vlach ethnic revival.

The reaction, however, came too late to check the revived cultural pride of the Greek Vlachs and so the response in Greece was bifurcated: On the one hand there was the Greek faction of conservative Vlachs, which had been fighting an imaginary "Communist-Slavophile-Rumanizing" enemy since the war and was all too pleased to take on a real one again; on the other hand there was the new generation of progressive Greek Vlachs, which had just tasted true Western democracy for the first time and liked it. The former group long ago expected that Vlach culture had been laid to rest for good and was actually quite shocked to see that culture revived - this delayed its response to that revival. The latter group, however, was stimulated by the revival - "Indeed," it seems to have

asked itself, "why *not* celebrate Vlach culture?" – and suddenly, village by village, activist Vlach cultural groups and periodicals began to appear. Soon they organized themselves as the Pan-Hellenic Vlach Cultural Society

(PEPSB) and in 1984 they started what has become an annual summer mountain festival celebrating Vlach culture.

This was a radical step in a society so conditioned to perceive assertions of a non-Greek ethnic identity as somehow "unpatriotic," as if ethnicity were the same thing as loyalty to a certain state or government. In the years since then, the PEPSB has grown and has elicited the participation of an increasing number of Vlach villages and societies in Greece. It soon came under heavy attack from the conservative Greek Vlachs; specifically, Mr. Averoff wrote a scathing letter to the principals of the PEPSB which asked that they discontinue their efforts - after all, their assertion of a Vlach identity was necessarily, by its very definition, a non-assertion of a Greek identity and as such is somewhat threatening to a conservative politician like Averoff. (Besides his genuine concern for the Greek nation, Mr. Averoff may fear that Greek voters, if they are informed enough about the Vlachs, may come to perceive him and other Vlachs as non-Greek outsiders of dubious loyalty - an unfair charge, to be sure, but a legitimate fear nevertheless.)

In other words, prescient statesman that he is, Averoff saw that the Vlachs themselves were for the first time on the verge of shattering their own creation-myth and stepping out of their camouflage. Not having had their own state, they have happily thrown in their lot with Greece, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Albania while asserting in typical nomadic mountaineer style that they are "the oldest and purest" members of each of those nations. Now, for the first time in their history, they were asserting they belonged to a separate group and Averoff - one must give him credit - had the foresight to see that this would sooner or later definitely rob the Greek Vlachs of their ritual assertion that they are "the oldest Greeks." (*Of course* it is a meaningless assertion in the first place, *of course* it is the habit of pastoral mountaineers the world over to assert a fictitious purity of blood ancestry, *of course* we in the West see this in an instant - but the situation in Greece has been such that the Vlachs have been somewhat successful in either hiding their Vlach identity or getting Greeks not to question the Vlachs' alleged "Greek racial purity" too closely.)

The remarkable nature of the achievement of the new generation of Greek Vlachs is especially evident when one considers that the Vlachs in America did not even have to come up against such a strong origin-myth (who would ever believe that the Vlachs are "the oldest and purest Americans"?), yet they have been slower than the Greek Vlachs to turn to their cultural roots with pride and to

than the Greek Vlachs to turn to their cultural roots with pride and to seek nourishment, self-understanding, and lasting values there. That the Americans have picked up in recent years may even have much to do with the stimulus from Greece; we'll examine this question in more detail next week.

One could have predicted, then, that Mr. Averoff and his faction would attack the new generation of Greek Vlachs. What came as more of a surprise to some was the attack by the conservative pro-Rumanian and Latinizing Vlachs. One might have expected that when these old-time Vlach nationalists saw the Vlachs in Greece actually taking steps to revive the culture, the former would have fallen to their knees and thanked the Good Lord for His kindness; unfortunately, one would have been wrong. Their response was at best lukewarm, at worst a ringing assault on the new Vlach generation in Greece for publishing periodicals in Greek and for using the Greek alphabet even when writing a few words in Vlach. This response, as I have tried to explain, is not difficult to comprehend if one keeps in mind the *raison d'etre* I postulated for the ULCA: *not* "to keep Vlach culture and language alive at any cost" but rather "to keep Vlach culture and language alive only if it is Latin, not Greek." Thus the ULCA has alienated what was potentially its own greatest resource, the new generation in Greece.

Vlach Activism in Greece

One of the odd details of Vlach history is that a great deal of the ethnic activism among the Vlachs for the last 200 years has centered on the tiny hamlet of Avdhella in the Pindus Mountains. Some of the most famous Vlach scholars (Tache and Pericles Papahagi), cultural innovators (the cinematographers Milton and Ianaki Manakia), and nationalist leaders (Apostol Margariti, now execrated as the founder of the Rumanian nationalist movement) have come from Avdhella, and it has always been known for its ethnic pride (I suppose I carry on this tradition in a way; my mother is from Avdhella). The Vlach revival in Greece and the PEPSB were initiated by the Vlach society of Verria, but the Verria Vlach community is descended from a group of *Avdhelliatsi* who fled from a Turkish reprisal a century and a half ago.

Not only is Avdhella at the forefront of the Vlach revival through the Verria Vlachs, it has itself been a champion of that revival through its own society, which began to issue an informed and intelligent newspaper, *I Avdhella*, in 1984. Almost from the outset, *I Avdhella* has been attacked by the *hyperhellenes* and *superromani* as "not Greek enough" and "too Greek," respectively. *I Avdhella* is produced by members of the postwar generation and represents a progressive view; it has tried to steer its own course between pro-Rumanian and Latinizing Vlachs of the right and pro-

Greek and Hellenizing Vlachs of the right, but predictably it has stumbled upon the inherent contradiction all Greek Vlachs interested in their ethnicity must face sooner or later: that their ethnicity has significance only insofar as it is *not* Greek. (If there is no difference between Greek and Vlach ethnicity - as, for example, is asserted regarding Pontic, Cypriot, and Greek ethnicity - then there is no logic whatsoever to asserting Vlach ethnicity, and it will just be subsumed to Greek and swallowed up as Pontic and Cypriot ethnicity have been for so long.)

The PEPSB, of course, is facing the same dilemma. The usual solution for the Vlachs, no matter which national society they find themselves in, is to assert the mountain tribesman's claim to a "pure blood ancestry" - in this case, to the ancient Greeks. Of course this is nonsense, as are the assertions of the pro-Rumanians and Latinizers that the Vlachs are "pure-blooded Romans," of the Albanian Vlachs that they are "pure Illyrians," of the Yugoslav Vlachs that they are of "pure Thracian" ancestry, etc. All of it is nonsense - in fact, as we know today, *any* person's claim to "racial purity" has no better than a fifty-fifty chance of accuracy - but such old ideas die hard in the Balkans, even among scholars, despite the grisly disrepute all such theories suffered after Hitler attempted to put them into practice. One Greek-Vlach scholar in Athens, Achilleas Lazarou, has attempted to revive the old prewar "racial" theory that the Vlachs are somehow biologically Greek. This linguist has almost single-handedly created a stalemate for the Vlach cultural revival in Greece; it is little reassurance that he will probably be the last Greek scholar ever to assert a "racial" link between antiquity and the present, for if the Vlachs' deadlock is not broken soon, this revival, too, will die down and the Vlachs will in all likelihood not get another chance.

There are signs that Mr. Lazarou's hold on the Vlach postwar generation is loosening and may soon be rendered powerless. His book, *Arumanian and Its Ties with Greek*, was not warmly received in the international academic community. As impressive as his linguistic research may be, the mere fact that he tries to marshal it as evidence to prove that the Vlachs are somehow biological Greeks who happen merely to speak a Latin-infused dialect is "Balkan" enough to cause most Western scholars to steer clear of the book. Even some of Mr. Lazarou's own colleagues in Greece, who also see the folly in any "racial" argument, have taken pot shots at the book.

Nevertheless, many Vlachs were apparently still in Mr. Lazarou's thrall until only recently, when he finally went too far in trying to ingratiate the Vlachs to the still-nationalistic Greek academic community and caused a good number of Greek Vlachs to break with him: He actually tried to assert - in a journal, *Ipirotiki Imerolovia*, that is of poor repute among scholars - that the Vlachs

had no folk-songs of their own that were not the result of the Rumanian movement, i.e., that the Vlachs were always bilingual ("biological" Greeks who happen to have also spoken a Latin patois for 2,000 years but were now at last shedding it) and always sang their songs in Greek.

This will likely be Mr. Lazarou's own swan-song, for two very good reasons that *every* Vlach knows whether he or she has had one year of education or twenty 1) the Vlachs have a rather large repertory of folk-songs in Vlach from before and after the Rumanian movement, in pro-Greek and pro-Rumanian villages alike; and 2) almost every Vlach community still has a few old-timers around who can speak no language but Vlach - far from "bilingual in Greek and Vlach," most Vlachs throughout recorded history have been either monolingual or bilingual in Vlach and the neighboring idiom, be it Greek or Albanian or Serbo-Croatian or Macedonian Slavic. In fact, as recently as 1860, a Greek doctor required an interpreter in Metsovo, the most pro-Greek of Vlach villages, and even today, when the great majority of Vlachs lives in Greece and has learned Greek, most of the rest of the Vlachs around the world know next to nothing of Greek.

Thus Lazarou's assertion not only insulted the Vlachs in Greece, it was easily disproven without a huge scholarly apparatus and Mr. Lazarou now stands devastatingly discredited. (Some wits are saying that Achilleas has shot *himself* in the heel this time.) *I Avdhella*, as usual, has been in the vanguard of this debate, and its writers soundly thrashed Mr. Lazarou for what they perceived as a betrayal of their cause. Mr. Lazarou's response has been to attempt to rest on his academic laurels - as if the mere fact of his having a PhD or having attended 3 lectures by Zakynthinos could make his assertions about Vlach folk-songs true - and to imply that his critics are "Rumanizers" or "foreign agents."

Unfortunately, Mr. Lazarou's ideas concerning the Greek "racial" purity of the Vlachs were not unique to him - they are, as I have noted, a generic part of our mountain-clan culture - and so such ideas have persisted, all the more so because they seem to solve the Greek Vlachs' dilemma: to try to prove they are Greek even as they assert an ethnicity that is not quite Greek. It is only by the most dazzling sort of Balkan hocus-pocus that the legend that "the Vlachs are the oldest Greeks" has been kept alive. Of course, it does have a shred of legitimacy, and this probably accounts for its staying power: Once upon a time, from roughly 100 BC to AD 600, the Vlachs and the Greeks together were cast in the die of the same Eastern Roman (Byzantine, Orthodox) culture. Late in this period, the Roman element lost predominance to the Greek, and soon the Roman population of Byzantium went almost completely out of the control

of the central government. But the most basic features of the Greco-Roman culture shared by Vlachs and Greeks continued, were imparted to the Slavs, and survived the Ottoman conquest. This explains the strong natural attraction the modern Greek state has held for the majority of Vlachs, despite the fact that linguistically the Vlachs and Greeks are far apart while the Vlachs and Rumanians are quite close - the Rumanians long ago attempted to turn away from the Byzantine ideal to one that is Western, while the Vlachs and Greeks stayed rather more true to the Byzantine cultural ideal. This makes modern Greece the natural home of the Vlachs, and it is no wonder so many of them have been happy to live and die in and for Greece.

Even after two centuries of Greek nation-building and assimilation of the Vlachs, however, many clear differences remain between the two cultures; these differences are the root of the Greek Vlachs' dilemma between wanting to be Greek and yet also wanting to be Vlach, and thus far no one has been willing to take any kind of bold step in order to break the deadlock. A good example of this deadlock is the PEPSB's attempt at a periodical, *Ta Nea ton Vlachon*; the first issue struck a militantly pro-Greek and xenophobic posture while at the same time attempting to assert an ethnicity that is not quite Greek. (If you find this confusing, remember one thing: so do they.) The next thing was...there *was* no next issue, to my knowledge - they just don't know what to say and are apparently still thinking about it. (Mr. Lazarou's shadow may in fact be evident here, too, for he has insinuated himself into the PEPSB.)

We who are outside the immediate situation can see - as can Mr. Averoff, with a statesman's experience behind him - that only two directions remain for the Greek Vlachs: either back off the ethnic revival completely and let Vlach culture die "naturally" or go all the way and admit that Vlach ethnicity is not exactly the same as Greek ethnicity, though the two are closely related. It is as if these Vlachs boarded a train not knowing its final destination; once they find out, they can either jump off the train or, if the destination is not so bad, they can go with it. Either way, there is no going back.

There are signs that some of the Greek Vlachs recognize the tough choice they are facing and are ready for a breakthrough. The latest issue of *I Avdhella*, for instance, acknowledges at long last that the Freiburg group has managed to retain the initiative and is now pressuring the Greek government through the Council of Europe, whose "European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages" was signed by Greece. The proposed solution? That the Greek Vlachs recapture the initiative by acting to save the Vlach language on their *own* terms before they are forced to do the same thing on Freiburg's (or Europe's) terms.

Arumanians: A Second Look

Update on America:

A Community Suspended in Time and Space

The GreekAmerican, September 16, 1989

The Vlach community in America is both unique and quite strange. It is unique in that it represents a group of Vlachs who left the multinational Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century, before they could be thoroughly Hellenized or Rumanized or Slavicized or what-have-you; it is a community suspended in time. It is strange for the same reason: its relatives, friends, and compatriots who remained in the old country have since become more or less Hellenized, Rumanized, Slavicized, etc., leaving no modern Vlach culture for the American community to turn back to as needed for its own growth or that of its children; it is a community suspended in space, too. In the past, its only intellectuals have been Rumanian-educated and thus committed to that nation; nevertheless, the community itself has always clearly differentiated itself from the Rumanians proper. It is a community that came directly out of the mountains and into American culture without a heavy overlay of Greek or Rumanian culture to shape that experience. This has left it a more authentic community, if a less sophisticated one. Let me explain:

The Vlachs are pastoral-nomadic mountaineers who have lived a fairly self-sufficient lifestyle at least since the Roman conquest. No civilization penetrated their mountains in the 2,000 years after Rome; civilization is, to paraphrase the French historian Braudel, a phenomenon of the lowlands - coastal cities and plains - and only rarely had it penetrated *any* mountains before the 20th century. Later Byzantium was either unable or did not care to change the Vlachs' lifestyle, and their collaboration with the Ottoman conquest and their service as mercenaries for the Turks gained them privileges and a certain autonomy that allowed them to continue their ancient lifestyle uninterrupted until the turn of this century.

To be sure, not all Vlachs remained shepherds, muleteers, bandits, and soldiers until then; their wide travels put them in contact with the West and many of them became merchants and traders and grew wealthy. As the need for literacy arose, they were drawn by the enormous cultural weight of Greek civilization; thus, as Vlachs over the last three centuries made their way out of the mountains and into civilization, they learned the Greek language as a medium to that civilization and others. There were no Latin or Vlach schools or churches since Latin culture had receded in sixth-century Byzantium.

By 1900 a good part of the southern Vlach population had come into contact with Greek civilization in one way or another, and many of the men among them had become bilingual. But the

many of the men among them had become bilingual. But the northern Vlach population, surrounded by Albanians and Slavs, retained a pastoral lifestyle into the twentieth century and those few of them who did come out of the mountains learned Albanian, Turkish, and/or Macedonian Slavic, not Greek. Thus when the pro-Rumanian movement began (in the late 1800s), it did not in these areas have to compete with modern Greek culture, which had hardly touched these Vlachs. For this reason, the Rumanian movement had greater success in the north.

When the Greek government decided to use force against the pro-Bulgarian movement - its main competitor for northern territory - it also made the unfortunate decision to use violence against the unarmed pro-Rumanian Vlachs in order to eliminate what the Greeks perceived as another potential threat to their domination of Macedonia. This is one of the uglier episodes in Greek history, and the murders, hangings, and arson of those days poisoned the attitude of these Vlachs toward Greeks in general.

The American Vlach community is largely made up of those who between 1900-20 fled this violence and/or the looming possibility of Ottoman or Greek conscription; most came from a tribe known as the *Farsharotsi* whose members lived in a group of villages centering on the town of Korce (Korytsa in Greek), now in Albania. There were in fact at least three large northern tribes that had escaped Hellenization because they had remained in the mountains in their traditional lifestyle right into the twentieth century: the *Farsharotsi* (named after the town of Frashari in Albania, which may have been their focal point before Korce), the group that forms the nucleus of the American Vlach community; the *Mizukiari* (named after the region of Mizukia in Albania), who were already somewhat Albanized by 1900 and who have a community in Southbridge, Mass.; and the *Gramushteani* (named after Mt. Grammos, their focal point), who seem to have formed the core of the 1920-40 migration to Rumania - in fact, the Freiburg Vlachs are *Gramushteani*, and the American office of the ULCA is called "The Gramostea Foundation."

The main Vlach society in America, the Society "Farsarotul," was founded in 1903. With World War I and the demise of the Ottoman Empire, however, the community lost its focal point in Europe and has since been cut off from the old country; at the same time, newcomers have tended to see themselves more as Greeks, Albanians, Yugoslavs, or Rumanians than as Vlachs, so the community has stagnated. Further, innate Vlach conservatism has kept the community frozen in its ways and prevented it from making any allowance for a modern type of Vlach culture that might have some sort of appeal for the youth. Our forefathers did not quite grasp what they were getting themselves into in America until it was too

late; some of them returned to the old country, but most of the rest stayed and stubbornly tried to re-create the old country here.

Even the handful of intellectuals is extraordinarily conservative, wishing to return to the "good old days" of authoritarian patriarchy and to an imagined past of omnipotence as an ethnic group. In fact, the intellectuals can be far worse than the merely uneducated, and this applies loosely to several Eastern and Central European generations that came of age between 1870-1940; the societies from which these students came had not yet modernized, yet they were given modern, liberal educations and many of them reacted violently to their newfound feelings of alienation and rootlessness. Their ties to their villages, communities, and religion partly dissolved, they often became the most zealous advocates of the new loyalty to which they had converted: nationalism. These young students were radicalized and became a cornerstone of the fascist movement that swept across Europe and threatened to engulf the entire world between 1920-45.

I have a good friend, an American-born Vlach who fought in the U.S. Army in World War II and helped liberate concentration camps and then worked for the government for many years - he has a Ph.D. and is multilingual. He has had much experience with this particular generation of Central and East European intellectuals and has warned me that they are a "marked generation" which saw the traditional order disappear from Europe in the first half of the century and couldn't stand it. Many are still trying desperately to restore it and the security it held for them - one of their symptoms is that no matter where they are, they do not feel at home (e.g., they refuse to become Americans). Their home exists only in their imagination; nevertheless, they will stop at nothing to get there. A sad situation indeed. These people are not fun to be around, and their fist-pounding brand of ethnomania has alienated the youth of many an ethnic group - Greek readers, too, will recognize the type.

At any rate, due to a combination of the factors outlined above, the Vlach American community and the Society "Farsarotul" itself were clearly moribund by the early 1980s. Around 1985, however, both community and Society suddenly began to revive. In terms of the Society, the older generation had held out against the younger, more progressive generation for as long as it could and then simply collapsed; the new generation took over in 1985 and has made encouraging progress in reviving the community through annual dances, a semi-annual Newsletter of some quality, and other activities designed to bridge the gap between old and new cultures.

Since this is an educated generation, the old intellectuals (led by Dr. Aurel Ciufecu) have lost their monopoly of power and have retreated into other activities more to their liking. Chief among these have been the "Congresses of Macedono-Romanian Culture" held in

have seen the "Congresses of Macedonian-Romanian Culture" held in 1986 and 1987 at Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport, CT.

These "Congresses" are the last stronghold of the extremely conservative older generation of pro-Rumanian Vlachs in America. They purport to be "scholarly" but in fact they are enormously biased; like their counterparts in Germany, they also pretend to represent the Vlachs of their region and thus consider themselves empowered to take votes on questions of language and culture, etc. In reality, of course, they represent no one but themselves - a tiny constituency of pro-Rumanian Vlachs which has thus far managed to exclude American Vlachs (by rarely using English and by convening on Labor Day Weekend, a major holiday in America), Greek Vlachs (by vilifying them, Greece, and the Greek Church), and all other Vlach constituencies besides its own.

These gatherings have been as extraordinarily unsuccessful in drawing a broad cross-section of Vlachs of all ages and political persuasions as the "Congresses" in Germany. It may in fact be fortunate that so few people have become involved, for they would only have become alienated by the experience. Here is how I described the "Congresses" in a recent issue of *The Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul*:

"I went not long ago to a function which was billed as a "scholarly discussion" about our people. Most of the people there were not scholars. Of those who were, most did not make a presentation in their own field. Of those who made presentations, most were in Rumanian, not in Arumanian or in English. A few ethnic slurs and threats of armed violence were made. When time came for discussion, there were shouting matches instead of civilized dialogue; there was breast-beating instead of critical understanding of others' views; there was finger-pointing instead of serious group-wide self-examination and reflection. It was a mess, chaos.

"And this is supposed to attract and excite our generation? In 1988? I think I would have enjoyed a 3-day weekend in Tehran more than this. I can't tell you how embarrassed I was nor how hopeless I felt about our future as an ethnic group. There were almost no other young people there besides me and the two people I dragged along - the average age was high enough that help was often needed in negotiating the steps to people's seats. Who had made the wiser choice, I or the hundreds of our youth who stayed home or went to the beach? I think maybe they had."

I have made it a point to sit through and suffer these "Congresses" because I feel it is important that *someone* outside of their circle witness the goings-on and record them; this makes for a modicum of accountability. There is no other way to influence these people, for most of their opinions were cast in steel long ago and simply cannot

be changed. (We Vlachs have countless jokes about our own stubbornness.) I refuse to participate formally, however, until the "Congresses" are on a more academic footing. Far from scholarly, these "Congresses" are more aptly labeled "liturgies" for they do not seek an open mind, they seek a stronger belief and they preach hellfire and brimstone in order to achieve it. As minority group members who have refused to assimilate, they are separatists and can be extraordinarily righteous.

At the end of the 1987 Congress, I offered a parable to try to illustrate how the principals of the "Congress" were *themselves* reducing their own potential constituency. I told them of the Puritans who left England in the seventeenth century and of their problem of separatism: First they went to Holland to get away from the Church of England, but that wasn't pure enough for them - they felt they needed an entirely new land, a pristine place where they could start all over again. They came to America but even their own colonies were not pure enough for some of them. One Puritan minister, Roger Williams, got to the point where he felt the community was so tainted (by the mere fact of its unsevered connection with the Church of England) that he could only commune with his own congregation - soon, the single person pure enough to commune with him was his wife. Only at this point did Williams realize he'd gone too far; he then adopted a more realistic attitude.

The Vlach community in America has much in common with the Puritans. Facing persecution, assimilation, and other threats to their close-knit community in the old country, they came here seeking refuge. Coincidentally, they also tried to start anew in New England - they actually tried to re-create their Balkan village communities within modern urban America. Their leaders have told them they are holier than their compatriots who have become connected to Greek, Albanian, Slavic, or American culture; this moralization of culture has put the saints on a course of endless separation from the rest and has led to an atomization of the community. *But these leaders have not the slightest idea that they might have destroyed the community by turning more and more people away through their righteousness and inflexibility*; they insist that they are doing precisely the opposite, trying to save the community and preserve its purity. My parable was lost on them.

A historian of the Puritans, Edmund S. Morgan, speaks across the centuries in his book, *The Puritan Dilemma*: "Every age has its own separatists. They are the intransigents, the undeviating purists who have to be right whatever the cost, who would sacrifice the world rather than compromise their own righteousness." The Puritans had to take strong measures to root out the extreme separatist tendencies among them; fortunately or not, we have no such recourse today and so must use other means to persuade these

people to try another approach.

In point of fact, despite their eruptions of violent hatred and their chaotic, unintellectual atmosphere, the American Congresses," like those in Germany, are relatively harmless as they consist mostly of the same people saying the same things to each other year after year. Ironically, the only ones who take the pro-Rumanian conservative Vlachs seriously are the pro-Greek conservative Vlachs, and the two groups just keep vilifying each other ritually - I have a theory that one group could not exist without the other. For example: A few years ago, a kooky and reactionary Greek newspaper named *Stochos* printed a prominent notice which read,

THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS.

Greek Patriot: Forbid on the road, in the coffee-shop, at your job, beside you, EVERYWHERE, the speaking of "Vlach," "Macedonian," etc. Tear up all such printed material that comes to your attention. Use EVERY MEANS so that the conscious and unconscious agents of foreigners who utilize these "linguistic" concoctions understand that THIS IS GREECE and that there is room only FOR THE GREEK LANGUAGE. Smash HOWEVER YOU CAN the plans of the enemies of the Nation. THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS.

This got the pro-Rumanians' blood boiling, and they constantly reprinted this silly extremist statement from Greece's small lunatic fringe as proof of anti-Vlach discrimination in Greece as if it represented the mainstream of Greek opinion! (Sometimes I think that the *superromani* really wish it did represent Greek public opinion; in this they are much like American Hawks who have been robbed of their beloved Cold War by Gorbachev.) *Stochos*, obviously delighted with all the attention, next obtained the Congresses' logo (complete with Latin mottoes which echo the antiparliamentarian attitude of the 1930s by seeming to advocate action more than scholarly pursuits) and reprinted them under the headline, "WE WILL CUT OFF THE LEGS OF THOSE WHO FOMENT THE KUTSOVLACH QUESTION." This then supercharged the *superromani* a second time, and so it goes, back and forth, more and more exciting and violent thrills being exchanged between sad old men on both sides.

The Anarchy of the Intellectuals

Following is a reproduction and translation of the announcement I received concerning the "Third Congress of Macedonian-Romanian Culture." It is written not in Vlach but in a new Rumanianized language invented by the writers - a continuation of the linguistic anarchy they have created. The words that are actually in use in Vlach are shown bold.

Avem onoarea s'va anuntam ca al III-lea Congres di Cultura	We have the honor of announcing to you that the Third Congress
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<p>Aromana (Vlaha), patronat di Ethnic Studies Center, Sacred Heart University, Bridgeport, CT, va s'aiba loc dila 1 pana la 4 septembrie, 1989.</p>	<p>of Arumanian (Vlach) Culture, hosted by the Ethnic Studies Center, Sacred Heart University, Bridgeport, CT, will take place from 1-4 September 1989.</p>
<p>Congresu ari ca scop: prezentarea di lucrari, tu un forum national, iu si s'disbata cu idei academic, cum s'na pastram di aoa s'ninti limba si cultura a noastra.</p>	<p>The Congress has as its scope: the presentation of works, in a national forum, and discussion of academic ideas on how we can preserve our language and culture now and in the future.</p>
<p>Programu va s'aiba sesiuni di interes general, di specialisti ca si activitati artistico culturale.</p>	<p>The program will have sessions of general interest, of specialists as well as artistic and cultural activities.</p>
<p>Persoanili ci vor s'faca comunicari s'na pitreaca titlu si un rezumat pana la 1 iulie, 1989; prezentarea orală easti limitata la 20 minuti ti una lucrari. Limbili oficiali a Congresui sant: Aromana (Vlaha), Engleza, Romana.</p>	<p>Persons who wish to make presentations should send us the title and an abstract before 1 July 1989; the oral presentation is limited to 20 minutes for one work. The official languages of the Congress are: Arumanian (Vlach), English, Rumanian.</p>
<p>Ti alti informatiuni in legatura cu Congresu, luati contact cu: Prof. John L. Mahar, Director, Ethnic Studies Center Tel. (203) 371-7945.</p>	<p>For more information regarding the Congress, get in touch with: Prof. Aureliu D. Ciufecu, President, C.M.R. Congress Tel. (203) 371-8743</p>

It is a source of endless wonder that these American "Congresses" haven't folded up yet, and the answer is complex. The prime reason, I would say, is that a lot of interest still does exist in the world concerning the Vlach question, and so on each occasion the committee that organizes the "Congresses" has been able to garner a few participants. Most just send in their papers and do not actually present them, but at least the issue is kept alive and a focal point provided for the discussion. Another important factor has been the burgeoning population of Vlach refugees from Rumania. There is a bit of a story behind this, too.

When U.S. immigration laws were restricted after 1920, those Vlachs who were still not won over to the Greek, Albanian, or Serbian national ideas and who wished to emigrate were given an apparently viable alternative by the Rumanian government, which had won an enormous amount of territory in the Second Balkan War and World War I. The government needed to settle ethnic Rumanians alongside the significant Hungarian population of Transylvania and the Bulgarian population of the north Dobruja. The Rumanian

the Bulgarian population of the southern Dobrudja. The Rumanians offered the Vlachs large tracts of land in southern Dobrudja; northern Vlachs particularly responded and colonized the area in force, but in 1940 when Rumania returned that region to Bulgaria many of these Vlachs lost everything they had.

This period also marked the heyday of the Rumanian fascist Iron Guard and a large number of Vlachs now joined that group and formed one of its most radical and violent wings. They felt abused and manipulated by the Liberal government, which lacked a strong commitment to retaining southern Dobrudja. Several prominent politicians, including one Liberal prime minister, were assassinated by death squads which often included Vlachs.

Most of the Vlach colonists were eventually resettled in northern Dobrudja, the beautiful Black Sea coastal region (centering on the port city of Constantza) which has remained part of Rumania. The area is thus dotted with re-created Vlach villages of *Farsharotsi*, *Gramushteani*, and Bulgarian Vlachs known as *Chippani* (many Vlachs from Greece also resettled in Rumania but have tended to live in cities, not villages). Though one absolutely must not trust such figures, some of the Vlachs in the area boast that they number 80,000 in northern Dobrudja alone. If this is anywhere near the truth, it is potentially of huge significance as it would far outnumber the Vlach population in Greece (estimated at 30,000 by the latest scholar to study the question, Tom Winnifrith). In other words, a new center of gravity of Vlach culture may exist in the communities transplanted into Dobrudja; if so, this group (and not the Greek Vlachs) may end up setting the direction for the Vlachs in terms of language and culture. This remains to be seen.

The dreadful circumstances of life in Rumania under Ceausescu have caused a number of Vlachs to emigrate to America in recent years, and it is these Rumanian Vlachs who have formed a new constituency for the old intellectuals and their "Congresses." Naturally conservative and often militantly nationalistic, they can be very passionate in their declarations concerning the Vlachs - though few of them have studied any other point of view besides the party line of the pro-Rumanians, and almost none of them has actually set foot in northern Greece.

The Balkan migrations to America in the postwar period have had their up and down sides. On the up side, we here have been somewhat reconnected to our culture and reinfused with a bit of its spirit (I qualify these statements intentionally, because the refugees are rather Rumanianized by now and so they do not bring us our authentic culture but rather a mixture of Rumanian and Vlach culture, just as emigres from Greece bring a mixed Greek and Vlach culture). On the down side, after we have finally taken two steps forward into modernity here in our new land, the newcomers tend to

insist that we take three steps back. It is the same in the Church, as Greeks have also experienced: where not long ago we seemed on the verge of services in English and other such adaptations, the recent emigres have set the clock back indefinitely and the Church has strangely been willing to sacrifice progressive, American-born generations for this.

There we stand in America at this writing: the old conservative pro-Rumanian intellectuals with their following largely made up of Vlach refugees from Rumania, and the new generation of American Vlachs who welcome modernity and yet wish to retain a link to their culture. It is a mirror image of the situation in Greece in a way - a traditional, inflexible, militantly nationalistic older generation facing a modern, flexible, pluralistic generation. There is no chance that the two older generations, the *hyperhellenes* in Greece and the *superromani* in America and Western Europe, will ever unite - they are sworn enemies and must prop each other up until the very end. But there is a realistic possibility that the two younger generations could unite, as those in Greece continue to distance themselves from the more extreme *hyperhellenes* and those here do the same with the *superromani*.

This, in my opinion, represents the Vlachs' best chance for the future. If the younger generations in both Greece and America could defeat the xenophobes among them and unite, then finally a serious and healthy approach could be taken to the question of the Vlachs' survival. Both groups would be energized by the contact - the possibilities are limitless and include the Greeks' sending representatives and cultural groups to America, the Americans' sending travel and discussion groups to Greece, the creation of an international Vlach periodical which sought to address questions of alphabet and neologisms in an impartial manner, etc. The Society "Farsarotul" has already tried to initiate such contact but a reply has apparently fallen victim to the deadlock in Greece - the Greek Vlachs are uncertain what they should say on the subject - and there the matter stands.

Arumanians: A Second Look

Conclusion: Save the Turtles, but to Hell with the Vlachs

The GreekAmerican, September 23, 1989

Despite requests from the Vlach diaspora, despite pressure from the Council of Europe, despite the editorials of Greek Vlachs, the Greek government seems paralyzed by a lack of will to preserve the Vlachs and other Greek minorities. Melina Mercouri as Minister of Culture jetted 'round the world on behalf of Greek culture; I heard her plead for the Elgin marbles many times but never heard a word in

behalf of the other cultures within Greece, the ones which have not achieved hegemony. The sadly misguided priorities of governments sometimes come to light in strange ways, as when the American administration proposes a constitutional amendment to forbid people to burn flags but not (as the Rev. Jesse Jackson noted) an amendment to forbid people to burn crosses, or when the government of Greece acts to save the loggerhead turtles of Zakynthos but not to save the Vlachs of Macedonia and Epirus. Are we that unimportant to the Greek government? Is our number now so small that that government feels it has nothing to fear if it lets us pass on?

If so, the Greek government has much to learn, for it is not solely the Vlachs who will benefit by the preservation of their culture and language - the Greeks themselves will benefit as well. In short, Greek magnanimity towards the Vlachs will pay off not just in the legitimacy it will lend Greek requests for fair treatment of Greek minorities, but in ways that may be hard to anticipate at the moment.

Europe as a Melting Pot

There is a prevalent myth that America is a "melting pot" where people of ethnic groups from all over Europe and the world are melted down into one group, the Americans. Not only have these groups retained a separate identity and culture even after several generations in America, but America was never Europe's "melting pot" - *Europe* was. Recent scholarship has focused on the process of European nation-building over the last two centuries (the classic work is Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen*), and that process has included the subsuming of minority identities within the states to the new national idea.

Greece is an outstanding example of this process. There are no reliable censuses which show minority groups in Greece - in Ottoman times or in 1989 - but it is common knowledge that if the modern Greek population could trace its ancestry, a significant portion would go back to Albanian, Slavic, and Vlach families (in addition to Greek families, of course). The Greek national idea, Hellenism, has been enormously successful in taking these other groups under its wing, and neither the assimilators nor the assimilated seem any the worse for having made such a bargain. In the earlier part of this century, Greek politicians spoke openly of the need to Hellenize the Vlachs, Albanians, and Slavs of Macedonia, and scholars - friends and foes of Greece alike - have long marveled at the remarkable ability of Hellenism to attract those three ethnic groups. In fact, the Vlachs have a problem thinking of themselves as a "minority" in Greece because they are able to rise to the highest levels in Greek society. The truth is that modern Greece has been very good to the Vlachs *as individuals, not as Vlachs*.

The process of European nation-building has been so successful that within the last two decades - again, under the influence of the American civil rights movement - our cultural ideal in the West has changed from assimilation to pluralism (though there have admittedly been problems with Islamic populations in France and Germany). It has been realized that we are fast headed towards the sterile uniformity of an international culture and that fostering ethnic and cultural diversity can save us from that fate. Greece has taken a stand to try to preserve its own culture against the incursions of that of the West; the same logic dictates that Greece should do what it can to preserve the various cultures within its borders.

Now I ask that you follow this argument closely: Either there are different cultures and different ethnic groups - Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, Finns, Vlachs, African-Americans, French, Basques, etc. - or there are not. If there are and one ethnic group differs from another, they both ought to be preserved inasmuch as is possible - this is the very meaning of "diversity."

Vlach culture and ethnic identity are different from Greek culture and identity. Not radically different, but different nonetheless, and it is in everyone's interest to preserve those differences to the best of our mutual ability. For those who are unfamiliar with the details of Vlach culture and ethnicity, I offer the following gloss of its key differences from Greek:

First and foremost, of course, is the language; though Vlach and Greek have influenced one another profoundly over the centuries, the former is a Romance language closely related to Rumanian while the latter is in a different family altogether. Next in importance is the different historical experiences of the two groups in the years before and after their common experience in the Eastern Roman Empire, from 150 BC to 600 AD. One of the facts the *hyperhellenes* are desperate to keep under the rug is the Vlachs' traditional cordial relationship with the Ottoman Turks. *The Vlachs collaborated in the Turkish conquest*, hiring themselves out as mercenaries and gaining important privileges in the bargain. There was no stigma created between the Vlachs and Turks until quite recently, and in fact the Vlach language outside of Greece still abounds in positive references to the Turks that have been purged within Greece (e.g., "Turkish coffee" retains its name, attractive women are called "as pretty as a Turkish woman," etc.).

Another key difference between Greeks and Vlachs is the traditional deep gulf (cited by the French historian Braudel, for example) between illiterate pastoral mountain culture and literate coastal seafaring civilization; each has a different world-view and different concepts of time, history, and nature. There is also the contrast cited for two millenia between Roman and Greek civilization: the former was intensely pragmatic, concerned with

functionality more than abstractions, while the latter was concerned with beauty and other abstractions more than functionality and practicality. In fact, the contrasting cultural ideals are still embedded in both languages in such clues as the word for "bad," one of the most basic concepts of any culture: the Greek word, *aschimi*, means "ugly," while the Vlach, *slaba*, means "skinny, not robust." Abstraction versus pragmatism.

Another important Greek-Roman cultural difference that has apparently continued from antiquity is the markedly better way women are regarded in Vlach culture than in Greek. Travelers visiting Greek and Vlach villages have long commented on this disparity, and the scholarly consensus is that Roman women achieved a better position in their society than Greek women in antiquity. It was not surprising to me, for example, to read that Euterpe Dukakis had been in the vanguard of Greek women in America who went away to college, encouraged by her father, because I knew that her father was Vlach and that she had grown up with his parents in the house and had taken in the cultural values and the language.

Of course, the simplest way to slice through all the "racial" and ethnic mumbo-jumbo concerning the Vlachs is to examine their own and the Greeks' ethnic designations for one another, for each has maintained a careful distinction from the other over the millenia. A Vlach styles himself *Rumanu* or *Arumanu* while referring to a Greek as *Greco* - obvious continuities from antiquity. A Greek, meanwhile, would have called himself *Hellene* in classical times, *Romios* for 2,000 years thereafter, and *Ellinas* since the 1820s or so, while using *Vlachos*, a term borrowed long ago from the Goths and Slavs, to describe a Vlach. Can there be any clearer demarcation between two groups?

It is an odd sensation to be exposing our culture like this, for if there is one thing we Vlachs are known for it is our ability to camouflage ourselves within the various national cultures in which we have found ourselves. But we might as well come out of the closet and confess right here and now that *it is a camouflage*, that as long as they do not forget their Vlach identity even the two most fanatically pro-Greek Vlachs when they get together will refer to "the Greeks" as outsiders (for more details on this interesting and fluid phenomenon, see Muriel Schein's "When Is an Ethnic Group" in issue 14 of the scholarly journal *Ethnology*, 1975).

The bottom line, for better or for worse, is that ethnic identity in the modern world is largely a matter of choice. This cuts both ways: no amount of logical argument can show a Vlach who thinks he is Greek that he is not. Nor do I particularly wish to do so; I do wish to show, however, that the two are different cultures.

The Benefits for Greek Culture, Scholarship, and Identity in Openly Seeking the Preservation of the Vlachs

I have thus far stressed the benefits of "diversity" for Greece, but these benefits are essentially abstractions - "prevention of the homogenization of culture," etc. There are many, many concrete benefits, and the last installment of my 1987 series attempted to list some of them. I'd like to continue that list now and discuss my assertion that only by taking the Vlachs and their culture seriously can Greeks hope to understand themselves and their own culture, in America as well as in Greece.

For example: A debate has been raging lately between Greek feminists, who contend that Greek women are treated shoddily, and their opponents, who contend that Greek women are not treated so badly. To be fair, the feminists seem to be winning the debate; their opponents, however, in arguing against them, bring up such examples as Euterpe Dukakis to try to prove that some Greek women were not oppressed by their fathers (she was encouraged by her father to go away to college). Now: Doesn't it make sense to include the fact that Euterpe's father was not just a Greek but a Vlach who had adopted Greece as his country? Wouldn't the argument be advanced immeasurably by considering the common observation that Vlach women have traditionally been in a better position in their society than Greek women? It might also become obvious that while Hellenization has offered Vlach *men* a better situation, it has been a bit of a misfortune for Vlach women; they might be better off if they remained Vlach.

Let's take this one step further: What is "Greek culture," after all? Has it not been considered far too monolithically so far, as if everyone between Crete, Constantinople, and Corfu had precisely the same customs, language, and world-view as has the elite of Athens? Doesn't it obliterate and obscure the many other cultures in Greece to speak so broadly of "Greek culture"? What about the Jews, the Vlachs, the Albanians, the Gypsies, the Slavs, the Turks? Aren't they part of Greece, too? If they are, then half the scholarly and lay conferences and publications over the years concerning Greece have not really been about Greece - they have been about *only a part* of Greek society. Even something so commonly assumed to be "Greek" as spinach pie (*spanakopita*) is considered by some scholars to have originated in Vlach cuisine. It is as if one took an idealized English culture - that of Margaret Thatcher or Winston Churchill or a Sussex town - and spoke of all British citizens as if they had that same culture. A far more accurate picture could be obtained by paying attention to details and noticing *differences* as well as similarities. Greek scholarship would seem to stand in need of some thoughtful

Greek scholarship would seem to stand in need of some thoughtful revision.

The clearest sign we have of a group's mentality is its language; a world-view, a whole way of thought and life is embedded in the words, phrases, and sentences of a language. If you want to understand a New Yorker's world-view, study his language. If you wish to discern a Frenchman's *mentalité*, study his language. If you want a window into the way a Vlach sizes up and approaches the world around him, study his language. Even when persons change languages they often bring old expressions and ways of thinking along with them, which last a generation or so until the individuals are assimilated completely. Moreover, a substantial number of Greek surnames and toponyms are derived from words in Vlach. How will Greeks ever recover these meanings and their history if they do not respect and begin to study Vlach, have access to Vlach dictionaries in any store, etc.? In fact, each of Greece's minorities has a unique richness it brings into the modern Greek mosaic. Why not begin to celebrate this diversity?

I stated at the outset of this series my belief that the path to a clearer Greek identity lies through the identity of the Vlachs, and I'd like to explain now what I meant by that.

Once upon a time, there was a classical Greek civilization. Three cataclysms followed in succession, however, which drastically changed that civilization forever: the Macedonian conquest, the Roman conquest, and the adoption of Christianity. A new civilization was created in the Balkans; it was Roman (called "Byzantine" by Westerners) and Orthodox. Its two main peoples, Greek- and Latin-speakers, both called themselves "Romans" for the next 2,000 years and shared many cultural traits, traits they also managed to impart to the Slavs, Albanians, and others in the Balkans. Even the conquering Ottoman Empire was influenced by this Roman Orthodox civilization.

Then 200 years ago, certain Greeks began to fancy themselves "Hellenes," members of an ancient civilization that all but disappeared 2,000 years earlier when it became fused to Roman civilization. The evidence is that these modern Greeks did not simply seek to revive the ancient culture spontaneously, on their own, but in response to Europe's predominant position in the world: Europe could free Greece of the Turks if it wanted to, but it only wanted to *if* the modern Greeks clearly were connected to the ancient Greeks.

Greek elites - including by then many Vlachs - jumped at the chance to have a state free of the Ottomans, but it was a Faustian bargain - they paid for that state with their very souls, by forsaking their 2,000-year-old Roman Orthodox (Byzantine, Romeic) civilization for one that had the long-gone classical period grafted onto it.

Greeks could eventually adopt this new version of their culture because the Greek classical period *was* legitimately a part of their history, if a remote part. But the new culture left the Vlachs out by completely ignoring the fact that Byzantine civilization had a *Roman* ancestry as much as a Greek and represented a fusion of the two cultures with Christianity as a catalyst.

Since the 1820s, Vlachs have had to swallow this affront to the legitimate history of the Byzantine civilization of which they were a part. They have had to pretend time and time again - as for example, Dimitra Liani has done recently - that Socrates and Plato are somehow *their* ancestors, too. Where at least for Greeks there is a shred of truth in calling themselves "Hellenes," for Vlachs it is almost comical.

I believe that Greek culture took an extremely artificial turn under European hegemony in the early 19th century, and that this dichotomy between the real culture, that of the *Romios*, and the specious culture, that of the *Ellinas*, accounts for much of the tension in Greek culture to this very day. The *Ellinas* is a Western-imposed cultural ideal that has diluted the true Romeic culture of Byzantium.

The survival of the Vlachs constitutes both proof of this culture and a way back to it. I only hope it is not too late to recover that culture - to do so would actually be to make modern Greece the true home of the Vlachs, not a place that forces them to pretend they are Socrates' descendants in order to gain acceptance.

I do not mean that Greece ought to go back to a "purer" culture than it has now, or that it should use Byzantium as its only model. I mean simply that Greeks should at last be able to see that their culture was cast in the same multi-national Greco-Roman mold as that of the Vlachs, and to go forward from there. Too many references to Socrates and Plato sound artificial and stilted anyway when they are coming from the children of Orthodoxy. Modern nationalism has led the Greeks to emphasize the classical period out of all proportion to its actual influence on day-to-day modern Greek life and culture. An opportunity exists in the 1980s to have a pluralistic society, to re-create the multi-nationality of earlier empires within the framework of modern nation-states. Is this not what Gorbachev seeks in the Soviet Union?

Instead of moving towards pluralism, Greece is simply staying still (at least it is not moving backwards). Greece is missing an excellent opportunity to assume the role of protector of the Vlachs, a role that has been up for grabs for some fifty years now - and if Greece doesn't take it, someone else will. In my 1987 series, I suggested a scenario wherein Greece would even investigate the status of the Vlach minority in Rumania and take steps to help those Vlachs. Such magnanimity is the hallmark of a great, mature nation.

Instead, when Vlach refugees from Rumania seek asylum in Greece they are likely to be branded "Rumanizers" and to be rejected on that basis. Why not take the opposite approach and welcome these refugees publicly, showing all Vlachs the advantages of Greece over Rumania as a protector?

As of this writing, great changes are in the making for Greece. The PASOK government of Andreas Papandreou has been repudiated at the polls, and a historic coalition of Left and Right has taken the reins of government temporarily. A conservative regime does not bode well for the Vlachs as an ethnic group; the few speeches I have heard Mitsotakis make have been peppered with too many appeals to Greek jingoism in Macedonia, "Northern Epirus," etc. But the Left might provide some leavening; Florakis himself is reputed to be a Vlach, and he might take this opportunity to see that the Greek government complies with the Council of Europe's harmless requests concerning minority languages - a traditional concern of the Left under any circumstances.

We are at another one of those historic turning points, when special opportunities blossom. I think Greece can only grow and enhance its pre-eminent claims to democracy by taking special measures to nurture the language and culture of the Vlachs, by acting as the very midwife of their transition into modernity.

Surely Greece is big enough to take on this humanitarian goal.

Or is it?

The Silencing of John Zdru

The GreekAmerican, March 10, 1990

For roughly a decade, Mr. Nacu Zdru has been publishing a periodical entitled *Frاندza Vlach* (Vlach Leaflet) and distributing it to Vlach communities throughout the world at his own expense.

Frاندza is written in Vlach, using the Romanian-based alphabet of the old pro-Romanian Vlach movement, and it usually features a poor English translation of selected items as well. Mr. Zdru himself claims not to be pro-Romanian but rather simply pro-Vlach; he says he wants to preserve the language and culture of the Vlach citizens of Greece, Yugoslavia, and other Balkan countries. He uses the Romanian-based alphabet because he does not know how to write Vlach in any other alphabet - he seems to mean no political statement by it.

In terms of the contents of *Frاندza Vlach*, there is simply not much to say beyond the fact that it is of low quality. Outlandish and exaggerated statements are routinely made - one day the Vlachs are Thracians, the next they are Bithynians, the next, Pelasgians; they once inhabited the entire Balkan Peninsula; they have the "purest blood" of all the Balkan peoples; and so on. In short, the only thing in *Frاندza Vlach* to be taken seriously is its constant call for Balkan governments to take measures to preserve the language and culture of the Vlachs.

Mr. Zdru is a native of Greece and a veteran of the Greek army who saw active duty during the Italian invasion and again during the Greek Civil War. He has kept up his ties to his village of Kedronas (in Vlach, pronounced more like "Cundrova"), and recently invested in a house there for his retirement. All of a sudden on May 23, 1989 he was summarily expelled from Greece without the benefit of even so much as a piece of paper showing the charges against him or grounds for that action. Only by inquiring at the U.S. Embassy was Mr. Zdru able to discover that his Greek citizenship had been unilaterally nullified in 1986 without his knowledge and without explanation.

Such flagrant disregard for due process of law is more characteristic of a military dictatorship than a modern democracy.

As reprehensible as I personally find some of Mr. Zdru's ideas - especially the racist notion (see the following interview of Prof. Tom Winnifrith) that the Vlachs have the "purest blood" of all in Balkans

- he has every right, in a free society, to have and to express those ideas. The question then becomes: Is Greece a free society?

The Greek government has failed to reply to Mr. Zdru's requests for an explanation. Nevertheless, this is potentially an important issue that could involve such international human rights organizations as Amnesty International and could affect Greek relations with both the United States (Mr. Zdru is an American citizen) and the rest of the world (e.g., Albania could answer Greek charges that ethnic Greeks there are not allowed to speak or publish in their own language by pointing to the silencing of Mr. Zdru in Greece). Indeed, there are strong parallels between Mr. Zdru's case and Greece's treatment of two Greek politicians of Turkish ethnicity; the expulsion of Ahmet Sadiq and Ibrahim Sherif was said by the Turkish government to have violated "the defendants' rights to a just trial and freedom of expression." The preliminary information we have concerning Mr. Zdru would lead one to believe that the very same rights have been violated in this case.

Thus, *The GreekAmerican* felt it was only fair that before it broke this major story, the Greek government should be given a chance to answer the main questions on this issue: Why was Mr. Zdru's citizenship nullified? Why was neither he nor the American State Department informed in a timely fashion? Why was he forced to leave without even the benefit of a written document explaining the reason(s) for same? And why has he not received any explanation to date?

On Monday, February 10, we put these questions to the Greek Press Office in New York; as of Tuesday, February 27, there was still no response from the Government of Greece. In the interim, the state department's report on human rights practices in Greece was submitted to Congress. (See *The GreekAmerican*, February 24, 1990. The Zdru case is cited, though not by name, in the section entitled "Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Language, or Social Status.") Unless the Greek government provides some concrete indication otherwise, the state department's conclusion stands that Mr. Zdru was expelled because of his pro-Vlach activities. We await the reply of the Government of Greece, and we reassure our readers that we will continue to report on this important story until the facts of the matter are established and publicized.

PUTTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT:
An Interview with Tom Winnifrith
The Newsletter, volume IV, Issue 2, August 1990

Following are excerpts from an interview conducted with Dr. Tom Winnifrith on April 15, 1990, during his tour to study Vlach communities in Australia and America. The interview was conducted by Nicholas Balamaci, with additional questions posed by Spiro Macris and George Moran.

N.Balamaci: Who are the Vlachs?

T.Winnifrith: The Vlachs are a Latin-speaking people in the Balkans. Their history has not been properly recorded. They are, as a people, not connected with their immediate neighbors --the Albanians, the Slavs, the Greeks. They are connected with the Romanians as fellow Latin speakers.

NB: Do you mean historically and linguistically connected?

TW: Linguistically. "Historically" is a very difficult question to answer.

NB: You said that the Vlachs are not connected with their neighbors. What did you mean by that?

TW: Their language is entirely different from Albanian, Greek, and Slavic. They have some words in common but to describe Vlach as a "dialect of Greek" -- as some people do -- is clearly wrong.

NB: How did you become interested in the Vlachs?

NB: How did you become interested in the Vlachs?

TW: I studied Latin and Greek at school and university; I've always been interested in minorities; and I am very fond of the Balkans. I think also I'm just an oddball, always supporting the underdog. One day at my university I picked up a book in French on the Vlachs and that really inspired me. I then discovered that all that I read about the Vlachs seemed wrong, and that inspired me to try to put the record straight.

NB: What makes the Vlachs an interesting study?

TW: It is a subject nobody else has really studied properly since Wace & Thompson in 1913. A lot has happened in the Balkans, and this is an opportunity to put the record straight in the face of a lot of chauvinist nationalist prejudice. Greek books on the Vlachs all take the line that the Vlachs are the descendants of Roman legionaries who married Greek wives and persuaded their wives to speak Latin. A lot of other nationalities in the Balkans tend to ignore the presence of the Vlachs. Romanian writers on the whole maintain that the Vlachs are Romanians -- though they can't explain why Romanians should leave the Danube Basin and settle on high mountains in the Pindus, many miles away from Romania.

NB: You gave a figure in your book of roughly 50,000 Vlachs remaining. Do you still stand by that number?

TW: As a rough check on this, I do know that in 1912, when Wace & Thompson gave their figure of 500,000, the district around Bitola and Mt. Pelister had 10,000 Vlachs. There are now 1,000 there, so in the Balkans, probably 50,000 isn't a bad guess. You do have to be careful in what makes a Vlach.

S.Macris: In your book, you mentioned some Vlachs who had converted to Islam and moved to Turkey. Could you speak to that?

TW: I have not been able to trace them; my guess is that they would have lost their Vlach identity. But then again, I met a young girl in the Meglen [Vlach district just north of Salonica] who had grown up in Tashkent, where she spoke Russian, Greek, and Vlach -- so Vlach is there in Russia as well as in Melbourne, and for all I know, it's probably in Turkey as well.

NB: Can I get your comments on the Nacu Zdruc case?

TW: Yes, my comments are those of The GreekAmerican -- I mean it did seem to me extraordinary that this kindly old man should have been expelled from Greece for doing nothing else except printing his opinions -- even if some of those opinions were misplaced.

G.Moran: Vlach is an undeveloped dialect; isn't it necessarily relegated to oblivion? Is there any hope for the future?

TW: I've been thinking about this quite a long time -- I think there is hope if the Vlachs communicate with each other and with the outside world, saying what they want. And what I think they want is their history recorded correctly, and they want their language recorded, if not preserved, and they want their identity -- as shown by culture

not preserved, and they want their identity -- as shown by culture, dances, wedding customs, and various other rituals -- established. They do not want any political struggle. Now, in the case of the language, we do have an example in England of a language -- Gaelic, in Scotland -- doing rather better because schools are being encouraged by the government, and people, even non-Gaelic speakers, are prepared to let their children have a go in this language. It will be very difficult to set up schools in Greece and Yugoslavia, because the governments there are strongly nationalistic. But I think with the help of the European Community, it might be possible to establish voluntary schools in Vlach in those two countries. If a language dies, attempts to revive it are almost impossible. A lot of history is embedded in Vlach, and I would regret its passing.

SM: Given the developments in Eastern Europe and Russia, we seem to be going back in time to 1914 and the Great War, where these petty, small nationalistic groups vie with each other for territory and cultural supremacy. It seems to me this is a dangerous time for the Vlachs -- I can see that if I were the President or Prime Minister of Greece, Bulgaria, or Yugoslavia I would not feel good about giving them complete freedom to express their culture and what-have-you. Must culture and language become associated with territory? Is a homeland essential to the preservation of a culture? It seems to me it would be disastrous for the Vlachs to want a homeland; we must speak of realistic goals -- cultural, linguistic -- that will not create fear in the Balkan governments today.

TW: I absolutely agree. There is no good to be achieved by trying for a new nation state. We should follow the example of the Scottish Gaels, who demand only their culture, schools and language, not an independent Scotland.

GM: How do you account for the language surviving in Metsovo, given all the pressures and active discouragement of its use?

NB: If I may interject -- one theory I've heard is that Vlach was preserved better in the villages that had no Romanian movement because there was no reaction against them...

TW: Yes -- I have written something on this. I actually conducted a survey of twelve Vlach villages, trying to work out why it survived in some and not in others. We did come to that same conclusion -- that Vlach had survived best where Vlach had been encouraged least -- because what a pro-Vlach movement led to was suppression and emigration. And that would explain Metsovo, where they threw out the Romanian school in 1913. Where you had Romanian schools, you had a dissatisfied minority, and that dissatisfied minority often emigrated.

NB: How do you see the European Community intervening? How realistic is it?

TW: There is a Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages of the E.C., and

I've tried to get them interested in the Vlachs, but they said it depended very much on the cooperation of the individual states. The E.C. is interested in minority languages for various economic reasons -- they are aware that there are thirty minority languages as well as the nine official ones -- and they can bring pressure in certain instances. A T.V. producer is interested in making a documentary on European minorities, and I'm involved in the episode on the Vlachs. This producer is hoping for E.C. support because Europe is very rich and wants, as it encourages political uniformity, also to encourage cultural diversity. The first thing to do is really get the Vlachs on the map, and that we will try to do, and then once people know who the Vlachs are, then the E.C. may be able to do something about the situation.

NB: You've now been around the world and seen more Vlach communities than anyone else. What is the next step for us?

TW: The first thing to do is try and get Vlach communities to talk to each other so that everyone isn't acting in isolation. The communities in America, Australia, Yugoslavia, and Greece should meet and try to hammer out a policy for where you hope to go, what your aims are -- these being modest aims -- and a method of keeping in touch with each other. This would attract Vlachs from all over the world, even those who aren't really aware that they're Vlachs. In Australia and America, there's a particular problem because the Vlachs there tend to associate with Greeks and Yugoslavs, or even Romanians, and don't establish their separate identity. So it is very difficult -- and yet, unless you do something, the whole thing will end.

Can the Vlachs Write Their Own History?

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A distinction between “traditional” and “modern” societies is extremely useful, though it has certainly been subject to some misuse. Perhaps the worst misuse is when Westerners simply assume that their society is “modern” (or “developed”) and better off while others are more or less “traditional” and, implicitly or explicitly, worse off. A common corollary to this argument is that there exists a series of steps, which can be discovered through the application of strict social-scientific method, that all societies must pass through in order to survive in today’s world – as if there were one future, or one path to it, for all.

This branch of modernization theory has not fared well in the post-war period, which has seen the self-assertion of non-Western societies (with their own patterns of development) and the

emergence of a *mentalité* of pluralism in the West. Some still argue that the West is better because it developed the very notions of pluralism and of objective standards for measuring what is good, while non-Western societies tend to assert that what is their own is best, thereby leaving no room for pluralistic ways of thought. But this argument defeats itself: The development of the idea that no one culture is necessarily superior to any other proves that Western culture superior to all others. Clearly the West deserves credit for its various innovations, including pluralistic ways of thought, but the point is precisely that *other* cultures deserve some credit, too. While the particular excellence of Western society may very well be the system of rational inquiry that has led to, for example, advanced, successful economies and systems of government, the particular excellence of non-Western societies, which often demonstrate a limited ability to harm the natural environment and a healthy respect for things spiritual, is that they have not led to such Western ills as massive environmental pollution and the possibility of nuclear annihilation. Cultures can learn “excellences” from one another; the one thing that we now feel we must avoid – and we are indeed indebted to the West for this particular bit of wisdom – is that any culture think itself so superior as to seek to dominate the others, putting an end to what diversity still remains after a half-millennium of Western hegemony.

Another critique of the traditional/modern distinction sees it as a typical dichotomous division of reality between an idealized past and a less-than-ideal present. Yet the human tendency to idealize the past does not by itself negate the value of distinguishing two different types of society. And criticism of modernization theory as simplistic and dichotomous can best be answered by noting that the theory does not necessarily postulate that there are only two types of human society, “traditional” and “modern”; rather, it simply seeks to describe a transition from one type to another without excluding the possibility of, say, a third type (such as a pre-Neolithic hunting and gathering society, for example).

Thus while some of the earlier views of modernization are discredited, the concept remains; modernization is seen not as an absolute series of stages through which a given society must pass, nor even as “good” or “bad”, but rather as “ a *tendency* or set of *tendencies*,” as the historian John Gillis puts it. Gillis goes on to explain,

[T]radition and modernity are not two completely different conditions. Elements of modernity – for example, the recognition of merit over birth – existed to some degree in pre-industrial society. By the same token, the traditional factor of advantage from birth is still powerful in most modern societies despite every effort to give all

powerful in most modern societies, despite every effort to give all children equal opportunity. Yet few would deny that over the past two hundred years merit has become more important and birth less so in determining the many important functions in a society. It is therefore the tendency toward equal opportunity rather than the realization of total equality that we describe as modernization.

This interpretation, too, is not without its critics; Immanuel Wallerstein, for example, argues that this view of world history ignores the fact that in order for certain areas of the planet to be developed (a loose synonym for “modernized”), certain other areas of the planet must be underdeveloped. Yet by pointing this out, Wallerstein does not refute modernization theory, but amplify it; indeed, he himself retains the distinction between societies that are “developed” and those that are not, simply asserting that the latter are a prerequisite for the former. Eric Wolf warns that the label “traditional” tends to obscure the differences between widely disparate peasant societies. This is an important point to keep in mind when dealing with modernization theory, which, though it seeks to delineate characteristics various societies have in common, should not be constructed to imply that all traditional (or even modern) societies are precisely the same.

Not only does the traditional/modern distinction continue to be a useful one, it still provides a basis for the periodization of the last European millennium – we speak of medieval, early modern, and modern European history. Various characteristics have been suggested as criteria for modernization, including urbanization, commercialization, and industrialization; the changing social mobilization of people from localistic loyalties to centralized, integrated national societies; the priority of merit over inherited status; the specialization and professionalization of labor, with resulting new social divisions; the separation of politics and economics from religion and family life; the growth of literacy; the rise of mass media; increased social mobility; and, of course, a new *mentalité* whose main characteristic are an acceptance of social change and a concomitant emphasis on progress. It is this new *mentalité* and its new conception of time with which this essay is most concerned; Mircea Eliade describes the “two distinct orientations” of time in human society as “the one traditional, ... that of cyclical time, regenerating itself *ad infinitum*; the other modern, that of finite time.”

Since these developments first occurred in the West, there is a tendency to call this process “Westernization.” That term implies that when a society undergoes modernization it is forsaking local culture in favor of wholesale adoption of Western European and American cultural forms. It is still far from certain, however, that a

modernizing non-Western culture must lose itself in the process (one thinks of the Soviet Union and Japan); thus the term “Westernization” will be avoided here. At the same time, there is no doubt that traditional societies throughout the world have not systematically modernized before contact with the West; they did not produce, say, a modern historical ideal – portraying change over time in an objective manner – before their exposure to Western education and academic values. This ideal of objectivity is indeed something new under the sun; in fact, the degree to which even Western societies, long convinced of their own superiority, approach that ideal with consistency is questionable even today.

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The Vlachs are a traditional society of the Balkan Peninsula. Once contained entirely within the Ottoman empire, they were divided as that empire was dismembered to form or enlarge the modern Balkan nation-states. By 1918, the Vlachs were effectively split between Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and what was to become Yugoslavia. Mass migrations created additional communities in America between 1900-1920 and in Romania between 1920-1940.

For reasons that constitute the basis of this essay, much paper and ink have been wasted on the question of the origin of the Vlachs. Perhaps the simplest way to approach an answer is by analogy to the Americans of today; in antiquity, the Roman language (Latin) and culture supplanted most of the other languages and cultures of the Europe save those of peoples who had developed their own literature (the Greeks) or were not subdued by the Romans (the Basques) or had a segment of their populations located outside the Roman Empire (Germans, Gaelic-speaking Celts). Since there is no way of knowing the lineage of the Romanized populations – there were Greeks in what is now Marseilles, Germans in Spain and Italy, Syrians in the Roman army – they are known to us simply by the language that they currently speak, whether Catalans, Italian, Provençal, French, Rhaeto-Romance, Spanish, or Romanian. (A short-lived European pre-occupation with “racial origins” ended with the cataclysm it helped cause – World War II – and one hardly hears the term used any longer.)

The Vlachs are thus the Balkan populations that were Romanized, along with individuals later assimilated to Vlach language and culture (as Slavs, Greeks, and even some Gypsies have been). In other words, the Vlachs do not date to classical times, but are a “new” people; there simply was no such thing as a Vlach before the Roman conquest. Which populations existed in the Balkans at the time of the conquest? According to the best information we have, the main groups were Illyrians, Thracians, and Greeks, the last group including the Macedonians. North of the Danube were the Dacians. Some members of each group were certainly Romanized. The

Some members of each group were certainly Romanized. The Albanians may be the descendants of the Illyrians, as they assert. The Thracians, Dacians, and Macedonians disappeared, assimilated by Romans and Greeks (and, of course, after the sixth century A.D., by Slavs). In Byzantium, Greek civilization was fused to that of the Romans, with Christianity being the catalyst; after a brief period during which it gave way to Latin in official circles, the Greek language came to dominate again in the sixth century A.D., except in the remote areas of the Balkan peninsula, where a new Romance language was spoken. It is surmised, on the basis of linguistic evidence, that these Eastern Romance speakers were in touch with the Italian peninsula until the sixth-century Slavic invasions severed this connection.

Though both Romance-speakers and Greek-speakers were known by the same designation at this time – “Romans” – it seems that the Romance-speakers nevertheless differentiated themselves from the “Greek-speaking “Romans”; it remains uncertain whether Greek-speakers considered these Eastern Romance speakers as somehow different from themselves. After the Slavic invasions, which severed the Byzantine empire’s control over much of this Romance population, the Byzantine Greeks came to perceive these Romance-speakers as outsiders and called them by a new name they had learned from the Slavs, who in turn had learned from the Slavs, who in turn had learned it from the Goths: “Vlachs.” This word came from the same Germanic root that provided the designation “Welsh,” and it has an interesting history. The Oxford English Dictionary cites these forms: Serbian and Bulgarian *Vlach*, meaning Romanian or Italian; Czech *Vlach*, Italian; Polish *Wloch*, Italian; Polish *Woloch*, Walachian; Russian *Voloch*, Walachian or Italian. These forms “are Slavonic adoption of the Germanic *Walh* (OHG. *Walh*, *Walah*; MHG. *Walch*; OE. *Wealh*), foreigner, applied especially to Celts and Latins.” The Anglo-Saxons, Germanic invaders of England, applied this term to the native British (Celtic) population they found there, calling them “Welsh.” The extension of meaning from “Celt” to “Latin” is explained by John A. Armstrong in his *Nations Before Nationalism*; in speaking of the tendency of ethnic groups to define themselves by comparison to “strangers,” he notes:

Thus the extensive Germanic groups defined themselves as the people “between Wend and Walsche,” never using either term to refer to any group that spoke a Germanic tongue. Just as the real referent for Wend shifted, probably, from Finnic reindeer nomads located northeast of the Germanic elements to the Slavs who later occupied the eastern limits of the Germanic sphere, the referent for “Walsche” (or “Welsch”) changed from Celt alone to Celt, Latinized Celt, and Roman alike, on the southeast confines of the Germanic

world.

While there is a gap of several hundred years in the history of the Romance-speakers north of the Danube River, the Vlachs of the southern Balkans seem to have existed there (though not necessarily in the same precise locations within the southern Balkans) since the Roman conquest. Here we enter the turbulent waters of Balkan history, which, more than other branches of European history, has regularly been subordinated to present national imperatives; in this case, the Romanians and Hungarians both covet Transylvania and have sought to legitimate their claims to it by asserting historical priority in that region. Thus the Hungarians theorize that the Romanians are really Vlachs from the southern Balkans, who migrated north of the Danube during the Middle Ages, *i.e.*, after the Hungarians got there. The Romanians respond by answering that they are the descendants of the autochthonous Dacians who, though conquered and partially assimilated by the Romans, have continued to exist in all current Romanian lands since antiquity; the Romanians see the Vlachs of the southern Balkans alternately as autochthonous Thracians who were Romanized (the Dacians were a Thracian tribe) and as Romanians from north of the Danube who migrated south.

Like all other ethnic groups on the continent, the Vlachs' consciousness and primary loyalty have long been linked to their immediate environment – village, mountain, valley, clan – and not to any national idea; such ideas were born in Western Europe in the early nineteenth century, and only since then have Vlachs and others come to see themselves as part of a “nation.” (The religious history of the Vlachs has not even begun to be addressed by serious scholars.) Whereas the Romanians eventually went on to create their own nation-state in the nineteenth century, the Vlachs have, since at least the seventeenth century, come more and more under the influence of Greek culture, especially through the vehicle of Greek Orthodoxy, due to their proximity to Greek populations. In fact, all Balkan groups during the Ottoman occupation were marked by their relatively peaceful coexistence and the fluidity with which they adopted aspects of each other's culture (especially Greek culture, which predominated through the Church). Once nationalism became a force in European political life in the nineteenth century, however, the peaceful Balkan coexistence ended, and as Ottoman strength in Europe faded, the various Balkan national groups fought over the remaining Ottoman lands in the peninsula.

A Vlach national movement began among wealthy Vlach merchants in Vienna and Budapest at the start of the nineteenth century, but the rising Romanian state soon took the lead, claiming the Vlachs as long-lost kin and investing large sums in Romanian

the Vlachs as long lost kin and in setting large sums in Romanian schools and churches for the Vlachs. While genuinely fraternal feelings certainly existed under the benevolent, naïve form of early nationalism, the Romanians also hoped to use the Vlachs as a bargaining chip in their territorial claims against Bulgaria. This Romanian nationalist movement gave rise to the new ethnic designation *Macedoromâni*, which meant to signify that the Vlachs were simply Romanians who happened to come from Macedonia. The new designation was adopted at the expense of two important facts, however: first, that (assuming the Romanians have been north of the Danube since antiquity, as they assert) the two branches of Eastern Romance population had been virtually separated for some twelve centuries (*i.e.*, since the Slavic invasions) and had evolved rather differently during that time; and second, that while Vlachs are certainly found in Macedonia, they also inhabit the neighboring regions of Epiros, Thessaly, and Thrace.

The recently formed Greek state opposed this Romanian national movement, and the Vlachs soon came to be divided into pro-Greek and pro-Romanian factions. The bitterness between the two was not great until Greece, in conducting a guerrilla war at the turn of this century against various armed groups of Slavic nationalists for possession of Macedonia, made the unfortunate decision to use force against the unarmed Vlach nationalists, too. Conflict erupted on the academic front as well: Greek nationalist scholars, seeking to prove Greek historical priority and continuity in Macedonia from antiquity (*i.e.*, before the Slavs got there), adopted the theory “that the Vlachs were Vlachophone Hellenes, that is to say racially Greeks who had learnt Vlach.” Though this thesis has never found support outside of Greece, it has enjoyed a remarkable staying power among both Greeks and Hellenized Vlachs, and it is important for its effects on Vlach identity. If one is “biologically” Greek anyway, and one’s Latin idiom merely an anomaly, then indeed why *not* abandon that idiom and return to one’s true “race”?

It is upon this skeletal sketch-unencumbered by the Romanians’ desire to have been in Transylvania before the Hungarians, untainted by the Greeks’ need to claim members of their “race” in Macedonia from time immemorial – that the other facts of Vlach history may be hung. Just what that history and those facts are has not yet been attempted (much less realized) outside of a handful of rather remarkable works which, not coincidentally, have had no particular axe to grind concerning the Vlachs: The writings of Gustav Weigand, published in Germany in the 1890s; the Englishmen Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson’s 1914 classic, *The Nomads of the Balkans*; and the 1987 book by Tom Winnifrith, also an Englishman, entitled *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People*. Particularly important is Winnifrith’s comprehensive critique of

Greek, Romanian, and other local scholars who have purported to study the Vlachs impartially but who in reality have subordinated the Vlachs to their own narrow nationalistic concerns. This critique has cleansed the slate of Vlach history and rid it of the accumulated debris of 200 years of nationalist infighting – almost all of it at the expense of the Vlachs. Winnifrith’s historiographical critique is the signal for a fresh start in Vlach history, a start provided by the remainder of his own book.

But Winnifrith’s book is short, far from comprehensive, and suffers from a weak theoretical structure. If local scholars have been ruled out due to their nationalistic concerns, to whom can we turn for the definitive history of the Vlachs? Winnifrith’s critique of Balkan national scholars would seem to leave us with two main alternative sources: impartial Western scholars, motivated by a sense of curiosity and wonder, or the Vlachs themselves, motivated by an interest in and affection for their ethnic background. Western scholars have already shown that they can produce reliable works on the Vlachs – but those works are few and far between, and there is not much interest in the Vlachs, though they are clearly on the verge of extinction. On the other hand, the Vlachs themselves have a natural interest in the subject – but can the Vlachs write their own history?

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Vlach society never modernized – as a society, that is, for many Vlachs assimilated into societies that were modernizing. But in doing so, they had for all intents and purposes to give up their identity as Vlachs: no modern schools, literature, or political entities were created by or for the Vlachs (the approach of both Romanians and Greeks was generally that theirs was the literary language of the Vlachs, so rather than modernizing Vlach language and literature, Romanian and Greek schools taught the Vlachs Romanian or Greek language and literature). Without schools, Vlach never developed words for the myriad innovations of modernity, from automobiles to presidents; such terms as do exist are borrowed from more developed languages such as English, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, or one of the Slavic languages. No modern Vlach culture has been created.

Herein lies the essence of the problem, for Vlachs who have chosen to remain involved with their culture have by and large continued to work within the conceptual framework of an extremely traditional culture – even when the intellectuals among them impose on that culture the nomenclature and forms of modernity – rather than seek to create a modern pan-Vlach identity complete with literature, criticism, representative institutions, etc. One of the ramifications of this phenomenon (and the thesis of this paper) is that a traditional *mentalité* is imported into such nontraditional activities as the writing of history, with results as damaging to the traditional

society as they are to the ideals of the modern historical profession.

What is a “traditional *mentalité*”? Better yet, with the benefit of Wolf’s criticism, what is the traditional *mentalité* of the Vlachs? I would like to offer three criteria, one that is characteristic of traditional societies in general, one that is typical of pastoral-nomadic groups such as the Vlachs, and one that is particularly associated with Vlach traditional society and is critical to any attempt to understand that society.

The first of these criteria – and what Claude Lévi-Strauss describes as “[t]he characteristic feature of the savage mind” – is what we might call timelessness. The Vlachs, like many others, were a “people without history,” attuned mostly to the rhythms of biology and nature before coming into contact with anthropocentric Western societies. Even after centuries of contact with the West, however, the Vlach traditional *mentalité* survives, and in this the Vlach experience is comparable to that of other traditional societies. In fact, the antipathetic relationship between the traditional *mentalité* and modern historicism is brought out most clearly by Calvin Martin, a historian whose essays on the historiography of the American Indians stand as a landmark for all scholars interested in the survival of traditional ways of thinking in seemingly modern times and places. Martin asserts that

despite our profusion of monographs we have in truth largely missed the North American Indians’ experience and meaning of it. We have missed their “time” as they construed and sought to live it. Instead ... we make them into a “people of history”: assign them our terms and conception of living in time and space, our commitment to changing reality and changing humanity over the ages.

In contrast to the anthropological (human-oriented) outlook of a “people of history,” American Indians have the biological (nature-oriented) outlook of a “people of myth.” According to Eliade, the only “history” mythic people have is sacred history, which

is a “history” that can be repeated indefinitely, in the sense that the myths serve as models for ceremonies that periodically re-actualize the tremendous events that occurred at the beginning of time. The myths preserve and transmit the paradigms, the exemplary models, for all the responsible activities in which men engage.

Moreover, “such an ideology makes it impossible that what we today call ‘historical consciousness’ should develop.” If something exists now, it must always have existed. “The man of archaic cultures tolerates ‘history’ with difficulty and attempts periodically to abolish

it.”

The second criterion of the Vlach traditional *mentalité* is a preoccupation with genealogy, the tracing of real or fictitious bloodlines through the branches of biological descent. The historian John A. Armstrong contrasts the territorial sense of identity that arose in Western Europe during the Middle Ages (and led to the development of stable frontiers around the various territories) with the non-territorial ethnic identity of pastoral nomads characterizing such areas as the Middle East; for the latter, “[b]y far the most important mechanism is the extraordinary dominance of the genealogical principle.” This “concern for finding ancestors has been carried to lengths that appear absurd to an objective observer,” such as when “Albanian refugees in the Negev and non-Semitic Somalis alike claim descent from Mohammed himself.”

Moreover,

Because such claims are neither provable nor disapproval, the force of their presentation, including skill in enlisting learned authorities, the superficial plausibility of the oral traditions, and the real power of the claimants are decisive.... [I]t is not real blood relationships but conviction impelled by an intense desire to identify with a more prestigious group that determines the identity myth.

Of pastoral nomadic origin themselves, the Vlachs, too, rely heavily on genealogy as the ordering principle of their identity.

The third and final criterion of the Vlach traditional *mentalité* I will cite for the purposes of this paper is an attraction to the freedom, mobility, and inconspicuousness of a mountain lifestyle; the Vlachs have done much as they pleased for the last two millennia simply by staying out of the notice of other peoples. As Charles Eliot noted in 1908, “Their villages are nearly always placed in the highest and least visible spots ... [an] obvious advantage as a mean of eluding the Turkish tax-collectors.” One way these characteristics show up in the present is in the strong impulse to camouflage Vlach identity within the context of a stronger, more prestigious, or more successful group. Such a phenomenon, of course, would be most marked in the modern period of competing national identities and states; the old empires did not aggressively seek converts and in fact tended to insulate the governing classes from the governed, keeping the two cultures apart. This chameleon-like characteristic of the Vlachs has been cited often in the last century. Wace and Thompson observed that the Vlachs “are essentially a mountain people and as soon as they begin to settle permanently in the plains ... [they] rapidly become merged with the surrounding races.” The two British scholars, who traveled through Vlach villages in Greece in 1898, noted that the Vlachs “are

Vlach villages in Greek regions during the period of Romanian-Greek friction over the Vlachs, noticed peculiar behavior even in Vlach villages:

Thus on one occasion we overheard the school children being ordered to talk only Greek as long as we were present; in another village we were assured spoke only Greek, Vlach proved to be the common tongue ... Once in the early days when our knowledge of Vlach was small we arrived at a Vlach village which had just reunited after a winter in the plains. All around were talking Vlach; we were welcomed kindly by the school-master who spoke to us in Greek. "We only talk Vlach when we first meet again after the winter" were almost his first words. It was not until a month later that we heard another word of Greek.

So noteworthy did Wace and Thompson find this phenomenon that they chose to end their tome on the Vlachs on this note: "[T]heir numbers have been steadily, but slowly diminishing, and they themselves have helped this by their lack of national feeling, their dispersion and their power of self-effacement."

Barely a decade earlier, in 1905, the British socialist and journalist Henry Noel Brailsford had written,

There is no race in all the Balkans so mysterious and so individual as the Vlachs. They shelter themselves in the Greek Church, adopt Greek culture as a disguise, and serve the Hellenic idea. It is rare to meet a man among them who does not speak Greek more or less fluently and well, but at home the national Latin idiom persists, and their callings, their habits, their ways of thinking make them a nationality apart.... They live apart, rarely intermarrying with Slavs, upheld by some tradition of an ancient superiority which teaches them to despise the newer race. If they are a timid people they are also singularly tenacious. A family may be scattered between Roumania and Thessaly, but they never cease to be Vlachs.

While he acknowledged that with some Vlachs Hellenism was a genuine passion, Brailsford was quick to add,

With the mass of the Vlachs, however, this loyalty to Greece was a more calculating and interested attachment. This sparse and furtive race is of necessity opportunist. It seeks to merge and conceal itself in some larger organization from the same timid and unobtrusive instinct which causes it to build its villages on the mountains. So long as Greece held an undisputed primacy among the Christian peoples of the Balkan Peninsula it was obviously the interest of the Vlachs to shelter under the Greek name. But the

interest of the Vlachs to shelter under the Greek name.... But the recent misfortunes of Greece have thrown some doubt on the wisdom of this connection.... The stronger force has an attraction for the Vlach mind.

Modern scholars, too, have noticed this characteristic of the Vlachs, which is operative not only in Greek regions but in Albanian and Slavic areas as well. The Croatian-American sociologist Vatro Murvar noted,

The Vlachs preferred to use the names of people [*sc.* nations] with whom they wished to become assimilated. They were anxious to achieve this assimilation quickly because “they were ashamed of the associations attached to their own names. They therefore preferred to call themselves Greeks or Serbs.” They identified themselves with the Serbs, although they had nothing in common with them but the religion.

Murvar in fact devoted his entire doctoral dissertation to attempting to prove the existence of a Vlach elite calling itself Serbian but still operating within the context of Vlach culture even as it controlled the new Serbian state and today continues to dominate in Yugoslavia.

An ambivalent attitude toward national identity is not unique to the Vlachs; it may even be common among what we might call the world’s “smaller” cultures. In his book on nationalism, Gellner notes that

in many cases, it is far from clear how a given individual is to be assigned to his “cultural background”.... Life-style, occupation, language, ritual practice, may fail to be congruent. A family’s economic and political survival may hinge, precisely, on the adroit manipulation and maintenance of these ambiguities, on keeping options and connections open. Its members may not have the slightest interest in, or taste for, the unambiguous, categorical self-characterization, such as is now associated with a putative nation, aspiring to internal homogeneity and external autonomy. In a traditional milieu an ideal of a single overriding and cultural identity makes little sense.

Precisely how the Vlachs have manipulated the various ambiguities inherent in their situation is the subject of an important essay by Muriel Dimen Schein entitled “When Is an Ethnic Group? Ecology and Class Structure in Northern Greece.” Concentrating on the region of Epiros, Schein contrasts the Vlachs (whom she calls by their self-designation “Aroumani”) with the Sarakatsans (a Greek pastoral nomadic group) in order to demonstrate that “under

pastoral nomadic group) in order to demonstrate that "under conditions of competition for strategic resources, ethnic identity can be used as a means of organizing adaptation to natural and social environments; ethnic differences will then be expressed and recognized, and ethnicity becomes a basis for differential success."

Schein begins by recognizing the ubiquitous Vlach custom we have been discussing: "Like the Aroumani who inhabit other Balkan countries, those in Greece have adopted the major customs of their host country, so that today, in a town or city, the Aroumani can be distinguished from the other rural Epirotes only when they speak Roumanian [*sc.* Vlach]." In the course of their competition for the limited pastures of Epiros, Vlachs and Sarakatsans have "made use of ethnic identification as a way to allocate and secure pasture." Political and ecological factors interacting with ethnicity led to Sarakatsan success, their lower class becoming specialized as stock-breeders while their upper class, as well as both upper and lower class of the Vlachs, were forced to become generalized into numerous professions – an advantage if the ecosystem changes (as it did in this century). Yet Sarakatsan upper classes tend to lose their Sarakatsan identity, becoming for all intents and purposes Greek when they leave their villages; this does not always happen with the Vlachs, giving the Vlach upper and lower classes the potential advantage of a common bond of ethnicity. In past centuries the Vlach retained their language and identity due to specific economic and legal advantages given them by the Ottoman Turks.

But the Roumanian [Vlach] is still learned today in the villages, not because of any one particular reason, but because identification as Aroumani continues to confer advantages in diverse contexts. Aroumanian ethnic identity condenses multiple experiences and meanings – non Greekness, ecological and economic marginality, unique control of muleteering, and dominance of the cheese trade – and thus has great but non-specific potential uses.... This is not to say that all Aroumani have always maintained their group membership. Emigrants do so when it is to their advantage: thus, politicians clearly find it useful, as do cheese and stock merchants who use it to maintain connections with Aroumani shepherds. At the other end of the hierarchy, villagers in the remote mountains also continue to use their identity as a major means of finding a way into commercial and political networks. On the other hand, those who settle in plains villages, or become businessmen in non-related industries find it less beneficial to identify themselves as Aroumani and consequently cease to speak Roumanian [Vlach].

In short, ethnicity is a more fluid concept than it is commonly held to be, and ethnic identity is often asserted when doing so confers some

political or economic advantage. Schein's thesis goes a long way toward explaining the paradox of the Vlachs' assertion of a non-Vlach ethnic identity to outsiders even as they tenaciously retain a Vlach identity among themselves (save when they settle in lowland areas and are genuinely assimilated).

As stated earlier, in the absence of a modern Vlach culture, Vlachs who have wished to modernize have done so by assimilating into other cultures that were modernizing. Those who have retained a Vlach ethnic identity have often continued to work within the conceptual framework of an extremely traditional culture – to be Vlach, in other words, is necessarily to be “traditional” to that degree – and virtually no one has sought to create a comprehensive Vlach identity. At best, Vlach intellectuals have merely impose the nomenclature and forms of modernity on traditional Vlach culture, and as a result a traditional *mentalité* is imported into such nontraditional activities as the writing of history, which we now anticipate will lead to assertions that the current situation of the Vlachs has always existed (timelessness) and that the Vlachs have a direct biological link to prestigious ancestors (preoccupation with genealogy); furthermore, the choice of which ancestors to assert will be related to the advantages conferred by the resultant ethnicity (usually either Greek, Serbian, or Roumanian outwardly, with a Vlach identity held in reserve for possible in-group use). Let us now conclude this study by examining a few examples of how these organizing principles of the traditional Vlach *mentalité* have acted to shape and circumscribe the Vlachs' writing of their own history.

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Considering how consistently scholarship has been subordinated to political imperatives in the Balkans, it is no surprise that the two main schools of thought among the Vlachs concerning their own history should parallel quite closely the Vlachs' political alignments. In other words, there is a Latinist school (essentially a new incarnation of the old Romanian school), asserting the kinship and non-Hellenic racial origin of the Vlachs and Romanians, and a Hellenic school, maintaining the kinship and Hellenic racial origin of the Vlachs and Greeks. The traditional nature of the debate is evident from the fact that it has never ceased to center on this question of “racial” origins.

The Latinist school is now represented by Vasile Barba of Freiburg, whose *Uniunea tra Limba shi Cultura Aromana* (Union for Arumanian Language and Culture) issues a quarterly periodical, *Zborlu a Nostru* (*Our Word*) as well as some occasional publications, including a soft-cover collection entitled *Latin South of the Danube Today*. ULCA has also held two international “congresses” thus far, at the University of Mannheim in 1985 and the University of Freiburg in 1988: the participants have been few and

Frederick in 1900, the participants have seen few and overwhelmingly of the Latinist school themselves. The mantle of the Hellenist school has recently been taken by the linguist Achilleas Lazarou of Athens with his major work *Arumanian and Its Links to Greek*. Lazarou has also written articles concerning the Vlachs for various periodicals, most recently his controversial “History of Vlach Popular Songs.”

The radical nature of the last-mentioned article makes it a natural starting point for us, as a very stark example of a phenomenon sharpens one’s ability to pick out more subtle versions. For more than a century now, a single fallacy generated by an over-enthusiastic Greek nationalist researcher has skewed the study of Vlach folklore in Greece. In 1880, Aravandinos wrote that the Vlachs,

though they do not use the Greek language at home, nevertheless compose [*sic!*] their songs in it. The reader will find many such songs in the present selection, mostly gathered in Metsovo, Grevena, and Malakasi-Vlach districts in part, certainly, but where one almost never hears a Vlach song. In their dances, at weddings, saint’s day festivities, or at home when their woman sing lullabies to their babies or keen dirges over the dead, they always sing in Greek, even though occasionally some of them, in their ignorance of the Greek language, do not precisely understand the meaning of what they sing. Let this therefore stand as yet one more proof of the almost complete assimilation of this race with that of the Hellenes.

We may ignore for a moment the patent impossibility of composing songs in a language which one is either ignorant of or does not precisely understand, the fact that the songs in question were gathered in areas that were partly Greek, and the problems that arise when circumstances cause one to feel compelled to prove “the almost complete assimilation” by one’s own group of the group one is examining. One does not require even these arguments to realize that in order to prove that the Vlachs “always” sing their most important songs in Greek, one would have to prove the almost total absence of such songs in Vlach among unassimilated Vlachs. In light of the well-known reticence of the Vlachs, one would have to have secreted sound-recording equipment in Vlach villages over a period of a century or more. Not only would this have been impossible, but the very notion upon which it would have been based – that a certain linguistic group, unlike all other linguistic groups the world over, is defective in that it speaks in its own language but somehow cannot or will not sing in it – is absurd in the first place. Aravandinos has taken his own peculiar experience – that of a Greek nationalist

visiting villages anxious to be considered “Greek” – and generalized it as if it were representative of all Vlachs at all times; indeed, here is a striking example of the events of a very particular place and time being forced to fit the mold of “timelessness”.

Regardless of this, the notion that “the Vlachs always sing their songs in Greek” has enjoyed a certain staying power among Greek folklorists. The appearance in 1985 of an anthology of folk songs in Vlach, *The Songs of the Vlachs*, flew in the face of this staple of Greek scholarship and created no small degree of consternation; not only did the author, Zoe Papazisi-Papatheodoru, assert that the Vlach sang songs in their own language, she had the temerity to publish those songs in an alphabet derived from Romanian – thus drawing a connection (consciously or not) between the Vlachs in Greece and the Romanians for the first time since the end of World War II, when a new Romanian government chose to discontinue support of schools and churches for these Vlachs. To be sure, this was not the first collection of Vlach songs ever published; several editions have appeared in Romania in the last dozen years alone. But Papazisi-Papatheodorou’s book was the first Vlach effort to break the Greek post war consensus not to assert any non-Hellenic ethnic identity in that country, and as such the book achieved a certain notoriety.

Lazarou’s article was an effort at a direct scholarly response which, though it spoke in the idiom of the Greek political and academic establishment, would come from a person who was himself Vlach. Piqued by the appearance of a collection of Vlach folk songs, which were not even supposed to exist, Lazarou’s tactic was simply to resurrect and reassert the Aravandinos fallacy of a century ago, only with more of a scholarly apparatus this time. But one need not be a scholar to know that Aravandinos requires more than footnotes; indeed as most Vlachs know whether they’ve had one year of education or twenty-one – the Vlachs have a sizable body of folk songs in Vlach that have come down over the centuries, and to this day new songs are created in Vlach almost daily by people who speak Vlach as their primary language.

Lazarou’s thesis is this: that the Vlach sing their folk songs in Greek, and that any folk songs they have in Vlach are the (artificial, by implication) creations and residue of the pro-Romanian nationalist movement among the Vlachs (which lasted from roughly 1860 to 1945). The evidence against this radical position is vast and, with the exception of the collection by Marcu cited earlier, eminently reliable. (Marcu apparently reasoned that Greek songs referring to the Vlachs or their villages must once have been sung in Vlach; though there is no clear evidence that such an assumption is warranted, Marcu nevertheless seems to have gone ahead and translated some of these songs “back” into Vlach - *this* if anything

translated some of these songs back into Vlach *mus*, if anything, is the “smoking gun” Lazarou seeks.) The other collections cited above are largely reliable, as is the sampling in Wace and Thompson, who are in fact explicit about certain types of Vlach songs:

There are two men in the village [of Samarina] who continually compose new ones which they sing at festivals. They do this not for gain, but for amusement; and neither of the two song writers can be said to have had much education. This song writing is not due to the Roumanian propaganda, for every now and again some one else will make up a topical and personal song, and we have heard muleteers singing them.

Numerous recordings exist of Vlach folk songs; though many were made in Romania, most of the recent issues have come out of Greece (those that have not include collections compiled by the United Nations and by the French National Centre for Scientific Research). In the course of my own travels in Thessaly, Macedonia, and Epirus, I have heard dozens of songs and located and purchased several cassettes featuring Vlach songs, most of them from Vlach villages that had little or no contact with the pro-Romanian movement (for instance, Metsovo, Gardiki, Migidei); new cassettes, as one might imagine, are being produced constantly.

Even Vlachs transplanted to America have continued to compose and sing songs in their own language, on almost any subject - from factory work to the moral deficiencies of the next town to major events within the community. Of course, these are not limited to songs recorded on paper, disk, or cassette; the great majority of Vlach songs, now as ever, goes unrecorded. As I was growing up in the United States, I heard perhaps hundreds of songs, not one of which was ever recorded. Does this mean that they did not exist? Moreover, because our community here is, like the Vlach villages of Greece, located within the confines of a significantly more advanced culture (*i.e.*, one with a long, established literature, with schools, with a vocabulary that has kept up with the times), at a point when cultural interaction was unavoidable Vlachs in America naturally began to learn and sing American popular songs – even Vlachs who hardly knew any English. The same thing occurred in Greece a generation, or more earlier, much to the delight of Aravandinos. The number of these non-Vlach songs has obviously increased over the years, to the point where most members of the current generation here – again, like most members of the current generation in Greece – know almost no songs in Vlach, but plenty in the second language.

Which bring us to another fallacy propagated by Lazarou in his eagerness to make Vlachs into Hellenes: the relegation of Vlach

to a “second language.” While it is true that in 1991 very few Vlachs manage to get along without knowing at least one other language besides their own, most Vlachs know of elderly persons who to this day speak no other language but Vlach. There is abundant evidence that fluency in Greek has come to most Vlachs only lately; as recently as 1861, for example, Spiridhon Sokolis, a Greek doctor visiting Metsovo – the most ardently pro-Greek of all Vlach villages – found that

with only a few exceptions none of the women or the boys up to the age of ten knew Greek at all, so that Mr. Sokolis had to employ an interpreter. The men, however, speak Greek freely as it was an essential language for commerce.

What has happened here is that Lazarou has taken a very recent state of affairs and removed the time factor from it; “If Vlachs speak Greek now and sing songs in it, they must always have done so.” In other words: What exists now must always have existed. Timelessness.

Timelessness and the assertion that the Vlachs are the direct biological descendants of prestigious ancestors are in fact the concepts that animate Lazarou’s major work, *Arumanian and Its Links to Greek*. Though it proposes to examine the origin of the language spoken by the Vlachs of Greek regions, this book actually attempts to assert that the Vlachs are biological Greeks whose Greek language became Latinized after the Roman conquest of Greece. This assertion clearly places Lazarou within both the Vlach tradition of tracing a prestigious biological ancestry and the discredited European tradition that views history in terms of racial or biological continuity. It is as impossible to prove purity of ancestry for the Vlachs as it is for the French or the Greeks, a fact readily recognized by Lazarou’s colleague M. Hatzopoulos. In a brief but important essay entitled “Photice: Colonie Romaine en Thesprotie et les Destinées de la Latinité Epirote,” Hatzopoulos concedes the futility of Lazarou’s biological approach to the Vlachs and suggests instead that we attempt to describe and trace what happened to the Latin colonies we do know existed. One need not share Hatzopoulos’s faith in linguistic and inscriptionary evidence in order to agree that this approach is more promising by far than what Hatzopoulos terms the “false problem” of “racial” origins.

“Racial” origins also preoccupy the Latinist school led by Barba. In this case, however, the chief concern is to prove the purity of the *non*-Hellenic ancestry of the Vlachs; within that constraint, there is room for some flexibility, as shown in the following statement:

The Arumanians have been in the areas known today as Macedonia, Thessaly, Epirus, and Albania for many thousands of years. For two thousands years alone the Arumanians have been known by this name and have spoken the Latin language brought by the Romans after Rome was able to conquer these regions. For many thousands years before that the ancestors of the Arumanians were known by the regions inhabited by the groups to which they belonged: Agrionians, Dorians, Dardanians, Hedonians, Macedonians, Pelasgians, Sitronians, etc. However, they were all the same, for they were part of the most numerous people then known in Europe, the Thracians. All groups of Thracians spoke a single language, Thracian, which has not come down to us in written form, but we know well today that it was a different language from the single written language of that time, the Greek of Greek towns located on the coast in the area of the Peloponnese.

It is no accident, however, that the most prestigious ancestors of this lot, the Romans and Macedonians, are mentioned most often in ULCA publications – both in word and in image, for a roman coin with Caesar's portrait is the logo on every issue of *Zborlu a Nostru*, while the cover of *Latin South of the Danube Today* carries both the same coin and a portrait of Alexander the Great. Moreover, it is a sad remark upon the ULCA's desperate flight from any sort of Greek ancestry that it has led directly to several groups that modern Western scholarship agrees were Greek, most notably the Macedonians.

The extent of ULCA's concern with proving the purity of the Vlachs' non-Hellenic ancestry is evident throughout its literature. Great pains are taken to eliminate even a drop of Greek blood:

In 146 B.C. Greece, too, was conquered by the Romans, who made it a Roman province. But since the Greeks had a language that was written and was respected by the Romans, they kept their language even after the Roman conquest. The Greeks were not Romanized. But all of those in the Balkan Peninsula who did not speak Greek – The Macedonians – took the Latin language.

Not only must Greek blood be avoided, but that of barbarians, too:

After the division of the Roman Empire into two parts, one with its capital in Rome and the other in Byzantium – Macedonia stayed with the Byzantines ([A.D.] 395). For some 200 years, the ancestors of the Macedo-Romanians protected themselves well from the barbarians who occasionally crossed the Danube to loot. In 447

groups of barbaric Huns reached the Pindus. Nevertheless, all barbarian groups left the Arumanian regions just the way they had come – like a storm. “Water comes and goes, but stones remain.” The barbarians came and went, but the Arumanians remained.

Thus closes the circle of Vlach history for both schools, Hellenist and Latinist alike; indeed, the only difference between the two seems to be that one arose within the framework of a society that confers advantages on those asserting Hellenic origins, the other in one that confers advantages on those with non-Hellenic Latin origins.

This is a carousel in which some of the horses are black, others white, but all have the same overarching concern: to get back to where they began. Can the Vlachs write their own history? “Historical consciousness” commences precisely at the point where such carousel figures tear free of their moorings and take flight into a future they create for themselves. The possibility of a modern Vlach-authored history can begin only when Vlachs have abandoned the safe, circular track of their traditional ways of thought.

From the Editor: Two Great Global Revolutions
The Newsletter, volume V, Issue 2, August 1991

There are two great global revolutions underway -- and both have the potential to affect our people and our position in the world. One is a revolution in thought, while the other is a very physical and very violent revolution.

The revolution in thought

The issue of human rights has joined the goal of peace at the very top of the list of international priorities -- a revolution in thinking that has been going on for several decades. American-style freedom to be who one wishes to be (within the framework of the law) is becoming a global norm, and this can only bode well for people everywhere

people everywhere.

Just glance at these news clippings taken at random over the past year alone:

"When Lucille Watahomigie began to work as an elementary school teacher in Peach Springs, Arizona, the principal forbade the use of her native Hualapai language in the schoolroom... Two decades later, Mrs. Watahomigie is herself principal of Peach Springs School, which has become a mecca for Indian educators, tribal leaders and linguists around the country who want to breathe new life into America's first languages." (New York *Times*, 1/8/91)

"Representatives of 35 nations launched a new effort to improve the protection of national minorities... The meeting is a follow-up to a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) conference in Copenhagen last year where for the first time the 35 member countries, including the United States and Canada, pledged to "protect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities on their territory and create conditions for the promotion of that identity." (*The GreekAmerican*, 7/6/91)

"Breton cultural nationalism is probably running stronger today than at any other time this century... And by shaking off their image of being France's most isolated and backward region, Bretons have found a way of being both Breton and French." (New York *Times*, 8/2/91)

"Too few people realize that Navajo Indians, who volunteered to serve their country, contributed immeasurably to the success of Okinawa and Iwo Jima with their 'code talk.' Navajo code talkers on each end of a communication line or radio would pass on commands in their native tongue, saving precious time and lives by eliminating the need to code and decode during the height of combat, confusing the Japanese, who could not break the code." (New York *Times*, Letter to the Editor, 4/1/91)

"For the first 43 years of her life, Barbara Anderson did not talk about her ethnic background. But now it is a matter of pride -- and record. On the latest census form, Mrs. Anderson checked a different box: American Indian. "I no longer had to pretend," she said. Census officials are finding a sharp increase in the number of people who identify themselves as American Indians." (New York *Times*, 3/5/91)

The violent revolution

Unfortunately, human rights can be taken to such an extreme that it comes into conflict with the other top international priority, peace, as is happening right now in Yugoslavia and in parts of the Soviet Union. Minority groups and small republics are using force to assert

their rights against central authorities. This is wrong, not because violence is "wrong" -- but rather because non-violent recourse exists. In this day and age, when there are so many international institutions devoted to minority rights, there is no longer an excuse for ethnic violence.

By every indication, Greece is fast heading for a showdown on the explosive issue of minority rights. For the last five years, this writer has been urging the governments of Greece to show intelligence, flexibility, and even boldness in their thinking about the minority situation, especially in Macedonia. It's an explosive issue, but so was the collapse of communism, and bold thinking by Mikhail Gorbachev got us through that; so was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but the bold thinking of George Bush got us through that; and so on.

But as bold as George Bush has been, Greece's leaders have been fearful; as far-sighted as Mikhail Gorbachev has been, Greece's leaders have been myopic; as the rest of the world adapts to a new order, sclerotic Greece just goes on saying and doing the same old things -- "there is no Slavomacedonian issue" -- "there is no Vlach minority" -- "Macedonia has always been Greek" -- and all the rest of the nonsensical clichés that have substituted for serious thought about the problem of Macedonia for a century now.

What does this have to do with ethnic and national violence? Just north of Greece, Yugoslavia is quickly falling apart, and the "non-existent" Republic of Macedonia has now voted for independence. If Macedonia indeed separates from Yugoslavia, Greece will have a major problem on its northern border, because Greece has made the Macedonians belligerent by denying their existence for so many decades.

There is another problem on the horizon for Greece: for the first time since the end of World War II, Romania has expressed an interest in the Vlach minority in Greece and Albania, and made official overtures in their behalf. This must be like a terrible dream for Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, who last year was devastated by U.S. criticism of Greek treatment of its Turkish and Moslem minorities.

Greece has been functioning as a democracy since 1974 -- that's 17 years now. 17 years during which Greece could have done bold things to avoid future problems. 17 years during which Greek leaders could have risen above the petty chauvinism that has marked and marred Greek political life. 17 years during which Greece could have declared itself the protector of the ethnic identity of the Macedonians and the Vlachs -- 17 years during which Greece would have had greater credibility as the protector of Macedonians and Vlachs than the authoritarian communist regimes in Belgrade and Bucharest. What an exciting idea -- democratic Greece standing up to the sclerotic rule of Tito and Ceaușescu and insisting upon fair

treatment for the Macedonians and the Vlachs! It would have turned Balkan diplomacy upside-down in the best possible way -- and instead of trembling in fear and reciting cliches now as Yugoslavia and Romania lurch violently toward democracy, Greece would be welcoming with open arms the independence of Macedonia and savoring the moral high ground it had gained as a protector of minorities.

The entrenchment -- and retrenchment -- of the same old ways of thinking have cost Greece an enormous amount of prestige in the international community -- for the world has truly changed. The tragedy is that the government of Greece has not yet realized this; indeed, for those who bother to read its pronouncements anymore, the Greek government seems utterly incapable of the dramatic new thinking required by the new world order. How long can Greece continue to hemorrhage not only American goodwill but international goodwill? Time will tell -- but Lord, it is a painful process to watch.

What does all this mean for our people? I am happy to say that we have nothing to lose and everything to gain -- if we remember the two most important lessons of this century. First, in insisting on our right to speak and learn our language and to form our own associations, etc., we must continue to renounce the use of force. Especially in a new era when so much support exists for minority rights, we must denounce violence as an abhorrent and unacceptable alternative. This year, a group of eighteen ethnic and national minorities set up its own version of the United Nations. Calling itself the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization (UNPO), the group held its first forum in February 1991 at the Peace Palace of the Hague, in the Netherlands. The UNPO seeks recognition for its members and promotes non-violent change. We should join UNPO immediately.

Second, we ought to be very careful about the offer of support from Romania. We do not wish to be unwitting pawns in Balkan power politics -- we're the only ones who lose, and if you look at our history, it seems as if we *always* lose. Indeed, it is time for some fresh new thinking on our part, too. Personally, I would be inclined to accept some help from Romania -- not as a "Romanian" minority in Greece, but only as a minority in Greece that is distinct from both Greeks and Romanians and yet closely related to both. Both countries have Vlach minorities -- and both should be working to preserve our language and identity. If we have schools someday, they must be in our language, not in Greek or Romanian -- otherwise the whole issue is meaningless.

The news is good -- it's not too late for the Greek and Romanian governments -- and it's not too late for our people. It's only too late for those who refuse to change with the times.

"It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

--Winston Churchill

From the Editor: The Balkan Powder Keg, Revisited

The Newsletter, volume VI, Issue 2, August 1992

The Balkans are exploding again and although our people are not yet caught up in it, there is a strong possibility that they soon will be. As long as the fighting is contained in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Croatia, most Arumanians will not be directly affected by it. But there are two flashpoints, Kosovo and Macedonia, that, if ignited, will surely endanger and perhaps even cost the lives of many of our people.

Kosovo is a region of the former Yugoslavia that is 80-90 percent Albanian; formerly autonomous, it was forcibly placed under Serbian rule in 1989 by strongman Slobodan Milosevic, the former communist who has remained in power by espousing ardent Serbian nationalism (chief blame for the bloodbath in Bosnia is assigned to Milosevic). There is unrest among the Albanians of Kosovo, who are essentially under military occupation by the Serbs. Albanian-language instruction in the universities and secondary schools was brought to an end; the Albanians boycotted these schools, started teaching their children at home, and elected their own Parliament (not recognized by the Serbs, who have prevented it from convening). The situation is very tense, and Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, representing the United Nations and the European Community respectively, have been visiting the area and trying to keep the peace.

If war breaks out in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians, next-door Albania will surely be pulled into it -- as will the nearly half a million Albanians of Macedonia, who constitute between 20 and 25 percent of that republic (they are a majority in western Macedonia, which, like Kosovo, shares a border with Albania).

Macedonia has its own set of problems -- both historical and in the present. The historical problems are so tangled and contentious that it would trivialize them to try to describe them in this brief column. Suffice it to say that during the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, and the Ottoman Turks all were pulled into a war over Macedonia, and the region continues to be a sore point between Greece, the former Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Since declaring independence from the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia has been recognized only by Turkey, Bulgaria, and Russia; wider recognition has been blocked by Greece on the

argument that the name "Macedonia" can only be used by Greek Macedonia. Behind that silly argument lies a very solid argument against international recognition: Macedonian nationalism has long had territorial claims against Greek Macedonia, and international recognition ought to be based on a convincing renunciation of those claims (some less than convincing renunciations have already been made). Another complication is that, like the Vlachs, Slavic Macedonian nationalists cannot quite agree on an identity. Where Romania proselytized among the Vlachs in Macedonia, Bulgaria did so among the Slavs of "south Serbia" (later called Macedonia); today, some Vlachs think of themselves as Romanian, others as Greek, and still others simply as Vlach; and some Macedonians think of themselves as Serbian, others as Bulgarian, and still others simply as Macedonian.

Whether Kosovo brings Macedonia into a Balkan war, or whether tensions within Macedonia itself reach the breaking point, an explosion here is likely to involve the entire peninsula; Albania, Greece, the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and even Turkey could be drawn in as the republic is dismembered. And while there are few Vlachs in Kosovo, there are plenty in Macedonia; we will be affected, but how?

The Vlachs of Macedonia have joined the Vlachs of Greece in calling for the non-recognition of the fledgling republic. The reasoning is a bit Machiavellian: when the Serbs ran the show, they supported Vlach cultural preservation efforts, including weekly TV and radio broadcasts in our language, as a counterweight to Macedonian nationalism. The Macedonians are not likely to be as generous, because they are not even a strong majority in their own proposed country; accurate figures are hard to come by, but out of a total population of 2.2 million, perhaps 1.3 million are Macedonian; the rest are a mixture of Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Gypsies, Vlachs, and others. The very diversity of Macedonia has already led to efforts to assimilate the Vlachs and others as quickly as possible in order to bolster the relatively small number of Macedonians. Another bad sign is that the largest political party in the Macedonian Parliament, the nationalist IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), is condemning the Vlachs for resisting its pro-Bulgarian orientation.

In a recent development, the Union for Arumanian Language and Culture (ULCA) of Freiburg, Germany, led by Prof. Vasile Barba, sent a memorandum to the European Community requesting that a special commission be appointed to investigate the Slavic state's "oppression" of other ethnic groups. The memorandum stressed that a multi-ethnic Macedonian state could survive only if tolerance were its byword -- if it became a true "Switzerland of the Balkans "

As we have noted in the past, it is not clear who the ULCA represents besides a small group of Romanian-educated Vlach intellectuals based in Western Europe (the latest issue of the ULCA periodical, *Zborlu a Nostru*, tried to address this growing concern among its readers by telling them how ULCA was incorporated and what it does, ignoring the real question, "By what right do you speak for the Vlachs of the Balkans?"). Nevertheless, its constant effort to remind the Europeans of the Vlachs is helpful. The ULCA can gain legitimacy and strengthen its claim to represent our people by also reaching out to our compatriots in Greece. I hope it does -- for in all likelihood, we have never needed unity more than we will in the next year.

From the Editor: Nationalism Is Killing Us
The Newsletter, volume VII, Issue 1&2, August 1993

After a spurt of activity during the 1980s, the Vlach cultural revival has stalled. The reasons are not hard to find.

Greek nationalism was brought to a fever pitch by the breakup of Yugoslavia and attempted creation of a republic named Macedonia, and now over the question of "Northern Epirus" (southern Albania, long claimed by Greek nationalists). Since the Vlachs represent the main Greek claim to both of these regions, which host more Vlachs than Greeks, it once again became necessary to argue that the Vlachs are actually Greeks.

Macedonian nationalism has also been on the rise. The Macedonian Slavs feel it very important to assimilate the Vlachs for two main reasons: to blunt Greek claims to have a minority in Macedonia, and to ensure that the Macedonian Slavs constitute a majority in that country (if the Vlachs here listed themselves as "Albanian," for example, the number of Albanians might approach the number of Slavs, which would mean trouble).

Albanian nationalism is marching forward, too, in response to the Serb threat in Kosovo and the revival of Greek claims on southern Albania. By counting the Vlachs as Greeks, Greece ends up with a sizable minority in Albania, so the strategy of Albanian nationalists is first to pretend that the Vlachs do not exist (i.e., that they are regular ethnic Albanians). But our Orthodoxy tends to make us resist assimilation in Muslim-majority Albania and opens the door to our claiming we are Greek. The Albanians would much rather we identify ourselves as anything but Greek, and so they have at times treated us as a Vlach minority, at other times as a "Romanian" population on Albanian soil.

Indeed, the Albanian Vlachs can determine the direction the "Greek question" will take; if they declare themselves Greek, the

Albanians have a real headache, but if they say they are Vlach or Romanian, Greek claims will be undermined. And so the Romanians and Greeks have been competing heavily for our loyalties in Albania. Romania, for example, made several dozen scholarships available to young Albanian Vlachs and invited a delegation of Albanian Vlachs to Romania, where they met with officials and with Romanian Vlachs. In fact, Ianku Balamaci recently lost his position as President of the Arumanian Society of Albania at least in part because of objections to his taking his family on this junket, and because he allegedly distributed the Romanian scholarships himself, without the advice of any committee. He was also thought to be aligning himself too closely with the Romanians.

There have been many signs lately that the Vlachs of Albania are aligning themselves with the Greeks. The attractions are nearly irresistible -- almost the only way out of Albania's economic misery is to obtain a visa to work in Greece, and our people can do so simply by declaring themselves "Greek." And every time Albania strengthens its ties with the Islamic world -- an astute political move, considering Europe's abandonment of the Bosnian Muslims -- the Vlachs, Greeks, and Orthodox Albanians are brought closer together by their fear of Islam.

These are the external reasons for our faltering revival. But there are plenty of internal reasons as well, starting with the trait most often cited by observers of the Vlachs -- our uncanny, chameleon-like ability to assimilate. Until recently, we have tended to adopt any identity except our own.

That trend was broken during the 1980's by a group calling itself the Union for Arumanian Language and Culture (ULCA), based in Freiburg, Germany. Although its leader, Prof. Vasile Barba, was educated in Romania, sometime during the last decade he realized that our only chance of survival was to assume our own (as opposed to a Romanian) identity. This was a real breakthrough for our people, one that held great promise for resolving the old Greek-Romanian division among us.

But Prof. Barba's group has sadly been unable to move much further than this first concession. Not only have they failed to reach out to the Vlachs of Greece, they have consistently alienated them. The latest *faux pas* came in a recent issue of their organ, Zborlu a Nostru, which harshly described the Greek-dominated Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church as a "wolf." Now it's obvious that such intemperate language will help nothing. But beyond that, it's not even true; I happen to know Patriarch Bartholomew as well as some of his staff, and "wolf" is the last word I'd use to describe him -- rather, he represents the best hope for Orthodox unity and progress in many years.

Barba & Co. have also been under harsh attack by Romanian

nationalists almost from the start. His latest nemesis is a fellow named Hristu Candroveanu, "Director" of *Deshteptarea* (Awakening), a Romanian periodical aimed at our people. So strongly does Mr. Candroveanu believe we are Romanian that he campaigned in *Deshteptarea* for the Vlachs in Romania not to declare themselves "Arumanian" in the recent Romanian census. Candroveanu has also taken on the Vlachs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who happen to believe, like Mr. Barba, that we are Arumanian and not Romanian. So greatly has he alienated the Macedonian Vlachs that they recently wrote a formal letter of protest to the Romanian Minister of Culture.

On the Greek side, there is a fellow named Achillea Lazarou who is as fervent in his belief that we are Greeks as Candroveanu is that we are Romanians. Things have reached such a fever pitch that not long ago Mr. Lazarou felt compelled, like Richard Nixon, to issue a sort of "enemies list" of heretical writings, i.e., publications that do not follow the party line that the Vlachs are Greeks. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I discovered that this Newsletter made the Lazarou list. We are hated by pro-Romanians and pro-Greeks alike.

Nationalism is killing us. We have to make some decisions about our identity; either we Vlachs are a unique ethnic group, and our language and culture are worth saving, or we are members of some other ethnic group (Romanian, Greek, or what have you), in which case the thing to save is Romanian or Greek language and culture. We have been unable to resolve this dilemma for some 200 years now; unless we do so soon, the question will be moot.

The Vlachs in Albania

A Travel Memoir and Oral History

The Newsletter, volume VII, Issue 1&2, August 1993

My father left Albania in 1916, but even fifty years later he enjoyed telling me how difficult his journey to the United States had been. By this he meant not the seaward leg of the voyage, as other immigrants might, but the route on land. "Balkan" is Turkish for mountain, and it is notoriously difficult to get around on that peninsula. At fourteen years of age, my father had left the town of Korçë on horseback and crossed the snowy mountains of Macedonia, descending several days later into a Greek port in Thessaly.

He arrived in New York City and was so smitten that when his father returned to the Balkans, he defied him and remained here. *Ubi bene, ibi patria*. He taught himself to tend bar, worked in speakeasies during Prohibition and later in Mamma Leone's, and, except for a few brief stints in the humming wartime factories of New England, remained in New York for the rest of his life. After

World War II, he considered going back to Albania, but, like the old joke about Philadelphia, it was closed; instead he visited Greece, where he met and married my mother.

We are Vlachs, Romance-speaking descendants of indigenous Balkan peoples and the Romans who conquered them during the second century before Christ. By retiring to the mountains, we survived two millenia of invasions by Slavs, Byzantines, Avars, Huns, Normans, Goths, crusaders, Turks, Nazis, and communists. In 1991, when the fog of totalitarian rule finally lifted from Albania, the Vlachs there were permitted to organize an ethnic society. The first conference of this new society was scheduled for April 5th, 1992, but my father had died fifteen years before, so it was left to me to complete the circle.

The return to Albania was considerably easier. A single phone call and a piece of white plastic, two by three-and-one-half inches, with green and black ink on it, were all I needed to get back to the country my father had left with so much difficulty seventy-six years earlier. It took him the better part of a month to get to America; it took me 17 hours to get back -- ten hours aloft plus a seven-hour stopover in Rome. He braved bears, wolves, and brigands in the mountains and U-boats in the sea; for me, the greatest inconvenience was the boring in-flight movie.

I was one of a delegation of three American Vlachs traveling to Albania for the conference. On the propeller plane from Rome to Tirana we met another American, a representative of the Explorers Club who was visiting Albania to explore the suitability of the Drina River for white-water rafting (*Get ready, Albania, I thought, Club Med can't be far behind*). I spent most of the flight at the window. The Adriatic, once a great sea separating the two great civilizations of antiquity, from the air seemed more like a very large lake. Perhaps I have studied too much history, but as we crossed it, I had the feeling that we were crossing a frontier -- from West to East, from civilization to barbarism, from science to mysticism, from right to might, from prosperity to poverty, from light to darkness. Even as I strained to find Albania on the horizon, I knew it must be dark.

To my surprise, my first glimpse of Albania was not dark but bright -- the clean white clouds that covered it; the beautiful light green of the inshore Mediterranean; and the golden shingle of the unspoiled coastline. But as soon as we were on the ground, the dark side of Albania prevailed and, reinforced by a steady rain, provided a dispiriting backdrop for the week's events. My first sight as we landed was the dozens of cows and sheep that had claimed almost all unpaved ground in Tirana's Rinas Airport, my first scent as we disembarked was their odor.

As we stepped onto the tarmac we were met by two somber officials. Although this is changing now Soviet and East European

officials. Although this is changing now, Soviet and East European policemen were once everywhere the same, as if formed in a single mold and then dressed in the same uniform -- low-cut flared-leg trousers (in the parlance of the 1960s, stovepipe hip-huggers); epauletted shirt worn outside the pants, like a tunic; oversized round hat with a splash of Communist red above the visor -- with only a change of colors and insignia indicating a change of country. Our hosts were wearing blue with red trim, and as we walked away from the plane one of them made like he would shake me down for 50 bucks for a visa. I followed my New Yorker's instinct and laughed out loud. I had a letter of introduction from the Albanian Mission to the United Nations and ended up paying only the usual fifteen-dollar fee.

Rinas Airport is a landing strip and a modest control tower atop a building the size of a supermarket. The arrivals area consists of two bare concrete rooms; in the second and smaller room, two slabs arise from the floor like sacrificial altars. Since I had already traveled in Eastern Europe in the full gloom of communism, I knew these were for my luggage, and I braced myself for the usual thorough search. To my surprise, however, the woman in charge asked merely, "Anything to declare?" and when I said no, she waved me through.

The small parking lot was mobbed with Vlachs who had come to greet their three compatriots from America. This visit was our first attempt to renew formal links with our Albanian kin after almost a half-century of communist rule. If Americans are still rare in Albania, American Vlachs are nothing less than a novelty, and we were received very warmly. For a moment, the embrace of my community made me feel at home, but the fifteen-minute ride into Tirana brought me back to reality.

Albania is a land of superlatives, but unfortunately, since World War II most of them have been negative -- the most repressive communist regime, the most isolated, the most militarized, the poorest country in Europe, the worst infrastructure, and so on. The poverty was obvious during the ride from Rinas Airport and figures soon confirmed what my eyes had seen. The official exchange rate in April 1992 was 45 leks to a dollar, but because there was little faith in the lek and much in the dollar, a far different rate prevailed in the open air of the plaza across the street from the state bank. The day I arrived the plaza was paying 82 leks for a dollar; as I left ten days later, the rate was 90; a week after that, it had reached 100.





View of Skanderbeg Square in central Tirana. Hotel Tirana on left.

At the time I arrived, a laborer earned about 800 leks a month (eight dollars) while a professional made roughly 1,200. I saw signs of the dismal economic situation everywhere. Most of the people were fairly slim -- there simply is not enough food to sustain overweight Albanians. Also striking is the high rate of gum disease and tooth loss; indeed, at times it seemed to me as if the only people with good teeth were the police and the military, who must have received priority for medical and dental services and a balanced diet. Communists look after nobody if not their own.

The poverty was also evident in the people's clothing. When I was a child, my mother used to send me to the post office every few months with a box of used clothing she had collected for our relatives in Greece, which was then in a bad way. Albanians are now receiving such packages from friends, relatives, and charities throughout the world, and in the odd mixture of well-worn clothing one sees more than a few fashions whose day has passed. And not just the clothing the world no longer has use for, but also a good portion of its older machinery, which is jerry-rigged and kept running against all odds. Indeed, it is a mark of Greece's relative prosperity that many of its discarded automobiles and buses find a second life in Albania.

When I was in graduate school, it was in vogue to question whether there really is such a thing as a totalitarian society. Students who'd been subjected to no power greater than that of their well-to-do parents were routinely heard to say that even in *Hitler's* regime, there was room for action against the state, which was itself "not monolithic but nuanced." It seems to me that a society is totalitarian if its ideal is total control. Some societies live up to that ideal better than others, and in this regard, Adolf Hitler might have learned a few things from Enver Hoxha (pronounced HOE-jah), whose dictatorship reached so deeply into Albanian society that even those who detested him wished Comrade Enver a long life and toasted his achievements at the family dinner table every night. Hoxha died in 1985, passing his mantle to Ramiz Alia, who was apparently so shaken by the fate of the Ceausescus in 1989 that he took a small step back from

Hoxha's hard line, decreeing an end to government celebrations of Stalin's birthday, for example, and opening the door to political pluralism; facing certain defeat in April 1992 by Sali Berisha, a cardiologist who helped found the new Democratic Party, Alia resigned. He was the last communist ruler in Europe.

The Hoxha regime was a sort of mass psychotic episode for Albanians, who were routinely fed this very sick man's world view and forced to participate in his delusions and paranoia, which grew steadily worse over the decades. In a "Constitution" promulgated in 1967, even religion was banned; making the sign of the cross became a criminal offense with a penalty of three years in prison, and you couldn't even exclaim "Jesus Christ!" The damage done to Christianity in Albania was brought home to me when I left Tirana with a group of young Vlachs for a tour of the south, where the Vlachs are concentrated; making the sign of the cross is a ritual for any Orthodox embarking on a journey, and they all asked me to do it again and again, so they could learn how to do it properly. All religions seem to have suffered equally, so much that today, no accurate statistics exist of Albania's religious composition; although one often hears the prewar figures of 70 percent Moslem, 20 percent Orthodox, and 10 percent Catholic, the truth is that no one knows the real numbers, which are probably still too fluid to be set in type. Many are lapsed from the faith of their fathers, making Albania fertile ground for Christian evangelicals and Moslem fundamentalists alike, and both have sent large brigades there.



**Bell tower of Orthodox cathedral Evangelismos in Tirana.
Note bricks knocked out of crosses, now restored.**

Communist repression extended far beyond religion. Hoxha's interior minister used to brag that one of every three Albanian citizens was an informer. People were threatened with fifteen years in prison just for saying that the store shelves were not full. For attacking Hoxha or his government, the term was said to be 25 years. The entire society was terrorized; one day as I spoke with a cousin in his house in Korçë, we heard a car pull up outside. He tensed up visibly, then laughed. Under the communists, that sound had been terrifying, because the few automobiles that did exist belonged to the government and the only one likely to pay a house call was the brutal secret police, the *Sigurimi*.

Although Albanians are intensely aware of the depredations of their former rulers, they seem almost disinterested in revenge. In contrast with several other formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, there is no widespread movement afoot in Albania to go after the *nomenklatura*, the bureaucrats and informers who made the old system work. If there is any truth at all to the claim that one in three Albanians collaborated, the potential for disruption of Albanian society is great. But at the moment, Albanians are more preoccupied with sheer survival in a state whose economy and organs of government collapsed for all intents and purposes with the defeat of the former regime in early 1992.

Under the communists, some ten percent of the population (300,000 people out of about 3 million) served in the military -- an extraordinarily high percentage. The United States, by comparison, has less than one percent (about two million out of 250 million), and for some of us, even that seems too many. Although we will probably never know the true military budget for Albania's communist decades, it seems safe to assume that it devoured a huge proportion of the country's very limited resources. Even at the time of my visit, one still saw plenty of red-cheeked soldiers.

But if there is a Hoxha legacy more ubiquitous than even the soldiers, it is the 800,000 concrete bunkers he built throughout the country to defend Albania against invasion by America, of all countries, as if we had nothing better to do than to storm tiny Albania. When the attack came, one or two Albanians was to jump into each bunker and, firing any weapon available, make the imperialist enemy pay dearly for every inch of Albanian soil. It is difficult to exaggerate the ominous psychological effect of these bunkers. Their design recalls a science-fiction robot: domed top pierced by a dark rectangular eye-slot, with stout cylindrical torso buried underground. They are eerie and they are everywhere -- in fields and in mountains, on boulevards and on beaches, alongside railroad tracks, everywhere.

Today the bunkers are in disrepair, choked with vegetation or

filled with debris. They stand as both symbol and metaphor for Albania under Hoxha: closed off, suicidal, under siege, alone in a sea of enemies, awaiting the final attack. They are also a reminder of the sheer indifference of rulers to ruled, for each bunker cost about 350,000 leks to build -- at the time, half the cost of a very modest house. Had that money been invested in real construction projects instead of in Hoxha's delusions, Albania's failing infrastructure might have been renewed.

The greatest threat to Albania all along has been not America but Serbia, whose hardline nationalists claim Kosovo, a region within Serbia that is 90 percent Albanian, as the heartland of the Serbian people. In 1989, led by ultranationalist premier Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia withdrew the limited autonomy conferred on Kosovo by the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974. Instruction in Albanian was discontinued and the region was occupied by the Yugoslav Army and placed under a sort of martial law. The Albanians responded by teaching their children at home and boycotting Serbian elections, instead conducting their own and electing as their president a frail, 47-year-old academic named Ibrahim Rugova (not recognized by the Serbs). Mindful perhaps of the systematic slaughter committed by the powerful Yugoslav Army in Bosnia & Hercegovina, Rugova has set a peaceful course for political change in Kosovo and he has found a willing ally in Albanian President Sali Berisha. Their nonviolent vision is something of a novelty on this bloody peninsula and one can only hope it succeeds.



Bunkers like this litter both town and countryside throughout Albania.

My own greatest security concern when visiting Albania was not external but internal; I had read of widespread rioting, looting, and violence in the weeks before I arrived, but most of it ended after Albania's first democratic election on March 22nd, 1992 (on that date, a new Parliament was chosen, which two weeks later elected

Dr. Berisha president). Dislodging the old regime was like removing a painful tumor -- the patient was soothed and able to rest. The calm was evident even to foreigners, but we three American Vlachs had an extra reason to feel safe in the phalanx of kinsmen that enveloped us as soon as we left the airport building. We were submerged within the group. This cut both ways: On the one hand, Albania was still not quite safe, and anyone who tried to mess with me would have to reckon with not one person but dozens; on the other hand, I had to submit to the demands and customs of my hosts, relinquishing to them some of my crotchety, absolute American sovereignty. It wasn't easy, and I wasn't always successful, but they may as well start learning what life is like in the kind of society they are seeking to emulate.

In communist Albania, private ownership of cars was forbidden, and as late as 1991 there was only a handful of private motor vehicles in the entire country; today, only one other modern symbol of freedom, the newspaper, is proliferating faster than the automobile -- 17,630 cars entered Albania in 1992. At Rinas, a car hired by our hosts picked us up, delivered us to the hotel, and almost drove off with my luggage (the driver apologized profusely). There is one first-class hotel in Tirana, the choice of most international travelers, the Italian-built, low-slung Hotel Dajti; there is also a single second-class hotel, the tallest building in Tirana and all Albania, the fifteen-story Hotel Tirana. I had a room reserved at the Hotel Arbëria, a third-class hotel aimed at visitors from Eastern Europe and other impoverished countries -- \$25 per night, which to my Albanian friends and relatives seemed a huge sum of money. The Arbëria is designed in the spare, shabby communist concrete style that dulls the senses in every country of Eastern Europe. My room was cold and dark, the concrete floor barely covered with vinyl tiles and worn-out sections of linoleum of varying sizes haphazardly fitted together. The single bed consisted of a foam mattress suspended by a light wire mesh that offered no support whatsoever. The sheets were patched but clean, except for the mouse droppings right near the pillow. In the bathroom, the toilet paper was rough, the water closet leaked, and there were unexplained holes in the wall, but at least the shower fixture worked.





A new sight: freely available newspapers of every opinion.

My wife Caryn's grandmother Kyratsa was born a year after my father in the same town and also came to the U.S. in 1916. She was 13 and left most of her family in the old country, including her parents, whom she never saw again, and a two-year-old sister, Bia, who still lives in Korçë. At the time I arrived, the two sisters hadn't seen each other for 76 years.

Bia was waiting for me at the Hotel Arbëria, along with two nephews, Victor and Robert Stefa. As always, I am amused at the improvisation necessary to converse in our undeveloped language in the late twentieth century: Victor is a veterinarian turned meat inspector, but there are no such terms in Vlach, so he tells me he is a "doctor of beasts," while Robert, speaking of foreign investment in Albania, describes offshore oil drilling as "pricking the ocean" and proudly tells me he has "a television with paint," by which he means a color TV. I answered their questions for an hour or so, gave Bia a suitcase full of clothing and other American goods (few of my own relatives are still in Albania), and sent her off on the six-hour ride back to Korçë with some trepidation -- on the way to Tirana the day before, their bus had passed no less than five automobile accidents.

It was twilight and I was exhausted after the long flight, but a large group of men from the new Vlach society eagerly awaited me at an apartment on the other side of town. We took a taxi to one of Tirana's dirt roads, but we got lost looking for the building we wanted -- they really do look alike. Finally we found the place and the young men immediately began toasting my arrival. The most common beverage in Albania is a strong liquor known as *raki*; having once seriously overdone it with the Greek version, called *tsipouro*, I can hardly stand even the smell of it. My new friends were surprised and, I think, more than a bit dismayed, as if they had never before met anyone who could not drink *raki*. Fortunately, there were also several bottles of a popular Greek orange drink on hand, and if I could not satisfy their desire for me to share their hard liquor, I made up for it with my ability to provide information, a very precious commodity in this closed society. I answered their questions about America (great place, but with its own set of problems), how I learned to speak Vlach (from my mother, who had just come from Greece when I was born), how many Vlachs there are in the world (perhaps 150,000, but they think there must be many more), and the salaries of various jobs in America (I countered their oohs and aahs

with a sampling of our cost of living -- food, rent, and so on).

By the end of the evening, I was as tired as I have ever been. We needed candles not only to make it down four flights of shoddy stairs but even to walk outside, for Tirana was pitch dark. We could not find a car but were lucky enough to catch a bus back to the hotel. I drifted off into a deep sleep only to be surprised at first light by the sound of a rooster crowing, right in the heart of this capital city of 350,000. On the street, there were other surprises: dirty children begging in tattered clothing; Protestant evangelicals in a van trolling for proselytes; the empty white pedestals of smashed communist monuments; and even some familiar faces -- Vlach acquaintances from Western Europe and Greece also in town for the conference.

I spent that first full day in Albania, April 4th, a Saturday, walking around Tirana with Victor and Robert. We had lunch at a restaurant named Rogova, run by Albanians from Kosovo. Yugoslavia did far better economically under communist rule than Albania, and thus Yugoslav Albanians come from a fairly developed country, as opposed to the Third World conditions in Albania proper. The Kosovars also have capital to invest, while the average Albanian does not, and so they have formed a sort of bourgeois class in Albania and are at times rather resented. As we settled into a meal consisting of several different kinds of meats, Victor began to describe the methods used by some of his fellow meat inspectors; I lost my appetite but kept the momentum going by sipping a bottle of beer and answering questions. Vlachs all the way, Victor and Robert especially wanted to know about the family in America. They keep track of relationships up to third cousins and were astounded to learn that, having married Caryn, I did not know their entire family tree. The excuses I tried to offer (Caryn grew up in Bridgeport and I in New York; I have a poor memory) only managed to shock them further -- in an oral culture like theirs, a poor memory is a luxury no one can afford, and the members of their family are anyway known for their extremely sharp memories. They are absolutely unreasonable about the need to remember things, and I know their genetic material so well that I am actually not surprised when they lean forward and admonish me in unison, "Put your mind to it."

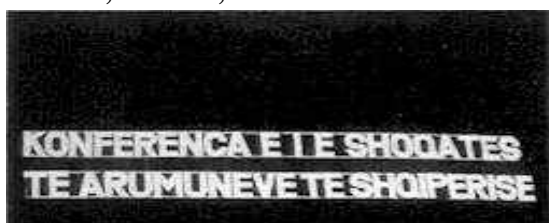
As an American walking the streets of Tirana in April 1992, I may as well have had two heads. But though Americans themselves were a novelty, American popular culture was well-known. As we ate at Rogova, Bob Dylan sang softly in the background; a sign in front of the Hotel Dajti mentioned "McHammer" (sic); and when the day had run its course and I returned to my own hotel, a highly amplified rock-and-roll group was playing live music at a club downstairs, curiously alternating songs like "Black Magic Woman" with Albanian melodies.

I woke up early Sunday morning, eager to see what would

happen at the Vlach conference. The Albanian government had been kind enough to lend us a large auditorium in Tirana University. As Victor and I walked there, we met many people we knew on the street. The hall was packed with hundreds of people, and every country and faction was represented. The Vlachs have been in a precarious position as an ethnic group since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, when we were divided among Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia. Too few and geographically dispersed to even consider having our own state, we were claimed by Greece, to which we are linked culturally, and Romania, to which we are linked linguistically. This tug-of-war for our loyalties lasted from about 1860 until 1945, when the postwar Romanian communist regime decided to give up on us. With the overthrow of Romanian communism in 1989, however, the Greek-versus-Romanian debate resumed, joined by a third group that holds that we are neither Greek nor Romanian but just Vlach citizens of whichever state we happen to live in.

Meanwhile, our numbers have continued to dwindle. At the turn of the century, two British scholars who studied the Vlachs estimated our population at 500,000. The most recent survey, a book written in 1989 by another British academic, Dr. Tom Winnifrith -- a Brontë scholar who has had a lifelong fascination with the Vlachs -- figured the number of Vlachs at perhaps 50,000. But that was before Albania was opened up to western eyes.

Like everything else in the Balkans, population statistics are tied to history; indeed, if the peoples of the Balkans ever succeed in destroying one another, the cause of death can be listed in just one word: history. And only history can explain the question of Vlach population statistics. Albania was created just before the first World War and saved from dismemberment just after it by Woodrow Wilson, of all people. Serbia and Montenegro felt the northern part of the country belonged to them; Italy considered Albania its special colony in the Balkans; while Greece claimed southern Albania, which it began to call "Northern Epirus" as if a region by that name had always existed. Everyone has since given up on these claims except some extremist Greeks who are in any case not supported by their government. The basis of their argument is the Greek minority in Albania, known in Greece as Northern Epirotes. But when they reckon the number of their minority in Albania, Greek nationalists sometimes count *all* the Orthodox, regardless of whether they are Greek, Vlach, or Albanian.





Dais of the Conference of the Arumanian Society of Albania

Today, the Greeks claim to have anywhere from 50,000 to 350,000 compatriots within Albania. Several Vlachs in Albania told me that there are only 50-100,000 Greeks, while there are 200-300,000 Vlachs. I honestly do not know whom to believe, and conditions being as they are in Albania, it will be some time before a reliable census is taken. Only one thing is for sure: even together, Vlachs and Greeks today comprise a rather small portion of Albania's population.

The conference of the Albanian Vlachs began in an orderly way. Since people from the village of Selenitsa provided the main impetus for the creation of an ethnic society, they predominated on the board, which was seated at a dais on the stage of the auditorium. There were even a few women, and goodwill was evident everywhere. But the dynamics of a traditional society are very simple: traditions, rituals, and customs bring a modicum of order to an otherwise chaotic world. Say we are living in a village hidden way up in the Pindus mountains, out of the reach of any civilization or law; what is to prevent me from killing you, raping your daughter, or stealing all your livestock? The consensus afforded by tradition -- that's all. It's the only thing that keeps the lid on such a society; and when the lid starts to blow, watch out. As we all know, it blows rather often on this peninsula. Maybe this has something to do with the mobility of the modern world: it is possible, though difficult, to keep an entire village hewing to the same tradition, but imagine the problems when you meet people from another village, or another region, or another country, or another continent, whose traditions do not match your own? All of a sudden, the lid no longer fits.

So the Vlach conference worked splendidly for as long as a consensus was maintained, and then it spun quickly out of control. Once these meetings go out of control, they assume the nature of a bidding war: Someone on the stage says something that so unnerves a member of the audience that the latter feels he must stand up in his seat and disagree; hearing shouts of approval from the audience, another person is emboldened to stand up and outbid the fellow

before him with an even more radical idea (or a more radical statement of the same idea); and so on. Such meetings offer a flash of insight into the process of radicalization at times of chaos -- all of a sudden, you see before you not Costa and Spiru, but Danton and Robespierre, or Trotsky and Lenin. I am filled with awe for the achievement of modern institutions like political parties, the U.S. House of Representatives, the Society Farsharotul, or even whole countries, which manage to stay together by creating a consensus for a new tradition.

The pro-Romanian faction had prepared itself well and the speaking program included the Romanian ambassador to Albania, who spoke of the Vlachs and Romanians as "one people"; a Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan who promised to build churches for the Vlachs; and a Romanian Senator from Transylvania whose nationalist party enjoys the support of many hardline members of the Vlach emigrant community in Romania. But while the Romanians either spoke in Albanian or required translators from Romanian into Vlach, the Greeks had the presence of mind to see that their delegation was entirely Vlach (led by the Mayor of Metsovo, the largest Vlach town in Greece) and spoke our language perfectly. The loudest incident of the day occurred when the Romanian Ambassador was allowed to speak before the Mayor of Metsovo, which was considered a grievous insult by the Greek Vlachs -- "How could you put that foreigner before *un di a nostru* (one of our own)?" The entire Greek delegation staged a noisy protest at the foot of the stage, drowning out the Romanian ambassador until they were promised that the Mayor of Metsovo would be the very next speaker. This man, Aleko Kakrimani, spoke so eloquently, succinctly, and non-politically about the bonds between Greek and Albanian Vlachs that he almost brought the house down (it didn't hurt that people from Metsovo speak a particularly melodic version of our language).

Although pro-Greeks and pro-Romanians later engaged in more bitter polemics outside the conference hall, it turned out that they were little more than a sideshow, for the vast majority of Vlachs in Albania think of themselves as neither Greek nor Romanian but simply as Vlach citizens of Albania. I found this everywhere I went, even in Korçë, where at the turn of this century emotions had run strongest on both sides, pro-Greek and pro-Romanian. The leadership of the Albanian Vlach Society has followed this non-partisan line despite pressures and blandishments, earning if nothing else the goodwill of the Albanian government, which would no doubt view the Vlachs differently were a nearby state to claim their loyalty. And by repeatedly emphasizing this position, these leaders skillfully kept their conference on track despite all the fireworks.

I have by now served on enough boards and attended enough conferences to know that the most important work often takes place

conferences to know that the most important work often takes place before or after the regularly scheduled activities, usually at the luncheons and repasts that accompany such events. The Vlach conference was no different; after the formalities were concluded, we walked back to the Hotel Arbëria for a banquet that is lavish by many standards, especially those of Albania in early 1992. It was there that I got to meet everyone face-to-face; it was there also that most of the real deals were made and schemes hatched. There were some bright spots, like Orthodox Archbishop Anastas, who spoke very openly about letting the Vlachs celebrate the liturgy in their own language, a position never before heard from a Greek prelate. There were also some dark spots, like the attempt to create a "Balkan Federation of Vlach Societies" without the Greek Vlachs -- indeed, without any semblance of a democratic debate (the discussion was held behind closed doors by "intellectuals," the second most dangerous class of human beings in the Balkan Peninsula after men in general). I found out about the meeting quite by accident, went into the room, and stood alone against excluding the Greeks; the consensus was damaged and it soon ruptured on another issue. A bidding war began, no new consensus was achieved, and the meeting broke up when someone made the face-saving comment, "We get fired up and all of a sudden we want to do everything under the sun in one day." The banquet ended with many a warm embrace and a few cold stares; I went up to my room but had trouble falling asleep, not only because of the turmoil of the day's events, but also because I was filled with anticipation about embarking the next day on a weeklong tour of southern Albania.

In the morning we drove west to the seaport of Durres, where we turned south, following the coastal plain to another port city, Vlorë. Durres is relatively prosperous, as evidenced by its many new cars and decent buildings; like Constantza, the great Romanian harbor on the Black Sea, it has climbed a notch above the surrounding poverty because of its maritime tradition. Many young men from Durres became sailors, one of the few classes to hold western hard currency in communist times -- they needed it to buy supplies in the various ports they visited. Moreover, in the final days of the Alia government, thousands of people tried to escape Albania by climbing aboard Italian vessels in Durres harbor; those who made it to Italy and found work began to send money back to their families in Durres, and these remittances have contributed to the town's prosperity as well.





**Byzantine mosaics deep in the underground corridors
of the Roman amphitheater at Durres.**

Another thing Durres has in common with Constantza is its antiquity; in ancient times, Durres was a Roman port named Dyrrachium, Constantza the Greek town of Tomis, and both are littered with ancient monuments. In 1966, an Albanian resident of Durres was uprooting a fig tree in his back yard when he came upon something that looked like brickwork; excavation revealed the existence of a huge Roman amphitheater. A whole neighborhood had been built on top of it. Thus far, 34 houses have been removed, revealing one-third of the edifice. To give some idea of its size and of the Roman population in that part of Albania in antiquity -- and this sheds some light on the origins of the Vlachs -- the amphitheater held 15,000 spectators; the current soccer stadium of Durres holds only 5,000. Entryways and corridors within the amphitheater were later converted to Byzantine churches and chapels that still bear striking mosaics and frescoes, and burial vaults have also been found, but archaeology is a luxury in Albania right now and excavation has ceased. Perhaps a western university will become interested in the site.

We left Durres and headed south. Driving along the simple two-lane highways of Albania is actually quite an adventure; motor vehicles are a new thing and neither people nor animals are in the habit of looking out for them. Although there were some close calls, we did not hit any people, but the birds of Albania seemed to be intent on using our car as an instrument of suicide, so often did they fly into our radiator grill.

The coastline north of Durres is rocky but to the south it is sandy and, save for the occasional bunker, essentially unspoiled -- a Mediterranean developer's paradise. This was quite a contrast with Vlorë, which has clearly not fulfilled as much of its maritime potential as Durres. I was relieved not to be staying there overnight; our destination was a household in a partly-Vlach village in the mountains just inland. We arrived there and were greeted by our hosts, an elderly widow, her handsome 25-year-old son, whom I'll call Spiru, and Spiru's wife and infant girl. It was a very traditional

family and Spiru's wife was so deferential that I never learned her name. To be fair, this was not due only to her reticence; in the patrilineal genealogy of the Vlachs, the wife is considered to have married into the clan of the husband, and she is forever addressed by the husband's family and friends as *nveasta* -- "the bride." The downside of this, of course, is the subsuming of female to male identity, but some see an upside in still being considered a bride at 60.

Spiru had earned money working in Greece and his household had an air of prosperity. Greek visas are worth thousands of dollars in Albania, so great is the need for employment that will earn hard currency. Greece has taken to offering visas to the Vlachs of Albania, who have only to accept the designation "Northern Epirote." This is a brilliant move on the part of the Greeks; they could strengthen the Greek minority if they could count the Vlachs as Greeks, and what better way to do so than to reward people with a visa? Spiru is one of a growing number of Vlachs who have taken advantage of this offer. He recognizes that by calling himself something other than *Ruman* (or *Aruman*) -- the self-designation of the Vlachs -- he has become an instrument of Greek foreign policy. But he has a family to support; and Greece is a nice place to live and to work; and when he's done, he'll return to his family and household in Albania; and anyway, he knows what he is, no matter what his Greek identification card may say; and so you can move one more Vlach from Column A (Vlach or Albanian) to Column B (Greek). This is the way things go in the Balkans.

Spiru actually represents the greatest hope of Albania -- hardworking young people who go wherever they can to earn money to send back to their families. He will do any sort of work offered him, at the best wage he can find. Even though Spiru plans to return to Albania, he reminds me of my father, who routinely sent his American earnings to his family in the old country until he had his own family to support. That Albania is surviving the collapsed economy of its first year of freedom is due as much to foreign remittances as to humanitarian aid.

It was in Spiru's house that I first noticed something that I would see in many other Albanian households. It looked like a paper sculpture with a design resembling a 360 degree fan. I was surprised and delighted when I was told that it was a book by Enver Hoxha with its pages folded to create a pattern; this tradition seems to have sprung up spontaneously after the fall of the communists. Perhaps the greatest growth industry under the old regime was publishing the works of great communist leaders, especially Enver Hoxha. With the birth of democracy in Albania, however, his books were converted to two new uses: these sculptures, which turn something ugly into something almost pretty; and toilet paper, which does not.



One of two remaining uses for the books of Enver Hoxha.

We had a wonderful dinner of several courses -- Lord knows Albanians cannot afford to eat like this themselves, but they spare nothing for a guest -- and then went to bed. We arose the next morning to a raging storm of perfectly round white hailstones the size of dimes; by the time we were ready to depart, the hail had turned to a driving rain so dense that a young boy who ventured to step out into it was soaked within two seconds. We decided to continue our journey despite the downpour.

I was given the seat of honor in the front, next to the driver -- this happened everywhere I went in Albania. The first thing I noticed was the driver's brand of cigarette, Yugoslavia; *There's one brand name that won't last very long*, I thought to myself. While our previous driver spoke only Albanian, this one also knew some Greek, so I was able to communicate with him (I am fluent in Vlach and conversant with Greek and Romanian), though not quickly enough to prevent the mishap that soon befell us. At one point, the road we were on crossed a small stream, which made its way under the highway through a large conduit. The rain had so swollen the stream that it had overwhelmed the conduit and burst across the road. Our driver nonchalantly plunged right into the raging torrent, which was already about two feet deep. The distributor got wet, shutting down the engine and leaving 5 people in a very small car in the middle of a thundering red-clay river that was rising perhaps an inch a minute. We were taking in water. The next thing I knew, Spiru disrobed down to his underwear and jumped out of the car. A wave of water swept in as he opened and closed the door. He made his way to the front of the car and singlehandedly pushed us up a slight incline 20 feet to safety. Even considering the buoyancy of the car at that point, this was still an extraordinary feat. These mountains produce hearty people: had our fate depended on this city boy's

produce hearty people, had our fate depended on this city's reflexes, for example, I am certain the consequences would have been far worse.

We dropped off Spiru in Vlorë -- he was almost completely unfazed by the incident, as if it had been all in a day's life in the mountains, and probably it was. We went on to the famous town of Tepeleni, home of Ali Pasha, "the Lion of Iannina," an early-nineteenth-century Ottoman lord of Albanian origin made famous by Lord Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Not much remained of the castle Ali Pasha had built there. The great pasha had started his climb to fame as a brigand on these very roads, and in Tepeleni I heard a story about a modern-day successor. When private cars began to appear on Albanian roads again, a fellow had taken to stopping them at gunpoint just outside Tepeleni and robbing the passengers. One of his victims did not take very kindly to this, however, and returned and ran him down with his car. End of story.

A member of our party, a Vlach academic, had planned a luncheon for us with two friends in Tepeleni, both doctors. I was amazed to see them both smoke and drink *raki* just as liberally as any Albanian male, especially since one of them was a specialist in lung diseases. Lunch for 5 here cost a mere 105 leks. Midway through our meal I needed to use the toilet, but when I inquired I was told there was none. So surprised was I that I asked again. We were at a restaurant in the woods just outside of town and, of course, it was still raining. There was no alternative: out into the woods I marched, umbrella in hand.

Our next stop was Gjirokaster, a town of 25,000 built on the side of a mountain and my favorite site in Albania. Perhaps because it was Enver Hoxha's home town, it was well preserved and almost entirely free of communist concrete blocs. Quaint old shops face each other across steep cobbled streets. It has a sizeable population of Greeks, who call the town Argyrocastro. High above the town there is a castle built by the Byzantines in the 12th century atop the walls of the original settlement, which themselves date from the 5th or 6th century A.D. The conquering Ottoman Turks built the castle higher; Ali Pasha added more when he ruled the region; and on top of that, Ahmed Zogu, Albania's king between the two world wars, built a small prison which was also put to use by Mr. Hoxha's secret police (a member of our party told us of an uncle who was hung by his ankles and tortured there for 27 days) -- making this castle yet another metaphor for Albania, a diachronic sort of bunker. Hoxha's house has also been reincarnated, first as his local villa, next as a sort of Hoxha Museum, and now as a Folk Museum.

The mountains around Gjirokaster are dotted with many small villages; we aimed to stop in one of them, Andon Poçi, whose history is typical of how villages form and disperse in the Balkans. Andon Poçi used to be Albanian, but during World War II its

Andon Poçi used to be Albanian, but during world war II its residents (and those of many of the villages around Gjirokaster) fled the guerilla warfare in the mountains and settled in cities. Vlachs in need of mountain pastures came from throughout Albania and northern Greece and resettled the village. Each family lived in a kind of grass hut known as a *kalyva* until 1960, when the modern village was built. By "modern" I mean contemporary, for there is nothing modern in any other sense in Andon Poçi. The road leading to it is little more than a rutted track of such varying quality that when we briefly hit 15 miles per hour it felt as if we were speeding. As far as I know, no home has indoor plumbing, and even the outhouses are primitive. But the villagers are wonderful, hospitable people, and they were absolutely delighted to meet an American who spoke *Rumaneashti*, our word for the Vlach language, which, owing to the guttural French-style "r" of the Vlachs in Albania, starts out sounding like a growl, *Rrrrmaneashti*. I was fed huge quantities of bread, cheese, mutton, and potatoes and was toasted every 5 minutes with *raki*, the only beverage in town. I think I must have met all 1,000 villagers by the evening's end; at least, I felt as if I had, and, bundled up against the cool mountain air in several layers of thick wool blankets, I quickly settled into very sweet slumber.

I was excited when I awoke; our next and last stop was Korçë, my father's home town. Actually, he was not from Korçë but from a tiny village named Pliassa. There used to be two Pliassas, a Vlach village on a mountain just outside Korçë and an Albanian village at the foot of the same mountain; only the lower village still exists. The Vlachs were once transhumant shepherds, spending the summer in a mountain village and the winter in a town in the lowlands but always considering the mountain residence their true home. Korçë was my father's winter town, but Pliassa was his home.

My father told me about the wolves and bears in the mountains, and particularly one encounter with a wolf when he was a boy -- he never saw the wolf, only heard it howling nearby as he walked along a mountain path one moonlit evening. He also told me over and over about an Albanian "revolution," but this confused me because it wasn't like the American revolution; I learned much later in graduate school that this relatively minor incident in the overall scheme of international affairs took place during a period of near-anarchy in Albania between the start of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and the end of World War I in 1918. This "revolution," however, was the defining moment of his life -- indeed, the defining moment in the life of most of the members of his clan: the cold-blooded murder in 1914 of his father's first cousins, the priest Haralambie Balamaci and his brother Sotir, by pro-Greek nationalists in Korçë.

The Balamacis are part of a large Vlach tribe known as Farsharots. Like so many other aspects of Vlach history, the source

of this title is uncertain; it is thought to come from the Albanian town of Frashari, but it is not clear that the tribe was ever based there. Haralambie Balamaci (also known by the honorific title Papa Lambru) was born in 1863, one of a number of priests in the Balamaci family. He had been raised in Greek Orthodoxy (a Greek church was built in Pliassa in 1801), but in 1860 the Romanian government, motivated as much by romantic nationalism as by the need for more chips in its bid to become a player in Balkan power politics, had begun its campaign to bring the Vlachs under its influence by building churches and schools for them in and around the Vlach heartland of Macedonia, which was then still under Ottoman control. The Balamacis were among the strongest clan in their community, largely because of the great wealth in sheep possessed by Haralambie's uncle, Spiru Balamaci; once they were won over to the Romanian cause, almost the entire Farsharot tribe came with them.

Haralambie renounced the Greek church and began to celebrate the liturgy in Romanian, which he and others believed was the Vlachs' "literary language." This upset the local Greeks and pro-Greek Vlachs and Albanians greatly. When the Ottomans ceded Thessaly to Greece in 1881, many Albanian Vlachs were cut off from their winter pastures by the border change; Papa Lambru joined his uncle Spiru in a Vlach delegation that lodged a protest with the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul. This upset the pro-Greek Vlachs and Albanians of Korçë still more and ten years later, when Papa Lambru again traveled to Istanbul, this time to request the creation of a Romanian Episcopate in Vlach regions, an attempt was made on his life.

This was the period of a savage guerilla war between pro-Greek and pro-Bulgarian forces over who would get Macedonia once the Turks inevitably pulled out. In southern Albania, the pro-Romanians tended to side with the pro-Bulgarians against the Greeks. (I am told there were very few ethnic Greeks in Korçë, though there were enough pro-Greek Vlachs and Albanians to sustain a Greek Orthodox Cathedral there. There were definitely no ethnic Romanians.) Tensions grew between pro-Greeks and pro-Romanians. In 1905 the Greeks sent a band of guerillas led by a pro-Greek Vlach named Gouda to Pliassa to discourage the use of a Romanian liturgy in the church named Saint Mary (in Vlach, *S'ta Maria*); he burned the liturgy books, but worship in Romanian continued. In 1906, the Greek Bishop of Korçë, Fotios, decided to visit Pliassa and personally change the language of the liturgy from Romanian to Greek. He was warned not to go and was stoned when he arrived, which so enraged him that he excommunicated Papa Lambru and all of his supporters. Papa Lambru went directly to Pliassa and held a service in Romanian to rally his people and then

he bought a house in Korçë and started his own Romanian school there. In retaliation, Fotios barred all pro-Romanian Vlachs from the Greek church in Korçë; Papa Lambru promptly began holding services in the house, in Romanian, galling Fotios still more.

Later that year, Fotios was assassinated by a Vlach named Thanas Nastu, who escaped to Romania. Turkish authorities rounded up several Balamacis and put them in jail but were unable to link them to the crime. In 1908 the new Greek bishop of Korçë repeated the rite of excommunication, but the victory of the Young Turks in the same year and their repression of all Balkan ethnic groups alike led those groups to unite in a final revolution against Turkish rule in the peninsula. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 prised most of Turkey in Europe away from the Ottomans but although the Greeks won much of Macedonia, they also desired southern Albania ("Northern Epirus"). Greek troops occupied the region and the local pro-Greek faction was ecstatic, fully expecting union with Greece. But the mysterious ways of Great Power politics defied their expectations, and in the middle of March 1914 they learned that Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos had concluded an agreement with the Powers wherein Greece gave up its claim to southern Albania and instead received the Aegean Islands (Chios, Mytilene, and others). Greek troops were to withdraw from Albania by March 31st.

In the months before, Papa Lambru's life had been threatened several times. Albania was in a state of near-anarchy, and he had become a virtual prisoner in his own household, afraid to come out even to shop. The pro-Greek faction of Korçë detested him and when they saw that, partly as a result of his efforts, their cause was being lost, their anger no longer knew any bounds and they cried out for his blood. Early on the morning of March 23rd, 1914, a group of some 60 armed men surrounded the house where Papa Lambru and his brother Sotir lived with their families. They shouted that if the priest did not come outside, they would burn down the house. Papa Lambru came out, followed by Sotir, who refused to leave his brother's side. Their pockets were emptied and the contents replaced with pictures of Fotios, the assassinated Greek Bishop. The two brothers were marched to a piece of high ground just below the Orthodox church of St. Elias (called *Shin d'Ili* in Vlach, a corruption of the Albanian *Shen Ilia*). Sotir's wife and son followed at a distance. Along the way, Papa Lambru and Sotir were kicked, beaten, tortured, and stabbed. When they neared *Shin d'Ili*, they were tied to trees and shot dead. Their bruised and bullet-riddled bodies were kept on display there for three days.





The bodies of Haralambie and Sotir Balamaci lie in state before burial. Kneeling at center is Papa Lambru's son Nicutsa.

My father was 12 at the time and he came to America two years later with this memory etched deeply in his mind. No wonder he spoke of it so often. Pliassa was soon abandoned by the Farsharots, giving rise to one of the largest and most far-flung diaspora communities ever produced by a tiny Balkan village. Before 1920, many emigrated to America; after 1920, others were lured by Romania to settle in the Southern Dobrogea, a region acquired from Bulgaria after World War I. There were very few Romanians among its population and the idea was to use the Vlachs to colonize the region for Romania. But less than two decades later Romania was forced by Hitler to cede the Southern Dobrogea back to Bulgaria, uprooting these Vlachs yet again and radicalizing them in the process. Many never forgave the Liberal Romanian government then in power; this community soon became a fertile recruiting ground for the Iron Guard, the Romanian variant of Nazism and Fascism, and Vlachs eagerly manned its death squads and were responsible for some of its most spectacular assassinations, which often targeted Liberal party leaders.

By this time, only a rump of the Farsharot community remained in Korçë. Vlachs from other tribes began to move into the Vlach quarter of town, in the continuing process of communities coalescing and coming apart. Pliassa itself had only come together in the 18th century, after Ali Pasha and other Albanian chieftains had sacked several important Vlach centers, including the great town of Moskopolje. Who knows from which of these places the Balamacis had come when they found refuge in Pliassa? There is family tradition that the name was once pronounced Bulamaci, then Balamaci; a branch of the family moved south into Greece, where their name became Balamatsi (Greeks cannot pronounce the "ch" sound and so change it to "ts"). Another group went west to the Macedonian town of Bitolja, where their name became Belimace; some of their descendants moved to Romania and kept that name, while just recently I met a descendant of another branch of that family that had ended up in Greece as Bilimatsi.

There are only a few Balamacis left in Korçë: one descendant of Papa Lambru, his granddaughter Marioara Balamaci, who is elderly and unmarried; and the rather more plentiful descendants of Papa Cota Balamaci, the man who was quickly ordained a priest in 1914 to take Papa Lambru's place (some say he had been a bandit until then, but the bandit who becomes a priest is a popular paradigm in Balkan storytelling). When I visited Korçë, I stayed with my wife's relatives, the Stefas; I suppose that as first cousins of my mother-in-law, they were more entitled to host me than Marioara Balamaci, who is my third cousin. The Balamacis, the Stefas, and most remaining Farsharots live in the old Vlach quarter of town, located on the outskirts at the foot of a hill; many of the houses there are essentially as they were when my father left in 1916, and as I walked through the town my head swam with his descriptions of the small private courtyard attached to each house, the whitewashed walls, the cobbled streets, the fountains, and the cold air (Korçë is 700 meters above sea level).

After a quick series of visits and another grand dinner, I had begun to feel a flu coming on and made a deal with everyone in the household to let me sleep late the following morning. But of course I was awakened very early by an exuberant Vlach voice shouting, "*O, lai Nikolao! Niko! Niko! Niko!*" The voice turned out to be that of my cousin Salvatore Balamaci, who was too excited about having an American relative in town to let the morning be wasted on sleep. And so it went throughout my entire stay in Korçë -- I was bedridden with the flu and unable to visit people, so a steady stream of relatives came to call on me. My greatest regret was that I could not make the pilgrimage up to the ruins of Pliassa.



**Marioara Balamaci next to a photograph of her grandfather,
Papa Lambru Balamaci, in her house in Korçë.**

I spent an extra amount of time with my cousin Marioara, who is a sort of family historian (she also possesses a treasure-chest of old family photographs and letters and diaries of Papa Lambru and other Balamacis, including some letters from my own father). It turns out that the story of Papa Lambru did not end with his death in 1914. The Romanian school in Korçë, like the entire pro-Romanian movement among the Vlachs, lasted until the second world war. In 1925, with the help of remittances from the Vlachs in America, Papa Lambru's small chapel had been replaced with a Romanian Orthodox Cathedral, St. Sotir, but a severe earthquake in 1931 essentially destroyed it and the community was reduced to using a small makeshift chapel erected just behind the crumbling cathedral. In 1959, the Chief of the Communist Party Committee of Korçë decided to pull down the rest of the church structure so the land could be used for something else; Papa Lambru's bones were also buried on the property and Marioara insisted that they be exhumed and reburied in another cemetery. But the Party Chief was a descendant of one of Papa Lambru's killers, and in an all too typical act of Balkan hatred he not only exhumed the bones but broke every single one of them. Marioara calls this the second murder of Papa Lambru. She reburied the bones herself and 3 years later, in 1962, at his new grave, Papa Lambru was honored as an Albanian hero for resisting the Hellenization of the Orthodox of southern Albania. In 1970, a majestic new Heroes' Cemetery was built high atop the hill behind the Vlach quarter, and Papa Lambru's bones were moved to a marble-covered crypt in a prominent position there; a street in Korçë was also named after him -- the street where he used to live, in the house now occupied by Marioara.



Papa Lambru's grave in the Heroes' Cemetery overlooking Korçë.

My own ideas about the Vlachs are rather different from those of Papa Lambru. I don't think we are Romanian. I see the pro-Romanian movement, well-intentioned though some of its supporters may have been, as just another attempt to assimilate us to a non-Vlach national culture. I have little patience for nationalists, Vlach or any other kind. Nor do I have the visceral hatred of Greeks that the pro-Romanians have; quite the contrary, my mother is from Greece and I've always had a special fondness for that country -- I even made it a point in college to learn to speak Greek. I sometimes feel guilty that my views are so different from those of Papa Lambru, and I try to salve my conscience with the thought that though non-nationalist ideas like mine may not save our small culture, they are probably the only way to put an end to Balkan atrocities like his murder -- and like the unspeakable horror being visited on the people of Bosnia today. It seems to me that it is deeply held ideologies, not the lack of them, that animate the greatest crimes.



Some of the main figures in the Albanian Vlach Society: (from left) Ianku Balamaci, Rrapo Zguri, Dr. Spiro Shituni, and Victor Stefa.

During my week in Albania, Sali Berisha, a cardiologist and leader of the opposition to the communist regime, was elected President -- the first democratically-elected leader in the history of that country. It was an extraordinary experience for Albanians, and even an outsider like me was able to feel some of the excitement and emotion. While I was in Korçë, the television replayed again and again the election of Berisha, the applause of the Parliament, the acclaim of the people. It was a transforming national experience, evocative of the election of John F. Kennedy in the United States, everyone watching, everyone hopeful. In his acceptance speech, Dr. Berisha announced that he would not reside in the Presidential Palace but rather among the people, in the modest Tirana apartment he and Mrs. Berisha shared with their teenage son and daughter.

he and Mrs. Berisha shared with their teenage son and daughter. Throughout Albania, people were moved to tears, but few more than Victor and Robert, who watched Berisha intently and translated his words for me.

Their father had been a prosperous pharmacist in Pogradec, a resort town on Lake Ohrid. The communist regime had confiscated his pharmacy and put him to work in it. But on January 10, 1951 they accused him of "economic sabotage" and put him in jail. The specific charge was even more ludicrous: they charged him with planning to poison the water supply of Pogradec and kill everyone. They kicked his family out of their seaside villa and condemned him to hang, but after 11 years in various prisons throughout Albania, he was released and lived another 23 years, until 1985. His story is all too typical, and as Victor and Robert studied the figure of Sali Berisha on their television screen, they could hardly believe that the nightmare was over, that their father was vindicated.

The return to Tirana was anticlimactic. When I arrived at Rinas Airport, an Albanian who was returning to New York on the same flight shouted to me, "I saw you on television!" (the Vlach conference had been televised, another gracious gesture by the new Albanian government). The in-flight movie, *Frankie and Johnny*, is one of my favorites and helped prepare me for the cultural shock of returning to New York. Caryn awaited me at JFK; it was good to be home, but strangely, I found my sudden anonymity a bit disconcerting, like a celebrity unrecognized.



The writer with Dr. Sali Berisha, President of Albania.

Nine months later, in January of 1993, I returned to Albania to help Sali Berisha build his press office up to western standards. You just never know where life is going to take you. During my 4 weeks in Albania, the sun shone every day but one, and even the one exception was perfect the day I climbed up to Pliassa inside a

exception was perfect, the day I climbed up to Pliassa inside a snowcloud -- it gave the scattered stones of my father's village an aura of immateriality, figures appearing from the mist as ghosts, a shroud still preserving Pliassa's mysteries. Rinas Airport was fenced in, free of livestock, and almost pretty. The lek had stabilized at about 100, both on the street and in the bank. Ramiz Alia was under house arrest, and Enver Hoxha's widow Nexhimije was just at the end of her trial, both charged with relatively minor things like embezzlement and unauthorized expenditures. Wages had increased to about 2,000 leks for a laborer and 3,000 for a professional. The military budget had been slashed. But the cost of a meal for 3 at Rogova had risen from 620 leks to 2580 leks. Tirana residents were used to foreigners and it was possible to walk the streets in something resembling normal urban anonymity. Bia and Victor had finally made it to America in November, when my son Andrew was born. And although I now have a few Albanian stories of my own to tell him, I want him also to know about his grandfather, who left Albania in 1916...



Sections of walls like this one are all that remains of Pliassa.

"Better an ounce of luck than a pound of intelligence."

--Albanian saying

Views of Korçë:



Street named after Papa Lambru Balamaci



typical doorway -- note architectural details, indicating past prosperity



Land of contrasts -- sheep grazing in front of Tirana's modern Hall of Culture.

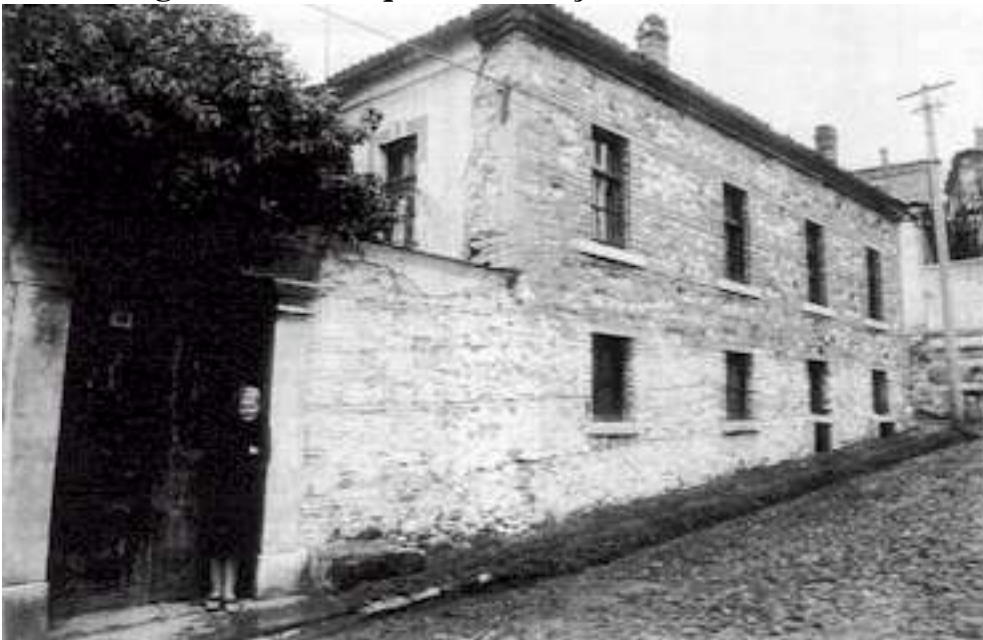


Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

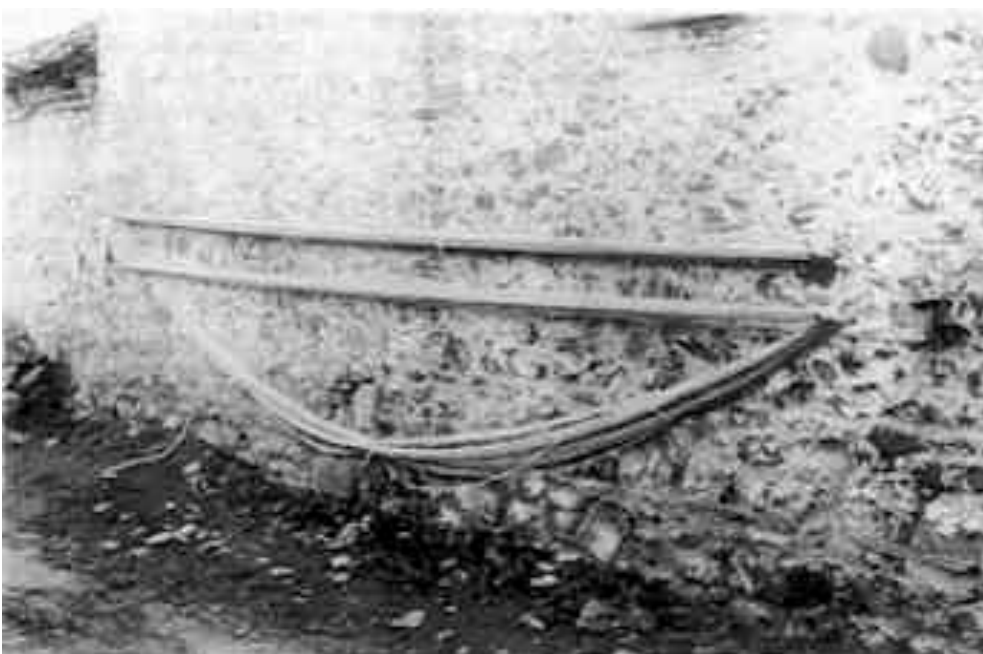




Vlach merchant George Caporan selling traditionally crafted rug in the town square of Korçë



Marioara Balamaci standing in doorway to her house on Papa Lambru Balamaci Street.



The side of a house in the Vlach quarter of Korçë, Albania. Traditional woolmaking crafts survived communism; now their greatest challenge is to survive and prosper in capitalism.

Northern Epirus, Southern Albania and the Vlachs

The GreekAmerican, September 11, 1993

Greek claims in southern Albania are based on a Greek minority numbered at some 350,000. There is a potential problem with this figure, however, in that almost half of these may not consider themselves Greek. Greek tallies typically include the Vlachs of Albania, despite the unaligned position of the representative organization of Albanian Vlachs.

The Vlachs are Romance-speaking descendants of indigenous Blakan peoples (Thracian, Greeks, Illyrians, Macedonians) and the Romans who conquered the Balkan Peninsula in the second century B.C. Cut off from Latin civilization by the Slavic invasions of the sixth century A.D., the Vlachs have since followed a nomadic lifestyle in the mountains of Macedonia, Epirus, Thrace, and Thessaly. According to Greek scholar Peter Charanis, the Vlachs were long a thorn in the side of the Byzantine empire, and indeed, Vlach collaboration with the Ottomans played an important role in the Turkish conquest. Two important factors brought them closer to the Greeks during the Tourkokratia: their lack of a literary tradition, which opened them to assimilation by the two civilizations with which they had contact, Greek and Turkish; and their Orthodoxy during the Ottoman years, when untold numbers of Orthodox Slavs, Romanians, Albanians, and Vlachs were drawn into the orbit of what would later be called Hellenism. In the nineteenth century, the larger groups established their own national states and began themselves to compete for the loyalties of the Vlachs.

The Romanians and the Greeks were most successful (the Vlach language is closely related to Romanian), except in the remote mountains of Albania, where a good number of Vlachs managed to avoid extensive contact with civilization until the long arm of Albanian communism finally reached them after World War II. But their assimilation was incomplete and they organized themselves as an ethnic group while Albania's dictatorship was crumbling in 1991. On April 5, 1992, I attended the first conference of The Vlach Society of Albania. Out of that meeting arose a sort of "Constitution" requesting the government's support in establishing schools, churches, and other institutions in order to preserve the Vlach community of Albania.

Almost every Albanian Vlach I spoke with claimed that the usual Greek figure for the Greek minority (350,000) represents perhaps 100,000 Greeks and 250,000 Vlachs. The only impartial scholar I know of who has travelled extensively through southern Albania, Dr. Tom Winnifrith of Warwick University, conservatively

Albania, Dr. Tomi Winniford of Warwick University, conservatively estimates 200,000 Vlachs in Albania. These figures are obviously far from complete, and yet, they weigh heavily on Greek claims against Albania; if the Vlachs indeed comprise the majority of “Greeks,” then the Vlachs have it within their power to either bolster or undermine Greek claims in Albania.

Those claims have been in the spotlight since Albania expelled a Greek priest this summer for separatist activities and Greece retaliated by expelling thousands of illegal Albanian immigrants from Greece. But amid all the publicity the issue has received, thus far little mention has been made of the Vlachs.

There are two reasons for this. The Albanian Vlachs (in contrast with the Greeks) have steadfastly refused to turn their organization into an ethnically-based political party. They have also avoided aligning themselves with either the Romanians or the Greeks. But the temptation to take sides in the latter competition are enormous – and in this struggle, the Greek side has an advantage in terms of economic resources. While the Romanians have made token gestures by providing construction materials for churches and scholarships for Albanian Vlach students to go to Romania, the Greeks bear the greatest gift of all – a visa enabling the bearer to earn hard currency – and thousands of Vlachs happily declared themselves Voreioepeirotoi in exchange for this almost unique opportunity to break free of Albanian poverty.

In a way, this is history repeating itself. In the 18th and 19th centuries, hundreds of thousands of Vlachs embraced Hellenism as a means of social mobility, a ticket to a higher social state. For the Vlach merchant diaspora, adoption of Greek culture, letters, and national identity meant access to a far-flung network of business partners and contacts. For the mass of the Vlachs, it meant that in just one generation, a family could evolve from rustic, unlettered mountain shepherds to learned, literate members of a universally respected cultural tradition dating back thousands of years. Under these circumstances, the question is not why so many Vlachs have opted for Greek identity in recent centuries, but rather why so many have not.

There are signs lately that more and more Albanian Vlachs are throwing in their lot with Hellenism. The President of the Albanian Vlach Society, Ianku Balamaci (a distant relative), just lost his position at least partly because he was suspected of pro-Romanian sympathies, Mr. Balamaci had angered some of his constituents by bringing his family on a junket to Romania and by allegedly deciding on his own, without benefit of a committee, who would receive some 67 scholarships made available to Albanian Vlachs by the Romanian government.

But the Albanian Vlachs’ support of Greece is still not

axiomatic. The movement to organize a Vlach Society came from the grass roots and enjoyed widespread support, and there is a strong mandate in the Society's "Constitution" for preservation of Vlach ethnic identity. Given a choice between Vlach and Greek identity, it is not clear what these Vlachs will do.

Of course, Greece need not force them to make that choice. In fact, Metropolitan Anastasios, the Orthodox Archbishop of Albania, has already pointed the way by supporting the right of the Vlachs to worship in their own language. If Greece emerged as a champion of Vlach ethnic identity and its preservation, there is little doubt that the Vlachs of Albania could be brought into the Greek-Albanian dialogue in a very positive way, as a potential counterweight to extreme nationalists on both sides, Greek and Albanian. This would call for a change in strategy by the Greek government, which would have to stop taking the Albanian Vlachs for granted or pretending they do not exist.

If the Vlachs are able to help bring about understanding between Greece and Albania, they can end up being a factor for peace throughout the Balkans. The next focal point is obvious: the Vlachs in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) are under pressure to assimilate from the Macedonian Slavs, who may not constitute a numerical majority in their own country unless they include smaller groups like the Vlachs in their number. By coming to the assistance of these Vlachs, Greece could wield more influence in FYROM and perhaps chalk up a few foreign policy victories, at the same time bolstering its stature in human rights circles – laudable, desirable, and arguably even important goals for Greece in 1993.

From the Editor: The Failure of the Ethnic-State

The Newsletter, volume VIII, Issue 1, February 1994

Not long ago I attended a lecture about Woodrow Wilson and his support of the right of ethnic groups to have their own states -- a principle that falls into greater disrepute with each new atrocity committed in its name. At the lecture's end, a bow-tied professor with an elegant accent arose and said, "Yes, a lot of terrible crimes have been committed in the name of national self-determination -- but it builds states, and anyway, what is the alternative?"

I wanted to shake the man and say, "You're *standing* in it!" There is an alternative to the tribalism that is rending the world today. It's obvious -- perhaps a little too obvious. It's called the American Way, and it's one of our greatest contributions to Western civilization.

During the Enlightenment, educated western Europeans felt they had rid themselves of a kind of tribalism by rejecting the deep religiosity of the Middle Ages. But they merely ended up trading religion for nationalism. You can deplore the blind faith of medieval society all you want and cry out against the barbarism of Crusade and *jihad* alike but the simple truth is that nationalism is the most destructive force in human history, having killed 75 million human beings between 1914 and 1945 alone -- and it just keeps on killing.

Among the strains of nationalism that have appeared in the world is one mutated form, the American version. It is almost unique in that it is not based on ethnicity but citizenship. "The adjective 'American,'" writes historian Michael Walzer, "points to the citizenship, not the nativity or nationality, of the men and women it designates. It is a political adjective... It never happened that a group of people called Americans came together to form a political society named America. The people are Americans only by virtue of having come together. And whatever identity they had before becoming Americans, they retain."

The idea that the people who constitute a nation ought to be

of the same ethnic group originated around the middle of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, where it prevailed over the notion of citizenship as the common bond. Perhaps this has something to do with America having been an amalgam of ethnic and religious groups from the start, while most Western European states were dominated by one or another group. Whatever its genesis, the ethnic-state has been a disaster.

The American citizen-state was strong enough to stay together despite a Civil War with Southern separatists; if coming together as a nation was the act of all the people, then it followed that there was no right of unilateral secession -- the dissolution or dismemberment of that nation also had to be agreed to by all the people. On the other hand, the European ethnic-state has left itself open to secession and subdivision when rival ethnic groups claim the right to self-determination -- a notion reinforced after World War I, when Woodrow Wilson championed that right for every "nation or people" (in practice, every ethnic group).

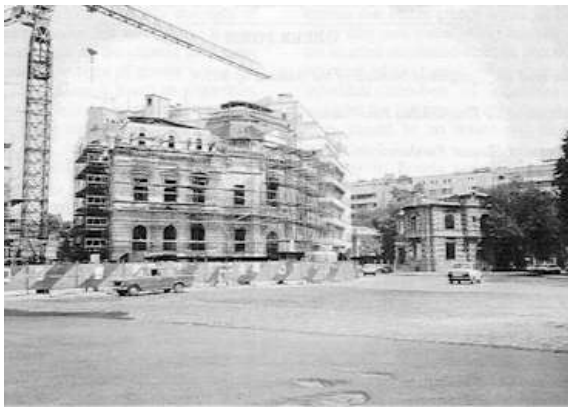
It is utterly ironic that a President of the United States should have supported so un-American a principle. The irony was not lost on Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, who saw unqualified self-determination as a concept that was at best inconsistent with American practice, at worst "loaded with dynamite." But he was overruled and ultimately dismissed by the President; ethnic self-determination was enshrined in the settlement of World War I; and while some Western European nations have since moved away from the ethnic-state model, the concept of self-determination has gone on to dissolve colonial empires and multiethnic states throughout the rest of the world.

The problem is not really the right of self-determination but who has it. It is an individual right of the citizens of a state, not a collective right of groups within the state. Our system is based on a covenant between the individual and the state. "A mature nation such as Britain or France is in reality a melting pot of races and cultures, held together by common allegiance to political structures and traditions," writes Jacques Attali, former President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, who also notes, "Such structures and traditions are either absent or barely developed in Eastern Europe."

In all fairness to the people of Eastern Europe, Western countries that have moved to some degree beyond nationalism are not necessarily their moral superiors. Indeed, non-Western countries learned about nationalism from the West, and out of necessity. Ethnocentrism is like a powerful weapon system: once one country has it, others feel a need for it as well -- a trend that has helped fuel our current worldwide escalation. Once Serbian nationalists, for example, start oppressing their Albanian minority, there is not much

example, start oppressing their Albanian minority, there is not much left for the Albanians to do but to ratchet up their own nationalism, and so on. It is perhaps natural that the response to collective oppression is a demand for collective rights. But it would be misguided to discourage the latter without also discouraging the former.

It is high time we admitted that absolute self-determination has been an absolute disaster, to this very day. Germany precipitated the Yugoslavian catastrophe, for example, with its pressure for premature recognition of Croatia and Slovenia. Why do we automatically assume that ethnic groups would be better off in their own states? Only because they are so often mistreated in states dominated by other ethnic groups. The truth is, if individual members of minorities are accorded the full panoply of human rights, there should be no reason for them to secede.



Today in Bosnia and in many other countries throughout the world, the failure of unqualified self-determination can be measured in grave markers. Our support of this misguided concept dates from a war that began in Sarajevo in 1914; perhaps the mass carnage in Sarajevo in 1992-94 will help bring us to our senses.

Scene from Bucharest after the Ceaucescus.

"The man of archaic cultures tolerates 'history' with difficulty and attempts periodically to abolish it" -Mircea Eliade

From the Editor: From Mystery to Politics

The Newsletter, volume VIII, Issue 2 & volume IX, Issue 1 (combined), February 1995

It's been almost 3 years since the euphoric discovery that the Arumanian community in Albania had somehow survived communism and was organizing to preserve itself. At the time, scholars were estimating our population in the Balkans at around 50,000 and declining fast; here was a forgotten pocket of Vlachs claiming to be some 250,000 strong! I well remember the awe felt by all outsiders who attended the first international conference of the Albanian Vlachs in April of 1992; we were shocked at the size of our community there, swept away by its enthusiasm, and amazed at its solidarity.

The situation is very different 3 years later. Far from being the launching pad for an international Arumanian revival, our community in Albania today stands distraught and deeply divided.

thanks to the same factors that have made group preservation so elusive for all Vlachs over the past two centuries: a lethal combination of politics and pride.

In an earlier issue of this Newsletter, I warned of the political threat to our community in Albania, where the old Greek versus Romanian contest for our souls had already begun to emerge from a half-century of dormancy under Albanian communism. In essence, we are speaking of a bidding war in which Greeks and Romanians offered scholarships, jobs, churches, schools, and money to Vlachs who sided with them. Anyone even remotely familiar with the economic and cultural resources of both countries knows that the outcome was never in doubt; Greece has far more attractions for the impoverished Albanian Vlachs -- jobs and opportunities, not to mention a chance to claim descent not from rough mountaineers but from Socrates, Plato, and other paragons of a culture that is almost universally admired in the West. In other words, no contest.

A brief story will illustrate what has happened: When I visited Albania in 1992, one of the most vociferous young leaders of the new Vlach association befriended me and spent much time with me. His name doesn't matter; what matters is that he kept saying to me (and to anyone else who would listen), "The Romanians are our brothers. We are the same people. They will help us. We must stand with them." And so on. I told him my view that the Vlachs were neither Romanian nor Greek but a distinct ethnic group, but he would not hear it: "We are Romanians, they are Romanians, that's all there is to it," he said, in the gruff and peremptory way males in our culture are trained to make such pronouncements. Having learned (rather late in life, being a bit thick myself) that it was futile to try to change the mind of any Vlach with a strong opinion, I gave up.

Two and a half years later, I opened up a Greek newspaper in New York and noticed that an article about the Greek minority in Albania also mentioned the Vlachs. Upon closer examination, I read a quote from the very same fellow, his name now hellenized with an "s" at the end, who said, "The Vlachs are Greeks, they are the oldest and truest Greeks, but we have wandered away from our true culture. We want to rejoin our hellenic brothers." And so on.

The French mystic poet Charles Peguy, one of many who fell in the butchery of the First World War, wrote that "All things begin in mystery and end in politics." This story could easily be cited as proof.

It may not be terribly surprising that politics has divided our people in Albania; after all, we had never demonstrated unity in that country. What is truly surprising is that our community in Korçë, which has in the past demonstrated unity, is right now also being torn apart by politics.

Readers of this Newsletter already know that Ianko

Readers of this Newsletter already know that Tinko Balamaci was deposed as President of the Arumanian Society more than a year ago because he was felt to have spent too much of the community's money on trips to Romania and was perceived as being in the pocket of the Romanian Ambassador to Albania, who has made it his special hobby to reclaim the Albanian Vlachs as long-lost kin. The other person clearly representing the Romanian view is a Vlach priest, a very nice fellow named Taki Veriga; he was trained by the Romanians and sent back to lead the Korçë community in worship. But some in the community now discredit his efforts on behalf of the Romanians because of the funding he's received from them; these people are leaving the small Arumanian congregation the Society Farsarotul has pledged so much money to support and instead worshipping at the Greek Metropolitan church nearby.

On the other hand, the Greek Ambassador to Albania employs people fluent in Vlach who have built strong personal relationships with members of our community. The Greeks distribute largesse, too, and not just to certain chosen individuals -- they give to everyone they possibly can. Trips are sponsored to Greece to witness the annual festival of the Pan-Hellenic Union of Vlach Cultural Societies. Visas are given to work in Greece for hard currency. Contacts are made with prosperous Vlachs in Greece (there are many); jobs are offered; alliances formed; and commitments made. The Greeks have tenaciously defended the Orthodox of Albania. Many Korçë Vlachs seem to feel, correctly or incorrectly, that in Greece they have a friend who is interested not in itself but in them.

I favor neither side, and have had the honor of being hated and vilified by both. I only know that the Vlach community in Albania is being torn apart by politics as usual, and now it's reached our home base in Korçë. I cannot help but think of Noel Malcolm's devastating statement about the centuries of struggle along the border between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, both of which used Vlachs as mercenaries: "Apart from the big set-piece campaigns," he writes, "the military struggle between Ottoman and Habsburg on this border consisted mainly, year in, year out, of Vlachs fighting Vlachs."

The other factor in our dismemberment, besides politics, is pride -- the pride of my friend who knew he was right in saying that the Vlachs were Romanians, and the pride that drove him 30 months later to say just as certainly that we were Greeks. It is the same pride that so often leads us to shout rather than listen when we discuss our situation; the same pride that prevents us from admitting our errors, and condemns us to repeat them; the same pride that makes us dedicated members of the group one instant, and fiery rebels the next. It is the pride of an old people confronting a new world.

Once upon a time, the tribe sustained the individual, and

strict rules, absolute certainties, and unquestioned authority sustained the tribe. But what worked well in the Balkan mountains of the 16th century can be a recipe for disaster in the modern nations of the 21st. We seem to be learning that the hard way.



The northern flank of Mt. Grammos, in Albania: to the south lies Greece.

From the Editor: Our Choices In America
The Newsletter, volume IX, Issue 2, Fall 1995

"Each person, withdrawn into himself, behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others. His children and his good friends constitute for him the whole of the human species. As for his transactions with his fellow citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone. And if on these terms there remains in his mind a sense of family, there no longer remains a sense of society." - Alexis de Tocqueville, writing of Americans in

sense of society. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing of Americans in his classic *Democracy in America* (1835)

We Arumanians in America are descendants of the great wave of immigration that swept into the United States at the turn of the century. Most of us today are not immigrants, but members of a transitional generation with one foot in the Old World and one foot in the New. We are forced to make choices between the more traditional lifestyle of our parents and grandparents, on the one hand, and lifestyles associated with modern America, on the other. We see, for example, how bonds of friendship have overtaken the bonds of kinship as a primary force in American life. But we also see the desolation and loneliness that can accompany a lack of community.

This contrast between old and new -- between traditional and modern, between the Balkan Peninsula and America, between the demands of our community and our needs as individuals -- is a constant theme in our lives. We're not always conscious of it, until something makes it evident -- such as the memoirs by Bill Balamaci and Barbara Shola included in this issue of the Newsletter, for example.

It's a provocative subject -- it goes to the heart of who we are, and how willing we are to cling to, or relinquish, old ways. On one side, traditionalists lament the loss of a time that was better and more pure than the present. On the other side, lovers of modern American life disdain old ways, along with the often onerous communal obligations that accompany them.

No matter which side you're on, it's healthy to take a step back and consider how fortunate we are to have such a choice in the first place. Though this is now changing, people in the old country have had little choice but to follow traditional ways. And those who are totally assimilated to American society have equally few alternatives to the individualized way of life so accurately described by de Tocqueville more than a century and a half ago.

This idea of a choice is something new under the sun. For most of this country's history, outright assimilation was an ideal that few people questioned. American values were considered supreme, and not without reason -- this country's achievement in world affairs remains unique. But in the last few decades, this unquestioning assumption of the superiority of the American way of life has given way to a more subtle point of view, one that recognizes that there are good things about ways of life in both the Old World and the New World.

That is why we are lucky to have a choice. We may be able to have the best of both worlds -- not by abandoning or adopting either wholesale, but by choosing the very best from each.



**Vlach children learning the catechism in a church in Voskopojë,
Albania**

(Photo: Lala Meredith-Vula)

The Balkan Vlachs: Born to Assimilate?

The Newsletter, volume X, Issue 1, Spring 1996

Cultural Survival Quarterly, Summer 1995

The Vlachs are a Romance-speaking Balkan population once characterized by a transhumant lifestyle. Among their many other characteristics one must count an uncanny way of making those who study them question their most fundamental notions about ethnic groups and cultural survival.

It all begins with their genesis: The Romans conquered Macedonia in the second century B.C., intermarrying with the indigenous Balkan peoples. The Vlachs are descendants of this union. Although their language is similar to Romanian, the Vlachs are located at quite a distance from Romania, in Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The main distinguishing features of the Vlachs have long been their Romance language and their transhumance, which involved migration between summer (highland) and winter (lowland) pastures. Although today relatively few Vlachs are true transhumants, those who retain a Vlach identity still tend to make summertime pilgrimages to their mountain villages. Because there are few books in Vlach and no standardized alphabet, Vlach culture has been fast losing ground to modern advances in communications, from books and schools to satellites and MTV. Parallel to these changes has been the hectic pace of Balkan state-building (*read*: fast-track efforts to assimilate minorities). Once wholly contained within the (Turkish) Ottoman Empire, early in this century the Vlachs were divided among the modern Balkan states. At the time, their

population was estimated at 500,000; recent estimates cite less than half that number. Vlach population figures are notoriously hard to substantiate; the most recent scholar to study the Vlachs, Prof. Tom Winnifrith of Warwick University in England, estimated in 1987 that there were 30,000 Vlachs in Greece and 20,000 in Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania (he has since stated that the latter figure may be five to ten times higher). Communities of Vlachs also exist in Western Europe, North America, and Australia, which together host several thousand Vlachs.

The situation seems pretty straightforward: Another ethnic and linguistic group is disappearing under the indifferent juggernaut of modernity; what's happening to the Vlachs is bad, because assimilation is bad, right?

Well, perhaps . . . except that the Vlachs are *themselves* the product of a successful assimilation.

One of the forerunners of modern Western civilization was the civilization of ancient Rome. Two thousand years ago, the Balkan Peninsula south of the Danube may have been as diverse as it is today; there were Thracians, Illyrians, Epirotes, Macedonians, Greeks, Scythians, Moesians, and many others. Though the memory of Rome has long been lost, Those who were Romanized created a new Balkan group that in most cases calls itself *Rumani* or *Arumani* (in English, Arumanians or Aromanians), though outsiders have dreamed up a host of other names: Vlachs, Koutsovlachs, Tsintsars, Karagouni, Chobani, Vlasi, and Macedo-Romanians, to name just a few.

By all indications, once the Roman conquest was completed, the process of adopting the Romans' language and religion was fairly passive. Rather than force these on locals, the Romans built roads, bridges, and other means of communication; they created and enhanced industries and markets; and, perhaps most importantly, over the centuries they opened up a vast new realm of opportunities in the army and administration. The process of Romanization gave indigenous groups *entrée* into a more developed collective entity and civilization. Two thousand years later, another conquest is taking place in the Balkan Peninsula, not at the tip of a sword, but at the touch of a TV remote control. It is therefore difficult to argue today that assimilation is an evil that the Vlachs must avoid, when it was assimilation that gave birth to the Vlachs in the first place.

The Vlachs make us question other cherished notions, such as that of "indigenous groups." One can argue that the Vlachs represent indigenous Balkan peoples (Thracians, Greeks, Illyrians, and others) who continued to survive in their ancestral lands -- albeit speaking a new language -- after the Romans came. However, as far as we know, those groups were themselves Indo-European invaders who only happened to settle in the Balkans many thousands of years

ago. In our search for the legitimacy conferred by the title "indigenous," where do we draw the line?

Even a cursory acquaintance with the Vlachs will make anyone wonder what constitutes an ethnic group. Is it a common language, religion, culture, or some other such "barrier" to outsiders? The Vlachs are famous for the ease with which they assimilate, but when they're not actually assimilating, they are known for holding their Vlach identity in reserve, to be displayed when favorable circumstances exist. It was in an article about the Vlachs that anthropologist Muriel Dimen Schein decided to pose an old question in a very new way: "*When is an Ethnic Group?*" (italics added).

The Vlachs thus present a fascinating case study of a traditional society adapting to modern life. They provide a valuable contrast with many of the groups whose plight is usually presented on these pages. But as much as they may differ on the particulars, the general outline of their history is much the same: the modern world has not been friendly to their survival as an ethnic group.

A "People without History?"

Although the origin of the Vlachs is pretty straightforward, their trail is difficult to follow through the historical record. The Romanization of the Balkan Peninsula began during the late stages of the Roman Republic, and continued under the early Empire. Latin remained the language of officials in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire until the sixth century A.D., when Greek came to dominate. But in the more remote areas of the Balkan Peninsula, a new Romance language took root. Today, two Balkan groups trace their ancestry to these Romance-speakers: the Romanians, to the north of the Danube River, and the Vlachs, to the south.

While there is a gap of several hundred years in the history of the Romanians, the Vlachs seem to have existed in the southern Balkans (though not necessarily in the same precise locations) since the Roman conquest. Here we enter the turbulent waters of Balkan history, which has regularly been subordinated to present national imperatives. In this case, the Romanians and Hungarians both covet Transylvania and have sought to legitimize their claims to it by asserting historical priority in that region. Thus, the Hungarians theorize that the Romanians are really Vlachs from the southern Balkans who migrated north of the Danube during the Middle Ages, i.e., after the Hungarians got there. The Romanians respond by asserting that they are the descendants of the indigenous Dacians north of the Danube who, though conquered and partially assimilated by the Romans, have continued to exist in all current Romanian lands since antiquity; the Romanians see the Vlachs of the southern Balkans alternately as indigenous Thracians south of the Danube who were Romanized (the Dacians were a Thracian tribe) and as

who were Romanized (the Dacians were a Thracian tribe) and as Romanians from north of the Danube who migrated south.

Ethnic Conflict, State-Building, and Assimilation

Like other ethnic groups, the Vlachs' consciousness and primary loyalty have long been linked to their immediate environment -- clan, village, mountain, valley, -- and not to any national concept; such ideas were born in Western Europe in the early nineteenth century and only since then have Vlachs and others come to see themselves as part of a "nation." Whereas the Romanians eventually went on to create their own nation-state in the nineteenth century, the Vlachs, due to their proximity to Greek populations, have come more and more under the influence of Greek culture. In fact, all Balkan groups during the Ottoman occupation were marked by the fluidity with which they adopted aspects of each other's culture, especially Greek culture, which not only predominated through the Orthodox Church, but was also the language of trade and commerce -- so much so that to prosper as a merchant was to become "Greek". Once nationalism became a force in European political life in the nineteenth century, however, this relatively peaceful Balkan coexistence ended and, as Ottoman strength in Europe faded, the various Balkan national groups began to fight over the remaining Turkish lands in the peninsula.

A nationalist movement began among wealthy Vlach merchants in Vienna and Budapest at the start of the nineteenth century, but the rising Romanian state soon co-opted it, claiming the Vlachs as long-lost kin and investing large sums in Romanian schools and churches for them. While genuinely fraternal feelings certainly existed under the romantic form of early nationalism, the Romanians also hoped to use the Vlachs as a bargaining chip in their territorial claims against neighboring Balkan countries. This Romanian nationalist movement gave rise to the new ethnic designation *Macedoromâni*, "Macedo-Romanians," which meant to signify that the Vlachs were simply Romanians who happened to come from Macedonia. But the Greek state opposed the Romanian movement, and the Vlachs soon came to be divided into pro-Greek and pro-Romanian factions. The bitterness between the two was not great, however, until Greece, in conducting a guerilla war at the turn of this century against various armed groups of Slavic nationalists for possession of Macedonia, made the unfortunate decision also to use force against the unarmed pro-Romanian Vlach nationalists.

Conflict erupted on the academic front as well. Greek nationalist scholars, seeking to prove Greek historical priority and continuity in Macedonia from antiquity (i.e., before the arrival of the Slavs), adopted the theory that the Vlachs were really "Vlachophone Hellenes," that is, Greeks by "race" who had learned a Romance

language. Though this thesis has never been supported outside of Greece, it has enjoyed a remarkable staying power among both Greeks and Hellenized Vlachs. Its effect on Vlach identity has been tremendous -- if one is "biologically" Greek, and one's Latin idiom merely an anomaly, then indeed why not abandon that idiom and return to one's true "race"?

Modern nationalism divided the Vlachs in other ways. Once contained entirely within the Ottoman Empire, the various Vlach territories were dismembered along with that Empire through most of the 19th century in order to form or enlarge the modern Balkan nation-states. The Vlachs were by no means passive in this process: When the cession of Thessaly from the Ottoman Empire to Greece was proposed in 1881, a large number of Vlachs joined to petition the Sultan in protest. The document cited their fears of assimilation by the expansive Greek state, as well as the fact that the new border cut right across the main north-south migration route for transhumant Vlach shepherds. But their protests went unheeded. By 1918, the Vlachs were effectively divided among Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and what was to become Yugoslavia. Mass migrations created diaspora communities in America between 1900 and 1920 and, and in Romania between 1920 and 1940. Vigorous assimilation was the rule everywhere, and after the Second World War, it seemed that the Vlachs' disappearance as an ethnic group was imminent.

Revival and Renewed Conflict

During the international "ethnic revival" of the 1980s, it looked as if the Vlachs' situation might change. Emigre communities in America and Western Europe took new interest in their culture and language and encouraged their compatriots in the Balkans to do the same. At the same time, the Pan-Hellenic Union of Vlach Cultural Societies was founded in Greece as an umbrella organization for the country's far-flung Vlach villages. In Yugoslavia, concessions were made to Vlachs seeking to preserve their culture -- books were published, records pressed, organizations founded, and TV and radio broadcasts made. An alternative to the destructive Romanian-Greek dichotomy also emerged as a number of Vlachs in France, Germany, America, and Greece stepped forward for the first time to assert a Vlach identity.

But -- perhaps in response to the revival of the 1980s -- ethnic pride gave way to ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, with great ramifications for cultural survival. For the Vlachs, the first blow came in 1991, when the crisis between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ratcheted up nationalist sentiments on both sides of that border. The Vlachs of Greece had only asserted their ethnicity timidly in the first place, since the Greek state admits of no ethnic minorities within its borders: the Macedonian problem

made the assertion of any non-Greek identity almost impossible.

Similar developments occurred in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Before the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Vlachs there were organized into several associations. They are recognized as a minority in the Constitution of the Macedonian Republic and they enjoy television and radio broadcasts in their language. The Macedonian crisis, however, once again made them a pawn in a power struggle, with both Slavic Macedonians and Greeks making claims on the Vlachs' loyalties. Slavic Macedonian ultranationalists, apparently fearing the consequences should they constitute less than an absolute majority in that fragile, multiethnic republic, threatened to retaliate against Vlachs who classify themselves as anything other than "Macedonian." Then neighboring Greece began to claim a "Greek minority" of 250,000, and they included the Vlachs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in that number. A new census has just been completed, in which the Vlachs confirmed their penchant for hiding behind other identities -- only 8,000 people said they were Vlach, though local activists say the number is more like 80,000.

The second blow was delivered when relations between Greece and Albania deteriorated sharply in 1994 over the state of the Greek minority in Southern Albania. One of the more surprising discoveries made by western visitors to Albania as it began to open up in the 1990s was the size of the Vlach community there; one scholar who has toured Southern Albania extensively in the last 5 years, Dr. Tom Winnifrith, of the University of Warwick in England, places the number of Albanian Vlachs at up to 200,000 -- a huge figure considering that Winnifrith previously had found only about 50,000 Vlachs in the entire Balkan Peninsula. When a new democratic government was elected in Albania in April 1992, the Vlachs there were allowed to organize an ethnic society. For a short while, it looked as if they might be able to hold their own and avoid the fate of all other Vlach cultural preservation efforts over the last two centuries.

But then the Greek-Albanian crisis erupted. The Greeks claim their minority numbers 400,000, while the Albanians place it at 60,000 -- neither side's figures are reliable. Greek nationalists tend to count all the Orthodox Christians of Albania as "Greek," including Vlachs and Albanians. There has been an active effort to bolster Greek claims by wooing the Vlachs, and in contrast to the half-hearted Romanian attempts to influence the Albanian Vlachs, the Greeks are meeting with a good measure of success, for many reasons. The Vlachs see Greece as a powerful protector against the Moslem majority of Albania. They also see that extraordinary economic opportunities are theirs for the taking across the border in Greece, if only they declare themselves "Northern Epirotes" (the

Greece, if only they declare themselves "Northern Ephraim" (the Greek term for their minority in Albania). And, when speaking of impoverished descendants of shepherders, one must never underestimate the powerful attraction of the dignity conferred by an imputed link with Socrates, Plato, and Homer. The result is that in Albania, too, the Vlachs are playing into the hands of the economic, political, social, and diplomatic forces conspiring to assimilate them.

These Balkan machinations are wreaking havoc in the 3 largest indigenous communities of Vlachs -- those in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania. Almost all other Vlach communities are transplanted. In Bulgaria, there is no remaining community to speak of, save a few villages in the Dobrogea, which Romania colonized with Vlachs when it held that region briefly between the two world wars. And while a 1992 census found 28,088 Vlachs in Romania proper, Vlachs there routinely cite figures in the hundreds of thousands. Whatever their actual number, the emigre community of Romania is committed to assimilation into Romanian society.

The Vlach Diaspora

Among Vlachs in the United States, interest shown in the overseas community has been complicated by the political situations being played out there. Many of those old divisions are reproduced intact in the USA, with the result that the American Vlach community usually keeps to itself. The United States is the home of the oldest and largest Vlach organization in continuous existence, the Society Farsarotul (founded 1903, 400 members today), which publishes a Newsletter twice a year that attempts to track the situation of the Vlachs throughout the world. The main goal of the Society Farsarotul is to preserve the community in America by providing it with a focal point.

A few Vlachs also settled in Western Europe, and since the early 1980s, some of them have tried to create a base from which to launch an international Vlach cultural revival, holding "Congresses" and appealing to the European Union for help. Led by a professor named Vasile Barba, who is affiliated with the University of Freiburg, this group is known as the Union for Arumanian Language and Culture. Although the group is made up largely of Vlachs who come out of the old pro-Romanian movement, it broke with that movement by advocating a Vlach (as opposed to a Romanian) identity for Vlachs. The ULCA also created an alphabet for the Vlach language rather than use the Romanian or Greek alphabets, as Vlachs in those two nationalist movements try to do.

But the ULCA has been strident in tone towards the pro-Greek Vlachs, who are the key to the Vlachs' cultural survival. The most developed segment of the remaining Vlach population is in

Greece; the only remaining Vlach town, Metsovo, is located in Greece; the most appealing nation-state for Vlachs to throw in their lot with has traditionally been Greece.

The Western European Vlachs have doomed their cultural preservation efforts to failure with their anti-Greek rhetoric -- and with them, the Vlachs may have lost their last chance at survival. Their last chance at survival as Vlachs, I should say, because the indigenous peoples who are today Vlachs survived, in part, by assimilating, and are merely doing so again. Unless some kind of incentive is developed to encourage Vlachs to remain Vlachs (such as funding schools to teach the language, and newspapers to extend its currency and usefulness), it is reasonable to expect this ethnic group to disappear within one or two generations. Their case reminds us that, while humankind is diminished by the loss of an ethnic or linguistic group, the members of the group themselves can sometimes gain.

Vlach Women and Modernization: A Footnote to Progress

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Note: This article is adapted from a paper that was written almost 20 years ago in graduate school and neither intended for publication nor subjected to academic peer review. I include it in this Newsletter not as fact but rather as an unproven thesis that may provoke thought about the trade-offs we make as we accept the economic, cultural, social, and political benefits of the modern world, and may even stimulate further research into the lot of Vlach women in Greece.

In the Balkan Peninsula today, centering on the region of Macedonia, there exists a small Romance-speaking population alternately known as Vlachs, Arumanians, Koutsovlachs, Macedo-Romanians, and Tsintsars. Their self-designation is *Arumani* or "Romans," and they are thought to be the descendants of the Roman and Romanized indigenous Illyrian, Thracian, Macedonian, and Greek population that arose in the Balkans after Rome's conquest of that region in the second century B.C. Because of the importance of the pastoral segment of their population and because of their seasonal cycles of migration between mountain and valley, the Vlachs are often described as "nomads" or "transhumants," but these labels are misleading: Not all Vlach settlements are seasonal – some are permanent. And even when an entire village migrates with the seasons, not all the villagers are shepherds. In fact, the Vlachs are

equally well-known for their commercial activities, and they played a key role in Balkan economic, social, and political development in the early modern and modern periods.^[1]

One aspect of Vlach culture is its steady erosion by the surrounding cultures. Once a small but fairly compact group under the single dominion of the Ottoman Empire, the Vlachs by 1914 were divided among what are now the modern states of Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and Macedonia, and since then have come to be largely assimilated by these four national cultures. At the turn of the century there were thought to be 375,000 to 500,000 Vlachs;^[2] an estimate for the year 1961 gave roughly 130,000 left,^[3] while the most recent researcher in 1985 found only 50,000 remaining.^[4] Before the national states, the major cultural force to be reckoned with in the Balkan Peninsula was that of the Greek Orthodox Church, which had managed to dominate its Slavic competitors during the eighteenth century. The majority of the Vlach population has since at least that time been under the strong influence of Greek culture, and in fact the Vlachs played a crucial role in the emergence and development of the modern Greek state.^[5]

It is this phenomenon, the Hellenization of the Vlachs, that is of interest here. The remarkable power of Hellenism in assimilating the Vlachs has routinely been attributed to the idea that there was some strong benefit for the Vlachs in being Hellenized; Arnold Toynbee, for example, has said that "Hellenism stands to them for the transition to a higher social phase."^[6] In *Nearer East*, D. G. Hogarth saw the attraction of Hellenism for the Vlachs in the fact that it represented a "higher civilisation."^[7] H. N. Brailsford felt the connection of the Vlachs to Greece to be self-interested and opportunistic, the result of the "undisputed primacy" of the Greeks (and of Greek as the language of commerce) in the Balkans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries;^[8] again, the implication is functional, i.e., that there was some advantage to be gained by the Vlachs through their Hellenization. The most recent historian of the Vlachs, Tom Winnifrith, also cites the advantages and prestige of Greek language and culture as factors in the Hellenization of the Vlachs.^[9]

Commercialization, the spread of literacy, and the forging of new national cultures are all aspects of the process called "modernization." Hellenism would seem to have been an agent of modernization for the Vlachs—a means of mobility, a way to leave behind their primitive mountain way of life and to enter the modern world of widespread education, of market society, and of nascent nation-states. The Vlachs had only to accept a Greek identity; in doing so, they moved from one traditional society that was not modernizing (Vlach society) to another traditional society that *was*

(Greek society), largely because Greek society offered certain benefits—at least according to the above hypotheses.

Taking the plight of women into consideration has been a powerful corrective to the Western notion of progress through modernization. The question is, does it do the same for Balkan history? Did the social changes that held benefits for men also benefit women?

* * *

When we ask the question this way—whether, when women are taken into account, Hellenization truly represented something like "progress" for the Vlachs—we arrive at a different answer. Hellenization turns out to have been a double-edged sword for Vlach women, a phenomenon that has gone almost completely unnoticed simply because no one has bothered to ask such a question. We can best illustrate this by comparing the position of women in Vlach culture and their position in Greek culture.

Wace and Thompson, English scholars traveling through the Balkans just after the turn of this century, were struck by the difference in the position of women in these two cultures; we will thus quote them at length. In discussing the system of social calling in Vlach villages, they observe,

The noticeable feature about these functions is the part played by women. Vlach women, unlike women in a Greek village, are treated by the men with far greater respect and in some cases almost as equals. The women pay calls like the men and both converse together freely. On the other hand the women rarely and apparently never as a regular habit eat with the men of a family. This is probably mainly a matter of convenience, since the women do the cooking, and does not necessarily imply any idea of inferiority... [W]hole families will go out for picnics together and in general both sexes meet as equals. The superior status of women...strikes one forcibly on coming from a Greek to a Vlach village... [T]he fully developed social system as regards calling which the Vlachs possess is, as far as our knowledge goes, totally unknown in Greece. Further the Vlach custom according to which a whole village or parish is at home to everyone else on the festival of the parish church is, we believe, peculiar to the Vlachs. The freer social life of the Vlachs, partly due to frequent travels, gives them in this respect better manners and a broader outlook on life. Consequently the Vlach women never become what the Greek village women so often are, drudges in the houses of their husbands, who often deem them little better than cook-housekeepers. ^[10]

Another unusual "freedom" enjoyed by Vlach women was the custom of visiting each other and sometimes staying the night on Saturday or Sunday nights; these overnight stays (known as *azboru*, "flying") were actually more common among unmarried than married

women.^[11] Married women, shortly after settling down into their new households, enjoyed the custom known as *merinde* wherein they would visit their own relatives and friends in the village for a snack and a chat at mid-day.

The relations between the sexes in Greek culture, in contrast, have been characterized by Ernestine Friedl, a pioneer in the anthropology of Greece, as having "an atmosphere of covert mutual dislike."^[12] While Friedl asserts that Greek men and women *can* "overcome overt cultural attitudes of deference and covert attitudes of sexual mistrust,"^[13] it is precisely those cultural attitudes and their associated behaviors that interest us here, not how they may be overcome.

Juliet du Boulay, an anthropologist who studied a Greek mountain village in Euboea, has also described this fundamental opposition between the sexes:^[14] Men are seen as logical, divine, superior, sexually pure, and strong, in contrast to women, who are irrational, demonic, inferior, sexually impure, and weak. Other attributes follow,

and are seen as deriving in principle from the inherent superiority of the man...Men are thought to be responsible, cool-headed, and brave; they alone bear the economic burdens of the house, stand between their families and starvation, fight in wars, and protect their women's honor. Women are thought to be seductive, credulous, and fearful, endangering the house by their sexual weakness and their basic irresponsibility in the matter of gossip.^[15]

These ideal roles plus the physical roles of men and women control their relationship so completely that outside of these roles, "any possibility of a personal relationship... is completely excluded."^[16] It is also central to the woman's role, for complex reasons which make sense within the framework of Greek culture, that she is obliged to remain in the house, in fact, "she *is* the house... a woman's absence from the house is contrary to her role."^[17] There is no evidence of a social calling system that is clearly women's own^[18] – quite the contrary; for example, Dr. Henry Holland, a British traveler, noted in 1815 that,

Female society can hardly be said to exist here [on the island of Zante]. The ancient habits of the country still confine the women in great measure to their own houses...^[19]

There will be found here [in Ioannina], however, as in other parts of Greece, a great disparity in this respect between the sexes... [The women] seldom leave the galleries or apartments of their own houses, but when going to attend the services of the church, or when going to enjoy the luxury of the warm baths... Though not secluded from intercourse with the men who visit their houses, whether

Greeks or foreigners, they seldom exchange visits with other families, or partake in any common social amusements. Their female friends they chiefly see when at the baths...^[20]

Another point of contrast between Vlach and Greek culture with respect to women was the dowry; again, it is worth hearing directly from our sources:

The social life of the Vlachs in which both sexes meet on almost equal terms and the fact that a Vlach girl has no dowry means that theoretically in both betrothal and marriage there is a certain freedom of choice on both sides. How much this is so in practice it is not possible for a stranger to say. Among the Greeks no girl can hope for marriage unless her parents can give a dowry large enough to attract some suitable young man... The Vlachs all condemn this system alleging that it prevents free choice... [T]he position of women among the Vlachs is better than in Greek villages where a girl has no choice at all.^[21]

The Vlachs themselves have a custom of the bride's providing a trousseau (*paya*) of woven goods and household equipment at the time of marriage. The Vlachs in Greece eventually did accept the custom of the dowry,^[22] which continues today in spite of recent laws against it. Greeks, too, have the custom of providing a trousseau (*roukha*), but they add to this a dowry proper (*proika*). Once consisting usually of portions of land, the dowry is now most often paid in cash.^[23] Though some argue that the dowry gives a woman security because under Greek law she retains certain rights to the dowry even after the marriage, in practice there is ample reason to doubt this: "Material power and authority,... regardless of any economic provisions in the Greek legal code, belong to the man."^[24]

In fact, the different gender conceptions of the two cultures are embedded even in the two languages: The usual Greek root-verb for marriage of either males or females is *pantrevo*, which is derived from the classical *hyp-andros*,^[25] meaning "under a man, subject to him, married."^[26] Vlach, on the other hand, has a different verb for each sex: a man marrying uses *nsurare*; a woman, *maritare*. The former is derived from Latin *in + uxor*,^[27] meaning "in relation to" + "a wife."^[28] The latter is derived from Latin *maritare*,^[29] which originally meant "to join or `wed' (vines and trees grown to support them)" and in imperial Rome had come also to mean "to provide with a husband or wife, marry."^[30] The image of subjugation of woman to man in the Greek is simply not evident in the Vlach which, if anything, seems to contain an almost egalitarian notion in both male and female terms. The Vlach also may acknowledge a different experience and point of view for men and women by using two different verbs, whereas the Greek would seem to allow for no other reality than that of the man.

Among the possible explanations for these differences between two neighboring cultures are their antecedents; although both Greek and Roman classical civilizations were patriarchal in character and knew dowry systems, one study of the relative position of women in each society has concluded that upper-class Roman woman, at least, "had far more freedom than the woman of similar status in Classical Athens. The Roman woman had choices; the Athenian had none."^[31] The Englishman Henry Holland traced the disparity between the sexes in modern Greek culture to Antiquity: "Even in the ancient times of the country this disparity appears to have existed."^[32] But more research will have to be done on this subject before any definitive conclusion can be made.^[33] What is offered more plausibly as an explanatory factor is the simple fact of the mobility which is a cornerstone of the Vlachs' way of life—this inevitably must broaden their perspective and widen their social experience. Wace & Thompson, as noted above, cite the Vlachs' "frequent travel"^[34] as a factor in the relative freedom of Vlach women, while Henry Holland, in explaining the position of Greek women, says "They have none of the advantages which the men obtain from travel, but are secluded in great measure from admixture with the world."^[35]

If we consider the benefits of modernization in this light, we see that for Vlach women, Hellenization was a mixed blessing. Thus, when writers have referred to the attractions of Greek culture for the Vlachs, to the advantages it offered, or to the benefits it conferred, they refer more to the position of men than that of women. Hellenization meant progress and mobility for Vlach men; for Vlach women, it may actually have meant a loss of prestige, of power, and of choices.

Further, Greek cultural sanctions worked against the education of women,^[36] and so only in the late nineteenth century did these women begin to receive some of the direct benefits of modernity in the form of education; yet even then, that education was Greek and in part represented the efforts of the Greek nation-state to more fully assimilate the Vlachs and other non-Greek ethnic groups.^[37] Vlach women may have gained something then,^[38] but at what cost? More importantly, what would women's life have been like in a political society which embodied Vlach cultural values? My guess is that women there would have had a head start over their counterparts in Greece in the modern fight for women's equality.

All this is not to say that Vlach society was somehow ideal for women or not patriarchal or even that it was "liberating" in any meaningful way—far from it. It is simply to say that modernization is not a series of linear steps, but rather may involve steps considered "backward" along the way; that history that is not holistic, that is,

history that does not seek to examine the situation of all, can be terribly misleading in its conclusions; and that state-making, like any other process involved in modernization, does not necessarily represent "progress" and in fact can have a negative impact on people and on society.

There remains a further question, and perhaps the most important of all: Did Vlach women perceive the changes wrought by their Hellenization as having been for the worse or for the better? In other words, *had* they been asked whether Hellenization represented an improvement or a misfortune for them, how would they have answered? As was pointed out earlier, the criterion of "more or less options," though arbitrary, has the virtue of being objective; but can one use objective standards to judge something as subjective as whether lives actually improved or not? Is there evidence of how most women actually felt about the development of Modern Greek society?^[39] If so, we may need to dig it up before we can be truly confident in our assertions about women's gains or losses.

If it does not stand as proven that the position of women has deteriorated, at least it is evident that until women's views on the development of modern society can be determined, it cannot be taken for granted that that development has been for the better. In other words, if "deterioration" is not proven, at least we see that "improvement" is clearly not proven, either.



^[1] The key English-language work on the lifestyle, culture, language, and history of the Vlachs is A. WACE, M. THOMPSON, *Nomads of the Balkans: An Account of Life and Customs among the Vlachs of Northern Pindus* (1913). A more recent work which deals with

history only is T. J. WINNIFRITH, *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People* (1987). On the role of the Vlachs in Balkan development, see T. STOIANOVICH, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant," *Journal of Economic History* XX (1960), p. 234-313, and V. MURVAR, "The Balkan Vlachs: A Typological Study," Ph.D., University of Wisconsin (1956).

[2] WACE, THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 10 (their estimate is 500,000; they also cite the German scholar Weigand's figure of 373,520).

[3] See the figures in Z. GOLAB, *The Arumanian Dialect of Krusevo in S.R. Macedonia S.F.R. Yugoslavia* (1984), p. 16.

[4] WINNIFRITH, *op. cit.*, p. 1-8.

[5] See, for example, J. K. CAMPBELL, *Honour, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (1964), p. 3, n. 4; MURVAR, *op. cit.*, p. 158, makes much the same point, though his concern is to show the degree to which the Vlachs were assimilated to Serbian culture.

[6] N. FORBES, A. J. TOYNBEE, D. MITRANY, D. G. HOGARTH, *The Balkans: A History* (1970), p. 242.

[7] D. G. HOGARTH, *Nearer East* (1902), p. 149, 170.

[8] H. N. BRAILSFORD, *Macedonia: Its Races and their Future* (1906), p. 185.

[9] WINNIFRITH, *op. cit.*, p. 136-7.

[10] WACE & THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 49-50 (It is hard to generalize in a region as diverse as the Balkans; the custom of the whole village being at home to everyone else on the festival of the local church, for example, is probably not peculiar to the Vlachs); and compare the section about food-serving customs with the experience of George F. Abbott at the dinner table in a Vlach household just a decade earlier: "we sat on cushions, the ladies of the house as well as the men--an arrangement which impressed me as a sign of uncommon refinement. Among the peasants of Macedonia women as a rule wait on the guests, but do not sit down to dinner with them." G. F. ABBOTT, *The Tale of a Tour in Macedonia* (1903), p. 254.

[11] WACE & THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 52. One would expect the unmarried female to be more restricted in her movements than the married.

[12] E. FRIEDL, *Vasilika: A Village in Modern Greece* (1962), p. 90-91.

[13] FRIEDL, *op. cit.*, p. 90-91.

[14] J. du BOULAY, *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* (1974). This study is especially valuable in that it concerns a mountain village. Mountain villages tend to have certain similarities across cultural lines, as do lowland villages. Comparing a Vlach mountain and a Greek lowland village might show up contrasts that are simply the result of differences between mountain and lowland cultures; comparing two mountain cultures may better bring out differences

comparing two mountain cultures may better bring out differences that are more strictly cultural.

[15] du BOULAY, *op. cit.*, p. 102. In her essay in *Gender & Power* (p. 139-167) entitled "Women—Images of Their Nature and Destiny in Rural Greece," du Boulay concentrates more on the fact that women can be "redeemed" from their "fallen" nature through the institution of marriage, yet she stresses that "two factors, motherhood and age, act over the years not to modify the severity of the code under which women have to live, but to increase the respect which they are accorded within it." (p. 158-9) In other words, "while the superiority of men, with all its implications, is inevitably a value prominent in the culture, the redemption of women within the terms set by male superiority is a value that is equally important." (p. 167)

[16] du BOULAY, *op. cit.*, p. 118. Cf. R. KENNEDY, "Women's Friendships on Crete: A Psychological Perspective," in DUBISCH (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 121-138: "Men and women spend relatively little time with one another, know little about each other's domains, and have a great deal of animosity toward each other in general." (p. 122)

[17] du BOULAY, *op. cit.*, p. 131-133.

[18] See du BOULAY, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27, 208-209. Cf. KENNEDY, *loc. cit.*, p. 129: "It is not considered correct social behavior to be outside one's neighborhood for a purpose not recognized by mainstream culture, and visiting a woman friend is not supported by the dominant culture. This proscription means that visiting often must occur in relative secrecy... Moreover, unlike men, who have the social institution of the *kafeneion* [cafe], women have no place or time specifically designated for social intercourse and relaxation."

[19] H. HOLLAND, *Travels in the Ionian Isles, Albania, Thessaly, Macedonia, &c.* (1815), p. 24.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 153-155.

[21] WACE, THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 104-5; see also p. 201. Another work cites the lament of a Vlach chieftain as recently as 1953, valuable because it shows the gradual nature of assimilation of new customs as well as the direction from which those new customs come: "Ten years ago women took only their household equipment as a dowry; now they've started giving flocks as dowries. This accursed custom of the dowry has come up to us from the cities." In I. T. SANDERS, *Rainbow in the Rock: The People of Rural Greece* (1962), p. 115.

[22] See, for example, A. FOSS, *Epirus* (1978), p. 104.

[23] See FRIEDL, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-59, who also observes (p. 56): "In fact, the grooms are not interested in the *rukha*. As one villager phrased it, 'It is land and money they burn for around here.'"

[24] du BOULAY, *op. cit.*, p. 128; see also p. 104. Cf. FRIEDL, *op. cit.*, p. 59, 64-70.

[25] N. P. ANDRIOTIS, *Etymologiko Lexiko tis Koinis Neohellinikis* (1971), p. 262

(1971), p. 202.

[26] H. G. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1940), p. 1852.

[27] T. PAPAĞAGI, *Dictionarul Dialectului Aromân, general si etymologic*² (1974), p. 907.

[28] P. G. W. GLARE (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1983), p. 2123.

[29] PAPAĞAGI, *op. cit.*, p. 782.

[30] The definitions are from GLARE, *op. cit.*, p. 1079. The history of the changing meaning of *maritare* is from A. ERNOUT, A. MEILLET, *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la langue Latine: Histoire des Mots*⁴ (1967), p. 387.

[31] S. B. POMEROY, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975), p. 188.

[32] HOLLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

[33] It may even be that the present can help shed some light on the past, which for the common people is so obscure. To cite just one example, the name of the custom of *merinde* comes from Latin *merenda*, "lunch" or "snack."

[34] WACE, THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[35] HOLLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[36] See, for example, E. PAVLIDES, J. HESSER, "Women's Roles and House Form and Decoration in Eressos, Greece," in DUBISCH (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 68-96, especially the discussion (p. 93) of differential access to education in modernizing societies such as the one they studied in Greece.

[37] See the extremely perceptive discussion by BRAILSFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 181-184, of the culture-reproducing force represented by women in the Ottoman Empire, and the belated efforts of the Greek educational system to include females and thereby to eliminate non-Greek cultures. The most sophisticated discussion of the role of the modern Greek national ideology in the education of women is M. HERZFELD, "Within and Without: The Category of 'Female' in the Ethnography of Modern Greece," in DUBISCH (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 215-233.

[38] It is by no means clear that Vlach women "gained" at any point in this process, even after adopting a Greek identity; in fact, the status of Greek women has diminished "as their society has undergone the transformation from a subsistence economy to a market economy while retaining both dowry and traditional restrictions on women." Women seem only to gain if they "leave the village for urban centers where opportunities for education and wage labor exist." PAVLIDES, HESSER, *loc. cit.*, p. 94.

[39] SANDERS, *op. cit.*, p. 154, contends that Greek women "are not discontented with their social relations." The argument that these women are somehow self-deceived is anticipated and answered

(inadequately, in my view) by du BOULAY, *loc. cit.*, p. 153-8. In any event, we can't know the answer unless we include women in history —at the very least— or, at most, even grant women a history of their own.

From the Editor: The End of an Illusion

The Newsletter, volume XXIV, Issue 1&2, Fall 2009/Spring 2010, volume XXV, Issue 1&2, Fall 2010/Spring 2011

Of all the Newsletters we have published in our 24 years, this issue may very well be the most important, because it contains 3 remarkable contemporary documents that show the situation of the Balkan Vlachs today as THEY see it, not as self-styled Vlach leaders in the West see it.

Several generations have grown up in the U.S. since the two largest mass migrations of Vlachs in the 20th century: to America between 1900-1920 and to Romania between 1925-1943. Those of us in the U.S. who were raised to think of ourselves as Romanians, as well as those who grew up in Romania as citizens of that state, have had at least two core beliefs in common: (1) that the Vlachs are actually Romanians, and (2) that we were pressured by the Greek government to become Greek, persecuted when we refused, and are still persecuted there.

Those of us who have actually traveled to Greece and other Vlach areas found a very different story: (1) the overwhelming majority of those Vlachs do not feel they are Romanian and never did, and (2) aside from two periods of very real pressure and persecution – during the Greek military struggle between 1897-1913 to gain control of Macedonia and during the authoritarian, quasi-fascist Metaxas regime between 1936-1941 – not only have the

fascist Metaxas regime between 1936-1941 – not only have the Vlachs *not* been persecuted by the Greek government, they have been welcomed at the highest levels of that government and in fact helped found the Modern Greek state and have held major positions in its government from that time to the present date.

So different were the beliefs we were raised with from the reality of the situation that my first trip to Greece in 1981 was more like shock therapy than a vacation. I expected to see a focused effort to extinguish Aromanian traditions. Instead, I found thriving communities that were preserving Aromanian traditions and language better than most of us. Other than a few bigots not sanctioned by the Greek government – bigots much like those found in every human population – there was no “persecution”... in fact, the evidence presented by my own eyes indicated that the Vlachs of Greece lived a life where they enjoyed far more freedom to organize, to speak their language, and to live in liberty and prosperity than their compatriots in Albania, Bulgaria, Yugoslav Macedonia, and even Romania.

That and subsequent visits changed my view forever. While I still vehemently disagree with Greek nationalist scholars who contend that the Vlachs are and always have been Greeks, I understand that the Vlachs are not Romanians, either – but we have important cultural, historical, and linguistic ties to both Greece and Romania.

But what about those of us who have never been to Greece or other Balkan countries? How can we test the beliefs that have dominated our understanding of who we were and who we are?

We can start by reading this special double issue of the Newsletter of the Society Farsarotul.

Alexandru Gica is a remarkable young man who, alongside a love of mathematics and a career as a Professor at the University of Bucharest, has maintained an interest in and a passion for his Vlach heritage. In this issue, we present two studies that took him years to pull together – one that covers the history of the Vlachs in Romania from the beginning of their mass migration there in the 1920s to the present, and one that covers the history of the Vlachs in Greece, Albania, and Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Macedonia during roughly the same period. I think it is fair to say that these papers are unique – there is no work I’m aware of that covers developments in our communities in those countries during those years, and definitely not one with comparable rigor in terms of scholarship, original research, depth, and impartiality. We are deeply grateful to Alexandru and to the New Europe College for their permission to reprint these important articles in English for the first time and for the privilege of allowing me to edit them accordingly.

Another unique insight into the state of our people in the old

country – in this case, in Greece – is offered by the 2009 letter from the leaders of the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Vlach Cultural Societies to the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe in the wake of European attempts, inspired by Vlach activists mainly in Western Europe, to influence the way Greece approaches its Vlach community – by designating them as a minority and creating official support for Aromanian language and culture. The Greek Vlachs’ response is essentially “Thanks but no thanks – we’re doing a pretty good job ourselves, and if we need your help we’ll ask for it.” By reprinting it we do not endorse it, we merely show the official position of the Vlachs of Greece (who arguably constitute a majority of the Vlach population). This document is also interesting because of the number of Greek towns and villages whose Vlach societies signed on to it and belong to the Federation – 101 in all! – and most of us will find an ancestral village or two in that list.



We include a paper by Athena Katsanevaki on a subject that has not received as much attention as it deserves: the musical tradition of the Vlachs, within the context of the Byzantine

civilization within which it arose. We hope you find this issue as interesting to read as it was to edit!

A welcome message for the tens of thousands of Aromanians who attended the Great Assembly of Moschopolis on August 15, 2010, convened by the Albanian Council of Macedonarmâns

Coda

Most of the articles in this collection were written in the 1980s and ‘90s. In the intervening decades, the challenges and time constraints of raising a family and pursuing a career have allowed me only to

write the occasional article. But I've continued to read, research, and stay in touch with the situation of my fellow Vlachs throughout the world.

In many ways, that situation has remained the same – those Vlachs who care about their ethnicity fall into three main groups: those who believe the Vlachs are Greeks, those who believe the Vlachs are Romanians, and those who believe the Vlachs are simply Vlachs.

The first group is the largest by far, and the last group is the smallest. If you've read this collection, you know that, while the last group is relatively new and has offered fresh ideas as alternatives to the orthodoxy of the old-time pro-Greek and pro-Romanian factions, it has stunted its own growth by its dogmatic insistence that the ancestors of the Vlachs cannot possibly include any Greeks – much like the pro-Romanian movement from which most of these “pro-Vlachs” came – and by creating an artificial vocabulary that is largely Latin-based (e.g., *conferintsa* rather than *diaskepsi*, *cumandusescu* instead of *kivernisescu*), even though most of our people are in Greece and we've been borrowing modern and abstract words from Greek for centuries. These things alienate the Greek Vlachs mightily.

I subscribe to one of the online discussion groups of these “pro-Vlachs” and have veered between hope and sadness as I follow the dialogue – and “dialogue” is a euphemism for what is sometimes the electronic equivalent of a shouting match (and how does one shout electronically? **BY USING BLOCK CAPITALS, OF COURSE** – it's as if the size and case of the font you are using determine the veracity of your claim). Although they are just a handful of people, they have now split off yet another faction that asserts the Vlachs are the descendants of Alexander the Great and the Macedonians. It will surprise no one that these Vlachs are almost all from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and their actions will have a familiar ring to those who have read my essay, “Can the Vlachs Write their Own History?” – they have simply found a new prestigious ancestor to tie their identity to.

So there has been a general lack of forward movement over the last two decades, other than the development of yet another faction among a small population that is getting smaller each day. But as disheartening as these developments may be, there is actually a bright side, too, and we would do well to remember it. The Greek Vlachs, for example, have continued their annual, highly public reunions at various Vlach villages in the Pindus Mountains every summer. The Romanian Vlachs have given birth to a new faction, but in my opinion, this one happens to be a positive development –

there is now a sizable group of Vlachs in Romania who see themselves not as Romanians but rather as a minority within Romania, a development that has given heart palpitations to ardent Romanian nationalists. And even though what I am calling the “pro-Vlach” group is propagating some of our worst mistakes – debating whether the Vlachs are Roman or Macedonian in origin while excluding the one group that could save them, the Greek Vlachs, is not unlike rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic* – at least they are continuing the conversation about the Vlachs, and we desperately need that conversation to continue if there is to be any hope at all that the Vlachs will survive as Vlachs.

Which brings me to my final observation – there is one place where Vlach culture, history, and language are being preserved better and more consistently than any other effort that has been undertaken in the last 200 years – and it didn’t even exist 10 years ago: **YouTube**, of all places! Founded in February 2005, YouTube has already attracted more videos about the Vlachs than any of us could have dreamed of. It really is astonishing – just search for Vlachs, Aromanians, Tsintsars, Macedo-Romanians, or any of the other names by which we are known – and you will see and hear a cascade, a flood, a tidal wave of recordings by, for, and about the Vlachs. And the best part is that no one controls it, and no one *can* control it... It is an extraordinary compendium of the free expression of thousands of human beings – and, to my complete surprise, it’s the thing that gives me the most hope for the future.

What will come of all this, I cannot pretend to know. Our traditional society in the Balkans is undergoing the wrenching process of modernization, which those who came to America were subject to almost instantly on arrival. I have tried, in the course of a quarter-century, to describe events in the US and abroad as I have seen and understood them, in the hope that the perspective of a Vlach in America will somehow contribute to a greater understanding of the Vlachs of the Balkans. I am grateful to Alexandru Gica for the opportunity to share that perspective with a new generation through this book.

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