

***Romanian schools and churches in Balkan Peninsula
(1864-1948)****

Dr. Adina Berciu

Library and Information Science Department,
Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest
E-mail: adina_berciu2002@yahoo.com

Dr. Adina Berciu is a professor at the Library and Information Science Department of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest. She teaches courses on Archive Science and Documentation. Her research fields are: Archive Science, Heraldry, Sigillography, Numismatics, The Art of Miniatures.

Abstract

The present article on Romanian schools and churches, in the Balkan Peninsula, over the period 1918-1948 is based on the unprecedented documents identified in the funds preserved in the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Central Historic National Archives in Bucharest. The author has studied and selected the unprecedented documents that had the most important significance for the purpose of presenting the evolution of the school and church situation of the Romanian communities situated at the south of the Danube, starting from year 1864, when the first school was established in Tarnova, (Macedonia) and up to 1948 when the Romanian state abandoned the work unveiled by ruler Al. Ioan Cuza. The article presents this situation, very dramatic, of the Romanian communities from the Balkans based on the documents of Archives.

Keywords: *Schools, Churches, Balkans, Romanian*

The Balkan Peninsula reunites peoples of different descents, languages and religions, forming an extraordinary ethnical and linguistic variety.

This cohabitation, which is, in itself, quite unique, took place on geographical grounds that favored the circulation of the people and the cultural information on both sides of the mountain ranges that crossed it, as well as on both sides of the Danube.

* The present article was published, on an extended form, ca *Introduction* to the documents volume: *Școli și biserici românești din Peninsula Balcanică. Documente (1864-1948)*, vol. I / *Romanian Schools and churches in Balkan Peninsula. Documents (1864-1948)*, I. Bucharest, Editors University Bucharest, 2004, 666 p. The documents were gathered and selected by Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu and Maria Petre. The *Introduction* as well as the present study was elaborated together with Maria Petre. The Study is a synthesis of the article in Romanian.

Despite the hostile conditions of the land, as the relief is mainly formed of mountains, said places were inhabited by Greeks, Serbians, Croatians, Bulgarians, as well as by Thracian descendent populations: Albanians, Balkan Romanians.

The Romanians living at the South of the Danube, known by various names, such as: Aromanians, Macedo-Romanians, Trans-Balkan Vlachs, Aromanians from Albania, Epiroti Romanians, Megleno-Romanians, Kutso-Vlachs represented a special element from an ethnical, social and cultural points of view in the civilization of the Balkan Peninsula. The documents they are most often either called *Vlachs*, or they are especially called Romanians, as they in fact called themselves, for they believed they were part of the Romanian nation.

With respect to the Balkan Romanians, we hold information from the Byzantine chroniclers; the former were also analyzed by the representatives of the School of Ardeal, by the generation of intellectuals of 1848 and 1859 and the second half of the 19th century.

Beginning from the second half of the 19th century, the history and the existence of the South-Danube Romanians has become a subject of research as well as controversy among linguists, historical geographers, ethnographers, literates, both Romanian and foreign. Many of the Western intellectuals were to travel to the Balkan Peninsula, become familiar with their life, culture, language and customs, and were to leave us with precious, even impressive, reports.

The Aromanians' life represented the focus of both Western and Romanian historiography up to the 5th decade of the 20th century. Between the middle of the 20th century and up to 1946, the Romanian State was profoundly involved in the life of the Balkan Romanians.

After 1945, the East-European side and part of the Balkan Peninsula commencing its Communist period, the fate and the history of the Romanian community in the Balkan Peninsula were characterized by silence and total disinterest. Their schools, high schools and churches were terminated and their language was forbidden.

There were plenty of Romanians in the Middle Ages and in the modern era in the first decades of the 20th century in the Balkan peninsula, who occupied territories from the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea. The actual number and spreading of the Balkan Romanians may not be accurately determined. According to Max Demeter Peyfuss, researcher, "we may not be wrong in accepting that today, 400,000 Aromanians live in the South Eastern Europe"(1).

The Balkan Romanians, a minority population living among the majority Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian population, have fought for obtaining certain desiderates of a national nature. The national battle of the

Balkan Romanians was fought on three distinct levels: education in the national language, their own church organization including the acknowledgement of a Romanian bishop and, ultimately, a proportional representation, on ethnical bases, in various local bodies. The action of awakening of the national conscience has begun at the beginning of the 18th century, and it culminated, in the second half of the following century, with the establishment of schools and churches in the Romanian language(2). A great success was their acknowledgment as a distinct nation, Christian Romanians, within the Ottoman Empire, by means of the imperial Resolution of May 9/22, 1905. The latter acknowledged and allowed for the free use of the Romanian language in schools and churches.

The national aspirations of the Balkan Romanians aimed neither at joining Romania nor at creating their own state in the Balkans. What they wanted were citizen rights that were equal to those of the other nations of the Ottoman Empire, and cultural autonomy.

The development of education in the Romanian language in the Balkans could not have been accomplished without Romania's support. The idea of establishment of a school in the Romanian language and, subsequently, the establishment of several churches of the South-Danube Romanians was promoted by the leaders of the Romanian 1848 revolution: Nicolae Bălcescu, Dimitrie Bolintineanu, Ion Ghica, Ion Ionescu of Brad, and others, who, upon noticing the massive presence of Romanians at the South of the Danube, immediately thought of the educational and the religious aspect of the matter. The first school was established on July 2, 1864 in the Târnova commune(3).

After 1878, the development of education was carried out in more favorable conditions, created by the Berlin Treaty of 1878, which confirms, *inter alia*, the freedom of knowledge of the Ottoman Empire inhabitants.

The Great Vizier Savfet Paşa issued in September 1878, the Vizier's Order no. 303, requesting the local authorities (the Governor of the Salonic and Ianina Vilayet) not to prevent the functioning of the Romanian schools(4).

The situation of the Romanian schools in Turney was entrusted by the Romanian government to a General Inspector of the Romanian Schools in the Balkans, a position that was held by professor Apostol Margarit since 1877 to 1902. The Inspectorate's headquarters were located in Bitolia.

The Greeks' reaction to the establishment of schools and churches of the Romanians was immediate and harsh, preventing the use of the Romanian language in schools and churches by any possible means.

The Romanians commenced a vigorous action, with the support of the Romanian State, in view of the establishment of schools at the South of the Danube.

Therefore, according to the documents, in year 1900 in the Ottoman Empire (the European side) there existed 113 Romanian primary schools, 5 Romanian secondary schools and over 30 churches with the sermon in the Romanian language.

The success obtained pursuant to the Resolution of May 9/22, 1905(5) represented the legal basis for the organization and strengthening of the Aromanian community which, supported by the Romanian state and diplomacy, shall further develop the Romanian schools and churches in the Ottoman Empire (the European side).

Therefore, on the eve of the Balkan wars (1912-1913) in the European Turkey there functioned 92 primary schools, 6 secondary schools and in over 40 localities the religious sermon was held in the Romanian language.

The commencement of the First World War brought about significant changes in the Southeast European side as well.

In all of the Balkan states, thousands of Romanians were called up and sent on various battlefields, and their schools and churches were closed again.

The immigration phenomenon in Romania reached maximum peaks, especially after the peace conference in Bucharest in 1913, when all Balkan Romanians could become Romanian citizens, regardless of the place where they continued to live.

During the Turkish domination, in Albania there existed 17 Romanian schools and a gymnasium in Berat.

In 1926-1927 the Ministry of Public Instruction provided for the reestablishment of the Romanian schools that existed in 1912, the opening of two primary schools in Tirana, the reorganizing of the high school in Corcea(6). However, all of these efforts were to no avail. In the autumn of 1927 the Albania state nationalized all schools, including the Romanian schools in Carcea, Pleaşca, Şipsca.

In 1930, pursuant to the diplomatic efforts of Romania's new Minister in Tirana, Vasile Stoica, the schools in Sipaca and Corcea were given back to the Romanian communities(7). During the Second World War, the situation of the Romanian schools in Albania worsened. In 1944 the Romanian school in Corcea was the only one that still functioned.

In Bulgaria, based upon the exchange of letters between Titu Maiorescu and D. Tonceev, concurrently with the closing of the peace treaty in Bucharest (1913) two Romanian schools were opened in Sofia and Giumaia. Subsequently, however, the Giumaia school and church were torn down.

The Bulgarian authorities allowed for the reopening of the school and the church in Giumaia only as late as 1920.

In 1924, upon the request of the Romanian community in Sofia, the Ministry of Public Instruction authorized the establishment of a gymnasium.

In 1934, the gymnasium was converted into the Romanian Institute in Sofia, which carried out the activity of a high school. A kindergarten and a primary school also functioned apart from the Institute.

The courses of the Romanian Institute in Sofia, as well as the Romanian schools in Bulgaria, would cease their activity in September 1945, when all foreign primary schools and gymnasiums in Bulgaria(8) were terminated.

The Romanian schools in Greece functioned during the interwar period on the basis of the tacit consensus between the Romanian and the Greek states: "They were neither state schools, nor schools that were supported by the respective Romanian population, both cases provided for under the minority regime of the peace treaties, but by the Romanian state, the Romanian schools would disappear because of the fact that the poor population could not support the schools"(9).

In 1923, 26 primary schools and 4 secondary schools functioned in Greece.

In school year 1939-1940 in Greece there were open 29 primary schools with 60 teachers and 950 pupils and 4 secondary schools with 54 teachers and 477 pupils, namely: a commercial high school for boys and a professional gymnasium for girls in Salonic, a boys' high school in Grebena and a gymnasium in Ianina. Apart from each of the secondary schools there also functioned a boarding school supported by the Romanian state. The analytical curriculum was the official one in Romania, supplemented by the Greek language, the history and the geography of Greece. During the war, the premises and the furniture of the Romanian schools were damaged and, as a consequence, the schools were closed (1940-1941). In the autumn of 1941 they were reopened, but the bombings turned the teaching activity into a very difficult task.

The Romanian state continued, over this entire period, i.e. 1940-1945, to send the teachers and the priests their due wages.

After the end of the war, on February 20, 1946, the Greek Government closed all of the Romanian schools and churches the support of which had cost the Romanian state and the local Romanian communities so many efforts, for over a century. The teachers and priests who had Romanian citizenship were banished. Solely the teaching and the clerical staff remained in Greece.

In the Serbian Macedonia, up to 1918, in 18 Romanian communes there functioned 24 primary schools, a high school for boys and a professional school for girls in Bitolia. All of said schools were closed immediately after 1918 by the Yugoslavian government, and the premises were seized. Any attempt to reopen them was in vain(10).

The Romanian state continued its diplomatic proceedings in order to determine the Serbian state to allow for the reopening of the Romanian schools in Macedonia.

The Romanians in the Yugoslavian Banat enjoyed, to a certain extent, a minority treatment, which offered them a national life within the neighboring state. In 1919 in the Yugoslavian Banat there existed 66 Romanian primary schools, out of which 18 confessional schools, with 43 teachers and 38 communal schools, with 62 Romanian schoolmasters.

In 1935 Romania and Yugoslavia executed and notified a school agreement. Said agreement stipulated that in the Romanian minority primary school in the Yugoslavian Banat and in the Serbo-Croatian minority primary schools in the Romanian Banat, the teaching language shall be Romanian and Serbo-Croatian, respectively; starting from the third year, Serbo-Croatian and Romanian, respectively, were to be taught as study subjects, and history and geography were taught in the language of the country where the respective schools were located.

The necessary schoolmasters were trained in the schools in Vârset and Timisoara. In school year 1939-1940 in the Yugoslavian Banat there functioned 33 primary schools the courses of which were taught in the Romanian language, to 4324 pupils.

In the Romanian section of the Serbian state high school in Vârset there functioned 4 Romanian lower grade classes, with 4 teachers from Romania and 203 pupils.

Religious aspects

The issues related to the religious life of the Balkan Romanians were related to the actions of the ecumenical Patriarchy in Constantinople, and to the repeated rejection of the Romanian actions by the same, especially at the end of the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th century.

The Romanians had intended to use Romanian language in church since the second half of the 19th century. But said attempts have continuously been met with the categorical refusal of the Greek clergy and the Patriarchy in Constantinople. Over this entire period, countless aggressions were directed against the Romanian priests and the Romanian subjects in the Ottoman Empire (the European side).

Spirits calmed down a little bit after the Balkan wars and the First World War.

After 1892 Romanians commenced an ample action for the acknowledgement of their church-related rights, asking the Sultan to grant them the right to their own Episcopal office. The Romanians very difficultly obtained the right to have their own spiritual leader, who was found in the

person of the metropolitan bishop of Ohrida and Prespa, Antim. However, the patriarchy failed to acknowledge the same. On the other hand, Antim failed to rise up to the expectations of the responsibility he had undertaken. In 1899 he returned to Ohrida and Prespa.

After the imperial resolution of 1905, which ensured the use of the Romanian language in church, Patriarch Ioachim protested to the grand vizier against the new statute granted to Romanians, and in the meeting of the Holy Synod of October 12, 1905, he proposed that all priests and believers “who dared pray to God in their mother tongue”(11) should be anathematized. The Patriarchy’s stand resulted in the ceasing of the diplomatic and commercial relations with Romania(12).

After 1908 the issue related to the establishment of a Romanian Episcopal office was resumed, but without any actual result.

The religious issue of the Balkan Romanians was recorded in the documents of the London Conference and of the Peace Congress in Bucharest (1913) but subsequently, the documents according to which Serbia and Bulgaria and Greece agreed to, and acknowledged the rights of the Balkan Romanians to have schools and churches in their mother tongue, were not longer given any attention. In their turn the Balkan states have always looked for pretexts for avoiding the friendly interventions of the Romanian State and preventing the good progress of the Aromanians’ cause.

Until the First World War in the former Macedonia there were 38 churches. After the war, the development of the Romanian churches’ situation was similar to that of the schools located at the South of the Danube.

In Albania, out of the 10 Romanian churches that existed in 1912, only 6 still functioned in 1941.

In Bulgaria, prior to the First World War, where there existed Romanian communities, Romanian priests performed the religious service in the Romanian language. Subsequently, the parishes were joined into the Bulgarian ones. Romanian priests were banished and those who remained were forced to perform the religious service in the Bulgarian language, using Bulgarian religious books.

In the fourth decade of the 20th century, the service was performed in the Romanian language only in Sofia, Giurmaia and Bregova.

In Greece, after the First World War, Romanian church was hierarchically subordinated to the Greek Orthodox Church, and the priests were supposed to be Greek citizens.

After the First World War the policy of obstructing the priests who served at the churches of the Romanian communities in the Romanian language continued.

The places were either destroyed during the war or taken over by the Greek authorities.

Nevertheless, during the interwar period, 11 Romanian churches continued to function in Greece, and the Romanian state continued to pay the indemnities of the church staff.

In 1941, solely 11 out of the 23 Romanian churches that functioned in 1912 were open.

In Yugoslavia, in the church field the same policy as that used in the education field was applied. In 1919 the Serbian authorities allowed for the reopening of the Romanian churches in: Bitolia, Crușova, Gopești and Moloviște. Subsequently, upon motivating the absence of the priests, solely the church of Bitolia(13) was opened.

In November 1938, the ecclesiastical authorities in Bitolia resumed the attack against the Romanian church.

Father Gh. Cosmescu was summoned to deliver the keys of the church. As the former fell ill, the church was closed, and the keys were kept at the Consulate.

The attempts of the Romanian state to at least keep the Romanian church and cemetery in Bitolia failed. In 1939 the Romanian church in Bitolia was deemed Serbian and the first service in Serbian was performed on November 12, 1939. The cemetery was taken over as well, and father Gh. Cosmescu was forbidden to deliver his sermon in the chapel.

In view of regulating the religious life of the Romanians in the Yugoslavian Banat and of the Serbians in the Romanian Banat, a joint commission was established and negotiations were carried out for 12 years and only as late as July 2, 1934 in Belgrade, one signed the Convention relating to the regime of the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Churches in said area. The Romanian Parliament ratified the Convention in June 1935. Yugoslavia failed to ratify the same. In the Serbian Banat 53 Romanian Orthodox parishes functioned until 1941(14).

The process of denationalizing of the South-Danube Romanians also continued after the Second World War. In the autumn of 1945 the Romanian schools and churches in Albania were included, in February 1946 the Romanian schools in Greece, in 1947 the Romanian schools in Bulgaria and in 1948 the Romanian churches in Greece.

As far as the situation of the Romanians in the Valley of Timoc is concerned, both the Romanians in Bulgaria and the Romanians in Yugoslavia, totally lacking the possibility to benefit from education and religious sermons in their mother tongue, were subjected to an accelerated process of assimilation, and it is a miracle that they managed to maintain their ethno-linguistic identity.

The Romanian state, also included in the Communist influence scope, continued to pay, in a first stage, the indemnities of the teaching and church

staff in the Balkan Peninsula. The rare diplomatic interventions with the Governments of the four Balkan states were unsuccessful. Consequently, the South-Danube Romanians were abandoned and the Romanian state also resolved, by means of decree no. 159 of July 22, 1948, upon the end of the functioning of the foreign schools in the country.

Despite the very difficult conditions, the South-Danube Romanians have maintained, for the following four decades, to a great extent, their language, their customs and the conscience of their own identity so that, after 1990, in all countries in the area, their own publications, cultural societies were established, and the language began being used in education, the media etc.

We hope that the current edition of documents should remind our contemporaries of the efforts made for almost a century, on the one hand by the Romanian state, on the other hand by the representatives of the South-Danube Romanians, for maintaining their linguistic and cultural identity.

References

- (1) Max Demeter Peyfus, *The Aromanian issue. Its evolution since the beginning to the Bucharest peace (1913) and the Austro-Hungary's stand*, translation by N. Șerban Tanașoca, Bucharest, the Encyclopedical Publishing House, 1994, p. 13.
- (2) Th. Burada, *Researches on the schools in Turkey*, Bucharest, 1890, p. 53.
- (3) Sterie Diamandi, *People and aspects in the history of the Aromanians*, Bucharest, 1940, p. 200; M. V. Cordescu, *The history of the Romanian schools in Turkey, Sofia, Turtucaia of Bulgaria and of the Romanian language colleges in Lipsca, Vienna, Berlin, Bucharest*, 1906, p. 13; Ionel Cionchin, *The first Romanian school in Macedonia (July 2, 1864) established by Dimitrie Atanasescu*, in „Clio”, Timișoara, year II, no. 9, 1993.
- (4) Th. Burada, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
- (5) A.N.I.C., Kretzulescu fund, file 831, f. 62.
- (6) A.N.I.C., Ministry of Public Instruction fund, file 712/1926, f. 152.
- (7) *Ibidem*, file, 756/1930, f. 4-5.
- (8) *Ibidem*, file 4336/1945, f. 42.
- (9) *Ibidem*, file 1444/1941, f. 5.
- (10) *Ibidem*, fund of the Ministry of Public Instruction, file 799/1923, f. 9.
- (11) Gheorghe Zbucă, *A history of the Romanians in the Balkan peninsula: the 18th - 20th centuries*, Bucharest, 1999, p. 139.
- (12) Vasile Diamandi-Aminceanul, *The Romanians in the Balkan peninsula*, Bucharest, 1938, p. 138.
- (13) A.N.I.C., fund of the Ministry for Public Instruction, (fond Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice), file dosar 326/1921, f. 17.
- (14) *Ibidem*, fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, dosar 391/1941, f. 32.