

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

LVI



2025

BALCANICA

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ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

UDC 930.85(4-12)

BELGRADE 2025

ISSN 0350-7653
eISSN 2406-0801

ANNEMARIE SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ AND MONICA HUȚANU, *THE VLACHS OF EASTERN SERBIA: LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY*.

Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2023, 256 p.

Reviewed by Ela Cosma*

Published as volume 3 of the series “VLACH” (Vanishing Languages and Cultural Heritage), initiated by the eponymous commission headed by anthropologist Thede Kahl (Director of the Institute of South Slavic Studies at the Jena University) and approved by the Austrian Academy of Sciences Publication Committee, this book offers a dense and pioneering sociolinguistic contribution on the Romance-speaking inhabitants of Eastern Serbia in contemporary history (1940–2025).

Both authors have dedicated their lifetime studies and field research to the problems of the Serbian Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians and Banat Romanians living in the former Yugoslavian countries (especially in Serbia and Vojvodina). Following the paths paved by Paun Es Durlić and Biljana Sikimić, Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković has also tackled folklore and dialectology (as the author of *Românii din Timoc astăzi. Ființe mitologice*, Cluj-Napoca, 2012; co-author of *Românii de lângă noi*, Bucharest, 2013; co-editor of *The Romance-Speaking Balkans: Language and the Politics of Identity*, Brill, 2021; *Vulnerable and Endangered Languages in Europe*, Belgrade, 2025), while Monica Huțanu’s interests included historical linguistics and Romanian phonetics and orthography (co-author of *Dicționar ortografic esențial*, Deva, 2008; co-editor of *Zakonik Cara Stefana Dušana, knj. V, Rumunski prevod Zakonika Cara Stefana Dušana i Epitimijskog Nomokanona 1776*, Belgrade, 2021).

The collective subject of the present volume is the generically (and officially) called *Vlachs*, described by the two authors as speakers of a Romanian variety they refer to as *Vlach Romanian*. As Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković and Monica Huțanu repeatedly show, the neutral term *variety* is used in this book to avoid (politically charged) terms like *language* or *dialect*. The same reason has led the authors to employ the double ethnonym *Vlach Romanians*, thus bringing together, on one hand, the Serbian exonym, Vlachs (*Vlasi*), living in Eastern Serbia and their own endonym, Romanians (*rumîn, rumâń*), who speak Vlach (*vlaški*) or Romanian (*rumunjește*), and, on the other hand, the Romanian phrase denominating the (same) Romanians of the Timok Valley (*românii din Timoc*), speaking a Romanian idiom with minor differences (especially in terms of vocabulary) from the standard (official, literary, academic) Romanian language (p. 13–14, 16, 23, 25–26, 32–33, 153 sq).

Based on ethnographic studies and recorded linguistic influences, the Vlach Romanians in Eastern Serbia are divided into the communities of *Țărani* (in Rom. = “peasants”, from *țară* = “land, country”) or *Mărginiți* (in Rom. = “people from the border”, from *margină* = “border”) and *Ungureni* (in Rom. = “coming from the Hungarian parts”). According to old and

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new historiography (Gustav Weigand, “Die rumänischen Dialekte der kleinen Walachei, Serbiens und Bulgariens”, in: *Siebenter Jahresbericht des Instituts für Rumänische Sprache* 7, 1900, pp. 1–92; George Ciuglea, “Români din Serbia”, in: *Români din Timoc*, vol. I, collection of sources by C. Constante and A. Golopenția, edited by Nicoleta Mușat, vol. I, Timișoara/București, Editura Marineasa/Editura Martor & Muzeul Țăranului Român, 1912/2008, pp. 148–161; Marijana Petrović-Rignault, *Description syntaxique et sémantique du valaque (un parler daco-roumain de Serbie)*, Université Paris Sorbonne–Paris IV, PhD dissertation in manuscript, 2008; Paun Es Durlić, *Sacred Language of the Vlach Bread*, Beograd, Balkankult Foundation, 2011; Petru Neiescu, Eugen Beltechi, Ioan Faiciuc, Nicolae Mocanu, *Atlasul Lingvistic Român. Graiurile dintre Morava, Dunăre și Timoc*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2021), the Țărani are the lowlanders from the valleys of the Danube and Timok rivers in the eastern parts of Serbia, who came from the Romanian Principality of Wallachia (*Țara Românească*) after the 17th century, speaking “a Romanian variety similar to that in Western Oltenia” and forming 20% of the Vlach Romanian population in Eastern Serbia, while the *Ungureni* were shepherds and highlanders from the west, populating the mountainous region of this area between the Danube and Morava, speaking “a Romanian variety close to the Banat dialect” and having an accent from Banat, where from their ancestors had settled in the 18th–19th centuries, accounting for almost 80% of the mentioned population (pp. 16, 33–34, 45–48, 59, 64). The current state of the Vlach Romanian variety still spoken today in Eastern Serbia by the descendants

of these Țărani and *Ungureni* can be read, in phonetic transcription and English translation, in a sample of valuable texts collected by the authors themselves (pp. 66–106).

The six chapters of this book are preceded by a necessary “Abbreviation List” (p. 11) and a summarizing “Introduction” (pp. 13–22); the chapters are succeeded by the appreciative “Acknowledgements” (pp. 233–234), ending with the consistent and up-to-date “Bibliography” (pp. 235–256).

The book chapters are structured as follows: I. The first offers a general presentation of “the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia”, with regard to 1. their ethnonyms and 2. political geography, 3. the Romanians from Vojvodina, 4. ethnohistorical references in Serbian, Romanian, and German from the 19th–20th centuries describing the Romance-speaking population of Serbia (pp. 23–44). II. The second chapter offers a proper linguistic approach to “Vlach Romanian: A Language Profile”, with the theoretical considerations of the authors (pp. 45–62) followed by a representative corpus of 10 transcriptions of the Romanian variety spoken in Eastern Serbia, with the English translations of the texts (pp. 63–106). III. The next chapter includes the “Publications in Vlach Romanian”, starting from the 19th-century “pioneers”, followed by the folklore collections of the second half of the 19th century, before finally turning to “the committed researchers, enthusiasts and organizations”, as well as associations (like the *Ariadnae Filum*, or that of *Gergina*) of the 20th and 21st centuries (pp. 107–152). IV. The fourth and most sensitive but also boldest chapter of the book dares to show the “Ideological factions and the standardization of Vlach”, in an unprecedented attempt to discern science

from politics (pp. 153–172). V. The fifth chapter is about “Vlach Romanian on the Internet”, presenting websites (like those run by Paun Es Durlić or *Matica Vlaha*), electronic newspapers and Facebook pages (*Vlasi na kvadrat*) (pp. 173–198). VI. The last chapter of the book brings hope for the future of the endangered variety spoken today by the analysed population, in an attempt to find “The recent visibility of Vlach Romanian in the linguistic landscape of Eastern Serbia”, by showing small signage (commercial signs, street names, toponyms, places of worship, graveyard inscriptions, *grafitti*), which speak about a symbolic language resurrection of the Vlachs (pp. 199–232).

In many regards, this book is the climax of a synthetic effort spanning 15 years of field research and continuous work on studying the Eastern Serbia’s Romanian Vlachs, as Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković and Monica Huțanu admit (p. 18). The strengths of the book derive undoubtedly from the primary conditions, met by Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković and Monica Huțanu, of mastering 1. both (standard) Serbian and Romanian, 2. linguistics, philology and dialectology, 3. methodology and practice of field research within the analysed communities. These rare and *sine qua non* competences are hard to match and find in recent interpretations, which makes the book unique, especially its “Introduction” and Chapters II–VI.

The weaknesses of the present volume stem from the authors’ minor specialization in broader social sciences, like history and political science. Consequently, in Chapter I (debating the ethnonyms, proposing the term “Vlach Romanians” and then not sticking to it throughout the book, instead switching between the

denomination of “Vlachs” and “Romanians” according to the presented bibliography, mixing genuine historiography with policy-making approaches, confusing cultural activism with scholarship), a solid background of investigation, as well as the historical references are often inadequately defined and explained.

In fact, the authors have meritoriously done their part as sociolinguists describing the Vlach Romanians and their language (1945–2025), offering the reader a short history of the preoccupations regarding the folklore of the distinct ethnic communities. However, the volume dedicated to *The Vlachs of Eastern Serbia. Language and Society* also reveals, in my opinion, a pressing need for collaboration with historians to extend the research on this topic by also collecting and critically editing archival documents from earlier periods, the Middle Ages and the modern period, which mention the presence, organization and way of life of the Romance-speaking inhabitants of Eastern Serbia.

ISSN 0350-7653



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