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HISTORICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON THE TRADITIONAL CIVILIZATION OF POMAKS OF THE GREEK THRACE

Abstract: The traditional society of the Pomaks is structured on a series of contrasts, which characterize their traditional system of values. The problems they face as much in the boundaries of the Muslim minority of Thrace, as well as in the frames of the wider Greek society of the region have defined their cultural expression.

In the mountainous regions of Thrace, there have been living for centuries perhaps the most enigmatic inhabitants of Rodopi, Pomaks, about which there has been a lot of talk especially lately. After the final tracing of the boundaries between Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey the Pomaks were divided as far as territory and population are concerned between the first two countries while from the aspect of national consciousness they comprise the object of claim between the three countries aforementioned to a lesser or greater extend. This reality, tough and inevitable for them, is dictated by the general trend of minorities' exploitation to put forward territorial claims, which prevails nowadays in the Balkans and causes various profound juxtapositions of people and state formation in the wider area of Southeastern Europe.

Therefore, scientific research of the Pomaks, of their history and civilization cannot but be affected by this political juxtaposition, as far as aims are concerned, planning and its results to the extent that a researcher's nationality can influence his scientific speech. This fact must always be taken into account in the probing of the existing bibliography, since under this point of view many issues are interpreted as theses are explained which, on a different occasion seem at least peculiar.

The geographical space which the Pomaks of the Greek Thrace occupy is signaled by three main clusters of settlements: the villages north of Xanthi where from settlement's point of view dominates Ehinós, the villages north of Komotini, with their center Organi and the villages of the region of Eritropotamos in Evros, among Didimoticho and Ortakioi. Yet there are Pomak sin other parts of Thrace as well with maybe the most characteristic case that of the Pomaks of Xanthi who have settled down in the city, yet again rallied around in a special neighborhood, and have acquired all the characteristics of urban life, so much in their vocational performance, as well as their cultural behavior¹.

It should perhaps be quoted from the very beginning that these three groups of Pomaks of the Greek Thrace do not present unified character. Beyond the linguistic differences which are ascertained during the registration and study of the Pomaks language, the Pomaks of Podopi Prefecture, have been mainly occupied with the cultivation of tough cereals - a fact which has led them to an intense reclusion and to discernable trends of self-sufficiency, in the scope of their traditional communities- while those of Xanthi Prefecture have been occupied with cultivation and trade of tobacco, so that their societies to be more open, with wider contacts with the outer world. All these of course have left their imprint on the social structures and their cultural behavior.

But if we can today trace and register their traditional culture, through the procedure of on-the-spot research, their historical past comprises an enigma and challenge for the researchers. Apart from some reports in the archives of bishopric of Philipoupoli, which concern their islamization, very scarce and disputable quotations of the Byzantine sources, and results of archeological excavations in the precincts of their settlement which have been presented mainly by the Bulgarian side, the reports we command are from scant to minimal. Unexploited for example until the present day remain the reports of Germans and Austrian officers who have worked on technical and public projects in the region and have published in newspapers of their countries interesting touring and descriptive passages about the Pomaks they met, during the last two decades of the 19th century.

This situation is radically reversed during the time of the Balkan Wars when the Pomaks, with the rest of the minorities of the wider region, came into the limelight of historical evolutions. This phase of their history during

¹ P. Theocharidis, *Pomakoi, I mousoulmanoi tis Rodopis*, Xanthi 1995 (in greek), pp. 10 seq.

which with representatives and petitioners are trying to vindicate their differentiation from the Bulgarians and the Turks, and presumably even their autonomy lasts until the final definition of the boundaries in the region². Since then, that is after the second decade of the twentieth century, they follow the historical fortunes of the countries in which they were incorporated with differentiations, which are owed to the role and meaning of the minorities in the Balkans, as aforementioned.

Namely, in Bulgaria there were systematically exerted, and until recently strenuous pressures of every form, for the shedding from the Pomaks of any national, linguistic or cultural peculiarity, so that they will not be used by Turkey as on bridgehead to territorial claims. This situation denotes not only the testified attempts of their violent conversion to Christianity, which arose in specific times, but also their general characterization as “Muslim Bulgarians” which was attributed by the state authority to all of the Muslim minority of the neighboring country. And this exact reality echoes the fear of the Pomaks of the Greek Thrace for their presumable “Bulgarization”, which was ingeniously exploited by the official Turkish propaganda³.

In Greece, on the other hand, the Pomaks were pushed out of the limelight after the civil war, when because of the linguistic idioms which resembled to the Bulgarian language, and place of residence, in the line of the Greek-Bulgarian borders, were considered presumably suspects and friendly populations to the Bulgarians with the result being the imposing of inspection in the transference and free community, which only recently have been revoked. The official Greek position, in the framework of the doctrine for the existence of one and not more Muslim minorities in the Greek Thrace, has led to the approaching of the Pomaks with the rest ingredient elements of the minority, with the consequence of the development of binding ties and the potential forming of a new and fictitious “national consciousness”, which has alienated the cultural countenance of the Pomaks leading them to acts and choices that would have been unconceivable of to them two decades ago⁴.

² Kall. Papathanasi- Mousiopoulos, *Ptyches apo tin istoria ton pomakon*, Thrakiki Epetirida 8 (1991), pp. 229-238 (in greek). P. Papachristodoulou, *I Pomakoi*, Archeion Thrakikoy Laografikou kai Glossikou Thisaurou 8 (1947), p.7 (in greek). P. Foteas, *I Pomakoi tis Dyitikis Thrakis*, Komotini 1978, p. 4 (in greek).

³ Cf. J.Konstantinov, *An account of Pomak conversions in Bulgaria (1912-1990)*, in Ger. Seevann (ed.), *Minderheiten in Sudost-europa*, Oldenburg 1992, pp. 343-357. Abd. Dede, *Bati Trakya Turk Folkloru*, Ankara 1978, p. 15.

⁴ Abd.Dede, *Andartlik Hikayeleri*, Turk Dunyasi Arastirmalari Dergisi 4 (1980), pp. 90-97. K. Tsioumis, *I Pomakoi sto elliniko kratos (1920-1950)*, Thessaloniki 1997, p. 75 (in greek).

The issue of language offers an absolutely characteristic example of these interactions. Having the Pomak language as their mother tongue, the Pomaks are forced to learn the Turkish (sometimes the Arabian as well) language in the scope of the minority's education, as treaties, bi-lateral agreements and current practice have defined these. Therefore, in their contacts with the rest of the minority they use the Turkish language, whereas in contacts with the majority and the state they need knowledge of the Greek language. In this way they turn out to be trilingual or not knowing, with the result sufficient of any language apart from their mother tongue- the Pomak language, which nevertheless they cannot use outside of their community.

Unregistered until recently, the Pomak language has lately comprised a subject matter of various and different approaches. It is worth mentioning, in all of this movement, that beyond the attempts of extraneous to the Pomak writers (like P. Theoharidis⁵, Nath. Panagiotidis⁶ and myself) in the issue have also been engaged Pomak intellectuals, like Ritvan Karahotza, Hamdi Omer and Mumin Aidin, by compiling dictionaries and grammar books, syntax⁷ and spelling books through which the small children would be able to learn the language of their ancestors. The reaction of the minority's circles, especially in the attempt of the spelling book was intense and direct, because they were strengthening existing distinguishing lines in the framework of a minority which they wanted to present as unified, without in fact, being so.

A presumable emergence of linguistic differentiation on behalf of the Pomaks, could according to their point of view, constitute the beginning of other equivalent evolutions as well, which would have as a final outcome the consolidation and awareness of their diversification, an event basically subversive for the implementation of the Turkish policy on the specific issue.

The language problem is indicative of the framework in which also the study of the Pomaks history and culture is encircled. It is known that a similar confrontation exists regarding the issue of their identity and origin. The Bulgarian bibliography, which is influenced by the Bulgarian vindication of the Pomaks because of language supports that they are early Bulgarians, who were later islamized. On the other hand, the Turkish bibliography, relying on the Turkish vindication of the Pomaks because of religion, supports that they are Turkish speaking races, probably Kumans, or Tsepnides relating them to the activity in the region of Ebu Muslim, favorite of the Abbasids

⁵ P. Theoharidis, *Pomakoelliniko lexiko*, Thessaloniki 1996 (in greek).

⁶ Nath. Panagiotidis, *I Pomakoi kai I glossa tous*, Alexandroupoli 1997 (in greek).

⁷ R. Karachotza, *Grammatiki pomakikis glossas*, Xanthi 1996 (in greek). Idem, *Syntaktiko pomakikis glossas*, Xanthi 1997 (in greek).

dynasty (750-1258). Finally, the Greek position is that they are descendants of ancient Thracian races, probably as that of the mentioned in the sources Agrians, who in some, relevantly recent, phase of their history have been islamized and linguistically traumatized⁸.

The research finds it even more difficult from the aforementioned propaganda, which springs from some leading circles of the minority, in the framework of the Turkish foreign policy, which supports that the Muslim minorities of the Balkans are of Turkish racial origin and national consciousness, without taking into consideration historical, folklore or ethnographic data. Therefore, it is exerted systematic propaganda on the Pomaks, with starting-points in the minority's education, and in particular the teachers from Turkey teachers, and the clergymen of Islam, that exploits their seclusion, hence the lack of informing and the weakness of crosschecking the claims, and pressures that the Pomaks have tolerated in the past, mainly those who live in Bulgaria, from state mechanisms, so as to banish their peculiarities and to become homogeneous to the rest of the population. With the threatening fear of an alleged oncoming violent and compelling conversion to Christianity and with the claim of a planned expropriation of their land, the Pomaks are forced to an always increasing isolation, to introversion and denial of rendering any kind of information that may concern the past, their identity or their cultural present. If, all the more so, it is calculated together the almost exclusive watching from their part of Turkish satellite channels, which is made easier from the free distribution of proper antennas, it is easily understood the difficulty that every new researcher faces for their approach and the study of their cultural patterns and their social formations.

Yet, the relevant bibliography increases at a fast rate, simultaneously in Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Especially as the folklore bibliography receives important development, with the study of partial circumstances of specific settlements. Here it should be quoted that there is even an important unpublished primary folklore material, in handwritten collections of the Centre of Greek Folklore, the Athens Academy, the Folklore Frontistirio of G. A. Megas in the Greek Folklore Company and the relevant collections of the Universities of Thessalonica, Ioannina, (at the Schools of Philosophy) and Thrace (at the department of History and Ethnology), which has lately become a subject topic of study⁹. The published material comes mainly from

⁸ P. Chidioglou, *I Ellines Pomakoi kai h schesi tous me tin Tourkia*, Athens 1989, pp. 10-12 (in greek).

⁹ M.G.Varvounis, *Laografika ton Pomakon tis Thrakis*, Athens 1996, pp. 163-168 (in greek). Idem, *Paradosiakos politismos ton Pomakon tis Thrakis*, Athens 2000, pp. 44-52 (in greek).

Sarakini, Smigada and Organi of Rodopi Prefecture, as well as the settlements of Kaloticho, Ehinós, Kotili, Miki, Sminthi, Oreó, Kimmeria, Selero, Thermes and Kiknos of Prefecture of Xanthi.

From what has preceded it is obvious that it is imposed, in the present phase of the research, the circumstantial publication, and study since the traditional civilization of the Pomaks presents small or great differences from one village to the other, and of course among the three Thracian Prefectures. Only after the publication and study of similar material from various Pomaks' villages we will be in a position to proceed to overall contemplations, having done the necessary discriminations and grouping for a similar enterprise. In this framework the folklore information that follow come from Sminthi and Chrysa of Xanthi Prefecture, and the Pomaks of the city of Xanthi and were registered in on-spot searches during the period of 1995-1996.¹⁰ It should also be quoted here that in all those that follow there is an attempt to be described and studied some basic sectors of daily life of the Pomaks in Thrace, in its rural or urban version, with comparisons between these two patterns of organized economic, social and cultural activity and creation. It is mainly of interest the different element, in relation to the Christian majority and the Muslim minority of the region, and not the similar, so as to be indicated some of the characteristics of the special cultural identity of the Pomaks, which make them different from the other minorities of Thrace. Therefore, it does not have anything to do with organized and complete description of their daily life, but for an indicative gleaning of these elements that are repressed and suppressed, in the scope of inter-minority proceedings and expedencies, which were mentioned earlier.

Two basic practices, the name giving and circumcision determine the birth of a new member of the community. The first one depends on the parent's will, since only the second child is named after the grandfather or grandmother, and that not always.

Yet definitely, the name giving incorporates the child in the family group as a person, as an eponymous member. On the other hand the circumcision consists an initiation ceremony, with religious content, which defines the integration of the child in the wider religious group, and the cultural community that it defines or entrenches. It usually takes place before the child completes its three years of age. In Xanthi nowadays the modern means of medical science are used, since laser beams have replaced the razor, and the doctor took the position of hotza. In the same urban environment has fallen

¹⁰ *Folklore Collection of Democritus University of Thrace*, manuscript 43, pp.70-74 (K.Zografopoulos, Chrysa of Xanthi, 1995).

into disuse and the custom of a child's eulogy from the hotza, which was followed by treat or feast for the relatives and friends of the family¹¹.

The same urban homogeneity is also noticed in the customs of marriage, which in the Pomaks' region out of Xanthi retain some archaic forms, while in the city they tend to mime forms of the Christian wedding, apart of course from the religious ceremony. This phenomenon should probably be related to the general assimilation and standardization of the wedding customs in the urban surroundings, which is seen in various Greek regions.

The absence of religious rituals in Islam leaves space for the development of folklore customary practices, which also define the wedding in the Pomaks. On Saturday night, for instance, usually the day of the wedding there are feasts both in the bride's house as well as in the groom's house. The customary defined ritual of the wedding consists of the handing over of the bride to the groom, at noon on Sunday, the bride is accompanied by the groom's relatives and friends, and after a short carousal in the yard of her house, he leads her to his own house, where the new couple will settle down. The settlement is usually man-father-placed and very rarely newly-man-placed. On the other hand in Xanthi, on Sunday noon after the established conviviality of Saturday, the bride goes to the hairdresser's and afterwards with the groom goes to the music hall where they will celebrate their wedding, with friends and relatives.

Yet the common resultant of the wedding rituals¹², in the village or in town, remains the drawing of the wedding contract, a week before the wedding, from the hotza with the presence of the groom, the bride and friend-witnesses on each side, where the wedding nuptial allowances from both families are also defined, usually a house, fields, cattle, or jewelry. The Pomaks themselves admit that it is not any more inviolate condition the bride's virginity, in relevance to the equivalent freedom that also the groom savors. They claim that it is good for the wedding to take place at an early age, and they admit that young people should get to know each other, before marriage and discuss oians. In the Pomaks' villages since the presence of a woman at the café is thought to be unconceivable of, the meeting takes place in the afternoon, in the street out of the houses, where the young people go around in parties. In Xanthi, there is of course the solution of the café, which can host both houses.

¹¹ P. Mylonas, *I Pomakoi tis Thrakis*, Athens 1990, pp. 79-90 (in greek). E. Arvanitou, *Turks et Pomaques en Grece du Nord : une minorite religieuse ou deux minorities nationales*. Paris 1983, p. 82.

¹² P. Mylonas, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-67. Y. Frangopoulos, *Les Grecs Musulmans : A propos d' une minorite religieuse dans les Balkans*, *Balkan Studies* 34 (1993), pp. 105-107.

In the villages, after the meeting of the young, the whole procedure of approaching each of the two families follows a customary defined way, since there is an approach of exploratory character from some common acquaintance of both, during which the answer of the bride's father "it doesn't finish" is equivalent to denial, whereas the answer "shall I make some coffee to drink?" is equivalent to an in principle acceptance. Consequently handkerchiefs or items of clothing are exchanged and then follows a visit of the groom's family to the house of the bride, which is equivalent to the contracting of a mostly brief engagement, during which the details of the wedding are settled and is furthermore allowed the free-community of the engaged. The drawing up and signing of the bridal contract, where it is also foreseen compensation for the bride in case of her unreasonable dismissal by the groom, it is considered to be virtual validation of the wedding, after which the couple can cohabit or have sexual intercourse, under the condition that the wedding's ceremony, will be completed in short period of time, usually in a week. As time passed it has fallen in disuse the visit of the groom's family to the bride's house on Saturday night before the marriage during which the mother-in-law would put henna (kına) in the bride's hands, a custom connected to the wedding's rituals not only amongst the Muslims but also amongst the Christians of Thrace.

The wedding ceremonies, as well as every feast or formal moment of the community is defined by the making and consumption of a festal meal, pilaf. It is made of rice, meat, fat and salt, which they boil in large pots and share with the guest. Also in the category of the wedding customs which have fallen in disuse is included the inspection of the bride's virginity, which the past took place on the same night of the wedding from the mothers of the groom and bride, who were waiting for this purpose outside of the newlyweds' chamber.

During the third and last phase of human life, death, it is also observed a shrinking of the ritual part, yet of a smaller extent, since it concerns acts connected with metaphysical beliefs, and which present stronger resistances to time, for this particular reason. It all of the burial ceremonies that take place out of the house's precincts, women do not participate, according to invariable Muslim practice. The corpse of the dead is exhibited in the house, in a room where the mirrors are covered and the TV that could by chance exist was removed, and those who come to console the family bring flowers. Usually a special coffin is not used, but a sort of stretcher for the transfer of the dead to the cemetery, although in the urban environment of Xanthi the Pomaks started, during the last decade, to occasionally use coffins as well.

The corpse of the dead is wrapped naked in a one-piece item of cloth, which is cut by the hotza, wrapped, and sewed inside it. The men who participate in the funeral, especially if the previous night they slept with their wife, have to have washed themselves before the ceremony, as they are likewise washed after their return from the cemetery, in an obviously symbolic attempt to take away the miasma of death, and especially of the dead body, from themselves. They also consider that women are, compared to men, more sinful, and for this reason they dig their grave deeper, so that it will be achieved a posthumous propitiation for their sins. Moreover, they believe that married women can easier achieve holiness after death, than unmarried women or men.

Before the burial the deceased is reposed at a specially formed space outside of the mosque, while the hotza and all of those who follow the funeral pray inside. Afterwards the hotza asks three times all those that are present if they had any complaints from the dead, so that the chance will be given for his fellow-villagers to forgive him for any -if by chance- differences they had, while he lived. Furthermore, for the same reason, he asks if he was a good human being in his life. In this way unity of the community returns, which could have been disturbed by personal differences and juxtapositions.

At the burial, the deceased is placed in the grave without a coffin, they put straw on him, and then they bury him. Afterwards, the family of the dead offers pilaf with meat and yogurt to the relatives and close friends. Forty days after death the feast is repeated with pie, which the women of the family prepare jointly, while they also distribute the dead person's clothes to friends or to the poor, as a way of commemoration. For ten days after the burial, the relatives of the dead daily read extracts from the Koran at his house. Some have the habit of offering sweets (usually marshmallow or chocolate products) to the people right after the burial in the place of the cemetery, or at the very next Ramadan, in memory of the dead¹³.

From all the aforementioned, one can observe that the Pomaks are faithful Muslims, and they have regulated their daily life according to the moral and practical commands of Islam¹⁴. This is intense even in the details of their annual worshipping and calendar circle, which is settled on the basis of the three Bayrams of the year, kurban bairam, seker bairam and Ramadan bairam. These three mass feasts constitute the landmarks of the

¹³ L. Geitler, *Poeticke tradice Traku I Bulharu*, Praha 1878, p. 24.

¹⁴ F. Tsimbiridou, *On nous appelle Pomak!'. Construction et politiques du pouvoir face a l'avenement ethnique*, Paris 1998, pp. 10-12.

annual circle and the axons around which the Pomak of Thrace settles and organizes his life.

Kurban bairam is characterized by a homely organization worship sacrifice of lamb (kurban), which is bought by every house lord on the eve of the feast, and it is dyed with henna (kına) in three points on the fur of its back. In addition, the Pomak women dye their fingers and toes, as well as their palms. From its vehicles themselves, the custom is related to the red color the grouse's feet have, which the Pomaks consider to be damned and on awful bird, because some religious myth of theirs account that once Mohamed was hidden in a tree's cavity while being chased, where he was discovered after the howl "pits kinti –pits kinti" of a grouse with red feet. Besides for this reason on their sacred holiday, Friday, they indulge in grouse hunting, in which they aim just to kill. It should be noticed here that similar conceptions about traitorous plants or animals also exist amongst the Christians of Thrace as well, as far as the way in which the Jews discovered the chased Christ is concerned, and also the fact that the color red is considered to be deterrent and protective, in customs of the Greek but also others, European or not, nations.

The lamb that will be sacrificed should not weigh less than fifteen kilos nor should it have body deficiencies, i.e. to have an eye, ear, or horn missing. After the prayer of the first day at the mosque, the Pomaks return home and slaughter the lamb, clean it, cut it into pieces and put aside portions for the poor and unprotected neighbors, since charity is among the duties of a good Muslim, and it is imposed during the feast or merrymaking days. They keep only as much meat as they will consume on the festal table, while they consider it as their worshipping duty to distribute the rest. Moreover, the consumption of alcohol is prohibited at this table, in contrast with the rest of the days during which the religious command for avoidance of alcoholic drink has rather fallen in disuse.

The slaughtering of the lamb also presents ritual elements, since during the transport and the whole procedure extracts from the Koran are read. Before the slaughter, they let it to drink water and cover its head with a new handkerchief. Afterwards they dig a hole in the yard of each house, and pour in the animal's blood; they also throw in the handkerchief and throw soil, burning them, while the meat of the they bake it in the oven. As the Pomaks themselves say, the rest Muslims of the region spit the lamb, drink ouzo while they eat it and give their neighbors a small amount of meat, elements that they consider essentially differentiating elements of theirs, related to them, and which shows that the Pomaks consist a special part in the Muslim minority of Thrace.

Seker bairam lasts for three days, and it is characterized by the consumption of sweets, and the exchange of visits between relatives and their friends. The family, in its most enlarged version, gathers around the commune festal table, where again the consumption of meat dominates. The Pomaks of Xanthi in particular visit, during seker bairam, their relatives in the nearby villages, where they are also hosted. The naturalist element is intense in the customs that characterize this feast during which the Pomaks reaffirm and reconnect their traditional family bonds, but also their relationship with the surrounding natural space, where the activity of every traditional human being, and every traditional community is registered.

Finally, Ramadan bairam is found at the end of thirty days of rigorous fasting of the Ramadan. During this period the Pomaks wake up in the morning before sunrise to eat, and eat again after sunset. During the whole day they do not drink, not even water, and they do not smoke. After the completion of the days of the fasting, follow three days of general holiday and merrymaking, which make up bairam.

Their inviolable religious duty the Pomaks consider the prayer, with passages from the Koran, five times a day, before which they wash their hands, feet and face, and especially their ears. Their holiday is Friday, during which, washed and in special clothes, they enter the mosque for the solemn prayer. The Pomak women go to the mosque only during the Ramadan, at the last prayer of the day, which takes place at around eleven at night, whereas the rest of the days they pray alone at home. But even in the mosque they pray separately from the men, usually in an elevated loft, which plays the role of gynaekoniti. This is also an indication of the subordinate and almost supplementary, presence of the woman in the Islamic society of the Pomaks.

All those described above make up the official version of the worship life of the Pomaks. Yet, there are also some customs of their daily life, with distinct devotional substance, that echoes their Christian past, since it is known from the sources that their islamization occurred during the 17th century, although it is not certain that they used to be Orthodox Christians before. It is most probable that they belonged to some heresy, one of the various of the region, a fact that also defined their accession to the Muslim heresy of bektasides¹⁵, whose again the dissemination in the region of Thrace

¹⁵ St. Nicoglou, *Observations on the Moslem Minority in Western Thrace*, Athens 1956, p. 5. C. Ozonder, *Pomak Turkleri*, Bati Trakyanin Sesi 1:4 (1988), pp. 20-25.

was assisted by the religious policy of Turkish sultans, since its superficial similarities to Christianity were rendering it an alluring perspective to Islam for the unredeemed Thracian population whom they wanted to adjure.

Customs like crossing of the bread's yeast before it is baked, or the placement of a Christian icon into the dead person's grave, the participation in worshipping life as well as the devotional practice of the Christian element of the area mainly aiming at achieving some miraculous therapy, but also the use of Christian symbols as charms are usually mentioned as evidence of a Christian past or, according to a more propulsive concept, of a Crypto Christian present. And these very claims, which are usually supported by personal testimonies, are the ones that are used as evidence for the supposed existence of a planned conversion of the Pomaks to Christianity, which fills them with fear and leads them to their absolute seclusion¹⁶.

It is, nevertheless, beyond any doubt that the grains of collective oral historical memory, their historic traditions, the survivals of their customs and the archaisms of their traditional behaviors, as well as their names of places, will show us the way to the probing of their historical and cultural past, their identity itself. And this past is of interest as much as their present, that seems to transform radically, under the burden of Turkish propaganda, leading the Pomaks to a loss of the peculiarities which for many years they have retained and to an unwilling homogeneity towards the rest of the promiscuous elements of population that make up the Muslim minorities of Thrace, under this pretext and cloak common religious identity. For this reason the language, the distinct customs and the worshipping peculiarities of the Pomaks of Thrace, are found under persecution, in an attempt to erase all the partial ingredients of a different cultural and national identity and to create a fictitious Turkish national consciousness of all the Muslims of Thrace.

Yet, during their unconstrained private talks the Pomaks themselves stress their differentiation, which emerges even amongst them. They mention, for instance, that the various villages of the Pomaks present differences, not only in language, but also in customs and garment. A Pomak from Myki has claimed, for example that he could distinguish the regional descent of the Pomaks who participated in the Saturday bazaar of Xanthi, by their attire, and that speaking with a Pomak from Oreo or Pachni he understood only three fifths of the words and expressions that he used, although all the above mentioned villages are found in the periphery of Xanthi. There are also quoted,

¹⁶ M.G.Varvounis, *Paradosiakos politismos ... op. cit.*, pp. 144-163.

as linguistic jocular narrations¹⁷, misunderstandings that happened because of the different usage of language and the diverse meanings of the words¹⁸, among residents of various villages, with always a comical outcome.

There are sections of human activity, like traditional medicine and veterinary medicine, omens, prejudices, superstitions and their folklore meteorology, that preserve worthwhile studying archaisms, with roots in an equivalent tradition as it is consigned by various sources of posterior antiquity and the Byzantine era. Moreover, other sectors, like their traditional materialistic life, presented stability or difficulty in movement of structures for long spells of time, to be radically transformed, and these in their turn after the decade 1960-1970, that consists of the limit of cultural transformations for the traditional society of the Pomaks, which today can be characterized as a society that has entered intense and discernible procedures of transition.

The differences of the Pomaks between the various villages of Thrace can also be seen from details of their materialistic and social life. As quoted above pilaf make up their main festal meal. Yet at its preparation differences are presented, since in some places they use only lamb meat (Myki) and elsewhere beef as well, so that will not be too fatty (Dimario). On the other hand elsewhere they put together rice and corn, while in other villages they boil together various nuts, like chestnuts, wheat, hazelnuts etc., thus giving the whole a character of welter. But even in their behavior towards foreigners they present differences, since some villages have closed communities, with intense introversion and xenophobia, whereas others offer hospitality to visitors, servicing their various needs. The same can be noticed about the female's attire since the Pomak women, avoid to wear the yashmak, but only in their close surroundings in which they know that they will be misunderstood, preferring to leave their hair loose, in all other cases.

It has already been quoted above that the Pomaks' language present differences from settlement to settlement and from area to area. Lately there has been an intense attempt of registering and study of this language that has started to bear fruits, and has caused a strong reaction from the governing circles of the minority. As a small contribution to this attempt will consequently be quoted some phrases, some of which are proverbial, which have been registered in 1995 in Sminthi of the Xanthi Prefecture: Kolku kolku koto tepe (: How many like you!), Esey i esey nema prokopi (: Whatever

¹⁷ Tat. Seyppel, *Pomaks in Northeastern Greece : An endangered Balkan Population*, Journal of Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs 10:1 (1989), pp. 41-49.

¹⁸ Y. Frangopoulos, *Essai d'analyse d'une communauté musulmane dans un espace frontiere*, Louvain 1988, p. 18.

happens there is no prosperity!), Etus da vidis, etam da vidis (: Here to see, there to see- with the meaning that time has passed), Begaite da begaime (: Let's leave quickly), Nema da vavvus (: You are not going anywhere), Da ne vide? (: Have you by any chance seen?), Opjono naddolu (: He has gone down the road), Mene miso spravi (: It seems to me that), Podegnal deto mu vidiat utsise (: He went where his eyes could see), Da bi moglo, vat kapka voda ia udavila (: If he could, he would drown her in a spoonful of water), Da zivee i da naruva (: Let him be alive and kicking), Fore nozot do kokala (: The knife has reached to the bone), Nabite ot glavosomi (: Get off my back!), Grodajsi rabo toto (: Mind your own business), Esas sjo togona rabota (: This is her own business), Akvajo etas rabota? (: What kind of job is this?), Golema rabota (: Big deal!), Nema enia (: He doesn't have any worry, he isn't careful), Dosla дума (: in the course of conversation), Izede mi usite (: He's talked my head off, he keeps telling me something), Tseka da to nautso (: I'll teach you, -like a threat), Dato nevisol utsisemi (: Keep out of my way!), Toi megare i polovina (: He is a donkey !-meaning that he is rude), Pisali miso na seytan kane defter (: They've put us down in their black books)¹⁹.

The traditional society of the Pomaks is structured on a series of contrasts, which characterize their traditional system of values. The problems they face as much in the boundaries of the Muslim minority of Thrace, as well as in the frames of the wider Greek society of the region have defined their cultural expression. Therefore, it is not contingent that similar conflicts, also expressed in the well-known schema of the contrast nature/culture, usually consists the semantic nucleus of the folklore songs, myths, fairytales and their jocular narrations. Even in their songs, or their lullabies, this contrast, which expresses the problems of their incorporation and integration in their population and social entreties that vindicate them, constitutes the dominant ideology.

The Pomaks, during the course of centuries, have suffered a lot, with crowning examples of their linguistic and religious traumatism.²⁰ These features of theirs also comprise the poles of pressure exertion, sometimes acute and painful, from Bulgaria and Turkey, on them. Characteristic is also the founding of Democracy of the Pomaks, after the Berlin Congress in 1878, which the Turkish Historiography has attempted to present it as something that it was not, that is to say an effort of the Greek Thrace "Turks" to attain their autonomy. The lack of information as well as a podium to express ideas and aspects has obstructed -and still does- the Pomaks to take stand at

¹⁹ M. G. Varvounis, *Proverbial phrases of the Pomaks in Greek Thrace, Mesogeios* 2 (1998), pp. 68-70.

these issues, that directly concern them of course, but about which they are almost never questioned.

The Pomaks beyond the Greek boundaries, who live in the massifs of southern Bulgaria and the Greek-Bulgarian borders, having been integrated in exactly the same historical framework, have suffered a series of persecutions and oppression, with the intention to become Bulgarians. Similar pressures have suffered the Pomaks of the Greek Thrace as well, during the periods of Bulgarian dominancy in the region, with the most recent being the Bulgarian occupation of 1941-1944. Right afterwards, in the context of the cold war climate and the doctrine of the danger from the north, the Greek policy secluded the Pomaks, considering them to be suspect population with an uncertain possible attitude in a future war. All these, while the Pomaks themselves had paid a heavy blood toll by defending the territory of their country, during the Second World War battles.

There followed the activity of the Turkish propaganda in the region with the aims of similitude of the minority, which were mentioned before. In order to achieve this, the doubts and memories of the past should be erased. Therefore, they tried to persuade them to abandon the language, customs, habits and even their national self-definition, by attributing their suspicion to these elements. In this way their folklore is confronted as a species for rejection and change, since it is squeezed among their national consciousness and their religious identity. That is why the reaction of these factors in the attempt of the Pomaks themselves to save and reassume their language has been so violent and systematic, as it was explained in detail above.

The question about their true national and racial identity still remains, still their cultural façade was investigated with all the above mentioned. The researcher who comes, as crowning of his searches, to confront this question is found in a real embarrassment, since the scientific data is scarce and the danger of deviation towards political positions distinct and visible. If we accept that their most distant origin dates back to the ancient Thracian races, something which is also reinforced by the usage of names of places and linguistic characterizations that lead to the ancient Thracian race of Agrianes, we should also admit that the centuries which have passed added many elements to their racial and national identity²¹. Language and religion comprise two important defining factors, which should not pass unobserved. No matter how much the possible Christian past of the Pomaks is stressed,

²⁰ G. H. Bousquet, *Islam in the Balkans*, *Moslem World* 26 (1925), pp. 315-317. Eren Cervat, *Pomaklar*, *Islam Ansiklopedisi* 9 (1964), p. 575.

what is of interest and defines them is their Muslim present, since they themselves are mostly faithful Muslims, even if they belong to heresies like that of the bektasides or allevides. Religion also defines their daily life, through a series of regulative arrangements that characterize every religion, and especially Islam.

What is rarely stressed and searched are the differences of the Pomaks and the rest of the members of the Muslim minority of Thrace, that is those elements that constitute their special identity, whether they are racial, or cultural. Apart from language it concerns manners and customs, behaviors and mentalities, a special attitude of life, the ascertainment, the description and study of which demands a systematic approach of the Pomaks and their community, something which is rather unachievable in the Greek Thrace today, because of the involvement of political causes and national vindications. Yet although all these elements are missing, reality starts to emerge dimly. According to this, the most appropriate answer to the generalizing and polarizing question which is usually posed, that is to say if the Pomaks are Greeks, Bulgarians or Turkish it would be the expression of a simple and almost self evident truth, which is usually forgotten intentionally or unwillingly: that the Pomaks are nothing else but Pomaks, a characterization which would suffice to attribute their special identity, from whichever view this is confronted or studied.

²¹ Cf. En. Serifgil, *Toponimik bir arastirma. Gocler ve yer adlari (Turkler, Pomaklar ve Bulgarlar)*, Turk Dunyasi Arastirmalari 2:7 (1980), pp. 81-126, with bibliography.

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ИСТОРИЈСКИ И ЕТНОЛОШКИ УТИЦАЈИ НА ТРАДИЦИОНАЛНУ
КУЛТУРУ ПОМАКА У ГРЧКОЈ ТРАКИЈИ

Резиме

Помаци су словенофоно муслиманско становништво у Западној Тракији, по језику и традиционалној култури различито од становништва муслиманске мањине у Грчкој. О Помацима се такође не може говорити као кохерентној групи. Територијална припадност повлачи језичке и обичајне и социјалне разлике, па тако се издвајају, на пример, Помаци округа Родопа или Ксанти.

Структура традиционалне културе Помака заснива се контрастима вековима уобличаваног система вредности. Њихов садашњи културни израз открива промене проистекле из симбиозе традиције етнитета ове муслиманске мањине и хришћанског грчког окружења. Иновације код Помака, чији је свакодневни живот организован по исламским моралним и практичним одредбама, испољавају се у обичајима животног циклуса, посебно свадбеним и самртним. У интензитету промена испољава се социјални моменат изазивајући разлике између Помака у сеоским и градским срединама.