

ETNOLOGIE

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THE EMERGENCE OF VLACH NECROPOLISES WITH PETROGLYPHS IN WESTERN BALKANS

Rezumat

Apariția monumentelor funerare vlahe cu petroglife în Balcanii de Vest

Lucrarea abordează unele activități și tradiții ale vlahilor, legate de apariția necropolelor cu monumente funerare impresionante și cu petroglife în Bosnia și Herțegovina și în țările din jur ca Serbia, Croația și Muntenegru. În lucrare sunt prezentate traseele de transhumanță ale vlahilor din Balcanii de Vest și legătura dintre transhumanță și poziția necropolelor. O abordare similară este făcută în legătură cu rutele de transport ale vlahilor între minele din munți și orașele italiene din Dalmația. Rutele sunt puse în legătură cu poziția unor necropole. Durata activităților de transport coincide în timp cu durata formării necropolelor. O asemănare între unele petroglife și persistența unor tradiții funerare la românii/vlahii din Serbia de Nord-Est întărește ipoteza unei contribuții importante a vlahilor la apariția necropolelor cu petroglife.

Cuvinte-cheie: vlahi, necropole, petroglife, transhumanță, transporturi, pază, tradiții funerare.

Резюме

Появление валашских надгробных памятников с петроглифами на Западных Балканах

В работе рассматриваются некоторые действия и традиции валахов, связанные с появлением захоронений, увенчанных впечатляющими надгробными памятниками с петроглифами, в Боснии и Герцеговине, а также в соседних странах – Сербии, Хорватии и Черногории. В работе представлены пути перезахоронения валахов с Западных Балкан и показана связь между местонахождением некрополей. Аналогичный подход применен в отношении транспортных маршрутов валахов, пролегающих между горными шахтами и итальянскими городами Далмации. Маршруты выстроены в зависимости от местоположения захоронений. Время транспортных перевозок совпадает со временем формирования захоронений. Сходство между некоторыми петроглифами и устойчивостью погребальных традиций румын/валахов северо-востока Сербии способствует подтверждению гипотезы относительно значимого вклада валахов в появление надгробных памятников с петроглифами.

Ключевые слова: валахи, захоронения, петроглифы, трансгумация, транспорт, охрана, погребальные традиции.

Summary

The emergence of vlach necropolises with petroglyphs in Western Balkans

The paper deals with some activities and traditions of Vlachs connected to the emergence of necropolises with impressive tombstones and petroglyphs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in surrounding countries like Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. The paper approaches the traces of the Vlach transhumance in the Western Balkans and the connection between transhumance and the position of the necropolises. Similar approach is made about the traces of the Vlach transportation routes between the mines in the mountains and the Italian cities of Dalmatia. The routes are set in connection with the position of some necropolises. The duration of transportation activities coincides in time with the duration of the formation of necropolises. A similarity between some petroglyphs and the persistence of funerary rites of the Romanians/Vlachs from North East Serbia strengthens the hypothesis of Vlach main contribution to the emergence of necropolises with petroglyphs.

Key words: Vlachs, necropolises, petroglyphs, transhumance, transportations, guards, funerary traditions.

The Vlachs are the Latinized and the indigenous population of Balkans, descendents of the Eastern Roman Empire. “Vlach” is an exonym for Romanians, Aromanians, and other latinophons from the Balkans, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine and Czech Republic. The Vlach language is a Latin language, very closely related to Romanian. They kept the orthodox faith of the Eastern Roman Empire. A large part of Vlachs was over time slowly assimilated by the Slavs, and they gradually lost their language in Western Balkans. According to several researchers the Vlach [28; 10; 15; 18, p. 215] medieval necropolises with gravestones and petroglyphs (stecci in Serbian) of Western Balkans were elevated between the 12th and 16th centuries.

There are some unclear data in connection with the emergence of the funerary monuments with petroglyphs: why did they appear in the area of Herzegovina and partially in the surrounding countries? There were some approaches of this subject. Marian Wenzel wrote that the tombstones “were initially erected by feudal aristocracy, and that the custom was

later adopted and the decoration much elaborated by certain groups known as Vlachs, who were organized in a *cătun*, (small village in Romanian and Albanian), on a tribal, non-feudal basis. The Vlachs being economically strengthened by their *pastoral products trade* with Ragusa, started to imitate the upper classes. Other non-Vlachs inhabitants adopted the same custom” [29, p. 15]. John Fine wrote that the Vlachs controlled the carrying trade and the protection of caravans from brigands and they became extremely rich and came to dominate Zeta (Montenegro) and Hum (Zachlunia, today in Herzegovina) [10]. According to Šefik Bešlagić, some mountainous regions were not suitable for the livestock farming and settlements and have no funerary monuments with petroglyphs. The same situation is for the Northern parts of Bosnia, where the Hungarian policy did not permit the presence of the “schismatics”. The emergence of large markets, related to carrying and the mining centres, and the creation of a civil class influenced the decline of placing funerary monuments with petroglyphs [3].

In order to further clarify the subject of the emergence of funerary monuments, the paper goes deeper into the topic and shows supplementary data about the connection between the activities of the Vlachs and the position of necropolises. The paper describes the traces of the Vlach transhumance in the Western Balkans and the connection between transhumance and necropolises. Also, data about the traces of the Vlach transportation routes between the mines in the mountains and the Italian cities of Dalmatia are connected with necropolises. The duration of transportation activities of the Vlachs is the same as the duration of the necropolises elevation. Finally, the similarity between bygone rituals showed in some petroglyphs and present funerary traditions of the Romanians/Vlachs from North East Serbia are revealed, strengthening the hypothesis of Vlach main contribution to the emergence of necropolises.

Transhumance is a seasonal movement of herders with their livestock between summer and winter pastures. It is practiced between higher pastures in summer and lower valleys in winter.

Vlachs from Western Balkans participated in the founding of Zeta and Hum principalities. Zeta was led for a while by a Vlach family (Balšić or Balša). The German linguist Gustav Weigand found that the name Balša is used in Romania. Ștefan Starețu wrote that Balšić are alleged ancestors of the Balș family of Moldavia [22, p. 95]. John Fine considered that “the occupation of shepherd seems to have been dominated in Hum by ethnic Vlachs” [10]. As can be seen in the transhumance map (Fig. 1) there are a lot of toponyms of Vlach and Romanian resonance as

Romanja, Visitor, Durmitor, Pirlitor, Vlasina, Vlasic, Vlahinja, Vlasulja, etc.

A lot of personal names used in Western Balkans were identified as Vlach [18, p. 129]: Banjan, Balac, Bilbija, Boban, Bokan, Banduka, Bencun, Belen, Bender, Besara, Bovan, Čokorilo, Darda, Doman, Drečo, German, Gac, Gala, Jarakula, Kalin, Kešelj, Keser, Kočo, Kalaba, Kokoruš, Kosor, Lopar, Macura, Mataruga, Pađen, Palavestra, Punja, Riđan, Šola, Šolaja, Šabat, Šurla, Šatra, Škipina, Špira, Tubin, Taor, Tintor, Kecmani, Šikmani, Toromani, Šumani, Karani, Šurlani, Servani, etc.

Ilona Czamańska wrote that “The majority of Serbs from the Republika Srpska of modern Bosnia is of Vlach origin, as well as the majority of the population from Bosnia and Herzegovina in general. Natural conditions are extremely favourable for the conduct of pastoral activity because of the numerous mountain meadows covered in lush grass (which was rare in the Balkans)”. She also considered that the result of islamization is “the creation of a specific Slavic-Islamic culture in Bosnia by the population which was ethnically Vlach. One can speak in this area:

1. About Vlachs who evolved into the Serbian nation.
2. About Vlachs who evolved into the Bosnian nation.
3. A least numerous group, can be mentioned, namely Roman Catholics who are most often identified with the Croats, although they do not necessarily identify themselves as Croats” [5].

The main transhumance traces in the Western Balkans and some necropolises near these paths are shown in (fig. 1). The transhumance supposes highland pastures in summer and lower plains in winter. According to these extremities, there are necropolises in mountains, in plains, and along the transhumance traces. The highland necropolises are less decorated and the gravestones are simpler.

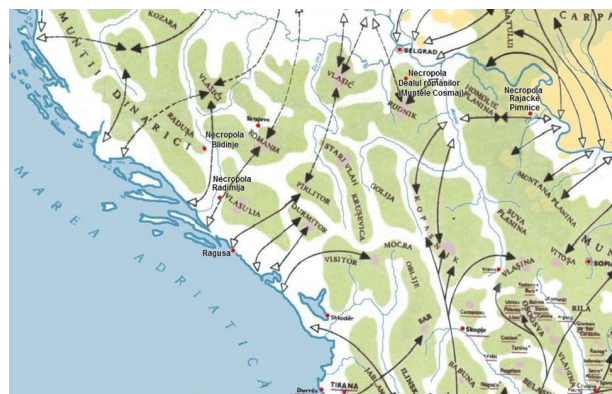


Fig. 1. Transhumance routes of the Vlachs in Western Balkans and some necropolises; adapted from Dimitriac Macrea [16]

Some examples of necropolises in Bosnia and Herzegovina were revealed by Djuro Tosić [26]. He identified Vlach necropolises at Stolac (Radimlja village), Ljubinje, Bileća, Boljuni, Vlahovici, Kruševo and Obosko, placed near the transhumance paths to mountains. Radimlja is frequently cited as the most important Vlach necropolis [9, p. 89]. Arthur Evans noted that the family of Banjani (from Bileća area) was mentioned as Vlachs in medieval Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro, in the Middle Ages, in Ragusan reports and Serbian chrysobulls [8]. Banjani villages currently include Klenak, Koprivice, Macavare, Milovići, Miljanići, Petrovići, Prigradina, Riječani, Tupan. Also, Blidinje necropolis is near the transhumance path to Vlasica mountain. Near Ljubinje area there was a Vlach area of Boban family, attested by Esad Kurtović [14]. Also, a lot of medieval written records make references to Vlach settlements in Bileća area [27].

The necropolises Bajina Bašta and Prijepolje placed along the transhumance traces to Pirlitor Mountain are typical examples of Vlach monuments in Serbia. The hill named “Dealul românilor”/“Vlasko brdo”, placed at 20 km South of the Danube, near Kosmaj mountain, has a highland necropolis with simple parallelipedic stones. In Timoc region, at Rajacke Pinnice, there is a Vlach necropolis with stone pillars with petroglyphs. All these necropolises are placed near transhumance traces. There are over 3000 gravestones in 121 Serbian localities [24]. The earliest records of the names of the Vlachs as well as the names of localities in Serbia, show a combination of Vlach and Slav elements. Ștefan Starețu wrote that “the Serbs and Vlachs are probably a single ethnic substance, constructed in the Balkan Peninsula as a unity in the 8th – 14th century” [22, p. 82].

The Vlach necropolis with petroglyphs from Cetinje, in Montenegro (built by the sons of a Vlach family [3], about 1450, next to the church they founded), are very close to the transhumance routes from Visitor mountains to the plains near the bay of Cattaro/Kotor. Also Žabljak and Plužine necropolises are placed near the transhumance paths to Pirlitor and Durmitor mountains. The Vlach Drobnjaci family was attested in the documents from Cattaro/Kotor area from the very end of the 14th century [13].

In Croatia, and especially in Dalmatia, Vlachs were known as Morlachs. The word Morlach is derived from Italian Morlacco, being connected to Greek Μαυροβλάχοι, a translation of Turkish Karavlahs. Kara (black) means North in Turkish geography [19]. Alberto Fortis, an Italian writer, naturalist and cartographer described “Morlachia” land in his book “Viaggio in Dalmazia”. Alberto Fortis discovered during his travels a “Morlachian ballad” (Hasanaginica)

and other Morlachian songs. He also discovered the Dalmatian funerary monuments with petroglyphs later named “stecci”.

The necropolises from Dubravka and Konavle, for example, are placed at the extremities of transhumance traces of the Durmitor mountain. Necropolises of Velika and Mala Crljivica and other Dalmatian necropolises are placed along the Trilj-Imotski road, an old Roman road and a transhumance trace along the sea shore. Drăgănescu identified the sea shore transhumance route from Albania to Istria and showed that it was still in use during the 18th and the 19th centuries [6; 17]. The Vlachs were transhumant herdsmen, shepherds, and farmers, but later became specialized in transportation and guarding activities. Vlachs had gained a monopoly on the carriage and begun to amass an impressive fortune [9, p. 94]. According to Marian Wenzel, the funerary monuments with petroglyphs found in and around Bosnia and Herzegovina “were not the tombs of medieval heretics (Bogomils) and they must be the grave markers of Herzegovinian stock breeders, who had achieved relative prosperity, as mounted armed guards accompanying the caravans between Ragusa/Dubrovnik and the silver and lead mines in the first decades of Ottoman rule in Bosnia” [28]. There are connections between transportation activities of the Vlachs and their settlements, especially between trade routes and the emergence and the decay of the Vlach necropolises (fig. 2). Similarly with the elevation of the funerary monuments, the carriage activities started approximately in the “13th century, when the exploitation of Balkan mines began in earnest, and lasted until the 16th or 17th centuries, when mining in the region declined as a result of the influx of cheaper silver and other factors” [12, p. 97-110].

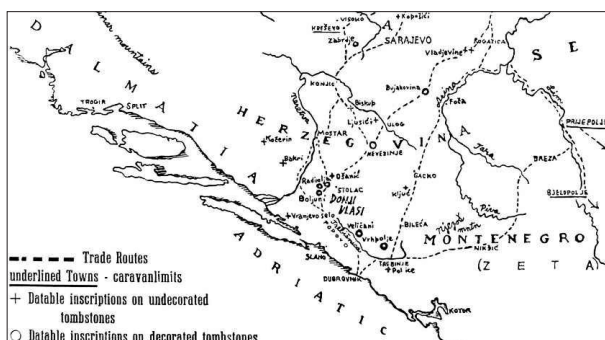


Fig. 2. Trade routes of Vlachs and some necropolises.

Source: Maximilian Hartmuth [12, p. 107]

The necropolis next to Bileća, for example, is mentioned in the 14th and 15th century as an important crossroad town in caravan routes from the mines and mountains to the Italian cities from Dalmatia.

The necropolis contains gravestones with petroglyphs from the 13th to the 16th century, which weigh up to 5 tons. The necropolis belongs to the period of Vlach economic revival before the Turkish occupation [1].

Generally, carriage is connected to armed guards. Vlachs were hired by the Dalmatian merchants, to lead and to protect the caravans from brigands. Through this occupation, some Vlachs became extremely rich and had dominated the Hum region [10]. The increased wealth of Vlachs in the Western Balkans as a result of carriage, mounted guard and trade of pastoral products resulted in a demand for luxury goods and artistic tombstones.

Some necropolises from Herzegovina contain tombstones with petroglyphs with dancers as depicted in (fig. 3).



Fig. 4. Funerary dance of Romanian/Vlach villagers of Duboka, Timoc region; bouquets are held between dancers. Source: Elizabeth Wayland Barber
Fig. 3. Petroglyphs depicting a funerary dance (hora). Sources: left [11], right [25]

The majority of scholars has attempted to explain the petroglyphs containing a dance (*hora* in Romanian/Vlach or *choros* in Greek or *kolo* in Serbian) motif by linking its depiction to the performances of such dances in the course of funerary rituals. Marian Wenzel wrote that the Romanians/Vlachs of North East of Serbia (Duboka village) “still perform *hora* in which three female dancers carry bunches of flowers, while the leader carries a sword, which corresponds to a few petroglyphs with *hora* depicted on some funerary monuments. This particular dance is believed to serve as a soul’s guide to the other world” [29, p. 348]. Elizabeth Wayland Barber approached the petroglyphs with “hora” and mainly the petroglyphs with dancers with flowers (fig. 4) and wrote: “The parallels between (Romanian/Vlach) dancers from Duboka in Timoc and the depictions on medieval funerary stecci are far too close for accident” [2]. She also made a comparison between male dancers wielding swords from petroglyphs and the Romanian dance “Călușari”. The cult of the dead, called “Pomana” and the laments of Vlach in Timoc region (North-East of Serbia), were approached by Annemarie Sorescu-Marinkovic [21], David Binder, Paun Es Durlic and many other researchers.

Binder wrote that: “The villagers (from Homolie area) were parading in their annual ‘Pomana’ festival, singing softly and moving with a sedate two-step and carrying candles, mirrors, cakes and wine” [4]. Paun Es Durlic observed that one day after Pomana ritual, three widows dance (hora) around a table, holding platters with bread and singing these verses in Romanian: “La rai, suflete la rai, Bagă seamă cui mi-o dai, Că la poarta raiului, Șede floarea soarelui, Și mirosul florilor! In English: To heavens soul, to heavens, Be careful to whom you give, Since at the Heaven’s gate, There is a sunflower, Smelling sweetly” [7]. Some rituals are an evidence of paganism and may be the source

of many customs and ceremonies that exist even today in the Romanian minority (called Vlasi by Serbs) from Timoc region, and even in Romania. The similarity between ancient dances of some petroglyphs and the funerary dances of today Romanian/Vlach minority in the Timoc region may be considered as a continuity of ancient funerary traditions among the Romanians/Vlachs. This part of the spiritual culture of the Vlachs may be considered the most ancient form of funerary spirituality in the whole of Europe [23].

A research project supported by the World Bank in 1992–1994 had found that “Yugoslav historiographies deny any specific ethnic (and even cultural) identity of the Vlachs, and denounce especially their contribution to the creation of regional national states. In this way, historians in the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans have generally completely ignored the Vlachs as a research issue. Thus, the history of these stateless people is still obscured and politically biased. Evidence that the Vlachs (or any other rival group) could have been territorial predecessors or biologically, culturally, linguistically or politically a real contender and sometimes or often an important factor in shaping the nation’s identity, are routinely rejected as groundless. That is why there is hardly any serious and critical interpretation of the Vlach presence and impact in the history and contemporariness of any of the respective Balkan states” [20]. The funerary monuments with petroglyphs in former Yugoslavia were left to nature destruction, reutilization and vandalism, so the number of gravestones decreased dramatically.

A proposal made by some of the former Yugoslav countries to UNESCO had as a result the inclusion of a number of necropolises in the list (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6921>) of UNESCO World Heritage but *without the mention of the Vlach minority* contribution. It is a case that shows how UNESCO failed to protect the heritage of minorities.

Conclusions

Vlach heritage in the Western Balkans is special and unique since its funerary monuments and its ethnoses are defined by archaic traditions with the cult of dead as its central structure. There is even paganism in the Vlach traditions and it may be the source of many customs and ceremonies that exist even today in the Romanian minority from the Timok region in Serbia.

According to Marian Wenzel and Elizabeth Wayland Barber, the similarity between some petroglyphs and some funerary rites of today of the Romanian/Vlach minority from North-East of Serbia may be considered as a confirmation of the Vlach mark in the emergence of the necropolises with petroglyphs.

The majority of transhumance routes from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia are bordered with necropolises of Vlachs. In many cases funerary monuments were degraded or vandalised.

The transportation activities of the Vlachs from silver mines to Ragusa and other Dalmatian cities started approximately in the 13th century, when the exploitation of Balkan mines began in earnest, and lasted until the mining in the region declined as a result of the influx of cheaper silver and other factors as Islamization of Vlachs. The development of the transportation activities performed by Vlachs was synchronous with the development of the necropolises and the routes are very close to the necropolises from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The transhumance traces, transportation routes and armed guarding of caravans are in connection with the rising of the financial status of a large category of Vlachs and with the emergence of necropolises.

The inclusion of some necropolises in the list of UNESCO World Heritage without the mention of Vlach minority contribution failed to protect the heritage of Vlach minority despite the protective role of the organization.

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