

# The Truth

CONCERNING

# THE RUMANES IN SERBIA

by

T. R. Georgevitch



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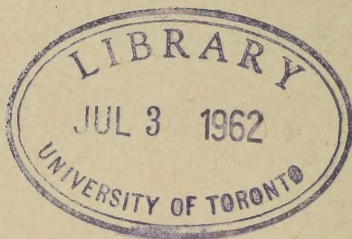
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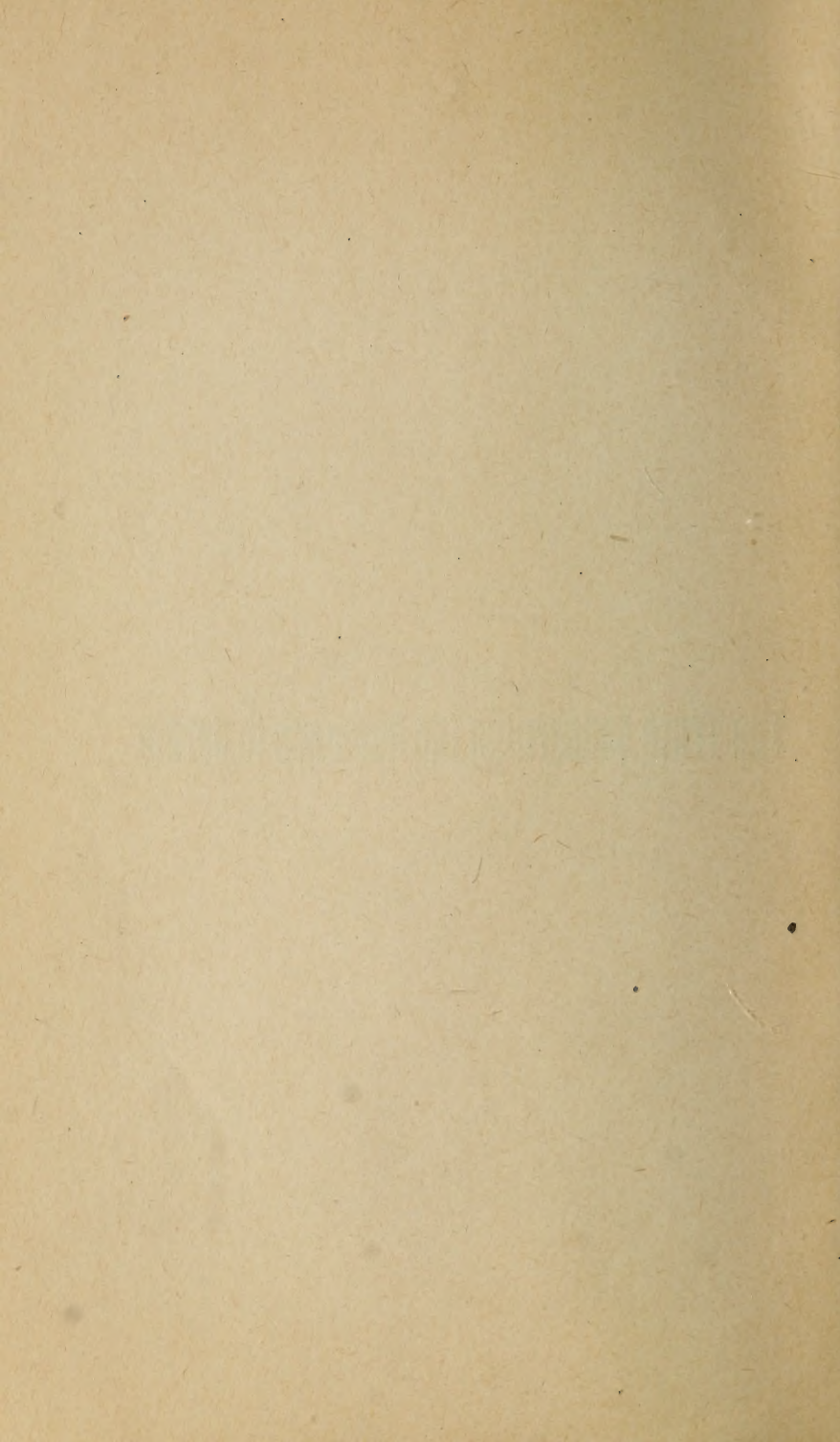
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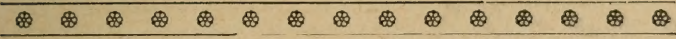


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**The Truth concerning the Rumanes in Serbia**



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# The Truth concerning the Rumanes in Serbia

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## INTRODUCTION

During the whole of their history the Serbs and Rumanes have not only been the best of neighbours, but also friends whose loyalty has been proof against every trial. Once only, in 1394, did the Serbs make war upon the Rumanes, at the time when the Serbian princes were compelled, as Turkish vassals, to fight against the Roumanian Voyvode (prince) John Mircea. A Serbian contemporary historian tells us how the Serbian princes were only constrained by force and with aching hearts to take part in this fight and how King Marko (1371-1394, Kraljevitch Marko, the famous hero of the Serbian national poems) spoke the following words before the battle : « I pray to God, that the Christians (the Rumanes) may be victors in this fight, though I be the first to fall ».

From that time onward and throughout the whole of the painful history of the Serbian and Roumanian peoples, perfect accord has always prevailed between the two ; and not only that, but they were until this day inspired by genuine and mutual affection. Neither political vicissitudes, nor wars, nor great temptations, nor all the attempts of Austria-Hungary — who sought to sow discord between them — were strong enough to shake this friendship.

To-day is once more a black-letter day in the annals

of Serbo-Rumanian relations. A few Rumanian chauvinists in Paris have arisen, not « constrained by force and with aching hearts », as the Serbian princes of yore, but in full liberty and deliberately to destroy and tarnish an ideal tradition which the two neighbouring peoples had piously preserved throughout long centuries.

This fact is most ominous. We are confronted with it at the present juncture, when the Serb and Rumanian peoples are entering upon the most radiant days in all their history, when the visions of concord and common effort are outlined in glorious hues upon the horizon, if they will but preserve what they have acquired at the cost of their blood and so assure their future progress. It emerges at the very moment when with the disappearance of Austria-Hungary the very shadow of intrigue between Serbs and Rumanes ought to disappear, — it appears as it were like a wraith of the old Austrian policy between them.

Let us take the facts at once. A few Rumanian chauvinists with a renegade at their head have begun to flood the world with pamphlets and articles demanding, either that the Rumanes living in the North-East of Serbia should remain incorporated with Serbia as a set-off against the Serbs who would be incorporated with Rumania in the Banat, or that Serbia « in consonance with the principle of nationality », should cede to Rumania the part of her lands inhabited by Rumanes. Clear-sighted Rumanian political men, true patriots and men who know how far the Ruman population extends in Serbia and what is the numerical proportion between Rumanes and Serbs in those regions, have never raised this question. The question of the Rumanes in Serbia was non-existent. Hitherto no one had raised it but Austria, because it was needful to the latter that



discord should be sown between Serbia and Rumania. Both in 1913 and 1914 she pointed out north-eastern Serbia « as a field for natural and legitimate expansion of the Kingdom of Rumania ». But « Rumania would never listen to that Siren voice » (1).

No sooner had this traditional part of Austria-Hungary been revived in Paris, than several Serbian scholars at once sought to stifle it, in the interest of both Serbs and Rumanes. In a moderate tone, in an altogether friendly way, supported by evidence, they pointed out the inaccuracy, the lack of logic, and the absurd side of the pretensions of the Rumanian chauvinists and perpetuators of Austria's policy between Serbs and Rumanes.

Unfortunately this did not stop the mischief-makers. They embarked upon an even more unscrupulous line of action. Besides publishing a fresh crop of pamphlets and articles, they founded the « National Committee of the Rumanes in Serbia » and the « League for liberating the Rumanes of the Timok and Macedonia » ; they drew up the « Memorandum of the Rumanes in Serbia » which they submitted to the Peace Conference and in which they demand that the north-east of Serbia should be ceded to Rumania.

The Serbs attached no importance to all this. They knew that the world is not sufficiently credulous to believe off-hand the assertions of a handful of men who may or may not be sincere, and were convinced that the Peace Conference had a clear view and thorough knowledge of the questions it was called upon to settle.

For myself, I should not have written a line concerning all these machinations but for a direct provoc-

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(1) *La Roumanie*, November 27th. 1914, N° 4.632.

ation. In 1906 I published an account of my travels through the part of Serbia inhabited by Rumanes, setting down the facts and impressions I gathered cursorily and by the way. In the « Memorandum of the Rumanes of Serbia » which the Chauvinists submitted to the Peace Conference as well as in several other pamphlets written to furnish evidence for Rumanian right to north-eastern Serbia, they have done me the injustice, while doing me the honour of quoting my authority as that of an author « well-known for his ethnological studies » who « published a pamphlet about them (the Rumanes of Serbia) written in a scientific and impartial spirit », — they did me the injustice, I repeat, of taking certain passages from my book, combining them and commenting upon them in a manner so arbitrary, that — presented in this fashion — they no longer represent either the true facts as observed by me, or my real impressions. Judging by their quotations, one would think that I, too, put forward the same contention as themselves in regard to the Rumanes of Serbia. This is the reason why I could no longer remain indifferent. I have no copy of my book to hand at the moment, and am therefore unable to compare textually and quote my own facts and genuine impressions as I recorded them there. Nevertheless, I know and remember very well what are my facts and impressions concerning the Rumanes of Serbia ; moreover I have applied myself to studies and researches concerning them, even more recently than in 1906, travelling in the Serbian districts inhabited by Rumanes, and devoting careful study to the literature dealing with the Rumanes of Serbia. Hence I propose here to give a summary of my knowledge on the subject of the Rumanes of Serbia and that « in a scientific and impartial spirit » on this occasion also. Not only have my studies in no way modified my facts

and impressions of 1906, but on the contrary they have merely served to strengthen and crystallize them. In this way the question of the Rumanes in Serbia will in itself become much clearer.

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## Why the Rumanes settled in Serbia.

The north-east of Serbia, and notably the countries of Pozarevats, Kraina, Timok and Morava, although in overwhelming majority Serbian as regards population, is also peopled by a considerable number of Rumanes. These Rumanes are the descendants of recent immigrants from Rumania and the Banat, hence the appellations of *Tarani* (of Tara, or Tara Rumaniasca, i. e. the Rumanian land, Rumania) and *Ungureani* (of Unguria, i. e. Hungary).

The ancient Roman colonists of whom there had been great numbers throughout the Balkan Peninsula, had completely disappeared from Serbia as far back as the fifteenth century, leaving no trace at all, and there is no connection between them and the present Rumanes of Serbia. No memories remain of the old Roman colonists, save certain place names which strike one as surprising in the midst of a purely Serbian population, — names such as Stari Vlah (Old Vallach) in South-Eastern Serbia. Vlashko Polje (Vallach Plain) in the country of Podunavlye, Sharbanovats in the county of Nish, etc. It is interesting to note that these ancient Roman place names are very rare in the regions inhabited now-a-days by the Rumanes of Serbia. Consequently there is no question of continuity between the ancient, i. e. Roman colonists in Serbia and the Rumanes of to-day. These Rumanes are new-comers.

The territory where the Rumanes of Serbia are to be found to-day was, before their arrival, exclusively Serbian. It was an integral part of the old Serbian Empire. There stood the old Serbian monasteries of Gornjak, founded by Prince Lazar (1372-1389) ; Manasija, founded by Stephan Lazarevitch (1389-1427),

Tuman, Bukovo, Vitovnitsa, Manastiritsa, Vratna. Important Serbian mines were situated there, still mentioned with pride in the national ballads, and the memory of which is enshrined in the local topography (Rudna Glava, Zlatovo, Zlot, Maidan-Kuchaina, Shashka, — the last-named appellation being derived from the German miners, the Saxons, who worked in these mines, — the Timok, the « golden river » of the Serbian national ballads, etc.). All the old graveyards of the times previous to the settlement of the Rumanes are purely Serbian, all the epitaphs are Serbian and refer only to Serbs.

When the Rumanes came to settle in the North East of Serbia they found Serbs there, some indigenous, some new-comers from the south-eastern provinces, and the south, whence the stream of immigration continued even after the arrival of the Rumanes and until quite recent times. The best proof that this process did indeed take place as it has been described here is furnished by the place names which are exclusively Serbian throughout the whole North-East of Serbia, as much in the case of the counties (Kraina, Kljuch, Porech, Crna Reka, Zvijd, Homolje, Pek, Stig, Mlava), as of the mountains (Crni Vrh, Sto, Miroch, Veliki Krsh, Leskovik), the rivers Porechka Reka, Crna Reka, Krivovirski Timok, Pek) and almost (1) all the villages (Brestovats, Bor, Duboka, Rakova, Bara, Boljetin, Kobishnica, Crnajka, Manastiritsa, Toponitsa, Slatina, Kamenitsa, Dubochani, Vrbitsa, Rechitsa, Glogovitsa, Podvrshka, Grabovitsa, etc.)

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(1) I say « almost », because there are villages inhabited by Rumanes and bearing Turkish names, such as Tabakovats, Djanjevo, Jakubovats, Mustapich, etc. Only a few villages have Rumanian names (Valakonje, Klokochevats, and a few more), but the date of foundation of each of them is known, likewise the derivation of their names.

Finally local traditions pertaining to certain localities and observed by Serbs and Rumanes alike, likewise prove that the Rumanes came and settled in purely Serbian regions. These traditions refer only to Serbian historical characters and Serbian historical events (such as the tradition connecting the Monastery of Gornjak with Prince Lazar, the Milosh Obilic traditions of the Monastery of Tuman and Milosheva Kula (Milosh's Tower) in the Porech ; that of Princess Militsa in the village of Shetonja and that of the Battle of Kosovo in the village Izvaritsa, those of Markova Krchma (Marko's Inn) and Miroch concerning Kraljevitch Marko, etc.) Neither Serbs nor Rumanes living in the North East of Serbia have any traditions concerning Rumanian historical characters or events of Rumanian history.

Moreover, the Rumanes of Serbia are themselves well aware of their recent arrival in Serbia. Each family has its tradition on the subject. They all know they are immigrants, they all know where they have come from. Many of them even know the locality and what relations they left behind them.

The chief cause of the Rumanian settlement in Serbia is the following. Owing to the Turkish invasion and wretched lot prepared for the populations subjected to the Turkish domination throughout whole regions of the present Serbia, these populations found themselves compelled to take refuge beyond the Save and the Danube. Especially during the latter half of the 17th century large numbers of the inhabitants of the north-east of Serbia were forced to fly. The result was a steady diminuation of the population in that part of the country. The fertile lowlands of the Danube, the Timok and the Morava, the mountains between the valleys of these rivers, the forests and rich pastures of those regions could not

well remain deserted. Little by little, they began to be re-peopled by immigrants from the south-west and south of Serbia. Even the western part of the present Bulgaria was at times drawn into this current of immigration. The first Rumanian settlements in the north-east of Serbia date from about that time.

But apart from the attraction of the deserted regions in the north-east of Serbia, the Rumanes had other special reasons for quitting Rumania and coming to Serbia. Unfortunately these reasons cannot be quoted without repugnance, and I greatly regret to be compelled to reopen the wretched graves of Rumanian past generations who drove the Rumanian peasant from his home, and the mere memory of whom causes the Rumanes of to-day, who have so high a sense of honour, to blush for shame. The Rumanes of Serbia are simply fugitives. They fled from Rumania naked, so to say, bringing nothing away with them, seeking only to preserve their lives and honour. Until the middle of the 19th century the Rumanian peasants were the serfs of their boyars. The word « robi » (slave, serf) is used by the Rumanes themselves. The emancipation of the Rumanian peasants towards the middle of the 19th century is called in Rumanian the *disrobirea taranilor*, which means *the liberation of the peasants from serfdom*.

Setting aside the question of the origins of peasant serfdom in Rumania — a matter of secondary importance — I will merely give a brief description of the position of these peasants. All the land in Rumania was divided between the boyars, the clergy and the free peasants. Work on the estates belonging to the boyars and the clergy was done by Rumanian peasant serfs who were tied to the soil and led the lives of slaves. Only the free peasants owned their land and were their own masters.

Gradually, by most dispicable means, the boyars and the clergy succeeded in acquiring almost all the land in Rumania. The wars with the Poles, Hungarians, Turks, and Tartars, the civil wars between Vallachs and Moldavians, bad harvests, epidemics and the primitive customs of the people, — all helped to impoverish the free peasant and to compel him to run into debt. « There were no money-lenders but the boyars and the clergy. The gulf of usury gaped beneath the feet of the *mosneni* (free peasants) and being unable to extricate themselves they and their properties fell into the hands of the usurers » (1). The injustice and partiality of the courts further aided the usurers in ousting the peasants from their lands, even when they were not in debt. They were bidden to produce title-deeds, although it was well-known that in many cases the peasants had acquired their land by the right of occupation. Being unable to produce title-deeds, the peasants were simply driven out of their property. « In cases where written title-deeds existed, the boyars or agents of the princes falsified or made away with them ; and if in spite of all this fraud, the mosnen managed to take his case into court, he found in the presiding boyars the very men who were despoiling him, judges and litigants on their own cause, plaintiffs and executors, who pronounced the sentence for which they themselves had signed the request. In this work of rapine, the clergy supported the boyars and the boyars the clergy ; Castle and Church divided the spoils ». « To rob a peasant of his plot of land is a claim to honour, a bill of exchange drawn on public esteem »,

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1) Elias Regnault. *Histoire politique et sociale des Principautés Danubiennes*. Paris 1855, p. 293.



says a Rumanian writer of the former half of the 19th century (1).

The Constitution given by Serban I in 1594 transformed the peasants who cultivated the great estates of the boyars into serfs who were « tied to the soil upon which they lived ». « From that day the cultivators were sold with the land, and their names figure in the bills of sale » (2).

A very harsh lot was that of the Rumanian peasants on the estates of the arrogant and pitiless boyars. In the fertile Rumanian lands, where bountiful nature offers man a most generous rewards for his efforts, the peasant was a mere drudge ; the entire result of his work went to the boyars whose « whole economic science knew but one word — robbery ». (3). And thus, while unbridled luxury reigned in the boyars' palaces where life was a continuous round of pleasure, the peasants dragged out a miserable existence, the mere account of which arouses pity and indignation. « The peasants' hovels were merely dark burrows, called *bordei*, holes dug in the ground and roofed with poles covered with earth, rising scarcely above the level of the plain. The earth covering the roof soon became grass-grown, so that from a distance one would have taken it for a slight undulation of the soil, but for the clouds of smoke which issued from it from time to time and revealed the human habitation. The interior was indescribable. Neither furniture nor utensils, with the exception of the boards which served as beds or seats and the pot for

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(1) *Ibid.* 293-295.

(2) *Ibid.* 297.

(3) *Ibid.* 282.

cooking the *mamaliga* » (1). A writer of the beginning of the 19th century says of the house of the Rumanian peasant that it is « a veritable troglodyte's cavern » (2), and another author, writing in the latter half of the 19th century says that « the hut of an African negro is more adapted to the necessities of life » than the habitation of the Rumanian peasant (3).

« His (the Rumanian peasant's) sole food and that of his family is a paste consisting of maize meal cooked in water. This plain and coarse food is called *mamaliga* ; it has the advantage of being quickly and easily prepared ; if the peasant is in the fields at work with his family, wherever he may be, he lights a fire suspends the pot of water above it by means of three crossed sticks. As soon as the water comes to the boil he throws in the meal with a little salt, and the former at once turns into a thick porridge. It grows even more stiff when it cools, and each person cuts off a slab with a piece of string (4) ».

Everything else corresponds to the wretchedness of such habitations and such fare. Morally crushed, the unfortunate Rumanian peasants were quite unable to help themselves or to oppose any kind of resistance to the cruel abuses of the boyars, and the latter exploited the positions to the uttermost. « The boyars have created a special trade of their own. They keep the pot-houses and foster drink. Indeed, the boyars, having the legal monopoly of all alcoholic

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(1) *Ibid.* 284.

(2) W. Macmichael. *Journal from Moscow to Constantinople*. London 1819, p. 105.

(3) E. de Laveley. *La Péninsule des Balkans*. Paris, 1888, t. II, p. 310.

(4) Regnault. *Histoire politique et sociale des Principautés Danubiennes*, p. 283.

products in their domain, build taverns on their own account, and by a disgraceful industry rob the peasant of the very last *para* (centime) that has escaped their rapacity. Unfortunately the peasant, like every poor wretch left without hope or future, yields only too easily to a temptation which bestows oblivion, and spends every festival day in these melancholy dens... As landlord he (the boyar) contests his wage, as inn-keeper he robs him of it. This last-named speculation is a double crime. Among the peasants it encourages a vice which degrades them ; it enriches the boyar by the gain from vice » (1).

« If the *ciocoi* (crouching hound, the name bestowed upon the boyar by the peasants) could have laid hands upon the sun, he would have seized it, and sold God's light and warmth to the peasant for money ! If the *ciocoi* could have taken possession of the waters of the sea, he would have speculated in them ; and then he would have enslaved the peasant through fog and cold and thirst, even as he has enslaved him through hunger, by seizing the land ». That is how the procedure of the boyars was stigmatised by a Rumanian peasant summoned in 1848 before a Commission composed of 18 boyars and 18 peasants, for the purpose of drafting a Bill for the agricultural classes of Rumania, and a contemporary Rumanian author writes. « Not the wars of the Middle Ages, not the annual incursions of the Tartars, nor the ravages of the soil caused the decline of the country ; the open sore, the gangrene which was rotting away its heart in peace time no less than in time of war was the boyardy » (2).

Add to all this the tyrannical rule of the Rumanian princes, the want of piety of the clergy, extremely

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(1) *Ibid.* p. 283.

(2) *Ibid.* 294-296.

heavy taxes and tolls, the injustice and venality of the courts and other abuses of the worst kind, and you will have a fair picture of the position of the Rumanian peasants.

All so-called reforms applied to the condition of the peasant, and all ostensible legislation in this respect proved either of no importance or, more often than not, merely an aggravation. « The law was for the boyar a dead-letter, valueless unless it offered a text for fresh vexations ».

After the law of August 5th 1746, which was meant to improve the lot of the peasants, thousands of them abandoned their homes and took to the forests, seeking refuge in brigandage and demanding by violence that of which they had been robbed by violence. After the decree of 1775 which was likewise supposed to improve the position of the peasants, 10,000 of the latter turned brigands and protested « *vi et armis* » against the injustices of which they were victims.

The desperate plight of the Rumanian peasants was the reason why they abandoned their homesteads and fled in all directions,— to Transylvania, to the Banat, to Serbia and to Bulgaria. Space forbids me to enumerate all the Rumanian emigrations here, and I will limit myself to mentioning a few. They will suffice to serve as typical examples of those which succeeded them. After the Law of August 3rd 1746, large numbers of Rumanian peasants fled from Vallachia and Moldavia. A census taken shortly after this alleged reform clearly revealed the true state of affairs. Instead of 147,000 tax-paying families in Vallachia, and 110,000 in Moldavia, the census shows only 70,000 in the former and 50,000 in the latter country (1). The depopulation of Vallachia proceeded at such

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(1) *Hist.* 72.

a pace and assumed such vast proportions, that the Porte enjoined upon Charles Ghika, under threats, to limit the exactions which were driving the peasants away. Greatly alarmed, Prince Ghika only succeeded by dint of generous promises in inducing part of the peasants to return, and that only for a brief period. Already in 1775, the tide of emigration set in afresh in all directions. After the Regulations of 1831, thousands of Rumanian peasants, unable to withstand the severity of these Regulations, sought refuge abroad. « The Moldavian peasants proceed to Bukovina, to Bessarabia and the Dobrudja ; the Vallachs to Transylvania, Serbia and Bulgaria. In vain the rivers are assiduously watched and as if in a state of siege ; the emigrants cross at the spots which are clear of troops. Emigration is especially rife in winter, when the frozen Danube presents an ever-open bridge (1).

Apart from these wholesale emigrations the Rumanes also came to Serbia in smaller parties, even in single families or as isolated individuals. The acts of the Serbian National Archives in Belgrade contain many documents referring to the immigration of Rumanes, singly or in groups, into Serbia during the reign of Prince Milos Obrenovic (1815-1839).

These Rumanes arrived in Serbia in a state of extreme destitution, possessing nothing, bringing nothing but their wretchedness, cursing the country whence they came and its masters, demanding a refuge and trusting to find protection and to live a life of quiet and security.

These are the circumstances under which the Rumanes came to settle in Serbia.

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(1) *Ibid.* 319.

## The Rumanes in Serbia.

On Serbian territory a new and entirely different life began for these wretched Rumanian fugitives. Under the Turks and even after the liberation there were great tracts of deserted territory in Serbia. On their arrival in the country, the Rumanes occupied this land and became its indisputed owners. When Serbia became free, she presented the Rumanian settlers with all the land they had taken possession of as unclaimed property and nobody has ever disputed their title. Nobody who has not travelled through north-eastern Serbia knows how vast is the territorial area in which are situated the fields, meadows, pastures, farms and vineyards of the Rumanian settlers. Under Turkish domination in Serbia they paid the Turks the same dues as did the Serbs ; but these dues were not even remotely comparable to those they had been compelled to pay in Rumania. And just as they had been placed on an equal footing with the Serbs under the Turks, they continued to be so after Serbia's liberation from the Turkish yoke. Neither under the Turks, nor in free Serbia were they subjected to exactions, abuses or blackmail, as formerly in Rumania. The Turkish courts, and afterwards the Serbian treated them with the same impartiality as that granted to the Serbs. Nobody incited them to vice or immorality or caused them practical injury.

In place of the « dark burrows » where they were wont to spend days of despair with their families, the Rumanian peasants who came to Serbia learnt from the Serbs how to built handsome comfortable houses in villages, some of which resembled towns. Instead of the *mamaliga* which in Rumania constituted their

sole food, they had vast herds of cattle which supplied them with dairy produce and meat, and for drink they had wine and brandy by the barrel. Instead of being left destitute, as in Rumania, after being fleeced by the boyars, they sold the great surplus of their produce and figured among the richest inhabitants of the country. You need only pass through the North East of Serbia to see how large the Rumanian villages are, how rich, prosperous, and pretty, such as Valakonje, Bor, Krivelj, Oshtrelj, Ranovac, etc... Merely to compare them with the descriptions of those villages of cave-dwellers in Rumania reveals at once the difference between the free and contented citizen of Serbia and the former Rumanian serf.

This is the « painful position of the Rumanes who belong to Serbia » as it is styled in the appeal of the « Committee of the League for liberating the Rumanes of the Timok and of Macedonia ».

Ever since their arrival in Serbia the Rumanes have occupied a position in every respect the same as that of the Serbs. In the Turkish times, they endured the same sufferings, and when Serbia was liberated, they enjoyed the same liberties and privileges. From the earliest days of Serbia's liberation, the position of the Rumanes has been as it has just been described. Among many instances to prove this, I will quote but one. During the reign of Milos Obrenovic, while the Turks were still in the country, it so happened that they did violence to a Rumanian girl. Prince Milos at once took up the young girl's case with all the weight of his authority, and in his protest to the Pasha of Belgrade said to the latter : « We cannot permit such outrages to be offered to *our daughters* ». And also in later years the Rumanes were never in a different position from the Serbs as regards rights. No special laws exist for them in Serbia. In the eyes of the law,

before the authorities and before the courts, they are absolutely on an equal footing with the Serbs.

The prosperity and liberty enjoyed by the Rumanes in Serbia have caused them always to prefer their new home to the old, to defend it on every occasion and to shed their blood for it. At the time of the wars of liberation against the Turk, the Rumanes likewise revolted and fought side by side with the Serbs. In their poetry, in their mother tongue, they sing of the dark days spent under the Turkish domination and of the chivalrous struggle waged against them, just as the Serbs do in theirs. Their countryman, the Serbian Hajduk Veljko Petrovitch, the greatest hero of the first Serbian insurrection (1804-13) is celebrated in the national ballads of the Rumanes of Serbia no less than in those of the Serbs.

There was never any discontent or irredentism of any kind among the Rumanes of Serbia. The Rumanes of Serbia have never had any dealings with those of Rumania ; on the contrary, the Rumanes of Serbia have never taken any interest in Rumanian affairs. As they possessed sufficient land for agriculture and stock-raising they never went to Rumania in search of work, as was often done by inhabitants of the poorer districts in Serbia. They never even displayed sympathy for Rumania. They have not given that country so much as one man of distinction. All their relations, their interests, their sympathies, — in short, all they had to give, they gave to their new home, to Serbia.

Certain Rumanian patriots sought, years ago, in their patriotic zeal to inaugurate a Rumanian propaganda in Serbia. This attempt was made in various different ways. Trusting to the primitive character of the people, they even exploited superstitions beliefs in working for their cause. Supposed prophets ap-



peared at night, clad in phantastic robes, to tell the people that the Rumanian land lay close to the navel of the world (Mount Rtanj) and to alarm the people with fabulous tales, threats and heavenly portents. But all this was waste of effort. The Rumanes of Serbia desired no other country but Serbia. The Rumanian chauvinists who are to-day here in Paris, engaged in propaganda for the union of north-eastern Serbia with Rumania, and who have never seen the Rumanes of Serbia, do not even realize the injustice of which they are guilty towards their co-nationals in that country. The only one of their number who is fully aware of this injustice is Dr. Athanas Popovici, born and brought up among the Rumanes of Serbia, who — if he were their true friend and faithful interpreter of their wishes — would not proceed as he is doing now, but in an opposite sense. Evidence of the fact that he knows what the Rumanes of Serbia think, may be found in the fact that for his « Committee of the League for the Liberation of the Rumanes of the Timok and Macedonia » he was unable to find a single member (with the exception of himself !) who was also a Rumane of Serbia, and that he could find only one Rumane of Serbia to sign his « Memorandum of the Rumanes of Serbia » which he forwarded to the Peace Conference, and that was himself.

Finally, all the Rumanes in Serbia are not of pure Rumanian stock. Many of them were originally Serbs, who fled to Rumania and the Eastern Banat before the Turkish invasion and tyranny. Living among the Rumanes they became Rumanised, and emigrated later on to Serbia as Rumanes, flying from the boyar terror in company with genuine Rumanes. There were actually men who fled first to Rumania from the Turkish fury, and eventually returned from

that country (1). Many Rumanian families in Serbia have preserved the tradition that they were formerly Serbs, that they crossed the Danube in their flight before the Turkish terror, that amid the Rumanian surroundings they lost the use of their native language and subsequently returned to Serbia as Rumanian families. Certain Rumanian families in Serbia still bear names which point to their Serbian ancestry. All the Rumanes of Serbia observe the Serbian customs. All celebrate the *Slava*, which is a specifically Serbian custom ; they have a Serbian name for it, *Praznik*, i. e. holiday. The Rumanes of Rumania, on the other hand, do not know this custom. Serbian historic traditions, preserved amid Rumanian surroundings in Serbia no less than among the Serbs themselves, likewise recall the Serbian origin of many of the Rumanes in Serbia. Their traditions no less than those of the Serbs themselves enshrine the memory of historic personages or events of ancient Serbian history (Kraljevitch Marko, Starina Novak, the battle of Kosovo, etc.). The Rumanes of Serbia know nothing of Rumania, her historic personages or events. The only matter of Rumanian origin preserved in their traditions is the sad and terrible account of sufferings formerly undergone in Rumania and of their flight from that country.

This is the true position of the Rumanes in Serbia. I think that the Rumanian chauvinists are themselves more or less aware of it, although they always seek to mislead the world as regards Rumanias alleged claims to the North East of Serbia. In spite of all that they have not hesitated, — *not* to redeem the sins of their forefathers and to seek to induce their dispersed

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(1) Voir E. Regnault, *Histoire politique et Sociale des Principautés Danubiennes*, p. 319.

countrymen to return to their ancient homes (which would be, up to a certain point, intelligible) — but to lay claim to Serbian territory into the bargain. Not content with claiming only the lands which have been *given* to their exiled countrymen in their capacity of new citizens of Serbia, which received them, saved their lives, and made them free, rich and happy, they even demand four Serbian counties besides, where the population consists of a small Rumanian minority living by the side of a huge Serbian majority ! ! !

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## **Mis-statements concerning the Rumanes in Serbia.**

The Rumanian chauvinists have not hesitated to put forward assertions in their pamphlets and articles, which are an attack upon the honour and good name of Serbia. I will adduce a few examples to prove that these assertions are absolutely at variance with the truth.

They allege above all that the number of Rumanes living in Serbia is far above that given in the Serbian official statistics. Some of them assert that there are 250,000, others say 300,000, yet others 350,000, and finally some, hoping to turn the principle of nationality to account for Rumania's benefit in the North-East of Serbia, allege that their number amounts to 500,000. As a matter of fact there were in the four north-eastern counties of Serbia 159,510 Rumanes in 1895 ; 120,628 in 1900 and in 1910 little over 90,000. These figures plainly show the diminution of the Rumanian element in Serbia. The Rumanian chauvinists cannot conceal their astonishment over this failure to increase on the part of the Rumanes of Serbia and accuse the Serbian State of falsifying the statistics. Now there is no need to be astonished or to accuse anybody. History knows of countless instances of such gradual decrease in the case of peoples placed in foreign surroundings and exposed to foreign influences. It even tells us of peoples who have entirely disappeared under similar circumstances. The Rumanes of Serbia live in purely Serbian surroundings and are constantly under Serbian influence. They cannot constitute an exception to the laws of history. They are becoming Serb-

icized and their numbers decrease from day to day. The surplus sought by Rumanian chauvinists has gone whither went the Thracians of ancient Dacia, the Illyrians who peopled Dalmatia, the millions of Slavs who once inhabited Germany, the Serbs who emigrated to Russia in the 17th century, and the Serbs who lived in the eastern part of the Banat, — and finally all those other peoples of ancient and modern history, which are extinct to-day.

So much for the falsifications of the Serbian statistics. Now let us examine what truth there is in the statements contained in the statistics of the Rumanian chauvinists. So long as their attention had not been drawn to the fact that a vast Serbian majority lives side by side with the Rumanes (1), in the North-East of Serbia, they asserted that there were from 250,000 to 350,000 Rumanes in the country. When they realized that these figures were not large enough to give the Rumanes the benefit of the principle of nationality in the North East of Serbia, they simply raised their figures to 500,000 (2). By this arbitrary proceeding they might just as well have placed the number of Rumanes in Serbia at 50,000,000. That figure would have sufficed to secure the benefit of the principle of nationality for the Rumanes not only in Serbia,

(1) See : *The Rumanes of Serbia*, by Belic, Covijic, Cok, etc. Paris, 1919, p. 6, giving the following statistics for the north-eastern countries of Serbia.

<i>Counties</i>	Serbs	Rumanes
Kraina	72.828	39.314
Timok	124.770	24.768
Pozarevats	333.775	26.131
Morava	200.211	3.427
Total :	<u>631.584</u>	<u>93.640</u>

(2) *Le Temps*, April 22nd, 1919.

but throughout the Balkans, including many neighbouring countries. But the question which arises is to know on which side the falsifications lie. Are they to be found in the Serbian official statistics, the data for which are collected by the local municipal authorities, which are in the hands of the Rumanes themselves in all Rumanian villages in Serbia, and who have put the number of Rumanes at 90.000, — or in the arbitrary statistics of the Rumanian chauvinists, who have discovered 500.000 ?

In addition to the false accusation of falsified statistics levelled against Serbia by the Rumanian chauvinists, the latter bring sundry other equally false charges against the former. They assert that « the authorities of the Serbian administration had embarked on a policy of Serbisation against that population. The Rumanian language was ousted from the church, the Rumanian sacred books were burnt ; in the schools, Rumanian children were forbidden the use of the Rumanian tongue » (1).

All this is contrary to the truth.

The Serbian authorities have never undertaken the Serbisation of the Rumanes, they had no occasion to do so. As a matter of fact the Rumanes of Serbia have never prided themselves on their Rumanian origin. Quite the reverse. They have not only displayed indifference towards Rumania, but they speak to this day with horror of that country. What had the Serbian authorities to fear that should have recourse to Serbisation ?

As regards the Rumanian language in the Church and the Rumanian sacred books, I propose to furnish a few data on this subject, which I collected during

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(1) *Mémoire des Roumains de Serbie*, p. 5.

the course of my studies concerning the Rumanes of Serbia, and for which I am sure the Rumanes themselves will be obliged to me, because they must be quite unknown to them. At the time when the Rumanian emigrants crossed over to Serbia, a certain number of Rumanian priests accompanied them, bringing with them Rumanian sacred books. The first mention of Rumanian priests in Serbia occurs in the first half of the nineteenth century, at the time of the Austrian occupation of the country. The delegates of the Serbian metropolitans who inspected the churches and parishes of Serbia at that time found Rumanian priests in the Rumanian villages, and for each one of them they duly entered the birth-place and date of arrival in Serbia. As the Serbs and Rumanes belong to the same confession and as a large number of the Rumanian priests was acquainted with the Slav liturgy, which the Rumanes had also been in the habit of using until a recent period, it so happened that Rumanian priests sometimes settled in purely Serbian villages. This occasionally occurred even in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In free Serbia, Prince Milos Obrenovitch not only subjected the Rumanian priests to no kind of vexation but even commanded (as transpires from the documents of the Serbian National Archives) that Rumanian candidates should be ordained to the priesthood whenever they desired.

« When we speak of the village priests in Moldo-Vallachia — says Heliades Radulesco — you must picture to yourself a simple peasant, the equal of all his parishioners, the same education, same dress, same duties, he tills the soil, supports his wife and children ; he pays taxes, does forced labour when the protecting armies invade the country ; he is not supposed to know how to read any books save those pub-

lished by the Church ; if, by any chance he can read or write manuscript, it is luxury ; all he needs to do is to read the office and recite the gospels in the vernacular as they stand, without comment » (1). These Rumanian priests who were without any education were moreover as superstitious as their peasant parishioners. They absolved the faithful of their sins, exorcised, hurled the anathema, and performed ceremonies, which, though naive and quaint, were none the less contrary to the precepts of the Christian religion. There is much evidence of this kind concerning them to be found entered in the Serbian archives of the beginning of the 19th century. Pope Yon in the Timok caused his peasants to communicate by giving them nettles by way of the host ; another pope exhumed vampires, etc... It is not my purpose, in mentioning these things, to represent the Rumanian priests in an unfavourable light. Indeed, under the Turkish domination the Serbian priests were no better. It was the fault of neither, if they had no opportunities of acquiring a better education. The number of Rumanian priests in Serbia decreased rapidly, because the new-comers were only proportionate in numbers to the new emigrants. As the priests died, the settlements were left without Rumanian priests and so were reduced to electing **Serbian pastors**.

While Serbia was under the Turkish rule, and the church of Serbia was administered by Greek metropolitans, a clergy like that described above could be tolerated ; but when Serbia regained her freedom, when the autonomy of the Church was proclaimed and

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(1) J. Héliade Radulesco, *Mémoires sur l'histoire de la régénération Roumaine en 1848*, p. 27, cité par E. Regnault, *Histoire politique et sociale des Principautés Danubiennes*, Paris 1857, p. 332.



the cultured scholar, Metropolitan Petar, placed at its head, the Rumanian clergy gradually disappeared together with the ignorant and unlettered Serbian priests, and their places were taken by men who had studied in theological seminaries. As Serbia had no fresh reserves of Rumanian priests at her disposal, and as there was no expressed demand for them, the ecclesiastical authorities were reduced to appointing such priests as they could dispose of in the North-East of Serbia. The population was in every way satisfied with them and until the present day nobody has ever protested against their Slav liturgy. The old Rumanian sacred books were not « burnt » as the Rumanian chauvinists assert in their memorandum. They had served their turn and were withdrawn from service and placed in the national library at Belgrade, where they are to this day.

The use of the Rumanian tongue was never forbidden in the schools in Serbia for the good and simple reason that this use never existed. The Rumanes have never felt the need of Rumanian instruction and have never demanded it. The Serbian schools gave them complete satisfaction, the same as the Serbian instruction which sufficed them amply for their requirements in the market, in the army and in their dealings with the authorities. The idea of a special instruction never occurred to them.

Besides, it is perfectly superfluous for me to write so much as a word in Serbia's defence. Undeniable facts speak in her defence. Serbia has long been a constitutional State. The legislative elections are free and all citizens take an equal part in them. Rumanes of the North-East of Serbia have always been returned for the Serbian National Assembly (Parliament). Under the protection of their mandate as deputies they could not only have criticised and exposed all

the injustices of which they were supposed to be the victims, but also laid claim to all that in their opinion was being unjustly withheld from their countrymen, and all this they could have done with far greater freedom and facility than the Rumanes of Hungary in the Hungarian Parliament. Now, since the Serbian National Assembly has existed, the Rumanian deputies have not once given expression to their discontent, and such demands as they put forward invariably received satisfaction.

From the foregoing one may judge on what grounds rest the accusations levelled against Serbia by the Rumanian chauvinists.

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## Dr. Athanas Popovici

In the county of Kraina, a few hours down the Danube going towards Negotin, on the very shores of the river and the highroad that runs along it, lies the large and pretty village of Mihailovats. This village is the birth-place of Dr. Athanas Popovici, the only protesting Ruman of Serbia and « Leader of the national movement of the Rumanes of Serbia ».

Mihailovats, is a village of recent origin. It is barely 80 years ago since the Rumanes settled there. The story of the immigration of the inhabitants of Mihailovats in Serbia is preserved in the documents of the National Archives in Belgrade. I will give it briefly ; because it is typical of the settlement of the Rumanes in Serbia.

Facing Mihailovats, in the middle of the river of Danube, is an island called Veliko Ostrvo (large island). This island used to be inhabited by the ancestors of the present inhabitants of Mahailovats, who were languishing under the exactions of their boyars (whom they, too, used to call *ciocoi*). Gradually, family by family, whenever a propitious occasion presented itself, they seized it and escaped to Serbia, until 1835. In 1834 certain regions of Eastern Serbia, including the county of Kraina, passed definitely under Serbia's authority. The inhabitants of Veliko Ostrvo, under the leadership of their priests (popes), one of whose number was certainly the ancestor of Mr Popovici from whom the latter derives his name (Popovici = Popovitch), addressed supplications to Prince Milosh Obrenovitch of Serbia, begging him for permission to cross over to Serbia, and entreating him to come to their aid and

liberate them from the torments they were enduring. As Prince Milosh was at some distance at Kragujevats, it was through the intermediary of Vule Gligorievitch, who at that time representend the central authority at Donji Milanovats on the Danube, that they addressed their supplications for transmission to Prince Milosh. In the blackest colours they depicted to Prince Milosh the tyranny which they suffered at the hands of the boyars, whom they quoted by name, as well as their grievances, which they enumerated expressly. In a timorous and cringling tone they humbly beg and entreat Prince Milosh in petitions, addressed to him in the Rumanian tongue, to lend them his aid, to permit them to come to Serbia and to help them to save their own lives and their own honour, as well as the lives and honour of their families. Prince Milosh who cherished a special sympathy for Rumania was not at all anxious to intervene in internal affairs of Rumania or to give cause for recrimination. He therefore adopted a most cautious attitude in the matter. But when Vule Gligorievitch began to send him petition after petition, and even to convey to him the verbal supplications of the inhabitants of Ostrvo as transmitted to Gligorievitch by their delegates, Prince Milosh, touched by their misfortunes, yielded at length and gave orders that the inhabitants of Ostrvo were to be succoured. And so, one night, with the help of the Serbian authorities, all Veliko Ostrvo crossed over to the Serbian side. Prince Milosh gave orders that the inhabitants of Ostrvo were to be well received that food and other articles of primary necessity were to be supplied to them as a gift, and that they were to be conceded a free grant of land for the building of a village and a vast stretch of territory for pasture and stock-raising. He caused a church to be built for them at his own expense, and extended to them all the lib-

erties and advantages enjoyed in Serbia by the Serbs themselves. In token of their gratitude, these Rumanian emigrants called their village Mihailovats, after the name of Prince Milosh's younger son, who was named Mihailo (Michael).

The popular tradition of this flitting of the inhabitants of Mihailovats is still alive in their midst. It is a tale that makes you shudder and would seem improbable, were it not identical with the account to be found in the records of the National Archives in Belgrade. It is quite a long time since it was taken down by the Serbian scholar M. Dj. Militchevitch, and I heard it recited during my stay at Mihailovats in 1907. The inhabitants of Mihailovats know very well that their truly independant life, their liberty and prosperity only date from their arrival in Serbia. They recall the name of Prince Milosh with gratitude. They love their new country with the best of our patriots and fulfil their duties like the most loyal of citizens. The only one among them who fails in this is Dr. Athanas Popovici. I do not know the reason why his patriotism should be different, — but what I do know is that he does not express the opinion of any Rumanian in Serbia, let alone of any of the inhabitants of Mihailovats.

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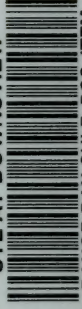
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