

The Role of the Vlachs in the Bogomils' Expansion in the Balkans

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Abstract:

The paper approaches an old idea about the contribution of Vlachs to the spread of Bogomilism in the Balkans. Vlachs and Slavs had the greatest contribution to the expansion of Bogomilism. To explain the role of the Vlachs, the article first explores the presence of the Vlachs along the Via Militaris and Via Egnatia and the references about their faith. Then it focuses on the references about the Vlachs' contribution to the spread of Bogomilism in Serbian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Dalmatian, and Croatian lands. It concludes that the main contribution of the Vlachs on the Bogomils' expansion was in the Western Balkans.

Key words: Bogomilism, Vlachs, Balkans, Paulicianism.

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Introduction

The first work about the contribution of the Balkan Vlachs to the spread of Paulicianism was written by Isidor Ieșan.¹ The Balkan Vlachs were the Romance-speaking heirs of the Roman citizens of the Eastern Roman Empire. When migrant Slavs occupied parts of the Eastern Roman Empire, all Romance-speaking citizens were forced to run to the forests and mountains due to the pagan Slavs ferocity and started pastoral activities. Vlachs dwelled in all the Balkan lands since the early medieval times. Vlachs' first church services were in the Latin language, but later, around the 10th century, after the Christianization of the Slavs, the language shifted into Slavonic language in the territories controlled by Slavs. Vlachs initially were the majority of dwellers in the Balkans, but later, a large part was Slavicized in time and started to speak Slavic languages.

The Paulician heresy started in Armenia, a province of the Eastern Roman Empire, and spread towards the Balkans, especially in Macedonia and around the Roman trade routes. Macedonia is regarded as the cradle of Bogomilism.² Adherents to Paulicianism in the Balkans were also called Bogomils, Massalians, Patarenes, Babuni, etc.

Spreading Directions

The spread of Paulicianism happened from East to West direction. From Asia and Constantinople, the most used routes were Via Militaris, through "Macedonia *thémata*" and Via Egnatia, through "Bulgaria *thémata*". As can be seen in Fig. 1, the Romans reversed the administrative names of the two lands, Macedonia and Bulgaria.

¹ Isidor Ieșan, *Secta patarenă în Balcani și în Dacia Traiană* (București Institutul de arte grafice C. Sfetea, 1912), 699.

² Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: a Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge, 1960), 49-50.



Fig. 1: *Thémata* Bulgaria and *thémata* Macedonia
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme_\(Byzantine_district\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme_(Byzantine_district))

Many Armenian Paulicians were brought to Europe, the majority in the Philipopolis area, around Via Militaris of so-called “Macedonia *thémata*”. Ana Comnena wrote in “The Alexiad” about the Balkan Mountains of “Macedonia *thémata*”: “On either side of its slopes (Balkan Mountains) dwell many very wealthy tribes, the Dacians (later called Romanians) and the Thracians on the Northern side, and on the Southern, more Thracians and the Macedonians.”³ Isidor Ieșan considered that Vlachs’ uprising that led to the emergence of the Vlach-Bulgarian state was supported by the Bogomil Vlachs.⁴

The main area of Paulicianism or Bogomilism in the Balkans was in ancient Macedonia, in connection with Via Egnatia. Ancient Macedonia was a land contained in the *thémata* called “Bulgaria”, a military and administrative division of the empire created from the areas of the encampment of the territorial armies. Therefore, the Bogomils and their preachers who spread to the West were wrongly called “Bulgarians” (instead of Macedonians), after the name of the imperial *thémata*.

Both routes, Via Militaris and Via Egnatia, passed through lands inhabited by Vlachs, the autochthonous dwellers of the Balkans. Isidor

³ Ana Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. A. Dawes (London, 1928), 253

⁴ Isidor Ieșan, *Secta patarenă în Balcani și în Dacia Traiană* (București, Institutul de arte grafice C. Sfetea, 1912), 682.

Ieșan hypothesized that the Balkan Vlachs were the ones, who spread Bogomilism in the Balkans and not the Slavs.⁵

Via Militaris Area

One of the first data about Paulicians came in 970, when a lot of Armenian Paulicians were brought to Europe. During the rule of Alexius Comnenus, thousands of Paulicians of the Philippopolis area were enlisted in the imperial army and were engaged against the Normans. Emperor Alexius, dissatisfied with the behaviour of Paulicians during the war, disbanded their units. As a result, the Paulicians started a rebellion. The Vlachs of the surrounding area of Philippopolis and an army of Pechenegs adhered to Paulician rebels⁶. The leader of Paulicians was Travlos, a former courtier of Alexius. Paulicians set up their camp at Veliatova and in the ensuing battle, the Romans were defeated (1086). A new army, led by Taticius managed to make Pechenegs to retreat to Paristrion. Without the main military help, Paulicians were relocated to Alexiopolis or Neocastron and many of them were converted to Christianity.⁷

A Vlach called Ivanko managed to establish an autonomous land around Philippopolis at the end of the 12th century. Initially, Ivanko was the boyar of the Vlach court of Asan brothers, the rulers of the Vlach-Bulgarian state. Emperor Isaac gave him the military command of Philippopolis and Ivanko was for a while the defender of the Roman Empire but soon became the enemy of the empire.⁸ Ivanko captured new territories around his possession along the road from Philippopolis through Smolena, reaching Mosynopolis and Xantheia. He allowed the Vlach compatriots of the newly conquered lands to remain in their lands.⁹

Later, under Ottoman rule, the remaining Paulicians lived in an area near Philippopolis, and further northward. In the 17th century, they were converted into Catholicism.

⁵ Isidor Ieșan, *Secta patarenă în Balcani și în Dacia Traiană* (București, Institutul de arte grafice C. Sfetea, 1912), 690.

⁶ Stanley Sandler, *Ground warfare. An International Encyclopedia* (ABC Clio, 2002), 109.

⁷ George Finlay, *A History of Greece* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 65.

⁸ Niketas Choniates, *O city of Byzantium, Annals*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1984), 259.

⁹ Niketas Choniates, *O city of Byzantium, Annals*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1984), 283.

Bogomilism has little importance in the history of the Bulgarian state. There are a lot of works of Bulgarian scholars, however it could be said that their works are exaggerated. Historian John Fine wrote that,

*“Since the Bogomils cannot be found playing a role in any political or social event in Bulgarian history, Bogomilism had little impact in Bulgarian history...if we are analyzing Bulgarian history as a whole and significant movements and causes of historical developments in Bulgaria, Bogomilism’s importance has been tremendously exaggerated in all historical works”.*¹⁰

In addition, historian Isidor Ieșan wrote about the exaggerations of some pro-Slavic historians in their works about the Bulgarian Bogomils and Slavs’ history.¹¹ Also, Steven Runciman wrote about the Bogomilism in Bulgarian lands: “If there had been much heresy there would have been heresy-hunts, and some record would almost certainly have survived”.¹²

Via Egnatia Area

According to several sources, the main Bogomil settlements were in the area of today Macedonia. The majority of the adherents of the Bogomils in Macedonia were Greeks, Vlachs, Slavs, Romanised Cumans, and Pechenegs.¹³

A Vlach called Dobromir Chrysus, with an army of 500 Vlachs, managed to establish an autonomous land along the Vardar River valley and in the Moglen area.¹⁴ In 1197, Emperor Alexius besieged Prosek, Chrysus’ fortress near the Vardar River but failed to conquer it. Later, in 1208, another Vlach, called Strez, claimed Chrysus’ possessions. Strez was helped by an army of Serbs and managed to control all of Macedonia until his death.¹⁵ Even today, the Moglen area is dwelled by a Romance-

¹⁰ John Fine, *The early medieval Blakans* (University of Michigan Press, 1983), 179.

¹¹ Isidor Ieșan, *Secta paterenă în Balcani și în Dacia-traiană* (Institutul de arte grafice C. Sfetea, București, 1912), 679.

¹² Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee. A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81.

¹³ Robert Mihajlovski, “Bogomils on Via Egnatia and in the Valley of Pelagonia: The Geography of a Dualist Belief,” *Byzantinoslavica: revue internationale des etudes byzantines*. 72, (2014): 152-170.

¹⁴ Niketas Choniates, *O city of Byzantium, Annals*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1984), 267.

¹⁵ Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 688.

speaking population called Megleno-Romanians and their language is very close to Romanian and Aromanian.¹⁶ St. Hilarion, Bishop of Moglen, was confronted in his diocese with a large number of Bogomil heretics in the middle of the 12th century.¹⁷ The Orthodox Christian Church prosecuted the Bogomils and built churches and monasteries for anti-Bogomil purposes in all Macedonia, some of them in the places of former Bogomil holy houses.

Nânta (Notia in Greek) was the largest Vlach village in the Meglen region and there it was the place of a monastery built by St. Hilarion on the place of a Bogomil house. The church succeeded in converting the Bogomils but was not entirely successful. During the 17th and in the beginning of the 18th century, the former Bogomil Vlachs of Nânta were Islamised. Later, the converts were transferred to European parts of today Turkey. Tede Kahl wrote that in the 20th century "...some of the Nânta inhabitants were a crypto-Christian community".¹⁸ Another known group of Aromanians, fully assimilated by Greeks, of surrounding areas, is called *Sărăcăciani* in Aromanian.¹⁹ They are called Sarakatsani in English, Karakachani in Bulgarian, and Crnovunci in Serbian.

The Vlachs, called themselves Aromanians in this area, were spread in all of Macedonia but the densest areas dwelled by them were around the lakes Ohrid and Prespa, near Via Egnatia and in a zone near Štip and Kocani villages, where they live even today. (Fig. 2)

¹⁶ Capidan Theodor, "Meglenoromânii, vol. II.: Literatura populară la meglenoromâni" *Cultura Națională - Academia Română. Studii și Cercetări*, București, VII, (1928): 54.

¹⁷ Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 80.

¹⁸ Tede Kahl, "The islamisation of the Meglen Vlachs," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (2006), 74.

¹⁹ Theodor Capidan, "Sărăcăciani," *Dacoromania*, 4, (1924), 923-959.

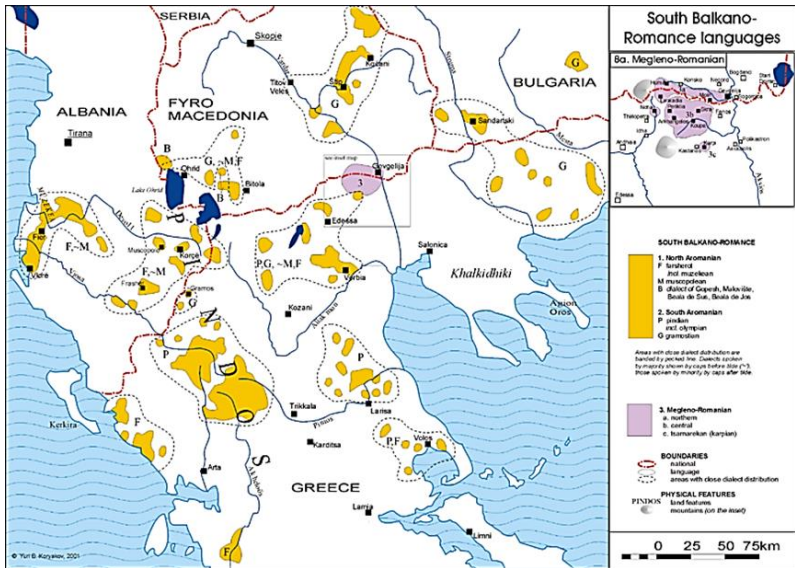


Fig.2: Aromanians around Macedonian lands
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aromanians>

There were and there are many Aromanian villages in different parts of old Macedonia, even today in Albania and Greece. George Kedrenos has a mention about Vlachs in 976 when they were guides and guards of Roman caravans in the Balkans. Between Prespa and Kastoria they fought and killed a Bulgarian rebel named David, brother of the Bulgarian ruler Samuil.

An interesting topic is of the Paulician or Bogomil cemeteries. One of them was located near the Banitsa village (today Vevi) but was destroyed in 1982.²⁰ The cemetery contained a lot of ringed crosses, and probably they were of the Paulicians reconverted to Orthodoxy.²¹ Similar ringed crosses may be seen today near Greek village Nea Chalkidona. (Fig. 3)

²⁰ Elias Petropoulos, "Les Tombes bogomiles en Greece?" *Le Fou*, vol. 21/22, (1982), 53-54.

²¹ Konstantinos Chryssogelos, "The Byzantine heritage in Greek Cinema: the lone case of Doxobus," in: *Byzantium in Dialogue with the Mediterranean: History and Heritage*, (Brill, 2019), 272.



Fig. 3: Bogomil cemetery near Nea Chalkidona
<https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q28858514>

A large group of the Bogomils lived around the Babuna Mountain in central Macedonia, between Prilep and Veles. Babuna region was densely populated with Bogomils, who fled because of the persecutions. From Macedonia, Bogomils were widespread further, under different names: Patarens, Babuns, etc. An important role had the Bogomil Vlachs who came to dominate the carrying trade, caravans, and guards across the Balkans. Also, transhumant Vlach families probably contributed to the spread of Bogomilism with their annual displacements between mountains and plains. Material evidence and recent observations showed that the transhumance in Northern and Western regions of Macedonia in the twentieth century still uses the routes of the ancient Vlachs.²²

Bogomil Vlachs in Serbian Lands

From Macedonia, Bogomilism easily arrived in Serbian lands where Vlachs and Slavs lived together. Vlachs (Aromanians) lived in the Southern parts, and other Vlachs (later called Romanians) in the Northern parts, approximately in the former Moesia, Dacia Mediterranea, and Dacia Ripensis. Between them, there were the Torlaks, a group of autochthonous bilingual Vlachs, later assimilated by Slavs or Turks. There are today opinions that Serbs are assimilated Vlachs: "...one can speak in this area about Vlachs which evolved into the Serbian nation."²³

²² NGL Hammond, "Travels in Epirus and South Albania before World War II," *Anc. World* 8, 1-2 (1983): 36,44.

²³ Ilona Czamanska, "Vlachs and Slavs in the Middle Ages and Modern Era," *Res Historica* 41 (2016): 20.

Štefan Starešu wrote that the Raska area of the Serbian lands was called Old Vlachia or Stari Vlaska in Serbian, meaning the land of Vlachs.²⁴

The numerous Vlachs in Serbian lands made some Slavic writers to argue that the term “Vlach” was used just to mean “shepherd” but this opinion is rejected by the experts.²⁵ Benedikt Kuripešić (Benedict Curipeschitz), a Habsburg envoy to Süleyman the Magnificent, who travelled through the Balkans in 1530-1531 in “Lower Bosnia”, mentioned the Serbs (Surffen), also called the Vlachs (Wallachen), Ćići (Zitzen) and Martoloses (Marcholosen).

Bogomils were called Babuns in Serbian lands, a name of a Macedonian mountain. A lot of documents contain data about the Vlach Bogomils in Serbian lands. A document about the Bulgarian St. Ephrem, Patriarch of Serbia around 1400, talks about his dispute with a “Messalian” (Bogomil) Vlach who loses and dies promptly.²⁶ A Habsburg envoy to the Ottomans, who travelled through the Balkans in 1530-1531, mentioned the Vlachs, also called Tsitsi (Aromanians), of St. Paul’s faith (Paulicians), originating from Smederevo and Belgrade.²⁷ This may indicate that the Vlachs were the exponents of the Bogomilism in Serbia, for a period of time. Rulers of the Serbian lands, like Stefan Nemanja, also started harsh actions to destroy the Paulician/Babun heresy. The leader of the heretics and his followers were executed or exiled.²⁸

Another Serbian ruler, Stefan Dušan, called himself “*Imperator Raxie et Romanie, dispotus Larte et Blahie comes*”²⁹ initiated a law code containing several clauses with penalties for Babuns.³⁰ Bogomilism in Serbian lands reached a peak in the twelfth century and then started to die because of Orthodox Church measures. Some Bogomil necropolises (Peručac, Bajina Bašta, Hrta, Rastište, Prijepolje) remained in Southwest part of today Serbia, along the paths of the Vlachs’ transhumance.

²⁴ Štefan Starešu, “Medieval name and ethnicity: Serbs and Vlachs”, *Balkanica Posnaniensia*, XXII/1, Ius Valachicum I, Poznań – Bucharest (2015): 82.

²⁵ Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York University Press, 1994), 79.

²⁶ P. Pavlov, V. Grudkov, *Zhitia na sv. Patriarch Joakim i Tarnovski, sv. Isai Serski i sv. Patriarch Efrem Pechki* (Veliko Tarnovo, 1999), 77-78.

²⁷ Benedikt Kuripešić, *Putopis kroz Bosnu, Srbiju, Bugarsku i Rumeliju 1530*, trans. Đorđe Pejanović (Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2001), 26-27.

²⁸ Andrew P. Roach, “The Competition for Souls: Sava of Serbia and Consumer Choice in Religion in the Thirteenth Century Balkans”, *Гласник на ИНИ*, 50, 1 (2006): 152.

²⁹ Silviu Dragomir, *Vlahii Nord-Balcanici in Evul Mediu* (Editura Academiei, 1959), 26.

³⁰ Maja Angelovska Panova, “Punishment of heretics: comparisons and contrasts between Western and Eastern Christianity in the Middle ages”, *Journal of History*, XLVII, No.1 (2012): 153.

Bogomil Vlachs in Herzegovina

From Macedonia and Serbia, Bogomilism spread to Bosnia, with the contribution of Vlachs. The majority of Bogomils in Bosnia were the Vlachs, according to written documents and to numerous necropolises of the Vlachs, called “*stecci*” by Slavs.

In addition, the majority of the Orthodox Christians in Bosnia were the same Vlachs. So important was the number of the Vlachs of the Bosnian Orthodox dwellers that, some centuries later, the term “Vlach” was still being used in Bosnia to mean Orthodox Christian.³¹ The Vlachs of Herzegovina were bilingual, speaking a neo-Latin language (Aromanian) and Serbian. Part of them passed to Bogomilism but many remained Orthodox Christians. Majority of Vlachs, frequenting Serbian churches, got Serbian names, and speaking Serbian, later, in the 19th century, they were registered as Bosnians, Serbs, or Croats.

Pope Gregory IX wrote in a letter to King Bela IV dated 14. XI. 1234: “...Vlachs, although they are considered Christians, ... they have customs and rituals hostile to the Christian name”.³² Historian Zef Mirdita wrote that Vlachs’ belief system, rich with Pagan elements, first converted from Christian faith, then to the Bogomil faith, and finally to Islam.³³

Arthur Evans wrote about Bogomil’s origin of the necropolises and in addition, he described the presence of Vlachs in Bosnia in the 19th century.³⁴ Karl Kaser published a book and a map about numerous medieval Vlach extended families in Herzegovina³⁵(Fig.4). Some research on the skeletons of Bogomil gravestones have shown a Vlach origin.³⁶

³¹ Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York University Press, 1994), 72.

³² August Potthast, *Regesta pontificum Romanorum inde ab a. 1198 ad a. 1304* (I Berlin, 1874), 83.

³³ Zef Mirdita, “Vlasi, polinomičan narod”, *Povijesni prilozi. Historical Contributions*, 33 (2007): 260.

³⁴ Arthur Evans, *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot During the Insurrection* (Longmans, Green, 1877), 94-95.

³⁵ Karl Kaser, *Hirten Kämpfer Stammeshelden* (Böhlau Verlag, Wien-Köln-Weimar, 1992), 153.

³⁶ Mužić, Ivan, “Vlasi i starobalkanska pretkršćanska simbolika jelena na stećcima. Starohrvatska prosvjeta.” *Split: Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments* III. 36 (2009): 323.

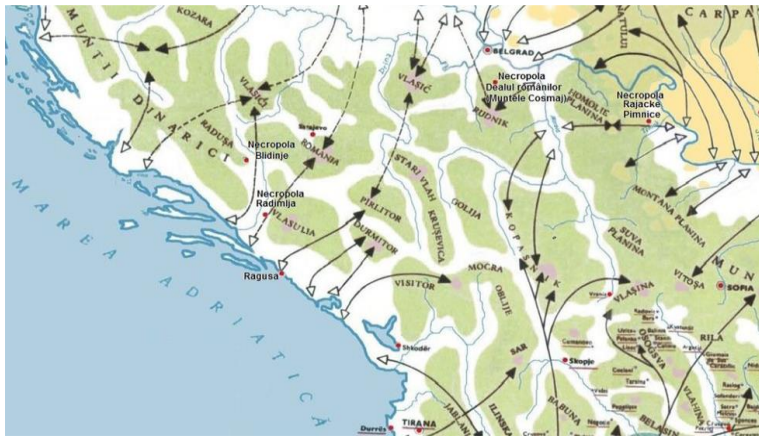


Fig. 5: Transhumance routes of the Vlachs in Western Balkans
D. Macrea, *Probleme de lingvistică română* (București: Editura Științifică, 1961), planșa 2.



Fig. 6: Radimlja necropolis. Bogomil Aromanians wearing traditional fustanella
<https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/Ste%C4%87ci+>

The necropolises with petroglyphs are the main heritage of the Vlachs in Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Dalmatia.⁴² The same opinion had Ante Milošević who wrote that the Bogomil affiliation of Vlachs is most clearly demonstrated by their decorated tombstones.⁴³ Some necropolises were listed as important world heritage (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Necropolises in Bosnia & Herzegovina listed by UNESCO (<https://www.stecciwh.org/locations/stecci-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>)

Ivan Božić wrote about Vlachs' heritage mentioning that "the contemporaries made a clear distinction between the Vlachs (Morlachs) and those Slavs whose descent did not exclude Vlach admixture".⁴⁴ Ottomans later called Vlachs with a Turkish name: Karavlahs, meaning Northern Vlachs in opposition with Vlachs of Greece. The end of the decorated tombstones production is related to the Ottoman invasion and with the conversion of Bogomil Vlachs to Islam. Vlachs (Morlachs) were the main carriers of the trade between Ottoman Herzegovina and

⁴² Marian Wenzel, "Bosnian and Herzegovinian Tombstones – Who Made Them and Why?," *Sudost-Forschungen*. 21 (1962): 102-143.

⁴³ Ante Milošević, "Stećci i Vlasi. Stećci i vlaške migracije 14. i 15. stoljeća u Dalmaciji i jugozapadnoj Bosni." *Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture Split* (1991): 8.

⁴⁴ Ivan Božić, "Svijet ratničkih družina i stokarskih katuna", in: *Crna Gora u doba oblasnih gospodara, Istorija Crne Gore*, eds. Milinko Djurović (Titograd, Vol.2, pt.2, 1970), 349.

Venetian Dalmatia. There is data that before the Vlachs' conversion to Islam, they used their Patarene warehouses during the trade.⁴⁵

Bogomil Vlachs of Montenegrin Lands

Bogomils may also have infiltrated the lands of today Montenegro through the transhumance of the Vlachs.⁴⁶ According to Montenegrin Đuro Batričević, Vlachs have an important contribution to Montenegro's population.⁴⁷ The region with the highest mountains in Montenegro is around the Durmitor mountain. In the late medieval ages, there lived the Vlachs of Drobnjak "čätun".^{48 49} or family. Ivan Bozic wrote about Vlachs' contribution to the making of Montenegro.⁵⁰ The majority of Bogomil medieval tombstones were found in mountainous areas, where Vlachs practiced pastoral activities. It was a strong influence of the Bogomil Vlachs of Herzegovina.

An important place of Vlachs was the village Donji Kraj, near Cetinje, where a Vlach Church (*Влашка Црква*) was built in 1450. The church was built on the site of a Bogomil Vlach necropolis, containing about 150 tombstones.⁵¹ There is an interesting ballad in connection with the Vlachs of the Cetinje area, very similar to ballads common in all Balkans (similar to the Miorița ballad in Romania). The ballad tells that a dweller, named Radule Vlach, was the richest man of the county, possessing numerous herds of sheep, goats, and cattle. Another shepherd, called Crnojevic, with his men, attacked Radule when he went up the mountain with the herds. Crnojevic killed Radule and his family and took the herds, becoming the richest and the powerful man of the valley of the river called today Crnojevic river. Amazingly, Crnojevic's son was a man of culture, and his help, monk Macarie, a refugee, set up the first printing house in the court of the king Radu cel Mare, in Romanian lands.

⁴⁵ Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Springer Science & Business Media, 1974), 299.

⁴⁶ Silviu Dragomir, *Vlahii Nord-Balcanici in Evul Mediu* (Editura Academiei, 1959), 174.

⁴⁷ Đuro Batričević, *Vlasi u Crnoj Gori* (Novi Sad, 2004), 42.

⁴⁸ Milica Mlovic-Dukic, "Prilog istoriji Drobnjaka u srednjem veku", *Glasnik Zavicajnog muzeja* (1999): 153-154.

⁴⁹ Esad Kurtovic, "Vlah Drobnjak Žur Stipanović (1429-1459)", *University of Sarajevo, Godišnjak* (2013): 373-383.

⁵⁰ Ivan Bozic, "Svijet ratnickih druzina i stokarskih katuna", in *Crna Gora u doba oblasnih gospodara*, ed. Milinko Djurovic, Vol.2, (Titograd, 1970), 349.

⁵¹ Ratko Đurović, *Binoza*, (Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1969), 97.

Many Vlachs were members of the Bogomil sect and a lot of specific tombstones remained on the paths of their transhumance. Most known Vlach necropolises are in the areas of Cetinje, Niksic, Pljevlja, Pluzine, and Zabljak. Many tombstones are of the Bogomil sect, with petroglyphs, similar to Bogomil tombstones of Herzegovina. Many tombstones of Montenegro, Serbia, Herzegovina, and Dalmatia were and are subjected to vandalism.⁵²

Bogomil Vlachs in Croatian Lands

In Croatia, and especially in Dalmatia, Vlachs were known as Morlachs. Morlachs' name came from Karavlachs and means Northern Vlachs, where *Kara* means "black" in Turkish but also means North in old Turkish geography.⁵³ Venetians and Croats used Morlach name, an Italian translation, for Karavlachs. Vlachs were the autochthonous population of Croatia, and they were Slavicized and later they lost their maternal language.⁵⁴ However, few Croatian historians recognize the Vlachs as autochthonous dwellers.

Alberto Fortis, a Venetian writer, naturalist, and cartographer, the greatest narrator of Morlachs' world described "Morlachia" land in his book *Viaggio in Dalmazia*. Alberto Fortis wrote that the Morlachs of Dalmatia called themselves Vlachs and mentioned that they were of Catholic, Orthodox, and of the Islamic faith. The Islamic faith of a part of Morlachs was narrated in the famous Morlach ballad called "The Mourning Song of the Noble Wife of the Hasan Aga".⁵⁵ Giovanni Lovrich wrote about the origin of Morlachs, contradicting a wrong origin mentioned by Fortis and showing their kinship ties with Wallachia (Romanians).⁵⁶ According to Croat historian Moacanin, during the Middle Ages, the Vlachs or Morlachs in Croatian lands including Dalmatia were about 50% of all dwellers.⁵⁷

⁵² Sefik Beslagic, *Stecci Katalosko Topografski Pregled* (Sarajevo, 1971), 431.

⁵³ Poghiric Cicerone, "Romanizarea lingvistică și culturală în Balcani," in *Aromânii, istorie, limbă, destin*, ed. Neagu Giuvvara, 17. (București: Editura Humanitas, 2012), 17.

⁵⁴ Stanko Guldescu, *The Croatian-Slavonian Kingdom: 1526-1792* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 1970), 67-70.

⁵⁵ Alberto Fortis, *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (Vol 1, Presso Alvise Milocco, 1774), 98.

⁵⁶ Giovanni Lovrich, *Osservazioni di Giovanni Lovrich sopra diversi pezzi del Viaggio in Dalmazia del signor abate Alberto Fortis* (Francesco Sansoni, 1786), 69.

⁵⁷ Nenad Moacanin, "Croatia and Bosnia an eternal movement from integration to dissolution", in: *Zone Di Frattura in Epoca Moderna: Il Baltico, i Balcani e L'Italia Settentrionale*. ed. Almut Bues (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 101.

Starting with the 12th century, a part of the Orthodox Vlachs became adherents of Bogomilism, and later converted to Islam with the arrival of the Ottomans; also in the 14th and 15th centuries, there were Roman Catholic Vlachs in Croatia and Bosnia.⁵⁸ Some Catholic Morlachs were known as Uskoks and they were without any doubt of the Vlach origin.⁵⁹ In the Lika region, full of Catholic and Orthodox Vlachs, many Muslim Vlachs changed their faith to the Catholic church after Lika was taken back from the Turks.⁶⁰

The most important material heritage of the Bogomil Vlachs in Dalmatia and some parts of Croatian lands are the medieval necropolises. The heretics of the Dalmatian coast were mentioned starting with the 11th, the 12th⁶¹, and the 13th century.⁶² Most known necropolises are Cista Velika, Dubravka and Konavle villages. The necropolises of Dubravka and Konavle are placed at the extremities of transhumance traces of the Vlachs of Durmitor mountain.⁶³ Necropolises of Velika and Mala Crljivica and other smaller necropolises are placed along an old Roman road and a transhumance trace along the seashore. John R. Oreskovich mentioned the existence of some Paulician monasteries in Dalmatia and Lika in the 15th century (Donje Pazariste, St. Marija, Brinje)⁶⁴

The conversion of Bogomils into the Islamic faith, around the 16th century, had, as a result, the end of the apparition of gravestones with petroglyphs. Many South Slavic countries practiced and continued to practice the cultural appropriation of the Vlachs' heritage.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Ivan Crkvenic, "The Posavina border region of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina: development up to 1918", *Drus. Istraz, Zagreb*, God. 13 (2004), BR. 1-2 : 299.

⁵⁹ *Géographie Mathématique, Physique et Politique de Toutes les Parties du Monde, vol. 4. États de l'Autriche et de la Prusse, et des Appendices sur la Pologne et les Indemnité d'Allemagne*, (Paris, 1803), 108.

⁶⁰ John R. Oreskovich, *The History of Lika, Croatia: Land of War and Warriors* (Lulu.com, 19 Sept. 2019), 25.

⁶¹ Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 20.

⁶² Florin Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500-1300)* (Brill, 2019), 532.

⁶³ Octavian Ciobanu, "The emergence of Vlach necropolises with petroglyphs in Western Balkans," *The Journal of Ethnology and Culturology*, Chişinău, Volume XXIV, (2018): 6.

⁶⁴ John R. Oreskovich, *The History of Lika, Croatia: Land of War and Warriors* (Lulu.com, 2019), 24.

⁶⁵ Octavian Ciobanu, "Cultural appropriation of the Vlachs' heritage in Balkans." Proceedings of the International Conference "Cultural Heritage and Identities" (University of Bucharest, November 15-17, 2019).

Bogomils in Romanian Lands

Some groups of Bogomils found refuge in the North part of the Danube, but Bogomilism did not become a religious movement in Romanian lands. According to Anton Balota, the influence of Bogomil refugees was only popular culture, manifested through the spread of Byzantine and Slavic popular apocryphal literature.⁶⁶ Anton Balota mentioned that the main groups of Bogomils were in:

- Banat area, where the newcomers, locally called "Carașoveni" were speaking a language close to Serbian but with a lot of Albanian words. Probably this group was made of bilingual Vlachs (Aromanians) of Serbia; they rejected Serbian origin and they did not celebrate traditional saints of Serbia⁶⁷. They probably migrated in the 12th century during the persecutions of Nemanja and later in the 14th and 15th centuries⁶⁸. Today this group has the Catholic faith. Ioan Silviu Oța found several alleged Bogomil necropolises spread in different areas of Banat⁶⁹;

- Blaj and Sibiu area (Cergăul Mic village), where the newcomers (called Schei) were the heirs of the Bogomils and came from Bulgarian lands, probably between the 13th and the 16th centuries. Today this group has a Lutheran faith;

- Brașov area, as workers for the Black Church; called Schei (today there is a neighbourhood called Schei), came from Bulgarian lands as a result of Ottoman invasion. They were fully assimilated;

- Siret river area in Moldova (Șcheia village), mentioned during the king Ștefan cel Mare around the 15th century. This group was fully assimilated.

Other necropolises of Bogomils were discovered around Bucharest, dating from the 16th, 17th, and the 18th centuries.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Anton Balota, "Bogomilismul și cultura maselor populare din Bulgaria și Țările române," *Romanoslavica* 10, Bucharest, (1964):14-69.

⁶⁷ Anton Balota, "Bogomilismul și cultura maselor populare din Bulgaria și Țările române," *Romanoslavica* 10, Bucharest, (1964): 63

⁶⁸ Victor Tufesescu, "O mărunță populație balcanică," *Balkanica*, IV, (1941): 513.

⁶⁹ I. S. Oța, "Morminte bogomile din sudul Banatului (secolele XII-XIII)," *Arheologia medievală*, II, (1998): 113-118.

⁷⁰ Gh. I. Cantacuzino, "Considerații privind necropola din jurul bisericii vechii curți domnești din Câmpulung," *SCI VA*, 49, 2, (1998): 186-187.

Also, it has been found some old cemeteries with ringed crosses (Fig. 8), probably of the reconverted Bogomils to the Orthodox faith, similar to the ringed crosses found in Greece.⁷¹



Fig. 8: Năpradea village, Sălaj county.

<https://tudorphotoblog.blogspot.com/2015/07/adevarata-poveste-crucii-celtice-de-la.html>

The apocryphal literature had an oral circulation in Romanian lands and other East Slavic lands during the Middle Ages and even later. Today, the most known apocryphal works are some carols, secular literature of the feasts.

Conclusion

During the emergence of the Bogomil faith, many Vlachs became Bogomils for a couple of centuries and they contributed to the propagation of their heretical faith together with other dwellers of the Balkans. A large part of Vlachs changed their religion from Orthodoxy into Bogomilism then into Islam.

According to several historical documents and the research of some scientists, the main contribution of the Vlachs to Bogomilism was mainly in Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Dalmatian, and Croatian lands, where they have a lot of traces, the Bogomil necropolises with decorated tombstones, called "*stecci*" in Serbian, placed on top of the mountains and on the plains, along their transhumance paths.

⁷¹ Octavian Ciobanu, "Misterul crucilor inelate," www.rumaniamilitary.ro, 2019, accessed April 2020.

The history and the religion of the Vlachs are little known today. The Vlachs' history and heritage in the Balkans are subjected to cultural appropriation in most Balkan states.

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