

***Farsherots, Moscopolitans, Megleno-Romanians
– Online Recovery of their Cultural Heritage***

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Abstract

This article presents the research project “Farsherots, Moscopolitans, Megleno-Romanians – Online Recovery of their Cultural Heritage” conducted in 2011 and financed by the Department for Romanians from Everywhere. Given the utmost importance of protecting and preserving the immaterial cultural heritage of a people the article highlights briefly the objectives of this project, the interdisciplinary character of the team and the conclusions of the research that took place in Romania, Albania, the Republic of Macedonia and Greece.

Keywords: Farsherots, Moscopolitans, Megleno-Romanians, cultural heritage

The immaterial cultural heritage of a people or community is made up of events that are part of certain social practices, rituals and customs (birth, baptism, marriage, burial), festive events, games, knowledge and practices concerning nature, the universe, techniques related to traditional crafts (kneading bread, pottery art, weaving, sewing etc.) verbal and nonverbal expressions and traditions (dance), etc. These are handed down from generation to generation, being constantly recreated by the community and giving it a sense of identity, of belonging.

In our opinion, this immaterial cultural heritage, along with the material one should be protected, preserved and valued, all the more so in view of maintaining the identity of the Romanian communities from the south of the Danube, in particular the Aromanian community in Albania. Albanian legislation concerning the national Heritage does not provide the protection of the immaterial heritage of the Aromanian minority.

Based on the European requirements concerning the protection of the immaterial Heritage, the Romanian legislation (Law 26/2008 on the protection of immaterial cultural heritage) and given the objectives of the Department for Romanians from Everywhere, funds were obtained from the latter for the project "Farsherots, Moscopolitans, Megleno-Romanians – Online Recovery of their cultural heritage".

It is necessary to specify that the information on the evolution of Aromanians in Albania and of the Megleno-Romanians after World War II from an ethnographic, sociological and cultural perspective is quite limited. Consequently, the team of this project investigated in the field the way in which these communities live in order to collect as much data as possible based on which to propose a series of measures aimed at preserving their cultural heritage, in particular the immaterial one. It is also true that no such research, of an interdisciplinary nature, with such an impact on the Aromanians in Albania and the Megleno-Romanians in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia has been made so far. In general, researchers have been interested in studying the Aromanian dialect in Albania. There were also concerns about the adoption by the Albanian of the Latin alphabet; papers have been written on the Romanian-Albanian relations, the history of Albania, documents have been published on the schools and churches in Albania (19th–20th centuries), and there are also papers covering the problems of the Aromanians in Albania up to the first decades of the last century, studies on the history of the Megleno-Romanians etc.

Moreover, such a field research with an interdisciplinary character was necessary in order to establish schools, churches, libraries, museum centers, etc. in the Aromanian community. The research in case is required

all the more so because the Institute of South-Eastern European Studies established in Albania at Saranda in 1938 based on the donation of the land by the historian N. Iorga and the efforts of Professor Dumitru Berciu was unfortunately closed after 1948.

It is a well known fact that in Greece, Albania and the Republic of Macedonia dozens of schools and churches were established and operational (starting from the second half of the 19th century and up to the first half of the 20th century) with the support of the Romanian state and they played an important role in maintaining the identity of the Aromanian community, with all the "baggage" of its immaterial cultural heritage. Certainly, all this has been done with many sacrifices on the part of the Aromanians.

Our investigations are meant to be a reminder for the descendants of the Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian community, but also for the North-Danubian Romanians of all these essential issues, which were made possible due to their predecessors' efforts. Institutions such as the family, the school and the church have served to preserve the Romanian identity of the Aromanians, their immaterial cultural heritage representing an important component. The education received by the predecessors of these communities in their families, at school and at the church allowed them to accumulate traditions, customs, songs, dances and handicrafts.

In the field we found that despite the vicissitudes of history, these institutions have fulfilled their mission: the immaterial heritage is largely preserved in the Aromanian community in Albania, but in particular in Romania where the political regime established at the end of World War II was much more permissive. However, the danger of losing this patrimony is quite obvious.

Information on the immaterial heritage of the Aromanians in Albania and on methods that can be used to preserve it is not available so far and nothing has been published to this purpose by the "C. Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore or by other institutions. Therefore, such a study performed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers was quite necessary.

That is why we believe that this study is useful not only for the Aromanians in Albania and the Megleno-Romanians in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia or for those in Romania, but also for departments and institutions operating within the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian Peasant Museum, the "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum etc.

By underlining the value of the Aromanian immaterial heritage we also intended to stimulate the community initiatives aimed at the

revitalization and preservation of immaterial heritage elements that can become a source of economic (eg cultural tourism), as well as identity development. The results of our research will also support the European policies on multiculturalism in the Balkans by promoting appropriate cultural information on the Aromanians (Farsherots, Moscopolitans) and Megleno-Romanians in Albania, Greece and the Republic of Macedonia. Moreover, the immaterial heritage can not be protected and preserved if it is not identified and recorded in a register / catalog or presented in a relevant study.

A key component of this project was the archiving / recording of oral history testimonies such as: habits in the family cycle (birth, wedding, funeral) and in the calendar cycle (holidays and traditions with fixed date: Christmas, New Year celebrations and customs without a fixed date: Easter, holidays and agro-pastoral calendar customs, celebrations and community traditions, mythical representations), traditional songs and dances, information about the legacy of traditional crafts a.s.o. To this, we can add many pictures of churches, cemeteries, and also aspects of daily life of the Aromanians in Albania and of the Megleno-Romanians in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia.

The project team had an interdisciplinary character, including researchers from various fields, such as history, ethnology, linguistics, sociology, museology, archiving, musicology etc. but who also work in environments that promote traditional culture. Moreover, the interdisciplinary character of the team met the requirements of a viable cultural project, developed in a cultural area less addressed so far.

The novelty aspect of the project consisted of a comparative historical and ethnographic research of the immaterial heritage, in particular that of the Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians from Romania (Constanța, Palazu Mare, Ovidiu, Nisipari și Cerna) and of those living in Macedonia (Skoplije, Ghevghelia, Huma), Albania (Pogradeț, Corcea, Moscopole, Divjaka, Elbasan, Permet, Fier, Saranda, Gjirokaster, AndonPoci), Greece (Kalambaka, Glykomilia, Hrisomilia, Cupa (Koupa), Liumnitza, Perivole (Birislav), Oșin, Lungutza, Arhanghelos). Communities from areas with a similar or even identical identity fund were involved in this project.

The key conclusion of the team was clear: these two communities are not similar but *completely identical*, both in terms of immaterial heritage, but also of cultural identity. The subjects interviewed from the Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Greece and Romania were selected from different age groups (between 10 and 80 years old) and different social

groups: school teachers and university professors, priests, plastic artists and folk artists, engineers, lawyers, accountants, clerks, owners of micro enterprises, traders, housewives, etc, thus allowing the team to draw objective conclusions.

Among the project objectives mention can be made of the following: conducting a research on the values of the cultural immaterial heritage, in particular of the Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian heritage in the Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Greece; detecting the missing components of the Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian immaterial heritage; identifying optimal solutions for protecting these community values: establishing small heritage museum centres, as part of the Farsherot, Moscopolean and Megleno-Romanian communities in Pogradet, Divjaka, Fier, Corcea, Skoplije, Huma, Ghevghelia, Perivole, Karpi, Houma, Osani, Hrisomilia, Glykomilia, Axiopolis; recording on CD elements of the specific immaterial heritage of this community and creating a Portal.

The target group of this project is represented by the Romanian and European public interested in the Aromanian (Farsherot and Moscopolitan) community in Albania, the Albanians in Albania and also the Megleno-Romanian community in the Republic of Macedonia and Greece and on a larger scale, the target is represented by the Aromanian community in the Balkans and Romania. The study, the book and the CDs that will be subsequently produced will be sent to the Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian associations, to consulates, embassies and cultural institutes of Romania in the Balkan Peninsula, to libraries, research institutes and universities in the Balkan states.

The material will be used to promote before the Council of Europe the cultural policies of the Romanian state on the problems of the Balkan Aromanian community and generally to support the policies concerning the "Romanians living outside the Romanian borders".

The team has found that despite the historical vicissitudes and the major changes primarily determined by the technological progress, the Farsherots, the Moscopolitans and the Megleno-Romanians have continued to maintain their language, religion, traditions, customs and crafts inherited from their ancestors. It is not less true that they are determined to do the same in the future, despite any political or other kind of barriers.

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