

ROMANIANS FROM THE VALLEY OF THE TIMOK – THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Decebal Marius Floroica

¹PhD student University of Craiova, Romania, decebalflo@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study is the result of long-standing concerns on the issue of the Romanian population from the Valley of Timok in Serbia. The Valley of Timok is an ethnographic - and, I might add, an ethnographic - paradox. Here, elements belonging to the traditional Romanian culture, that have long disappeared from the territory comprised within the Romanian borders, have survived, as if untouched by time, as in a natural ethnographic reserve, of an outdoor-museum type, while other aspects of this culture have developed into a specific direction, unknown to other regions in the country. Thus, today, this traditional community lying at the fringe of the Romanian living space provides the researcher with a fascinating image of a world in which the newest components of modern culture evolved, or were grafted. Thus, the system of beliefs and ritual practices that we meet here is deeply Romanian, but, at the same time, profoundly characteristic of this area, acting as a true identity landmark of the inhabitants of this allogeneic environment. **The purpose of the research** is to learn about the current situation of the Vlach community and to identify the historical elements, the geodemographical element, the human settlements, and their spiritual life.

The analysis of the theme was carried out based on qualitative research which made use firstly of observation (observation of social life in its space-time totality) as a method that is precursory of the launch of the other instruments, the sociological research and the study of social documents. The research aimed to analyse the demographic structure, the religious structure of the population, the ethnic groups, the typology of rural settlements, the households and traditional crafts, the traditions, the spiritual life of the Vlachs, and folk culture. The wealth of the information sources, the wide variety of documents used to reconstitute social life contributed to the description and explanation of the social processes and phenomena of the community.

The results of this study demonstrate that the Romanians of Timok preserved in their customs and traditions the entire beauty of folk culture, which most often resisted by itself, with deep attachment to language and tradition. Although they were almost always deprived of churches and schools to cultivate their ethnic knowledge, the Romanians from this community never lost their ancient speech and customs, not even after hundreds of years, these being almost identical to those from Oltenia, a fact that demonstrates their belonging to the Romanian nation.

Keywords: Timok Valley, social life, cultural life, religious life

1 INTRODUCTION

The Romanian community from Eastern Serbia ranks second after the Serb one, the Romanian ethnic area

representing continuity to the west of the Romanians from Romania and Bulgaria. Between the two rivers, Timok to the east and Morava to the west, the Romanians form a compact area, holding the majority in many towns and districts, being met with in other parts of Serbia, but already very dispersed.

The origin of the Romanians living in Eastern Serbia is hard to elucidate, given the lack of bibliographical sources, with only more or less fortuitous recordings of their existence. There is no uniform opinion on their origin, several theories being issued over time.

The Theory of Local Origin. The chronicles of the twelfth century, followed by the writings of Dimitrie Cantemir and of the Transylvanian School, the historians Nicolae Iorga, A.D. Xenopol, Dimitrie Onciu argue that the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people took place on both banks of the Danube. The territory studied was under Roman administration for a long time, the Romanisation of the Morava-Timok area as well as the continuity of the Thracian-Illyrian population Romanised over the centuries so far being certified through a number of historical sources, as well as by means of numerous toponymical evidence (Vâlsan, 1927; G. Zbucnea, C. Dobre, 2005). A convincing argument about the ancient presence of the Romanians here is the geographical reality, the native element being met with more often in regions that were inaccessible to the invaders, i.e. in the woodland hills and mountains, people finding shelter in *zbăguri*¹.

The Theory of the North-Danubian Origin. This theory is supported mostly by the Serb historians and ethnographers (Stanojevic, 1993; K. Jiricek, 1911). They state that the Romanians that are now living in Eastern Serbia would be, in their entirety, descendants of groups that passed from Banat and Oltenia to the Balkan world in recent times, i.e. in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of these scholars assume there was a migration of Romanians from Banat and Wallachia in the fifteenth century, others in the sixteenth century or rather in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the absence of fixed boundaries, at least until the mid-nineteenth century, the contacts of the population in the region were permanent; the economic, political and historical circumstances resulted in successive migrations, different in scope depending on the period, from the Northern to the Southern Danube regions. The wars, natural disasters, marriages, crafts, seasonal work, grazing, the exploitation of new agricultural land could be mentioned among the reasons for movements in the region. It is certain that the migration of the Romanian population as was natural was continuous and, in fact, performed in both directions, also because until 1832 the passage over the Danube was unrestricted. It was only during the Organic Statute, when Romania was occupied by the Russian, that governor Kiselev decided (in 1834) to set up Border Guards Corps to guard the border for the first time, thus breaking the link between the Romanians from the two banks of the Danube.

One theory that is very widespread especially in the Serb scientific circles is that the Vlachs (Vlas) are a Serbian ethnic group of mixed Slavic-Romanic origin, a bilingual population whose mother tongue is both Serbian and Vlach. There is another theory circulating in the Serbian milieu, according to which massive groups of Serbs passed at some point in Romania because of Turkish oppression, they learnt the language, acquired the customs, after which they returned to their homeland (Marinkovic, A. S., 2006).

1.1 The Romanians from the Timok Valley and Their Integration into Serbian Society

The period between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II did not bring major changes to the fate of the Timok Romanians. The two Balkan countries (Serbia and Bulgaria) which encompassed them continued to deny them the most basic national rights, depriving them of schools in which to teach and churches in which to worship in their own language, continuing unabated the processes of denationalization they had started since the nineteenth century.

A special moment in the history of the Romanian spirit occurred in 1918. Out of the initiative of Atanasie Popovici, a Committee of the Timok Romanians, led by the former, was established in the fall of 1918. The Committee issued a manifesto written in Cyrillic letters and addressed to the Timok Romanians, entitled: *To the Romanians in Serbia* (Konstandinovic-Traian, 2008). The memoir made a brief overview of the situation and development of the Romanians from the Timok Valley. It also invoked the right to self-determination, based on which the new political map of the world was to be decided.

The Committee intensified its action in November. Then, A. Popovici showed, inter alia, that the unification of the Timok Romanians with Romania was not a claim of the Royalty, but a wish of the Romanians in Serbia,

¹ "Zbăg"- a place where people hid and whereto the access was not easy.

who wanted cooperation and understanding with their brothers. He already considered a potential discussion of the Timok issue at the Peace Conference. The Committee of the Romanians from the right bank of the Danube met on November 4, 1918 and decided to submit their problems to the Romanian policy makers and to the representatives of the Great Powers. In mid-November, Atanasie Popovici also drew up an alternative program to that of the union between Timok and Romania, a solution that became increasingly unlikely. On behalf of the Timok refugees from Romania, it was decided to draft a memoir with condolences of the co-nationals from Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia. In principle, the requirement was to fully ensure national rights, including the exercise of executive power by elected representatives. It was demanded that there be Romanian mayors, teachers and priests in the Romanian villages. It was also required to set up a national committee. On November 13 there was a protest against abandoning the Timok people in the context of the perfection of Greater Romania (Konstandinovic-Traian, 2008, p.115.)

At the Peace Conference of Paris, Atanasie Popovici went to the French capital as a member of the Romanian delegation and addressed a memoir on behalf of the Timok population from Serbia (Zbucea, G., Dobre, C. 2005,p.113). The document contained the essence of the Romanian population in north-eastern Serbia. The author of the memoir showed that, before 1912, Romanians had been present in four counties, which made up nearly one third of the old Serbia. Emphasis was laid on the continuity, respectively on the autochthony of the Romanians since the process of Romanisation, long before the Serbs appeared in the area. Subsequently, other Romanian brothers added up to these locals. Following an analysis of statistical data, it was stated that at least 340,000 Romanians lived in Serbia, but their presence was hidden by the authorities. It also presents the action of Serbisation and the vitality of the population there. The data shown were meant to inform and sensitise the Great Powers about the Timok population and convince the former to make a fair judgment on them. It also demanded inter alia, the recognition of the establishment of the Romanian ethnic group from Serbia as a legal person, as well as the equality of the Romanians and Serbs in administration, jurisdiction and equality in respect of the acquisition of real estate throughout the Serbian state. As far as the education system was concerned, there was a demand to introduce Romanian language as language of instruction in education, in the Romanian settlements.

The Governments in Belgrade, however, did not want to accept this status of the Romanians, which proved a total existence in this matter, a fact that, as we shall see, resulted in the issue of the recognition of the Romanians as a distinct ethnic group in Serbia being raised during World War II as well. It may be argued that the Banat Romanians, the Macedonians and the Timok population were treated as distinct minorities, a fact that managed to prevent their common national movement in the Yugoslav state. Of the three branches of Romanians in Yugoslavia, the most difficult situation was that of the Romanians from the Timok Valley, which were the most backward culturally. They did not benefit from the provisions of the Treaty on minorities, as the region they lived in had been part of Serbia prior to January 1, 1913 and therefore had no right to build their own churches and schools (Zbucea, G., Dobre, C., 2005, p.64). As a matter of fact, the Serbs were considered to have largely succeeded in the denationalization of the Romanian element from Timok by school and church.

1.1.1 The Romanians from Timok during the World War II

In 1939, when World War II started, the political map of Europe underwent major changes that did not spare Romania or Yugoslavia or any other region. Under complex circumstances, in the spring of 1941, Yugoslavia, which had existed for more than two decades, disappeared. The temporary disappearance of Yugoslavia from the political map was the result of both internal causality and the evolution of international relations, namely of the policies of the Great Powers. The territory of the former Yugoslavian state was divided into nine zones with different regimes. In the then context, Timok Valley, inhabited by Romanians, remained in the structure of the so-called Serbia, effectively controlled by Germany. It then began a new page, after all, a tragic one, in the history of the Timok Romanians, including in what concerned their reports with the German and Bulgarian occupiers, but also with their brethren of the same nation from the left of the Danube, as well as with the authorities in Bucharest.

The representatives of the Timok Romanians repeatedly tried to gain national rights. The last major attempt was a memoir that was left out of consideration by the authorities and, just like in the interwar period, a different regime for the Romanians in Yugoslav Banat, compared with those in Timok Valley, continued to be applied.

1.1.2 Integration of the Timok Vlachs in the Serbian State

The Council of Europe (to which Yugoslavia and Serbia belonged and still do) adopted several documents that tackled the issue of the minority rights (Băluțoiu, V., 2009, p. 17). Regarding the Romanians in the

Timok Valley, a problem was the failure of the Serbian state to recognize them as a minority. "Timok Romanians are on trial with the Serbian state because they are not recognized as a national minority. Of the 14 national minorities in Serbia, the Vlachs are the only ones that are not conferred recognition" (Băluțoiu, V., 2009, p.17). The explanations given by the Serbian authorities were puerile or motivated by delays due to legislative procedures. It was only in 2002 that the law for the protection of rights and freedoms of minorities was approved in Serbia. Among the first who established Councils, as legal and legitimate representatives, were the Romanians in Vojvodina. An explanation accepted by the ignored Romanian community is reflected in Serbia's key problems: the breakup of Yugoslavia and the later separation from Montenegro, the unresolved situation of Kosovo and Metohija, a large number of refugees living in Serbia.

The Law² on the protection of the rights and freedoms of national minorities was adopted in 2002 and is the basic law regulating the status of national minorities. It was adopted during the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but continued to exist in Serbia after the referendum in the spring of 2006, out of which Montenegro seceded from the state union. This law will remain in force until the Serbian Parliament adopts a new law on national minorities. On March 1, in Brussels, the permanent representatives of Romania and Serbia to the EU signed the Protocol on National Minorities, a condition imposed by Romania for its vote on the granting of the EU candidate status to Serbia.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis of the theme was carried out based on qualitative research which made use firstly of observation (observation of social life in its space-time totality) as a method that is precursory of the launch of the other instruments, sociological research and the study of the social documents. Documentation was an absolutely necessary step, with attention paid to all sectors of documentation: *bibliographic documentation, direct documentation in social and administrative – territorial units*. The bibliographic documentation that was necessary to perform the research was represented by the academic literature in sociology and ethnography. Both the national and the European contexts were taken into consideration, the bibliography being represented especially by: books, courses, studies and current articles from specialty literature.

The fieldwork started from the categorization of the types of research performed by Mihai Pop and Paul Ruxăndoiu, in Romanian Literary Folklore, where three basic types of research were distinguished, i.e. direct research, typological research and theoretical research. This research tried to offer a distinct typology of field research typical of the Timok Romanians, stressing the particularities of this area, which could significantly affect field surveys.

This phenomenon will be approached on several levels:

Ethnocultural heritage:

- traditions and values of folk culture stored in the oral memory of the community or materialized in cultural assets (folklore archives, folk art collections);

Current ethnographic and folkloric reality:

a) Context: milieux, groups and some special nuclei formed on the basis of kinship (family, nation), sex and age, related to certain occupations or with a folkloric role;

b) Folkloric life: customs, holidays etc.;

c) Folk creation: folklore crafts and types;

d) Carriers and performers of folk tradition and creation (craftsmen, folk life protagonists, bards, etc.)

The cultural and artistic activity grafted on folk tradition and creation: cultural institutions, artistic associations, traditional events etc.

Religious life – customs related to baptism, to weddings, funerals, feasts, the holidays of the village etc.

The research methodology will be structured around a few dominants:

- cumulation of an updated inventory of folk culture, in fact a fund of the future bank of data and values of

² Law on National Councils of National Minorities (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no.72 / 2009).

contemporary creation;

- record of the living reality, as a search for the identification of the elements specific of the social, cultural and religious life of the community from the Timok Valley.

3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Timok population lives in North-eastern Serbia and North-western Bulgaria, in 154 Romanian villages and 20 mixed ones, relatively compact Romanian, lying between the Danube, Morava and beyond Zaicear, on both banks of the Timok, as well as in 32 villages in the region of Vidin, in the Bulgarian Timok. Around Bor there are 11. They come from the proto-Romanian mass of the formation of the Romanian nation until the fifth century, before the coming of the Slavs, over whom new groups settled permanently, coming from north of the Danube, from Oltenia and Banat, a result of natural migration or of the refuge from the oppression of other times.

In ethnographic terms, the Romanian population in this area is divided into three categories, the ethno-folkloric differences between them being small: Pădureni, Văleni and Cămpeni. Ethnographically, the differences between the three groups of population from the Timok area (Pădureni, Văleni Cămpeni) are small, fading over time. In fact, there are several layers of Romanian population, a mixture made in the last four centuries. There is an old native Romanian population, in this area of the Romanian ethnogenesis, thinned and pressed by the Slavic population. Even today the Timok Romanians call Vidin after its ancient name, Dii (Țîrcomnicu, E., 2010).

Human settlements

In the unit studied, the Timok Valley, a first generation of attested settlements is represented by the settlements from the Roman period. However, the dating of some current settlements starts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Human settlements are documented in the Timok region in the fourteenth century as well. The year of the first known attestation of the village is noted, however, with its current name or with another name known by the local population. Many localities are older than the number of years mentioned, but there is no certainty over the year of foundation. Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, the settlements in Eastern Serbia were mentioned either in Turkish censuses or in the writings of scholars who strolled this land. Since the eighteenth century, more information has appeared on human settlements due to the making of cartographic documents with a more accurate and diversified content. The first maps for this area were made by the Austrians. In 1861 there appeared "The Ethnographic Map of European Turkey and of the Autonomous Vassal States", prepared by G. Lejean, which is a very valuable document in respect of the names of localities and their ethnic structure, Lejean supporting the element of Romanian presence in most settlements from the Timok Valley.

After 1833, from the moment of adding the entire region of the Timok and Morava to the Serbian state as a result of the denationalization policies, the names of the settlements begin to be modified officially, the General Headquarters maps showing that the region of Eastern Serbia is a land with many Serbian names. Currently, the administrative division of Serbia is on several levels, it being composed of the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo and central Serbia as an integral part of Serbia.

The Typology of Rural Settlements

Most villages in Eastern Serbia are located mainly in the fertile valleys of the waters that cross them, in the wide depressions between the mountains and then along the roads. They are part of the category of the crowded villages (Zecevic, S., 1970, p.34). For the land between the rivers Pek, Timok and Danube two rows of villages are met: one along the Danube River and the other hidden in the valleys of the rivers. Another category of villages is represented by the dispersed type, these being present on the smooth platforms of the mountains, where the estates, the abodes (huts) are met with, villages in the mountains having a mixed shape: a part piled in the dale, another one scattered on the heights around.

The Serbian geographer J. Cvijic studied the villages in the territory between the rivers Timok and Morava, saying they are the Timok type. He characterized the Timok village as one of the aggregate type, with a round, oval, sometimes irregular shape, with aggregate houses built of stone. The houses are placed next to one another, in the middle of the village there being space usually for the church, for an inn, or for the performance of the round dance ("kolo").

By the type of ethnographic groups, the Romanian settlements in Eastern Serbia region are divided into "Wallachian-Transylvanian" settlements and "peasant settlements". As can be seen, the settlements of the former are dominant, mostly located west of the mountains Miroč, Veliki Graben, Deli Jovan, up towards the

Morava basin. There are mountain villages, the inhabitants' main occupation being farming.

The Traditions and Spiritual Life of the Vlachs

Due to a complex ethnogenesis and limited influence of the church, almost non-existent in the Morava-Timok region, many pre-Christian elements have survived over time, the spiritual life of the local population being an archaic and diverse one. The spiritual life of the Romanians in the study area, composed of oral and musical traditions, customs, beliefs and magical rites, often has strong pre-Christian roots.

The Eastern Serbia region is extremely rich in traditions which play an important role even today in the daily life of the inhabitants. There are no such events that are not accompanied by proper traditions, these being some traditional rules of behaviour arising from experience and habit which, like the laws, although not written, lead from the shadow the entire society and represent an ethical feature essential to any ethnic community.

Customs Related to Childbirth. They constitute an important series of practices and customs which are centred around the entrance of a new creature into this world, being meant to help the child integrate in its family, nation and rural community. The customs and superstitions accompany the child from conception until its Christianization. Dr. Slobodan Zecevic stated that: "There are some habits regarding the actual act of the birth: the new-born must be put in contact from its birth with the ground that confers its vital force on it; these are the traces of the prehistoric culture of Mother Earth" (Zecevic, S., 1970, pp.43-44). The habits related to birth involve several important milestones: the Fates, baptism, cutting the tassel, lifting the child to the girder of the house. At birth, midwifery is more important than godparenting. The first bath of the new-born is also given by the midwife three days after its birth. Holy water and a few sprigs of basil are put in the water at the first bath, this protecting the new-born against evil. Customs of child protection: protection of the new-born was continuous because "nobody knew where evil can come from". There were rituals of protection the mother had to take into account. The most frequent evil that could affect the child was the evil eye. Incantations were used as a treatment for children's diseases. "Ursatuarele-Ursatorile" (the Fates) represents a special moment of the integration of the new-born in the temporal world. Godparenting has an important significance for the family. The right to choose the name belonged exclusively to the godfather. Godparenting is hereditary, handed down from father to son, and in the case of marriages where the boy goes to the girl's house, as the son-in-law of the house, from the father-in-law to the son-in-law and the daughter. Moreover, the godfather is the one who cuts the child's tassel – the first haircut.

Customs Related to the Wedding. These habits are a complex ceremony that marks, in a festive manner, the change of a young couple's existence. Even today, in the villages from Eastern Serbia, the wedding comprises many ritual moments which govern the "transition" from one stage to another, the moment of starting a family for the purpose of procreation, of starting a new life cycle. The wedding was held in autumn, when the wine began to seethe, or, at the latest, in a week or a month after this moment. The wedding day was Sunday, possibly Thursday. The wedding was not held on Saturdays because Saturday was "the Day of the dead". Wedding invitations were usually made by both in-laws, together or each to their wedding guests, about a month before the wedding.

Customs Related to Burials. The funerary rite and the cult of the dead is perhaps the most important part of the spiritual life of people in this region. It is a very developed one, "being one of the spiritual attributes characteristic of the Vlach population, while for other population groups, the custom of celebrating the feast of the village Slava is the key moment during the year (National Museum Zaječar, 2011, p.42). The deep faith in life after death developed a series of burial customs at the Romanians from Eastern Serbia, according to which the dead man's soul will not find rest in the next world unless all the rituals are respected. These start from the moment of death and last until after the funeral. In Eastern Serbia, even today it is believed that death is announced by signs. Among the strongest signs foreshadowing death to a person are the song of the cuckoo and of the owl in the yard or near the house, the appearance of a bear in a dream, being called by a dead person in one's dreams.

Customs Related to the Calendar - Folk calendar was very well preserved by the Romanians here, mostly due to the area (hills and mountains), where empowerment is still very little visible, the economic activities performed even today being the same: farming and working the land.

The farmer in this area still knows quite well the periods that are unfavourable and favourable for field work and knows how to differentiate between the working and the non-working weekdays. The same calendar tells the celebration days and the days of fasting. Such a calendar provides the human being's touch with nature, as well as with divinity.

After the study done in the Krajina of Negotin, Slobodan Zecevic noted that: "if about popular beliefs we can say that they are the consequence of a false relationship between cause and effect that leads us to the realm of imagination, popular knowledge on the other hand is based on empirical observations. Applying the latter is primarily found in folk medicine, as well as in meteorology, astronomy (determination of weather after the position of celestial bodies) and in other opportunities related to everyday life" (Zecevic, S., 1970, p. 46).

In the popular beliefs from here, weekdays have a great influence on human life. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday are considered to be the good days. Saturday is the day of the dead and is best suited for alms. According to the belief, it is the hardest for people who are born on Tuesdays, who will see supernatural phenomena, miracles and will confront with many troubles throughout their lives, and those who are born on Fridays will be unhappy in life and will always encounter misfortune. Sunday is the day when people do not work as this day represents the Day of the earth.

Each season has its specific holidays, most rules are still followed scrupulously, otherwise there is a risk of unintended consequences. Some celebrations are found in the Orthodox calendar (Serbia uses the old calendar, the Gregorian one, which is 13 days behind the Julian one), others are kept alive in public memory by transmission from generation to generation.

Folk Culture: Folk Music and Costume. Vlach culture is unique and very interesting because it is one of the oldest cultures and one that is preserved nowadays as well. Vlach culture, like other peoples' cultures, is a set of symbolic systems, at the forefront of which there lie language, matrimonial rules, economic relations, art, religion (Otovescu, D., 2010, p.46). Society and culture are in a relationship of interdependency, they are two distinct relationships that cannot function one without the other. The Vlachs acquire their own culture and learn to pass it on from one generation to another, keeping their cultural particularities through music, language, traditions etc.

Songs were extremely important, music and poetry having forms and meanings of unusual richness in the Romanian village from Eastern Serbia. Songs understood as music and poetry or chanted verse constitute an indescribable organic unit. Songs can be divided into worldly songs, which include lyrical songs and epic songs, and ritual songs. The themes of the lyrical songs are very broad, they sing about the beauty of love, hidden secrets of love, about longing for family and other topics. Epic songs had texts with a different thematic content, the typical one from this category being the ballad.

Dancing songs were expressions of the inner rhythm, songs connected to dancing, the round dance being identified with a game. The dance was learnt from an early age. Village feasts were the place where and the moment when the human being was able to free itself and escape from daily hardships. This is the reason why celebrations and round dances were organized very often, they having a strong social function. It was during these meetings that the young people were introduced one to another, displayed their clothing and were remarked for their dancing skills.

Folk costume. The folk costume is an important feature that characterizes an ethnic group and contributes to a better understanding of the tradition and popular culture of that group. The region from the East of Central Serbia is considered by specialists and not only as one of the most interesting regions in the Balkans, both ethnically and ethnologically (National Museum Zaječar, 2011,p.38). The co-existence of Romanian and Serbian nationalities from the Timok Valley has resulted in a wealth and variety of the elements from the traditional dress. In the traditional costume of the Vlachs in the region, characterized by archaic elements, the ethnologist Slobodan Zecevic finds a few small differences, given, as is but natural, by the areas they live in, the costumes of the "Ungureni" Romanians, that is the costumes of the inhabitants of mountainous areas, also called mountaineers, have several elements in addition to those of the peasants who live in the plains. But all costumes have characteristics in common: pieces of white cotton clothing, belts with typical ornaments, meticulous seams, peasant's sandals. The clothing, as well as every object for the house, was made in the past by women, it was homespun, the population relying completely on their own resources.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Because of the processes experienced by Serbia in recent decades, the country has been affected by a deep political, social and economic crisis, with influences on the study area as well, with tendencies of depopulation of the region, especially through emigration to the European states. The Romanian identity has much diminished since the period after World War II.

Generically called "Krajina of Serbia" or "Timok Valley", demographically, the region is today a mixture of

Serbian and Romanian population, without being able to exactly specify the number of Romanians.

This region of Eastern Serbia is extremely rich in traditions that play an important role in the life of its inhabitants even in present times. Many rites are still practised today, while others only survive in the memory of the elders. The habits of the Vlachs from this region are characterized by a terminological, structural-phenomenological and symbolic unity that is extremely high.

Unfortunately, the spiritual life of the Romanians from the Morava-Timok area did not enjoy the attention which would be due to it; in almost all studies printed in Romania there are a few pages about the customs and folklore of this community, but so far, no large-scale scientific work about this community of Romanians lying between the Valley of Morava and the Valley of Timok has been published.

It was found that the type, the dialects, the costume, the customs, the traditions and all manifestations of life resemble those of Romanians from Oltenia, Wallachia and Banat. Although this region was visited by a number of researchers over the past two centuries, it is extremely rich in ethnocultural terms.

As the area studied is an extremely traditional one, it constitutes a real ethnographic archive, a true living museum, where you can meet and collect customs and traditions that have long disappeared elsewhere. The region in Eastern Serbia keeps new elements arising both from the capitalisation of the resources specific of the mountain and from the pastoral customs and culture transmitted across the generations.

Although they were almost always deprived of churches and schools to cultivate their ethnic knowledge, the Romanians from the study area never lost their ancient speech and customs, not even after hundreds of years, these being almost identical to those from Oltenia, a fact that demonstrates their belonging to the Romanian nation.

“The Vlachs in the Valley of the Timok are Romanian. This fact is sustained by a series of arguments: Romanian ethnogenesis also took place on the territory inhabited by them, the language spoken by the Vlachs is the Romanian language, there is a similarity of customs and traditions, etc.” (Băluțoiu, V., 2009, p.16).

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