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## **When in the Balkans, Do as the Romans Do —Or Why the Present is the Wrong Key to the Past**

The history of the Balkans is mostly written as the history of the Balkan nations, especially in the historiography of the Balkan states themselves. This approach produces textbooks and national multi-volume history works that transfer a sense of national identity to ever new generations, but it also gives a skewed perspective on the past and hinders a proper understanding of the past in its own terms. National historiography stresses ethno-linguistic continuity as the main fabric of history and leads to empty quarrels about the ownership of ancient symbols and personalities, such as the violent megalomaniac Alexander the Great, whom both the Greeks and the Macedonians claim as part of “their” history. It also sees the present nation-states (at least the particular nation-state of each native historian themselves) as the necessary and predestined outcome of historical processes.

One of the three paradoxes of nationalism mentioned in Anderson’s (2006 [1983], 5) influential study is “[t]he objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.” Although Anderson’s main argument of ethno-national consciousness being an essentially modern phenomenon is largely accepted in specialized studies of nationalism, it has not influenced the paradigm of national historiography in the Balkans to any significant degree. The newly independent Balkan states of the 19th century, such as Greece and Serbia, and later Romania and Bulgaria, were among the first states in the world that were ideologically based upon ethno-linguistic (as opposed to state-centered) nationalism, but their rise is still commonly described as a “national revival”, that is, a return to the imagined national identity and glory of the past.

In what follows I try to argue for an alternative view of understanding the age of “national revivals” in the Balkans as an age of *constructing*, not

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*reviving* ethno-linguistic consciousness. National identities in the Balkans, as elsewhere, I see as socially constructed institutions in the sense described by Berger and Luckmann (1967) in their classic book. Among the Christian population of the Balkans before the age of “national revivals” there were no various oppressed national identities to be revived, but a common and relative stable system of cultural values centered around the so-called Romaic identity.

My main sources of inspiration were the writings of the Ghent historian Raymond Detrez (2008; 2010), to which I try to add some linguistic arguments. I join Detrez in seeing the life and work of the Ohrid-born author Grigor Prličev (1830–1893) as a particularly apt illustration of what the breakup of the Romaic community meant at an individual level. My article should also be read in conjunction with, and as a complement to, Max Wahlström’s article in this volume.

### **1. Linguistic Constellations in the Romaic Community**

The medieval East Roman Empire, known as Byzantium in later scholarship, was not an ethnically based state. Its Greek-speaking citizens did not call themselves “Greeks” or “Hellenes”, which would have identified them as “pagans” (meaning ‘country people’ > ‘non-Christians’), but as “Romans” (Ρωμαίοι; Haldon 2010, 15–16). In the Ottoman Empire, “Roman” (Ρωμαίος or Ρωμιός) was the word used of a ‘Balkan Orthodox Christian’. The European part of the empire was called *Rumeli* (as opposed to the Asian part *Anadolu*, Sugar 1977, 35), and the self-governing confessional community of all Orthodox Christians was called *Millet-i Rûm* in Ottoman Turkish, which can be translated as “the Roman nation”—but without the modern connotations of “nation”.

Even in English, the adjective *Romaic* has occasionally been used to refer to modern Greeks and their language. What is important to note, though, is that the Romaic community was not ethnically Greek; it was not ethnically based at all. It included not only ethnic Greeks but also Slavs, Albanians, and Vlachs (speakers of Balkan Romance), who were Orthodox Christians and used Greek as their language of higher culture. In Bulgarian lands, for instance, 1,115 different books in Greek circulated between 1750 and 1840, but only 52 Bulgarian book titles are known from the same period (Detrez 2010, 60, quoting Manjo Stojanov). In later Bulgarian historiography, the Bulgarian readers (and writers!) of books in Greek have often been seen as a “Hellenized” intelligentsia that consisted, in the best case, of misguided

individuals and, in the worst case, of traitors to the national cause. But this means attributing an ethnic character to a community that did not possess it at that time.

Raymond Detrez (2008) has convincingly argued that the Romaic community of the Ottoman Empire in the era before the modern national movements can be considered to have been a kind of proto-nation,<sup>2</sup> with several characteristics that later became associated with nations proper. It had a common name Ρωμαίοι ‘Romans’ and a common cultural identity ρωμιοσύνη ‘Romanity’; the ethnic name Ἕλληνες ‘Hellenes’ began to be used for Greeks only towards the end of the 18th century. The Bulgarians used the word *grāk* (pl. *gārci*) ‘Greek’, to be sure, but it often had a non-ethnic meaning of ‘a wealthy city-dweller, burgher’ (Detrez 2008, 156–157). The Romaic proto-nation was associated with a definite territory, that of the Ottoman Empire (Orthodox Christians outside the Empire were not called “Romans”), it had a common religion and a common language of higher culture, and it had common administrative institutions in the Roman *Millet*.

From the vantage point of modern non-Greek national histories, the Romaic community is often described as a manifestation of Greek hegemony over other Christian Balkan nations. However, the later Hellenic, that is to say, ethnically Greek national consciousness, was not its direct continuation; instead this new consciousness was, in the words of Socrates D. Petmezas (1999, 51), “as an imagined community [...] constituted at its expense.” The use of the Greek language did of course favor its native speakers, as the use of any ethnic language as a lingua franca always does, but it did not entail the assimilation of other ethnic groups into any kind of Greek ethnicity.

Greek as a language of higher culture was not completely opposed to all vernaculars inside the Romaic community. Both Ecclesiastic Greek and Church Slavonic were used as sacred languages, and the Greek-speaking hierarchy did not try to hinder the use of Church Slavonic before the 19th century (Detrez 2008, 160). As for the written Greek used by the learned, it

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<sup>2</sup> Detrez’s concept of “proto-nation” is inspired by Hobsbawm’s (1992, 46–79) notion of “popular proto-nationalism”. Detrez defines “proto-nation” not only as something that later became a nation but as a stable entity in itself: “In order for the essence of the proto-nation to be fully comprehended, it has to be considered as a social formation in itself, with members exhibiting their specific identity—and not as a historical community that is transitional or marked by the absence of a national consciousness and whose essence is defined by what it is only going to be, i.e., a nation, and which deserves attention for that reason only” (Detrez 2008, 154, my transl.).

was opposed not only to vernacular Slavic, Albanian, and Vlach, but also to vernacular Greek (Horrocks 2010, 413–427). All these vernaculars could be written with the Greek alphabet, especially in Macedonia, where Cyrillic letters were no longer known even among the Slavic clergy (Lindstedt 2008b: 395–396).

This sociolinguistic situation is graphically seen in the manuscript of the *Konikovo Gospel*, a handwritten bilingual evangelarium (Gospel lectionary for Sunday services) created by an anonymous scholar in Southern Macedonia in the late 18th or early 19th century (Lindstedt, Spasov & Nuorluoto, eds., 2008). Each page has in its left column a Greek text, which is a translation of the New Testament *koiné* into vernacular Greek. This translation follows the vernacular Greek New Testament published in Halle in 1710 by Anastasias Michail of Naousa, or possibly its republication in a slightly modified form a century later in 1810 (Leiwo 2008). The right column on each page contains a line-by-line Slavic translation, written in Greek letters, of this vernacular Greek text into an Aegean Macedonian dialect of the Lower Vardar type.

The Slavic Macedonian text of the *Konikovo Gospel* is thus a translation not directly of the official Greek New Testament, but of its vernacular version. The manuscript contains two vernacular versions in parallel and shows how vernacular Greek and vernacular Slavic were regarded as being on the same level, as opposed to the high variety of official written Greek used by the Church, and also to Church Slavonic. What is more surprising is that the manuscript seems to have been actually used as a liturgical book. This is apparent not only by its beautiful layout, the use of red ink in titles and initials, and the liturgical instructions (in Greek), but also by the fact that the manuscript has been damaged by much use, as shown by numerous stains of candle wax and oil, and by the worn bottom right-hand corners of the folia from the turning of pages. We cannot know which of the two vernaculars was used when chanting the New Testament readings in the Divine Liturgy, but even if it was the Greek text, this must have been a radical step given the negative attitude of the Church authorities towards the use of the Greek vernacular (Leiwo 2008, 249–250). Vernaculars were more or less on a par with each other, including the Greek vernacular, because the Romaic community was not ethnically Greek.

Other Macedonian vernacular Gospels, such as the *Kulakia Gospel* (Mazon & Vaillant 1938), were translated directly from the official Greek New Testament (Lindstedt 2008b, 397), but they did not include the original

of the translation itself as the Konikovo Gospel did. However, an interesting parallel to the Konikovo Gospel is the bilingual Greek and Albanian New Testament printed in Corfu in 1827. It was originally translated by Vangel Meksi (Evangelos Meksikos, died ca. 1823) and later edited for print by Grigor Gjirokastriti, who became the Archbishop of Athens under the name Grigorios Argyrokastritis (Elsie 1991; Fiedler 2006, 65; cf. also Mazon & Vaillant 1938, 13). This New Testament is the first extensive Albanian text in the Tosk dialect. The Greek and Albanian texts of Meksi and Gjirokastriti's Gospel, both in Greek letters, have been arranged in two columns as in the Konikovo Gospel, and the Greek text is basically the same version in the vernacular (Lindstedt 2008b, 398, 402). Here we again meet the Greek vernacular on a par with another Balkan vernacular.

An interesting three-column arrangement of languages can be found in *Petre Kavajof's trilingual notebook*, written in 1839 in the Macedonian town of Struga. Georgievski (2003) published it in facsimile with an incomplete linguistic analysis. The notebook, written for the study of Greek, contains Old Greek sentences in the first column, translated word by word into Modern Greek and local Macedonian in the parallel second and third columns, respectively. The differences in the Greek versions in the first and second columns is at times minimal, and I leave the more precise characterization of their language varieties for a Greek scholar; the labels "Old Greek" (*starogrčki*) and "Modern Greek" (*novogrčki*) are suggested by Georgievski (2003, 15). But what is interesting is that Modern Greek and Macedonian are both used in the notebook as explanations of and tools for learning the Classical Greek text. Again, Modern Greek appears as one among the vernaculars of the Balkans.

A well-known apparent counterexample to my analysis is presented by Daniel of Moschopolis's Greek book *Introductory Instruction, Containing a Quadrilingual Lexicon of the Four Common Dialects, That Is, Simple Romaic, the Wallachian of Moesia, Bulgarian, and Albanian*, published in 1802 (Daniil 1802; Ničev 1977; Friedman 2008, 387–388; Cuvata 2002). Daniel, a Vlach by birth, tells us that the aim of his book is to make the Vlachs, Bulgarians, and Albanians speakers of Romaic, that is, Greek (Daniil 1802, 7). Clogg (1976, 91) translates the key passage into English as follows:

Albanians, Wallachians, Bulgarians, speakers of other tongues, rejoice,  
And ready yourselves all to become Greeks,  
Abandoning your barbaric tongue, speech and customs,

So that to your descendants they may appear as myths.  
Honour your nations, together with your motherlands,  
Making the Albanian and Bulgarian motherlands Greek.  
It is no longer difficult to learn Greek [...]

Detrez (2008, 164–165) rightly points out that later in the same poem, Daniel also emphasizes the purely practical value of the Greek language in trade and other professions, but this does not explain away the beginning passage where Albanian, Bulgarian, and Wallachian (Aromanian) are called “Barbaric” languages (“Βαρβαρικὴν ... γλῶσσαν”; cf. also Wahlström in this volume). It is true that the quadrilingual part of Daniel’s book (the famous *Lexicon Tetraglosson*, though it is not really a lexicon or dictionary but a kind of phrase book) at least assumes that the speakers of those three languages know how to read their mother tongues (in Greek letters) and, therefore, does not confine literacy to Greek. But the fact remains that for Daniel, the Greek language was much more valuable than the Balkan vernaculars. Ironically, Daniel’s command of Greek was rather weak, and his textbook abounds with all kinds of grammatical mistakes, partly interference from his native Aromanian (Ničev 1977, 43–46).

Although the *Lexicon Tetraglosson* is arranged in four vertical columns for the four languages and is therefore graphically similar to the bilingual and trilingual works discussed above, Daniel’s book differs from them in that it does not make a conscious distinction between the high and low varieties of Greek; rather, the author seems to inappropriately mix different varieties in his text (Ničev 1977, 43). Therefore, this text glorifying Greek and belittling other Balkan languages comes from a man who did not know Greek sufficiently to fully understand its diglossia. For the anonymous author of the Konikovo Gospel, as for Grigor Gjirokastriti and for Petre Kavajof, the Balkan vernaculars had at least some value because they could be written in Greek letters and placed on a par with vernacular Greek, though not with the high variety of Greek. This way of valorizing the vernaculars through Greek diglossia was not open for Daniel of Moschopolis because he seems to have had a more monolithic view of Greek. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that he downplayed his native Aromanian not because he had studied too much Greek, but because he knew too little of it.

As pointed out by Detrez (2008, 165–166), before the birth of independent Greece (1830) and the construction of a national Greek identity in the 1840s, the Greek language was not ethnically marked in the Balkans.

It would, however, be an exaggeration to assume that a harmonious Greek and vernacular bilingualism reigned all over the Balkans—the more so as the role of Turkish must also be taken into account and, at the other end of the prestige scale, Romani was not used in writing at all. It certainly was an advantage to be born as a native speaker of Greek, and in the long run a significant number of speakers of other Balkan languages would have shifted to Greek if the Ottoman Empire had been preserved. This is what actually happened to a great number of Vlachs or Aromanians (Mackridge 2012). But there was no significant movement of “Hellenization” in the Ottoman Empire before the 19th century, in the sense of consciously depriving other Balkan people of their national identities.

## **2. The Breakup of the Romaic Identity: The Case of Grigor Prličev**

The Greek national movement arose earlier than that of the other Christian peoples of the Balkans. What Petmezas (1999) calls the “new radical republican intelligentsia” replaced the earlier proto-nationalist Romaic identity with a new nationalist Hellenic identity in the four decades preceding the birth of independent Greece (1790–1830). A great number of Bulgarians took part in the Greek national movement and in the War of Greek Independence in the 1820s (Sampimon 2006, 55–91).

The first representatives of the strictly Bulgarian cultural revival and national education, such as Petăr Beron (1799–1871; see Wahlström in this volume) and Najden Gerov (1823–1900), were born much later than the first representative of the Greek Enlightenment, Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), and the first important Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi Sava Rakovski (1821–1867) was born in the year of the first Greek armed revolts (Daskalov 2004, 178). It is true that the Bulgarian national revival is often seen to have begun with the writing of the *Slavo-Bulgarian History* (1762) by the monk Paisij Hilendarski (1722–1773), but his work spread only in handwritten copies, had little influence in its own time, and did not formulate any national political program (Daskalov 2004, 104).<sup>3</sup>

The birth of independent Greece made Greek a language of a nation-state, jeopardizing the Romaic identity even in lands that remained in the Ottoman Empire. In the 1830s, the Greeks and the Slavs (Bulgarians and Macedonians) started to come into conflict in the Orthodox Church, but the

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<sup>3</sup> “The puzzle is that the oeuvre of Paisii (in 1762) stands in isolation, being some sixty years ahead of Bulgarian development, both social-economic advance and the spread of national ideas” (Daskalov 2004, 157).

final breakup of the Romaic identity took decades. In 1860, in Istanbul, the Bulgarian bishop Ilarion Makariopolski for the first time publicly prayed in the Divine Liturgy for the Sultan, not for the Patriarch of Constantinople (Crampton 2005, 69–71). Ten years later, in 1870, Sultan Abdülaziz approved the Bulgarian Exarchate as the first nationally based Church organization in the Balkans.

The Exarchate was the first modern Bulgarian national institution that defined the boundaries of the nascent nation; before that, there was no administrative unit which could have been called “Bulgaria” (Lindstedt, forthcoming). Local Slavic church communities (*obštini*) were partly allowed to decide for themselves whether to join the Exarchate or whether to remain in the Patriarch-led church (Nikov 1971 [1929], 222–254; Istorija 2004, 651).

The establishment of a Bulgarian national church organization soon caused a schism in the Orthodox Church, because the Patriarch-led church administration did not accept the secession of the Bulgarian Exarchate. Macedonia witnessed bitter strife between the “Patriarchists” and the “Exarchists”, and the dividing line did not always follow the ethnic or linguistic identity of the faithful. Even brothers of the same family could assume different identities—Greek, Bulgarian, or Ottoman (cf. Mackridge 2012 on the Vogoridis family). As pointed out by Lory (2005, 181), this schism alienated one part of the Macedonian Slavs from the Bulgarian national movement. Some of the educated Slavs preferred to maintain a Romaic identity—that is to say, they wanted to remain part of the Greek-speaking civilization without necessarily adopting a Greek ethnic identity, but in the struggle among national identities no one would be able to remain neutral in the long run. Mazower (2004, 269) quotes the answer the British journalist H. N. Brailsford received in 1903 when he asked a wealthy peasant in the market of Monastir (present-day Bitola in Macedonia) whether his home village was Greek or Bulgarian: “Well, it is Bulgarian now but four years ago it was Greek.” Today, it would probably define itself as Macedonian.

As a general picture, the Slavic national movements in the Balkans both copied Greek nationalism and reacted against it, and the Albanian national movement reacted to all of these (Mackridge 2012). Although various Albanian tribes had fought against the Ottoman central government as early as in the 18th century, a modern national movement of all Albanians did not rise before the 1870s, when it became clear that the lands inhabited by

Albanians would otherwise be divided among Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro (Hösch 2008, 157). This can be compared to the development in the Habsburg Monarchy where the division of the empire into a German-speaking Austrian and an autonomous Hungarian part (the *Ausgleich* of 1867) pushed the Slavs of the empire to develop their own national identities. The Ottoman Balkans did actually not lag behind Central Europe in the realization of a nationalist agenda—on the contrary, the Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians acquired their nation-states long before the Hungarians and the West Slavs (Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks).

The breakup of the Romaic identity and model of civilization can be very concretely observed in the life of the Macedonian Slavic writer Grigor Prličev, also known as a Greek author by the name Grigorios Stavridis (1830/1831–1893; see Prličev 1894; 2004; Detrez 2010; Dimitrovski 2004). He was born in Ohrid, Macedonia, where the upper class had a strong Romaic identity at that time; at his death (1893), the Macedonian Slavs were oriented towards independent Bulgaria, and not much “Romaicity” (ρωμοσύνη) remained. His literary career spans the era of the decline of cultural unity in the *Millet i-Rûm* and the rise of new national identities, and he actually never found an identity and community in which to place his literary production, which was written first in Greek and then in Slavic.

As a child in Ohrid, Prličev received a good primary education and learned to write excellent Greek—in his autobiography (Prličev 1894, 362) he states that he finally mastered literary Greek better than many a native speaker of the language. After reaching adulthood, he worked as a schoolteacher in Tirana and then went to Athens, the new capital of the Kingdom of Greece, in order to study medicine. The arrival in independent Greece was a great experience for him:

When [...] we had crossed the border between Turkey and Greece, a Greek trader, my fellow traveler, dismounted from his horse and kissed the soil. “We have trodden upon Hellenic ground,” he said.—My God! How red this ground is!—Yes! Because it is saturated with blood! I immediately made some verses, which I also declaimed with a prophetic inspiration. My intoxication intensified when I first saw the famous Parthenon from a distance. (Prličev 1894, 361, my translation; “Parthenon” written in Greek letters in the Bulgarian original)

Prličev never completed his studies of medicine but continued to write. In 1860, in Athens, he won the first prize in a state literary competition with his epic poem *Ὁ Ἀρματολός* (‘The Militiaman’). In small literary circles he was praised as a “new Homer,” but many ethnic Greeks despised him for his origins and non-native accent. He returned to his native Ohrid as a teacher.

In 1868, Prličev switched the language of instruction in his Ohrid school from Greek to Bulgarian and came into conflict with the local Greek-speaking clergy. However, to the end of his life he considered himself to be “weak in the Bulgarian language” (Prličev 1894, 399), meaning the Bulgarian standard language. His native Ohrid dialect was rather different from those East Bulgarian dialects upon which the emerging Modern Bulgarian standard language was being constructed, and today the Ohrid dialect is of course regarded as part of another language, Macedonian.

Representatives of the Bulgarian Reading-Room in Istanbul soon asked Prličev to translate the Iliad into Bulgarian. It was a natural request given his excellent knowledge of Greek, but he was unsure of his Bulgarian. In fact, he made use of a Greek-Russian dictionary and read Russian poetry in preparation for the translation. The first published parts of the translation were criticized for their bad Bulgarian, and Prličev burned this first version. In his autobiography he then gives an example of his second attempt, translated in “another style,” using “all cases and participles.” The example is written in an odd mixture of Bulgarian and Russian—Bulgarian and Macedonian had lost their case declension and the old participles almost completely hundreds of years earlier, so these grammatical forms were known to Prličev only through Russian. “I know,” he writes, “that this translation does not smell much like Bulgarian; but because I am weak in Bulgarian, it could not have become different” (Prličev 1894, 400). By using Russian forms he tried to create a kind of Slavic equivalent of Ancient Greek: “From day to day the spirit of the Russian language became more familiar to me, and as I could not write in Bulgarian, I began to write in Old Bulgarian” (ibid.).

After the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, Ohrid received a Slavic bishop, Metropolitan Natanail. Prličev wrote an ode praising Natanail upon his arrival (Prličev 1894, 400–401). But the two men soon came into conflict for reasons that are not clear in Prličev’s autobiography. He was first transferred to another school and then expelled from his position as a teacher in Ohrid altogether. He comments bitterly:

It was so strange: both my native country,<sup>4</sup> which never and nowhere values its sons, and the Greek bishop Meletios, my most implacable enemy, tolerated my lessons, sermons, complaints, and reproaches for 18 long years, and they never

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<sup>4</sup> In the original, *otečestvoto*; later in the same sentence expressed with the synonym *tatkovinătă*. Prličev did not mean the whole of Bulgaria or Macedonia, but only the town of Ohrid (cf. Detrez 2010, 58).

expelled me, but the first Bulgarian bishop Natanail, the long-awaited Messiah, shamefully expelled Prličev from his native country! (Prličev 1894, 402; my translation)

Prličev wrote his autobiography in Bulgarian in 1884–1885 as a teacher of the Bulgarian Male High School in Thessaloniki. It appeared posthumously in 1894 in Sofia, in the new Principality of Bulgaria—not as *Avtoviografija* in the Greek fashion as he had named it, but as *Avto-biografija*, and with the Greek-style punctuation corrected to Slavic (Prličev 1894, 346). The modest stance of the text does not conceal the bitterness of a talented man who tried to affirm himself first as a Greek author, then as a Bulgarian author, but was rejected by the cultural leaders of both communities.

Raymond Detrez (2010, 53) writes that Prličev “remained all his life an outsider” and defines his personal tragedy as follows:

After the Orthodox Christian community was replaced with communities marked by ethnic nationalism, be it Greek or Bulgarian, Pärličev<sup>5</sup> had become an ‘emigrant’ in a particular sense of the word: A person who did not move to another country, but feels alienated and confused in his or her own country[,] the moral, religious, political and aesthetic value systems of which have radically changed. (Detrez 2010, 61)

Prličev can thus be seen as a Ρωμαιοίς born tragically too late: in the old Romaic community he would have become a prominent community member, but the new reality divided among national movements did not have a place for him. Detrez (2010, 53) compares him with a writer in exile: “Pärličev ultimately continued to identify himself with the pre-national multiethnic Orthodox Christian community in the Balkans rather than with a particular ethnic or national community.” This may be an exaggeration because we do not have any evidence that Prličev regretted joining the Bulgarian national movement, despite feeling unjustly treated by some of its leaders. After all, Bulgarian (or Macedonian, from the present point of view) was his native language, and he was never ashamed of his background. He also wanted to enrich the Bulgarian standard language with Slavic elements taken from Russian. But his autobiography does show an emotional

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<sup>5</sup> Detrez uses the Bulgarian spelling of Prličev’s name (instead of the modern Macedonian spelling) and defines him as “a Bulgarian from Ohrid” (Detrez 2010, 53). This is certainly how Prličev himself would have wished to be defined, at least later in his life. But Detrez does not deny the *present* existence of the Macedonian nation and ethnic identity, as many Bulgarians do; in fact, Detrez has criticized the Bulgarians for still suffering from a historical “hangover” in the Macedonian question (Detrez 2009).

attachment to the Greek language—an attachment that the new reality required him to half-heartedly renounce.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Dismantling the Discourse of “National Revival”

Why is it then that the Bulgarian national historiography of today still sees Priličev’s Greek sympathies as a delusion—and that Macedonian historiography as well sees his Bulgarian sympathies in the same way (cf. Detrez 2010, 61)? On what basis are the histories of the “national revivals” in the Balkans entitled to attribute false consciousness to past historical personalities who did not subscribe to the present national identities?

In my recent attempt to analyze the conflicting national discourses about language boundaries in the Balkans (Lindstedt, forthcoming), I have identified three false premises that give the wrong keys to history: the essentialist fallacy, the primordialist fallacy, and the fallacy of objective language boundaries. They pertain to various nationalist discourses in the Balkans, especially to those directly or indirectly connected with language as an essential part of ethnic identity.

The *essentialist fallacy* assumes that an identity is based upon the objectively observable properties of people and can therefore be contrary to what they say and think themselves. In reality, ethno-linguistic identities are social constructs and, at ethnic, linguistic, or cultural boundaries, these identities are even a matter of free choice. Especially when ethnic boundaries are being constructed in a historical process, people choose their identities and do not only passively acquire them (this is also the main thesis of Mackridge 2012 discussing the Hellenic / Greek identity).

The *primordialist fallacy* is linked to Anderson’s first paradox of nationalism, which was mentioned at the beginning of this article. Primordialism considers a long historical continuity and distinctness to be both necessary and sufficient conditions for a nation to exist. Therefore, the nation-building processes of the late 18th and 19th centuries had to, and still have to, be depicted as revivals of the medieval tsardoms for the Balkan Slavs, and of the Byzantine Empire or even older entities for the Greeks.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mackridge’s (2012) conclusion: “It is probable that if Parlichev had been born a generation earlier, he would have remained an active propagandizer of Greek culture rather than simply retaining an emotional attachment to Ancient Greek poetry; yet if he had been born two generations later, he would no doubt have become a Macedonian nationalist.”

This always presupposes a selective view of history—the various past realms with the name “Bulgaria”, for instance, did not have a single square kilometer in common, so the ideologists of the Bulgarian national revival had to choose which past Bulgaria they would try to revive. (In fact, they finally simply defined the territory of the ecclesiastic jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Exarchate as “Bulgaria”; see Lindstedt, forthcoming.) Of course, the medieval realms functioned as a real inspiration for the “national awakeners”, such as Paisij Hilendarski, who was mentioned above, just as Antiquity served as an inspiration for the European Renaissance. But this historical continuity was a social construct, not a pre-given historical fact.

Finally, the *fallacy of objective language boundaries* assumes that every language is defined by an objective set of features that are shared by all of its dialects. Thus, entities such as “the Bulgarian language”, “the Macedonian language”, “the Romanian language”, or “the Albanian language” are seen as something which *acquired* a standard language, not as something that *were defined by* the constructed common standards. The dispute between the Bulgarians and the Macedonians on whether Prličev’s native language was Bulgarian or Macedonian, or what language the Slavic column represented in the *Lexicon Tetraglosson* by Daniel of Moschopolis, cannot be solved because both sides think there is only one correct answer to this question. A similar question would be whether Daniel’s native Aromanian was a dialect of Romanian or a language in its own right. A further complication comes from the view that a person can only belong to one language community, and that the artistic use of a language other than one’s native tongue (as in Prličev’s case) implies false consciousness.

On the other hand, not all Balkan languages are, in Kloss’s (1967) terms, only *Ausbau* languages (“languages by development”), but many of them are also *Abstand* languages (“languages by distance”), i.e., sufficiently different from their neighboring varieties to be recognized as distinct languages irrespective of the existence of a literary standard. Such *Ausbau* languages in the late Ottoman Balkans were at least Turkish, Greek, Balkan Slavic (usually called Bulgarian), Balkan Romance (usually called Wallachian), Albanian, Romani, Ladino (Dzhudezmo), and the languages of several smaller minorities, such as the Armenians or the Circassians. Therefore it cannot be said that the introduction of nationalism into the Balkans simply established boundaries where there had been none. And the use of Greek as the main written language of Balkan Christians would not

have satisfied the linguistic human rights<sup>7</sup> of the native speakers of the other (Abstand) languages in the long run. But what has to be rejected is the traditional historiography of “double oppression” where the Balkan nations are depicted as having suffered under the double yoke of Ottoman political domination and Greek cultural domination (Daskalov 2004, 99; cf. Wahlström in this volume). Against the alleged Ottoman oppression it can be remarked that the Ottoman Empire was for centuries one of the religiously and ethnically most tolerant realms in Europe; against the concept of Greek oppression, the new analysis of the Romaic “proto-nation” by Detrez, as described above, proposes a corrective.

That the past role of the Greek language is difficult to reconcile with other Balkan nations’ nationalist views on history was shown by several episodes after the publication, by a Finnish and Macedonian group of scholars, of the manuscript of the Konikovo Gospel, described in Section 1 above (Lindstedt, Spasov & Nuorluoto, eds., 2008; see also Lindstedt 2008a). Macedonian commentators, enthusiastic about such an early translation of Gospel texts in vernacular Macedonian, more or less passed over the fact that it is a bilingual Greek-Macedonian manuscript. Some dilettantes did not hesitate to resort to outright forgery even in the Macedonian text: there is an unauthorized YouTube (!) version<sup>8</sup> of the beginning of the Macedonian text in which the Greek loans *martiría* ‘testimony’ and *martirísa* ‘to testify’ have been replaced with the Modern Macedonian words *mačenik* ‘martyr’ (which is not an equivalent) and *svedočē* ‘to testify’ (which is actually *svedočī* in Modern Macedonian, but the forger has perhaps tried to use a form that looks dialectal). Even the “original” text given in this YouTube version in Greek letters is a forgery, making use of an orthography that is alien to the manuscript! This is an isolated example, to be sure, but at the same time illustrative of the extreme nationalist attitude towards history.

Biased attempts to explain the past in terms of the present nation-states are not confined to “anti-Greek” views, as “pro-Greek” views may likewise exhibit them. Seeing the Romaic community as a precursor to the Modern Greek nation is an instance of such a skewed view (Petmezas 1999). Another example would be seeing present-day Northern Greece, with Thessaloniki as its largest city, as a naturally pre-destined part of the Greek nation-state, as the histories of Modern Greece frequently do. This part of

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<sup>7</sup> For linguistic human rights, see Skutnabb-Kangas (2000).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bp8vItDA1o>

the Balkans did actually not belong to Greece before the Balkan wars of 1912–1913, and its population was not predominantly Greek before that time. An Ottoman census in Macedonia in 1904 counted, among the Christians, 896,000 Bulgarians, 307,000 Greeks, 99,000 Vlachs, and 101,000 Serbs, but in terms of ecclesiastic jurisdiction, 649,000 (Greek) Patriarchists against 558,000 (Bulgarian) Exarchists (Mazower 2004, 269). As late as in 1913, the largest ethno-linguistic and religious groups in the city of Thessaloniki were the Sephardic Jews (almost 40 percent of the population) and the Ottoman Muslims, with the Christians—Greeks, Slavs, and Vlachs—being only the third confessional group by size (Mazower 2004, 303).

Had the Greek troops not arrived in Thessaloniki eight hours ahead of the Bulgarian forces at the end of the war (Mazower 2004, 296–297), its history could have been written otherwise. But it would not have been a “right” or “wrong” history.

What should be the goal of Balkan historiography is to understand the past in its own terms, to see the relative nature of national identities and boundaries, and to recognize the positive role that the Romaic community and the Greek language had in the pre-national and proto-national Balkans (as also stressed by Wahlström in this volume).

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