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Greek Cultural Influence on the Bulgarian National Revival: The Case of Petăr Beron’s “Fish Primer” (1824)

Introduction

In this article I explore the early 19th century Greek cultural influence on the Bulgarian National Revival² (*Vǎzraždane*) and the creation of the modern Bulgarian literary language. I approach the question by exploring the ideas surrounding the creation of the *Riben Bukvar*, or “Fish Primer”, by Petăr Beron, published in 1824. This was the first Bulgarian textbook, and in contrast to coeval Bulgarian literature, written consistently in language based on spoken Bulgarian. The early years of Beron’s adulthood that led to the creation of the Fish Primer offer an illuminating perspective on the role of Greek culture in the Balkan society of the era. Special attention will be given to the influence of the well-known Greek scholar and educator Konstantinos Vardalachos on the thinking of the young Petăr Beron.

One of the most recent contributions to the question of Greek influence is by Raymond Detrez (2008), who, by analyzing the shared “Romaic” identity of the Greek Orthodox *millet* of the Ottoman Empire, reaches the conclusion that the Greeks presented no threat to the emerging Bulgarian national consciousness. However, as some additional evidence points to the contrary, I begin by examining the conflicting interpretations of this much-debated question in Bulgarian historiography. I argue that instead of being a threat, the rapid development of Greek secular culture was a precondition for the creation of the “Fish Primer”. What has led to much misunderstanding is the fact that the new ideas were debated and propagated predominantly in Greek, although not only by those who are now considered ethnic Greeks.

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² For criticism of the term, see Lindstedt (this volume).

Greek Influence in the 19th Century—A Threat to Everything Bulgarian?

The nature of Greek cultural influence during the 19th century is a much-debated theme in Bulgarian historiography. In more nationalistically oriented literature this influence has often been dubbed a threat to the emerging Bulgarian national consciousness, leading to an assimilation of Bulgarians. The use of this kind of language sometimes entails the romantic and teleological presupposition that national belonging is something that always existed among the members of what is now perceived as an ethnic group, only waiting to be woken up at the right historical moment, but facing numerous external threats.³ Nevertheless, it should be possible to debate the role of the expanding Greek influence in the declining Ottoman Empire without falling victim to this fallacy. The following passage is illustrative of a rather somber interpretation:

Greek cell schools⁴ had long existed all over Bulgaria wherever there were Greek colonies. These schools were not much different from the Bulgarian cell schools, but they were dangerous centers of Greek influence in Bulgaria, because of the economic advantages of knowing Greek, which was the *lingua franca* of trade in the Balkans, and because of the misplaced snobbishness of certain wealthy Bulgars who considered it “cultured” and “educated” to speak Greek and live like Greeks. (MacDermott 1962, 118)

This quote from Marcia MacDermott’s *History of Bulgaria, 1393–1885* reflects a typical attitude of the earlier historiography of Bulgaria: the portrayal of 19th century Greek cultural influence forming a threat to the emerging Bulgarian national consciousness. However, as Raymond Detrez (Detrez 2008, 159–160) points out, contemporary Bulgarian scholars have mostly discarded the idea of *dvojnoto robstvo*, the “double yoke” imposed on Bulgarians by the Ottomans, on one side, and the Greeks, on the other, who, in contrast with the Ottomans threatened Bulgarians with cultural assimilation rather than political oppression. While this picture has been abandoned in most current research, traditional views still persist.⁵

³ These views, which disregard the now predominant notion of nations being essentially rather late and artificial constructs, emerge most often in nationalistically motivated historiography and are quite often coupled with the understandable human tendency of thinking that what we have now is good because an alternative outcome is unimaginable.

⁴ Cell schools, most often located within monasteries, offered rudimentary primary education with a curriculum of mostly religious content (Crampton 2007, 49).

⁵ For example Lindstedt (this volume) is slightly more pessimistic. For a recent example, see Borislav Borisov (2009, 60–61) referring to the Greek language before the Bulgarian national revival as the “language of the cultural invader” (*ezikāt na okupatora na kulturata*).

In his lucid and thorough article, Detrez discusses the common Greek Orthodox identity in the Balkans before the national awakenings. He sees the myth of the double yoke as an anachronistic projection of modern day Balkan states onto the past—a projection that disregards the relative novelty of an ethnicity-based nation state (Detrez 2008, 152). The “Romaic” (Gr. ρωμαίικος) multi-ethnic proto-national identity was not based on language but on religion, which conflicts with the later national romantic ideas that considered language and *Volk*, the nation, to be inseparable. Detrez reminds us also that, in the Romaic community, instead of being a sign of ethnic belonging or “misplaced snobbishness”, the use of Greek by those who did not speak it as a mother tongue was simply something natural for Romaic city dwellers of a higher social status (*ibid.*, 165).

While it can be asked whether the Greek cultural influence was a force counteracting the birth of a Bulgarian national consciousness, a further question is whether any of this cultural expansion was part of a conscious attempt to Hellenize the non-Greek Christians in the Balkans. Detrez claims that the diffusion of Greek culture resulted from a natural development within the Romaic culture and was no-one’s active goal. This would be easier to accept if it were not for certain individuals with seemingly clearly stated Hellenizing motives as early as in the beginning of the 19th century. Paschalis Kitromilides (1989, 156) quotes a letter from 1815 by one of the most prominent figures of the Greek Enlightenment, Neofytos Doukas:

[...] because our language has been, as it were, completely compressed and confined in the smallest possible area, Greece itself, the nation, inappropriately, has been lessened as well, so that it is larger, on its own, than almost no other nation in Europe; however inasmuch it is in this regard reduced, it could equally derive advantages in other respects if it receives the necessary care; because no other nation might to an equal degree extend its language as we can, on the one hand through intermixture with those around us in Bulgaria, Wallachia, Albania, Asia and everywhere else, and on the other hand thanks to the elegance and usefulness of our tongue. In view, therefore, of our many present wants, if someone supposed that there might be anything more in our interest or better serving our prestige than spreading our language, he would not seem to me thinking soundly.

In fact, Detrez does offer an interpretation of another text expressing similar intentions, the often-quoted preface of the Daniil of Moschopolis’s *Tetraglosson*⁶, a Greek-Vlach-Albanian-Bulgarian dictionary published in 1802. He quotes the following passage:

⁶ For another perspective on *Tetraglosson*, see Lindstedt (this volume).

[...] Peoples that before spoke alien tongues, but devout in holy matters
Acquire the tongue and speech of the Greeks.
Greatly benefited in your professions,
And in all your commercial undertakings,
Rejoice young Bulgarians, Albanians and Wallachians, [...] ⁷

Detrez (2008, 165) accounts for this reminding that at that time Bulgarian intellectuals, too, used to encourage the learning of Greek for the same, purely practical reasons without any ulterior ethnic motives.

However, Victor Friedman (2008, 387) gives a very different reading of the same preface. He quotes the beginning of it:

Albanians, Bulgars, Vlachs and all who now do speak
An alien tongue, rejoice, prepare to make you Greek,
Change your barbaric tongue, your rude customs forego,
So that as bygone myths your children them may know. ⁸

According to Friedman, Daniil's *Tetraglosson* constitutes an attempt at "Hellenization of the indigenous non-Greek speaking populations of Macedonia". While Friedman's view feels justified, Detrez's choice of quote does seem somewhat biased in the light of this passage from the same text. However, before presenting further arguments, a glimpse into the study of the Bulgarian literary language is needed.

Greek Influence as Interpreted by Scholars of the Bulgarian Literary Language

In the study of the history of the Bulgarian literary language, the predominant view after the Second World War was very negative towards the Greek influence. It considered the Greek cultural expansion during the Bulgarian national revival to have been a threat to the development of a Bulgarian national consciousness and the use of the Bulgarian language. At the same time, as a model and a source for inspiration, the Greek culture was seen to be of minor importance. This attitude was held for example by the great Bulgarian linguist of the post-war era, Ljubomir Andrejčin. Rusin Rusinov, who according to Roger Gyllin (1991, 25) often echoes Andrejčin's views, describes the Greek "threat" during the 19th century in the following manner:

The construction of the Modern Bulgarian literary language began amidst a battle against the proponents of mental tyranny—the Greek Phanariots. A national

⁷ Translated by Richard Clogg (1976, 92).

⁸ Friedman uses another translation by Wace & Thompson (1913).

culture in the mother tongue could not be created without putting an end to the assimilating endeavors of the Greeks, carried out through church, school, and literature, without waking up and strengthening the national consciousness of the Bulgarians. The battle against the Greek mental yoke was first and foremost a battle against the Greek schools and the Greek language in Bulgaria and for their replacement with Bulgarian schools where the education would take place in the mother tongue. (Rusinov 1980, 33–34.)⁹

Rusinov continues by giving examples of the “battle”, quoting passages from two letters from 1839 by Vasil Aprilov, the famous founder of the Bulgarian secular school in Gabrovo: one to Neofit Rilski, the author of the first Bulgarian grammar, and the other to Rajno Popovič, an important writer-to-be. The quotes do not actually mention the Greek language but do, however, endorse the use of Bulgarian.

Going further back to scholarship at the end of the 19th century, an example of the earlier Bulgarian historiography reveals a similar attitude. In his preface to the biography of the same Vasil Aprilov, S. Milarov (1888, 5–6) bitterly criticizes the notion of “good old days” in describing the 1830s:

“Good old days!” . . . When in most places in Bulgaria there were only Greek schools, when only rarely was Greek not heard, when practically all of the uppermost stratum of the city dwellers were becoming Greek, especially the most eminent and rich Bulgarians abroad: in Wallachia, in Russia, in Constantinople, who were taking pride in being Hellenes and who did not have the habit of speaking anything else than Greek!

Milarov’s account continues by describing the steps that eventually led to the appearance of a new figure in the Bulgarian cultural and educational domain, Aprilov, and the opening of the Gabrovo school. He credits, among others, the Russian Bulgarist Jurij Venelin and Count Ivan Ivanovič Dibič-Zabalkanskij, a hero of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828–1829. He even praises Sultan Mahmud II for the reforms he initiated in the Ottoman Empire, but carefully avoids mentioning anything Greek except for the Phanariot clergy of Constantinople, who at that time “did not know the terrible force of a yet unawoken nation from whom they would suffer later on, in our days”.

These two accounts expressing a strong anti-Greek attitude appear very interesting if set against the thoughts of one of the most prominent Bulgarian scholars before the Second World War, the literary historian Bojan Penev. Penev (1977 [1930], 413–414) describes in his exhaustive four-part history of Modern Bulgarian literature both Popovič and Rilski as Hellenophiles.

⁹ Translations by MW unless stated otherwise.

Furthermore, young Vasil Aprilov is even described as a “Hellenomaniac” (ibid., 484). For Penev, these characterizations stem, for instance, from the fact that Popovič saw in Greek erudition a main source for Neo-Bulgarian education (ibid., 414). As for Aprilov, Penev’s choice of words is explained partly by the fact that Aprilov actively supported the volunteers in the 1821 Greek War of Independence. For Penev, unlike for his late 19th century and post-war colleagues, someone being a Hellenophile and a Bulgarian patriot at the same time did not carry a contradiction.

To gain a better understanding of these conflicting views, let us now take a look at the case of Petăr Beron’s *Fish Primer* of 1824. If anyone, Beron would have been either the beneficiary or the victim of the increasing Greek cultural influence in the Balkans, being educated by some of the most prominent Greek enlighteners and patriots in the Princely Academy of Bucharest, whose earlier principals included the aforementioned Neofytos Doukas.

Fish Primer and Its Inspirers

Petăr Beron was born in the village of Kotel in Eastern Bulgaria as the youngest son of a weaver¹⁰. His father considered the education of his son to be important, and consequently Beron attended school in his childhood. After the economic devastation of his family, caused by the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish war of 1806–1812, Beron became an apprentice of a weaver. (Schischkoff 1971, 10–11.) In 1819, after first having moved to Varna, Beron was enrolled at the Princely Academy of Bucharest, a Greek school known also as the Lyceum of St. Sava (Báčvarova & Báčvarov 1993, 20–27).

Beron spent only two years in Bucharest because following the Greek War of Independence in 1821 the changed political situation forced him, like many Greeks, Bulgarians, and Romanians to flee to Braşov. The city was located in Transylvania just across the Ottoman Empire’s border and already hosted significant colonies of Greek and Bulgarian merchants (Báčvarova & Báčvarov 1993, 32–35). It is during these years in exile that Beron, with the financial support of a wealthy Bulgarian tradesman, Anton Ivanov, drafted

¹⁰ Sources suggest him being born sometime between 1793 and 1800, although most recent sources regard the years 1799 and 1800 as the most likely (Schischkoff 1971, 10; MacDermott 1962, 120; Božkov, Dimov & Dinekov 1966, 129; Sampimon 2006, 76; Báčvarova & Báčvarov 1993, 23).

and in 1824 published the book *Bukvar s različni poučenija*, better known as *Riben Bukvar*, the “Fish Primer”.

A number of inspirers have been proposed for the work, no doubt because Beron wrote it (probably) as early as in his early twenties and the book seems extraordinary in several ways. The Fish Primer is the first Bulgarian book not written by a cleric. It is written throughout in language whose linguistic choices closely reflect what became, after several decades of debate and attempts of varying quality, the Bulgarian literary language. Lastly, the outstanding suitability of the Fish Primer as a textbook is demonstrated by the fact that the last reprint was made as late as 1862, which means that the book remained in use for well over half a century (Báčvarova & Báčvarov 1993, 40).

The biographers of Beron, Neli Báčvarova and Mihail Báčvarov (1993, 35–39), offer an interesting insight: a year before the publication of the Fish Primer, in 1823, Beron visited the Mechitarist monastery island of San Lazzaro off Venice. The visit, sponsored by Anton Ivanov, is well described in the painstakingly precise daily records of the Armenian congregation of Benedictine monks inhabiting the island. They praise for instance Beron’s excellent command of “Slavic, Greek, French, and Transylvanian”. And from them, it also emerges that Beron discussed his upcoming book with the monks, known for their study and publication of ancient Armenian and other texts.

According to Báčvarova and Báčvarov (1993, 38), this single visit must have had special significance in the creation of the Fish Primer. Beron and his hosts discussed the content of the primer and Beron was shown some examples of similar works, published in Paris, Venice, and Constantinople. The Mechitarists, who owned a printing press, suggested that even a new type set be designed for the book, but did not, however, print the work, because Beron wanted to continue his studies as soon as possible somewhere in Western Europe and could not wait much longer. Báčvarova and Báčvarov do admit that exactly how the visit might have influenced the contents of the Fish Primer is hard to judge. They also admit that Beron was not satisfied with the textbooks he was shown, and insisted that the content of his book could not be copied from an already existing primer because of the unique needs of his audience. (Ibid., 37.)

Another parallel is highlighted by Dell’Agata (Dell’Agata 2004 [1977], 86): as Báčvarova and Báčvarov (1993, 38) also note, Beron includes in the Fish Primer some teachings from Dimitrios Darvaris’s book *Ἐκλογάριον*

Γραικικόν, published in Vienna in 1804. Darvaris was an author and pedagogue of Vlach origin from Klisoura, near Kastoria, who wrote both in Greek and in a dialect of Serbian. Also as an author of a grammar of spoken Greek (or simple Greek, *ἀπλοελληνική*, as he called it), Darvaris could naturally be seen as somebody whose ideas might have influenced Beron's linguistic choices.

Dell'Agata also sees a possible textual link between the preface of Vuk Karadžić's *Srpski rječnik* from 1818 and that of the Fish Primer. Both authors deplore the intolerable situation that, for centuries, nobody had embarked upon the task of writing books that would teach the spoken language of the Serbians and Bulgarians (Dell'Agata 2004 [1977], 86–87). Janette Sampimon (2006, 78) mentions a Serbian primer from 1812 by Pavle Solarić, unfortunately without citing her source. However, the influence of Solarić's textbook, although also entitled *Bukvar*, must be seen as superficial at most. It is written in a mixture of Church Slavonic and the Serbian vernacular, Slaveno-Serbian¹¹, and its content is much more religious in nature than that of the Fish Primer.

Konstantinos Vardalachos and the Fish Primer

I wish to discuss another possible influence in the creation of the Fish Primer that is mentioned, often in passing, by many.¹² In Petăr Beron's third and final year at the Bucharest Princely Academy, a previous principal of the Academy, Konstantinos Vardalachos (1755–1830), returned to his old post, having taught at a school on the island of Chios for more than five years and for a short period from 1820 onwards in Odessa.¹³ Vardalachos was an important figure of the Greek Enlightenment, a pedagogue, an encyclopedist, and a contributor to the famous periodical of the pre-War of Independence era, *Ἐρμῆς ὁ Λόγιος*.

After the Greek War of Independence in 1821, the paths of the two men were similar—they both ended up in Braşov, and remained in contact with each other (Sampimon 2006, 78). During the following three years Beron worked on his Fish Primer. Over these years, until 1825, Vardalachos was engaged in a very similar activity. The forced absence from his pedagogical

¹¹ For the use of the term, see Nuorluoto (1989, 30–32).

¹² Vardalachos's role has been examined perhaps most thoroughly by Penev (1977 [1930], 302–305).

¹³ Thus, contrary to what many sources suggest, Vardalachos was not the head of the school when Beron started there as a student. For the erroneous accounts, see e.g. Penev (1977 [1930], 302) and Dell'Agata (2004 [1977], 86).

activities allowed him to work on what he called the “most needed school books” (Κούκκου 1966, 212). However, the books were not printed straight away but only at the end of the decade, in the printing press of the Odessa Greek School of Merchants, the same school Vardalachos had taught at just before returning to Bucharest.

At least six of Vardalachos’s books were published during 1829–1830 in Odessa: a grammar of Classical Greek (*Ελληνική γλώσσα*) (Βαρδαλάχος 1829a), a grammar of spoken Greek (*ομιλουμένη Ελληνική γλώσσα*) (Βαρδαλάχος 1829b), a three-part textbook (Βαρδαλάχος 1830b; Βαρδαλάχος 1830a; Βαρδαλάχος 1830c), and a textbook of Aesop’s fables in the classical language with a translation into the modern language at the end of the book (Βαρδαλάχος 1830d)¹⁴. The books had probably been in use as manuscripts: in his preface to the grammar of spoken Greek, Vardalachos (1829b, 3–4) mourns the fact that “for some time, the pupils, especially the beginners, have had difficulties copying [the book].”

A preliminary survey does not establish a direct textual link between the Fish Primer and these books by Vardalachos. The Fish Primer does, however, include a selection of heavily abridged fables by Aesop, three of which are the same as in Vardalachos’s book.¹⁵ In addition, while the Fish Primer is clearly intended for younger pupils, some of its topics are very similar to those in Vardalachos’s text-book, for example, under the title “Physics”, both address a range of biological phenomena, such as animals and humans.

Yet what is perhaps more important here is Petăr Beron’s conviction of the importance of using vernacular-based language in writing. I believe that although being a patriot, Beron did not yet envisage a fully functional Bulgarian literary language. One indication of this might be that he published nothing in Bulgarian after the Fish Primer. On the other hand, in his afterword to the book, he gives a concrete reason for the uncompromising use of the vernacular: it is much easier to learn another language when one first masters the grammar of one’s mother tongue (*ibid.*, 288).

¹⁴ According to Κούκκου (1966, 179–180), after the untimely death of Vardalachos in September 1830 the grammar of spoken Greek was reprinted twice, in 1832 and 1834. Three more posthumous works appeared in Odessa, including a selection of dialogues by Lucian of Samosata translated into spoken Greek (*sic!* *ομιλουμένη Γραϊκική Γλώσσα*) in 1831 and a translation of Josephus’ *History of the Jews* in 1834.

¹⁵ It must be kept in mind, however, that Aesop’s fables are an integral part of Darvaris’s *Eklogarion*, too, and their form is much closer to that of the Fish Primer.

As we can see from the books by Konstantinos Vardalachos published in Odessa, he used extensively the spoken language as a medium of education. In his preface to the grammar of spoken Greek, he justifies his choice of subject very clearly:

There remains no resistance to or doubt about the usefulness of the grammar of the spoken language, as the everyday experience has shown how very easily the boys advance in the old Greek (παλαιά Ελληνική) language when they are first taught the grammar of their mother tongue. When a person is taught the grammar of any language, the grammars of other languages appear easier, especially when [the first grammar taught is] of that language that one also hears and speaks every day at home. This we can observe also among the civilized nations, they do not study another grammar without being first taught that of their own language.¹⁶ (Βαρδαλάχος 1829b, 3–4.)

The Bulgarian grammarian Ivan Bogorov (1986 [1848], 1–2) likewise uses surprisingly similar phrasing in the preface to his grammar based on “people’s pronunciation” from 1848: “Still, we struggled to accommodate it [the grammar] in a way that the structure would be similar to foreign grammars so that after learning it first, it would later be easy for a child to learn other, foreign languages.”

Vasil Aprilov, on the other hand, who, along with Beron, is considered to be one of the most important “vernacularists”,¹⁷ directly commends Vardalachos for his method in his book from 1847, *Misli za segašnoto bălgarsko učenie*, “Thoughts on contemporary Bulgarian education”:

Vardalachos’s grammar of the Modern Greek language became a new beacon for the children and teaching received a new method. The Greeks studied first the new and only after that the old language, and thus their adolescents walk with brave steps into perfection. Would it not be advisable for Bulgarians, too, to follow that example!! (Penev 1977 [1930], 303 quoting Aprilov.)

As we can see, for others at the time, the use of the vernacular in education was a new invention—with which some were ready to credit a Greek, namely Vardalachos. But an additional Bulgarian figure of the National Revival, Ivan Dobrovski (1812–1896), mentions another Greek in a similar context:

Contrary to Neofytos Doukas, who wanted to re-introduce Classical Greek, [Adamantios] Korais insisted that the people, in order to succeed in education,

¹⁶ I would like to warmly thank Antero Hyvönen for helping me with some of the difficulties in the Greek original. However, I take full responsibility for any deficiencies in the English translation.

¹⁷ See e.g. Gyllin (1991, 27).

should be taught in their simple mother tongue instead of Hellenic which was not comprehensible to the people. Because of that, I, too, began to think that, for the same reasons that Korais gave for the Greeks, namely—to succeed in education, in this case, our nation, too, must be taught in its mother tongue, not in Greek. (Quoted from Penev 1977 [1930], 72–73.)

Conclusions

The effect of the Greek influence during the Bulgarian National Revival is admittedly complex. I hope, however, that the example of the Fish Primer has demonstrated at least one fact: the birth of the modern Bulgarian nation was very much intertwined with cultural developments among the other Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. This observation is in line with what Detrez writes about the Romaic proto-nation. I believe that what the conflicting views on the role of the Greek influence demonstrate is a shift in the Bulgarian attitudes that took place originally in the 1850s and 1860s during the intensification of the struggle for an independent Bulgarian church. In addition, as Lindstedt (this volume) demonstrates through the biography of Grigor Prličev, these decades do indeed seem to represent a final watershed period between the common Romaic and ethnically, linguistically based national consciousness.

To demonstrate this further, let us consider the following passage from an article in the newspaper *Gajda* by Petko Slavejkov from 1868:

Brother Bulgarians, our nation has endured and still endures great adversities! Great adversities, I say, because I do not know if there is a greater adversity than that when they take one's language away from somebody, when they do not allow that one prays or listens to the word of God in his tongue, when they recommend that one rejects one's nation, when they subsume one forcefully into another, foreign nationality, when they shove a strange language into one's mouth. (Rusinov 1980, 34 quoting Slavejkov.)

It is quite clear that writing of this nature would have been almost unimaginable only a few decades earlier. Hristaki Pavlovič, who was equally concerned about the growing Greek influence, puts it rather mildly in his foreword to a small Greek-Bulgarian dictionary from 1835: “Who succeeds with this useful language and learns it perfectly, I ask them strongly not to destroy their Bulgarian origins by calling themselves, as some insane people do, Greeks” (Penev 1977 [1930], 414).

Nevertheless, we need to return to the early examples of the Hellenizing ambitions that were described at the outset of this article. Although Doukas wrote in his letter from 1815 that anyone disagreeing would not be thinking

soundly, many, however, did disagree. The letter addressed to the Patriarch of Constantinople is, according to Kitromilides (1989, 158–159), one of the first examples of conflict between nationalism and Orthodoxy, the church being very much opposed to any type of secular nationalism, which, as Kitromilides notes, did eventually destroy “the ecumenical transcendental values that held Balkan society together within the fold of Orthodoxy during the years of captivity”.

While Doukas’s thinking clearly represents the kind of romantic nationalism that eventually shaped the political map of the Balkans, the case of Daniil is more complicated, mainly because he was not an ethnic Greek. As well, it was too early for Daniil’s exhortation to be part of any kind of systematic Hellenization attempt. I believe rather that Daniil was like the snob of MacDermott, the rich Bulgarians abroad of Milarov, or the insane of Pavlovič: those for whom their social status meant that they would speak and write Greek and regard those who did not as barbarians and peasants, in other words, typical Romaic persons of their social stratum in the sense of Detrez.

One final note must be made about the role of language in the shaping of the national state. I would not regard every early instance of self-identification along linguistic and ethnic lines as something that must be accounted for by those who believe in the prevalence of the Romaic identity in the Balkans. It would be naïve to think that such an obvious source of group identification would not emerge from time to time. As many ethnonyms show, language has always been a means of separating Us from Them. Friedman (2008, 386) points to jokes collected in the mid-nineteenth century from central Macedonia that clearly show how the awareness of the difference between language and religion must have already been widespread in the early 19th century, although in the same region, ethnic nationalism took roots only a century later.

It seems that for some historians it must have been painful to realize how much of the Bulgarian National Revival actually depended on external influences. All of the main proponents who were born before the 1820s received a solid Greek education, many of them partook in the Greek War of Independence, and further, they often wrote to each other in Greek¹⁸. One

¹⁸ This is not as strange as it may seem: in Finland, the most ardent and influential supporter of Finnish as the national language, Johan Wilhelm Snellman (1806–1881), never wrote a line in Finnish. He expressed his support for Finnish only in Swedish. (I would like to thank Henrik Forsberg for making me aware of this fact.)

could of course equally ask how Greek was the Greek enlightenment, when so many of its proponents were ethnically non-Greek. As the case of the Fish Primer shows, it was mostly a new pedagogical innovation that shaped the language of the book. The innovation was based on the ideals of the Enlightenment that were passed on in Greek, but in the hands of able Bulgarians, helped give birth to the Bulgarian national consciousness.

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