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“Those Were the Difficult Years...”*

Oral accounts of Vlachophones from their captivity in Požarevac, Serbia

Considering that the oral accounts of the people who experienced the events at a difficult period in time is the most important of all the other research material, I am attempting, with this article, to present a few phases of the captivity of the Vlachophones in Požarevac in 1916. The main objective is to depict the climate of the era throughout the time frame from 1916 – the commencement of their captivity outside Greece – and their return in 1918, through the personal and collective experiences of ordinary people. It is an effort to highlight the value of the oral culture, incorporating the voice of the unseen protagonists into the historical data. It describes the way they reached this specific area, the two years they spent there, and the four phases of their return.

Key words: Oral history, Collective memory, Vlachs, Captivity, Serres

This announcement is the product of an on-the-spot study of the Vlachophones of Serres, and more specifically refers to the Vlachophones of Irakleia (Tzoumagias), Petritsi, Vyroneia, and Poroion. It is founded mainly on oral accounts of first-generation individuals who witnessed the events of the captivity.

The chief objective of this article is to depict the climate of the period from 1916 – the commencement of their captivity outside Greece – and their return in 1918, through the personal and collective experiences of ordinary people. It is an effort to highlight the value of the spoken word, incorporating the voice of the unseen protagonists into the historical data. The information concerns historical, cultural

* Translated by the author.

and social events. The narrations of the men, but also the women, are significant and, due to the singular nature of these sources, an enhanced speculation develops on the function of the social memory.

Through partially-guided interviews, the respondents were asked to recount their own lives, but also the life of the community they lived in. At the same time, I visited the area inside Bulgaria, in order to have a full picture of the route they followed, and the area where they camped for four months during their captivity period in autumn of 1916. The scant bibliography on this specific event confirmed the narrations of the Vlachophones. Apart from the oral accounts, important information was also amassed by the State General Archives. The tables listing the names of those who went as captives to Pozarevac and the surrounding area, the names of those who died in captivity in Pozarevac and the surrounding area, and the names of those who returned, were placed at our disposal. Access to the personal archive of Ioannis Paschalias, one of the captives and later mayor of the town of Irakleia, proved to be of substantial assistance, and for this reason I would like to particularly thank his daughter, Eleni.

History, regardless of how much it can be founded on written documentation, always has need of the oral tradition as well, not only because the latter can fill in the so-called gaps in the written sources, but chiefly because the oral tradition is the indicator that measures the experience of History, the selective operation of memory, its economy.¹

This view is confirmed by Ong, when he maintains that in oral culture, the past is recalled to memory only when it has use in the present, and comprises, we could say, a “living memory”, while on the contrary, in the written culture, a distinct past is reconstructed, due to the certainty provided by dates, specific events, etc., when recorded.² The latter is the official History, with the military events and announcements, the critique of the war operations with the political changes, with the economic developments, the diplomatic affairs, the financial and commercial transactions, the progress in the arts and letters. These pertain to the history of dates.³

Conversely, oral history is a history constructed around people, making use of their need to keep their past alive with the recounting of their personal experiences. It brings history itself to life, and broadens its horizons. It highlights heroes, not only from the circle of leaders, but mainly from the anonymous populace. A basic prerequisite and underlying strength of the oral history is the function of the brain that we call memory. Thus, we articulate our memories with words, after recalling them. Language enables us to recount our past at any given moment.⁴

¹ S. Asdrachas, *Hypothetical historical conclusiosn*, Themelio publications, Athens 1995, 192.

² W. Ong, *Orality and Literac:y The Technologizing of the Word*, translation by K. Hatzikyriakos, Irakleio, 2nd edition, 2001.

³ Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory*, Nefeli publications, Athens 1998, 19-20.

⁴ M. Halbwachs, *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, in L. Coser (editor) 1992a, 173.

Memory, however, depends directly on the “social frameworks“ to which people belong throughout the course of their lives (family or broader group of relatives, social class, religious group, political party, professional circle). The on-the-spot witness of the events is never a solitary ‘I’. The individual testimony is already, and always, social, even the more so when we are dealing with traumatic memory. It is not only the fact that the language of the testimony contains the collective cultural heritage, but also the identity of the witness contains the other, both as a personal relationship, and as a relationship with the group to which he belongs.⁵ Each individual memory is a perceptive view of the collective memory.⁶ Consequently, the collective memory itself is not and cannot be uniform, but multifaceted, as it depends on the social group in the framework of which it is produced. Halbwachs considers it a certainty that every society has its own form of memory⁷ and that it is not limited simply to the memory and reflection of the past, but contains an entire network of outside – as regards the individual – relations, forms and objects that support, objectivise and embody the past. “The individuals are the ones who remember, but the individuals as members of some social group”.⁸

The conceptualisation of this history from within the life of ordinary people, from within their daily routine, way of life, their perceptions, and not from within the actions of some outstanding figures, has given it the characterisation of “History from below”.⁹

This History places emphasis on the living experiential element of the narrations and the way in which the experiences are objectivised as members of a community.¹⁰ It therefore becomes immediately perceptible how such a history, with such directions, is a new conceptualization of History with respect both to its content and to its method.¹¹ The oral account, Paul Thompson writes, by transforming the ‘objects’ of study into ‘subjects’, creates a history that is not only richer, more alive and emotional, but also more true.¹² Truer, Nestoros adds, not because it complies with some officially established „historic truth”, but because it reveals many more sides of the same prism.¹³

At the same time, this type of recording of history also highlights the complexity of historical reality itself. Characteristic examples are the oral accounts of people who, from within the rich and vivid language of the narrators, sketch a

⁵ A. Vidalis, *Oral accounts from the traumatic experience in collective memory*, Accounts in audio and visual depictions as a source of history, Katarti publications 1998, Athens, 112.

⁶ M. Halbwachs, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁷ M. Halbwachs, *op. cit.*, 40.

⁸ M. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, PUF, Paris. 1950, 33.

⁹ M. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, 33.

¹⁰ Y. Vozikas, *Narrations, recreations, identities*, Serres Chronicles, vol. 4, Athens 2002, 120.

¹¹ N. Kyriakidou, *Folk Studies II*, Poreia publications, Athens 1993, 255.

¹² P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past; Oral History*, Oxford Univ. Press 1978, 90.

¹³ N. Kyriakidou, *op. cit.*, 255.

unique picture of the reality of the time period of 1916-1922. This primary material comprises a priceless source of knowledge.

We should also clarify that the genuine document is the audio document which, in order to be studied, but also to be more widely propagated, needs to be transposed into a written text. As much as one desires to remain true to the original word, he can never reproduce the unique act of communication that takes place during the course of an interview. And this is so because the oral word of the narrators is not addressed to the reader who will read it, or to the listener who will hear his testimony – but to the researcher, the individual with whom he had a bond – during the time of the narration – in a relationship of direct communication. Certain elements of this communication are irreversibly lost during the transcription into writing: The accent, the intonation and the intensity of the voice, the nervousness or calmness of speech, the hand gestures, the facial expressions.¹⁴

The oral word has its own rules. However, in every oral narration, certain basic rules of “creativity” are in operation, which differentiate, with respect to form and content, the product of the oral word in relation to that of the written word.

A fundamental difference, for example, has to do with the fact that in the oral word the narrator functions with the material in his memory, does not have the ability to refer back to other “sources”, nor is able to turn back every so often, like a writer can, to check what he has said, correct it, etc. The narrator relates everything he remembers, and the account always proceeds forward. Even if he needs to make some kind of correction or rewording, this too is recorded in the course of the narration and comprises a part of it.¹⁵

The Vlachs in the greater Serres region

The Serres plain was a crossroads of upheaval, events and changes. It was a cradle of religions and rituals, but also a field of political and cultural developments, a place of coexistence and clashes among peoples. “*It was a place that frequently filled with smoke and blood. That’s why no matter how many times the ancient and contemporary writers speak about it, it is almost always about war.*”¹⁶ It is a place where different societies with different rationales, perceptions and mind-sets met. The tradition, which survives intact to our days, in correlation with the undisputable historical events, provide the prospect that a large volume of Vlach refugees settled in the Serres region. The settling took place gradually, circa 1750, with the persecutions of the Ottomans following the Orloff revolt (1770-71), and when they engaged in armed clashes with Ali Pasha (1790-1820).

¹⁴ R.V. Boeschoten, *Disdain and use of oral sources*, Folk Narrative and History, minutes of a congress in memory of A. Kyriakidou-Nestoros, edit. Hatzitakis-Kapsomenou Chr., published by Thessaloniki Observer 2001. See also, V. Nitsiakos, Testimonies of Albanian immigrants, Odysseas publications 2003, 25-26.

¹⁵ V. Nitsiakos, *op. cit.*, 26.

¹⁶ V. Tzanakaris, *Illustrated History of Serres*, vol. A, Serres 1991, 101.

However, Serres chronicler Papasynadinos writes about the existence of Vlachs in Serres and its surrounding region from the 17th century. He writes that in September 1641 the Vlachs who lived in the town of Serres and its region were equally hard hit like other ethnicities by a major outbreak of plague. Regarding the development of the Vlach communities in the 17th and 18th centuries¹⁷ in Serres prefecture, there are references that there were Vlachophones¹⁸ residing in Serres, who had settled there from previous population shifts and had developed trade and crafts.¹⁹

This mass migration, anonymous and expanded, took place in all possible ways and formations: families, small groups, entire villages. Depending on these formations, the internal structure of the groups and the settlements would change or be maintained. When settlement was gradual, then the first families formed the nucleus of the locals, and those who arrived gradually afterwards comprised the periphery, which increasingly grew dynamically, since everyone was welcome. The Vlachophones, coming mainly from Western Macedonia, Epirus, the villages of Aspropotamos, Moschopolis and Monastiri, settled on the mountainsides of Mt. Belles and Mt. Menoikios, reaching all the way to Alistratis, either establishing new villages or living next to the others already there. Thus, the villages presented a mixed population character and preserved the internal divisions on the basis of origin and the sense of corruption. According to Naum Marokos:

We were from Ramna. I was born there. Both my parents were Vlachs. They came from Bitoula (Bitola). From Krusevo, from there. First they came, then others came from Neveska, Grammoustianides, and afterwards came Bouisiotes. Those were villages. They are Vlachs. We even had Aitomiliotes. The first thing they did (built) after their homes was this old church. I was there, too. It was made of linden planks. The Vlachs themselves made it. Some of them were carpenters...

These population unities, which co-established the new communities, maintained and reproduced the consciousness of their singularity as they settled in separate neighbourhoods (mahalades) and transplanted there forms of social relations and mentalities which characterized the communities of their origin. The distinctions are strongly evident in the various manifestations of community life.

¹⁷ Petmezas Socrates, Paolo Odorico, *Memories and Advice of Synodinos, Priest of Serres, Macedonia*, published by Association "Pierre Belon" 1996, 170.

¹⁸ Bibliographical sources note that in Flamouri (a village that is abandoned today. It is recorded on the Army Geographical Service's map), which under the Turkish rule had a large population, there lived up until 1922 old men and women who know the Vlach dialect, and kept alive the memory that this cradle was an old Vlach village, which was violently (forcibly) Islamized between 1600 and 1650, and gradually turned Turkophone. Also, Elvias Tselemis corroborates that there were Vlachs in the region of Langadas and Sochou circa 1600. According to the Serb ethnologist Cvijic, the urban class of Nigrita came from Moschopolites, Sypiskiotes, Gavrovites, Vlachs and others. Many of these people later found themselves in the city of Serres. (See Liakos, Socrates, *The origins of the Armentarians*, Thessaloniki 1965).

¹⁹ "They are some also in Orvilos and Rodopi, but a few, whereas once they were incomparably more, and also in the Serres plains, but they originated from Western Macedonia," See Martinianos Ioakeim, Metropolitan of Xanthi, *op. cit.*, 54.

On the feast day of the Holy Apostles, we would hold a big panegyry (feast), and all the surrounding villages would come to see how we reveled. For three days we sang and danced. We sang a lot, in Vlach, too, but also in Greek. We had leventikous (gallant) dances. My mother would wear long silk dresses, and had lires (gold sovereigns) hanging here in front. Our women were very pretty. Dardanes (strapping women). On St. George's day, Turks would also come from the neighbouring villages and join our panegyry. The Turks would not hurt us. There was a rich Turk at Thrakiko, who gathered together lots of people, who worked for him, but he fed them, though. We didn't have problems with them. Ramna was the centre. Shepherds, sheep, they were all kehay-iades (large-scale shepherds).

The value of these accounts is very important, because the individuals remember and reconstruct their past as members of a social group, since the flowing history pervades the individual memory. In the oral material they record the mentality, perceptions, stance and the unique ways of perception of reality, as well as the resistances and attitudes arising from them. And from within this material arise the survival strategies but also those reactions that influenced the backbone of the social relations, such as the ways of participation and experience of history.²⁰

In the new homelands, the Vlachs very soon made strong their presence in the region, taking part and playing leading roles in the common liberation struggles of the homeland.

There were many Vlachs who were first in the Macedonian Struggle. Have you heard of kapetan Stergios Vlachbei? He was the fear and terror of the Bulgarians. He feared nothing. There was also Staikos, and Arnaoutos, my uncle Arambatzis, Tsikos, Roskas, the Tzoumailides', and others. Here in Ramna, where the mill was, they also killed priests. Because the priest chanted first in Greek, and then turned to Bulgarian, they came and killed him.

The road to captivity

The testimonies concerning the Macedonian Struggle and World War I are intense. However, I will refer along general lines to the narration of the events by elderly Vlachs²¹ regarding the forced movement of the Vlachs, and others as well, due to the creation of the war front in the Strymonas area in 1916.

²⁰ A. Botzouvi, *Oral History: boundaries and restrictions*, Testimonies in audio and motion recordings as a historical source, Katarti publications, Athens 1998, 25.

²¹ Narration of events by Naoum Marokos, 98 yrs. old, resident of Vyroneia, who lived in Ramna, and his wife, on September 16, 2000; Christos Pазis, resident of Irakleia, 89; Ioannis Gekas, N. Petritsi resident, 88; and Eleni Ziantari, 90, from N. Petritsi, Serres, from the personal archive of Ioannis Paschalias, kindly provided by his daughter, Eleni Paschalia, and from an off-print from the Serres Chronicles, vol. 6, by Y. Tzemailas, Contribution to the history of Irakleia (Kato Tzoumagia), Serres prefecture.

In the summer of 1916 the Bulgarians invaded the region of Serres. On August 6, the feast day of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, they entered Tzoumagia and took it over.

They took over the schools, which they used as barracks, and the two churches, after first disrupting the liturgy. Everyone who had collaborated with the Greek guerrillas against the Bulgarian comitatus during the Macedonian Struggle was arrested and physically abused.

On September 14, feast day of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, the Bulgarians forced all the residents to vacate Tzoumagia. Thus, all the residents, some 7-8000 souls, walked for many hours along the road leading to Bulgaria, via the Roupel and Kresna Straits. The same happened with the residents of Ramna, Petritsi, Sidirokastro, and other regions. The elderly Vlachs recount:

The bells were ringing, and a Vourgaros (Bulgarian) with a loudspeaker told us to take some bread and some clothes for a few days and get started. Everyone forward. Old people, young people, and children We put the old people on the 'arabades' (carts). And our flocks with us. On foot. A line from here to Sidirokastro formed. We didn't know where we were going. But they didn't take only from our village. They emptied all the surrounding villages. 8-9000 (people) were from Tzoumagia alone. There, near Strymonochori, night fell upon us, and we sat down to rest. The situation was difficult. The babies were crying, pregnant women, sick and elderly. The morning of the next day we set off again towards Vourgaria (Bulgaria) way. We ascended the Roupeli and Kresna and early in the afternoon reached Livounovo.

Eleni Ziantari recalls:

My father worked at the tobacco shop in Kavala, and the Vourgari (Bulgarians), together with my uncle, took them captive from there to old Vourgaria (Bulgaria). I was an infant when the Vourgari took my mother, and she straddled me in front of her, and had a velentza (heavy, coarse blanket) on her back to cover us, and with her other hand she held my brother Mitos, who was six years old. From all the villages, they took only the Greeks. The others they did not bother at all. Us Vlachs, because we were Greek, they gathered us all. They walked for a week to reach Kresna. There, they had neither food nor bread. My aunt's children died, all three of them, from hunger. She opened up the holes and buried them by herself...

Many were abandoned at Ano Tzoumagia, Petrovo, Petritsi, Dubnica, etc. But most of the families were led to Meleniko,²² physically and mentally exhausted, as cap-

²² Meleniko is a historic old city. It has about 70 churches and four famed Greek schools. It had always been the bastion of Hellenis and was distinguished for its intellectual tradition. The letters were especially cultivated in Meleniko. As early as 1880, a Greek school of higher learning was in operation. In 1913 they were operating a six-grade Greek primary school with 180 pupils a girl's school with 180 pupils, a four-grade junior highschool with 60 pupils, and a kindergarten with 40 toddlers. After the Treaty of Bucharest of July 1913, due to the fact that this strongly Greek city was turned over to Bulgaria, the Greeks abandoned their homes and went to Sidirokastro, in Thessaloniki, but also to Athens. The captives were housed in these empty homes in 1916. 10-20 families per house.

tives of the Bulgarians. They remained in Meleniko for 4 months. Their stay there was full of suffering and hardship.

I thought we would die there. We had neither bread nor food.

Y. Tzemailas writes about the same circumstances:

Due to the total lack of food, we were in danger of dying from hunger. Besides, the buying or selling of grains, flour and food in general was strictly forbidden. The Bulgarians rationed to us 100 drams of flour from corn (cornmeal) for each person, and even that was bitter and unfit for eating. We would eat kouspon (bran, sub-product of sesame oil, for the most part).²³

In December 1916, the winter was very harsh. Those of the captives who withstood the hardships were taken by the Bulgarians to the Bulgarian-held old Serbia, to Pozarevac. That's where the main bulk of the Vlachs remained.

From Meleniki, walk on foot some 6-7 hours, and in pouring rain we went to the railroad station. There they threw us into train cars. All together, one on top of the other. The train set off slowly, and afterwards reached Sofia, and from there to Nyssa in Serbia. I had stopped thinking. We all said:, as far as we can hold up. There, I remember, that inside the train some German soldiers would give us a morsel of bread...

...There were many who went on foot because they had taken their flocks with them, too. Others, again, went by arabades (carts)...

In Bulgarian-held Nyssa, they kept them in the train cars for three days. There, they gave them food and bread. From Nyssa they were taken to town of Simentria on the shores of the Danube. They put them in the holds of the Danube riverboats and transported them to Pozarevac. Pozarevac too, at that time, was Bulgarian-held. But it was a beautiful area, fertile and rich with respect to agricultural production as well as to stockbreeding, but also with respect to commerce.

When we reached Pozarevac, we saw God walking on earth. There was the Promised Land. Although the Bulgarians again did not leave us in peace, we nevertheless liked it very much because it had everything. There, in that city, most of us remained. Some went also to Petrovic and to other villages around there. We were stockbreeders there, too. The Serbs were a good people. But as soon as it got dark, they would disappear. They would lock themselves up in their homes.

Y. Veligratlis recalls:

My father would frequently talk to us about the years of captivity. What he would stress to us was that he had gone to civilisation. My father was one of the few who had education. He went with some others, when they reached Pozarevac, to ask for a room in a hotel. They told the hotelier that they were representatives of the Greek government. He rejected them. Leaving, they said in Vlach: 'they don't want us here, either'. The hotelier, who was also a Vlach, immediately settled them in a room.²⁴

²³ Y. Tzemailas, *Contribution to the History of Irakleia*, Serres Chronicles 1973, vol. 6, 123.

²⁴ Y. Veligratlis, *Interview in Serres*, November 17, 2005.

The Bulgarians would regularly arrest one person from each family and send them to forced labour, unknown where. Most of them never returned. Y. Tzemailas writes:

The main bulk of the Vlachs remained in Pozarevac. The city's shops were closed, and they were taken over and exploited, as loot, by Bulgarian private parties. There were no male Serbs left, except for those younger than 18 and older than 60, because Serbia had declared a general mobilization and, after its collapse, the Serbian army retreated to and was hosted in Greece, for the most part on Corfu, united with the Allied troops (Anglo-French).²⁵

Eleni Ziantari recounts:

Poziarova was a very beautiful city. The Serbs took us to work their vineyards. Many, also, worked in the homes of the Jews as servants. It had a lot of Jews. They were ultra-rich. They had very beautiful houses and were involved in commerce. They were merchants. We lived many families together in big kafeneia (coffee shops).

Question: Were weddings, feasts, held where you went?

Answer: What weddings? Such a large city, and it had only two churches. Since we didn't have houses, what marriages could we make? Of course, some married there. We have a quarry there, too. We had no place to stay. We were with one piece of clothing on our backs, my girl. Were we for weddings and feasts? Those who were servants were given a corner in the storage room to sleep. The others, nothing. They had very nice houses. But only one or two storeys. They did, however, have big basements.... The Jews did not harm the Greeks.... Our people, the Vlachs, had also brought their flocks with them.

Question: What did they do with the products? Did they sell them?

Answer: No. Sell what? They shared them out to our people. The Serbs would tell us that they could feed us for ten years.

The Greeks remained in this region until 1918, at which time their return commenced.

Return to the homeland

From the personal archive of Ioannis Paschalias we read: As captives, we stayed there for two years. Then the Bulgarian front broke. The Bulgarians, the first of all their allies, on September 19, 1918 asked for a truce with only one condition, the non-invasion of Bulgaria by the Greek army. Turkey followed with a truce, and on November 11, 1918, Germany put down its weapons. As soon as the news of the truce was announced, the Vlachs, with the nostalgia of return, started to organize return missions around December 1918. The road of the return was very difficult.

The first return mission was organized with George Lagazalis as president. Lagazalis, a clever and diligent businessman from Tzoumagia, was also president of

²⁵ Y. Tzemailas, *op. cit.*, 124.

the Tzoumagiotes in Pozarevac. The mission set off with arabades (carts), despite the adverse transport conditions prevailing, and despite the typhus, which was contracted by many of them, others more lightly, and others more seriously.

The second mission, with Constantine Veligratlis as president, set out with 100 arabades (carts) and many people on foot.

I, with my family and others from the village, were in Costas Veligratlis' group. Veligratlis was a big merchant from Tzoumagia. We started off full of joy. We walked for days, but the road did not seem long to us. A number of families stayed behind in Pozarevac. They're still there today, and many of us here had relatives, and would go to see them.

This mission from Pozarevac followed the public road along the length of the Belgrade – Thessaloniki rail line. It reached Nyssa, where there was a French headquarters, where the military liaison, Greek captain Koutsoumbas, took the Vlach captives under his protection. He kept them there for three days, until the Serbia – Bulgaria – Greece rail line was restored. From Nyssa they went to the city of Pyrot, on the Serbian-Bulgarian border.

There, in the city of Pyrot, we stayed about 20 days. The commander, Trikoupis, put us up in nice houses where we stayed, and we had very good food. You should see what a lewendis (brave, generous, upstanding man) the commander was.

From Pyrot, via the Pyrot – Tsarimbrot route, they reached Sofia.

There in Sofia he was with a military mission, with a certain Mazarakis as the leader, who together with the prefect Andreadis, sent us, via Hadrianople to Serres. Others came with arabades (carts).²⁶

The third mission followed, with the rest of the Vlachs from Pozarevac, who had contracted typhus. Their return was effected with the care of the Greek and the Allied military liaison missions. Y.Tzemailas writes:

Across the Danube, via riverboat, we reached Lon Palaga, there in Nyssa, and by rail, via Sofia, we reached Varna, where we were isolated, quarantined, in commercial railway cars, near the coast. They kept us there for about a month, awaiting the restoration of the steamship transport via the Black Sea, which had been swept of the mines, and the first travelers would be we captives. Three steamboats arrived in the port of Varna, the 'Xenoula'. 'Ourana' and 'Adriatikos', which picked us up for our return to Greece. A number died en route, due to the hardships, the sufferings and the typhus, and the bodies were cast into the sea. When we reached Proponthis, we saw the legendary battleship 'Averof' anchored there, the crew of which greeted us with the National Anthem. Afterwards we reached Kavala. There we were taken under wing by the Greek authorities, members of the Greek Red Cross and Allied missions for the care of hostages/captives, which had followed us and accompanied us from Pozarevac, on our entire journey of return from captivity, and they led us to and isolated us, in quarantine, in the Kavala tobacco warehouses, exhausted from the filth of our long journey, worn out and devastated by the typhus. One or two from

²⁶ From I. Paschalias' personal archive.

every family would die every day, but entire families succumbed as well. We stayed in Kavala for about two months. Afterwards, by rail from Drama, we reached Serres. There we were accommodated in the hall of the musical/athletical association 'Orpheus'...²⁷

The fourth and final mission, which contained about 1000 people from the area surrounding Pozarevac, headed by primary school teacher Sandro, reached Belgrade and then Zagreb, and wound up in the Adriatic port of Fiume. On an Italian ocean liner they reached Corfu and, via Patras, they reached Egio. There they stayed for approximately 6 months. Many of them reached Thessaloniki by boat, and from there on to Serres. Others set out from Patras with arabades (carts) and on foot. Many of them died on the road, due to a variety of illnesses. The picture they met with at their villages was lamentable.

There were so many weeds that I didn't know where our house was. From where should we start? There was nothing left standing. Many left and settled in Thessaloniki, in Serres, in Athens... We who stayed there lived at first in huts, in tents, until slowly we began to build our homes... .

That year, 1918, they suffered a hard winter.

We in Ramna, when we returned, found nothing standing. Everything had turned to ashes... Since they burned the village...Gone, too, was the church...the old one. Afterwards we built another one. But most left. The village dispersed. We were only 7-8 families who remained...Others went to Thessaloniki, a few to Vyroneia, and most to Petritsi...And some went to Tzoumagia...²⁸

Following the narratives of these people, one can only admire the wealth of information they leave to us. Their narrations were descriptive, without this meaning that they were not also interpretive. From this wealth of information, I have chosen to present the effect the war had, as a living experience, on the consciousness of the narrators, who were at a young age at the time of the war. It was the first issue that came immediately to the forefront, as soon as they commenced their narratives. The words of the narrators, with consecutive re-interpretations up until the time of the narration, with the contribution of not only memory but also of oblivion, of silencing or of repression. This resulted in the individual vision pervading the interpretation of the events.

The men would speak of the events that marked both their individual memory, as well as the collective memory of the village.

As Miroljub Manojlovic writes, a number of Greeks remained in Pozarevad, who were involved chiefly in commerce and in hotel enterprises, and with great success at that. Some of them became renowned, rich and eminent citizens of the city. Especially as owners of kafeneia (coffee shops), hotels. They gave Greek names to their kafeneia, such as "Itia" (willow tree) or "Kleousa" (weeping willow), "Ta Dyo Lefka Peristeria" (The Two White Doves), or "Kasine". The Greeks and

²⁷ Y. Tzemailas, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Naoum Marokos, *op. cit.*

Serbs were Orthodox Christians, and consequently their co-habitation was very good. Very frequently, and early on, we see weddings between Serbs and Greeks. With the passage of time, the second and third generations of the Greek settlers lost the Greek language, mainly because the Greeks were not living isolated or in groups, but very quickly assimilated into the wider Serbian society.²⁹

Although the narrators spoke about their lives, in the end, in their narrations, the presence of the community prevailed over the individual. In their effort to recount the collective experience of the events of the captivity, they downgraded their personal experience. They almost always spoke “we Vlachs”. They gave the impression that, at that moment, they had a deep conviction that they were speaking on behalf of all the Vlachs of their community. They spoke more as the holders of a historic tradition that needed without fail to be passed on to the next generations so that the younger people would know what their own generation lived through. I am writing in the past tense because these people are no longer with us. But with their words and vivid descriptions they have left us living pictures.

I would like to conclude this presentation with the words of George Evans, who writes:

although these veterans of the old times were living encyclopedias, I cannot, however, just simply browse through them. And this is so because they were people.³⁰

²⁹ Miroljub Manojlovic.

³⁰ E. G. Evans, *Oral History*, τεύχος 1/4 (1973), 57.

Калиопи Панопулу

„То су биле тешке године...“

Усмена сведочења Влаха о затвореништву у Пожаревцу, у Србији

Кључне речи: усмена историја, колективно памћење, Власи, затвореништво, Сер

У овом раду износе се усмена сведочења Влаха, као један од најважнијих истраживачких материјала, који су били заточени у доба Првог светског рата, тачније 1916, у Пожаревцу. Описана је општа атмосфера од 1916, тј. од тренутка заточења, до 1918. године, када су се затвореници вратили у родну Грчку, доживљена кроз индивидуална и колективна искуства обичних људи. Учињен је напор да се означи вредност усмене културе, методом укључивања гласова протагониста у историјске податке. Такође, у раду је описан и пут који су протагонисти прешли од затвореништва, до ослобођења, као и фазе после повратка.