

HERITAGE WITHOUT HEIRS?
TANGIBLE AND RELIGIOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE
OF THE VLACH MINORITY IN EUROPE IN THE CONTEXT
OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PROJECT
(CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUBJECT)

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ABSTRACT: The revival of themes concerning UNESCO cultural heritage, which emerged at the end of the 20th century, poses many questions in reference to the need, essence, and discourse on the subject as well as areas beyond it. One of these questions seems to be the cultural heritage of national communities in Europe, which were doomed to assimilation, persecution or even oblivion in the second part of the 20th century. In recent times, the critical research trend on cultural heritage has pointed out that the essence of heritage is a choice which transforms cultural achievements into “our heritage¹” – the areas of culture that we choose and often protect and pass on to the next generations. However, beyond “our protection,” there is a realm of “oblivion” which may include “alien” tangible and intangible objects about which we do not care, which do not matter to us and which we do not want to pass on to our heirs. It is a space of all forms of “our” degradation and marginalization of an “alien legacy,” a space where we often let this legacy become forgotten². It can be stated that the example of the Vlachs perfectly illustrates the complex processes related to cultures which were overwhelmingly subjugated by their neighbours and lost the fight. A neighbour, usually representing the culture of the majority, was stronger culturally, economically, politically and often militarily, too. The following article focuses on the phenomena which classical anthropology used to inspect, claiming that its role is to protect what is fading into oblivion. Thus, the analysis of the Vlach culture presented herein refers to a much wider reflection, which is a synergy of ethnography, ethnology and cultural anthropology, and to the critical studies on heritage which are emerging in Poland. This presentation will analyse the principal problems concerning research on the cultural heritage of displaced communities in Europe from the perspective of the Vlach minority. Based on the field research conducted in several countries of Europe (e.g. Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Poland), I will present the main classification of the Vlach tangible heritage with special attention paid to the most important cultural monuments, including religious building developments (churches, icons, small religious architecture). I will portray the difficulties found in protecting this heritage and the role of cultural institutions in its preservation and exposition.

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¹ Andrzej Tomaszewski, *Ku nowej filozofii dziedzictwa* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012).

² UNESCO cultural heritage itself poses many questions in reference to the need, essence, and discourse on the subject as well as areas beyond it. When analyzing the UNESCO list, we discover monuments which a given nation considers the most valuable, but also a lot of excluded areas which are still not part of officially recognized heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

The essence of heritage is a choice which transforms cultural achievements into “our heritage¹” – the areas of culture that we choose and often protect and pass on to the next generations. However, beyond “our protection,” there is a realm of “oblivion” which may include “foreign” tangible and intangible objects about which we do not care, which do not matter to us and which we do not want to pass on to our heirs. It is a space of all forms of “our” degradation and marginalization of an “alien legacy,” a space where we often let this legacy to become forgotten². It can be stated that the example of the Vlachs perfectly illustrates the complex processes related to cultures which were overwhelmingly subjugated by their neighbours and lost the fight. A neighbour, usually representing the culture of the majority, was stronger culturally, economically, politically and often militarily also. The following article focuses on the phenomena which classical anthropology used to inspect, claiming that its role is to protect what is fading into oblivion. Thus, the analysis of the Vlach culture presented herein refers to a much wider reflection, which is a synergy of ethnography, ethnology and cultural anthropology, and to the critical studies on heritage which are emerging in Poland.

Today, we already know that the cultural heritage of national, ethnic and religious minorities as well as stateless communities in the 20th century in Europe was doomed in many countries to assimilation, persecution and even oblivion. Such minorities are often faced with the situation in which their heritage is rapidly vanishing, which is caused by underfunding and a lack of general care. The heritage of minorities, including the one of the Vlachs, is not infrequently passed over in silence in official national discourse. It is also included in the so-called difficult heritage, which breeds tension and conflicts, because tangible and intangible objects which are part of it (spaces, artefacts, customs, rites, rituals, and professions, etc.) may have different and often contradictory meanings to audiences from various social groups³. The way this heritage is perceived and treated by the representatives of majority governments and communities where minorities settled and by the representatives of minority ethnic groups who

¹ Andrzej Tomaszewski, *Ku nowej filozofii dziedzictwa* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012).

² UNESCO cultural heritage itself poses many questions in reference to the need, essence, and discourse on the subject as well as areas beyond it. When analyzing the UNESCO list, we discover monuments which a given nation considers the most valuable, but also a lot of excluded areas which are still not part of the officially recognized heritage.

³ John E. Tunbridge and G.E. Ashworth, *Dissonant heritage - The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 1996); Krystyna Gutowska, “Niechciane dobra kultury: chronić czy niszczyć?” in: *Dziedzictwo kulturowe – konteksty odpowiedzialności*, ed. K. Gutowska (Warszawa: KNSiAPW, 2003, 97–123; Gerard Kosmala and Dagmara Chylińska, *Trudne dziedzictwo. Upamiętnienia poległych podczas I wojny światowej żołnierzy niemieckich na Śląsku*, <http://www.zgrit.uni.wroc.pl/strona%20internetowa%20pomniki/index.html> [access: 10/10/14].

feel heirs to that heritage is far from being the same. In the case of the former, minority heritage is often marginalized or even destroyed – it is sometimes even stripped of its right to be called ‘heritage,’ and the minorities this heritage belongs to are forced to live in conditions which are close to assimilation (it is enough to mention what was said to the Vlach minority in Greece: *Save your folklore, forget your language!*⁴). In the case of the latter, the areas of culture worthy of protection are often forgotten or – just the opposite – excessively glorified.

It should be added that what we often see today is the so-called heritage without heirs, i.e. cultural achievements being the legacy of the “dispossessed” ethnic groups which, historically, have experienced tragedies inflicted by their more powerful neighbours – ethnic cleansing, displacement, deportation or the Holocaust as understood in a broad sense of the term. This aspect of heritage was emphasized by Jacek Purchla, who in the 20th century associated it primarily with areas of Central and Eastern Europe⁵. It seems, however, that the tragedy-stricken categories of the space of cultural “heritage without heirs” are found in almost all areas of Europe and beyond, wherever the strong have managed to impose the rule of law on the weak, and wherever nations, ethnic groups and their cultures experienced inequality. In the absence of heirs among “the damned” and those doomed to death or, at the very best, to a wandering life, no one is interested in and no one describes or manages such cultural resources any more. A minority which becomes “absent” in a given country often loses the right to refer to its cultural resources as heritage, and for many people efforts to preserve these resources become efforts to protect the heritage of “the enemy.” In this case, the minority culture is not seen as a cultural heritage to be taken care of at all – no individual or institutional steps are taken to help its valorisation, preservation and transmission to future generations, and therefore many aspects of that heritage – which itself is often very valuable and considered by many to be far more interesting than the one recognized in the official national discourse – are lost and forgotten. Every now and then, cultural heritage becomes a subject of scientific research, which – although very valuable – produces a specific effect – they preserve pieces of the past that exist only in scientific deliberations. Through a kind of reconstruction of the past, what scientists do is often an act of cultural revival, cultivating our memory of the past and, if possible, showing the continuity of a culture’s history and traditions in modern times. Such actions inevitably involve formulating new hypotheses and giving scientific meanings to cultural areas that have sunk into oblivion⁶.

⁴ Thede Kahl, *Aromanians in Greece: Minority or Vlach-speaking Greeks? Minorities in Greece - historical issues and new perspectives*, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas (History and Culture of South Eastern Europe)*, Vol. 5 (2003): 205-219, see also: http://www.farsarotul.org/nl27_1.htm [access: 10/15/14].

⁵ Jacek Purchla, *Naród, dziedzictwo, pamięć*, <http://www.obserwatorkonstytucyjny.pl/publicystyka/narod-dziedzictwo-pamiec/5/> [access: 10/15/14].

⁶ Jan Assman, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, transl. A. Kryczyńska-Pham (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego,

On the other hand, minorities themselves tend to immensely glorify, ideologize and mythologize their heritage. Paradoxically, the more it is persecuted, the bigger its value. What is more, such heritage often “grows” beyond other heritage located in countries where minorities live. It becomes a “sacred” argument to fight for one’s rights, write one’s own history and use symbols of identity. It is a symbolic weapon in real-life battles, during which minorities place their heritage before a shared multicultural heritage of the region, or even of the nation and country. However, heritage which is used in this way may become a breeding ground for another conflict or may even spark the return of persecution for which, mind you, minorities are very often at fault, since there are heritage-driven conflicts for which the representatives of the majority are hardly the only ones to blame.

2. THE VLACH CULTURE – DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

When embarking on research on the cultural heritage of the Vlach minority (Aromanians) in Europe and beyond, we have to realize the scale of its inherent problems. All the situations mentioned in the preceding paragraph concern Vlachs, to a greater or lesser extent, since their culture is marked by certain features which must be factored in when analysing the complexity of their heritage. One needs to remember that, due to the nature of this culture, the Vlach heritage provokes a series of questions which still have not been answered in an unambiguous and clear way.

The first and most important feature of the Vlach culture is their **centuries-old nomadism**, in this context understood as the wandering and moving of the Vlach community from one place in Europe to another and their migration beyond Europe⁷. In the case of Vlachs, nomadism has a double meaning. First of all, there is **the journey of the Vlach ethnic group**, which over the centuries (at least since the 10th century) has moved from the southern lands of Europe up to its north-eastern areas⁸. Questions on the roots of these migrations have remained unanswered; what is known, however, is that the consequences, which are a vital element of the Vlach culture and heritage in general, include the dispersion of this minority across Europe and other continents, but also its contact with different cultural traditions, as it settled among various majority communities in many European countries. As a result, the culture of the Vlachs, and thus their legacy, is different in various countries, with only some ba-

2008), 52; Ewa Kocój, *Pamięć starych wieków. Symbolika czasu w rumuńskim kalendarzu prawosławnym* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), 20.

⁷ We still do not know whether nomadism was a typical feature of the Vlach culture right from the outset, or whether it was a settled community which was forced to move to new areas by various factors (historical, political or economic – due to their profession, i.e. herding, to find new grazing land).

⁸ Grzegorz Jawor, *Osady prawa włoskiego i ich mieszkańcy na Rusi czerwonej w późnym średniowieczu* (Lublin: UMCS, 2004); Alan J.B. Wace and Maurice S. Thompson, *The Nomads of the Balkans* (London: Methuen&Co. LTD, 1914), <https://archive.org/stream/nomadsofbalkansa00wace#page/n9/mode/2up> [access: 10/28/14].

sic characteristics in common. Hence, there is no such thing as one shared Vlach culture in Europe. This becomes particularly evident when analysing Vlachs' religious affiliations, which, in turn, gave rise to different cultural traditions – there is faith in different gods, a variety of beliefs, rites, rituals and customs, religious architecture typical of each group and, finally, dependence on other than traditional centres of religious authority. Therefore, the attitude of various Vlach groups to time and space as well as the symbolism associated with them is different, too. In conclusion, the wandering followed by the process of gradual settlement in different parts of Europe have given the Vlach cultural heritage a multicultural and multireligious touch as we know it today. Let us analyse the examples. Most Aromanians inhabiting Greece, Albania, Romania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia are members of the Orthodox Church. Similarly, the Orthodox tradition is prevalent among Megleno-Romanians, also called Kutzovlachs, who live in the borderland between present-day Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria, and also in Romanian Dobruja. Megleno-Romanians from the Moglena valley and Kožuf and Paiko mountains who live in the borderland between Macedonia and Greece to the west and northwest of the city of Gevgelija (e.g. in the villages of Huma, Sermenin and Konsko in Macedonia) are also Orthodox believers⁹. Islam is the religion of Megleno-Romanians from the Nótia village situated on the southern tops of the Kožuf mountains (now in Greece), and of Karadjovalides from Eastern Thrace (now western Turkey). Part of the Aromanians from the present Bulgaria, Greece and Albania are Muslims too. Probably, some Vlachs from Albania are the so-called Bektashi Muslims – Muslim Sufis who, together with the Turks, came to the areas of Albania at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries and officially are not part of the Islamic faith due to significant differences from the ideals of the canonical Islam¹⁰. So far, however, this topic has been very poorly explored and requires new field research in Albania. Istro-Romanians from Croatia are Roman Catholics¹¹, while *Morlachs* (aka *Mauro-Vlachs* or *Black Vlachs*) from the Dinaric Mountains, who are slowly dying out, are also primarily the followers of the Orthodox Church, with some Roman Catholics¹². The prevailing religion among Lemkos and Boykos, who are the representatives of the Vlach minority in Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine, in-

⁹ *The Vlachs. Report*, "Greek Monitor of Human & Minority Rights", 1995, Vol. 1 No. 3 December (May-June 1994), <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/reports/vlachs.html> [access: 10/19/14].

¹⁰ More on the Bektashi Order: Robert Elsie, *Der Islam und die Derwisch-Sekten Albanien. Anmerkungen zu ihrer Geschichte, Verbreitung und zur derzeitigen Lage*, <http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/fallstudie/RElsie2.pdf> [access: 11/09/14]; Vassilis Nitsiakos, *On the Border: Transborder Mobility, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries on the Albanian-Greek Frontiers*, http://www.brad.ac.uk/ssis/media/ssis/ceer/2011/Nitsiakos_review.pdf [access: 11/10/14]; Gilles de Rapper, "Better than Muslims, not as good as Greeks. Emigration as experienced and imagined by the Albanian Christians of Lunxhëri", in: *The New Albanian Migration*, ed. R. King, N. Mai, S. Schwandner-Sievers (Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 173-194; Henry N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: its races and their future* (London: Methuen & Co.), 1906, http://promacedonia.org/en/hb/hb_8_4.html [access: 11/10/14].

¹¹ See: <http://www.istro-romanian.net/> [access: 10/24/14].

¹² See: *Mauro-Valachica*, <https://notendur.hi.is/~maurizio/danubiana/maurovalachica.htm> [access: 10/24/14].

cludes the Orthodox faith and then the Greek Catholic Church. Polish highlanders of the Podhale region from the Tatra Mountains, who in recent years have been strongly associated with the Vlach identity and heritage, remain Roman Catholics, and so do the highlanders from Gorce near Ochotnica Wielka in Poland, who are now discovering and rebuilding their Vlach identity¹³. Hutsuls, who inhabit the south-west of Ukraine (Chornohora) and the north of Romania, are mostly Orthodox and, to a much lesser extent, Greek Catholics.

The multicultural face of Vlachs not only means a multitude of religions, but it is also the outcome of the centuries-long (constant or temporary) life next to other ethnic groups like Greeks, Albanians, Turks and Slavs: Serbs, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Poles and many others, who represent various cultures that influence them. Each of these ethnic groups has had a visible cultural impact on the nature of the Vlachs. Today, it is demonstrated in their language, beliefs, customs, rites and rituals¹⁴. In some European countries, members of the Vlach minority cannot speak Aromanian anymore and only use the official majority language of the country in which they live (including Ukraine, Slovakia, part of Greece and Romania). Some European Vlachs are bi- or even trilingual, for instance the Vlachs in Albania mostly speak two (Aromanian and Albanian or Aromanian and Greek) or sometimes even three languages (Aromanian, Albanian and Greek or Macedonian)¹⁵. Aromanians from the Pindos Mountains in Greece are typically fluent in two languages – Aromanian and Greek. The Vlachs in Serbia speak Aromanian and Serbian, while Istro-Romanians from Croatia speak Croatian and Aromanian, although the latter is slowly disappearing. Polish highlanders from the Podhale region speak the Podhale dialect (which is part of the Małopolska dialect), which is in many aspects similar to Romanian, brought there by the Vlach shepherds in the 14th and 15th centuries¹⁶.

Second of all, Vlach nomadism is entailed in their **dependence on their profession**, e.g. on sheep farming and sometimes on agriculture, transport and trade in a particular group of goods. Transhumance and the associated grazing periods, which were different in various parts of Europe and could be all-year-round or seasonal (depending on whether it was the New or the Old Orthodox Calendar – from the Catholic

¹³ Piotr Kłapyta, *Włosi – nomadzi Bałkanów i ich rola w kolonizacji luku Karpat*, www.porozumieniekarpackie.pl [access: 10/10/14]; Wojciech Mulet, *Włosi w Ochotnicy*, <http://skansen-studzionki.pl/?p=116> [access: 10/13/14].

¹⁴ More on this in: Ewa Nowicka, *Nasz język rozumieją aniołowie. Arumuni we współczesnym świecie* (Kraków: NOMOS, 2011), *passim*.

¹⁵ Kestrina Budina and Laurie K. Hart, Northern Epiros: The Greek Minority in Southern Albania”, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/albania/northern-epiros-greek-minority-southern-albania> [access: 11/09/14].

¹⁶ Witold Truszkowski, *Studia socjolingwistyczne z dialektologii rumuńskiej na materiale wsi Drogus w Siedmiogrodzie rumuńskim w konfrontacji z polską gwarą wsi Ochotnica Dolna w Gorcach* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1996); *Słownik gwary i kultury podhalańskiej*, in: *Góry i góralszczyzna w dziejach i kulturze pogranicza polsko-słowackiego* (Podhale, Spisz, Orawa, Gorce, Pieniny). Literatura i język, ed. M. Madejowa, A. Mlekođaj, K. Sikora (Nowy Targ: 2005), 171–175.

spring Feast of Saint Adalbert of Prague (April 23) or the Orthodox Saint George's Day (April 23/May 6) to late autumn, i.e. the Catholic feast of Saint Michael the Archangel (29 September) or the Orthodox Feast of Saint Demetrius (October 26/November 8)) resulted in periodic nomadism even among those Vlach communities which had already managed to settle in a particular European region¹⁷. Therefore, what evolved was a specific type of tangible (buildings, artefacts and objects used for breeding) and intangible (beliefs, customs and rituals) culture which is marked by dependence on nature and entails everything that is necessary for the survival of shepherds and their animals. Merging the religious traditions of new settling regions with the ones that the Vlachs brought from the places they had left has given rise to a distinctive set of religious and magic beliefs of a syncretic nature. It is important to remember that a shepherd's hut and grazing land, in this case mountain pastures, were the hub of nomadic pastoralism, and the life of a community with all the activities of a year cycle revolved around them¹⁸. Additionally, herding involved a specific social hierarchy with a senior shepherd on top, who was in charge of sheep flocks, hired young shepherds and managed dairy farming. One of his important attributes was being familiar with magic rituals, which, according to Vlach beliefs, were necessary to protect animals and people from diseases and evil forces. Thanks to the syncretism of nature, religion and magic, which was a chief quality of Vlachs' vision of the world, people were able to survive in the surrounding reality both economically (livelihood) and metaphysically. Today, we already know that herding combined with the ability to make food products from sheep's milk and cattle, regarded for centuries as a natural thing in the mountain landscape of many countries, is a wonderful example of the Vlach cultural heritage. It is slowly disappearing and preserved only in a few regions in Europe (it is worth noting that in some countries it has been artificially revived by intellectuals and regionalists). The skills this profession entails, together with all the magical and ritual facilities, are now known only to a few and can easily compete with other professions that are already on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Another feature of the Vlach culture that affects the nature of the cultural heritage of this ethnic group is their **relative isolation from strong cultural areas**. As a nomadic community, Vlachs tended to move from one place to another up to a certain point in time and, as a by-product and to a limited extent, they took advantage of the cultural heritage of other peoples. Initially, these were only occasional interactions, mainly including trade exchange and sometimes rituals, law and entertainment. However, when the Vlachs began to settle in various countries, which occurred at different points in the past, their contact with local communities and their culture became much more in-

¹⁷ More on this in: M. Luković, *Transhumantní migrace pastevců v centrálních a západních oblastech Balkánu*, in: *Tradiční agrární kultura v kontextu společenského vývoje střední Evropy a Balkánu*, ed. Z. Kłodnicki, M. Luković, P. Slarkovský, R. Stoličná, M. Válk, „Etnologické Studie”, Brno 2012, 12, 147-196; Piotr Kłapyta, *Włosi - nomadzi Balkanów*, in: *Pasterstwo w Karpatach. Tradycja a współczesność. Szkice*, ed. M. Kiereś (Warszawa: Centrum UNEP/GRID-Warszawa&Grafikon, 2013), 29-37.

¹⁸ Urszula Janicka-Krzywda, *Magia hal i polonin*, in: *Pasterstwo w Karpatach. Tradycja a współczesność. Szkice*, ed. M. Kiereś (Warszawa: Centrum UNEP/GRID-Warszawa&Grafikon, 2013), 41-56.

tense. Still, Vlachs settled mainly on the outskirts away from cultural centres, in places where they could practice their profession without being disturbed. These mostly included mountains and mountain valleys devoid of bustling cultural centres and cultural influences. Very often, however, Vlachs lived side by side with the members of other ethnic groups, who spoke a different language and adhered to diverse cultural and religious traditions. The situation was different in the case of Vlachs whose job involved trade and who settled close to the main trade routes running through Europe (e.g. Moscopole in Albania). These cultural interactions made the Vlach culture absorb or, to a small degree, give in to different traditions, becoming a syncretic culture with a tendency to retain its archaic kernel transferred from place to place and often based on herding traditions. Therefore, it has not produced great tangible cultural monuments, a uniform architectural style or elite schools of religious painting. This does not mean, however, that it has no significant cultural achievements, or that there are no similarities in the sacred art of the Vlachs scattered across Europe who have the same religion – this mainly applies to Orthodox art, which has clear centuries-old canonical rules, e.g. the same method in the exterior and interior polychrome decoration of temples or deep veneration of certain saints (St. George, St. Dmitri, St. Nicholas, St. Paraskeva of the Balkans, St. Sunday). Due to the long absence of a strong intellectual elite, Vlachs' culture is importantly marked by a relatively small number of written cultural sources. This has resulted in Vlachs' poor knowledge on all kinds of historical, political and religious complexities, and even – as emphasized by some researchers – in their lack of vocabulary and concepts required describing contemporary cultural shifts. It should be noted, however, that the Vlachs have never lived in total cultural isolation, because, culturally speaking, it is impossible. They are known to have been through periods of little contact with various European cultures, which, of course, contributed to the gradual transformation of their culture. For a number of researchers (e.g. historians or art historians), the above conditions and the fact that the Vlachs remained outside “high culture” may constitute a hindrance to their research¹⁹. However, for ethnographers and anthropologists, these “margins of culture” are a typical field of scientific exploration, in which they apply well-tried methods allowing obtaining a lot of interesting information. Therefore, when exploring the heritage of the Vlachs with so few sources and artefacts, ethnographers are aware that, for the most part, they have to rely on the category of cultural memory – which is crucial in today's humanistic studies. When researching Vlachs, this memory, associated by Jan Assmann with the supra-individual human memory and expressed in patterns of behaviour, rituals, objects and communication acts²⁰, should be treated as a carrier representing meanings which are symbolic to the Vlach minority.

¹⁹ There is probably one exception – Moscopole, where, in the 18th century, the Vlachs created a vibrant religious and cultural center, radiating to other regions of Europe.

²⁰ Jan Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, transl. A. Kryczyńska-Pham (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008), 35-37.

3. THE RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF THE VLACHS IN EUROPE – RESEARCH CATEGORIES

Keeping the above in mind and being aware of the complexity and wide scale of problems associated with the Vlach culture, today we divide the tangible and religious heritage of Vlach minorities into several categories. At the same time, what should be stressed is the close link between tangible and intangible heritage, since what has increasingly been emphasized recently is the fact that tangible objects should not be explored in isolation, as they have the so-called second world associated with their well-established spirituality, with the universe of perceptions and realities of local communities revolving around it²¹. As pointed out by Krzysztof Kowalski, the new perspective on heritage research tends to focus on heritage carriers, i.e. individuals and communities, as well as on their needs and social functions²². This duality in the studies on the Vlach cultural heritage is vital, because – despite scarce historical sources – it provides a holistic view of the historic monuments and of the world of religious and identity notions associated with them.

In terms of tangible cultural heritage, particular attention should be paid to Vlachs' **places of religious worship**. This category includes churches of different denominations and rites found in places inhabited by Vlachs all over Europe, from Albania to the Northern Carpathians, as well as outside Europe, in Turkey and – as a result of migration – in North America. Wherever they settled, the Vlachs built their own places of worship or used the existing ones. Either they gradually adopted a local religion which prevailed in a given region or they brought the original faith from one place to another with them. Therefore, it is safe to say that nowadays their religious legacy, reflected in their tangible heritage, is syncretic, multicultural and multireligious. It is worth noting that the Vlach places of religious worship include Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic churches and Muslim mosques. Most of them call for research, both in terms of case studies and comparative analyses²³. The majority of these monuments

²¹ Paweł Kucypera, Sławomir Wadył, *Kultura materialna*, http://www.academia.edu/2378887/MATERIAL_CULTURE_KULTURA_MATERIALNA_CO-AUTHOR_P_KUCYPERA [access: 11/11/14]; Anna Góral, Zarządzanie *miejscami kultu religijnego w kontekście rozwoju turystyki kulturowej*, http://www.turystykakulturowa.org/pdf/2012_01_02.Pdf [access: 5/01/12]; Ewa Kocój, *Zwyczaje cyklu dobowego w prawosławnych monastyrach w Rumunii, czyli o wzajemnych związkach materialnego i niematerialnego dziedzictwa kultury*, *Teologia i człowiek*, 2013, Issue 21, 83-103.

²² Krzysztof Kowalski, *O istocie dziedzictwa europejskiego - rozważania* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013), 29.

²³ Such research has recently been started by both researchers and institutions working for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Vlachs. More on this in: Ralitsa Rousseva, „Iconographic characteristics of the churches in Moschopolis and Vithkuoi (Albania)”, *Makedonika*, 2006, v. 35, 166, http://media.ems.gr/ekdoseis/makedonika/makedonika_35/ekd_pemk_35_Russeva.pdf [access: 10/31/14]; Ahilino Palushi, „The life cycle of St. Nicholas conducted in Basilica of “St. Nicholas” in Voskopoje, *Anglisticum Journal (IJLLIS)*, Volume: 2, Issue: 4, <http://pakacademicsearch.com/pdf-files/lan/170/312-315%20Volume%20%20Number%204%20%20August%202013.pdf> [access: 10/31/14]; „Emergency Restoration St. Nicholas Church, Voskopoja”, <http://albania.nlembassy.org/binaries/content/assets/posten>

are destroyed; in many cases, it is difficult to determine their “owners-heirs,” because there are no relevant historical sources or they do not exist in the collective memory of the inhabitants of Vlach villages. Many people are unaware of their Vlach roots, because as a result of sharing their living space with other ethnic groups, they have lost their Vlach identity and developed a new one. Certain monuments of the Vlach heritage, which originally were temples of one religion, have changed their “owners” and now belong to the Vlachs or ethnic groups of a different faith.

In the context of research on the tangible and religious cultural heritage of the Vlach minority, a very important role is ascribed to **small religious architecture**. This includes small objects constructed by the Vlachs and related to their religion or built by other ethnic groups and used by Vlachs for their religious practices. These are chapels, roadside crosses, statues, cemeteries and gravestones located in Vlach villages and towns or left by the Vlachs along their migration routes. Among them, there are free-standing buildings found along the main roads, next to residential buildings and in village centres, but also objects located far away from human settlements – by the side of roads and at the intersection of forest and mountain trails, as well as artefacts hung from trees (paintings and crosses). They are made of different materials: concrete, stone, wood, brick, glass and tin. They tell a lot about the techniques used by the Vlachs for this type of architecture, places from where they got their materials or about the traces of intangible heritage. The Vlachs used these objects for worship rites and practices typical of their religiousness and piety. These were liturgical church services or group and individual prayers, but also religious, cleansing, apotropaic and votive gestures. By observing such practices, we may draw conclusions about the spiritual culture of Vlachs – worshipping saints, making offerings and gifts for the Holy (e.g. flowers, herbs, food or coins), using votive objects to facilitate contact between the worlds (e.g. candles, olive oil).

In the context of research on the subject, two issues should be emphasized. Although these objects are often made of cheap and perishable materials and thus their monetary (economic) value is insignificant, researching them is very important for cultural anthropology and cultural heritage, as they reveal the whole archaic structure of the Vlach beliefs. Unfortunately, these objects are often non-existent in the so-called cultural memory – no one knows when, why or by whom they were creat-

web/a/albanie/netherlands-embassy-in-tirana/2013/may/pcf_chwb_voskopoj.pdf [access: 10/31/14]; „Voskopojë Churches”, <http://www.wmf.org/project/voskopoj%C3%AB-churches> [access: 10/31/14]; Jürgen Herrmann, *The situation of national minorities in Vojvodina and of the Romanian ethnic minority in Serbia*, Report Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=11906&lang=EN> [access: 11/15/14]; <http://vlasi.net/> [access: 11/15/14]; *REPORT ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF RUMANIANS AND VLACHS IN SERBIA*, <http://www.banatul.com/info/banat-history-romanians-in-serbia.shtml/> [access: 11/15/14]; Галина Шевцова, *Дерев'яні церкви України*, Київ 2007; Thede Kahl, „The Islamisation of the Meglen Vlachs (Megleno-Romanians): The Village of Na[^]nti (Nótia) and the “Na[^]ntinets” in Present-Day Turkey”, *Nationalities Papers*, 2006, 34, 01, 71-90, <http://www.paundurlic.com/pdf/The-islamisation-of-the-Meglen-Vlachs.pdf> [access: 11/01/14].

ed. In addition, in many cases it is extremely difficult to indicate the current owner of this tangible heritage – whether it is Vlach ethnic groups or the majority community in which the Vlachs once lived. It is unfortunately in this case that we may use the recently-popular term “heritage without heirs,” i.e. nobody’s heritage left there to deteriorate, with no care of its owners and at the mercy of an accidental stranger’s helping hand.

Another vital aspect of the Vlach tangible heritage includes **religious artefacts**. This is mainly religious painting – Orthodox and Greek Catholic icons and Catholic paintings located in places of worship (Orthodox churches, monasteries and chapels) but also in private hands (Vlachs’ houses). They are made of various materials: wood, metal or paper. It is worth noting that the analysis of this part of heritage provides a lot of information on local master craftsmen, amateurs and schools manufacturing artefacts as well as data on the intangible cultural heritage of the Vlachs – the most popular saints, votive gestures and religious beliefs, ideas, customs, rituals and rites. This analysis may also provide sources to explore relations between different religious centres (including Orthodox churches and monasteries). The category of religious artefacts also includes liturgical books used by the Vlachs, liturgical utensils and other items of worship such as various crosses, prayer ropes, prayer books, candles and many more.

In various European countries, the Vlach culture has been treated differently by the official political and scientific discourse. This heritage is referred to, appropriated or forgotten. In a broader sense, ethnological and anthropological studies bring a lot of reflection upon the social process of constructing rejected heritages and upon the ways of experiencing rejection by those whose heritage, paradoxically, is not valorised but gradually destroyed. In summary, the cultural heritage of the Vlach minority is currently a very important research subject in the field of humanities. Due to its specific nature, it requires comprehensive multidisciplinary international research. What is necessary is collaboration between historians, philologists, archaeologists, art historians, anthropologists and culture managers. Due to the complexity of the research problems, the study must be carried out using specific methodology, because in many countries admitting to be of Vlach descent or classifying particular tangible heritage to this category still breeds stereotypes or even persecution. Therefore, in this approach, tangible heritage becomes one of the signs indicating the complexity of the Vlach culture, allowing researchers to “tame” it in a multitude of ways, while being aware that although the Vlach culture has existed in isolation, it includes numerous penetrable elements to be explored in different configurations.

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