

Balkan Romani: The Dialect of Ajos Athanasios/Greece (Languages of the World/Materials 481). Irene Sechidou. Munich. LINCOM Europa. 2011. 99 pp. ISBN 978-3-86288-0317 (Pb.)

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Irene Sechidou's (IS) description of the Romani dialect of Ajos Athanasios (AA)—now a suburb of Serres (Macedonian Ser, Bulgarian Sjar, Turkish Siroz) in Greek Macedonia—is the sixth Romani dialect description to be published in LINCOM Europa's Languages of the World/Materials series, and it is a welcome addition. (For a review of the first five books, see Friedman 2008.) The work comprises seven chapters—Introduction (7-9), Phonology (10-22), Morphology (23-61), Syntax (62-78), Borrowing (79-84), Balkanisms (85-88), Dialect Classification (89-95)—and a bibliography of over 100 references (96-99). It is the longest of the descriptions published so far and the first to consider Romani in its Balkan context. It is a fine analysis and also a valuable addition to both Romani dialectology and Balkan linguistics. In fact, its significance is far greater than its modest length might lead one to expect.

IS gives two reasons for the AA dialect being of interest. The first is that it has both South Balkan I (Arli type) and South Balkan II (Bugurdži type) as well as East Balkan and West Balkan phonological features: "This shows that dialect classifications are useful but also relative" (p. 8). The second reason given by IS is that AA "is a dialect that has been in continuous contact with Greek since Medieval times" and thus "AA is an appropriate dialect for studying morphological and syntactic replication from Greek." IS notes (p. 9) that "[T]he first historical reference on the Rom of the city of Serres comes from the 'Chronicle of Serres' by Papasynodinos, written in 1621-22," where Roms are mentioned as living in Ali Bey Köy (the Turkish name of AA, Macedonian and Bulgarian Ali Bej Kjoj). IS writes that today AA is exclusively Romani.

Aside from the mention of Papasynodinos's Chronicle, however, IS does not give any other concrete historical information about AA. The reader is thus left with the impression of an unbroken continuity of Romani-Greek contact in AA, with a passing but minor intrusion of Turkish and almost no other in-put, although "Slavic" is mentioned as a source on three occasions (pp. 13, 33, 46) and in more general Balkan contexts also on pp. 30, 66, 84, 87, 88 (these last two mention Bulgarian but not Macedonian). However, for example, in explaining the preservation of palatals (š, č, dž) in AA, where, unlike, e.g. in Ajia Varvara (Iglja 1996:9, whom IS cites, but also noted for Sedentary Rumelian Romani in Paspati 1870:37), speakers do not eliminate the palatals in favor of dentals — the opposition palatal/dental does not exist in Greek) — IS cites only the existence of such an opposition in Northern Greek dialects, which existence she calls a preservation (p. 11). In fact, however, the opposition is an innovation, not a preservation, in Northern Greek, and, moreover, it is present in all the other languages of the region and so, if anything, it is a contact-induced change in Northern Greek and a preservation in AA. This opposition is thus consistent with that in all those other languages with which AA

was in contact. The impression of isolation given in the monograph is also strengthened by IS's attempt at reconstructing AA's sociolinguistic history (p. 94), where she posits that the dialect remained in and around its present location and developed in relative isolation after the arrival of the Roms in Europe (in the medieval period). In fact, however, the history of AA is more complex, there is evidence of contact with Medieval Slavic, and this in turn complicates the picture of AA Romani as an isolated dialect in contact only with Greek and, in passing, Turkish and a little bit of Slavic.

Turning to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when AA was still the village of Ali Bey Köy in Ottoman Turkey, we get a different picture of the complex linguistic environment in which it existed. Gopčević (1889:381) lists it as having 93 houses with 138 Muslim tax heads and 130 Gypsy tax heads for a total of 268.¹ He is not concerned with the nationalities of the Muslims, but for the Serres *kaza* as a whole he claims that a third are Muslim "Serbs" (p. 377).² According to Kǎnčov (1900:177), the population of Ali Bey Köy consisted of 60 "Bulgarian" Christians and 50 Gypsies for a total of 110. Brancoff (1905:200) records 40 "Bulgarian" Patriarchists, 12 Vlachs, and 252 Gypsies for a total of 304. Simovski (1998:245), however, observes that in the census of 1913 the population of Ali Bey Köy was recorded as 800, an indication that large number of families had been settled from elsewhere, presumably after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). The census of 1920 registered only 78 inhabitants, after which the village was treated as part of Serres.³

The town of Serres itself according to Kǎnčov (1900:176) had 11,500 Turks, 11,000 Greeks, 2,500 Jews, 2,200 "Bulgarians", 500 Gypsies and 400 Circassians. According to Brancoff (1905:199) the Christian population of Serres had two Bulgarian, one Vlah, and six Greek primary schools and 2 Bulgarian and 2 Greek secondary schools. While Roms almost certainly did not attend these schools, their presence indicates something about the relevant contact languages. According to Greek statistics cited in Brancoff (1905:250), the Christian population of the entire *kaza* of Serres was 21,288 Bulgarian Exarchists, 26,144 Bulgarian Patriarchists (total 47,560), 28,543 Greeks, 2,886 Vlachs, 56 Albanians, and 2,700 Gypsies. Kǎnčov's (1900:180) figures for the entire *kaza* are 40,316 "Bulgarian" Christians, 220 "Bulgarian" Muslims, 28,220 Turks, 1,060 Circassians, 28,665 Greek Christians, 1,800 Vlachs (Aromanians), 2,500 Jews, 4,563

¹ The Slavic dialects of the Serres region (some of which are still spoken there today) belong to a dialect complex that is claimed as Bulgarian in Bulgaria, as Macedonian in the Republic of Macedonia, and—when its existence is not being denied—as a separate language in Greece. Speakers themselves are divided among the various possible ethnic identities associated with these three nation states (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Greek). Identity issues are further complicated by the fact that some of these speakers (or their parents, grandparents, etc.) belonged to the Bulgarian Exarchate while others were loyal to the Greek Patriarchate during the Ottoman period, during which time there were also Muslim speakers of these dialects. These last were deported to Turkey under the terms of the treaty of Lausanne (1923). An additional complication is that fact that sometimes Exarchists were referred to as "Bulgarians", Patriarchists as "Greeks", and Muslims as "Turks", regardless of language, although some sources distinguish language and religion. Here I shall follow the modern practice in the field of Slavic linguistics and refer to the relevant dialects themselves as *Macedonian* and use *Slavic* when for older periods. When citing older sources, however, I shall use the terms "Bulgarian" and "Serb" when the source itself uses that term. I also translate *Tsigan-* with the English equivalent 'Gypsy'.

² The *kaza* was a late Ottoman administrative unit below the level of *vilayet*.

³ Zachos (2011) gives detailed historical statistics on the Romani population of Serres, but does not distinguish among the other ethnolinguistic groups. On the Vlachs of Serres see Panopoulou (2006).

Gypsies, and 340 Turkish Christians for a total of 107,684. One additional factor that should be taken into consideration is the destruction of Serres during the Second Balkan War (1913), when, according to the Carnegie Commission (1914:92), 4,000 of the 6,000 houses were destroyed. The Report's section entitled "The Massacre and Conflagration of Serres" (pp. 83-92) gives a depressing account of how various Greek and Bulgarian forces slaughtered non-combatants.

All of which is to say that Medieval Slavic, and later, Macedonian (in modern dialectological terms) must have been an important contact language at least until the time of Greek campaigns — at times violent — to eliminate the latter (see Friedman forthcoming). In fact AA does give evidence of very old contacts with Slavic (see below). Moreover, the Romani dialect of AA was by no means completely isolated from other Romani dialects given the massive population displacements. This in turn could account for some of the features otherwise associated with different dialect groups. It is also worth pointing out that the relatively small influence of Turkish and even lesser evidence of Slavic (which, in any case, is greater than that which IS identifies) could be symptomatic not of isolation, but of integration into the Greek linguistic environment. Iglá (1996:236-237) makes the important point that many Turkisms have become obsolescent in the dialect of Ajia Varvara, outside Athens, especially in the younger generation of speakers. Given that the Muslim population of Serres was completely replaced by Greeks in 1924 — almost all from Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace (Simovski 1998:264) — and given also the aggressive policies of Hellenization directed at the inhabitants of Greek Macedonia, the preponderance of Greek influence in AA is not entirely the result of a millennium of contact with Greek.

That said, however, AA does show some very interesting specificities suggestive of both periods of isolation and intimate contact with Greek and the Slavic dialects that gave rise to Modern Macedonian. One example of the isolation is the development of historical retroflex **d* into plain dental /l/, such that, e.g. *bal* 'hair' and *bal* 'stone' are homonyms (p. 14). This change occurred after the palatalization of original /l/ before front vowels, e.g., *loi* < *loli* 'red (f)' (p. 19) but *koli* 'neck' (p. 15). IS cites Tzitzilis (2002) as hypothesizing that **d* went to **l̥* such that it was not available for the palatalization of original /l/ before jot and /i/. The treatments of original **nd̥*, initial *a*- and *s/h* alternations are all complex.

IS also notes the elimination of /c/ and its replacement by /č/ as a consequence of Turkish phonotactics (p. 13), which in turn affects native phonology, e.g. instrumental *-sa[r]* > *-car* in the plural (after /n/) > *-čar*. The raising of mid vowels to high position (*e* > *i*, *o* > *u*) is characteristic of the local Macedonian and Greek dialects as well as AA Romani, and accentual units — also found in Greek and Macedonian — can occur as well, e.g. [amari_čhavé] = /amare čhave/ 'our children' (p. 21). The development of pronominal clitics, e.g. *rakljam len* > *rakljam-en*, *raklja-en* 'we found them' (p. 41), is another feature the AA shares with Greek, as mentioned by IS, but also with Macedonian, and Aromanian (as well as Albanian and the rest of Balkan Slavic).

In the nominal system, AA is noteworthy in having only the short genitive, except in one relic form, and a zero plural for all thematic masculine nouns ending in a consonant without exception. According to IS (p. 26), this latter feature supports the speculation that plurals marked with *-a* in this class are an innovation rather than an archaism. The treatment of derived nouns in *-ipen/-iben* shows a combination of archaism

and innovation, since final *-n* is preserved in the nominative singular, unlike in most of the Balkans, but all the other forms are based in the Greek participial formant *-ima-*, which is an old innovation found elsewhere in Romani.

For the adjective, in addition to the comparative marker *daa* < Turkish *daha*, there is a unique innovation *džin* apparently *adžaj*, *dži*, *adži* ‘more’ plus *-n* (credited to Tzitzilis 2002). In the pronominal system, aside from the innovative pronominal clitics noted above, the dialect has the remarkable archaism of *o* vs *a* in the third person pronouns, i.e. masc. *ov/av*, fem. *oj/aj*, pl. *ol/al*, and lacks the 3pl. *on* which elsewhere in the Balkans competes with *ol*. Paspatis (1870:67) also notes *aj* for fem. and exclusively *ol* (i.e. absence of *on*) in the plural. AA also has the remarkable collocations *kon-tu-mune* ‘whoever’, *o-tu-mune* ‘whatever’, and *kaj-tu-mune* ‘wherever’ (p. 46, or ‘anything, anyone, anywhere’ p. 83). The first element is native (*so* > *ho* > *o* for ‘what’), and the third element is from the Greek focus particle *monon* ‘only’. For the second element, IS (p. 46) cites a personal communication from Norbert Boretzky that the source could be “an anaphoric element of Slavic or Greek origin, cf. Slavic *-to-* or Greek *o, ti* ‘what’.” In fact, the local Macedonian dialects have both *-to-* and *-tu-* as an element added to interrogatives to make them into relatives, whence indefinites are derived (Ivanov 1972:39, Map 108). The suggested Greek etymon for *-tu-* makes no sense in this context and looks more like an attempt to eliminate the evidence of Slavic influence. Rather, what we have is three layers: Romani followed by Slavic followed by Greek, and the ordering points to successive degrees of influence, with the Slavic being older than the Greek, since Greek *-mune* might well have replaced an earlier Slavic marker at the end of the word such as *gode*, or *bilo*, or *(i) da e*.

Another AA feature that looks like a Slavic rather than a Greek Balkanism is the reduplication of possessive pronouns. IS (p. 47) gives the examples *pingli pi buti* ‘his own work (acc.)’ and *Mo dad minglo* ‘My father’. She notes that these forms also occur in Rumelian and Sepeči, and indeed the Turkish model of the type *ben-im baba-m* ‘my-GEN father-GEN’ is arguably a potential source. We can also mention here, however, Macedonian collocations of the type *tatko mi moj* ‘father me.DAT my.M’ as well Bulgarian *svojata si rabota* ‘his own work’ where *svojata si* corresponds to *pingli pi*. In both cases, Slavic and not Greek would be the potential source. For the verb, the AA copula has initial *e-* as in Crimea and the North Central dialects, rather than the more common Balkan *i-*, and this therefore looks like an archaism (p. 54).

The etymology given for *gritaňə* ‘Adam’s apple’ < Sl. *gropjes* ‘dung’ (p. 13) is not merely wrong but also potentially insulting. The form *grütanĩ* ‘larynx’ is attested as such already in Old Church Slavonic, and the AA form looks extremely archaic. The word is attested as Macedonian *grkľan*, former Serbo-Croatian *grkljan*, Bulgarian *grăkľan* and *grăkľjan* but Slovenian *grtānec*. The Balkan Slavic forms involve contamination with *grlo/gărlo* ‘throat’ plus the change of **tl* to *kl*, which is attested elsewhere. The AA form, which not only preserves original */t/* but also, apparently, traces of the final front jer, is thus an archaism giving evidence both of the ancient presence of Slavic in the region and AA’s conservatism. Moreover Macedonian *grob* — realized as [grop] since final devoicing is automatic in all Macedonian (and Bulgarian) dialects — means ‘grave’ and *grobje* (which could be realized dialectally as [gropje] if the form with final devoicing were taken as basic) is a collective form meaning ‘cemetery’. The form

gropjes with its final /s/ looks like a Hellenic rendering, and the gloss gives the impression of being a nasty joke.

Another gloss that looks like a joke — albeit whose we cannot tell — occurs in the section on adjectives. AA has “a special category of athematic adjectives which denote human qualities” (p. 33). According to IS, they all come from Turkish, with Greek *-is* in the masculine and either *-ka* or *-ena* in the feminine. The examples given by are *dilberis*, *dilberka* ,handsome/beautiful‘, *šinaétis/šinaetis* (sic), *šinaetiéna* ,bad, hot-tempered‘, *zuvralis* (no feminine given) ,scurfy‘, *budaláena/budavaena* (no masculine or stress on second form given) ,stupid‘ and *xajvan/xajvanka* ,intelligent‘ (sic!). The only Turkish etymon in this series given by IS is Turkish *hayvan*, which, however, she does not gloss. In fact *hayvan* means ,animal‘, and, in every Balkan language that I know of, its use to describe humans is pejorative, meaning ,beast‘ or ,dumb beast‘. Of the other cited adjectives, *dilber* and *budala* are the same in Turkish, but the initial *š* in from of Turkish *inaet* is mysterious. The only plausible etymology for *zuvralis* is native Romani *džuv* ‘louse’, *džuvarel* ‘to make lousy’, so this form is unusual in showing the typical Hellenic change of *dž* to *z*, which is otherwise not characteristic of this dialect.⁴ IS correctly observes the the feminine marker *-ka* comes from Slavic, but does not speculate on the origin of *-ena*, which could also reflect the productive Slavic adjective formant *-en* in its feminine, which is *-ena*.

Another unidentified Slavic loan on the same page (33) is *tank* ,narrow‘, Old Church Slavonic *tĭnŭkŭ*. The reflex /a/ is very interesting from the point of view of the local Macedonian dialects in the region. The reflex of Common Slavic **ĭ* in this word is /e/ in almost all the villages around Serres (Ivanov1972:17, Map 4). Some scattered villages to the north have schwa, but AA usually replaces schwa with /e/ not /a/ (pp. 10-11). The Macedonian-speaking villages with /a/ in this region were considerably to the northwest and northeast. The form could thus represent a heretofore unattested Slavic development in this part of the Serres region — Ivanov 1972 was unable to include any of the dialects spoken as close to Serres as AA — or the presence of Macedonian-speakers from further afield at some earlier time. Another loan that seems to come from far away is *zjaros* ,burning coal‘ (p. 30), which is probably ultimately from Albanian *zjarr* ,fire, blaze‘, although the word occurs in this form in the Greek of Epirus (Meyer 1891:485), where until 1948 there was an enormous Albanian-speaking population (the Çams). Its occurrence in the Romani of eastern Macedonia, however, points to contacts further away, unless it is from a Greek adaptation of Macedonian *žar* ‘fire, flame’. We can also note that *kikiriki* ‘nut’ (p. 29) is Macedonian.

The section on syntax is extensive and richly illustrated. Turkish *da* ,and‘ is mentioned, but *em* (Turkish *hem*, the loss of /h/ being characteristic of Macedonian), also occurs. The contrastive conjunction *ama* could be from Turkish rather than Greek (p. 70). Although IS claims the use of AA *te na* ,lest‘ after verbs like ,fear‘ and ,worry‘ is a calque on Greek (*na*) *min*, in fact it is more likely a calque on Slavic *da ne* which corresponds exactly to Romani *te na*. The point here is that Romani has the modal negator *ma* which corresponds both etymologically and functionally to Greek *min* elsewhere. In the meaning of ,lest‘, Greek *na* is not obligatory and *min* is the modal

⁴ English *scurfy* means scaly or dandruffy. I would probably use ‘skuzzy’. I wish to thank my Ottomanist colleagues Robert Dankoff, Cornell Fleisher, and Hasan Karateke for confirming that this word is definitely not of Turkish origin.

negator, whereas Romani uses the subordinating modal particle (*te* = Slavic *da*) and the indicative negator (*na* = Slavic *ne*). Elsewhere in AA, the Slavic negator *ne* is used after native Romani *te* as in *te ne dikhel o čhavo* ‚so that the child does not see [someone]‘. In Greek, the use of an indicative negator after the modal particle *na* is impossible, and so here, once again, the greater likelihood of Slavic influence has been missed. This omission is compounded on p. 87, where Aromanian and Albanian are mentioned, but Slavic is omitted. Albanian, like Greek, has a modal negator (*mos*), while the Aromanian construction corresponds to the Slavic and Romani. IS’s observation that *na min* is more common in Northern Greek points to the likelihood that the Greek is also a calque. Another Macedonian calque in AA not identified by IS is the placement of a constituent before a temporal conjunction in a verb phrase when the clause begins a sentence, e.g. *Mej kaj pantresaomas ...* ‚When I got married...‘ (p. 76) literally ‚I when I got married‘ which corresponds exactly to Macedonian *Jas koga se oženiv* literally ‚I when I married‘. The order subject - temporal adverb - verb is typical for Macedonian but was judged odd by native Greek speakers.

The section on borrowing claims that ‚[t]he influence of other Balkan languages on AA has been minor‘ (p. 79). While it is certainly true that the influence from Greek has been massive, it is also true that older influences from Slavic and more recent influences from Macedonian show up in ways that attest both to medieval and modern contacts. Given the campaign of extermination waged by successive Greek administrations against minority languages in Greece — especially Macedonian but also Turkish (cf. Kazazis 1977) — it is unsurprising that the evidence of these influences is harder to detect. IS’s claim that the coordinator *ama* is more likely from Greek than from Slavic (p. 84) is not supported by any evidence. The section on Balkanisms avoids mentioning Macedonian, but is otherwise acceptable other than the shortcomings already noted. The section on dialect classification brings together all the important material and has seven useful maps. As IS has made clear, the dialect is basically South Balkan (or South Balkan I), with significant eastern features, and some isolated innovations and archaisms. Of particular interest in terms of other diffusions is the development of original **nd* into a tri-consonantal cluster (*/nr, nl/ > /ndr/, ngl/*). IS makes the point that AA is the only dialect in the eastern group that participates in the innovation (p. 90). The other dialects are all spoken in the Republic of Macedonia, Pirin Macedonia in southwestern Bulgaria, and the western part of Greek Macedonia. This and some other more recent western innovations suggest contacts and influences from the later part of the Ottoman period.

The level of the English is excellent and the number of typographical errors is minimal. Since the number of errors is so small, it is easy to simply list them for the sake of completeness:

p. 30 knod, knods > knot, knots

p. 42 *har’ adalen-dar ka piena saro gadže* ‘like those that drink all the gadže’ > ‘like those that all the gadže drink’

p. 42 have a widespread > are widespread

p. 56 most known > most well known

p. 70 head to tow > head to toe

p. 86 *moze/zna* > *može/zna(e)* (‘can/know’)

This is a very solid description with abundant and appropriate references to all the relevant literature, including Tzitzilis (2002), which is as yet unpublished and thus

increases the value of this fine publication. IS's work thus represents a state-of-the-art summary of dialectal subclassification within the Romani dialects of the Balkans. The shortcomings noted above are minor, and were it not for the on-going harassment of Greece's Slavic-speaking minorities (Friedman forthcoming), they would be simply peculiar oversights. Unfortunately, in the current geopolitical context, such erasures (Irvine and Gal 2000) have the potential to contribute to the goals of extreme right-wing political parties like *Hrisi Avgi* (Golden Dawn), whose thugs assaulted me in Athens on 2 June 2009 at the presentation of the first Modern Greek – Modern Macedonian dictionary to be published in Greece (Karadža 2009). This is surely not the author's intent. The work is an extraordinarily valuable contribution to the study of Romani, and it belongs in the library of every scholar interested in the Romani language.

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