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**VINCENZO KORAROS' DRAMA AND ITS  
BULGARIAN READERS – AN EXAMPLE OF THE  
CULTURAL INTERACTION BETWEEN KARAMANLI  
AND BULGARIAN LITERARY TRADITIONS.  
ETHNICAL, REGIONAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS  
OF 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BULGARIAN-TURKISH  
BILINGUALISM**

**Abstract:** *The article touches on the social and cultural aspects of Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Cyrillic transliteration of the Turkish (Karamanli) translation of the religious play of the Cretan poet Vincenzo Kornaros has been used as a basis for the present investigation. Initially, this work was written in Greek at the beginning of the 17th century during the Venetian rule of the island. The work apparently followed the model of Jesuitical religious drama and exemplified the Cretan Renaissance which developed under direct Italian influence. Sophronios of Sille in 1836 translated it into the Turkish dialect of Karamanli using Greek letters. The Cyrillic transliteration was published in 1845 by the Bulgarian hierodeacon Hadzhi Yoanikiy in the printing house of the Constantinople Patriarchate in Istanbul. This new edition contained a long list of the names and residences of the people who pre-ordered the Cyrillic variant of the drama. The list also included fragmentary information about the social and professional status of the readers. The analysis of the evidence from the list, as well as other Cyrillic Turkish editions indicate that Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism from this period could not be limited to a certain region, social, or professional group. In many regions it was a popular phenomenon and was spread among different groups. The final part of the article comments on the discontinuation of this bilingualism.*

**Keywords:** *drama; Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism; readers; Bulgarian Orientalism; Karamanli literature*

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## **ПЬЕСАТА НА ВИНЧЕНЦО КОРНАРОС И НЕЙНИТЕ БЪЛГАРСКИ ЧИТАТЕЛИ – ПРИМЕР ЗА КУЛТУРНОТО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ МЕЖДУ КАРАМАНЛИ И БЪЛГАРСКАТА ЛИТЕРАТУРНА ТРАДИЦИЯ. ЕТНИЧЕСКИ, РЕГИОНАЛНИ И СОЦИАЛНИ ПАРАМЕТРИ НА БЪЛГАРО-ТУРСКИЯ БИЛИНГВИЗЪМ**

**Резюме:** Статията засяга социалните и културните аспекти на българо-турския билингвизъм през XIX век. За основа на настоящото изследване е използвана кирилската транслитерация на турския (караманлийски) превод на религиозната пиеса на критския поет Винченцо Корнарос. Първоначално тази творба е написана на гръцки език в началото на XVII в. по време на венецианското владичество на острова. Творбата очевидно следва модела на йезуитската религиозна драма и е пример за Критския ренесанс, който се развива под пряко италианско влияние. През 1836 г. Софроний от Силе я превежда на турския диалект караманли, като използва гръцки букви. Транслитерацията на кирилица е публикувана през 1845 г. от българския йеродякон хаджи Йоаникий в печатницата на Константинополската патриаршия в Истанбул. Това ново издание съдържа дълъг списък с имената и местожителството на хората, които предварително са поръчали кирилския вариант на драмата. Списъкът включвал и откъслечна информация за социалния и професионалния статус на читателите. Анализът на данните от списъка, както и от други кирило-турски издания показва, че българо-турският билингвизъм от този период не би могъл да се ограничи до определен регион, социална или професионална група. В много региони той е бил популярно явление и се е разпространявал сред различни групи. В заключителната част на статията се коментира прекъсването на това двуезичие.

**Ключови думи:** драма; българо-турския билингвизъм; читатели; български ориентализъм; литература на караманли

## **Introduction**

In a previous publication concerning a Cyrillic manuscript in Turkish preserved in Plovdiv library and dating back to the early 1830s, I (H. S.) concluded that the manuscript in question was one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century documents of Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism that dominated the vernacular practices of many Bulgarians during this period. It preceded the appearance of many Cyrillic printed editions in Turkish whose authors, collectors and editors were also Bulgarians. It satisfied the cultural, educational and religious needs of the Bulgarian population in the Ottoman Empire. This literature resulted from two different phenomena – existing Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism inherited from the previous centuries among the Bulgarian population, and the language democratization of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian literature – i.e. the substitution of the old prestigious literary languages Church Slavonic and Greek with the popular languages – New Bulgarian and colloquial Turkish. Unfortunately, the existence of this literature, as well as of Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism were neglected by Bulgarian linguists during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, therefore, many peculiarities of the language situation in Bulgaria after 1878 remained under-researched. Among those were the large number of Turkish loan words and idioms in Bulgarian dialects and sociolects, or the existence of Turkish speaking Christian groups. At present, many aspects of this bilingualism cannot be reconstructed, however, one of the Cyrillic Turkish books might shed light on the regional spread and the socio-cultural milieu of that phenomenon, which was not only preserved in the vernacular, but also transformed into a literary tradition.

## **Vincenzo Kornaros' drama and its translations/transliterations**

In 1845, the Bulgarian monk hierodeacon Hadzhi Yoanikiy from the village of Turiya (district of Kazanlak) reproduced a religious drama recounting the Biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice in Turkish with Cyrillic letters (Church Slavonic orthography). It was published by the printing house of the Constantinople Patriarchate in Istanbul. Initially, this work was written in Greek at the beginning of the 17th century by the Cretan poet Vincenzo Kornaros during the Venetian rule of the island. The work apparently followed the model of Jesuitical religious drama and exemplified the Cretan Renaissance which developed under direct Italian influence<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, the connection of Jesuit theater with cultural processes in the epoch of the Renaissance is indirect. It appeared as part of the efforts of the Catholic Church to

Sophronios of Sille in 1836 translated it into the Turkish dialect of Karamanli using Greek letters (Aytaç 2007: 14). Nine years later, hierodeacon Hadzhi Yoanikiy transliterated the Karamanli edition into Cyrillic, preserving the language of the Turkish translation with some phonetic changes (Kappler 2011: 53-57)<sup>2</sup>. Several peculiarities make the edition of Hadzhi Yoanikiy worthy of analysis:

This was the first example of this genre published specifically for Bulgarians. It enjoyed great popularity among them, and in 1858 the Tarnovo priest Andrey Robovski translated it into Bulgarian using Hadzhi Yoanikiy's edition. One of the paradoxes is that 19th century Bulgarians were introduced to this genre under the influence of Karamanli literature – the Karmanlides were a Turkish-speaking Christian community inhabiting the inland parts of Western Anatolia, in their variant of Turkish. The other paradox is that most readers did not accept the book as a new genre. For example, in spite of its success, it was never performed as a theatrical play. It seems that the majority of its readers perceived the book as a continuation of medieval apocryphal literature which provided the readers with “additional knowledge” about Biblical personages and stories. Abraham and his family were well-known heroes in many apocryphal works widespread in Medieval Bulgaria (Петканова / Petkanova 1981: 88-98). This kind of literature kept its popularity among Bulgarians even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Zahari Stoyanov ironically described the popular influence exerted by medieval apocrypha on the worldview of his compatriots in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>

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counter Protestant propaganda and Protestant translations of the Bible into vernacular languages. By means of religious drama and theater, Jesuits introduced different stories from the Bible to the ordinary people. Therefore, from historical perspectives these works were the result of the Counter Reformation of the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

<sup>2</sup> The exact title of the book was “Хазрети Аврааминъ зиѣде чокъ джана менѣатли курбанъ хекласи” – “The story of the sacrifice of Hazreti Abraham which brought benefit to many people”. Special attention must be paid to the word *hazreti*. It is an Islamic term and its appearance in the Karamanli translation of Kornaros' drama and from there in the Bulgarian Cyrillic variant, looks strange. However, that is not the only example in this respect. In 1841 the Bulgarian monk Theodosius of Sinai published in his printing house a Cyrillic transliteration of the Greek and Bulgarian part of the dictionary of Daniil from Moskopole. He added a Cyrillic Karamanli (Turkish) variant to the Greek and Bulgarian parts. Despite the designation *Karamanli*, the language of the Turkish variant reflects the Balkan Gagauz vernaculars. The Turkish text includes many examples of Christianized Islamic terms – for instance the word *namaz* is used regularly in means of liturgy. Similar transformations can be found in Bulgarian, too. For example, the Bulgarian word *хаджия* – a pilgrim to Jerusalem – was borrowed from the Turkish *hacı* – a pilgrim to Mecca. In our opinion the question requires a separate investigation.

century (Стоянов / Stoyanov 1981: 29). Moreover, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a long and acrimonious dispute among Bulgarians concerning theater. Many Bulgarians shared the medieval view that theater was a pagan invention hostile to church and could harm the soul. Publications against theater regularly appeared in the Bulgarian press until the 1870s (Леков / Lekov 1988, 211-212). Unlike the Catholic and Protestant experience in this field, 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian theater constantly avoided religious and Biblical subjects. The latter can explain the lack of dramatization of Kornaros' drama in Bulgarian areas.

The edition of Hadzhi Yoanikiy was one of the earliest Turkish Cyrillic books. It appeared only four years after the dictionary and *morn orthros* printed in the Thessaloniki printing house of another Bulgarian monk – Theodosius of Sinai. At that time, religious drama was one of the first examples of cultural cooperation between Bulgarian and Karamanli literary traditions. It reached its peak in 1870 when the printing house of the Bulgarian newspaper *Macedonia* published the poetry book of the Karamanli monk Johan from Indzhe Su – sandzhak of Kayseri (inland Anatolia). The book of Johan was published in the civil Cyrillic script and consisted of eight poems with religious content. Among them was a poem dedicated to Abraham's sacrifice which was Kornaros' drama and some original additions by Johan. In the text of the first poem *Visiting Jerusalem*, he expresses his benevolent feelings towards Bulgarians. In other verses he speaks of "the tribe of the Orthodox Christians" and lists the 'holy languages' of Orthodoxy: Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Arabic. According to him, the Gospel was read in these languages in the church of the Holy Sepulcher. The publication of Johan's poems testifies that even in the period when national feelings dominated the struggle of Bulgarians for church independence, the representatives of the Bulgarian movement in Istanbul upheld close contacts with other non-Slavic and non-Greek speaking Orthodox Christians. It is interesting to note that in 1875 – i.e. after the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, three Cyrillic Turkish liturgical books were published. Probably this was also as a result of the contacts with the Karamanli community<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> According to some evidences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Turkish was used in the Bulgarian churches – especially on "Bright Monday" – the second day of Easter when Gospel is read in different languages. These evidences concern the churches in Shumen (Николова / Nikolova 2004: 42). Several bilingual Bulgarian – Ottoman and Armenian – Ottoman inscriptions dating back to the last decades of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the next 19<sup>th</sup> century were found in the same town (Венедикова / Venedikova 2022: 75).

Hadzhi Yoanikii's edition was composed of two parts – the first one (92 pages) included the text of the drama, but the second (20 pages) was in Bulgarian and represented a long list of “donors” – actually clients who had pre-ordered and paid for the book. They were 562, with the number of their orders ranging between 1 and 20 copies per person. Therefore, the drama was the most popular book issued in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Bulgarians in a language different from Bulgarian. No other book or work published during this period in a foreign language enjoyed similar popularity. Simultaneously, the list of clients included information about their towns and partly about their professions and social status. This allows one to draw certain conclusions reflecting the social and regional aspects of Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism.

### **Readers' ethnicity**

Judging from the personal names, only three of these 562 donors were not Bulgarians. They were Savva Burra from Gabrovo – the name indicates Albanian origin, Podromos Ananioglu Karamanli from Istanbul – apparently Karamanli Christian and Kolyu Nenov Kalaydzhi from Turia – the birthplace of Hadzhi Yoanikii. The first two names of the third person were popular Bulgarian names but the third shows connection with the group of the Kalaydzhies – a small Romani speaking Christian community which inhabited the villages of Northern Thrace including Turia. They were tinsmiths and their group designation comes from the Turkish word meaning *tinsmith – kalaycı*. The anthroponym *Kolyu* in spite of its Bulgarian origin (it is a popular hypocoristic form of Nikola) even today is a widely used name among the Kalaydzhies.

The other four people who ordered the book in Istanbul were actually residents of Metsovo – a village in Epirus, Modern North Western Greece (Μέτσοβο). During this period, it was populated by Aromanians – descendants of Romance-speaking groups inhabiting the high mountains of the Western Balkans. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the residents of Metsovo were strongly influenced by Greek anthroponymical practices, but the four readers had Bulgarian family names and obviously could read Cyrillic. Perhaps they were original Bulgarians or Aromanians who had adopted Bulgarian identities. In these decades some Aromanians from Macedonia acquired Bulgarian nationality and contributed to the Bulgarian cultural and political renaissance. The Bulgarian origin of the other clients is undoubted.

### **Geographical distribution of the readers' residences**

Most of them inhabited towns and villages near Turia. The number of citizens who ordered the book several times exceeded those of the villagers – at first glance this phenomenon could be ascribed to mass illiteracy among the rural population during this period. For example, the number of readers in Kalofer was 97, in Gabrovo – 50, in Kazanlak – 59, Koprivshtitsa – 23, Panagyurishte – 21, Sopot -19, while in Maglizh – 12, Hainito – 12, Karatoprak – 11 Samunchiovo – 8, Dabene – 3, Choba – 3, Misilim – 2, Kolachovo – 2. Besides, many of the town residents ordered more than one copy – between 2 and 20, unlike villagers who always bought only 1 copy. However, there were two villages where the number of clients was extremely high – 30 in Turia, the home village of Hadzhi Yoanikii, and 61 in Gabarevo. The case of Turia could be explained by the personal prestige and authority of Hadzi Yoanikii – probably many of the clients were his relatives, but the case of Gabarevo seems inexplicable. The clients who originated from settlements distant from Turia were residents of the cities of Stara Zagora – 6, Chirpan – 17, Etropole – 16, Pirdop – 31, Sofia – 4, Samokov – 5, Edirne – 1, Istanbul – 16, etc.

### **Social and professional status of the clients/readers**

The list of readers gives fragmentary information about this problem. About 70% of the clients were mentioned only by their names and place of origin. Priests, monks, teachers and honorable citizens from the settlements near Turia were highlighted, but the professional occupations of the others were rarely listed. The clients from distant towns were given only by name. Therefore, categorical conclusions on this topic cannot be drawn. The number of priests was 46, of monks – 8 and of teachers – 6. The relatively large number of craftsmen engaged in textile production is also interesting: wool garment makers – 18, wool cord makers – 9, caftan makers – 8, tailors – 3. Other occupations included in the list were painters – 5, slipper makers – 4, owners of inns – 6, grocers – 6, soap makers – 2, builders – 2, goldsmith – 1, watchmaker – 1, icon painter – 1, cook -1, etc. However, the fact that some crafts engaged many people, compared to others practiced by fewer people, must also be taken into consideration.

Another problem is the lack of a common point between the readers, which can shed light on their bilingualism. For instance, the craftsmen were included in a system strongly regulated by the Ottoman state since the second part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and were in close contacts with many Turks – craftsmen, clients, and government officers. However, that was not the case of the priests, monks, teachers and the rural population. Their common

Bulgarian origin and affiliation to Orthodox Christianity can explain the inclusion of the Cyrillic church script in their written culture (in Bulgarian or in Turkish) but cannot explain their use of Turkish.

In fact, Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism from this period cannot be reduced to a certain region, social or professional group. Obviously, in many regions it was a common phenomenon and was spread among different groups. The trilingual French-Bulgarian-Turkish dictionary issued in 1869 clearly illustrates the mass character of this bilingualism. According to the explanation given in the introduction by its authors – Stefan Iliev and Dimo Hranov, the dictionary was designed for the Bulgarian schools where teaching manuals in French were badly needed. The Turkish part was added so that Bulgarian pupils could better understand French texts because many of the Bulgarian words “are not in wide use” (Илиевъ, Храновъ / Iliev, Hranov 1869: 1-2). The origins of this bilingualism, its development over the centuries and the factors that engendered it remain unclear and understudied<sup>4</sup>, but it seems that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Bulgarians did not accept Turkish as a foreign language. There is no other reasonable explanation of the large number of song collections, Christian instructive and poetical works, liturgical books and travelogue printed in Turkish with Cyrillic letters. Apparently, they were not published because of political and economic needs.

### **The end of Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism – the Bulgarian variant of Orientalism**

In 1895, the Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov issued a collection of feuilletons telling *incredible stories* of a Bulgarian visiting Central and Northern Europe (the lands of Austro-Hungary, Germany, Switzerland and Russia). The book manifests the appearance of a new cultural division in Bulgarian society. On one side, there were the new intellectuals educated in *Europe* (the countries from Central Europe and Russia) and obviously dreaming of the entire *Europeanisation* of Bulgarians – i.e. their unification with Central European or Russian high culture and models of social behavior. During the same period, the Bulgarian political and cultural elite was sharply and ultimately divided between two irreconcilable options of *Europeanisation* – the Pan-Slavic ideology of the Russian Empire and the

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the early Ottoman documents relating to the region of Turia show that in the 15<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Christians and Muslims inhabited different settlements (Kayapınar 2017: 237) – the latter does not indicate the existence of active language contacts between them.

Central European social and political order dominated by German culture and language. Paradoxically, the feuilletons united these two very different options in a common notion of *Europe*, because they had a common antagonist – that is the protagonist, or rather the antagonist of the narrative. He was a fictional figure originating from vague *non-European* strata of Bulgarian society. However, geographically they can easily be identified – the anti-hero is a trader of rose oil – an exotic and atypical *Oriental* product in Europe. In Bulgaria it was produced in the same region where most of the authors/publishers (including Hadzhi Yoanikii) and users of Cyrillic Turkish literature originated<sup>5</sup>. Actually, the author of the feuilletons relates about all traders in this product – “Anatolians, Armenians, Turks, Greeks” to the Orient and more exactly to a negative image of the Orient – “they invade Europe in large number” and “lie and deceive the world” (Константинов / Konstantinov 1989: 72).

The same *Oriental* mercantilism is the main driving force of the anti-hero in his tours around Europe. He always gets into conflicting situations with the bearers of *European culture*, does not show any interest in European cultural heritage and institutions like the opera or the theater, and is completely indifferent to the models of social behavior in Central Europe and Russia or to the ideas of Pan-Slavism. He is a patriot (nationalist) but his patriotism (nationalism) is entirely focused on *heroic deeds* which are incomprehensible and unacceptable to Europeans. They accept him as a “newcomer Oriental man” who must go to a mental asylum (Константинов / Konstantinov 1989: 28). One of the main fields of this confrontation with *Europe* is language. Except Bulgarian, he speaks only Turkish and Romanian – two “exotic” languages foreign to 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and excluded from the circle of “the cultural European languages”. Therefore, not only from geographical, but also from language perspectives, the anti-hero of Aleko Konstantinov strikingly resembles the bilingual communities which created and used Cyrillic books in Turkish. Moreover, many of the expressive phrases, lexemes and nicknames in the feuilletons are in Turkish or contain Turkish loanwords and elements. They are especially visible in the second part of the collection, where the author ascribes all the negative features of political and social life in Bulgaria from this epoch to the Oriental, non-European behavior of the anti-hero and his followers. In this way the author stigmatizes the use of Turkish, or even of Turkish phrases and words by Bulgarians. The feuilletons shed significant light on the process of

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<sup>5</sup> The home village of Hadzhi Yoanikii – Turiya, is found in the center of the *Rose Valley*. The most active publisher of Cyrillic Turkish books – Pencho Radov was born in Karlovo – another center of rose oil production.

gradual marginalization of Bulgarian-Turkish bilingualism and its diminution to non-prestigious verbal contacts, in spite of the fact that in some Bulgarian communities it continued to exist as a linguistic reality up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Николова / Nikolova 2004: 46; Бекир / Bekir 2022: 88).

The beginning of this process cannot be determined for sure but most likely it started after 1878 when many representatives of the Bulgarian emigrant circles in Russia, Romania and Western Europe came back to the newly established state and imposed a new system of cultural values and beliefs. In the following decades, this bilingualism became a sign of cultural backwardness and isolation from the high Bulgarian culture and of course from *Europe* in its two dimensions – West European and Slavic (i.e. Russian) civilization. The authors and publishers of Cyrillic Turkish literature, despite their undoubted Bulgarian identity and close relations to the Christian religious tradition and Orthodoxy were excluded from the official narrative of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian culture and literature<sup>6</sup>.

The collection of feuilletons can be considered a typical example of Orientalism in the sense introduced by Edward Said – “kind of intellectual power” and “family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective” (Said 2001: 41-42). The author makes a firm division between *Europe* and *Orient* and identifies the latter with the vulgar elements in the spoken language(s), social culture and political practices of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarians. Actually, he labels obvious vulgarisms that easily can be found in many popular cultures and languages as *Oriental*, irrespective of their origin and geographical spread. However, unlike the European, the Bulgarian variant of Orientalism was directed against groups inside Bulgarian society, which were bearers of the traditional forms of bilingualism. Indeed, similar tendencies marked the cultural and language policies of the other Balkan states at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They led to the marginalization and disappearance of the traditional bilingualisms and to the appearance of a new language situation dominated by large monolingual national communities.

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<sup>6</sup> This *Damnatio memoriae* was impossible in some cases, yet at the time this kind of activity was largely tacitly practiced. For instance, Petko Slaveykov in many official histories of the Bulgarian literature was seen as a crusader against “the dangerous influence of the Greek and Turkish songs” on the Bulgarian youths (Јеков1988, I 222). Actually, between 1854 and 1870 Petko Slaveykov published 4 song collections containing Bulgarian and Turkish songs. In an anthology compiled in 1857 the number of Turkish songs exceeded 40.

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