

## THE BALKAN SPECTRUM OF COLOR TERMS AMONG THE AROMANIANS (ETHNO-LINGUISTIC ASPECT)

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**ABSTRACT:** In June 2022, an ethnolinguistic expedition to the regions of Bitola and Krushevo (North Macedonia) took place. The study of the archaic phenomena of the traditional folk culture of the Aromanians living in this area was the main goal of the field research. However, during the interview, an additional result was compiling a system of coloronyms in the Aromanian. The linguistic status of the Aromanian is still a debatable issue, however, it can be noted that the phonetic and lexical distinctive features of the idiom under consideration is quite large. And the system of color terms, to be discussed in this article, demonstrates precisely these features.

The color terms of the Aromanian language have not previously been the issue of special study. Aromanian, once widespread and actively used by the educated population, has developed a rich system of color terms. However, with the loss of the metropolis, native speakers and prestige, the rich system is reduced to the basic coloronyms. The article considers on the basis of the author's own field research, as well as the published dictionaries and works involving the Aromanian materials, to compile a description of the color terms in this Eastern Romanian idiom. The functioning of the corresponding color terms was illustrated with the ethno-linguistic contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Aromanian, system of color terms, North Macedonia, dialectology, lexicology, traditional folk culture, Balkan Sprachbund

The Aromanian system of color terms is distinguished, on the one hand, by a high degree of borrowings from Slavic languages. On the other hand, the set of the basic coloronyms and their phonetic form reflect the most striking features of the Aromanian idiom compared to other Eastern Romanian dialects on the Balkans. It should be noted that despite the already published dictionaries and textbooks in Aromanian, the orthography norms are still being formed, so there may be different variants in spelling. In this article, we will adhere to the spelling rules adopted for the latest editions of the Aromanian dictionaries, with the exception of the direct citation of the earlier editions. The interviews were conducted in Romanian and the local Slavic idiom. The main interviewees were elderly people, representatives of the older generation, who spoke Aromanian. The middle-aged generation communicates in Aromanian only with their parents and only on everyday topics, while the younger generation are so called semi-natives: they understand what is said in Aromanian, but they do not speak it themselves, and they will not be able to pass the language on to their children. The topics on coloronyms arose in the course of interviews based on the ethnolinguistic questionnaire by A. A. Plotnikova (Plotnikova, 2009), and according to the author's own questionnaire, compiled for an in-depth study of the color terms in the different Balkan regions. The speakers were expected to respond in Aromanian. However, the so-called code switching often occurred, and then the native languages were mixed in the speech of the bilinguals.

### White

The main lexeme that speakers name for the white color is Arom. *albu*, which goes back to Lat. *albus* 'white' (Candrea, 1907, p. 6); it has the largest number of derivatives: *albã* 'rakia', *alba* 'white rash', *albeatsã* 'whiteness; whitewash', *albat* 'dressed in white', *albili* 'samovils', *albastru* 'sheep of white and black wool', *Stãmãna Albã* 'Shrovetide' (lit. 'White Week'), is named white due to the presence of a large amount of dairy products. Stable comparative constructions, being a guideline for color specification, help to identify the most characteristic objects of the surrounding reality. The interviewees without any exception used *snow* as a prototypical object of comparison: *albu cã neau* 'white as snow'. The comparison *cã zvestri* 'as lime' was also often recorded, and as a broader study of Balkan color terms shows it is stable for the languages in this region (cf. Rom. *alb ca varul*, Serb. *bel kao kreč*, Bulg. *бял като вар*). Comparative constructions with other objects were recorded sporadically: *cã floarã*, *cã lulici* 'as a flower', *cã scafã* 'as porcelain'. The dictionaries of the Aromanian reflect some other lexemes that can also act as a designation for white. These are borrowings from the neighboring Slavic languages, often serving the lexical-semantic field "domestic animals". In particular, the following lexemes are used to name animals according to their coat color: *bealã* 'white sheep', *bel* 'name of an animal of white wool', *bealbish* 'white-haired; fair-haired; white wool animal'.

The borrowings from the Turkish language are present in the the horse color naming: *ghoc* ‘white horse; fleabitten grey’ (from Turk. *gök at* ‘white horse’) (Petrović, 2012, p. 127–128; Elizović, 1932, p. 166).

### Black

There is no generally accepted etymology of the Aromanian coloronym *lai* ‘black’. But according to one version, it is close to the Albanian *laj* ‘to wash’ (perhaps *larë* ‘stain, pattern’) (DEX; Orel, 1998, p. 212, 214; Papahagi, 1909, p. 221). This basic color term has a wide range of compatibility. The coloronym *lai* is used when denoting dark shades, e.g. vegetables and fruits: *pâtârgeni lâi* ‘eggplant’, *yin lai* ‘red wine’, as well as in phraseological units like *listâ lai* ‘black list’, *bursâ lai* ‘black exchange’. The dictionary notes the second meaning of this lexeme - ‘unfortunate’: *Lailji Armânji nu-ari cari sâ-lji caftâ* ‘Poor Aromanians, nobody cares about them’ (Cuvata, 2006, p. 304). Grief and mourning are denoted with the derivatives from the main root: *lâeatsâ* ‘mourning’, *tu laili*, *cu laili* ‘in mourning’. However, in spontaneous speech it was possible to record the adjective *câtrani* (through Turk. *katran* ‘tar’ from Arab. *qatrân*) (БЕР 2, p. 276) meaning ‘damned; unhappy’, as well as a figurative expression with a color component *câtrani lai* ‘extremely bad’. The use of the lexeme in a figurative meaning contributed to the development of the coloristic seme: *câtrânsescu* ‘bring grief’, *câtrânseari* ‘in grief’ (cf. Balk. Slav. *ocrnuva*, *zavie vo crno* ‘to bring grief’ lit. ‘to make someone black, to make sad’), *câtrani* ‘mourning; mourning clothes’ (the Aromanians use black mourning, the field survey failed to record evidence of contemporary existence of the elements of white or blue mourning). Thus, the specificity of this Aromanian expression *câtrani lai* is manifested in the combination of a color term *lai* used in the figurative meaning and another coloronym *câtrani* in the role of an intensifier. Among the stable constructions there was a comparison *câ cafea* ‘as coffee’, a reality that is inevitably present in the everyday life of the Balkan peoples (cf. Alb. *zi si kaffja*, Bulg. *чепен като кафе*). The informants called the prototypical comparison with the *night* as the standard of black - *lai câ nopte* ‘black as night’; *câ drac* ‘as hell’, *câ câtrani* ‘as hell’ were also recorded, reflecting the mythological representations of the Aromanians. The other found color designations are used to indicate shades of the human skin, hair, and animal coats. Thus, the original Arom. *calesh* ‘dark, black-haired’ (from Lat. *cal(l)idus* ‘white animal with a black spot on the head’) spread to the contact Balkan languages as a color term for fur and / or is used in relation to black-browed, black-haired man: cf. dial. Rom. *calea* ‘white ox’, Balk. Slav. *kaluša* ‘white sheep with black wool around the eyes’, *kaleš* ‘about a person with fair skin and dark hair; white sheep with black wool around the eyes’, Alb. *kalesh* ‘fair-haired, fair-haired; dirty’, Turk. *kaleş* ‘black-eyed, black-haired’. In this meaning, is also widely used *sumulai* ‘dark, black, black-haired’ (from Arom. *lai*) and borrowings from Turkish: *cârmuz* ‘dark, black-haired’ (but *cârmeze*, *cârmezic* ‘dark red’, through Turk. *kırmız* ‘red; cochineal’), *mavrumat* ‘black-eyed’ (from Turk. *mavi* ‘dark, purple’) (Cuvata, 2006). To designate the dark color of the cattle coats, derivatives from the common Balkan root *murg-* are used (according to one of the hypotheses, from the early Alb. *\*mura*, connected with the Lit. *\*muras* ‘mud’) (БЕР 4, с. 332; Orel, 1998, p. 279): *murgit*, *murgu* ‘dark’, *murgâ* ‘gray mule’ (cf. Balk. Slav. *mura* ‘gray sheep’ (Prvonek), dial. Alb. *murgë* ‘grey mule’, *samurr* ‘grey dog’ (Kruja)) (Zlatanović, 2014, p. 392; Домосилецкая, 2012, p. 158).

### Red

The main term for red *arosh* (from Lat. *russus* ‘reddish’ or *röseus* ‘pink’) (Ciorănescu, 2001, p. 670), as well as a number of coloronyms *arubinli* ‘dark red’, *arumin* ‘reddish; ruddy’, *aroibu* ‘red horse’, *arus* ‘fair-haired; flushed with anger’ (from Lat. *russus* ‘reddish’), *aruseuvan* ‘red’, *arushit* ‘flushed, ruddy’ reveals the most remarkable feature of the Aromanian vocalism that distinguishes it from the Romanian language – the prosthesis of the vowel *a*. Whereas in the materials of past centuries it was customary to record these lexemes without a prosthetic vowel (cf. *rusu*, *ruşine* ‘fair-haired’) (Papahagi, 1909, p. 243). The Aromanian name of the Orthodox Trinity holiday is diachronically related to one of the coloronyms of red: *Arusa* ‘Trinity week’, *arusalii*, *arâsalji* ‘commemoration days’ (from Lat. *rosalia* ‘feast of roses’) (БЕР 6, p. 349–351)<sup>1</sup>. Stable comparisons are *câ jearlu* ‘as heat’, *câ mer* ‘as an apple’, as well as the prototypical comparison *arosh câ sândzâ* ‘red as blood’. The root *sândzâ* ‘blood’ (from Lat. *sanguis* ‘blood’) is used in the derivatives that can serve as coloronyms: *sândzânat* ‘bloody; ruddy’, *sândzânos* ‘red; bloody’, *sândzânari* ‘redness’ (Cuvata, 2006, p. 464). Among the color terms for red and its shades, there are also borrowings from the other Balkan languages: *alcu*

<sup>1</sup> More on the modern celebration of the Trinity among the Eastern Romanian population in: (Голант, 2013, с. 28 – 35).

‘bright red’, *alic* ‘red, ruddy’ (from Turk. *al* ‘red’), *crâsat* ‘dark red’ (from Gr. κρᾶσι ‘wine’), *ghurghuliu* ‘red; beautiful’. The terms for orange, reflected in the dictionary - *purdicalish* ‘orange’ (from Arom. *purdicalji* ‘orange’, cf. Balk. Slav. *portokalov*), *turungiu* ‘orange’ (from Turk. *turuncu* ‘orange’, cf. Balk. Slav. *turundži* (Bujanovac, Vranje), *alturundžief* (Samokovo)), were not known to our informants (Cuvata, 2006, p. 19 – 20, 147, 445, 542; Zlatanović, 2014, p. 675; Вакарелска-Чобанска, 2005, p. 20).

### Yellow

The only term for yellow that was recorded during the expedition was *gâlbîn* ‘yellow’ (from Lat. *galbinus* < IE \*ghel- ‘yellow, green’) (Pokorny). Most of the derivatives reflected in the dictionary are formed from the main coloronym: *gâlbînari* ‘yolk’, *gâlbînos* ‘yellowish; fair-haired’; *gâlbînos*, *gâlbînush* ‘gold coin’. The designations of yellow are also used to convey an unhealthy skin color: *gâlbîneatsă* ‘yellowness, pallor; yellow paint’, *ângâlbînescu* ‘to turn yellow’, *ângâlbîneari* ‘yellowing; loss of color’, *ângâlbînit* ‘yellowed; pale’, *tseară* ‘pale’ (*s-featsi tseară tu fatsă* ‘to turn pale in the face’, from Arom. *tseară* ‘wax’), *umbârnat* ‘yellowed, pale from disease’ (from Arom. *bârănă* ‘paint’). In the stable comparative phrases discovered during the field research, the main coloronym *gâlbîn* was found: *gâlbîn cã tseară* ‘yellow as wax’, *gâlbîn cã limone* ‘yellow as a lemon’, *gâlbîn cã focu* ‘yellow as fire’. These examples of stable expressions common in Aromanian confirm the conclusions of the study on a wider material: yellow can be compared with the sun, fire and gold, which have positive associations; and at the same time, yellow is the color of unhealthy skin tones, such contexts are regularly characterized by comparisons with lemon and wax (cf. Serb. *jer će dete da im bude žuto kao vosak* ‘because their baby will be as yellow as wax’ – was said to explain why a pregnant woman should not approach the dead. The skin color of a deceased person could be transferred to an unborn child by means of associative magic (Zaplanje)) (Djordjević, 2022, p. 347). The Aromanian-Macedonian dictionary gives possible synonyms for denoting yellow shades: *abrash* ‘animal of light-yellow wool’ (cf. Balk. Slav. *abrash* ‘fleabitten grey horse’), *ambră* ‘amber color’, *cil* ‘pale, pale yellow’ (Cuvata, 2006, p. 164).

### Green

The main lexeme denoting green, and the only one found within the interviews, was *veardi* (from Lat. *viridis* ‘green’) (Pușcariu, 1905, p. 176). The Aromanian dictionaries of the previous centuries also give the appropriate contexts: *Muloaha (măloahă) easte verde* ‘Malva is green’ (Athanasescu Hagi Sterjio, 1864, p. 16). The coloronym is used to denote not only “the color of grass and greenery” (cf. stable comparative phrases *veardi cã frenzi* ‘green as green leaves’, *vearzi cã iarba* ‘green as grass’), but also immaturity: *Ficiorlji-aeshțsă-s nica cu mintea veardi* ‘These children are still green in mind’ (Cuvata, 2006, p. 566). This coloronym can also denote an unhealthy complexion due to illness or anger, which is reflected in the meanings of derivatives from the corresponding root: *ânvirdzât* ‘turned green’, *ânvirdzâscu* ‘to turn green; to turn green in face; to get angry’.

Due to the method of continuous sampling a term for a dark shade was found – *caritcu* ‘dark green’ (Cuvata, 2006, p. 119).

### Blue

To designate blue, the Aromanian speakers used the lexeme *vinit* (from Lat. *vin* ‘wine’) without differentiation into shades. However, the dictionary gives a number of synonyms that can be characterized as dark or light shades of the color spectrum in question: *njirlu* ‘blue’, *njircicu* ‘blue-eyed’ (*njirleatsa-a tserlu* ‘sky blue’), *civii* ‘dark blue’, *teget* ‘dark blue’, *plav* ‘blue’, *nalbastru* ‘gray; blue’, *azur* ‘blue, gray-blue color’, *âmbutunat* ‘dark, darkened’, *lulachi* ‘indigo’, *lilavi*, *lila* ‘dark blue, violet’, *murnu* ‘blue, bluish; dark in the face; black-eyed, black-haired’, *murnescu* ‘to turn blue, darken’ (Cuvata, 2006; Димчев, 2009). The meanings of some derivatives from the above mentioned coloronyms are also noteworthy: *ânvînitsâscu* ‘to turn blue; to get angry’, *ânvînitsât* ‘turned blue; angry’, *murneari* ‘turning blue; anger’, *murnit* ‘turned blue; angry’. If one uses the material of the close Romanian language, then the meaning of blue as a color-symbol of sadness, grief, mourning can be traced in the figurative meanings of the main coloronym *albastru*: *Melancolic, trist, sumbru* ‘Melancholic, sad, gloomy’, and is also fixed in expressions: Rom. *inimă-albastră* lit. “blue heart” describes the feeling of sadness, or anger; Rom. *este (cam) albastru* lit. “to be blue” is used to describe something as negative (DEX’09). Thus, the blue color in the Eastern Romanian tradition, and in Aromanian in particular, can symbolize negative feelings – despondency and anger.

### Brown

As a designation for brown, a lexeme formed from the name of the reality of the Balkan world – coffee – is used: *cafiringhiù* ‘brown’, *cafiné* ‘brown’. Coloronym derived from Turk. *kahve*, is the most common characteristic color designation in all the considered languages of the Balkan Sprachbund, since it reflects the method of naming through an indication of a product common in the Balkan peoples (cf. Alb. *ngjyrë kafe*, *i kafentjë*, Rom. *cafeniu* etc.). Also, among the synonyms, the speakers named *orast* ‘brown, nutty color’ (cf. Balk. Slav. *oraov* ‘brown, nutty color’ (Rataje-Krmol)) (Zlatanović, 2014, s. 449). Due to the fact that the color term is formed on the similarity model and the comparison is embedded in the very form of the word, comparative constructions for brown were not found.

### Gray

The main lexeme used by informants to denote gray was *griv* ‘gray’ (from Lat. *grevis*) (Papahagi, 1909, p. 215). Derivatives from the corresponding root are the most numerous and are also used to define the color of gray hair: *griveliu* ‘gray’, *grivueari* ‘graying, whitening’, *grivuen*, *grivuit* ‘with gray hair’. In the meaning of the coloronym, the lexemes *cănut* ‘gray-haired, gray-haired’, *cănutsăt* ‘gray-haired, whitened’ could be used: *doi iedz cănuts* ‘two gray lambs’. Indistinguished grayish shades of animal fur can also be named with the lexeme *nalbastru* ‘gray, ashy; blue’ (*nalbastră* ‘gray sheep’) (cf. also Rom. *albastru* ‘blue’) (Домосилецкая, 2002, p. 158). Among other designations for gray in Aromanian, there is a lexeme formed according to the referential model on the object from the surrounding reality – ashes: *cinushear* ‘grey, ashy’ (from vulg. Lat. *\*cīnusia* < *cinis* ‘ashes’) (Candea, 1907, p. 46). In addition to the lexemes of Aromanian own fund, in the system of color terms there are borrowings from the Slavic languages: *siv* ‘gray’ (from Slav. *siv* (IE. *\*kei-*), *Sivgi* ‘name of a gray dog’ (Skok, 1973, p. 246–247). A pleasant find in a village of Malovishte (Arom. *Mulovishte*), an Aromanian enclave nearby the city of Bitola, has become a lexeme for a grayish horse – *zelenko*<sup>2</sup>, even though this word is not found in the dictionaries of the local Slavic idiom. Among the Balkan peoples, a horse, and sometimes other animals of a light or other indistinguished shades, are named on the basis of green color (cf. Balk. Slav. *zelen kon* ‘white horse’, *zelenka* ‘gray mare’ (Vrtogosh), *zeljka* ‘gray dog’ (Trstena)) (Zlatanović, 2014, p. 218 – 219)<sup>3</sup>.

### Motley

Within the frames of the expedition, the terms for multi-colored, in particular, motley wool, were also studied. The main occupation of the Aromanian population throughout the centuries-old history was trade and cattle breeding. Seasonal migrations of Romanian-speaking shepherds contributed to the vocabulary movement between the contact languages and the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula. The following lexemes are recorded for motley:

- *bacav* ‘white sheep with brown hair’, *bashur*, *bashurcu* ‘white sheep with brown wool on the muzzle; filthy’, *Bashur* ‘name of a white dog with brown hair on the muzzle’ (cf. Balk. Slav. *башура* ‘to soil’) (Cuvata, 2006, p. 93, 95–96).

- *bardză* ‘black and white sheep’, *bardzu* ‘fleabitten grey horse’ (from Alb. *i bardhë* ‘white’ < IE *\*bherHg-* ‘to shine; white’) (Orel, 1998, p. 17). In the course of the further contacts, the root was borrowed from Aromanian into the neighboring Balkan languages: Balk. Slav. *bardza* (Mali Trnovac), *bardze* (Dobrejance), *bardzoša* (Trejak), *badza* (Drenovac, Lučane) ‘white sheep / goat with black spots’, *bardzan* (Preobraženje) ‘white goat with black spots’; *barza* (Strandzha, Rodops), *bardza* (Yatros) ‘black and white goat with spots’, *bărză kuză* (Sevlievo) ‘with white forehead’, *barza*

<sup>2</sup> Dimitri Batalija, 1961, Mulovishte (North Macedonia).

<sup>3</sup> These and other non-trivial cases of the use of the coloronym green in the Balkan languages have been considered by many linguists (Ivić, 1995, p. 87–101; Рачева, 2003, p. 80–109). Thus, for instance, the Bulgarian researcher M. Racheva cites the data of the Balkan, as well as other Slavic languages, deriving a specific semasiological phenomenon of an unusual color definition beyond the Balkan Peninsula, to the ancient and Turkic influence. The researcher suggests that such cultural Balkanisms as phraseological units Gr. *πράσινα άλογα* ‘fables’ (lit. “green horses”), Rom. *cai vezi* ‘fables’ (lit. “green horses”), Alb. *ti do kalë jeshil* ‘you want the impossible’ (lit. “you want a green horse”), Alb. *kalë i preshtë nuk ka* ‘there is no green horse’, Bulg. *зелен кон* ‘peculiar, wayward person’ could only appear in the modern Greek folk language as a result of tracing the Turkish dialectal hippological term with specific ambiguity – *gök at* ‘white horse’. Through the medium of Modern Greek and numerous contacts of the Balkan population, these stable units spread to other Balkan languages (Racheva, 1984, p. 748–753).

(Tikvesh) ‘goat with a white spot on its head’, *barz*, *barzav* ‘goat with white spots on the head or body’ (Zlatanović, 2014, p. 39, 42; Младенов, 2011; РБЕ; Клепикова, 1974, с. 69; ТРМЈ, 2003, р. 90).

- *carabash* ‘white animal with black fur on the muzzle’ (from Turk. *kara* ‘black’) (Cuvata, 2006, p. 118).

- *mat* ‘white sheep with brown wool on the muzzle, around the eyes’ (from Slav. *maten* ‘muddy, dirty’, cf. Rom. *mîtnik*) (Cuvata, 2006, p. 328; БЕР 5, р. 433).

The term for multi-colored, mentioned by the speakers, was *chindisitã* ‘multi-colored, decorated’ (from Gr. κεντώ ‘to embroider’), as well as *ceacâr* ‘with different colored eyes’ (from Turk. *çakır* ‘greyish-blue’). The latter is used as a euphemistic designation for evil spirits<sup>4</sup>: *Ceuciu* ‘devil’ (Cuvata, 2006, p. 163).

### Conclusions

In the Aromanian system of color terms, Latin roots are consistently preserved: *albu*, *arosh*, *arus*, *gâlbîn*, *nalbastru*, *veardi*, etc. Of definite interest is the coloronym *lai* ‘black’. Its origin, widespread usage and at the same time the absence of a different color term of the Romanian origin, which would also be universal for speakers, requires a separate study. In the term of blue *vinit*, as well as in later coloronyms (according to the Berlin-Kay theory of the evolution of the basic color terms), the internal form of the word is traced, that is, the name of the object formed the coloronym (Berlin, Kay, 1969). Wine (Lat. *vin* ‘wine’) becomes a model for designating dark, blue, purple shades. The synonym for red *crâsat* ‘dark red’ (from Gr. κρασι ‘wine’) should also be mentioned. For the basic term for brown such a model is coffee, the comparison with coffee is one of the most stable in the specification of black *lai cã cafea* ‘black as coffee’. The terms for gray and motley are most susceptible to the influx of borrowings, since they are characteristic natural cattle coat shades, the basis of the economic life of the Aromanian population. Cross-borrowings in the terms for gray and motley testify to numerous contacts with the neighboring Balkan languages. The other hue colors such as pink, orange and purple are less represented. The expedition failed to record these terms from the native speakers, with the exception of those coinciding with the coloronyms in the language of the surrounding Slavic population, which may be the result of interlingual interference at the present moment. In the dictionary, however, color terms are given without any illustrations, which leads to the idea of their real absence in the vocabulary of Aromanian speakers. Aromanian, once widely represented and actively used by the educated population, has developed a rich system of color terms, which is reflected in dictionaries. However, with the loss of prestige, metropolis and speakers, the rich system is reduced to basic coloronyms and loses its synonymous rows.

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<sup>4</sup> However, in the expedition, only the lexeme *nafima* (from the local Slav. *natemago* ‘damned; devil’ from Gr. ἀνάθεμα / ἀνάθημα) was recorded in this meaning (Tome Simena, 2000, Krushevo (North Macedonia)).

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