

2 Current state of knowledge

Up until the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Boyash and the Rudari communities, their origin or affiliation to an ethnic group and the language they spoke, were almost unknown in the countries in which they lived. The first written works about them were two reports on the communities of Romanian speakers in Bosnia by IEȘAN (1906: 7), and later on by FILIPESCU (1906: 198). The two works describe their settlements and occupation (woodworking). In 1937, at Čokešina, near the Drina River, on the former border between Serbia and Bosnia, PETROVICI (1938: 225) reopened the issue of the communities of Romanian-speaking Gypsies with an article entitled *The Romanians of Western Serbia*. At the beginning, he writes: *From the first glance, these Romanians – as they call themselves – raised a doubt in my mind: they were quite dark-skinned. I asked them straight away: ‘Are you by any chance*

Gypsy?’ ‘Either Gypsy or Romanian, as you wish,’ they answered. Similarly, to speak ‘either Romanian, or Gypsy’ is the same thing for them. Three decades later, GHETIÈ (1968: 501-508) revisited the material collected by Petrovici, identifying the phonetic phenomena specific to the Boyash vernacular of Serbia, such as the palatalization of *n*, the passage from *ê* and *ĝ* to *ś*, *ź*, etc. An essential study for understanding the linguistic evolution of the Rudari and Boyash is the doctoral thesis of Ion Calotă, a dialectologist from Craiova (1995). His work is a study of *a dialect whose particularities are spread around an area that includes south-west Transylvania, south-east Crișana, and the north-east of the Banat, and this group, which is different not only from Gypsies, but also from Romanians, came from the western Carpathians, where they used to work as gold miners and panners* (CALOTĂ 1974: 3). A more recent contribution is that of

SARAMANDU (1997), who researched the dialect of the Boyash of Međimurje, in northern Croatia, on the border with Hungary and Slovenia, during an investigation for the New Romanian Linguistic Atlas. After analyzing the material gathered in the field, Saramandu concluded that, *the area of origin of the Boyash includes the south-east of Crișana, the north-east extremity of the Banat, and the south-west extremity of Crișana. It is the area where the palatalization of the dentals [t, d] and the treatment of the palatals [chi, ghi] yield the same result, i.e. the affricates [č], [č̣], [đ], [đ̣]* (SARAMANDU 1997: 109).

Research on the Boyash suffers from the fact that scholars in Roma studies have no great interest in the Romanian language and experts in Romanian studies none in the language of the Roma. Thus, there has been almost no in-depth investigation of the Romanian elements or any intensive study of Romanian as spoken by the Boyash. Although the Boyash and their language held a fascination for individual Romanian dialectologists (CHELCEA 1934, 1940, 1944; PETROVICI 1938) in the early days of the discipline, they are now

largely neglected by the majority of scholars; CALOTĂ (1971, 1974, 1993, 1995) and SARAMANDU (1997) being the exceptions. Had we been talking about sedentary groups who could not be linked with the Gypsies at all, traditional Romanian dialectology would have taken a greater interest in the language of the Boyash; however, the leading compendium of Romanian dialectology (RUSU et al. 1984) does not even mention their dialects. Similarly, tsiganologists also show little interest in the Romanian vernacular spoken by the Boyash, probably because the population does not speak Romani and the study of their language falls into the remit of those who study Romance languages. Furthermore, many tsiganologists also appear more concerned with researching sociological aspects so that we face a lack of knowledge concerning the language spoken by the Boyash.

Two works with an anthropological focus have recently been published, BEN-GELSTORF (2009) and DONDOREL (2007); however, they do not deal with the linguistic aspect. All in all, with few exceptions, there are no exhaustive linguistic studies

about the dialect of the Boyash living in Hungary. To fill this gap, in the autumn of 2002, the Linguistic Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences set up a researchers' committee to carry out complex linguistic, sociolinguistic, anthropological, and ethnographic studies of the Roma and Boyash, and the vernaculars they speak (BARTHA 2007). Today, Hungarian authors are documenting the language of the Boyash (ORSÓS 1994, 1997; KOVALCSIK/ORSÓS 1994; KOVALCSIK 1996; KOVALCSIK/BOROS 2000; SZALAJ 1999 et al.), but as they focus mostly on the folklore, there is still no collection of everyday language and no linguistic analysis has been carried out. Similar parallel efforts are being made in Serbia, where researchers from the Balkanology Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences are studying the Rudari communities of Serbia. In recent years, SIKIMIĆ (2003, 2005, 2007, 2008), RADOSAVLJEVIĆ (2007), SIKIMIĆ/AŠIĆ (2008), SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ (2005, 2008) and LESCHBER (2008a, b) in particular have devoted themselves to study-

ing the language and identity of the Romanian-speaking Boyash in Serbia and Croatia, while ŞERBAN (2007a, b) has focused on the identity and language of the Rudari in Bulgaria. There are only two publications on the Rudari in Greece (CHATZITHEODULU-LAIZIDU/ΤΑΒΑΚΙ 2002; ΝΟΜΑΡΧΙΑΚΗ ΑΥΤΟΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΗ ΛΑΡΙΣΑΣ 2003), and even these are just brief descriptions of the Athens suburb of Zefyri and the Nea Smyrni quarter in Larisa, with no details of the language spoken. There is not much more material on their situation in the Republic of Moldova (DUMINICĂ 2007). So little was known about the Boyash in Ukraine that in late 2009 several Romanian newspapers made reference to the Transcarpathian Boyash, with reports that Romanians had been found in Ukraine, who supposedly did not even know of Romania's existence (<http://stiri.rol.ro/> on 3.10.2009; cf. КОЛОМИЕЦЬ 2015). It should therefore be noted that there are still major gaps in our knowledge with regard to the Boyash in Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine and Greece.

