

# Documents on the History of the Macedonian Bulgarians

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*From a letter by Dimiter Miladinov, sent from Bitolya to Alexander Exach<sup>1</sup> in Constantinople, concerning the training of the Bulgarian children in their mother tongue.*

August 20, 1852

“. . . May I be allowed to point some observations of mine since my childhood. In almost six-eighths of Macedonia inhabited by Bulgarians speaking the same language, the latter are all trained in the Greek language and are called Greeks by the Greeks, with the exception of the Slavs living further north who are advancing in the Slav language.

A Russian traveler, Victor Grigorovich by name, a professor in Kazan, was very much surprised when he saw books in Salvic in Ochrida, in my native town of Strouga, in Prespa and elsewhere, as if the Bulgarians living there had been unknown to the European peoples and had been considered another nation by them. When I taught Thucydides in Ochrida, Grigorovich exclaimed with enthusiasm: “O, but are you not our brothers?” as if he were dreaming and did not believe that the Slav language was our mother tongue and the tongue of our forefathers. When the two of us arrived in my native town of Strouga the same evening he expressed the wish to hear my old mother sing (a Bul-

garian song), which he wrote down. He then asked me to write a grammar of the spoken Bulgarian language which book he expected to get from me, while in Vienna, where some Greeks and Albanians from places around our fatherland, instigated by certain people, accused him unjustly of having stolen books, while actually our fellow-countrymen had given him some books with pleasure . . .

Patriots! It will be impossible to resist the flood of the Greek language in these places if resolute measures are not taken. There are many Slav-Bulgarians who have studied and are now studying in Athens and as time goes by they form habits alongside with the language and as a result nationality blends with the feelings.

My brother, on his way back from Athens this summer, where he is studying Greek philology at the university for three years now, stopped at the monastery of Zo-graph in Mt. Athos to see hieromonach Partenii, who was once upon a time my student and who has lately been studying in Russia. It had been my ‘brother’s intention to persuade Partenii to help him continue with his education in Russia as a student of Slavonic philology. For the time being, however, he only studied Slavonic-Russian grammar and syntax at the monastery and came back to his native town. And Partenii gave him this promise (if this happens to be

true): “By working as a teacher, pay back, within three years your interest-yielding debts (since we also paid for our studies with money, taken at interest), and after that I shall have the money to send you in three years’ time to one of the universities in Russia.” From there my brother brought with him two books: one with church songs in the Bulgarian language, and a Bulgarian Gospel which he gave as gifts to my native town of Strouga where, as my brother writes, every Sunday the Gospel is read in Bulgarian by a priest, who speaks Slavonic, to the great satisfaction of the listeners.

At my suggestion the Greek teacher in Strouga, a former student of mine, and also priest Ioan were persuaded to train the students in Bulgarian first. If they had text books in that language, such as primers, grammars, syntaxes, arithmetics and geographies, I assure you that a good beginning would have been laid in the most western part of Macedonia.

“We all need a strong hand.” Mr. Peter A. Dimisovik and Dimiter K. Pagonidis who carry on trade over there can inform you of my humble feelings of patriotism and of Lady Poverty.

If you honor me with your answer, the delivery of the letters will be ensured by Mister D. Pagonidis and Peter Dimisovik, the address being the office of Brothers Robev and Sons in Bitolya.

With my deepest respect forever,  
I am

Very truly yours:  
Dimiter Miladinov.”

(The Miladinov Brothers, Correspondence), Sofia, 1964, pp. 17-21; the original is in Greek.

1. Alexander Stoilov Exarch (about 1810-1891), born in the town of Stara Zagora, Bulgarian journalist and public figure.