

# Transformations of vernacular architecture of the mountainous settlements of Pomaks in Xanthi, Greece.

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## Abstract

*During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the region of Xanthi in Greece, the tradition of dealing with the monoculture of tobacco combined with livestock farming contributed to the development of a rural family economy by the people of Pomaks. This led to the formation of the mountainous settlements and their residences. At the same time, part of the region's complete identity was associated with its ethnic, social and cultural characteristics, from the period of Ottoman domination to modern times. However, the physiognomy of the settlements today have been gradually altered, with a significant number of residents abandoning them because of historical, social, political and economic circumstances over the last 60 years. This paper<sup>1</sup> has a number of objectives. First, there is an attempt to record and present the physiognomy of the settlements and the characteristics of their architecture during the period of great prosperity. Then the specific reasons and procedures which have led to the current situation are highlighted and especially the problematic practices of piecemeal approach, both by the State and by the inhabitants themselves. This fragmentation has the effect of losing the identity of the region as a single network of settlements, the alteration of their character and their possible degradation.*

**Keywords:** Pomaks, Xanthi, Thrace, tobacco, livestock

## Introduction

Tobacco production and trade has been the economic development base of Western Thrace from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This process had a catalytic effect on the organization of the region of Xanthi at a regional level, where the urban and rural areas functioned as a tobacco-producing network.<sup>2</sup> An important part of this network was the settlements that Pomaks lived in the Rhodope Mountains.

The Pomaks in Greece, Muslim populations with a particular linguistic orientation, are residents of the mountainous regions of Xanthi and Rhodope, located in the border zone with Bulgaria. Their exact ethnic origin is a complicated issue because of the many claims of the Thrace area during its long history. It has become a subject of redefinition and subject of controversy among the states of the region, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, for the longest period of Ottoman domination in the region, the Ottomans called the Pomaks 'Agrican', a term from which came the name of 'Ahrian Mahala', the district that was constituted by Pomak populations in the city of Xanthi since the 17th century.<sup>4</sup> After the passage to the Greek administration and the Treaty of Lausanne, they formed part of the officially-institutionalized Muslim minority in Thrace. Today, according to unofficial figures, around 30,000-35,000 inhabitants live in Greece, of which about 23,000 in the prefecture of Xanthi and 10,000 in the prefecture of Rhodope.<sup>5</sup>

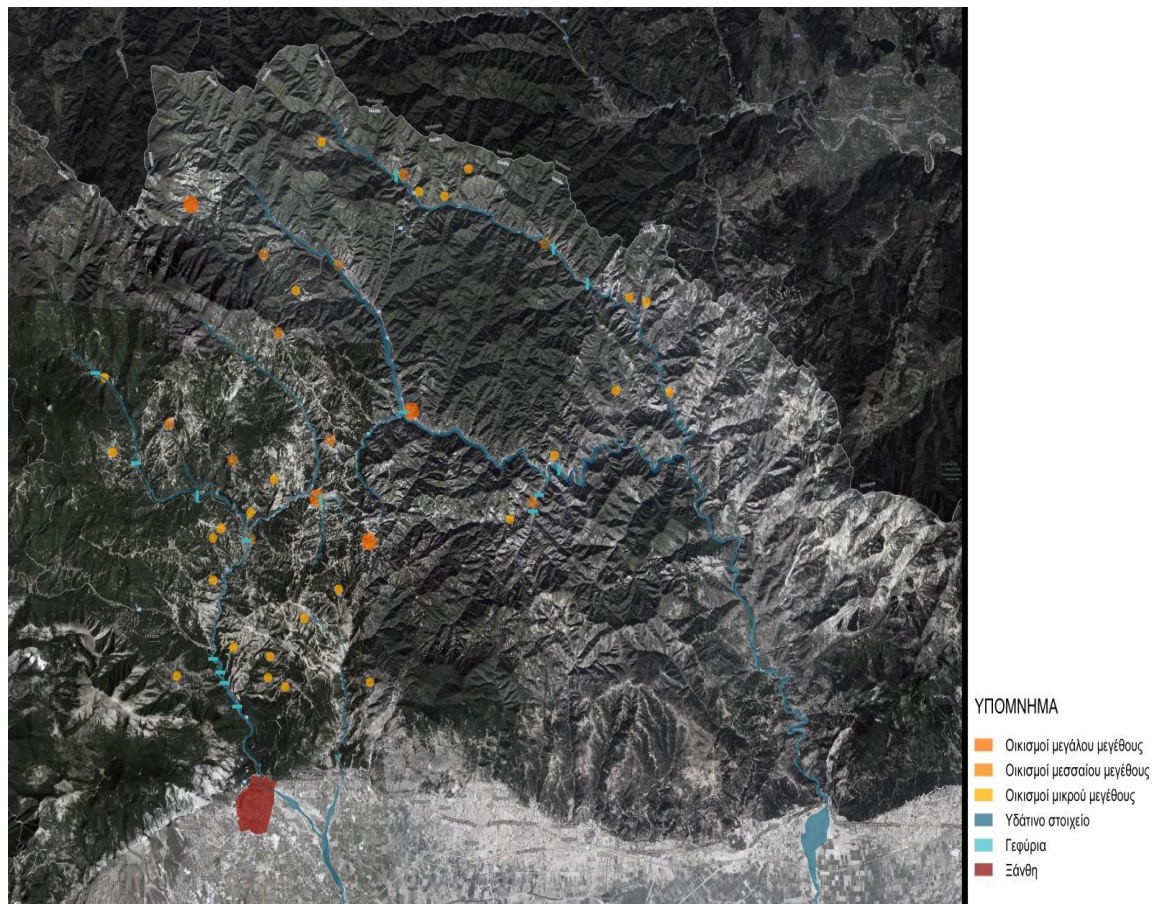
<sup>1</sup> This paper is a republication of the research done by Sinamides J. and Zacharaki M. for the purposes of the International Conference "The Pomaks of Thrace: Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches", held in Komotini, Greece, in 2017. The article was titled "From Acne and Tobacco houses, to Abandonment and Modern Buildings. Transformations of the physics of the Pomak Mountains in the prefecture of Xanthi" and is currently under publication.

<sup>2</sup> Sinamides, J (2014), pp. 124

<sup>3</sup> Troumpeta, S (2001), pp. 82

<sup>4</sup> Melkidi, C (1991), pp. 16-17

<sup>5</sup> Lalenis, K, Fragkopoulos I, Kioses I, Kipourous S (2012), pp. 121



**Fig. 1.** Diagram of Pomak settlements in region of Xanthi. With orange and yellow color the settlements, with red city of Xanthi, with blue rivers and springs.

Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)

The settlements of Pomaks in Greece are located in the northern mountainous and semi-mountainous part of the West Thrace region. The mountain zone of their habitation extends from the east (prefecture of Rhodope) to the west (prefecture of Xanthi) along the Rhodope Mountains, composing a network of settlements, known in greek as 'Pomakochoria', meaning the villages of Pomaks (Fig. 1). The settlements of Pomaks of Xanthi have been built on the edges of mountainous areas and are always adjacent to natural streams of water, with direct (rivers and torrents) or indirect ways (springs). Their primary occupation was livestock farming and agricultural production, with main crops being corn, potatoes and later tobacco.

Tobacco production eventually occupied the largest part of the area's inhabitants. As far as their organization is concerned, Pomaks seem to have lived in closed, patriarchal communities in their broad social environment; population-pure, with relative self-sufficiency (Fig. 2). They relied solely on family economy, where all family members engaged in livestock farming and, above all, in agricultural production. The social and economic processes are reflected in the space, and the mountain village network is confirming this kind of organization. The villages of Pomaks of Xanthi region have a more coherent urban composition due to the greater intensity of agricultural production here. On the contrary, the settlements of Rhodope region are characterized by sparse construction, with incomplete and loose urban fabric, reminiscent of more pastoral settlements than an organized whole, while rarely observed organized and clear urban planning.



**Fig. 2.** Members of family in Pomak settlement Medusa, 1950.

Source ©: Tasos Tefronides' records

The villages were placed relatively close together, but were far from the urban center of Xanthi. Connection was difficult, not only because of the kilometric distance, but also of the soil geomorphology and the presence of many rivers and torrents (Fig. 3). However, the creation of an important network of bridges, which has been common since the Byzantine times in the region, ensured communication with the city and the export of their important manufactured goods.

#### **Physiognomy and characteristics of the settlements of Pomaks of Xanthi**

The agglomerations, although largely corrupted, have some features that can give us a clear picture of their original physiognomy. These elements compose the overall identity of the mountainous residential area. Common elements can be traced to their relationship with the natural terrain, but also with different kinds of natural water flow, which have influenced the development and the internal network of the roads of the settlements, as well as the structure and shape of the houses. Still a common feature is the core assembly with central functions in each village. The most important place in this central unit holds the building of worship. Around the mosque, other buildings of public character, such as the school or the community offices—where they existed—as well as meeting rooms (cafes) or very small retail outlets, were often concentrated. It is no coincidence that the public space under Ottoman standards was limited to unstructured areas within this central core and the streets.



**Fig. 3.** Panoramic views of Pomak settlements (a. Oraion, b. Myce).

Source ©: Zacharaki Mara





**Fig. 4.** Narrow roads in Pomak settlements urban tissue (a. Echinos, b. Medusa, c. Oraion).

Source ©: author

Local roads are narrow and the urban tissue is organized in a spontaneous and free manner. The sides of these axes are essentially limited on both sides by high stonewalls, with a continuation which is interrupted only by the entrance doors to their dwellings or courtyards (Fig. 4). The houses have small courtyards particularly in villages where we find great building density. The presence of a peculiar characteristic on the ground floor of the dwellings of the Pomak settlements, the 'diavatiko' meaning passage, is very strong. The 'diavatiko' seems like a narrow portico and is a public passage at the level of the street where, above and beyond, the enclosed spaces of the house are developed on both sides (fig. 5). This prevented the discontinuity of the traffic network within the settlement.



**Fig. 5.** Examples of 'diavatiko', in Pomak settlements (a. Glauke, b. Kottyle, c. Echinos).

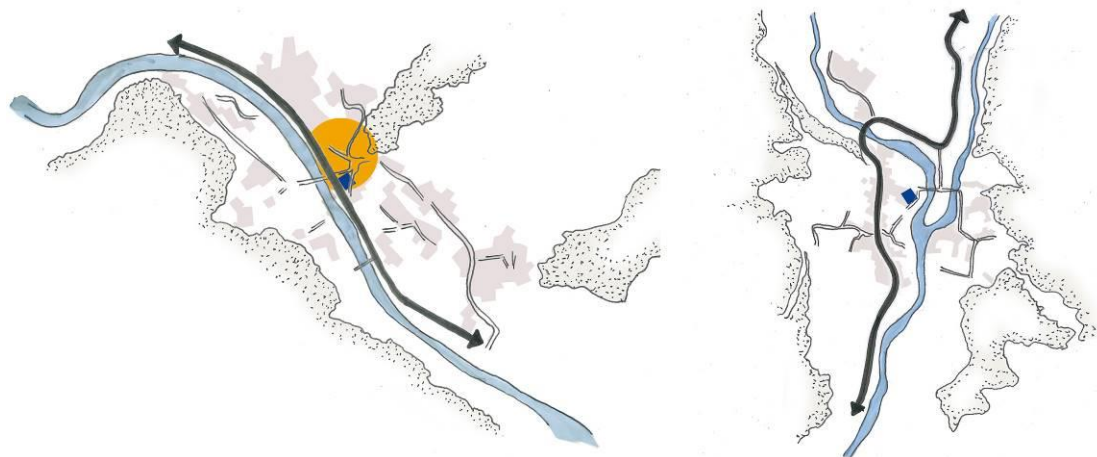
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Important differences are found in the development of settlements and their location on the natural terrain, their density, and the location of the core with the central functions.

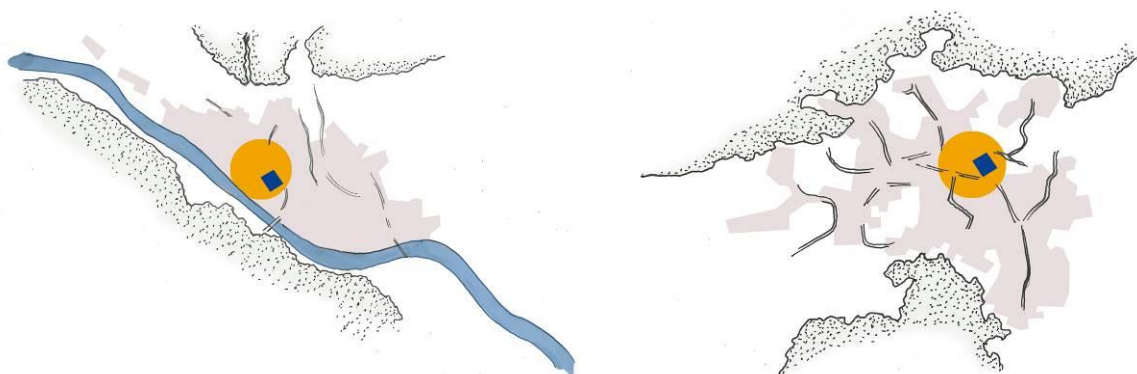
With regard to the *relationship of the natural terrain* with the mountainous settlements, we distinguish locations that developed alongside the banks of a river, either on one side, such as

Melivia, Ano Thermes, Glauke or on either sides, such as Smynthe, Myce, Medusa, Satres, or Koundouros. These settlements have milder terrain without steep slopes on the ground. Correspondingly, due to their siting in more steeply sloping ground, there are locations that developed parallel to the massif calls linearly or amphitheatrically.<sup>6</sup> They are placed rarely on flat ground, either at a top elevation (Alma, Lower Thermes) or in a low valley surrounded by mountain ranges (Centaurus).

The settlements according to their urban tissue's development system can be distinguished in linear, centrobaric or dispersed form.<sup>7</sup> Agglomerations with linear growth developed on either side of a central longitudinal axis, which usually forms the entrance and exit of the settlement (Fig. 6). Some of these are Smynthe, Myce, Pachne, Hemonio, Melivia, Medusa, Ano Thermes and Middle Thermes, Oreon, Kottyle, Satres. It should be noted how villages that developed on either side of a river always show linear growth. On the contrary, the settlements with centrobaric structure grow around a small core with central functions and the urban tissue is radially structured (Fig. 7). These are Centaurus, Glauke, Kato Thermes, Dimarion, Kyknos, Kottane. Finally, we observe the phenomenon of scattered settlements, where groups of houses are organized in small "districts", which can be spaced up to 100 meters apart, and usually in one of them is the core of the central functions (Fig. 8). Such as Prosilio, Chryso, Alma, Mantena. The scattered structure has its origins in the older satellite camps of the breeders, who preferred to be close to their pens while controlling wider areas for grazing. This phenomenon is now more pronounced in the Pomak villages of the Rhodope prefecture.



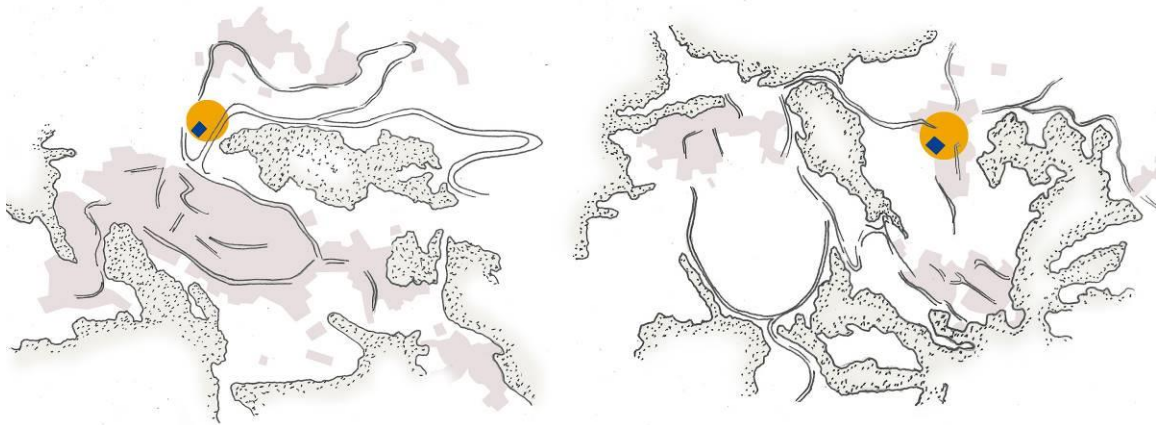
**Fig. 6.** Diagrams of linear settlements (examples a. Medusa, b. Smynthe).  
Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)



**Fig. 7.** Diagrams of centrobaric settlements (examples a. Upper Thermes, b. Dimarion).  
Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)

<sup>6</sup> Linearly development we find in settlements such as Pachne, Kottane, Akraios, Dimarion, Theotokos and amphitheatrically in Oreon, Kottyle, Mantena.

<sup>7</sup> Roukounis, Y. - Giannopoulou-Roukouni, M. (1985), pp. 142.



**Fig. 8.** Diagrams of scattered settlements (examples a. Alma, b. Mantaina).

Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)

In terms of density, the settlements are dense or moderate built in their overwhelming majority because of the limitations of the natural relief, where it does not allow uninterrupted expansion, depending on the population of the settlement.<sup>8</sup> Usually the most populous villages are densely built and those are Myce, Echinós, Centaurus, Dimarion, Glauke, Pahne.

The nucleus with the central functions, depending on the self-sufficiency and size of the settlement does not always have the same extent and therefore some of the reported uses may be absent. This section is located most of the time in the heart of the village, especially when we find centrobaric settlements. Some of these are Smynthe, Myce, Centaurus, Glafke, Pachne, Kotyle, Dimarion, Medusa, Upper and Lower Thermes, Oreon, Kottane. But there are also occasions where it is encountered in its perimeter, such as Aemonio, Middle Thermes, Kyknos, Melivia. Finally there are rare cases where abandoned villages show no traces of corresponding functions, not even a mosque.<sup>9</sup> It is no coincidence that in these settlements, the residents seem to be engaged solely with livestock farming.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, because of their extremely isolated position, they were probably inhabited seasonally in the year and were served by other nearby settlements.

*Echinós*, is the most particular case of settlement, as it is the largest in extent and population. Although its structure develops linearly in relation to a central elongated road, two separate districts have been created on each side—the upper and lower ‘mahala’- each of which has a center—barbed structure and two independent nuclei with central functions. Commercial uses also spread on the main road and beyond the two cores. Because of this phenomenon, a third mosque was probably built, in a centrobaric position of the settlement and near the main commercial part of the central axis.

#### Characteristics and analysis of vernacular architecture of Pomaks

The architecture in the pomak houses of Xanthi has many elements in common with the corresponding mountain residences, as it is shaped throughout the Balkan Peninsula until the Pontus region, in the years of Ottoman domination. The basic type of the mountain residence is the two-storeyed building with ‘hayati’<sup>11</sup> on the ground floor and the first floor (Fig. 9).<sup>12</sup>

Probably the most important element that has formed the functional organization of the pomak dwelling, as in most cases of rural or mountainous settlements in Balkans, is the siting of agricultural or livestock production within the building. However, a series of social, cultural and

<sup>8</sup> Lalenis, K, Fragkopoulou I, Kioses I, Kipourou S (2012), pp. 124

<sup>9</sup> Such settlements are Akraios and Koundouros.

<sup>10</sup> As it is mentioned in Troumpeta, S (2001), pp. 94, in remote settlements, Pomaks dealt only with livestock farming until the 1960's.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Hayati’, in ottoman and greek vernacular architecture, is called a semi-open extension of the interior, like an oriel, with a south or southeast orientation and it is a space essential to the dwelling life, as well as a source of sun and ventilation.

<sup>12</sup> Kizis, Y (1990), pp. 21-22

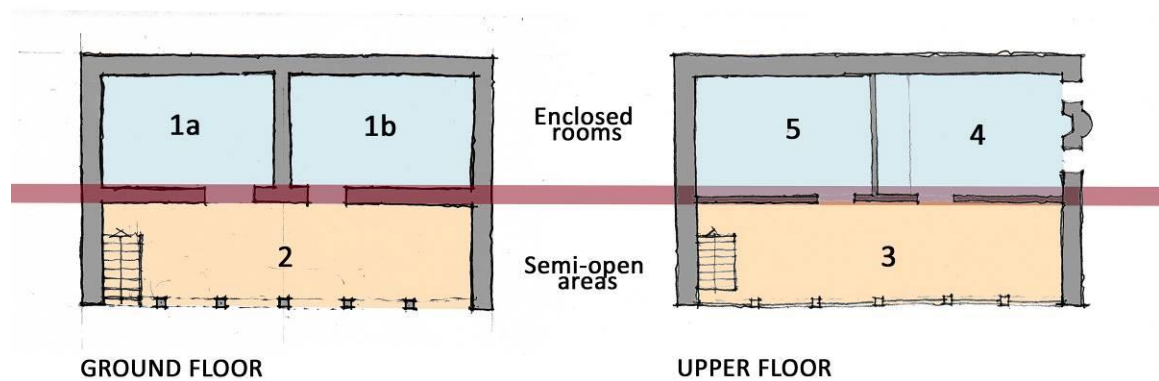


economic parameters led to minor changes and different variations, which contributed to the shaping of the architectural physiognomy of the mountainous Pomak settlements.



**Fig. 9.** Typical pomak houses (examples a. Melivoia, b. Medusa).

Source ©: author



**Fig. 10.** Ground and upper floor plan of the pomak house's basic type. (1. Stables and storage, 2. 'hayati', 3. main hall – upper level 'hayati', 4. family room, 5. Kitchen)

Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)

The basic unit is rectangular, two-storey and each level is organized according to the local bi-zonal composition of the traditional residence. Both the ground floor and first floor are divided into the inside and outside of the house and consist of the rooms (enclosed spaces) and the 'hayati' (semi-open spaces), respectively (Fig. 10). In the pomak dwelling, the ground spaces operated for collateral functions and part of the cottage industry, while the upper floor housed family accommodation and even some elaborate operations.<sup>13</sup> Entrance to the house was usually accomplished through the walled courtyard, and in rare cases from the street level. The floor of the ground level was in contact with the soil or was paved with stone slabs. The semi-outdoor space functioned as an entrance from the enclosed rooms of the ground floor, but also for the upper level. The communication of the two storeys and the entrance to the upper level was attained by a staircase of wooden construction, from the 'hayati' on the ground floor (Fig. 11). In order to secure the elaboration products and protect the family from odors and climatic conditions, the opening of the ladder was closed by a hatch. The enclosed ground spaces were used almost exclusively for housing animals and storing agricultural tools, animal feeds or fertilizers, but also for the storage or elaboration of tobacco leaves.

<sup>13</sup> Tentokali, V (1989), pp. 38-40.



**Fig. 11.** Typical 'hayati' and wooden staircase in the ground floor (examples a. Oreon, b. Medusa).

Source ©: Zacharaki Mara



**Fig. 12.** Typical main hall in pomak houses (examples a. Echinios, b. Kottyle).

Source ©: author



**Fig. 13.** Typical family room ('ontagie') in Memet Soukri's house in Kottyle (a. wooden door and part of 'musantra', b. the last part of 'musantra', the hammam, c. the fireplace or 'otzak').

Source ©: author

On the upper floor, the main hall<sup>14</sup> in the 'hayati' was mainly used as a workplace and storage of tobacco leaves (Fig. 12). Usually this space has no ceilings and in the wooden beams of the

<sup>14</sup> The hall in 'hayati' is called '*palat*' or '*ontar*' in pomak dialect, Theocharides P (1995), pp. 146.



roof, there were hooks for the hanging of the tabs of the tobacco leaves. In many cases, the buildings in their current situation show the area of the hall enclosed instead of semi-open. However, its facade is formed with consecutive openings. This happened either because reasons presented later for creating additional functional spaces for family's life and cottage industry production, or because the weather and climatic conditions do not favor semi-open spaces.

In this basic type, the enclosed spaces on the upper level were two rooms, which were the main family living quarters. The first was the family room and the second was the kitchen.<sup>15</sup> In these rooms, there were semicircular recesses in the masonry for the hearth, where it was a fireplace and an oven<sup>16</sup> correspondingly. In the family room, apart from the well-tended fireplace, there were particularly wooden morphological and functional elements. At the height of the door, around the room, there was a wooden shelf and a decorative wooden strip. Another specific element was a wooden wardrobe, called 'musantra', for storing the beddings and clothes that were often decorated. Usually at the last part of it, through the last sheet, there was a specially designed tiny room that was used as a small bath, the 'hammam' (Fig. 13).

The vernacular architecture of Pomaks has been heavily influenced by the social and religious standards that impose the protection of the privacy of the home and the inwardness of the family<sup>17</sup>. This privacy was carried out by the high stone fence, which reached almost the height of the house and cut off the view towards the interior of the courtyard and the 'hayati'. In the rare case where the loggia was exposed, extensive wooden trellis and planked parapet were manufactured.

This basic type, as expected, displays variations in many cases due to different factors, such as the initial population of the family, the increase of its members, the financial situation of the owner, or the placement of the dwelling on the natural terrain. In relation to the original population of the family, the need for more spaces and to the accommodation of more living rooms, led to more elongated structures and the presence of not just one, but another two or even three rooms. The new rooms are placed either in series or in protrusions, or even in a part of the original open hall. In the special case where family members were increasing (for example because of marriage), the basic house could be expanded with new wings and spaces, losing its original rectangular shape, and F- or Π-shaped contours were created.

Pomak dwellings can be divided into simple houses and manor houses, which were residences of wealthy families of tobacco farmers, intercessors or merchants.<sup>18</sup> Their basic differences are that manor houses or mansions are bigger in size and volume, they were more detailed constructions, and they had remarkable morphological features. In many settlements, such as Echinós, Oraion, Upper Thermes, Medusa, Koundouros, you can meet mansions where there are three storeys (Fig. 14). The two floors are connected internally with wooden staircases but operate autonomously by different members of the family. The ground floor loggia was open and parallel to the courtyard, while the corresponding floor was closed by many adjacent windows. The other window openings were framed with wooden cornices with ornamental beads. For protection, there were wooden shutters or wooden decorated trellis, but also elaborate wooden railings (Fig. 15b). Correspondingly, the simple houses had simply horizontal wooden bars. It is worth mentioning that in the village Dimario there was a unique mansion, very special in relation to the elements of the pomak dwelling that have already been described. It looks like a civic dwelling, with arched openings and decorative stone frames, while symmetry could characterize its morphological system and typology (Fig. 15a).

<sup>15</sup> The family room and the kitchen are called '*ontagie*' or '*kolimba*' and '*vrondesnitsa*' respectively correspondingly vely in pomak dialect, Theocharides P (1995), pp. 147.

<sup>16</sup> The fireplace and the oven are called '*otzak*' or '*fourine*' in pomak dialect, Theocharides P (1995), pp. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Tentokali, V (1989), pp. 18-30.

<sup>18</sup> Giannopoulou-Roukouni, M (1982), pp. 208



**Fig. 14.** Three-storey pomak mansions (examples a. Upper Thermes, b. Medusa).

Source ©: author



**Fig. 15.** Examples of morphological elements (examples a. mansion in Demarion, b. Upper Thermes).

Source ©: from left to right: Zacharaki Mara, author

In many cases, the pomak mountain house may have had an entrance from the level of the road through a large wooden door that led directly to 'hayati' and not through the courtyard or directly to the upper level, due to geomorphology and soil gradients.

In some of the settlements that were involved systematically with cultivation of tobacco, such as Myce, Glauke, Kottile, Upper Thermes, a particular architectural element can be found. In these villages, part of the pomak residence is the construction of an extensive wooden balcony, usually inside the courtyard extending the main hall on the floor and rarely extending to the south facade when it comes into contact with the road, thus creating a passageway (Fig. 16). Towards this peculiar construction, they may have been led when, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of the intensity of tobacco production, larger areas for agricultural production were sought. Given that in many cases the semi-open 'hayati' of the floor was later closed for better storage of larger quantities of tobacco leaves, the creation of open-air spaces—where the unstructured space allowed—to dry them was an appropriate solution.





**Fig. 16.** The extensive wooden balcony as a particular architectural element (examples a. Upper Thermes, b. Kottyle, c. Glauke).

Source ©: author



**Fig. 17.** The alteration of the basic type in settlement Akraios (a. southern view, b. northern view).

Source ©: author

In settlements that involved systematically or exclusively with livestock farming,<sup>19</sup> two interesting architectural features can be found. The first one appears mostly in the settlement Akraios as the only type and form of building that we find and rarely in few structures in Melivoia. This type of building, as a variant of the basic unit, retains the characteristics of a two-storey flat-faced dwelling, where in the ground floor there is space for the animals and not a semi-open 'hayati' in south, while in the upper level the day-out areas for the family (Fig. 17). However while the animal's entrance is found on the ground floor, the entrance to the main areas in the upper floor made by the street level in the north due to the high altitude difference. Admission is central and leads to the main hall with rooms on either side. In the occasion of Akraios, there is no semi-open space in the upper floor—apparently due to climatic conditions—opposed to Melivoia where semi-open 'hayati' is found. Furthermore, in Melivoia there is the second feature, where there is a separate single-storey, elongated building, either in the ownership of the residence or in a fenced property alone. These buildings were used as stables for the storage of animals (mainly cattle) and were later built than the residential buildings due to the large livestock production where it existed in the settlement.

<sup>19</sup> A settlement that inhabitants combined the production of tobacco leaves elaboration and livestock farming was Melivoia, while a village where the exclusive occupation of the inhabitants was animals was Akraios.





**Fig. 18.** Stone masonry and wood-framed constructions (examples a. Medusa, b. Koundouros).

Source ©: author



**Fig. 19.** Wood framed constructions (a. 'bagdati' in Ammonio, b. combination of 'bagdati' and 'tsatma' in Kottane).

Source ©: author



**Fig. 20.** Typical 'sachnisi' in Pomak settlements (examples a. Echinos, b. Kottyle).

Source ©: author

The pomak house was constructed using traditional methods and local materials were used.<sup>20</sup> However, construction remains common to all mountain settlements. They consist of stone and wood-framed constructions, with perimeter masonry and internal wooden skeleton. The strong stonework on the ground floor was reinforced with horizontal wooden sleepers, while the stone that had been used varied in each village, depending on the available material (Fig. 18). There are cases where the masonry is carved because of soft stones but most of the times not. However, in all cases, the outer walls were always coated. The masonry continued on the floor usually in the north wall and in some cases in the lateral, but never in the south where the loggia was. In these semi-open spaces, the construction of a wooden frame was evident with vertical posts, horizontal beams and elaborates

<sup>20</sup> Giannopoulou-Roukouni, M (1987), pp. 194-195



'relieving cushions'. On the floor, the geometry of the ground floor is often not followed in the upper level, mainly due to the irregularity and density of the urban tissue, thus creating one—or more—architectural protrusions, like bay window, called 'sachnisi' (Fig. 20). It's an element which is found in most of the residential areas, except for those engaged solely in livestock farming. 'Sachnisi's' walls, as in all the outer walls of the upper level and the inside wall (the exterior and interior light wood-fired masonry) are usually of lath-type, called 'bagdati' (Fig. 19a) or of 'tsatma'-type (Fig. 19b). Especially in the settlements located near the river, instead of laths, they were invested with a knitted system of reeds. The coatings were mud-based groves and strengthened with straw and hairs. The roofs were wooden, almost exclusively quadruple and depending on the village, the terrain and the available materials, we can find a coating of Byzantine-type tiles or stone slates.<sup>21</sup>

### Transformations after decline and abandonment

Today, the once thriving 'Pomakochoria' has been largely abandoned, which gradually happened over the last 60 years.<sup>22</sup> The first phase of the migration of the Pomak population was found in the 1950s and 1960s, with the start of the tobacco crisis. Many of the residents settled in the lowlands of the prefecture, but also in the city of Xanthi, while others migrated abroad to search for work. The second phase begins in 1974, when the Greek government takes measures to "stimulate the border" and restructure the economy of Thrace. However, the new jobs that have emerged and the opportunities for better living conditions are found in the vast majority in the large urban centers in the region and not as a whole. As a result, a large proportion of the mountain Pomak population settled massively in the city of Xanthi, initially temporarily and then permanently, with their full integration into the urban area. In recent years, a remarkable percentage of the younger population who has grown up in the Pomak villages have abandoned them. Due to the economic crisis affecting Greece, the opportunities for young people are few. The young Pomaks, either completing their studies at the Universities of Greece or Turkey or settling in an urban center, or as unskilled workers, mainly as seasonal shipbuilders, leave for central and northern European countries.

It is particularly striking that during the decades 1970-1980, the former Ministry of the Environment and Urban Planning carried out most of the declarations for the protection of traditional settlements. 'Pomakochoria' maintained their original architectural and urban planning, in the prefecture of Xanthi in a single declaration in 1978 for a settlement outside them.



**Fig. 21.** Arbitrary structures in vernacular pomak houses (examples a. Up. Thermes, b. Kottyle, c. Glauke).

Source ©: Zacharaki Mara

<sup>21</sup> We found tiles in the settlements Melivoia, Oraion, Echinis, Gorgona, Medusa, Kottane, Koundouros and stone slates in Pachne, Myce, Dimarion, Kottile, Upper and Lower Thermes

<sup>22</sup> Troumpeta, S (2001), pp. 95-96



**Fig. 22.** New construction built in Pomak settlements, since 1990 (examples a. Echinos, b. Smythe).

Source ©: Zacharaki Mara

After the 1990s, the most dramatic changes in the architectural physiognomy of the mountainous settlements took place. In the years that have preceded, the needs of residents who have not abandoned their villages, either for maintenance or for incorporating elements of the modern living model, has led them to transform their old homes by altering their original form and type. The distortion of elements of traditional architecture combined with the introduction of semi-urban standards in the villages of Pomaks was accompanied with the generalization of the use of concrete and brick and the appearance of arbitrary structures (Fig. 21). Removing the barriers that have hitherto existed in building permits and engaging many minority people in construction in major cities has prompted a growing trend for the construction of new buildings, either in the place of vernacular houses or in unbuilt plots in the villages of Pomaks. The homogeneity of the architecture of the new constructions, mainly according to the standards of "aesthetics of the contractors", which prevail in the Christian rural settlements in recent years, usually does not preserve the architectural qualities of the traditional pomak dwellings (Fig. 22). Only in some cases, due to the dense housing and free structure of the urban fabric, passages can still be seen even in modern buildings. Finally, there are many cases where new constructions have a very large scale, either in volume or height, relative to the physiognomy of the pomak mountainous settlements, since there are no architectural constraints and the town planning controls are loose.



**Fig. 23.** Recording of existing vernacular architecture buildings in Pomak settlements – with yellow color (examples a. Pacnhe, b. Myce).

Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)





**Fig. 24.** Recording of existing vernacular architecture buildings in Pomak settlements – with yellow color (examples a. Medusa, b. Kottyle).

Source: Sinamides J., Zacharaki M. (2017)

The general lack of planning coupled with the neglect of the protection of the settlements and the tendency towards urbanization and the adoption of new habitation standards has led to a rapid transformation of both the physiognomy of the built-up area and the cultural environment of the Pomaks.<sup>23</sup> Residents affected by the rebuilding tendencies prevailing in the general Greek area seem at first reading to choose this modern pattern of habitation. However, considering the indifference of the state to protect the memory and identity of the place, it becomes clear that the distortion found today is mainly due to the fact that no incentives have been given to the inhabitants to be able to dwell dignified in their traditional houses and by extension to their villages.

### Conclusions

Today extensive reconstructions have significantly altered the architectural character of traditional settlements, particularly in larger villages, where the pressure from financial interests and from the large number of active population is high (Fig. 23). The inadequacy of technical and social infrastructure is proportional to the time-span of the settlements from the urban center of Xanthi and therefore their isolation. For this reason, according to the latest records, in the settlements which either have a greater distance from the urban center, such as Medusa, Kottyle, Theotokos or the road network is incomplete. There are only paths, such as Kottani, Koundouro, Tsalapetinos, Akraios, the number of vernacular elements that have been preserved is large and the settlements retain their character (Fig. 24). There are rare cases, such as Dimario, that despite the fact that the morphological and qualitative characteristics of most residences have been altered, new constructions and interventions maintain a scale that respects the identity and tradition of its inhabitants.



**Fig. 22.** Settlements that preserve vernacular architecture (examples a. Medusa, b. Koundouros).

Source ©: author

<sup>23</sup> Lalenis, K, Fragkopoulou I, Kiooses I, Kipouros S (2012), pp. 129

Although the situation for the unity and development of the mountainous settlements of the Pomaks has reached a marginal point, we must investigate the possible policies that could be articulated in the direction of a single treatment of the whole and the preservation of its physiognomy. Addressing both the level of protection, promotion and interventions of each settlement where it is possible and its architecture separately, but also in the overall promotion of the area through developmental choices, directly dependent on its character. The issue ultimately goes beyond planning and seems to be touching on the contemporary issues of regional management and spatial planning policies. For this reason, the establishment of a special spatial planning framework for the Thrace region, in which the mountainous settlements of the prefectures of Xanthi and Rhodope will be dynamically integrated, would cover a significant oversight of the plans of national spatial strategy.

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