

# Pomak Villages in Izmir

*What language do you dream in?*

Tuncay Ercan SEPETCİOĞLU



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*In memory of Hanife Bayrakdar,  
my beloved grandmother...*



## PREFACE

Regardless of the type of economic, cultural, political, or social migration, such as forced migration, internal migration, or seasonal migration, migration studies are difficult and must be approached in an interdisciplinary manner. It is even more difficult to communicate with members of the community and access internal and external sources about the community if the community being studied differs from the dominant cultural atmosphere.

This study focuses on the Pomaks, an immigrant community in the countryside of Izmir, which is located in the westernmost part of Turkey, is known as the country's most modern city, and is the third most populous city.

Pomaks are a Muslim community who live in the Rhodope Mountains and along the Danube in the Eastern Balkans and speak a Slavic dialect. They now mostly live in Bulgaria, but they are dispersed and have lost a lot of population since a century ago. Beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, due to pressures from local administration, particularly Bulgarian and Russian administrations, and native non-Muslim people, and as a result of various political and military developments on various dates, the Pomaks, an autochthonous Balkan people, began to migrate to places they saw as safer, primarily Anatolia. Izmir and its environs are one of the migration's final stops. Although Pomaks are one of the most distinct immigrant groups to Turkey from the Balkan Peninsula for a variety of reasons and at various times, research on them in Turkey has primarily focused on their genealogical ethnicity. The history of the settlement of isolated Pomak villages on high ground in rural areas of Izmir's eastern districts is described empirically and ethically in this study. Documents from the Ottoman Archives are combined with oral history and observations from the region.

This study focuses on the Pomaks in Bayındır and Kemalpaşa districts of Izmir, where Pomak immigrants are particularly culturally distinct from the native population and other immigrant communities. It also examines a migration and settlement process that began in the Balkans and ended in these villages using documents from the Ottoman Archive and data from the field research.

In this situation, responses to the following questions will be required: Who are the Pomaks? Which settlements in Izmir's rural areas are home to Pomak immigrants who have a distinctive culture from the local populace and other immigrant populations, especially in terms of their mother tongue? Which political or military event caused these villages to serve as the immigrants' last homes before they carried on their journey? When and how were the communities established; were the villages founded? Who are the original inhabitants? What are the characteristics of their population and settlement? What sets the immigrant communities in the Pomak region apart from others? Do the Pomak communities have similar socioeconomic and cultural traits?

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