Preface

This book is the fruit of a collaboration of almost three decades – the project was conceived in 1993. However, our work on it did not begin in earnest until 2001, when we were both visiting what was then RCLT (Research Centre for Linguistic Typology), now CRLD (Centre for Research on Language Diversity) at La Trobe University. And the actual writing began in 2004, when VAF was a visiting fellow at what was then still RCLT. Although the book might have been finished sooner, we feel it is a better work for having been completed later, as we have been able to take into account much more than we could have close to twenty years ago. Publishing a book of this nature is like stepping into a moving stream; before it has even appeared, new data comes to light and new ideas are proposed. Thus, during the course of our decades of collaboration we have tried to keep up with as much of the voluminous and ever-increasing literature as possible. That said, we could not possibly cite every relevant scholar or published work.

We have opted for an approach that combines the old with the new, in keeping with developments over the past couple of centuries. When the Balkan languages – and especially the similarities among them – first came to modern scholarly attention in the nineteenth century, their current standard forms were at most nascent, and often not yet existent. When Sandfeld published his classic study in the early twentieth century, most of his material came, of necessity, from dialect materials in collections of folklore. By the end of the twentieth century, however, a number of Balkan standard languages had become well established, and these standards have supplied much of the material for subsequent Balkan linguistic handbooks. The study of various Balkan dialects has also progressed during this period, but primarily in specialist literature. In this, the first comprehensive Balkan linguistic handbook to appear in English, we have set as our goal both taking current advances into account and preserving the insights from the achievements of the past. Insofar as standard languages represent the dialects on which they were originally based, they provide a useful common ground. When dialectal phenomena offer relevant material, we utilize them. For languages without nation-state standards we follow the principles elaborated in the User's Guide to this work (see pp. xxivff.). Fundamental to our enterprise is the fact that the commonalities of the Balkan languages – which can be referred to as collectively defining a sprachbund – arose as a result of speaker-to-speaker contact, and further that for most of the speakers for most of the relevant time period, standards, and the literacy on which

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they were based, were either non-existent or outside the purview of their experience.

Contact linguistics, of which the study of the Balkan languages as such is a part, is a diachronic, i.e., historical linguistic, enterprise. As in any study of change over time, some results are well attested in the present, while other phenomena may have appeared only to have subsequently vanished, for various reasons. In this work, we have taken into account the current situation as well as developments that were attested a century or more ago but may no longer be present. In so doing, we are attempting to give a more complete and nuanced picture of Balkan linguistic convergence and divergence, rather than a presentist snapshot of the moment. Here it is important to stress that both processes are on-going in the Balkans not only in terms of well-attested global trends, but also in terms of less visible local practices.

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