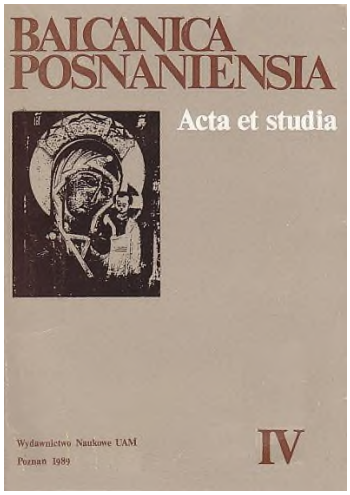


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ON THE HITHERTO UNUSED SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SERBS

RELJA NOVAKOVIĆ

ABSTRACT. Novaković Relja, *On the hitherto unused source of information on the origin of the Serbs*. Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia, IV, Poznań 1989, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 125-130. ISBN 83-232-0231-1. ISSN 0239-4278. Text in English.

This article is a contribution to the research on the origin of the Serbs. A novelty here is the inclusion into the author's considerations of the hitherto unused sources.

Relja Novaković, University of Beograd, Beograd, Jugoslavia.

Of the numerous workers dealing with the origin of the Balkan Serbs none has either noticed or regarded as worthy of attention a source of information on the origin of the Serbs as written down in the Karlovac Genealogy and the Branković Annals.

This information was not mentioned even by Niko Županić, who of all Yugoslav authors carried out the most thorough research into the origin of the Serbs on the basis of writings of Pliny and Ptolomy. As is known, Ptolomy mentioned the Serbs in the following sentence: "A Cimmerio accolunt Maeotici, Vali, Serbi, Serrei, Scizi, Gnissi"[1], and Ptolomy said that the Orinei, the Vali and the Serbs lived between the Keraunian Mountains and the River Ra (Volga).[2]

Analysing the above sentence by Pliny, Županić inferred that "in the first century A. D. and perhaps even earlier the Serbs and the Serrei lived between the north-western crest of Mount Caucasus (Corax) and the Sea of Azov, in the neighbourhood of the Zighians (Zinha), the Konapsens, the Tats and the Vali (Hali)",[3] and said that Ptolomy's Serbs should be "sought to the north of the Vali, roughly in the central Caucasus area, so that their native lands lay chiefly in Northern Iberia, the Tusci and the Surani being their eastern neighbours...".[4]

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[1] Županić, *Srbi Plinija i Ptolemija, pitanje prve pojave Srba na svetskoj pozornici sa historijskog, geografskog i etnološkog stanovišta. Zbornik radova posvećen Jovanu Cvijiću*, Beograd 1924, p. 557.

[2] Ibidem, s. 564.

[3] Ibidem, s. 564.

[4] Ibidem, s. 572 - 573.

As is known, Županić maintained that the Caucasus autochtones were "not in kinship with the Indo-europeans, nor the Mongols nor the Semites but belong to the family of Alarodians, the members of which include besides the Caucasians also the ancient Egyptians, Libyans, Berbers, Iberians, Basques, Ligurians, Rhetians, Etruscans, Pelazgians, Hittites, Mittanians, Caspians, Elamites, Sumers and many other old European tribes before the inundation of the Aryans (Indo-Europeans)".[5]

It is worth recalling that Županić divides the Caucasus autochtones into three groups, i.e. the Kirghisian (Adighe, antic κερκέτα) living between the River Kuban and the Black Sea, the Lezghian (Legae, Λιγύες)) in the south-east, in Daghestan, and the Georgian in Colchida and Iberia.[6] Županić adds that "one characteristic of the Caucasian dialects, namely the usage of nominal suffixes and prefixes in Caucasian names are of special interest in connection with the question of Pliny's Serbs. Citing a number of examples to this effect Županić infers that "From these examples we see that nominal plural suffixes (especially -bi and -ni) have been in use by Caucasian peoples both in ancient times and today and that therefore various name forms have been in use for each people. This rule applied to the Serbs gives us the forms Ser+bi= Serbi and Ser+ni=Serni. The root, without exception, is *Ser*. The form Ser+i= Seri might have been given them by their Indo-European neighbours and, even earlier, by certain Caucasian tribes, which also formed the plural by adding the suffix i i, as do the Hyrcanians and the Tusci in Daghestan today... The root, therefore, always remains *Ser*. Only the plural suffixes undergo changes...".[7]

As is known, Ljudmil Hauptmann, in his works on the migration of the Croats and the Serbs, said that Županić had been successful in his interpretation of the names *Ant* and *Serb*, namely that *Ant* derived from *And* (meaning people) and Serb from *Ser* (man), the plural form of which, Ser-bi, meant people.[8] However, Županić's Caucasian theory on the origin of the Serbs was not accepted in these parts by B. Grafenauer and G. Ostrogorski.

But before future historians concerned with the origin of the Serbs opt for any of the existing schools of thought on this as yet unresolved problem we feel that they should not disregard the information on the Serbs placed at our disposal by the Karlovac Genealogy and the Branković Annals. In the Karlovac Genealogy there is a sentence that runs as follows: "glagoljuš' išin'ny s"pisašeli jako Liki^{v}ju Sr"binu biši rodom, El'li^{v}mu mudrovani^{v}em', i vosa Sr'̃iska idolu služašte Zagonu, õ sudu i Zagoni i Zaky imenujuš se; õ Sera že Sr'blje".[9]

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[5] Ibidem, s. 574.

[6] Ibidem, s. 575.

[7] Ibidem, s. 576 - 577.

[8] L. Hauptmann, *Seoba Hravata i Srba*. JIČ, god. III, sveska 1 - 4, Ljubljana-Zagreb-Beogard MCMXXXVII, p. 53 - 54.

[9] *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, sredio ih Ljub. Stojanovič, Beograd-Sremski-Karlovci 1927, 2 (dalje: Lj. Stojanović).

As for the Branković Annals, "ex Sera Serbli" is all it records, in a note the latter part of which reads: "... Var cum haberet conjugem *Lieggam*, ab hac et Parte cognominati sunt Loggibardi. Et ab ea nati sunt Varo filii Kara, Sera, Melphiti, Viona, Jarvana (Arvana). Hi quinque ex Var et *Legga* sunt prognati et cognominati Loggobardi: Et ex Kala quidem rursus cognominati sunt Kalabri, *ex Sera Serbli*, a Melphite Melphitani, a Viona Venetici, ab Arvana Arbanasi. Hi itaque quinque nati sunt ex Var et *Legga*: a quibus dicti sunt partim Varvari parti, que Loggobardi". [10]

Though we know that neither Županić nor any other historian made use of the Karlovac Genealogy and the Branković Annals, both of which would have provided them with invaluable information, it is nevertheless conspicuous that Županić's interpretation of the form and meaning of the names *Serbi* and *Serrei* with emphasis on the root *Ser* is in complete agreement with that which is stated in the Genealogy and the Annals, namely: ot Sera že Srblje (ex Sera Serbli). Furthermore, it is also remarkable that one of Županić's groups of Caucasus autochtones the Lezghians (Legae, Λιγύες) seems to correspond completely with the data in the domestic sources, which mention *Liegga, Legga*. The origin of the Langobards is associated with these two names, but this is probably a result of the arbitrary conclusion of some ancient chronicler.

However, of all these data in the above sources, which should not be neglected in future studies, the most puzzling is the mention of *Dagon* ("i vsa srpska idolu služaše Dagonu, ot sudu i Dagoni i Daki imenjut se") and of Dagoni(a) near Istra (the Danube). [11]

We know that Dagon is believed to have been a Semitic deity and that he was especially worshipped in Ashdod and Gaza. Some historians link the meaning of his name with the Jewish word "dag" (fish), others believe that it derives from the Phoenician word "dagan" (wheat), while a third group connects it with the Canaanite name of *Dagantakala*, dating from the 15th century B. C. Some associate Dagon with the town of Beth-Dagon and some adhere to the belief, questioned by others, that Dagon is identical with the Assyrian-Babylonian, i.e. Akkadian deity Dagan. The Bible writes the name Dagan as Dagon, and the former is said to have been an Amorian deity, the chief god of the state of Mari. Certain workers claim that Dagon was equally worshipped in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf (on the Iranian side) and on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (Phoenicia and Palestine). There is also a conviction that Dagon, Odakon and the Assyrian god Dakan-Dagan are inter-related and some scientists believe that the images of Dagon as found on the Babylonian Gems, the Assyrian and Babylonian cylindrical inscriptions and on a piece of sculpture discovered in Khorsabad are in fact only different representations of the deity Dakan-Dagan. Naturally, there are numerous other interpretations concerning the origin and spread of the cult of Dagon. Although Dagon is portrayed in a variety of

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[10] R. Novaković, *Brankovićev letopis*, Beograd 1960, p. 37.

[11] Stojanović, p. 10.

manners, most frequently the upper part of his body resembles a man's torso and the lower tapers off into a fishtail.

Those interested in the subject will no doubt ask at once what this ancient deity has to do with the Serbs. Unfortunately, we believe that no one can answer their question at present but hold nevertheless that it would be a great mistake to dismiss this mention of Dagon as mere phantasy, especially if we keep in mind that we have no reliable knowledge about the origin of the Serbs either. If the above is the first public mention of Dagon in a text of this nature we believe that it would be of much value if someone, who is better acquainted with this subject, first examined the sources of the above data (perhaps first of all by going through earlier Byzantian chronicles) and then correlated his findings with the research results of those workers who somehow find the earliest ancestors of the Serbs either around Mount Caucasus or even farther to the east. Here we should not lose sight of the fact that one of more recent workers, Sakač, finds the ancestors of the Croats in the ancient Iranian land of *Harahvatiš*, which he identifies with Arakhosia of the Alexandrian period, and that others have long held the view that the names *Horoathos* and *Horouathos* as found on the Tanaid inscriptions (3rd century A. D.?) prove that the ancestors of the Serbs and those of the Croats occupied the Caucasus area at the same time.[12] After all, it is noticeable that written sources almost always mention the Croats and the Serbs as living one next to the other, which leads us to presume that from the ancient times onwards they should be followed as two ethnically close groups. We should not forget that in these studies we are led eastwards not only by the Tanaid names and the name of the land of *Harahvatiš*, but also by the meaning of the names *White* Serbs and *White* Croats, the latter provided we assume as correct those scientists who link these adjectives with the Iranian use of colours to denote direction, in which the white colour would stand for the west. According to this, the White Serbs and the White Croats would be called *white* because they arrived in the west from the east, perhaps as the Iranians. Therefore, the *White Serbs* and the *White Croats* would be given the adjective *western* to differentiate them from their *eastern* ancient homeland. It is clear that the east is the only possible direction, all others are out of the question.

But let us return to what the Karlovac Genealogy says. The author of this article does not know whether any worker has studied the above data, but there is one Serbian historian, Miloš S. Milojević, whose works have been assessed here as worthless and who wrote the following in one of his works: "The Morići, whose land was called Pomorije, or the Morjani-Morzi, whose land was named Morena, lived along a seashore. Among them was one tribe called the *Venashi-Venanii*. They had a temple of *Serbea* — the god of *Dacians*".[13] Milojević writes that these data relate to an

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[12] S. Sakač, *Historijski razvoj imena "Hrvat"*, Posebni otisak iz "Života" 1942, br. 1, Zagreb 1942, p. 1 - 18.

[13] M. S. Milojević, *Odlomci istorije Srba...*, I sveska, Beograd 1872, p. 112 (dalje: Milojević).

area roughly located between the Asia Minor coast of the Black Sea and Armenia. Unfortunately, since Milojević habitually either omits to quote the sources he used in his works or mentions them rarely, we do not know how he arrived at the above. We should add that he also cites a tribe called Dacians as having lived around the Black Sea but what we do not know is whether he had the Asia Minor or the European coast of the Black Sea in mind. At any rate, this datum has a striking semblance to one part of the sentence already quoted from the Karlovac Genealogy, namely "ot sudu i Dagoni i Daki imenujut se". Again, we must keep in mind that Milojević's theories should be treated with extreme caution because of his habit of omitting sources, but his mention of the name Venashi (Venanii), in our inability to associate it with anything else, reminds us rather strongly of the Asia Minor Veneti, who are object of much speculation, as are the names *Suani Sarmate* and *Sasone Sarmate*, which must also be taken into consideration. Both these names are recorded on the Peuntiger map along the Black Sea coast north of Kappadhokia.[14] True, Milojević was inclined to attribute much to the Serbs and sometimes he carried this to extremes, but if someone become interested in what has been said here on the Serrae, Legae, dagon, Dagon and the Venashi it would be worthwhile for him to check Milojević's data. It would be also useful for him to know that Milojević referred, among other things, to two maps of India, Bjoernsteir's (Moscow 1840) and Bjoern's (Moscow 1848). He says that he found in these maps scores of names of settlements, rivers and mountains of which many are identical in form with names found in modern maps of Yugoslavia.[15] That Milojević may have found such names on these two maps we can partly ascertain by referring to maps of India and neighbouring countries in an atlas of more recent origin. On these maps, too, we find a great number of names which entirely correspond in form with names used in present-day Yugoslavia, chiefly in the Serbo-Croat language area. If we look at the following maps – Asiatische Türkei; Persien, Afghanistan und Baluchistan; Zentralasien und Vorderindien; Vorderindien, Nordlicher Teil; Vorderindien, Südlicher Teil – we shall find, among others, these names: Altin, Baba, Bara, Bela, Beri, Bilek, Bor, Chum, Debar, Đera, Dol, Dohla, Garwani, Gola, Kom, Logar, Maidan, Narin, Niš, Pauni, Ram, Ras, Resan, Risan, Sana, Tanda, Topla. All these names can be found in maps of Yugoslavia. There are also scores which are very similar to Yugoslav names such as Nagode, Dipla, Seoni, Sol, Galitscha, Kulatschi, Kalatsch, Belich, Rekka, and names of potential interest include Sarp, Serab, Serani, Serbas, Serre, Serreis, Sirab, Sorabur, Surp.[16]

Available space does not permit us to dwell on examples such as Srbinda, Sribinda, Srbistan, Serb s, Sarbana and others having as a basis Sarb-, Ser-, Serb-, Sirb-, Sorb- and other similar forms which workers find between Mesopotamia and India.

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[14] *Tabula Peutingeriana*, Segmentum I, X. b, XI, XII. Die Welt der Antike 13. Auflage, VEB Hermann Haack, Gotha 1961, 2.

[15] Milojević, p. 47 - 48.

[16] Andrees Handatlas, Dritte Auflage, Bielefeld und Leipzig, 1893, 95 - 96 - 103.

The author of these lines quotes all this in connection with the hitherto neglected data as cited in the above Serb sources on Ser, Dagon, Dagoni(a), the Dacians and other details in his belief that it might be of value to scholars interested in the ethnogenesis of certain European peoples who are at the same time much better experts in this subject than he is. After all, we believe that it is difficult even to speak of the history and culture of the Balkan peoples if we do not know the origin and the earliest history of one Slavonic people from this group.

Let us briefly add that in connection with Dagon, Dagoni(a) and the Dacians it might be rewarding to consider the mysterious discovery at Lepenski vir stiuated on the border between Dacia and Moesia, a space associated with the Triballi among others. So far science has come up with no reliable theories on the Dacians and the Triballi nor on the ancestors of the Serbs and the Croats, and we are still in the dark as to why some early Byzantian historians called the Serbs also Triballi. Given the fact that there is already an abundance of unresolved questions and vague theories about the origin of the Serbs, it would do no harm to note one striking point, namely that the figures of heads discovered ad Lepenski vir display certain "fish-like" features. We spontaneously recall the fact that images of Dagon also had fish characteristics and that one chronicler, whose name we still do not know, claimed that "all Serbs" served under Dagon.