ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ

БЪЛГАРИЯ, БЪЛГАРИТЕ И ЕВРОПА - МИТ, ИСТОРИЯ, СЪВРЕМЕНЕ
т. IV

(Доклади от Международна конференция в памет на проф. д-р Йордан Андреев „Бulgария, земя на блажени ...“, В. Търново, 29-31 октомври 2009 г.)

Университетско издателство „Св. св. Кирил и Методий“
Велико Търново, 2011
The migration of the Croats and the Serbs from Central Europe to the Balkans is related to the enfeeblement of the Avar chaganate after 626. It is most probable that the two nations were freed from Avar dominion before they migrated southwards, while it is rather unlikely that Byzantium incited their revolt. The only available information we have on their migration to the western part of the Balkan peninsula is given by the Byzantine
emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetus in the mid 10th century. According to him, the descent of the Croats and Serbs took place during the reign of emperor Heraclius (610–641), with the Croats preceding. Researchers today have concluded that the terminus post quem is the year 6262. It is also mentioned that the area where the Croats settled had previously been occupied by the Avars3 and that the latter had desolated the land occupied by the Serbs, the Zachlumi, the Terbouniotes, the Kanalites, the Diocletians/Diocleians and the Arentani/Pagani4.

N. Klaic and L. Margetic have offered a different approach to the issue of Croat migration, placing it in the 8th century during the wars between the Avars and the Francs, as having taken place with the permission of the Francs5. Their supposition, although “covers” the two dark centuries in the history of the Croats, had no impact, firstly because there are no testimony of any migration from the Carpathians to the western Balkans during those years, and secondly, because the case of an “empty land” seems unlikely at the end of the 8th century in the area inhabited by the Croats6. An interesting position on the dating of the descent of the two nations is given by H. Ditten and R.-J. Lilie, who claim that Byzantium was able to be politically active in the Balkans between 628, the year Heraclius' Persian war ended, and 634, the year the Arabs began attacking Byzantine land7. This position, despite taking into consideration historical events in the East, presupposes the immediate involvement of Byzantium in the descent and installation of the Croats and Serbs, which, as demonstrated further on, has been contested.

When Porphyrogennetus named the original homeland of the Croats great or unbaptized8 he implied, according to the Byzantine image of the world, a territory beyond the borders of the empire, where pagan peoples lived (e.g. Great Scythia, Bulgaria, Moravia, etc.) On the contrary, the adjective minor defined a territory within the limits of the empire, as part of the Christian oikoumenē (e.g. Gothia or Scythia Minor, etc.)9. The first installation of the Croats in Central Europe, White Croatia10, is defined to separate lands, such as Silesia and Krakow11, Galicia12, Bohemia13, or a wider area that included Galicia, Silesia and eastern Bohemia14. On the other hand, the presentation of a “southern case”, locating the center of White Croatia in Carinthia15, seems to ignore the neighboring position of the unbaptized Serbs16. The position of the unbaptized (White) Serbia has been located either in Lusatia, between the rivers Elba, Oder and Saal17, or in the area of south-western Poland and northern Czech Republic18. In the first case, White Serbia is identified with the Sorabi/Surbi tribe19, remnants of which still remain in the German states of Saxony and Brandenburg (the Sorbi of Lusatia). The area around the river Vistula in southern Poland is presented as the original homeland of the Serbian tribe of Zachlumi, who settled in modern Herzegovina20.

According to Porphyrogennetus, a part of the White Croats, under the leadership of seven tribal leaders, abandoned their original homeland and headed southwards21. As for the path they followed, there are two versions: a) an “eastern route”, which descends from the rivers Pruth and Siret towards the Lower Danube and Thrace22, and b) a “western route” through Moravia, Lower Austria and western Hungary23. There have
been corresponding opinions of eastern\textsuperscript{24} and western route\textsuperscript{25} for the Serbian migration as well. The last seems to be the most probable, taking into account the distance between the land of origin and that of settlement. The Croats occupied the area of the Slavonic plain between the rivers Sava and Drava, as well as the mountainous region of Illyric Croatia, along the coastline of the Adriatic, near the Byzantine coastal cities. To the South, their limits reached the mouth of the river Tsetina, and to the East the rivers Vrbas and Kupa. To the North, they reached the rivers Lasa and Labin in Istria, while they held control of the part of Lower Pannonia between the Sava and the Danube\textsuperscript{26}.

The Serbs settled to the south-east of the Croats, in the area surrounded by the rivers Drina, Morava, Tsetina, Ibar, Tara, Lim, Uvac, Raska and Piva. The center of their settlement was the area of Raskia\textsuperscript{27}. Porphyrogenet\textsuperscript{us} also refers to other smaller tribes (Zachlumi, Terbouniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians/Diocleians, Arentani/Pagani), which occupied a part of the western Balkans until the Adriatic coast, particularly in Herzegovina and Montenegro\textsuperscript{28}. These tribes, apart from the Diocletians, are considered to be Serbian\textsuperscript{29}, therefore the actual area of Serbian migration was even larger if we add the aforementioned tribes.

Concerning the migration of the Croats and Serbs in the Balkans, Constantine VII refers to the active role of Emperor Heraclius, while mentioning that the Croats defeated the Avars. A significant number of researchers consider the information given by the Byzantine emperor as a reflection of the true historical context of their settlement in the Balkans, that took place with the consent or permission of Heraclius and under the suzerainty of Constantinople\textsuperscript{30}.

On the settlement of the Croats, Constantine VII presents two different versions, the origin of which have been attributed to two independent sources. Most probably, the information given in chapter 30 is based on the Croat oral tradition, while that of chapter 31 reflects the “official” Byzantine version\textsuperscript{31}. According to the narration in Ch. 30, when the Croats reached Dalmatia, defeated the Avars and settled in the area without the involvement of the Byzantine Empire\textsuperscript{32}. On the contrary, Ch. 31 mentions that the Croats first came into contact with Emperor Heraclius who ordered them to fight the Avars, and then gave them permission to settle in the land they occupied\textsuperscript{33}. In the description of their migration from White Croatia, the settlement in the Balkans and the victory over the Avars, a mythological background connected to the popular oral tradition that saved elements from the Croatian origo gentis has been pointed out. This tradition attributes the Croat settlement and ethnogenesis to the victory over the Avars, and the occupation of former Roman territory south of the Danube during the reign of Heraclius\textsuperscript{34}. On the other hand, the information concerning the Serbs depicts the Byzantine viewpoint, such as the meaning of their name (slaves), and their settlement by Heraclius in Servia, west of Thessaloniki\textsuperscript{35}. In the description given by the Byzantine emperor, there is no mention of a clash between the Serbs and the Avars\textsuperscript{36} nor are there any separate traditions that would save elements of a Serbian origo gentis\textsuperscript{37}. 

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The involvement of Constantinople in the settlement of the two nations in the Balkans has been seriously contested, mainly because of the ideological background and the political expediency underlying in the information of the Byzantine emperor. J. Moisidou points out that the emphasis given by Constantine VII to the uninterrupted dependence of the settlement areas of the Croats, the Serbs and the other smaller Serbian tribes on Byzantium reflects the political and ideological reality of the Macedonian dynasty era, that founded and "legitimized" the constant domination of the Byzantines over the peoples of the north-western Balkans since the reign of emperor Heraclius. The main axis of the shaping of this ideology was a series of historical events, such as the strengthening of Byzantine presence in the Adriatic during the reign of Basil I (867–886), the failure of Simeon I of Bulgaria (893–927) to dominate in the Balkans and subjugate Serbia and Croatia, the effort made by the Francs to control Dalmatia, and the alliance between the Serbs and the Byzantines against Simeon. According to W. Pohl, Porphyrogennetus created a myth in order to consolidate Constantinople's domination rights over the Croats and the Serbs on the demand for land to Heraclius, the permission of settlement, the alliance against the Avars, and their conversion to Christianity.

The political and ideological dimension of the information given by Constantine VII renders Ch. 31 doubtful of its credibility when mentioning that the Byzantine emperor commanded the Croats to fight the Avars and offered them land for settlement. Taking also into account the geopolitical conditions during the reign of Heraclius, it has been supported that there is no indication of an organized Balkan policy, neither before nor after the Persian wars, or even that the Byzantine empire could not prevent the settlement of the Croats and Serbs, thus obliged to maintain good relations with them. Although the clash between Croats and Avars mentioned in both Ch. 30 and 31 should be considered real, the version of Ch. 30, where there is no mention of the empire's involvement, appears to be more reliable. Therefore, there probably was no "permission" or "consent" of Heraclius for the settlement of the Croats, the Serbs and the other tribes in the western Balkans, as Byzantium was in no position to deter it at that specific moment, by diplomacy or military power.

Concerning the Serbs, their peaceful settlement, regardless of what is said about the intervention of Heraclius, appears to be quite probable, as they settled far from the Avar Chaganate, in contrast to the Croats, who occupied lands on the south-west borders of the Avars. On the other hand, there could only be a political dimension to the Byzantine emperor's effort to approach the two south Slavic nations only when their settlement had become an accomplished fact, which Heraclius was obliged to "arrange" in the best interest of his empire. Despite the defeat of 626 and the serious crisis that followed within the Avar Chaganate, the threat of a possible future return of the Avars to the Balkans never ceased to exist. The approach and integration of the Croats and Serbs in the Byzantine sphere of influence would allow Constantinople to gain a mound against possible Avar attacks in the western Balkans, and thus protect its dominions in Dalmatia.
NOTES


3 See below note no. 21.


8 Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio, 31, 153: Great Croatia, also called “white”, is still unbaptized to this day, as are also the Serbs who are its neighbours. On the widely discussed adjective abaptistas (unbaptized), see Lounghis, T. Κονσταντίνου Ζ’ Πορφυρογέννητου, De Administrando Imperio (Προς τον ίδιον υιόν Ρωμανόν). Μία μέθοδος ανάγνωσης. Thessaloniki, 1990, 102-106.


10 Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio, 30, 143; Ibidem. 31, 147: The Croats who now live in the region of Dalmatia are descended from the unbaptized Croats, also called “white”, who live beyond Turkey and next to Francia, and have for Slav neighbours the unbaptized Serbs.


16 Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio, 32, 153: The Serbs are descended from the unbaptized Sebs, also called “white”, who live beyond Turkey in a place called by them Boiki, where their neighbours is Francia, as is also Great Croatia, the unbaptized, ...; Belke, K., Soustal, P. Op. cit., S. 172.


21 Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio, 30, 143: From them split off a family of five brothers, Kloukas and Lobelos and Kosentzis and Mouchlo and Chrobatos, and two sisters, Touga and Bouga, who came with their folk to Dalmatia and found the Avars in possession of that land.


28 See below note no. 38.
32 Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio, 30, 143: After they had fought one another for some years, the Croats prevailed and killed some of the Avars and the remainder they compelled to be subject of them.


36 Jenkins, R. J. H. Op. cit., 131-133, according to whom the leader of the Serbs migrating towards the Balkans was the brother of Dervan, ruler of the Sorvians and ally of Samo. The supposition of F. Dvornik (see Dvornik, F. The Making of Central..., p. 287; Idem. Les Slaves..., 65-66), that the Serbs helped the Croats in their war against the Avars must be ruled out, as Porphyrogennetus does not make any mention of fighting between Serbs and Avars.


38 Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio, 29, 125: Since the reign of Heraclius, emperor of the Romans, as will be related in the narrative concerning the Croats and Serbs, the whole of Dalmatia and the nations about it, such as Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbouniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians, and Arentani, who are also called Pagani [they were subject to the emperor of the Romans]. Ibidem. 30–36, 139–165. Belke, K., Soustal, P. Op. cit., 145, 159, 168–173, 178–182.


