

## SLAVIC ONOMASTIC STRATA IN BANAT: AN OVERVIEW OF PRESENT RESULTS, THE QUESTIONS REMAINING

The first presence of the Slavs in the region known today as Banat as shared by modern Serbia and Romania is signaled by *Venadi Sarmate* in the Tabula Peutingeriana from 3rd century A.D., situated on the upper Tisza, *Sarmat(a)e* obviously referring to Sarmatian Iazyges settled in the Pannonian plain from the beginning of the Christian era, and *Venadi / Venedi* being the Roman designation of the ancient Slavs. The attempt to put this vanguard of the southward migration back to the 1st century A.D. because of the river name *Pathissus* “Tisza” in Plinius, presumably reflecting Slavic *Po-tis-ŕje* “region around the Tisza river” is uncertain, even if the assumed analysis is true, for the prefix *pǎ-* in the same function is used in Lithuanian too, and the tongue of the Dacians, who dominated this part of Pannonia in the centuries around the Christ’s birth, had probably many traits in common with Baltic languages. However, the Slavs may have heard of the Danube and its main tributaries in the mid-course even before they transgressed the Carpathians. Of two variants of Slavic name designating the Danube, both going back to Latin (< Celtic or Iranian) *Dānuvius*, *Dunavъ* seems to have been borrowed from the Goths on the lower Danube, and *Dunajъ* previously from the Dacians somewhere in the Carpathian mountains. The assumption, that the former originally designated the lower course of the river and the later the mid-Danube upstream of Iron Gates, may be corroborated by Serbian historical and dialectal data, confirming that the form *Dunaj* was in use among the Serbs as well. Indeed, the first Slavic tribe mentioned in Transylvania, a southward migrated branch of the Obotrites, appears in the Rojl Frankish Annals s.a. 824 as *Praedenecenti*, which is possibly deformed from Slavic *\*Pridunaj(s)ci* “settled near the Danube”. The archaic Serbian vernacular of Svinica on the Romanian side of the Danube in the entrance to the Iron Gates preserves at least some elements dating back to the late antiquity, such as *Dune*, *-eja* “Danube” (< *Dunajъ*) and the very name of the site, *Svinica*, translating Latin *Scrofulae* “cliffs” epigraphically attested on the spot (Lat. *scrofa* “sow” : Slavic *svinja* id.).

The formula of the oral poetry *tixъjъ Dunajъ* “the still Danube” is common to all Slavic branches, thus rooted in the premigration past; its adjectival component may have referred to Tisza, seen, from ancient Slavs’ standpoint in the Carpathians, as a headstream of the Danube. In contrast to the other river names of the region which were borrowed at an early date (*\*Tъmišъ*, *\*Morišъ* > Serbian *Tamiš*, *Moriš*), the Slavicized form *Tisa* shows no *-š-*, although Greek and Latin renderings of the Pre-Slavic name imply the original pronunciation *Tīša*; that might be due to the influence of Sarmatian, with its shift of Old Iranian *š* into *s*. The vocalic length in Slavic *Sava* compared to Pre-Slavic *Sāvus* may be explained, too, by the interference of Sarmatian *\*sāva-* (> Ossetic *saw*) “black”, in view of *Aqua Nigra* in Jordanes, related most probably to Sava.

As is well-known, the toponymy of today Romania is marked by a high amount of Slavic names, many of them showing the phonetic traits of the East South Slavic (i.e. Bulgarian), most notably *št*, *žd* from Common Slavic *tj*, *dj*. Much of them belong to the productive word-formations, which are not necessarily very old, such as *Cosuștea*, *Medvejde*, the adjective forms of *koșuta* “hind” resp. *medvѣdъ* “bear”, *Smîrdeștec* “the foul smelling (spring, brook)”. A deeper antiquity may be admitted for the archaic possessive adjectives derived from Slavic personal names. There is one instance of such toponyms in Romanian Banat, *Liuborajdia*, attested since 15th century, which might be taken as a clue to the priority of the eastern branch of the South Slavs in this part of Romania, where historically Serbian vernaculars were spoken. However, by looking closely, this particular finding turns out to be an evidence of something else, showing in a new light the general problem of “Bulgaroide” toponyms in Romania. The identical place name, *Ljuberažda* (derived by the *j*-suffix from the PN *Ljuboradъ*), recurs in East Serbia near Pirot; in the same region there is a village named *Prisjan*, first recorded in the 16th century as *Pristjan*, which has also its analogue in Romanian Banat, not far from Ljuberažda. There is there, namely, the toponym *Prisian*, first mentioned in the 15th century as *Priscian*. The East-Serbian *Prisjan* has much deeper roots, for it goes back to Roman *Prisciana*,

attested in Procopius' list of castella (corruptly written Τρισκίανα); consequently, this place-name must have been transferred from Central Balkans to the north of Danube before the 15th century, and the same should be true for *Liuborajdia*, as well as for much of Slavic toponymy in Romania, in view of the hypothesis assuming that the ancestors of the Romanians migrated to Dacia during the middle age from the mountainous Central Balkan area, where the so called Walachian-Slavic symbiosis had taken place previously, so that also Slavic toponyms could have been brought along by the immigrants to their new homeland. In Romanian Banat and Transylvania, they are to be considered as a secondary Slavic stratum versus the primary one, represented by the place-name Hung. *Gesztrágy*, which is again a *j*-possessive derived from a compound PN (*\*Gostiradъ*), but shows the typical Serbian development *dj* > *đ*. Cf. also *Mutnik* with Serbian *u* < *o*, *Radimnja* < *Radimlja* with preserved “*l*-epentheticum”.

The toponymy of Banat has been largely Hungarized since the 10th century, but behind some Hungarian forms archaic Slavic appellations can be recognised, such Hung. *Béga* < Slavic *\*běga* “arm of a river” (the modern Serbian name *Begej* being based on Hung. adjective). An isolated and highly archaic Slavic place-name is also *Beodra*, from *\*bělb* “bast” and *\*dъrati* “to skin”, cf. in Serbia *Liko-dra* (*\*lyko* “bast”). The river-name *Ponjavica* in South-West Banat, recorded as early as 1150 (*Ponoucea*), may even reflect, according to the early Slavic rules of sound substitution, I.-E. *\*pannon-* < *\*pani-on-* “swamp” as underlying the ancient name of *Pannonia*.

By investigating Pre-Hungarian Slavic traditions in Banat, the folklore of the local Serbs is not to be neglected, which abounds in Pre-Christian survivals, such as *Jarilo*, a pagan feast known otherwise only to the East Slavs; the remnants of the cult of *Da(j)bog*, a South Slavic counterpart of East Slavic *Daž(d)ъbogъ*; and the beliefs involving St. Theodor's horses that also find their closest match in Old Russian area.