

IN THE MARGIN OF SLAVIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Jedro Velike Karantanije je bila vojvodina Koroška. (The nucleus of Great Karantania was the Duchy of Carinthia.) Bogo Grafenauer, Zgodovina slovenskega naroda, vol. 2 (2nd rev. ed.) (Ljubljana, 1965), 147.

This note is a brief comment in the margin of modern Slavic historiography on the concept of a Great Karantania recently introduced in Slovene historical scholarship. Although made by someone who does not claim to be a professional historian, it reflects a logical reaction of western historiography vis-à-vis a blossoming ethnocentrism of East European history writing. In principle it calls for a return to critical rigor in dealing with historical sources, rigor which should help a student of the Slavic past to separate facts from myths and plausibilities which may or may not withstand critical testing in historical conjecture.

1. A classical example of such a lack of rigor in dealing with sources in the early centuries of Slavic history is the well known episode of Samo's state, 623-658. Our knowledge of the facts comes from only one source, the so-called Fredegarius,¹ a Frankish chronicle composed between 658 and 661, usually considered an original and a reliable source for events of the period. We know from this chronicle that a homo nomen Samo natione Francos, a man, Samo by name, of Frankish origin, organized a Slavic tribal union against the Avars, that in the year 631 he won a victory over Frankish king Dagobert, and that his tribal union lasted for thirty-five years.

Another source, known as Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum,² some two hundred years younger, dated about 873 and very probably textually dependent on Fredegarius, also mentions Samo. Here Samo and his realm appear to be "nationalized" for the first time, obviously in an attempt to support the claims of the Ecclesia Salisburgensis to its historical mission among the Slavs in the Eastern Alps and

Pannonia. Temporibus gloriosi regis Francorum Dagoberti, is asserted here, Samo nomine quidam Sclavus manens in Quarantanis, fuit dux gentis illius, which boils down to the claim that the Karantanians were ruled by a certain Samo, by origin a Slav. Nobody believes this ninth-century "nation-alization" attempt today, though we are made to believe other fictions which are not supported anywhere in Fredegarius: Samo was a Frankish nobleman and his revolt originated in Moravia, we read in Father Dvornik (Dvornik 1956, 61); Samo's revolt took place in Bohemia, claims George Vernadsky (Vernadsky 1944, 322); and the same Vernadsky has it that Samo's revolt enjoyed the support of the Franks and that his state was a merchant state of its own kind (Vernadsky 1944, 324), linking West and East, the Baltic Sea with the Adriatic. In a book recently published in this country, we find even this: the rapid development of the Great Moravian Empire in the eighth century had its roots in Samo's state; and Samo's kingdom continued to hold a certain degree of autonomy even after it collapsed--until its resurgence in the Great Moravian Empire (Drobena-Kucharek 1979, 65).

Now, the essence of such untested conjectures can be measured only against the few facts we find in Fredegarius. And what this chronicle tells us about Samo, can be counted on the fingers of one hand: one, Samo was a merchant; two, Samo joined a Slavic insurrection against the Avars; three, because of his bravery Samo won the admiration of the Slavs and they made him their ruler; four, Samo ruled for thirty-five years, waged several wars against the Avars and one against the Franks; and five, Samo had twelve wives, twenty-two sons and fifteen daughters. And not an iota more.

2. Another example, probably still better known to us and of special interest to our topic, is the episode of the so-called Great Moravia of the Slavic Middle Ages. I am referring here to numerous publications on this episode,³ and to Imre Boba's recent challenge of its premises (Boba 1971). Great Moravia as a state is usually dated with the beginning of Rostislav's rule in Moravia, 846; it ends with the Magyar victory over Sventopolk's successors, 906 A.D. Its name, better the descriptive element of it, "Great," goes back to the well known source De Administrando Imperio ascribed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus (905-959). The

Byzantine Emperor employed it around the year 950; he used it, for instance, in the phrase megale Moravia, the country of Sphendoplokos,⁴ where the modifier megale "great" defines Moravia as it existed immediately before its destruction.

Constantine uses the adjective megale with the name Moravia three times. The logical premises of this usage in his language are not known; we would expect it to be based on a system in which the modifier "great" opposes two terms in some kind of dyadic relation. One may be inclined to interpret this opposition along the temporal axis: an old area versus a new one, as Imre Boba does (Boba 1971, 83); or along the spatial axis: a geographically closer and known versus a more distant and less known territory, as Jakov Bačić does (Bačić 1979, 5-6), however, always in a set of two entities in some kind of symmetrical structure.

As far as we know, Constantine's De Administrando Imperio is the only source where Moravia is called Great. Today's Slavic historiography adopted Constantine's use (we may call it tradition) and puffed it with pride into a slightly overdone conception of a Great Moravian Empire. In this name "Great" is spelled with a capital "G" which implies a full-fledged proper name of a historical territory, like the Great Plains, the Great Basin in our hemisphere, or an area or a state of the type "Great Britain."

3. A similar usage has been introduced in Slovene historiography for a supposed Great Karantania--Velika Karantanija, spelled with a capital "V." Such an orthographic convention may induce us to believe that the term stands for a full-fledged historical geopolitical entity with this name in the Slovene Middle Ages. I am referring to Bogo Grafenauer's usage of this term (Grafenauer 1952, Grafenauer 1965), and its echoes, e.g. in the representative History of the Nations of Yugoslavia (Babić 1953), in Enciklopedija Jugoslavije (Grafenauer 1962), and most recently in the Polish Słownik starożytności słowiańskich (Kowalenko 1965).

As Bogdan Novak has so convincingly shown in his essay "At the Roots of Slovene National Individuality," Karantania represents the most important socio-political entity on the territory of the Eastern Alps for a period

from the seventh till the twelfth century (Novak 1975, 79-125). Its kernel area was, speaking grosso modo, part of the historical Duchy of Carinthia; its territorial extent, however, changed through time. At one time or another the name Karantania was used for the entire Slavic speech area of the Eastern Alps.

As it is known, the name Karantania is not Slavic. In its original form Carantanum it continues the pre-Slavic toponomy of the area; linguistically it is probably part of a Keltic heritage with an Indo-European root *kar--"rock, stone" as in the term for karst, Slovene Kras. The name must have existed before the settlement of the Slavs in the area. The Alpine Slavs accepted it and in the earliest use applied it to a zone around ancient Virunum and Gospovetsko polje (Zollfeld)--Carantanum. Two other local names in this narrower area are based on it: Krnski grad--curtis Corantana, and Senturška gora--Mons Carantanus.

The ancestors of today's Slovenes settled in Karantania very probably during their first wave of migration, before 580 A.D. Anonymous Ravennas in his Cosmographia (ab. 667-670) refers to the area with the Latin inter Carontanos "among Karantanians" (Kos, F. 1902, No. 182).⁵ This is the oldest record of this term. Fredegar's Chronicle, of approximately the same time, does not use this name; it speaks of Sclavi coinomento Winidi, "of Slavs who are known as Wends," and of Marca Winedorum (Kos, F. 1902, No. 154). A number of original historical documents, e.g. Charles the Great's famous bull of 811, and such chronicles as Annales Regni Francorum, Annales Fuldenses, refer to Karantania as provincia Karantana, regio Carantanorum, Car- nuntum quod corrupto Carantanum dicitur, in partibus Caren- tiae Sclauinie qui regionis; and finally Conversio, the main source for the history of the region: Sclavi qui dicuntur Quarantani, in Sclaviniam regionem Carantanorum, Quarantani et dux eorum Boruth nomine, Cheitmar dux Caran- tanorum, etc. (Kos, F. 1902, see under Karantanija, Karan- tanci).

The territorial extent of Karantania was not always the same. Its kernel area is represented by fields and valleys along the upper Drava and the upper Mura rivers. The regions north of the Karavanke range to the east and south of this nucleus, are in the sources sometimes assumed

as part of Karantania and their population as Karantanians. How much of this area was under Samo's rule, we do not know. What we assume that we know is that after 568 the kernel region of Karantania inside the Eastern Alps remained independent with its own institutional structure and freely elected princes. We also assume that we know that when Karantanians with the Bavarians' help drove back the Avars, about 745 A.D., Karantania was in some sort of union with Bavaria; in 788 it passed with Bavaria under the Franks. Again we may assume with Bogo Grafenauer, the leading Slovene historian today, that during the first period under the Franks, Karantania presumably was "an internally independent semi-vassal principality" (Grafenauer 1964, 391). After Frankish occupation of the western part of the Avar State during the Avar wars of Charles the Great (791-796), it was subordinated to the Markgraf of the new established Ostarichi--Eastern Mark. Around 820 the elected native princes of Karantania were replaced by Bavarian Markgrafen; Karantania became an administrative unit of the Empire, a County. From the beginning of the ninth century, with a population drift of German and Slavic colonists into Lower Pannonia, the name Karantania and Karantanians seem to be applied to Lower Pannonia around Lake Balaton as well.

After the death of Prince Kocel of Lower Pannonia, in 874, the political and ecclesiastic gravitation of the Eastern Mark passed into the narrower Karantania. Thus, under Arnulf, in 876, the new Duchy of Karantania (referred to in the sources of the time as regnum Carentanorum in 888, Karentariche in 898) (Kos, F. 1906, No. 286, No. 319) included the County along the Sava river, and both Pannonias. By the year 900, after the settlement of the Magyars in Pannonia and during which they controlled the territories of the former Eastern Mark, Karantania contracted again to its original nucleus linked with the Bavaria in a personal union.

After the victory at Lechfeld in 955 and after a further repulse of the Magyars in the 960s, the Duchy of Karantania again appeared in a strong union with Bavaria. This was in 976, and it was then that for a relatively short time of seventeen years, between 985 and 1002, the Duchy of Karantania combined the Slavic-Slovene regions in the east and south as well as two non-Slavic provinces in the west into a whole. This entity represented the

south-eastern flank of the Empire and included: the Upper Karantanian Mark (or Mark on the Mura), the Mark on the Drava (or Poetovio Mark), the Mark on the Sava, the Carniolan Mark with Istria, the marks of the Friuli and of Verona. This new defense borderland was indeed much greater than the old historical Karantania. It is to this Karantania, in the sources still spoken of as the Duchy of Karantania, that Bogo Grafenauer refers with the name "Velika Karantanija"--Great Karantania (Grafenauer 1965, 144-157). After 1002, this large borderland unit dissolved into its individual parts, Marks which subsequently changed into a series of new feudal lands, subordinated directly to the Crown. The narrower Duchy of Karantania now became Caren-tana, ducatus Karinthie, Carinthia (Kos, F. 1906; see under Karantanija), which already marks the beginning of a new period in the history of the Slovene lands.

These are the historical facts based on primary sources. As far as we know, there is not a shred of evidence which would warrant the use of the term Velika Karantanija to denote the Duchy of Karantania during this seventeen-year period of its maximal extent. If a scholar uses this term, he uses it without any historiographic support, entirely arbitrarily. It is, of course, quite legitimate and fitting to work out a logical terminological opposition between an ozja "narrower" and a Sirša "broader" Karantania, between the Karantania proper and a greater Karantania, and we would use the comparative form greater instead of great and spell it with a small "g." By positing a Great Karantania, consistently spelled with a capital "G," Bogo Grafenauer conceptualizes an entity whose existence has no support in historical evidence.

This is not to say that a historian cannot use his terms for his concepts of historical events. After all, a scholar's use of terminology always rests upon his conception and recognition of the entities with which he deals. On the other hand, a historian is expected not only to tell truths, but demonstrate their truthfulness as well. He is judged not simply by his veracity, but by his skill at verification. Thus, Grafenauer cannot be censored for the creation and assignment of a proper name to any individual entity of sufficient interest and importance he chooses, provided that he receives a consensus from the community of

scholars who still believe in the need of a critical test to which conjectures and plausibilities should be submitted.

It is known that in Slovene historiography Karantania represents the pivotal axis of the history of the Eastern Alpine Slavic community during the Middle Ages (Grafenauer 1952) and that the discovery of the nexus of Karantania at the end of the eighteenth century and the entire sequel of a cultural-historical Karantanism played a powerful role in the awakening of the Slovene intellectuals and masses into a modern Nation.⁶ Thus, one can understand the rationale behind the attempt to create a Great Karantania. This rationale, however, cannot serve as an excuse for an aberration in a national historiographic tradition which is remarkably free of ethnocentric fallacies.

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Footnotes

¹ Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus, ed. B. Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, II (Hannover, 1888), 18-168. Cf. also J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations (London-New York, 1960).

² Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum, ed. W. Wattenbach, Monumenta Germaniae historica, Scriptores, XI (Hannover, 1854), 6-14. Cf. also Milko Kos, Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum (=Razprave Znanstvenega društva v Ljubljani 11, Historični odsek 3) (Ljubljana, 1936).

³ Cf. Dvornik 1956, Dvornik 1970; L. Havlík, Velká Morava a středoevropskí Slované (Prague, 1964); Magna Moravia, Sborník k 1100. výročí příchodu byzantské mise na Moravu (=Spisy University J. E. Purkyně v Brně, Filosofická fakulta 102) (Prague, 1965); Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici, I-IV (=Spisy University J. E. Purkyně v Brně, Filosofická fakulta 104, 118, 134, 156) (Prague-Brno, 1966-72).

⁴Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio. Vol. I. Greek Text edited by Gy. Moravcsik, English translation by R. J. H. Jenkins (Budapest, 1949). For megale Moravia reference see Chapters 13, 38, 40.

⁵The No. (number) in the reference to Kos, F. 1902 or 1906 refers to passages in the Gradivo za zgodovino Slovencev v srednjem veku, I-II (Ljubljana, 1902-1906).

⁶Cf., for instance, A. T. Linhart's treatment of Karantania in Slovene history in his Versuch einer Geschichte von Krain und der übrigen südlichen Slaven Österreichs (An attempt at a history of Carniola and the other South Slavs of Austria) (Ljubljana, 1788-1791); J. Kopitar's Karantanian-Pannonian hypothesis of the origin of Old Church Slavonic language; and F. Miklosich's treatment of Church Slavonic as Old Slovene.

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