

## PTOLEMY'S ORINI AND OUR COUNTRYMEN GORANIES\*

Even today scientific thought in the history of the Serbian and other Balkan peoples is far from a finally and acceptably discussed question about their names and the ancient land of their birth. What is more historical sources on the Slav migration and the beginnings of Serbian history in the Balkans are still unknown. We have here in mind the sources that Byzantine Emperor and writer Constantine Porphyrogenitus VII could use in his work *De administrando imperio*.

Supporting Porphyrogenitus's interpretation of the phrase "according to the etymological name of Serbs", meaning the slaves (Latin *servi* – slaves), the biased and directed Nordic (German) theory was persistently trying to impose "the complex of a nation without the root and trunk" on the Serbs. Our great, world-famous linguist Milan Budimir, and my Professor of classical languages, urged by that theory, looking for the Pelasgian alphabet and language in the area of ancient Serbs, thus explained the situation in the classical studies in his work *Antiquity and Pelasgi* (1959): "As far as I know Prof. Vasić was the first to raise his voice against the Nordic theories in this part of Europe and associated the Carpathian-Danubian culture with the Anatolian and East Mediterranean cultures. Bearing in mind that German specialists (and their Slav followers) were almost the whole century masters of the situation in European science, regarding antiquity and east in particular, much effort and time will be necessary to revise traditional interpretations built in Nordic spirit."

Contrary to the present-day ideas of Serbs as "new comers" and a floating mass in Šar Mountain P. J. Šafarik already in the mid-1800s pointed in his work *On the Origin of Slavs* to the classical sources according to which Serbs were present in the Balkans before the "Great Migration". He had in mind earlier immigration of their fellow citizens from Propontis and the Caucasian area. He has so far remained unrivaled because he relied on Roman encyclopedist Gaius

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Plinius Secundus (23-79 A.D.) and Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy (121-151 A.D.) and many other writers of the classical and later times.

Writers of the classical period took down toponyms and ethnonyms which certainly had Slav roots, like for example the names of tribes - *Coralii* (Highlanders), *Dolonci* (Lowlanders), *Moriseni* (inhabitants of coastal regions); the names of towns – Bilazora, Deberus, Serdica; the name of the river Strymon etc.

Roman historian Titus Livius testifies to the fact that Thracians like Serbs had in medieval Balkan areas heads of tribal states and parliaments. If we place trust in Theophilactes, the 7<sup>th</sup> century writer, who explicitly called the Thracian tribe Getae the Slavs (Getae, seu quod item est, Sclavini), we can reasonably accept that Thracians were the Slavs. Later Byzantine writers wrote down many Slav names of that kind and called the country ranging from the Balkans to the Aegean Sea Sclavinia. The toponyms of ancient Thrace and Macedonia, as well as the biography of St. Demetrius are particularly convincing in that regard.

We find the oldest entry on the Serbian name in the work of Gaius Plinius Secundus “Istorija prirode” – On Natural History (Historia naturalis, VI c. 7, 19) in the Latinized form *Serbi* in the territory of the northeast coast of the Black Sea. The entry was written down in the middle of the first century of the new era and only a century later we find the name *Serbi* in the work of Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy. A description of the ancient Serbian location is included in his “Geography”: “Inter Ceraunios montes et Rha fluvium Orinaei et Vali et Serbi” (Orini, Vali and Serbs settled down between the mountains of Ceraunis and the river Rha (C. Ptolemy, Geographica..., V, p. 9). Šafarik also noticed that “the name *Srb* is found in the works of Plinius and Ptolemy as the name of a Sharmatian nationality living between the Meotis (the Sea of Azov) and the Volga on the present-day Serba River.”

The place mentioned by Ptolemy is associated with the Serbian name in the area along the Caucasus where at one time some other Albania was situated. That piece of information as well as the fact that classical Greek writers used the Ceraunis mountains as the oronym meaning “lightning bearing mountains” (ceraunos – lightning, thunder), when they alluded to the mountain range along the coast of Epirus, now Kimara. They urged us to look for a certain geographical similarity between the Ptolemy’s surroundings of the Caucasus Mountains, the climate of Epirus, and the Šar and Pindus mountain massif respectively.

It is here particularly interesting that the Serbian name *Goranie*, i.e. inhabitants of a mountain region, is recognized in the Greek name Orinei (Orini).

Every better and more comprehensive map shows many Serbian oronyms and hydronyms in the Albanian territory, especially in Korce-Valona direction. Amidst south Albania there is a mountain peak bearing the Serbian name Ostrovica. The biggest town in that area *Korce* (Serbian toponym Gorica), is

located northeast of Ostrovica. By mediation of its Greek doublet *Korytsa* the present-day Albanian form was obtained. Traveling through the central part of Albania Goustav Weigand, distinguished German Romanist (1860-1930), wrote down in his book on Aromunians: "Korce is situated at the foot of a hill covered with planted vines. The stream Morava breaking through the hill divides the town into two halves and flows down the widened valley of the river Dunavica."

South of Korce is *Kamenica* and southwest is *Potom*, former Podhum (Beneath the Hill). The places *Glave* (Glava – Head), *Ceravoda* (Curivoda - Leaking Out), the region *Trebeshini* (Trebišnjica) and the river *Vijose* (Vojuša) are situated to the west of Potom. Three towns bearing Serbian names are located on the Vijose River banks: *Selenice* on its lower course, south of the Sušice River mouth; *Klisura* on its middle course and the mouth of the Desnica and Vojuša Rivers; and *Konjica* on the upper course of the Vojuša River in Greece.

In fact, Serbs as the native inhabitants of that area of present-day Albania, left inerasable toponomastic traces behind themselves. Toponyms and ethnonyms like Gorica, Goranics, Kamenica, Glava, Klisura speak for themselves about their ancient past along that geographical transversal. We know that there was a later strong Slav migration current in that direction thankfully to which many Slav-Serbian (mixed Russian Church Slavonic and colloquial Serbian) geographical terms survived the blows of the warring and ethnic history in that part of the Balkan Peninsula.

According to archeological findings and paleontological studies many Indo-European tribes like Briges (Brežani), Ruggii, Getae, Dardani and others, who did not belong to any ethnically united group of people, lived on the sides of Ceraunic Mountain in the Šar and Pindus Mountain range, and in the greatest part of present-day Albania. It is known with certainty that a later migration of Slavs (in the 7<sup>th</sup> century) prevailed in that direction. Anna Comnena in her work "Alexiad" devoted to her father, Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118), mentioned Albanians only in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The followers of P.J. Šafarik, like Milan Budimir and others, are backing up opinions on much earlier presence of the Slavs in Europe, and the Serbs in the Balkans, based on repeated readings of classical writers, and the latest discoveries in archeology and paleolinguistics.