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Vlachs in the History of Central Europe A „Problemstellung”

Currently, the appellative „Vlach”, of which variants are known in the vernacular in most of the Slavic, Germanic and Romance languages, as well as in Hungarian and Greek, carries a variety of connotations such as „Celt”, „Italian”, „Rumanian”, „transhumant shepherd”, „person of a different faith, foreigner, stranger”. The Slavic equivalents of the ethnonym „Vlach” are, e.g., the Russian „voloch” (Sing.), „volosi” (Pl.); Polish „Wloch” (for „Italian”) and „Woloch” (for „pastoral Vlach”); Bulgarian „Vlakh”. All these Slavic forms are derived from a Germanic dialect (cf. Gothic *Walhs). The Hungarian „olasz” (for ‘Italian’) and ‘oláh’ (for ‘Vlach’) are loanwords from some Slavic dialects. The Greek „Vlakhos”, used for „Vlach” and for „shepherd” is borrowed, in turn, from the South-Slavs. Since the Slavic forms were adopted from a Germanic dialect, and the Greeks use the Slavic form, the borrowing must have occurred only after the Slavs have settled in the Balkans, i.e. not earlier than the sixth-seventh century A.D. (cf. the etymological dictionaries of M. Vasmer s.v. „valach”, „voloch”; A. Brückner s.v. „Wloch”, „Woloch”; I. Kniezsa s.v. „oláh”, „olasz”.)¹

The first recorded reference to Vlachs in Central and Southern Europe, in the form „Vlachi” (plural), is in the „Vita Methodii”, a Church-Slavonic text compiled in the latter part of the ninth century, soon after the death of Saint Methodius (ob.885). Methodius is recognized as having introduced the Slavonic liturgical

¹ Max Vasmer: *Etimologičeskii Slovar Russkago Iazika*. Moskva 1964. Aleksander Brückner: *Slovník Etymologičny Jazyka Polskiego*. Warsaw 1957. István Kniezsa: *A magyar nyelv szláv jövevényszavai*. I. Budapest 1955. Also confer Gyula Kristó (ed. in chief): *Korai magyar történelmi lexikon (9–14. század)*. Budapest 1994. s.v. blakok and Gyula Kristó: *Rómaiak és vlachok Nyesztornál és Anonymusnál*. Századok 112 (1978) 623-658.

language in a recreated church province of Sirmium. His biographer relates in detail the events leading up to the appointment of Methodius:

„And it came to pass in those days that the Slavonian prince Rastislav jointly with Sventopolk sent envoys from Morava [=iz Moravy] to emperor Michael saying thus: [...] many Christian teachers have come to us from the land of the 'Vlachs', Greeks and Teutons, teaching us in various ways. But we Slavonians are simple people and have none to instruct us in the truth [...] o kind lord, send us such a man who will show us the whole truth.”
(*Vita Methodii. cap. 5*)²

In the Old-Slavonian original the phrase „from the land of the 'Vlachs', Greeks and Teutons” reads: „iz Vlach, i iz Grek, i iz Niemets”. The modern translations of the phrase „iz Vlach” reads „from among the Vlachs”. However, for the proper understanding of the phrase „iz Vlach”, the following comments are offered. According to the semantics of Medieval Slavonian, and in some Slavic languages even today, the plural form of ethnic names provided also the name of the land. The distinction in semantics depended on the syntax through the use of different prepositions. The phrase „iz Vlach” (Pl. Abl.) meant „from within the land of the Vlachs”, while the phrase „from among the people named Vlachs” would have been expressed with the form: „ot Vlach”.

Since some of the Christian teachers mentioned in the *Vita Methodii* came from the „land of the Vlachs”, this land must correspond to what the German-speaking people called in the Middle Ages „Walisch Land” and in modern times „Welschland”. „Walisch Land” is the German vernacular for the Latin terms „Regnum Langobardorum” and „Regnum Italia”, both denoting Northern Italy.

The German toponymics „Walisch Land”, „Welschland”, „Walchensee” are based on the name of the Romanized „Volcae”, once the Celtic population of the Roman Gallia Cisalpina, today, Northern Italy. The ethnonym „Welsch” is still used in vernacular German for all Italians. Since in the ninth century in Welschen Land there were no Celtic (Welsh) speaking people, the phrase „iz Vlach” = „from the land of the Vlachs” may refer to any attested speakers of the region: people speaking Romance dialects, Germanic dialects in the Alpine regions, and South Slavs in Istria and Carantania. The implication of all this is, that the phrase

² Several editions. Cf. e.g. in *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici. II. Brno 1967. 134—163.*

„iz Vlach”, being topographic, cannot be effortlessly associated with any specific ethnic group. Each occurrence of a term resembling the ethnonym „Vlach” has to be analyzed in the context of the source in which it occurs, as well as against the pertinent historical background.

The ethno-political appellative 'Volchva' (Commulative Sing.) and 'Volochoi' (Plural) were known to the compiler of the Russian Primary Chronicle.³ In the Preamble to the Chronicle he describes the people of Western Europe, among them the 'Volchva', whom he placed between the people of Gallia and the people of the city of Rome [i.e. of the Papal State]. Hence the 'Volchva' lived in Regnum Italia, located between the Papal State and Francia Occidentalis. In the same Preamble one reads that the 'Volochoi' invaded the Slovenes, who dwelt along the Danube. In the chronological part of the Chronicle s.a. 898 the compiler noted that the Hungarians had expelled the 'Volochoi' and had, themselves, settled in the land of the Slavonians.

These events reflect the well attested changes leading to the fall of the Avar domination over the Danubian Slavs, known from other sources as the penetration into Pannonia of the Langobard-Bavarian armies of Peppin, king in „Regnum Italia” („Welschland”); settling Carantanian Slavs in Pannonia (Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum, caps. 6 and 10).⁴

The only other source for the study of problems pertinent for the Vlachs prior to the year 1000 is the Gesta Hungarorum of Anonymus Belae Regis (fl. 1200).⁵ His narrative covers events of the ninth and tenth century. His narrative concerning the Vlachs (caps. 9, 11, 24-27, 44, 46, 48, 49, 51) are subject to extensive interpretations with conflicting deductions.

In chapter nine of his narrative, Anonymus relates the hostilities around Kiev, shortly before 895, between the Russes and the recently formed Onogur-Magyar federation. After concluding a peace, the Russes told Almus, the duke of the federation, about the riches of Pannonia and have encouraged him to proceed to Pannonia. The Russes also named the various inhabitants of Pannonia. Since the enumerated names have bearing on the meaning of the name „Vlach”, the Latin text of Anonymus has to be scrutinized:

³ Several editions. Cf. e.g. Povest Vremennykh Let. I. Moskva 1950. 10, 11, 21.

⁴ Several editions. Cf. e.g. in Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici. III. Brno 1969. 292—322.

⁵ Cf. in Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum. I. Budapest 1937. 45, 46, 48, 65, 66, 98, 102.

„Duces vero Ruthenorum [...] rogaverunt Almu ducem [...] in terram Pannoniae descenderent [...] quam terram habitarent Sclavi Bulgarii et Blachii ac pastores Romanorum”.

The fragment „*terram Pannonie habitarent Sclavi Bulgarii et Blachii ac pastores Romanorum*” is being currently interpreted in Hungarian translations to mean: „Slavs, Bulgarians, Vlachs and the shepherds of the Romans”.⁶ Such a translation is suggested also by some of the printed editions of the Latin text, where a comma has been placed between the „Sclavi” and „Bulgarii” (e.g., *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum* I. 45; thereafter abbreviated as SRH).

In Rumanian translations, or in studies in Western languages originating in Rumania, the phrase „*Blachii ac pastores Romanorum*” is interpreted to mean, that the „Blachii” are „Romani”, hence, the Vlachs are Romans and thus the ancestors of the present-day Rumanians.⁷ The noted Rumanian historian, C. Giurescu, interprets the same fragment to read: „Slavs, Bulgarians, Romanians and the shepherds of the Romans”, simply translating „Blachii” as „Romanians”, consequently, in his view, the shepherds are not Romanians nor Romans.⁸

These currently offered analyses of the text of the *Gesta* are unacceptable on philological, logical and historical grounds. As noted above, the manuscript has no comma between „Sclavi” and „Bulgarii”. The grammatical forms 'Bulgarii' and 'Blachii' do not refer to ethnic or political entities, but are Genitive Singular adjectives formed from the appellatives „Bulgaria” and „Blachia” respectively. The forms „Bulgarii” and „Blachii” are used as adjectival attributes to indicate the lands of origin of the 'Sclavi': „Sclavi Bulgarii et Blachii” = „Bulgarian and Blachian Slavs”.

Scholars concerned with the identity of the Vlachs seem to overlook the fact, that Anonymus refers to conditions in Pannonia only. The „Sclavi Blachii”, are no others than Slavic speaking settlers from 'Welschland', the settlers known from the text of the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* (caps. 6 and 10). The „Sclavi Bulgarii” may have been the Timocani, a Slavic polity, that defected from the Bulgarian federation in 818 (*Annales Regni Francorum*) and settled along the Sava in Pannonia. There were also other „Sclavi Bulgarii”, namely the „Sclavi”

⁶ György Györffy: *A magyarok elődeiről és a honfoglalásról*. Sec. ed. Budapest 1975. 143.

⁷ Adolf Armbruster: *La romanité des Roumains*. Rumanian Academy 1977. 35, 45, 73.

⁸ C. Giurescu: *The Making of the Romanian National Unitary State*. Sec. ed. 1975. 38.

who were resettled between the Danube and Tisza, toward the Northern Carpathians by Keanus Magnus of Bulgaria (cf. Anonymus, cap. 11).

In the remaining fragment of the sentence under analysis, the phrase „pastores Romanorum” the genitive form „Romanorum” is not a definition of the ethnicity of the 'pastores' but, as Genetivus Possessivus, expresses the „dependence on, or belonging to, the Romans”. The „pastores Romanorum” were simply „the shepherds of the Romans”, hence the shepherds themselves could not be Romans.

It should also be pointed out that the „Romani” in the narrative of Anonymus were not the Romans of antiquity, but a segment of the population of the Frankish-Roman Empire of the ninth century. With the exception of one reference to the Romans of antiquity in chapter one, Anonymus always uses the name „Romani” for the military leadership of the Frankish-Roman Empire (caps. 11, 46, 48, 51). In chapter eleven the 'Romani principes' (= nobility, counts) settled their shepherds in Pannonia, „up to the river Danube”, at the time, when Keanus Magnus of Bulgaria occupied and settled Slavonians between the Danube and Tisza, toward the Carpathians.

This „Roman” and Bulgarian expansion occurred after the fall of the Avar realm, hence c. 800 A.D. A century later, when the Hungarians entered Pannonia proper; „All the Romans sought salvation in escape” (Anonymus cap. 46, cf., also caps. 48, 51). Thus the 'Volochi' known to the compiler of the Russian Primary Chronicle (Preamble), who invaded Pannonia and were expelled by the Hungarians in the ninth century, were fighting men from the Frankish realm of Regnum Italia = „Welschland”. Possibly, because of the overall 'Frankish' control of this polity, some scholars interpret the terms „Volchva” and 'Volochi' as „Franks” instead of: „people from Welschland”. Welschland at that time was an autonomous „regnum Italiae” within the Frankish realm. While the „Romani” had been expelled, their shepherds may well have remained in Pannonia. Finally, Anonymus does not report the presence of „Romans”, shepherds or otherwise, in Transylvania.

Anonymus, however, knew a certain „Gelou Blacus” as lord and duke in „terra Ultrasilvana”. He is known only to Anonymus. Gelou is named 'dux', 'dux Blacorum' and 'dux ultrasilvanus', hence equal in rank to other independent ninth-century rulers in the Carpathian Basin, such as Árpád, Menumorout, and Salanus. Duke Gelou's retainers and subjects were „Blasii et Sclavi” (Anonymus, caps. 24, 25, 26). In the phrase „Blasii et Sclavi” one has to note, again, the semantic distinction between the forms 'Blasii' and 'Sclavi'. The first form is Nominative Plural adjective, used substantively. Thus Anonymus refers to ethnic „Sclavi”,

evidently autochthons in Transylvania, and to „Blachii”: „those who belong or originate from a land „Blachia/Vlachia”.

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Duke Gelou and his „Blasii” played a significant role in the history of Transylvania. As reported by Anonymus, after the Onogur-Magyar federation had crossed the Carpathians (895), a certain Onogur chieftain named Tuhutum, with the permission of the duke of the federation, Árpád, moved into Transylvania, while Árpád, with his Magyars, crossed the Danube into Pannonia (cf. above, chapter Dacia-Transylvania). Tuhutum defeated Gelou. Many of his Blasii retainers were killed, others were captured („multi interfecti, plures vero capti”). Tuhutum, henceforth is the lord and duke of the acquired territory. Thus the Blachii, attested for the late ninth century in Transylvania, were fighting men, the retainers of duke Gelou.

A century later the Vlachs appear in sources under the name of „Wolachen”. Among foreigners („advenae”) assuming service at the court of duke Géza and his son Stephen king of Hungary (ob. 1038) there were Czechs, Poles, Greeks, Spaniards, Slavs, Armenians, Saxons, „Pagans” and „Wolachen” (Chronicon Henrici de Mugeln cap. 15 SRH II. 140). In a parallel text, in place for „Wolachen”, the name „Latini” is used (Chronicon Budense. SRH I. 303), while in another parallel text the name is „Walon” (Chronicon, quod in Monte s. Georgii conservatur. SRH II. 279). Again, the Wolachen-Latini-Walons are employed at the ducal or royal court or in the army. They were, obviously, not shepherds.

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By the year 1038, the year Saint Stephen died, his whole realm, which included at that time Transylvania, was organized ecclesiastically into the church provinces of Esztergom in Pannonia and regions north of the Danube, and of Kalocsa, east of the Danube, including Transylvania, later also Slavonia south of the Sava. The Hungarian church followed the practices of the Western, Roman, church, with the use of Latin in liturgical services. Through conversion to Roman Catholicism the local nobility of Slavic, Vlach and Hungarian descent, all became members of the Royal class of „servientes regis”, and soon were „Magyarized”.

From this analysis of the pertinent sources covering the ninth and tenth centuries, it appears evident that the Vlachs mentioned in the *Vita Methodii*, in the Russian Primary Chronicle and in the *Gesta of Anonymus Belae Regis*, were neither Romans nor shepherds. In the case of the *Vita Methodii* they are educated clergy; in the Russian Chronicle and in the *Gesta of Anonymus* they are fighting men of organized polities.

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Pastoral Vlachs are first attested in Central Europe in Byzantine sources for 976.⁹ In Hungary they may have appeared not earlier than 1054, the date of the schism between the patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople. Indications for that are provided by church history of the region. Before the Schism, dioceses and church provinces were either under the jurisdiction of the patriarchs of Rome or Constantinople. There was no need for overlapping jurisdiction. In Hungary the liturgical language was Latin, while in church provinces south of Hungary Greek or vernacular Slavonic.

The Vlach population of Medieval and early modern Hungary were speakers of a Romance dialect, and lived within „Latin” dioceses. Until the nineteenth century they used Old-Slavonian (Church-Slavonic) language in liturgy, and the Cyrillic letters in Church and private usage, and had a clergy that recognized the jurisdiction of the Orthodox archbishop Ochrid. Thus the conjecture is that, since in Transylvania there was no Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy before the eighteenth century, the Vlach clans and extended families must have arrived in Hungary with their own clergy after the schism of 1054, and continued to employ clergy from Orthodox Bulgaria or Serbia. „A document of Emperor Basileos II, dated May 2, 1020, mentions the Vlachs, living all over Bulgaria, as belonging to the archbishopric of Ochrid.”¹⁰

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In medieval Transylvania the Vlachs were a 'privileged' class of foreign settlers, like the Saxons. They had self-government by communities and paid taxes

⁹ Cf. Paul Miron: *Die rumänische Sprachgemeinschaft. Dacoromania. I.* 1973. 185.

¹⁰ Quoted from Paul Miron's study cited above.

directly to the king. They could follow their „orthodox” religion, but could not have bishops within the Roman Catholic dioceses. Vlach boyars (nobility) frequently converted to Catholicism, whereby they became part of the Hungarian nobility. Religion being no barrier, they soon became 'Magyars'.

There were two political organizations of the Vlachs in East Central Europe: Walachia, south of the Carpathians along the Lower Danube and Moldavia, and east of the Carpathians, toward the river Seret, both attested since the 13th-14th century respectively. These two principalities merged in 1859 to form the core of the Kingdom of Rumania, succeeded in 1947 by the Peoples Republic of Romania, followed by the present-day Republic of Romania.

The first attested connection between „Vlachs” and „Romans” was made in 1345 in the correspondence of Pope Clemens VI with King Louis of Hungary. The Pope referred to the „Olachi Romani”, the Vlach nobility and simple Vlach people in Transylvania and Sirmia, who became „Roman Catholics”. In the phrase „Olachi Romani” the term „Romani” is an adjective expressing fidelity to the Church of Rome, and not to a descendency from Rome.¹¹

Note also that the term „Ugrovlachi” means „Vlachs associated with the Hungarians (= Ugri)”, and „Ungureni” are „Vlachs from Hungary” (cf.; „Afro-American”, „oláh cigány”, „Sclavi Bulgarii”). If one would like to use philology „ad absurdum”, then the argument would be at hand to conclude that since „Olachi Romani” are Romans/Rumanians, the „Ugrovlachi” and the „Ungureni” must be Hungarians.

¹¹ Adolf Armbruster: *La romanite des Roumains*. Op. cit. 44—46, 73.