

drugačen scenarij. Na nek način celo podpira konzervativnejši a vseeno dokazljiv pogled na izvor Evropejcev. Kolikor mi je znano, pa žal knjiga med strokovnjaki zaenkrat še ni dosegla odmevnejše razprave. Morda je pač enostavneje razmišljati kot večina in se ogibati izvirnosti, tako, da se takšne koncepte raje kar prezre. Kdo bo naslednji, ki bo zbral pogum in si upal kaj povedati? Zaradi mene naj bo to kdorkoli, samo, da bi se zgodilo čim prej. Nujno je namreč treba preprečiti nadaljnjo škodo, ki se pojavlja ob uvajanju (in uveljavljanju) teorij, zgrajenih na napačnih, zastarelih temeljnih predstavah.

Zagotovo gre za zelo zanimivo delo, namenjeno predvsem učenjakom, ki bi želeli oceniti ali popraviti »/n/aše današnje poznavanje izvora Slovanov«!

Kot sem obveščen, prof. Curta pripravlja delo o zgodovini Grčije v več knjigah, ki bi utegnilo bilo zanimivo tudi za preučevalce makedonskih korenin. Močno si želim, da bi se tudi v tem delu držal istega principa izvirnosti in ne bi dopustil vpliva večinskega mnenja.

Ob zaključku le še pripomba: V zadnjem obdobju je bilo opravljenih že kar nekaj genetskih študij v smislu ugotavljanja strukture staroveškega prebivalstva Evrope (pismo Curti: http://www.maknews.com/html/articles/skulj/origin_of_the_slavs.html; 3. 2. 2008). J. Skulj je svojo raziskavo takole sklenil: »Odsotnost HG16 /genetskega zaznamovalca/ v moškem prebivalstvu Panonske nižine in v Sloveniji, na Hrvaškem, v Srbiji, Romuniji ter na Balkanu /.../ spodbija teorijo o preselitvi 'južnih' Slovanov iz območij pod Karpati na današnja pred 1500 leti. Če bi se to zgodilo, potem bi s sabo prinesli HG16, ki je severno in severovzhodno od Karpatskega gorovja (na Poljskem, v Rusiji in Ukrajini) pogost in razširjen genetski zaznamovalec« [5]. Razumljivo torej pogrešam vsaj kakšen namig avtorja o njegovem pogledu na takšne raziskave.

REVIEW OF CURTA'S BOOK *THE MAKING OF THE SLAVS*

About the author

This is a review of the book *The Making of the Slavs* [1], written by Prof. Florin Curta, Ph. D., for which he received the Herbert Baxter Adams Prize of the American Historical Association for the year 2002 (<http://www.historians.org/prizes/AWARDED/AdamsWinner.htm>; 4. 2. 2008). This award is offered for a distinguished first book by a young scholar in the field of European history.

Florin Curta is an Associate Professor of Medieval History and Archaeology at the University of Florida. He studied History-Philosophy at the University of Bucharest, Medieval Studies at Cornell University (Ithaca) and received his Ph. D. in History at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo). He also worked as an archaeologist performing field surveys and excavations with the Institute of Archaeology "Vasile Pârvan" (Bucharest). Prof. Curta wrote numerous articles and several books focused on southeastern Europe (more information is available on his website: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/fcurta>; 5. 2. 2008). His achievements in both history and archaeology, presented in his comprehensive book, offer a new methodological approach to southeastern Europe in the Early Middle Age. As an excellent basis for further research, this book merits our sincere affirmation.

Formation of Sclavenic ethnicity

The book represents a new approach towards the origin of the Slavs. Curta's conception is that *»early medieval ethnicity was embedded in sociopolitical relations just as modern ethnicity is. Ethnicity was socially and culturally constructed, a form of social mobilization used in order to reach certain political goals.«* (p. 34)

One could agree that the problem of Sclavenic (I use this medieval term intentionally) ethnicity was a result of a unique linguistic ethnogenesis (taking their wide expansion into consideration). On the contrary, many other tribes were either political (*ethnos*) or military (*folk, fulca, pulkas*) groups, from time to time resulting in major ethnic communities or settlements. Therefore in past centuries the term »Slavs« was created, and non-critically applied to some populations and regions. However, avoiding this kind of misunderstanding, Curta often uses the term Sclavenes, a label frequently employed in the early Medieval.

As Curta describes, he finds an original solution to solve the problem of Sclavenic pre-sixth century presence: *»Instead of a great flood of Slavs coming out of the Pripet marshes, I envisage a form of group identity which could arguably be called ethnicity and emerged in response to Justinian's implementation of a building project on the Danube frontier and in the Balkans. The Slavs, in other words, did not come from the north, but became Slavs only in contact with the Roman frontier.«* (p. 3)

To simplify, the circumstances were a crucial factor in forming the Sclavenic ethnic community. Nevertheless Curta refuses to write or even think about Slavic history before the sixth century: *»Though in agreement with those who maintain that the history of the Slavs began in the sixth century, I argue that the Slavs were an invention of the sixth century. Inventing, however, presupposed both imagining or labeling by outsiders and self-identification.«* (p. 335)

In other words predecessors of Sclavenes were present in the Balkans already before the 6th century, though not yet formed as an ethnically compact community. Can we therefore assume that proto-Slavic languages were spoken by larger communities in this territory (southeastern Europe) long before the 6th century? This seems to be a logical conclusion. Otherwise we could hardly believe that Curta would be able to state that *»Common Slavic itself may have been used as a lingua franca within and outside Avar qaganate. /.../ we may presume that duke Raduald learned how to speak Slavic in Friuli. His Slavic neighbors in the north apparently spoke the same language as the Dalmatian Slavs.«* (p. 345)

Sclavenic migrations?

For our purposes it is Sclavenic (Venetic) ethnogenesis which is most interesting. Prof. Curta speaks directly to this: *»Our present day knowledge of the origin of the Slavs /is/ to a large extent, a legacy of the 19th century. A scholarly endeavor inextricably linked with forging national identities /.../«* (p. 6)

He also challenges the reader *»to move away from the migrationist model which has dominated the discipline of Slavic archaeology ever since its inception.«* (p. 307). The

combination of both the historical and archaeological approach could be seen as one that gives the author more freedom to revise the firmly grounded model of the early medieval Slavic mass migration.

According to Curta, among Sclavenes there was no »*obscure progression*« involving a more or less permanent change of residence in the 7th century. Regretfully, the question of when the Sclavenic ancestors first inhabited these regions has yet to be answered. We can only assume that Protoslavs in the Balkans were a Pre-roman phenomenon. Selected excerpts confirm our conclusion: »*I began this chapter with the statement that the nature of the Slavic settlement remains obscure to many modern historians. Several conclusions follow from the preceding discussion, but the most important is that, whether or not followed by actual settlement, there is no "infiltration" and obscure progression. The evidence of written sources is quite explicit about this. /.../ The problem with applying this concept of migration to the sixth- and seventh-century Slavs is that there is no pattern of an unique, continuous, and sudden invasion. Moreover, until the siege of Thessalonica during Heraclius' early power, there is no evidence at all of outward migration in the sense of a permanent change of residence. /.../ What John /of Ephesus/ had in mind were warriors, not migrant farmers.*« (p. 113)

Not only in the north, also Sclavenes in the south (to the coast of the Aegean Sea) did not migrate in the 6th century.

Archaeological evidence

According to Curta, there is also archaeological evidence to move away from the »*migrationist model*«: »*More important, assemblages of the Lower Danube area, where, according to the migrationist model, the Slavs migrated from the Pripet marshes, long antedate the earliest evidence available from assemblages in the alleged Urheimat.*« (p. 337)

It would be interesting to know which finds in the Lower Danube area were taken into consideration here. Not only new evidence - also new interpretations seem to overthrow the idea of mass migrations: »*"Cultures", as one archeologist noted, "do not migrate. It is often only a very narrowly defined, goal-oriented subgroup that migrates. "To speak of the Prague culture as the culture of the migrating Slavs is, therefore, a nonsense.*« (p. 307)

Regretfully even modern archaeological research in Slovenia is based on such dubious assumptions, illustrated in a paper by Prof. Mitja Guštin, Ph.D.: »*Remains of an extensive early-medieval settlement are among most important discoveries of archaeological research at Nova tabla close to Murska Sobota. These remains prove Slavic settling from the 6th to the 9th Century*« [2]. The key argument springs from the assumption that the Prague culture is the one proving migrations, an idea labeled by Curta as »*a nonsense*«. He moreover points to other »*ethnicities*« as the ones responsible for the southern branch of the Prague culture: »*Such pots were hastily classified as Slavic, Prague-type pottery, in an attempt to provide an archaeological illustration to Procopius' story of Hildigis and his retinue of Slavene warriors (see Chapter 3). Similar pots, however, appear in contemporary children burials east of the Tizsa river in "Gepidia." This further indicates that deposition of handmade pots should be interpreted in terms of age status, not ethnicity.*« (p. 193)

Even where the so called Grubenhäuser (sunken buildings) are concerned we should be more cautious: »Archaeologists /.../ divide "Gepidia" into three areas: the Tisza plain, north Serbia, and Transylvania. Large sixth-century settlements excavated in Transylvania include sunken buildings (Grubenhäuser) /.../ Such buildings were common in contemporary settlement of Central and Western Europe. The earliest, but also richest, burials, dated to the second half of the fifth century also come from Transylvania. High-status burials /.../ may indicate the presence of a power center, perhaps the most important in the area during the half-century following the demise of Attila's Hunnic Empire.« (p. 194)

Interestingly, in the book *Balkan Prehistory*, Douglass W. Bailey mentions in the Balkans the semi-subterranean pit buildings similar to Grubenhäuser. These semi-subterranean pit buildings have been a form of simple dwelling places at least from 6500 BC and continued as such even after the breakdown of the élite (end of the Copper age) [3].

Indeed there is no reason to believe that archaeological particularities give any hints of a migration of a community. This could only be seen as one of the key arguments, because of which the 6th Century mass migration is losing its credibility.

Curta argues that »The distribution of hoards in the Balkans would at best indicate that large tracts in the western and central parts were not touched by invasions at all.« (p. 170)

He argues that distribution and frequency of the so-called coin hoards do not support the migration theory: »The distribution of sixth-century hoards in the Balkans reveals, however, a striking difference between central regions, such as Serbia and Macedonia, and the eastern provinces included in the diocese of Thrace. With just one exception, there is no hoard in the eastern Balkans with a terminus post quem before 600.« (p. 171)

In light of this, the presence of the coin hoards could be re-interpreted. Curta suggests that they could be the result of a closed Byzantine economy. For example, the hoards of five to nine solidi could »indicate the presence of the Roman army, not Avar or Slavic attacks«. (p. 178)

Furthermore, it was not only mis-interpretations but also inaccurate dating and flawed methods that forced the migrationist model into a »cul-de-sac«. Such arguments had encountered a dead-end and could no longer be expanded upon. In the Chapter titled *DATING THE CHANGE: WHERE WERE THE EARLY SLAVS?* (pp. 228-235) Curta cites »serious methodological flaws« and misdatings in archaeological approaches towards migrations of the Slavs, even in the »Greek territory«. This argument strikes yet another crippling blow against migrationism.

With these and other proofs, Curta challenges scholars to revisit migrationist conceptions: »First there is already enough evidence to move away from the migrationist model which has dominated the discipline of Slavic archaeology ever since its inception. A retreat from migrationism is necessary simply because the available data do not fit any of the current models for the study of (pre)historic migration. Cultural correspondences were too often explained in terms of long-distance migration, despite lack of any clear concept of migration to guide such explanations.« (p. 307)

Slaveni – Veneti – Wends?

Regarding the connection between Sclavenes and Veneti, Curta's conclusion is breathtaking even if applied only to the northern Veneti: »*Archaeological research has already provided an enormous amount of evidence in support of the idea that the Venethi were Slavs.*« (p. 13)

The failure to distinguish between various Veneti groups may lead to a link between the Baltic Veneti and the Alpine Wends (or Winds). If such a link existed, the relations should be visible to us. For example, present day Wendic toponyms (Wendisch, Windisch, Venediger, etc.; http://www.veneti.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=188, 1. 3. 2008) could be relics of past Venetic settlements.

Curta also analyzes Jordanes on the Veneti: »*Jordanes calls one and the same river Viscla when referring to Sclavenes, and Vistula, when speaking of Venethi. This was interpreted as an indication of two different sources. In the case of Venethi, the source may have been an ancient similar to Ptolemy's geography. It is equally possible, however, Jordanes was inspired here by Tacitus, for, like him, he constantly associates Venethi with Aesti.*« (p. 40)

However, Jordanes' report retains a convincing validity regardless of his sources.

On the next page (p. 41), Curta divides the Veneti with the following argument: »*In the "catalogue of nations" /from Jordanes' Getica/, we are told that the Venethi were "chiefly called Sclaveni and Antes," which could only mean that Venethi were subdivided into two categories, the Sclavenes and the Antes.*« This seems an interpretive difference and is perhaps best left decided by readers. However when analyzing Fredegar's and Bobbio's report, Curta forms a more solid conclusion: »*Fredegar had two apparently equivalent terms for the same ethnies: Sclauos coinomento Winedos. There are variants for both terms, such as Sclavini or Venedi. The 'Wends' appear only in political context: the Wends, and not the Slavs, were befulci of the Avars; the Wends, and not the Slavs, made Samo their king. It is therefore, possible that 'Wends' and 'Sclavenes' are meant to denote a specific social and political configuration, in which such concepts as state or ethnicity are relevant, while 'Slavs' is a more general term, used in a territorial rather than an ethnic sense. 'Wends' and 'Slavs' were already in use when Fredegar wrote Book IV. They first appear in Jonas of Bobbio's Life of St. Columbanus, ([termini] Venetiorum qui et Sclavi dicuntur). written sometime between 639 and 643. According to Jonas, Columbanus had once thought of preaching to the Wends, who were called Slavs.*« (p. 60)

Representing another very interesting interpretation of a source, Curta once again supports the idea that medieval authors were not mistaken or misled.

A surprise in the scientific field?

It may be valuable to note that some of Curta's predecessors outlined a similar approach. Archaeologist C. Renfrew states that there is no evidence for cultural and linguistic changes in Europe which archaeological research could offer [4]. There are also papers such as these two modern works: *Veneti -First Builders of European Community* (M. Bor, J. Šavli, I. Tomažič, 1989, 1996-English version) and *Origini delle lingue d'Europa* (M. Alinei, 1996,

2000). In the former, though written by non-academicals seeking to validate a specific national identity, some arguments still find support in the historical and linguistic evidence: *»colonization of Slavs in the Alps during the above time /6th Century/ cannot be authenticated by any historical source. It represents a fabricated, fictitious view that is repeated without critical examination.«* (p. 5)

In the latter, M. Alinei also uses a linguistic argument: *»I have to commence by clearing away one of the most absurd consequences of the traditional chronology, namely, that of the 'arrival' of the Slavs into the immense area in which they now live.«*

Prof. Florin Curta deftly maneuvers among German, French, English, Romanian, Italian, Russian, Bulgarian, Czech, Ancient Greek and Latin texts. This is surely a big advantage for doing comprehensive research work, since there is a much wider spread of material available. In addition, Curta's ability to span many languages with his research may also have inspired him to mount a successful challenge against some traditional or national linguistic-based theories.

Conclusions

The Making of the Slavs is a must-read for every researcher of Slavic origins. The work reveals an absence of crucial factors to support a model of early Medieval mass migrations and clearly indicates a different scenario. It supports both a more conservative and yet augmented view on the origin of Europeans. Regretfully, these ideas have yet to merit a noteworthy discussion or echo among scholars. Mainstream thinking in this field seems to prefer simply to ignore the concepts in Prof. Curta's book. Hopefully he will not be the last to take up this mantle. For the sake of good scholarship the traditional, and according to Prof. Curta inaccurate, models must be discarded in order to avoid constructing future theories on obsolete misconceptions. This book is a highly interesting work for scholars who would like to evaluate or revise *»/o/ur present day knowledge of the origin of the Slavs«!*

Prof. Curta is in process of writing a multi-volume series on the history of Greece, which might be of great interest in the research of Macedonian origins. This work may prove equally significant as the book discussed above if it follows the same principle of fearlessly departing from traditional influences in the face of contradictory evidence.

A final remark: A number of genetic studies have been made recently in order to determine the structure of ancient European populations (http://www.maknews.com/html/articles/skulj/origin_of_the_slavs.html; 3. 2. 2008). J. Skulj concluded that *»/a/bsence of HG16 /a genetic marker/ in the male population of the Pannonian plain and in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and the Balkan populations /.../ disproves the theory that the 'southern' Slavs migrated to the present locations 1500 years ago, from the areas beyond the Carpathian Mountains. Had they done so, they would have brought with them HG16, which is frequent and widely distributed genetic marker north and northeast of the Carpathian Mountains – in Poland, Russia and Ukraine«* [5]. Prof. Curta's position towards such studies is significantly absent from his book.

Proofreading: Jeffrey Hofreiter

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Spisek drugih del prof. Curte, ki se nanašajo na slovansko etnogenezo (kot jih je priporočil F. Curta osebno)

Here is a list with prof. Curta's other publications pertaining to the Slavic ethnogenesis

- Tworzenie Slowian. Powrót do slowianskiej etnogenezy. In: *Nie-Slowianie o początkach Slowian*. P. Urbanczyk, Ed., Poznanskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk/Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Poznan/Warsaw 2006, pp. 27-55 and 157-164. (<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/fcurta/urbasn.pdf>; 1. 2. 2008)
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