

23rd International Congress of Byzantine studies, Belgrade, 24 august, 2016

Tematic Session of Free Communications:

*The Migration period*

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THE TERM „SCLAVINIA“ -

BYZANTINE INVENTION, WESTERN INFLUENCE?

This article attempts to shed light on the term *Sclavinia*, its emergence, spreading and uses. It is not about the concept of Land of Slavs, neither investigating synonymic words like *Slovyanskaya zemlya*, *Dar as-sakaliba* and ctr., but it is strictly about the word *Sclavinia* that we find in Greek and Latin sources. One of the reasons of this is that there are some differences in the meaning between them – *Sclavinia* is a politically organized autonomous subject under Slavic rule, and not just a land inhabited by Slavs (possible meaning when we speak of *Slovyanskaya zemlya and dar as Sakaliba*).

It is widely accepted that *Sclavinia* is a term invented in Byzantium and after that spread to the west. The arguments for this is as follow:

- Form of the word, which is byzantine: *Sclavinia*.
- Belief that term existed in byzantine sources in VII and VIII century.
- Belief that it was most common and even typical for Byzantium, but not for the West.

The first argument is relative. When the form of ethnonym Slavs was already accepted in the West in his Byzantine form Sclav / Sclavini it was normal that the toponym deriving from it would keep this original and even classical form; so the form alone did not proof that the toponym was also created in Byzantium. We found many similar and synonymous forms related with the term *Sclavinia* that was clearly created in the West – like Slavia, Wenedonia, Slavonia and ctr. and this show that West was well capable to create its own artificial form without need of Byzantine assistance. It has to be underlined there, that all mentioned forms were artificial. Finally, the oldest four registered cases in western sources diverge from Byzantine form: *Slawinia, Sclavania*.

The second argument – *who was the first - he is the creator* is based on three pillars: appearance of the term *Sclavinia* in Theophylact's History, the same in Miracles of saint Demetrius and belief that the term existed in sources in VIII century used by Theophanes the Confessor.

The dominant thesis in the science today is that the term *Sclavinia* first is early mentioned in the early VII century in history of Theophylact Simokatta written in Constantinople. It is debated during the last years if he used it like a noun or an adjective. If the

second is truth then this example is disabled. Another possibility that I suggest there is that *Sclavinia* even might not exist in his original work. The oldest manuscript of Theophylact's History is from X c., when the term *Sclavinia* was already well affirmed - all other Theophylact's manuscripts depended on this one. Theophylact used the term *Sclavinia* in only one place in his History, and in the way, which made it unclear for his contemporary readers. None of his contemporary writers used it, and there is not any sign that anybody borrowed it from him. Patriarch Nicephorus, who wrote his history as a continuation of Theophylact's in the 70<sup>th</sup> or 80<sup>th</sup> years of VIII c., did not know the term *Sclavinia* at all. Theophane the Confessor, who in the second decade of IX c. widely used the term *Sclavinia*, and who incorporated a big amount from Theophylact's History in his Chronicle, did not use the term in the sections based on Theophylact. *Sclavinia* appeared in his Chronicle first time under 658. Therefore, it is possible that *Sclavinia* did not exist in the original of *Theophylact's History* but actually was an interpolation, or even a mistake made by the copyist in oldest X c. manuscript.

The last was actually the case of second example that once was used in the historiography – the term *Sclavinia* in *The Miracle of Saint Demetrius*, which in meanwhile was proven that appeared in just one manuscript from X century.

However, even if Theophilact really used this term like a noun and was the first who used it, this is not of big importance for this topic. More important is that no one borrowed it from him and therefore Theophilact wasn't the beginning of line of the users and evolution of this term. Use of *Sclavinia* by Theophylact, if it really happened, in reality was, at best, an isolated case without consequence.

The next argument is the supposition that the term *Sclavinia* existed in the sources used from Theophane. However, they were also sources of patriarch Nicephorus and it is a fact that the last one did not use *Sclavinia* even once. Theophanes used *Sclavinia* in just one situation described by Nicephorus (the expedition of Justinian II against the Slavs) and did not use it in several other common moments like foundation of Bulgarian state, Tervel's intervention in favor of Justinian II, war against Telecius, deserting of many Slavs from Bulgaria and ctr. Furthermore, in Theophane's Chorography *Sclavinia* appeared in some parts based on eastern Syrian sources - information that Nicephorus did not mention at all, and for Theophanes own time (810) which suggests that he himself put it in his narrative and not borrowed from the earlier sources. Therefore, it is logical that the term did not exist in their common sources and that most likely term *Sclavinia* was not used in 770<sup>th</sup> Constantinople when Nicephorus wrote his history, and appeared later before or in time when Theophanes wrote his Chronicle. Two other sources that used it for 811 – *Scriptor incertus* and *Anonymous Vatican Narration* confirm this, and the letter of Emperor Michael to the Louis the Pious from 824 give us a final proof that the term *Sclavinia* in the second and third decade of 9-century Byzantium was known well enough.

If it is correct, Theophane is the first known Byzantine author we are absolutely sure that used the term *Sclavinia*. In such situation, the oldest source in which we find it is not Byzantine but western one: *Life of Willibald*, written in 778, in Bavaria. There term was used for part of Peloponnese, indicating that in year 723 the Saint passed nearby by boat. Nothing supports the suggestion that he learned it in Byzantium except an unprovable presumption that

the term *Sclavinia* already existed and was widely popular in Byzantium in the early 8 century. It is remarkable that in this source the term is not in a Byzantine form – *Sclavinia*, but *Slawinia*. It was also argued that in the *Life of Vilibald* *Slawinia* was used like an adjective and not a noun. Nevertheless, even if it is true, an earlier doubtless appearance of the term still will be in the West. Few Chronicles from the end of VIII century used it about events of 789 in north Germania. Very close to time when *Life of Vilibald* was written.

Now the last argument – belief that the term *Sclavinia* was typical for Byzantine tradition but not for Western. It is simply not true. Actually, it is opposite. It is not just about who first used it – but also who used more and longer. In Byzantium, we can find *Sclavinia* at most in 10 sources from VII or IX century to the end of XII c. Eight of them use it just once, one – like anachronism, one like a geographic term, two may be were interpolations or mistakes, and just once was an official document. Therefore, *Sclavinia* was a rare exception in the Byzantine sources. Yes, it was an exception in the western source too, but still it was a more common exception. In the West, I found *Sclavinia* in at least five times more authors. In addition, it was used in official documentation of western emperors, kings, and popes between IX – XII century at least 28 times in contrast of the Byzantine one. *Sclavinia* was used in the West to the end of Middle ages, but in Byzantium it disappeared in XII. The term appeared in the West, in more forms than in Byzantium where we have only one. In addition, uses in the West of forms that differ from the Byzantine base, like *Slavia*, *Slavinia*, *Sclavania*, *Slavonia* were numerous then all cases of using *Sclavinia* in Byzantium together.

However, if *Sclavinia* appeared first in the West and was most common used there, then it put in very serious doubt the common assumption that the term is a Byzantine invention, which spread to the West because of Byzantine authority and influence. It is so easy for all of us to think that Byzantium was the active side and Barbarian – the passive side; the Byzantine was the inventor, and the Barbarian just consummators. Nevertheless, it was not true in many cases – the Byzantines were open-minded people and they adopted the useful ideas from everywhere.

When I came to the conclusion that *Sclavinia* was not created in Byzantium I supposed that it might be created in the West and imported to Byzantium. One of hypothesis was that it was created in the border zone around Adriatic Sea where Latin, Greek and Slavonic languages met each other, and was invented and used first by the Slavic neighbors there. The facts that it was used most often to Dalmatia, then anywhere else, and was used there longer, was the base for this assumption. Working hypothesis was that from there it spread to West and East after the Frankish conquest of Italy and conflict between Franks and Romeos for Istria and Slavic regions in Dalmatia in late VIII - early IX century. The conflict and negotiations for Slavic territories brought this term to the Frankish and Byzantine court. However, I have to abandon this idea because it did not fit the sources: the Langobards did not know the term, and it is obviously not from Slavic origin, so it was just impossible for Franks to learn it in Italy. Especially important is that the first Frankish sources which mentioned *Sclavinia* used it not for Dalmatia or Adriatic shores but for the North border of Germany, the territory of Obodrits and Vilces.

However, if it was not created in Adriatic region maybe it still was created in the West and imported in Byzantium? I could not find any signs that it spread in Byzantium from the West. Even in the West, the form was most often used in his Greek form. More important the term was used in different ways. In West - in singular, usually for well-known subject, with purpose to avoid repetitiveness, and therefore in some way it had a concrete meaning. In Byzantium – in vast majority – it was used in plural for many not well-defined subjects, and the purpose of using it there often was to avoid being concrete.

When I reached this point, I began to doubt the very idea that the term *Sclavinia* has to be invented in one place and after that, it spread from author to author. In majority of cases, especially earlier examples, it is impossible to find any clear evidence that one autor borrowed this term from another. Majority of cases are clearly independent.

Then I reached another explanation that the term *Sclavinia* was not invented in one place but it appeared spontaneously and simultaneously in many different places and authors often without connection between them. And I think that those hypothesis can be supported with strong arguments.

At least it was a very common way of making toponyms from ethnonyms in the middle ages, and it was easy to create *Sclavinia* form *Sclavi(ni)*, so we do not really need to explain it through *inventions and a borrowing system*.

It could well be explained through the example with the sources about the Frankish war against Wilces in 789. In 3 sources we find *Sclavinia* (*Sclavania*). But in other 3 we find *Wilcia*, and in one even *Wenedonia*. All this authors did the same thing; difference was – the base they choose for building the toponym. They created these toponyms not just from ethnonyms but also from anachronic names. In the same way they did when called Avarian chaganat *Hunia*, or more close to reality, when used word *Frankia*. For parallel, Theophanes did the same creating *Verzitia* from the name of tribe *Verzity*. So in the case of 789 war it is clear that different authors created different terms to describe the same land, people and event. Even when some of them used the same term, they described what happened with different words, which shows a high rate of independency between them.

This example lead us to important conclusion. All of this authors used *Sclavinia* or *Wenedonia* or *Vilcia* just once. No more. It was not just them. In fact, in vast majority of sources in West, but also in the East *Sclavinia* was used no more than once per source. I already pointed that Theophilact Simokatta used this term just ones. Now we see that it was actually a rule, not exception. It is another reason why I don't think that the question did he really use it or not possessed big importance. What was important is that he was not an inventor who started a line of spreading and using of the term. Obviously no one did.

One of consequence of this conclusion is that we cannot be sure what exact meaning put authors to the term, because they used it in theirs unique ways for subjects of different level of development from the tribe to the state. And it is an important warning against tendency to push sources too hard to find some clear and universal meaning behind the term *Sclavinia*.

In majority of cases *Sclavinia* was a situational term, created for a concrete specific situation, and wasn't intended for mass using.

This can partly answer the question: when this term used to appear so easily, why was it used so rarely? The term was so close to mind, it just was unpractical because of the too general and uncertain meaning. There always have been many Slavic countries in same times. So the first that comes to mind when *Sclavinia* is mentioned is – which one? Uncertainty was the biggest strength and, in some time, the biggest weakness of the term *Sclavinia*. *Sclavinia* gave opportunity to avoid mentioning some insignificant names of Slavic tribes (either known or not known), with a purpose to ease the narrative and not burdening the readers' minds. Or to avoiding be repetitive when speaking of great Slavic states. Because of this uncertainty, *Sclavinia* would easily be used for different regions and states in different times and from different authors.

Other important conclusion is that emergence and disappearance of term *Sclavinia* was not a repercussion of some changes inside Slavic societies but was consequence of outside factors. The main reason for its emergence was the change of the geopolitical situation that put many Slavs communities in Central Europe and the Balkans in the sphere of influence and domination of the great empires like subjects or neighbors. It happened in near the same time in east and west. In Byzantium, process started with the expedition of Staurakios in 783, and in the west – with the expedition in 789 when many Slavic entities were subordinated. Exactly this change was reflected in some Byzantine and western sources with the appearance of the term *Sclavinia*. Its disappearance in Byzantium was not because of evolution of Sklaviniis into states, but because of disappearance of the ethnonym Slavs itself. The parallel with Latin sources where the term *Sclavinia* survives to the end of Middle ages proof it very well.

So in conclusion the answer of the question in the title: it was neither Byzantine inventions nor western influence in Byzantium, but simultaneously, spontaneously appearance of the term *Sclavinia* in different sources, often independent from each other for describing some Slavic entities of different level of development.