

ON THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE BANAT AREA: COLONISATIONS

CELE MAI IMPORTANTE MOMENTE DIN ISTORIA BANATULUI: COLONIZĂRILE

I. PETROMAN*, Snježana TOLIĆ**, Cornelia PETROMAN*, I. CABA***, Gh. DULGHERU****

*Agricultural and Veterinary University of the Banat, Timișoara, România

**J. J. Strossmayer University, Osijek, Croatia

***Mihai Eminescu University, Timișoara, România

Corresponding author: Ioan PETROMAN, e-mail: i_petroman@yahoo.com

Abstract. The most numerous documents concerning the history of the Banat area are written in both European languages and Turkish. They were written at the end of the 14th century, before and after the Ottoman conquest. The name of the capital of the Banat area, Timișoara, is mentioned in the Chronicle by Asikpasazade in 1484, where it is written that the Turks passed by Demeskar (the spelling 'd' is due to the Turkish pronunciation of the Hungarian name "Temesvár" meaning 'Timișoara'), went on and entered the Hungarian Country. After the Turks left the area, a vast programme of colonisation of the Banat area with Italians and Spaniards original from Austrian-ruled provinces was put into practice (1716-1740).

Rezumat. Cele mai multe materiale privitoare la istoria Banatului sunt scrise în limbi europene, dar și în limba turcă. Ele datează încă de la sfârșitul secolului al XIV-lea, înainte și după cucerirea acestuia de către otomani. Numele capitalei Banatului, Timișoara, este menționat în Cronica lui Asikpasazade la anul 1484, în care se arată că turcii au trecut pe la Demeskar (ortografierea cu 'd' reprezintă pronunția turcă occidentală a echivalentului unguresc "Temesvár" pentru românescul 'Timișoara'), și-au continuat drumul și au pătruns în Țara Ungurească. După alungarea turcilor, a fost conceput un vast program de colonizare a Banatului cu italieni și spanioli originari din provinciile aflate sub stăpânirea Imperiului Austriac.

Key words: Banat, Timișoara, history, population, habitat

Cuvinte-cheie: Banat, Timișoara, istorie, populație, habitat

INTRODUCTION

The battles between the Turks and the defenders of the Banat area start ever since the end of the 15th century (OTTERDORF, 2006), but the settlement of the Ottoman military and civil administrations only occurs after the conquest of Timișoara, on July 26, 1552, by the Vizier Ahmed Pasha, great vizier since 1553, nicknamed Kara (Black), meaning 'valiant' (GRISELINI, 1774; 2). Turkish rule in the Banat area lasted until the conquest of Timișoara, on October 20, 1716, then under the control of Hajj (The Saint) Mustafa Pasha, by Habsburg soldiers led by the Prince Eugene of Savoy. Though the Turkish rule of the Banat stopped then, the province became an Austrian province only after the Peace of Pojarevat (Passarowitz), on July 21, 1718. This means that the Banat area was a Turkish province for 166 years, a year more than Dacia that was a Roman province between 106 and 271.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In order to approach this topic, we have studied a series of historical sources such as the Chronicle by Asikpasazade concerning the toponym Timișoara, the travel book by Evliya Celebi, as well as the travel notes of travellers that crossed the Banat area, such as: the

Frenchman Roger de Damas and the Italians Domenico Sestini, Leonardo Panzini, and Francesco Grisellini.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the Turks were chased out, the Banat area was subjected to a vast programme of colonisation with a large number of Italians and Spaniards specialised in mining.

The Banat's Governor, the Count of Mercy, took the initiative of building a silk manufacture in Timișoara, which asked for new mulberry-tree plantations for the raising of silkworms, as well as for people skilled in sericulture and silk processing.

The first group of Spaniards left Vienna in November 1735 under the guidance of Joseph Huber, an Imperial Commissioner in transportations. The directions of the Vienna Chamber's Court on November 5, 1735, to the Banat's administration show a particular care for the Spanish and Italian families and for their proper accommodation. These people, they say, "should not live in idleness, but in safety and worth; they should be directed to work, study, crafts, manufacture, or agriculture, to earn their own living during all their lives".

Bulgarian catholic elements, heirs of the ancient heretics that revolted against the Turks, withdrew in the Banat area in search for shelter, with the approval of the Court in Vienna, and settled in different locations. Towards the end of the reign of the Emperor Charles VI, and during the reign of Maria Theresa, i.e. between 1738 and 1741, the Bulgarians settled in Theresiapol (today Vinga) and Beșenova Veche (today Dudeștii Vechi). The leader of this wave of emigrants was the Bishop of Nikopol, Nicolae Stanislavici, who even became Bishop of Cenad. The Bulgarian population counted, in 1770, 8683 of the total 450,000 people of the Banat area. The reason this ethnic group was accepted in the Banat area was a strategic and economic one, as Bulgarians were very good vegetable growers.

The population increased: the old inhabitants of the area, such as Romanians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, were joined by Greeks from Macedonia and from the Aegean Sea islands, and by gipsies. A colony of Spaniards from Biscay settled in Becicherec, resulting in the naming of the locality Barcelona Nova. The Banat's population counted, in 1770, the following ethnic groups: Romanians, Serbians, colonists (Germans, Spaniards, Italians, and French people), Bulgarians, gipsies, Hungarians, and Jews (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1

The Banat's ethnic groups in 1770

No.	Ethnic groups	Number of inhabitants	
		(in numbers)	%
1	Romanians	181,639	57.00
2	Serbians	78,780	24.00
3	Colonists (Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and French people)	43,200	13.00
4	Bulgarians	8,683	3.00
5	Gipsies	5,272	2.00
6	Hungarians	4,535	1.00
7	Jews	353	0.00

Among ethnic groups working in the Banat area, Romanians were by far the most numerous (57.00%), descendents of the famous people that knew how to use both the plough and the sword (GRISELINI, 1774) but that had fallen into deep savagery – they were primitive and illiterates – full of physical and moral defects.

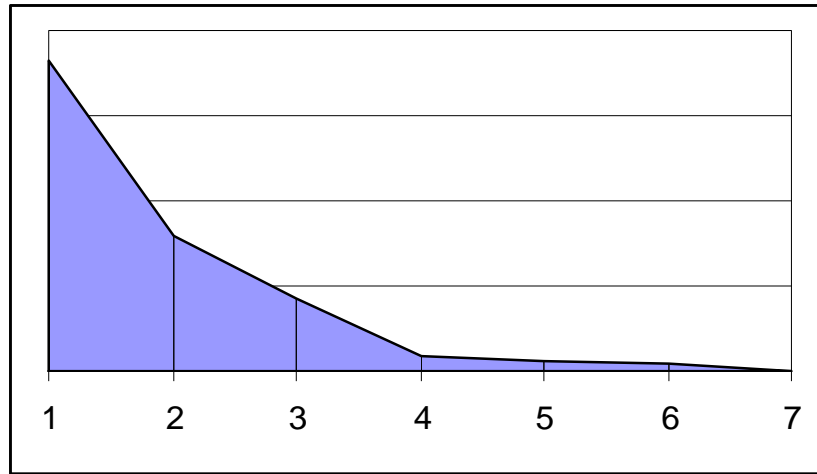


Figure 1 - The Banat's ethnic groups in 1770: 1 - Romanians, 2 - Serbians, 3 - Colonists, 4 - Bulgarians, 5 - gipsies, 6 - Hungarians, 7 - Jews

As for their religion, Romanians were adepts of Christianity and follow the Greek order. In the Banat area there were also catholic Romanians, called United Greeks. Their greatest virtue was their hospitality towards travellers and foreigners. Romanians used to practice agriculture, though in a primitive way, cultivating wheat, maize, hemp, and tobacco.

Plum trees – planted along the road from Oravița to Docnecea, but also in orchards in Bocșa that “looked as if they had been lined up by the most skilled of the orchardists” – were in honour, as Romanians liked “răchie” (‘a kind of plum brandy’) very much (GRISELINI, 1774).

Another proof that Romanians were as food craftsmen as other ethnic groups of the Austrian Empire is that, after the building of the glass manufactory in Caransebeș, “Romanians made their appearance quickly and, under the guidance of a glassware foreman, learnt the art of manufacturing bottles and glasses that were enough to supply the whole of the Banat area” (GRISELINI, 1774).

CONCLUSIONS

After the liberation of Timișoara from the Turkish rule, there was a vast programme of colonisation of the Banat area (1716-1740) with colonists from different provinces of the Habsburg Empire. The Court in Vienna and the administration in Timișoara, led by the Governor Claudius Florimund von Mercy, focussed on the development of the mining activities, of stone processing, of the development of manufacture, agriculture, vegetable growing, and sericulture.

Though a large number of craftsmen (colonists) were brought to the Banat area, most of the population (57.00%) were Romanians, who practiced both agriculture and crafts, such as glass processing.

Timișoara's ascension under the administration of the famous General Mercy is known through achievements such as: drinking water supply systems, marsh desiccation, channelling water courses, civil buildings, all contributing to the increase of the population, made up of both old inhabitants and colonists (Germans, Italians, Spaniards, French people, and Jews).

LITERATURE

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