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the Civilization?**

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## **The Clash of the Civilizations, or with the Civilization?**

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### **Abstract**

The essential part of the presentation deals with both the phenomenon of dynamism and spreading of Slavic tribes in the 6th and 7th centuries. The factor of the speed of movement of groups of Slav peoples, later occupying such vast expanses of Europe, seems to be extremely important. It was undoubtedly the Avars that influenced on the process. They subdued Slavic communities living on the areas of present Moldova and Wallachia and forced them to give tribute in various forms as well as used local tribes for skirmishing with the imperial army. However it was not the only causative factor of dynamic mobility of Slavic groups. It was possible thanks to their craft and organizational skills that allowed the efficient moving from place to place, with adapting to different natural and cultural conditions. Movement of the Slavs resembles not a conquest but rather advancing of the attractive cultural model adopted by non-militarised Germanic peoples which remained in their settlements after their elites had left towards the east and south. Historians of that time, like Procopius of Caesarea, noted that among the Slavs dominated little sophisticated but egalitarian culture that could be convenient for Germanic peasants.

In conclusions two directions of migrations have been indicated:

- Migrations of the Slavs – occupying in the 5<sup>th</sup> century the areas on the Dniester river and present south-east Poland, Moldova and Slovakia – toward the Danubian region in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.
- Return of Slavic peoples with a consolidated cultural identity and growing social differentiation in the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century to their native lands to start the process of the creation of statehoods of their own based on the Roman-Byzantinemodels.

**Key words:** civilization, Byzantium, Slavs, migration, archaeology.

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## Introduction

Slavic migrations in the VIth and VIIth century – the dynamics and extent of the Slavic expansion in the Danube areas in the light of archaeological sources.

It is not our goal to explain how it happened that in half of the VIth century the majority of Eastern and Middle Eastern European lands were overwhelmed by Slavic environment that reached the lower Danube- the border of military and cultural might which was Byzantine Empire (Fig.1. see also brief research on Slavic ethnogeny and expansion: Leciejewicz 2000,144-160, Buko 2005; Kaczanowski, Parczewski 2005).

Regardless to minor variations among researches it is beyond any discussion to refer to Byzantium as civilization. However the raising question is if the invasion of new Slavic ethnicity is the image of the impact of two civilizations, or the impact of archaic culture with the highly developed socio-cultural- corporeal organization of Early Medieval civilization.

To reach the editorial's office expectations of the length of the article, it has to be claimed that below presented conclusions do not extend the limits of the essay and my request for the reader is to accept such sort of text. The uprising question is what was the basis of such a quick and broad Slavic territorial expansion reaching the lands of Peloponnesus.

The author of the text who is intrigued by the Slavic impact with the Byzantine civilisation notices unusual adaptive skills of the Slavs who are taking over the New lands by applying simple constructional and transportation model and unbelievably dynamic for those times warfare in conducting the guerilla war. Starting the battles and wars was definitely the result of subordination to the Nomadic tribes; firstly the Huns then the Avars who were making the Slavic units to take part in the early stage of battles (see Tyszkiewicz 2010).

The problem of Slavic migration and settlement is multidimensional, however I am going to make a choice of the three most important constituents as I believe that the success of Slavic expansion can be perceived in the three organizational perspectives of their community: 1 – the settling and constructional skills, 2 – the communication and transport skills, 3 – the war skills. I am not going to mention the theory of Polish researcher Prezemysław Urbańczyk about the main role of the high society in the process of certain communities the expansion including the Slavic one.

P. Urbańczyk has pointed out that *it was the main political elites who were crossing the continent searching for the better opportunities to maintain and stabilize their dominance to the privileged line [...] This political competition between dominating organizations was a reflection of the dynamic changes in the times called " the period of migrations of nations" .Their lives were monitored by the late ancient authors who were not at all interested in the masses of settled agricultural people who could neither follow or understand the ongoing political situation (Urbańczyk 2000)*

I am quoting P. Urbańczyk to agree on the fact that the unconscious peasant communities made the annexation of the majority of European lands real. For an archeologist the problem of material goods which made the dynamic territorial escalation possible is of high importance. This phenomena can be restated by saying that the elites are the motive force of the tribal mobility but at the same time they change or pass away leaving the country colonial community subordinated to these elites.

East Slavic (Sclavs) privileged lines started to be controlled by the Avars who made them to take part in warfare, and the agricultural communities became an alimentary back up for the Nomads (Peisker 1905, 468; Tyszkiewicz 2009, 2010). In Nestor's chronicles (11/12 cent.) we can find a piece about Slavic tribe Dulebes who were constantly oppressed by Avars (Sielicki ed.1999)

### **The settling and constructional skills.**

In the 1 st. half of VIth century we observe byzantine struggles with Avars, Slavs and Antes. Prokoph from Cezareia (ΠΡΟΚΟΠΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΣΑΡΕΥΣ) who was portraying that events in his work *About the wars* (Ἐπέ τῶν πολέμων λόγι) paid attention to the Slavic buildings: *They live in shabby houses far away from each other and they move quite a lot* (VI 26). Nowadays thanks to archeological research conducted in Middle East Europe we can present examples of such houses so called half-dugouts (Fig. 2A, 4-6). Those types of housing were unbelievably functional as they were easy to put up and pull down. Many Early Medieval researches from Middle East Europe considered dugouts as a characteristic attribute of Slavic culture in the V th - VII th century (compare Parczewski1993). Pseudo-Maurice (ΨΕΥΔΟ-ΜΑΥΡΙΚΙΟΣ) In his work *Strategikon* (Στρατηγικόν) – written in 592-610 – stated that, [...] Sclav's and Ante's estates situated along the river surrounded by the woods and bushes and built on one another not leaving any space in between (Strategikon, XI, 4.7, 38). However it wasn't a continuous row of houses as was thought by Byzantine authors, but they created insular settling enclaves and were situated along the rivers. Typographical reconstructions based on archeological research are the proof for existence of those estates (Fig. 7).

### **Communication and transport skills (Fig. 8-11)**

In the 592 there was an Avarian-Sclavian invasion on Singidunum ( area of Belgrade in Serbia) and Sirmbyium ( area of Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia). Theophylact Simocatta (ΘΕΟΦΛΑΚΤΟΣ ΣΙΜΟΚΑΤΤΗΣ) writing about those events in the *Story* (Ἱστορία) has written: [chagan] *Has ordered the Sklavs to make a lot of light canoes to get across the Danube* (VI 3); [chagan] *has pitched the camp opposite Sirmium, and ordered the Sklavs to process the*

*wood for canoes so they could go across the river Sava [...] and they prepared for the sailing [...] so when the canoes were ready and launched the barbarian tribe passed the river* (VI 4). This author was also depicting the expedition of Peter - emperor Maurice's brother against the Slavs in lower Moesia (area of North Bulgaria) in 595 has noticed that the carriages were used not only for transportation but also for defense.

In the *Story* it is written: *when the battle was inevitable for the barbarians they joined the carts and made the embankment in the middle of which they placed the women with children* (VII 2). An example of massive usage of single-wood canoes is the time siege of Constantinople by the Avars, Slavs and Protobulgarians in the year of 626. We can read about it in the masterpiece et. *Avarian war* (Εἰς τὴν γενομένην ἐφοδὸν τῶν βαρβάρων), by George Pizyda (ΓΕΩΡΓΥΙΟΣ ΠΙΣΙΔΗΣ). He has written: *The barbarian has joined the land with the*

*naval battle by the attacking the ships with the Sclavs and Bulgarians (as he had finely made canoes). There however - as in a fishing net - he placed the canoes. When they attacked our fleet the destiny of the battle was unknown* (409-412,446-450).

### **War skills** (Fig. 12).

The description of Byzantine struggles with Avars, Sclavs and Antes from the first half of the VI th century can be found in the work of Prokoph from Cezareia who has written: *They stand afoot for the battle, holding their shields and lances, not wearing an armour they go against the enemies. They stand for the fight having neither chitons nor coats only the kind of trousers tucked up to their crotches. They lead harsh and primitive lives [...]* (VII 13).

In the second half of the 6th century *The Dialogues* (Ἐρωταποκρίσεις) by Pseudo-Cesarius (ΨΕΥΔΟ-ΚΙΣΑΡΙΟΣ) are written where a piece characterizing the Sclavs can be found.

In that part author has written: *[Sclavs]are cruel, lawless and under no authority, very often they kill their own commander or prince who they used to dine and travel with, they feed on wild foxes, weasels and boars, they howl like wolves* (II 110).

Let me quote again Theophylact Simocatta who as an author of *Story* has written:

*[...] so when the battle was inevitable for the barbarians they joined the carts and made the embankment in the middle of which they placed the women with children* (VII 2). The broadest and most adequate description of Slavic military styles is given by Pseudo-Maurice in his work of *Strategikon* where he describes the Slavic battle tactics: *How to deal with the Sclavs, Antes and similar tribes. The tribes of Antes and Sclavs are similar when it comes to their way of living and their characters; independent and not letting to captivate or subordinate especially on their own lands. There is a big number of them, they are tough, easily cope with the heat, cold, rain, lack of clothing and livelihood. Moreover they are very hospitable, kind and friendly. They keep various*



*animals and they farm[...]especially two kinds of millet [...] They have their shelters in the woods, by the rivers, and swamps which are hard to cross, they build many way outs of their shelters in case of danger. Inevitable goods are hidden. They are leading a dangerous life attacking their enemies in unexpected places. They make traps, trick the others, have a lot of experience in hiking and feel confident in water. They carry spears and shields , use wooden bows and poisoned arrows but don't know much about the martial arts and hardly ever take part in an open battle (XI 4,1-45).*

### **What say the eminent scientist (my subjective option)**

According to Przemysław Urbańczyk (Polish archaeologist, Polish Academy of Science) the bigger and more complex societies were replaced with the smaller and more ordinary ones. Making life more simple was the consequence of overtaking the left part of those lands by the primitive wild Eastern tribes what actually made them successful. It seemed to be a spread of attractive cultural trend happily accepted by non militarized societies which left their former elites staying at their homes (Urbańczyk 2005).

According to Peter Heather (English historian) cultural and linguistic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of millennium is a result of domination of the Slavic tribes in those areas (Heather 2009; 2010, 446). The appearance of Scylavs and Antes to the North of the Carpathian Mountains in the year 500 was the epoch-making event as there has never been any Slavonic speaking tribe. The later events seem to be very surprising as the Slavic expansion lasted for so long that it's almost impossible that it has taken only one form (Heather 2010, 449). Although the exact number of Slavic people who moved it is known to be an example of mass migration, what was a convulsion on political and cultural grounds. Three or four centuries after the year 500 the majority of Balkan Peninsula , Ukraine, Western Russia and the whole Central Europe were under their control (Heather 2010, 468).

### **Conclusions**

Slavs who were dependant on Nomadic people; first on the Huns, then Avars and Bulgarians, were used as manufacturers and first line soldiers. However, because of Nomadic military skills following the warriors there could have been movement of Slavic people what resulted in taking over big areas of Europe, slavification of Bulgarian people and almost Greek ones as well. Nomads have disappeared but the Slavs remained. Byzantine Empire have fallen, but the Slavs remained again. A prominent Polish historian and researcher Lech A. Tyszkiewicz concluding his reflection on subordination of Slavs to Avars in VIth-VIIth cent. wrote: *From the historical the point of view it wasn't the nomads who were the masters of the Avarian lands but the Slavs mentioning past slavery, Doulebian women' oppression Nomad's*

*bravery and extinction of Avars after the war with Charlemagne's army in 796- they died as , Obrzy<sup>1</sup> .*

Movement of the people was also possible thanks to great adaptive attributes like being able to make use of all the possible materials to build up and remove the estates and using all available means of transport. Moreover, it's essential to point out that the war tactics was based on the system of so called Guerrilla warfare especially operating in the woods and swamps which were highly inconvenient for the Byzantine army.

Primitive Slavic culture enters the well developed civilization and makes advantage of its weaknesses; its luxury, repulsion to democracy and treating all the other people as potential slaves. Considering the phenomena of territorial development we can follow J. P. Mallory i P. Urbańczyk and state that the success of Slavic culture measured by territorial expansion is surprising because of its little financial observed by archeologists. However from the anthropological point of view it can be stated that the success of society lies in institutions which offer the easiest ways of foreigners adaptation and free access to prestigious positions. (Mallory 1992, 152; Urbańczyk 2000, 86)

Finally it's important to point out that there was a reverse action. It's worth to quote a great American- Romanian archeologist Florin Curta who said that the Slavic identity wasn't formed on the marshy area of Pripyat River (Bellarussian and Ukrainian Polesia), but in the shade of Justinian's fortresses (Curta 2001, 346-350, 2006, 55). Some of the Slavic people have moved from the Balcans to the North and North-East (see Nestor's Chronicle), where they started to evolve to historically known 'tribes' (see. Brather 2001, 2006) and then, they set up their own countries (Moravia, Czech and Poland).

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<sup>1</sup> Obrzy – it's the name that Avars are called In Nestor's Chronicles – the nomadic people of Turkish origin.

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