

INTRODUCTION: FROM THE EURASIAN PAST

Several years have already passed since our journal last published a special issue on one topic or one group of closely connected topics. In fact, the last such “thematic volume” was the “war issue” published in 1991 (*Migracijske teme*, 2/1991). It came about at a difficult time, when Croatia was struggling to survive. Even today it is not easy, in view of the tasks of social and economic development that the country still faces. However, the war is over, defence was successful and our country is now a full member of the International community. We therefore now can, and we also should, direct our attention to the broader world that surrounds us.

The area covered by this issue of the journal is truly broad, even though we are talking of a more particular segment of this theme. Namely, the papers presented relate to the migration and ethnic past of the great landmass of “Eurasia”. This name for the combined body of Europe and Asia came above into circulation somewhere at the beginning of the 19th century, probably in the British colonial context. The Oxford dictionary gives two quotes from 1844 and 1845 as the first use of the English adjective “Eurasian”.¹ Both relate to British India, and both denote persons of mixed European and Asian origin. This “anthropological” use of the term has persisted in English till today, although in English and other European languages the basic geographical meaning “Europe + Asia” established itself quite a while ago. This is the sense, e.g., of the French adjective *eurasiien*, first registered in 1864. In Russian, the terms *Евразия* and *евразийский*, had and have the initial geographical sense, although due to the fact that Russia is an explicit example of an Eurasian country it was to be expected that these designations would receive special cultural and political connotations in the Russian context.² We mention this only in passing, in order to avoid possible misunderstandings. In this issue of *Migracijske teme* Eurasia is for the most part only the physical in which wide-range migration and ethnic developments took place.

To a great degree this geographical framework is more real than the typical

¹ The example from 1844 is a short sintagma – the Eurasian Belle; the quote from 1845 credits the “late marquis of Hastings” (i.e. Francis Rawdon, 1754–1826), with introducing the term Eurasian to denote “...all the progeny of white fathers and Hindoo or Mahometan mothers.”

² We are thinking here of “Eurasianism” as a political ideology that arose in Russian circles in the 1920s. The main concern of Russian “Eurasianism” seems to have been the preservation of the state integrity of Russia, which necessarily included the establishment of close ties with the diverse ethnic groupings in it, although through the leading role of Russian culture and language. Due to this detail, “Eurasianism” has been evaluated as hidden form of Russian nationalism, or alternatively, as priority of state over national interests. In both cases this posed the problem of the relationship of “Eurasian” ideology with the former Soviet order (for a recent polemic, v. *Этнографическое обозрение*, 1997, no. 2, В.А. Шнирельман, “Евразийство и национальный вопрос /вместо ответа В.В. Карлову/”, pp. 112–125, and the follow-up text: В.В. Карлов »О евразийстве, национализме и приемах научной полемики«, pp. 125–132).

division between Europe and Asia. Speaking from our point of reference, we live on one landmass that has on it several “focal meshes” of intensive occurrences. The western “mesh” is called Europe. However, in the East there are several such “meshes”. The “Far East”, i.e. the lands in which Classical Chinese civilisation had a strong impact, comprised one such “mesh”. India, labelled by geographers as a “sub-continent” comprised another. We also know that from antiquity the “Near East” functioned as a certain whole, although events in this region were very closely interlinked with those in Africa and Europe. The influence of Near Eastern religions on development in Africa and Europe is only the most apparent example of such influences. Also, one should not forget that the Islamic world (in the secular sense), which first evolved in the Near East, was also one of the heirs of the Roman Empire. In India or China the proponents of Islamic culture have the significance of “Westerners”. For indeed, there is little doubt that Turkey, for instance, is more closely tied to Europe than it is to China or Japan, even that it belongs for the most part to Asia. And what could we say for the Balkans, which were formerly known as “Turkey in Europe”? Are they truly a part of Europe? And how European is the so-called “Other Europe” – the European East? It has already become somewhat of a rule to cite Metternich’s claim that Asia begins from the Landstraße, the Eastern road out of Vienna. These and similar problems become less relevant when we imagine Eurasia as a whole, which includes several strong historical centres, surrounded by closer or farer peripheries, and then by “no one’s lands”, or more precisely interspaces and distant hinterlands.

Most of the papers in this issue of *Migracijske teme* treat these last areas of Eurasian, people from the interspaces or hinterlands. However, most of them also give us an idea of how much Eurasia is interlinked. The papers treat historical and/or linguistic themes, depending on the specialities of their authors. We must also note that the order in which they appear is not in accord with the usual rule in the journal. We did not follow this rule by placing the articles in sequence according to the alphabetical order of the authors’ surnames. Rather, we followed certain logic of thematic presentation.

Migracijske teme is not a journal that exclusively focuses on Croatian topics. Nevertheless, our “default” point of reference is logically Croatian. For this reason it was decided to begin the issue with a paper dealing with relations between Croatia and Eurasia, or more precisely Central Eurasia. Due to the fact that the author of this introduction is, by chance, one of the authors of the paper involved – together with Sanja Lazanin – once more it should be emphasised that the ordering of the papers is purely thematic, and does not reflect any considerations in regard to the quality or importance of the individual texts.

The following paper was written by esteemed Canadian scholar Edwin G. Pulleyblank. His text deals with probably the most enigmatic people from this region – the Huns, or more precise – their Eastern predecessors, the Xiongnu. One could say that the Huns, at least in general opinion, have become practically a symbol of Eurasian migrations and ethnogenetic processes. Their origin was a mystery also for both the Romans and Goths. As Ammianus Marcellinus once wrote: “None

of them, when asked, can tell you where he comes from, since he was conceived in one place, born far away from there, and brought up still farther away.” (*Hist.*, XXXI, 2.10). And the Goths, as we know from Jordanes, could imagine the Huns only as the progeny of exiled witches and of the foul spirits that wander in the deserts (*Get.*, XXIV). Yet we know that the Hunnic epoch marked one of the great turning points in the history of Europe and other parts of Eurasia. After they arrived in the West, an entire array for new peoples stepped onto the stage of world history – numerous Germanic peoples pressed on Rome, the Avar and Slavic migrations followed shortly afterwards, while on the vast Eurasian steppe from the Black Sea to the reaches of China a new continuity arose of predominantly Turkic-speaking peoples. This last effect suggested to many scholars that the Huns themselves were a front wave of the Turkic advance. However, analysing the Chinese sources on the Xiongnu, Pulleyblank arrived at the conclusion that they did not speak an Altaic language, such as the Turkic. We will let the readers to discover from his article what occurred on the borders of China in this distant time.

The third paper in this issue is in many regards special. In it Paolo Agostini of the University of Padova presents for the first time a view he has been developing over many years. It is his preposition that the so-called Uralic languages (Finnic-Ugric and Samoyedic), spoken by several peoples along the divide between Europe and Asia (as well as by the Hungarians), developed relatively recently out of a pidgin that was spoken along the trade routes of this area. According to Agostini, a special role in this process was played by the Xazar (or Khazar) khaganate – through which Semitic influences were also diffused to the peoples of the North. Since the article is quite different from the view on the origin of the Uralic languages and peoples that has prevailed so far, we might assume that it will come across opposition. Therefore, let us emphasise that we are dealing with a serious and highly documented work that without doubt opens up new visions! Moreover, the author himself is still developing his theories and shall surely have an opportunity to refine and expand them. Yet even as presented in the present form, Agostini’s paper is a highly impressive example of erudition, filled with copious examples. Although the text treats basically linguistic subjects, the author also touches on the historical material, especially in regard to the Xazar khaganate.

As the fourth contribution to the issue’s theme, we are honoured to present the synthetic work on the Altaic hypothesis by Alexander Vovin of the University of Hawaii. The theory of the Altaic language family – which in its micro-version includes Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic-Manchurian and in its macro-version Korean and Japanese as well – has during its evolution received changes, criticism and rejection. The assumption of genetic ties between the various Altaic branches has been opposed by claims of non-genetic relationships, involving borrowing and regional contact. In the first part of his paper, Vovin presents the main accomplishments in Altaic linguistics over the recent decades, which in itself is most useful to researchers and students. In the following sections of the paper, he shows that the Altaic language family is a valid reconstruction, and that the opposing criticism – that Altaic does not share common basic vocabulary or common inherited morpho-

logy – is not valid. We could add that Vovin's short review of Altaic verbal morphology is the first such attempt so far made in the field. The author does not enter into the question of the origin of Altaic, or of its original placement in time and space, except that he does note that Turkic probably branched out earlier than the other Altaic groups. However, confirmation of the validity of common Altaic origin is in itself highly important. The Altaic language mass, just as the Indo-European in the West and South unifies the backbone of Eurasia. The more we know of its characteristics, the more we can approach – at least hopefully – an understanding of basic processes in ethnic and migration developments in the past.

We have placed the short paper by Bertil Haggman near the end of the issue. The reason is simple – the paper already announces a somewhat different field of research. Haggman summarises the historical information pertaining to the Eruli, a Germanic people that migrated from Scandinavia to the Black Sea and the Danube lands, and then back to the North. This “re-migration” made them an exception among the peoples of the Migration Age. In the context of various commentaries, the author indicates also the theory that the Eruli were influential in the transfer of steppe influences to Scandinavia.

A bibliography prepared by Nenad Vidaković is located at the end of this issue. This is a list of works on Central Asian peoples that we feel will be quite convenient to researchers in Croatia. After a lecture in the summer of 1997 given in the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies by the Russian scholar Dimitry Vasilyev, Vidaković began to systematically look the various libraries in Zagreb for works on Turkic, Iranian, Mongolian and other Central Asian peoples. True, a few more still remain to be checked, in which additional titles might be found. However, although we hope this work would continue both in Zagreb and in other cities of Croatia, what has been listed so far is already very useful. Of course, the list does not only show what we have, but also how little we really have, and it is doubtful whether it will be more complete even after further searching through the libraries in Zagreb and the rest of Croatia.

Finally, we should add that we had hoped for this special issue of *Migracijske teme* to receive also manuscripts from our colleagues in Russia – from dr. Vasilyev and others. Unfortunately, due to their other responsibilities at this time and the need to publish our journal on schedule, and also due to the volume of the articles that had already arrived, it was not possible at present to receive contributions. Nevertheless, an idea has been formulated to prepare with them a computer atlas on Eurasian migrations and ethnic processes. Although the realisation of this idea depends on securing financial support, an outline and explanation of the project – and maybe also the first cartographic outlines – is already planned for inclusion in one of the next issues of our journal.

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