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ANCIENT DARDANIA

The Dardanians, as the sole large political force in the central Balkans in the Hellenic period, have long attracted the attention of researchers. On the basis of classical written sources and personal and place names, the theory of their Illyrian identity was put forward in the early 19th century and upheld by many Albanian and foreign writers¹.

The area occupied by the Dardanians and Dardania before the Roman invasions has been ascertained on the basis of data supplied by classical authors such as Herodotus, Polybius, Livy, and Strabo, and by ancient monumental inscriptions².

The pre-Roman Dardanians lived mainly in what today is Kosova, northwest Macedonia, and southern Serbia. To the south, their territory bordered on Peonia and Macedonia, and Bilazora near Veles was one of their border points. This was the border between the provinces of Upper Mezia and Macedonia in the Roman period. Their western border followed the course of the White Drin, and to the north-west the upper and central border of upper Mezia. The Morava in the east formed their border with the Thracians. It is more difficult to ascertain the Dardanians's northern frontier. It has been observed that the station of Ad Fines (Kursumlija) represented the border between the territories of the municipia of Ulpiana (Prishtina) and Naissus (Nis), but there is no question of this being an ethnic border. The northern border east of the Morava is also unclear. There is no doubt that Nis was later included within the borders of the Dardanian kingdom, and was reckoned by classical authors to be one of the most important Dardanian cities³.

Considering the geographical spread of the Dardanians before the Roman invasions, Kosova represents the core Dardanian territory, and can offer answers to a number of questions concerning the prehistoric and classical Dardanians. The question of links between bronze and iron age cultures is especially interesting. The question of ties between the Dardanians of the Balkans and those of Asia is also involved here. The question of connections with the Hellenic world at the dawn of classical antiquity is a separate one, as is the study of the culture of the period between the fourth and first centuries B.C.

The absence of written sources makes archaeological research all the more important. In Kosova, archaeological research has so far concentrated mainly on the excavation of neolithic, iron age, and some classical and mediaeval sites. Few bronze age sites have been excavated, and all of them are of an Illyrian character. Vertical and horizontal stratographies investigating the continuity between earlier cultures and Dardanian iron-age culture proper have not been carried out⁴.

The iron age has been the most intensively researched period in Kosova. Research has shown that a culture with distinct features that can without doubt be called Dardanian existed in

the eighth century B.C., in the territories that written sources later call Dardania.

Despite its individual characteristics, Dardanian culture belongs clearly to the Illyrian community.

Its similarities to the bronze age cultures of Anamorava and the cultures of Paracin and Mediana in the northeast, despite isolated finds in Kosova, do not in any way suffice to permit Dardanian culture to be seen as anything but Illyrian, especially in the absence of proper research of the bronze age in Kosova.

It must be borne in mind that this question concerns the shapes of utensils, such as coneshaped pots with brims folded inwards, that are widespread over a much wider area. The real relationship between the culture of Bernica e Poshtme (Gornja Strazava) and Dardanian culture has still not been established.

A few characteristics, such as the similarity of the urn of Bernica e Poshtme with that of the tumulus of Shiroka and the urn of Bellaqevc (the latter of a similar type to the urns of Lushte and Llapotinc) seem insufficient to assert a continuity between the Bernica cultural group and Dardanian culture. Even if such a continuity is demonstrated, the outward similarities of the tumuli of Kukes, Mat, and Gllasinac, which show a continuous development from the bronze age onwards, do not permit any separation of Dardanian and Illyrian territories.

On the basis of present knowledge, Dardanian culture before the Roman invasions developed in the following phases⁵.

I Pre-Dardanian culture (before 9th century B.C.)

Ila Dardanian culture (8th - start of 6th century B.C.)

Ilb (6th - mid-5th century B.C.)

Ilc (mid-5th - mid-4th century B.C.)

III Urban Dardanian culture (4th - 1st century B.C.)

While pre-Dardanian settlements are on the plains (Nosala, Klllokot, Fafos II, Glladnice), Dardanian settlements are in the hills. Most of them were inhabited in the eneolithic period and later from the eighth to the fourth centuries B.C. Settlements sited on strategic hilltops were defended by encircling stone walls and open trenches in the less well-defended parts. Research in Gadime e Eperme, Veletin, Bellaqevc, Cernice, Hisar near Suhareke, Teneshdoll, and Novoberde shows buildings within the settlements to have been rectangular, with wooden posts in stone foundations.

Some necropolises from this time have also been researched in Kosova. Burials were in tumuli. Cremation was practised, and ashes were placed in graves or urns. Features of the tumuli of Kosova link them to those of Kukes, Mat, and Gllasinac⁶. Remembering that burial rites are in general conservatively preserved and do not change rapidly, the Dardanian tumuli can be directly connected to the Illyrian culture of the western Balkans. The special characteristics noticeable in the Dardanian group in Kosova (Shiroke, Malopolc, Llashtice), in the Kukes-Drilon variant (Romaje, Perceve, Rugove), and the finds at Karagac must be considered in the context of contacts with neighbouring cultures developed through communications with the Adriatic coast via the valley of the White Drin and with other Illyrian territories via the Black Drin and the valleys of the Lepenc and Vardar.

The discovery of jewellery at Janjeve and the graves found at Banje e Pejës and Novi Pazar suggest comparisons with other Illyrian lands and ties with Greece.

Closer ties with the developed world of the south also encouraged the development of Dardania society. From the sixth century B.C., we encounter the

precursors of hill cities. In the fifth century, master potters produced pottery on the wheel, mainly of Hellenic appearance, which was sold on the market. Craftsmen also produced weapons and jewellery⁷.

Pliny writes about Dardanian traditions in jewellery: "Men even wear on their upper forearms (gold bands) that come from Dardania, and are therefore called dardane⁸. The presence of Hellenic imports on Dardanian territory at this time testifies to the development of trade. A number of finds show the development of pre-urban Dardanian society between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.; these include the tiles at Veletin and sockets for wooden king-posts; the spread of settlements beyond hill-top acropolises toward the plains; and the flattened terrace at Gradine near Gadime e Eperme, that must have required major physical effort and a high level of organization. Discoveries of coins from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. and the appearance of more elaborate forms of pottery testify to the demands of a more sophisticated society.

Urban settlements developed between the fourth and first centuries B.C. Strabo mentions the "polis arhaia" of the Dardanian Calabrians⁹, while Livy several times uses the term "urba" for Dardanian cities and mentions the city of Sintia¹⁰.

Many of the urban sites from this period remain undiscovered, because until recently archaeological research concentrated solely on the excavation of the acropolises of old iron age settlements. The erroneous view prevailed that these were continuously inhabited until the Roman invasion, which gave rise to the mistaken conclusion of the retarded development of Dardania as a result of the lack of contact with developed southern regions. The Dardanians contacts with the south have been viewed solely in terms of their frequent wars with the state of Macedonia (Dardania gens semper infestissima Macedoniae)¹¹.

Recent research has proved that close contacts with the Hellenic world began toward the end of the seventh century B.C. with import from Chios. It has also been observed that hill settlements in Kosova gradually disappeared toward the middle of the fourth century B.C.¹² as they also did in the Shkup valley (Shkup castle Nerezi, Varvara, Studencan)¹³. No case of the destruction or forced evacuation of a settlement has been noticed, which makes their desertion a result of the urbanization of Dardanian society the more likely explanation. In fact, a tendency to move settlements to the feet of mountains (Veletin, Tenesdoll) is observable toward the end of the sixth century B.C.

The development of Dardanian society and its ties with the south led to the birth of the Dardanian state, for which considerable evidence exists, including testimony to the existence of a monarchy (its kings included Longar and his son Bato, and Monun)¹⁴, the incidence of dynastic marriages, such as between Etuta of Dardania and Genc; the institution of slavery;

and the existence of an army at the disposal of the king, divided into corps of 8 000 men.

The fact that the Romans did not attempt either to destroy existing economic and social structures or to assimilate those whom they conquered enabled the Dardanians to preserve their characteristics and traditions into late antiquity.

Such ancient divinities as Dea of Dardania and the god Andin survived in the Dardanian pantheon¹⁵. Local costume was preserved, as is evident from gravestones and the bust of a woman from Killokot. A specific style of Dardanian architecture and

of monumental inscriptions arose in the imperial period. The tradition of mound burial was preserved, as shown by the two tumuli excavated at Ulpiana. Dardanian-Illyrian names survived, as did the names Dardanian and Dardania, themselves, until late antiquity¹⁶. Slave and peasant revolts (latrones Dardanici)¹⁷ indicated resistance to the Roman occupiers. The province of Dardania was created in the fourth century A.D. as a result of the growth of Dardania independence. These facts argue against the Romanization of the Dardanians in the time of the Roman Empire. M. Mirkovic points out that the indigenous inhabitants in the area of Scup and central Dardania (Ulpiana and Municipium D. Dardanorum) were greater in number than monumental inscriptions would suggest, which leads to the conclusion that not even the inhabitants of urban centres were Romanized to any great extent. Mirkovic also points out that most villages and their inhabitants retained their pre-Roman names¹⁸.

The Dardanians' independence did not in any way mean their separation from the other Illyrians. The Illyrian Kingdom extended from the Neretva River in the north to the Vjosa and Lake Ohër in the south¹⁹, and maintained close ties with the Dardanian Kingdom that were not broken by Roman occupation. Thanks to this continuity, the Arbers and Albanians, the successors of the Illyrians, were born as a people in the territory where the Illyrian states had existed²⁰.

Failing to appreciate this process, various writers have sought the origin of the Albanians in different areas²¹.

Urban centres such as Ulqin, Peje, Prizren, Shkup, Tetovë, Diber, Struge, Manastir, Korce, and Janina as well as routes of communication from Durrës, Shkodër, and Vlorë toward Athens, Salonica, Nis, and Sofia were important for Illyrian and later Arberian and Albanian integration.

In recent years, various baseless theories have been advanced with the aim of denying the ethnic rights of the Albanians in the territory of the former Yugoslavia as the successors of the Dardanians and the civilization they created.

These have included:

- 1) The denial of the Illyrian ethnogenesis of the Illyrians, with the assertion that their origin was Daco-Mezian.
- 2) The assertion of an Illyrian intrusion into Dardanian territory in the sixth to fifth centuries B.C., i.e. that the Illyrianization of the Dardanians began at this time.

- 3) The assertion that the Albanians were created in the early Middle Ages as a result of the intermarriage of nomadic shepherds and local un-Romanized remnants, including remnants of the Illyrians and Dardanians²².

Even though the elaboration of the Daco-Mezian thesis by Serbian goes beyond the academic sphere, it has become topical because of the status of Kosovo and the question of the Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. Certain matters that disprove this theory must therefore be mentioned. Its initiator, V. Georgiev, relying on certain linguistic data taken out of context, admits that "We know nothing about the language of the Mezians in the Balkans"²³. Nor do classical sources offer any kind of facts suggesting that the Dardanians were Mezian tribes or neighbours to them²⁴.

Remembering that the Tribalians were between the Dardanians and the Mezian tribes, it must be said that Dion Kasi distinguishes the Tribalians from the

Mezians. After analyzing the sources concerning the Mezians, F. Papazoglu concludes that they were not Mezians²⁵. It must be realized that the Dardanians had a long eastern border with the Thracians, not the Mezians. The only direct link with the Mezians might have been the Tribalians in the north, if the Mezian origin of the Tribalians is confirmed, but this does not make the Dardanians lived on Illyrian soil, writing that the river Angro the southern Morava or the Iber) flows from the "country of the Illyrians"²⁶.

The fact of the Illyrian character of Dardanian culture during the iron age disproves the theory of Illyrian intrusion into Dardanian territories in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. When one bears in mind that it was during these centuries that the Dardanians achieved a higher level of development and that it

was only slightly later that they appeared as the sole large political force in the central Balkans, any occupation of Dardanian territory by Illyrians or anybody else appears improbable. It must also be added that the Illyrian character of all the Dardanian kings (Longar, Bato, and Moun), is indisputable, as is the Illyrian character of the majority of the personal names that appear on monumental inscriptions from the Roman period discovered on Dardanian territory. Place names also testify to a continuity of the old names according to the historical development of Albanian phonetics, as in the cases of Naissus (Nis), Scupi (Shkup), Scardus mons (Sharr), Drinus (Drin), etc²⁷.

In conclusion, it might be said that the thesis of the Illyrian character of the Dardanians is the most tenable. Dardanian society developed to the extent that a Dardanian state was formed. Tradition, and economic and political interests contributed to the Dardanians' ties with other Illyrians. As a result, the territories where Illyrian states had formerly existed (in modern Albania, Kosova, western Macedonia, southern Serbia, Montenegro, and Cameria) did not succumb to Romanization, but continued to be inhabited by an indigenous Illyrian or Arberian-Albanian population. In contrast, in areas where the Illyrians did not achieve organization in states, the population was assimilated by Slav tribes, as in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Slovenia, Croatia, and Dalmatia.

1 R. Mack, *Grenzmarken und Nachbarn von Makedonen in Norden und Westen*, Dissertation, Goettingen, 1951, p. 172.

2 F. Papazoglu, *Srednjobalkanska plemena u predimsko doba*, Sarajevo, 1969, pp. 143-161.

3 *Ibidem*, p. 160.

4 Serbian authors attempt to assert the Daco-Mezian origin of the Albanians on the basis of these ties. See: "Iliri i Albanci", Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti, Beograd, 1988.

5 E. Shukriu, *Helenizovana keramika starijeg gvozdenog doba u SAP Kosovo*, Dissertation, Pristina, 1989.

6 B. Jubani, *Të dhëna për kulturën tumulare në Shqipërinë Verilindore*, in: "Studime Ilire", I, Prishtinë, 1978, p. 152. 7 E. Shukriu, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

8 Pliny XXXII 3, 12, *Ilirët dhe Iliria te autorët antikë*, Tiranë, 1965, p. 199.

9 Strabo VII 1,5.

10 Livy XLI 4, 7-10, XXVI 25, 3.

11 F.Papazoglu, *op.cit.*, p.111.

12 E.Shukriu, *op.cit.*, p.150.

13 I.Mikulcic, *Skopje so okolnite tvrdini*, Skopje, 1982, p.32.

14 F.Papazoglu, *Ilirska i dardanska kra-ljevina*, in: "Iliri i Albanci", Beograd, 1988, p.162, n.16.

15 E.Shukriu, *Dea e Dardanisë dhe mozaiku i Orfeut*, in: "Seminari ndërkombëtar për gjuhën, letërsinë dhe kulturën shqiptare", Prishtinë, 1989, pp.15-16.

16 F.Papazoglu, *Ilirska i dardanska kraljevina...*, p.169.

The author does not deny the possibility that the Dardanian population may have survived the barbarian upheavals and migrations and entered the Middle Ages under the new name of Albanians.

17 E.Cerskov, *Rimiljani na Kosovu i Metohiji*, Beograd, 1969, p.54; S.Anamali, *Ilirët dhe shqiptarët*, in: "E vërteta mbi Kosovën dhe shqiptarët në Jugosllavi", Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Tiranë, 1990, p.33.

18 M.Mirkovic, *Einheimische Bevoelkerung und roemische Staedte in der Provinz Obermoesien*, in: "Aufstieg und Niedergang der roemischen", Welt, II, 6, 1977, pp.844-845.

19 S.Anamali, *op.cit.*

20 The fact that a compact Albanian mass, "indigenous Illyrian separated from the Albanian core", existed in the area covered by the Illyrian Kingdom in the vicinities of Kotor and Ragusa is in favor of this idea: M.Shuflaj, *Serbët dhe shqiptarët*, Prishtinë, 1968, p.61.

21 H.Baric, *Hyrje në historinë e gjuhës shqipe*, Prishtinë, 1955, pp.47-50.

22 These ideas are assembled in the collection "Iliri i Albanci".

23 V.Georgiev, *Introduzione alla storia delle lingue indoeuropee*, Roma, pp.44.

24 According to Cassius Dionis (LI 27, 2), the Mezians and the Getes lived between Hemus (the Balkans) and Istria, i.e. far from the Dardanians.

25 F.Papazoglu, *Srednjebalkanska plemena...*, pp.60, 64.

26 Herodotus, IV, p.49; F.Papazoglu, *op.cit.*, pp.166-167.

27 E.Çabej, *Problemi i autoktonisë së shqiptarëve në dritën e emrave të vendeve*, in: "E vërteta mbi Kosovën dhe shqiptarët në Jugosllavi", ASHSH, Tiranë, 1990, p.54.