

Hypotheses of the Appearance of Rusins/Slavs in Transcarpathia (Transcarpathian Region)

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Introduction

That small ethnic group which ethnologists call Rusins is a matter in dispute a long time ago. I use this expression because usually it can be found only in scientific terminology. In the last centuries both the territory and the inhabitants of Transcarpathia were controlled by different powers who also had a great intellectual influence on them. In the 20th century those powers were changed very often (Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Czechoslovakia, Hungarian Monarchy, Soviet Union, Independent Ukraine) and it caused that the term ethnical affiliation has become not so clear for an average person. It is true for such a group of people, like the Rusins.

The aim of the work is to present both the appearance of the Slavs/Rusins on the territory of the North-eastern Carpathians (paying attention to the territory of present Transcarpathia) and the problematic historiographical questions related to this topic.

The national awakening of the Rusins can be dated in the end of the 19th at the beginning of the 20th century.¹ By the end of the First World War the attempt which could give autonomy to the Rusins had realized and it could contribute to their national consciousness.² But everything happened in a different way. After the War Transcarpathia became a part of Czechoslovakia, later as a result of the I. Vienna Award it was re-annexed to Hungary. The Hungarian government was willing to deal with the Rusins' self-determination but the realization of it was prevented as the country got entangled in the Second World War. In the end of 1944 the Red Army invaded Transcarpathia and the Soviet regime was built up here. The process of russification lasted until 1991 and judgement of the national affiliation of the Rusins became more difficult. But neither after Ukraine became independent, its officials didn't make any steps in order to improve the question concerning their national affiliation.

1 Andrea GÖNCZI, *Ruszin skizmatikus mozgalom a XX. század elején*, Ужгород – Берегове 2007, 28.

2 Михайло Петрович Тиводар, *Етнографія Закарпаття: Історико – етнографічний нарис*, Ужгород 2010, 14.

But who are those Rusins? The expression Rusin itself was used to identify those Ukrainians who lived in the territory of Yugoslavia.³ Those Slavs who lived in the Hungarian Monarchy were called Russians, Hungarians who live in the mountains, Ruthens or Rusins. For the sake of simplicity I will use Rusins in the following. In order to define Rusins we have to say that they are those Slavs who live/lived in that piece of land which was surrounded by the three big groups of Slavs (Eastern, Western, Southern Slavs) and beside this they distinguished themselves from the others. However, this situation is getting more complicated because of the previously enlisted historical events. In present days, in many cases only the ethnologists can distinguish Rusins from other groups of Slavs. So, to simplify it that is the Rusin ethnic which defines itself as Rusin.⁴

The geographical position of the Rusins goes far beyond the territory of Transcarpathia. They live equally in the eastern part of the Carpathians, in the territory of Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. In present days it is very hard to locate the position of the Rusins or Ukrainian-Rusin in Transcarpathia. Basically, they can be found in whole Transcarpathia. In such villages like Kis- and Nagydobrony (Мала Добронь and Велика Добронь), Vári (Вари), Dercen (Дерцен) where the most part of the inhabitants are Hungarians, they live in smaller amounts. That is why ethnologists divide Ukrainian-Rusins who live in Transcarpathia into two parts: dolisniaks (those who live in the valleys/people of the lowland) and verhovinciv (those who live in the mountains/people of the highland). We call dolisniaks those Ukrainian-Rusins who live in such settlements which lie in 200–300 meters and lower above the sea level.⁵ It means most of the plain part of Transcarpathia. In the first place this territory was populated up to the middle of the 17th century. Why? Settlements situating higher than these ones started to exist only when potato and corn were taken to Europe from the American continent. As the quality of the soil is not the best in the highlands only these plants were able to grow there and give appropriate harvest. People who lived there were engaged in animal husbandry, but agriculture also played an important role in their life. During the 17th century the mountainous region of Transcarpathia became populated. The Slavs who settled down here were called verhovinciv. Most of their settlements were formed near the upper reaches of the rivers. Due to the distance, the hardly crossable mountain roads and the lack of connection with other settlements three subgroups of the settled peoples were formed: lemkos (lemaks), boykos and hutsuls. The differences between them should be observed in their dialects, their folk customs, their traditional dresses and their buildings. Their location is the following:

1. lemkos – near the upper reach of the river Ung (Uzh) and near the Polish and Slovak border
2. boykos – near the upper reach of the river Latorca (Latoryca)
3. hutsuls – near the upper reaches of the rivers Tisa, Tarack (Teresva) and Talabor (Tereblya)

The representatives of these three subgroups can be found on the other side of the Car-

3 József KOBÁLY, Kárpátaljai ruténok: Mítosz és valóság, in: Kárpátaljai Szemle, Aug. – Sept., 1993, 25.

4 András S. BENEDEK, A gens fidelissima: a ruszinok, Budapest 2000, 15.

5 GÖNCZI, 11.

pathian Mountains. For example, there is a group in Bukovina who call themselves not hutsuls, but hatsuls.

The things we dealt with are well-known today too. But how did these Rusins come here? To answer this question we have to examine three different theories:

1. native/original inhabitants
2. they arrived at the same time with the Hungarian conquerors
3. they were settled down during the 14th century.

The first theory is that the Rusins are native inhabitants in Transcarpathia. The proving of the theory started in the 1990s. As we didn't have any written sources from the times when the Hungarian conquerors came to this region we have to rely on the archeological data. According to the excavations, we only have knowledge of the Slav inhabitants in Transcarpathia from the 6th century (the neighbourhood of Berehovo, Galoch, Homok).⁶ This is the so called kusanovica culture. Start out from this and Anonymus's stories the theory of native inhabitants has been born. In his stories Anonymus mentions that the Hungarian conquerors besiege and occupy an earth fort belonging to a Slav prince Laborcz in the neighbourhood of Ungvár (Uzhorod).⁷ The prince was killed during his escape. As follows, here is a theory that there could exist a Slav principality on the territory of Transcarpathia whose last prince was the previously mentioned Laborcz. With this theory it could be proved that a principality existed here which came to its end with the entering of the Hungarians.⁸ Expanding this theory such ideas came to light which might think about the discovery of a principality that had a connection with the Kyivan Rus and existed till the Tartar invasion. This Eastern-Slav state was so strong that the Hungarians didn't dare to start fighting with it, simply passed it by and only occupied it in the 13th century. The hedge system was wound up after the Tartar intrusion and the system of castles was built up. The fact, that a principality existed in Transcarpathia belonging to the Kyivan Rus have to be thrown away because they were separated from each other with a 70 kilometres wide mountain. The theory is getting more complicated as a considerable part of the historians agree with each other that before the Hungarian conquerors came here the southern Slavs, the so called White Croats lived on the territory of the present Transcarpathia.⁹ It is supported by the kusanovica culture. However, they are the representatives of the Alpine-Dinary people, while most of the Ukrainians belong to the Dniipro-Carpathian group. It is probable that before the Hungarian conquest Western Slavs lived in Transcarpathia but the amount of them was few.

The second theory tells that the Rusins arrived to Transcarpathia together with the Hungarian conquerors. This theory is strengthened by the fact that in the company of the Hungarian conquerors loggers and archers came here as Anonymus mentioned it.¹⁰ Archeological

⁶ József KOBÁLY, Kárpátalja népei a történelem keresztútján IV., in: Kárpátaljai Szemle, Jan., 1994, 27.

⁷ ANONYMUS, Gesta Hungarorum. Translated by Pais Dezső, Budapest 1975, 28.

⁸ BENEDEK, 8.

⁹ KOBÁLY, Kárpátalja népei, 27.

¹⁰ ANONYMUS, 28.

excavations also support this as beside the skeletons of the Hungarian warriors other skeletons were found similar to the Slav human type (cemetery from the time of the Hungarian conquest in Csoma/Tsoma).¹¹ In addition to this, there are many settlements in Transcarpathia which bear the marks of Slav effects (Oroszi/Orosievo). Presumably, they played a significant role as they protected the borderline.

The third theory says that they settled here in the 14th century. Presumably, after the Tartar invasion most of the local residents were wiped out. This caused labour-shortage. The only way to solve this problem was to bring Slav people here from the eastern part of the Carpathians.¹² They both defended borders and worked as simple workers. The shulteiss ("soltész") and "kenéz" helped a lot in the settling of the new inhabitants¹³. In all probability, they went across the Carpathians to the other side where they simply enticed those people who lived there. The newly settled people got different privileges, for example they didn't have to pay taxes for 8–12 years. It seems that this theory is the most probable because it can be proved with historical documents¹⁴. The "soltész"/"kenéz" got the right to judge on the new inhabitants or got financial benefits.

Summary

The question which of the enlisted theories is true can be asked? It is likely that all of them contain true facts. It is verified by archaeological excavations that before the Hungarian conquest Slavs lived in Transcarpathia. The second theory i. e. they came together with the Hungarians also has archaeological and logical basis. The third one is the most provable as written documents has remained for the posterity. To sum up, it can be stated that the ethnic group called Rusins settled down continuously in the territory of the present Transcarpathia from the 6th century. There were interruptions in the process and the amount of them changed several times. Apparently, they didn't belong to the Eastern Slavs. This process was accelerated from the 14th century (e. g. in the case of Fedir Koriatovych) but from this time we have to speak about the Eastern Slavs. In the 17th century there was another influx of the Eastern-Slavs in a greater amount. As a result of it, in the 18th century they were in majority in the territory of Transcarpathia.

Abstract

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Keywords

Transcarpathia, Rusins, Slavs, theories

11 BENEDEK, 8; Barnabás KÉSZ, A honfoglalás kori magyarok emlékei Kárpátalján, in: Kárpátaljai Szemle, Jun., 1993, 14.

12 KOBÁLY, Kárpátaljai ruténok, 26.

13 Ibidem.

14 GÖNCZI, 9.