CONTROVERSIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

THE BANAT, ITS HISTORICAL CONFIGURATIONS AND AN ERROR IN MARSIGLI'S *DANUBIUS PANNONICO-MYSICUS*

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In 1889, a curious notice appeared in the pages of the Hungarian historical journal "Századok." Written by Frigyes Pesty (1823–1889), one of the journal's founding editors, it complained in the most abusive terms about a recent event at the Şibot (Al-Kenyér) railway station in Hunedoara county. Earlier that year, Pesty explained, a monument had been erected in the station and dedicated to the victors of the battle of Câmpul Pâinii (Kenyérmező) in 1479, the voivode Stephen Báthori and Paul Kinizsi. The second of these was designated in an inscription on the monument as the 'ban of Timiş' and this description had been repeated in the last issue of the journal that had carried news of the celebration. At no great length, Pesty denied that Kinizsi could ever have held that title. He then launched into a general criticism of any such 'serious' journal that could have allowed so flagrant a historical inaccuracy to be repeated.[1]

At first sight, Pesty's belligerence might be explained in terms of a personal slight endured by an elderly academic who had only a short time to live. More than twenty years before, Pesty had written a lengthy piece specifically entitled *On the unjustifiability of the designation of banate of Timiş*.[2] Evidently, neither the organizers of the celebration in the railway station nor the current editors of "Századok" (which had back in 1868 carried a positive review of this earlier work)[3] recalled Pesty's contribution. Beyond this, however, was a deeper, political point. Pesty had fought in the Hungarian War of Independence and after 1849 he had briefly joined the emigration. In 1861, he had been elected to the Hungarian diet, the intransigence of which had brought down the Schmerling system inaugurated in the February Patent of that year. Throughout his career and in all his published works, Pesty demonstrated a strong antipathy to Viennese centralization and to the devices which the imperial court was apt to deploy to promote its interests. In Pesty's opinion, the territorial institution of the Vojvodina and Banat set up by Franz Joseph in 1849 was a deliberate assault on Hungary's integrity as a kingdom

[1] Frigyes Pesty, *Az úgynevezett temesi bánság,* in "Századok," 23, 1889, pp. 663-664.
[2] Idem, *A temesi bánság elnevezésének jogosulatlansága*, Pest, 1868.
[3] "Századok," 2, 1868, pp. 726-728.

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and one that could not be supported by any historical precedent. The duplicity of Vienna was such, however, that it was ready to wheel out dubious evidence of special forms of government in south-eastern Hungary and to use these as justification for treating the region as exceptional and as historically different from the rest of the country. In Pesty's opinion, by stating that Paul Kinizsi was ban of Timiş, both the dignitaries at the railway station and the editors of "Századok" were lending credence to a scheme that justified Habsburg innovations by reference to a non-existent form of government in the later Middle Ages. They were therefore perpetuating a lie and one that only benefited imperial policy.

Pesty's intemperate response to the 1889 celebrations at Şibot indicates some of the problems of nomenclature and toponymy that affect both this and many other parts of Europe. It is not just that the language in which one chooses to call a place carries a national and political resonance but also that the very names given to regions suggest a certain reading of history. It is the aim of this paper to explain the origin of the term Banat and to locate this name within multiple contexts. As I will argue, we will find the name of Banat or banate occurring in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as in the Middle Ages. The name seldom denoted, however, the same geographical space and no continuity may be demonstrated between its several manifestations. It may, nevertheless, be shown that the name of Banat was not only the subject of confusion but also, in the manner described by Pesty, might be deliberately manipulated to add historic weight to a political programme.

In 1849, south-eastern Hungary was reorganized as the *Grosswoywodeschaft der serbischen Woywodschaft und des Temeser Banats*. This territory had indeed formerly had its own voivode and would continue to have one. For several weeks in December 1848, a voivode elected by the Serbian National Congress had officiated as regional leader. The next year, the office was assumed by none other than Franz Joseph and, while delegating the work to a military governor, the emperor continued in this role until 1860 when the whole institution was wound up. The *Woywodschaft* thus briefly had its own voivode, thereby explaining the term and, by extension, modern-day usage of the name of Vojvodina. The Banat, by contrast, never had a ban; nor did Franz Joseph ever assume the dignity of 'Ban des Temeser Banats'. In what follows, we will examine how the territory of the Banat acquired its name even though it never actually had a ban of its own.

The origins of the so-called banate of Timişoara (Temesvár) reach back to the early eighteenth century when the region bounded by the Mureş, Tisa and Danube rivers was contested by the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. At the Peace of Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci) in 1699, the territory remained a part of the Ottoman empire, although its various strongholds were given over to the Habsburgs and subsequently razed. Together with northern Serbia and Oltenia ('Little Wallachia'), the region bounded by the three rivers came under Habsburg

rule in 1718 at the Peace of Passarowitz (Požarevac) and remained so even after the partial reversal of its terms at Belgrade in 1739. During the eighteenth century, this region was the subject of an increasingly vigorous colonization policy.

In the negotiations attending the 1699 Peace of Karlowitz, the territory between the Mureş, Tisa and Danube was called simply after the name of its principal city. It was thus referred to as the *Temesvarische Länder*, the *Temesvarer Region* or *Temesvarer Provinz*. The title of 'banate' or, in German, 'Banat' was only used after the capture of Timişoara by Eugene of Savoy in 1716. The earliest reference of which I am aware is a letter addressed to the Hofkammer in January 1717 which refers to the *Temesvarer Banat*.[4] Shortly afterwards, the name crops up in the diplomatic dispatches of British envoys.[5] The next year, following the Peace of Passarowitz, the term acquired official recognition with the establishment of a *Banater Landesadministration*. Thereafter, the name of Banat became sufficiently commonplace to work its way into the royal and imperial title. Maria Theresa thus, besides her many other titles, held the rank of *Frau auf der Windischen March, zu Portenau, zu Salins, zu Mecheln, und in dem Temesvarer Bannat*.

Needless to say, the description of this region as a banate was resented by the Hungarian estates, for it implied that the region was not a complete part of the Hungarian kingdom and so lent legitimacy to its status as a separate administrative unit. Usually, therefore, the Hungarian diet avoided the term of banate altogether and employed instead such terms as *Districtus* or *Comitatus*. In 1741, Maria Theresa promised the return of the Banat to Hungary and its absorption into the civil county administration. The transfer only took place, however, in 1779. Even then, the southern parts of the Banat were not incorporated within the Hungarian counties but instead within the Military Frontier where they remained until the late nineteenth century.

The term 'Banat', as used after January 1717, is hard to explain. There had previously been banates in this area but these had in more recent times been only the most temporary and fleeting institutions and the title of ban had conveyed but a very transient authority: bans of Lugoj or Caransebeş in the second half of the sixteenth century and later on, in the 1640s, a ban of Caraş. It is unlikely that the name 'Banate of Temesvár' rested on such meagre historical precedents.

In order to understand the origin of the name Banat, we need to look more closely at the discussions attending the various treaties with the Turks in the early eighteenth century. Negotiations between the various teams of envoys rested on two principles. On the one hand was ranged the principle of *uti possidetis* (more properly, *uti possidetis, ita possideatis*), the legal term which meant that peace

[4] F. Pesty, *A temesi bánság*, pp. 23-24.

[5] György Kurucz, *A Guide to Manuscripts and Documents in British Libraries and Archives Relating to the Kingdom of Hungary*, London, 1992, nos. 21.3721, 21.3762.

should be arranged on the basis of current possession. On the second, was the principle of historic right and of historic boundaries. This concern, in particular, drove a study of medieval charters and other accounts in order to establish the precise historical demarcation between the territories claimed as of right by the two sides. We certainly know that in this endeavour one of the principal agents on the Habsburg side was the general, historian, natural scientist and polymath, Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, who both before and after Karlowitz was much occupied in establishing the true historic borders between Hungary, Transylvania and the other dependencies of the Hungarian crown. Marsigli recorded his investigation of the antiquities, history and geology of the region in a number of accounts, some of which remain unpublished – most notably his history of the Hungarian monarchy and its dependencies and a history of Hungary (c. 1700).[6] Marsigli's main work, *Danubius Pannonico-Mysicus* was published in six volumes in The Hague in 1726. Such was Marsigli's reputation that his accounts of Danubian history later found their way into such standard Hungarian histories as those published by Johann Christian von Engel, József Kemény and Hunfalvy.

It may well be the case that Marsigli was responsible for associating the region between the Mureş, Tisa and Danube with the name of Banat and that the connection which he established worked its way into common usage as a result of his diplomatic and publishing activity. Writing in the 1860s, Frigyes Pesty came close to this conclusion, but it cannot be proven.[7] It may, nevertheless, be that the link which Marsigli made between the territory later called the Banat and the territory under negotiation at Karlowitz and Passarowitz was typical of a historic confusion of the time and one, moreover, which it is not hard to understand. A mistake in Marsigli's *Danubius Pannonico-Mysicus* is in this respect telling.

In the first book of *Danubius*, Marsigli writes the following: *The Banate of Temes* […] *is so called after the fortress at Timişoara and has the Danube on its right side. And it goes up to the torrent of the Cerna where near Orşova it disgorges into the Danube, and which separates the Banate from Wallachia on the east. To the south is the Danube by Serbia, and to the north the River Mureş, beyond which are the upper parts of the kingdom of Hungary. And it is distinguished from Transylvania by mountains. Its lower part gives way to the great county of Severin* [*Magno Comitatui Sourinensi*] *which once ran up to the River Olt and was divided into eight districts.*[8]

[6] John Stoye, *Marsigli's Europe 1680–1730: The Life and Times of Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, Soldier and Virtuoso*, New Haven and London, 1994, pp. 70-71, 161; "La Bibliofilia," 27, 1925–1926, pp. 199, 301.

[7] F. Pesty, *A temesi bánság*, p. 29.

[8] L.F. Marsigli, *Danubius Pannonico-Mysicus*, vol. 1, Hagae-Amstelodami, 1726, p. 9.

This is a fascinating description not only because it is in its history wrong but also because we can ascertain how the mistakes were made. The key is the reference to the banate of Severin.

The banate of Severin was one of the earliest Hungarian banates and was founded around 1230.[9] Its original purpose was to guard the south-eastern approaches to Hungary which were challenged in the early thirteenth century by Bulgarians, Cumans and Romanians. The territory of the banate reached deep into Oltenia and was sustained by a network of recruiting and provisioning districts within Hungary. In 1330, however, the territory of the banate was lost to the Romanians and its ban no longer held authority east of the Danube. Hereafter, the banate became in effect landless. It continued, though, to be associated with various recruiting districts, the resources of which might be deployed to defend the Lower Danube region. The most famous of these were the eight so-called 'Wallachian' districts which were given some exceptional privileges in the 1450s. The office of ban was, however, only intermittently bestowed by the Hungarian kings. Instead, Hungary's rulers usually ceded the banate's resources to local dignitaries and warlords as a means of sustenance. The main beneficiaries were military captains and the *ispán* or lord-lieutenant of Timiş county. Although they might rely for troops and provisions upon the resources of the banate, these officers were not referred to as bans unless they had been specifically granted the dignity of ban of Severin. But even when granted this title, the bans did not hold a defined territory but rather a dispersed collection of rights and entitlements. Paradoxically, therefore, while the later Banat may be characterized as a region without a ban, medieval Severin frequently had a ban but not, after 1330, a fixed territory which might be thought to constitute a banate.

The loss of the Severin banate's territory in Oltenia in 1330 left, however, an important trace on the developing Wallachian principality. The lands acquired in that year from the kingdom of Hungary continued to retain a special status within the principality even to the extent of having their own ban. The ban of Craiova, who governed the region between the Olt and Danube rivers, was frequently drawn from the wealthy Craiovescu family. These not only fulfilled a leading role within the prince's council but contributed a number of princes to Wallachia's supreme office. The office of ban of Oltenia remained until the 1830s one of the principal Wallachian dignities.

We may imagine the difficulties that confronted Marsigli in his attempt to order the events and chronologies of these regions into some form of historical narrative. He was aware of the medieval office of ban of Severin, but he confused the region of the long-lost Severin banate with the banate of Craiova and thus

[9] For this and much of what follows, see Martyn Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*, Basingstoke and New York, 2000, pp. 90-94.

located it as running east of the Danube into Oltenia. The eight 'Wallachian' districts which in reality had once lain to the west of the Danube, mainly along the course of the Timiş river, were thus moved eastwards and rendered Oltenian. The Severin banate was accordingly shunted to the wrong place and put on the wrong side of the Danube. Marsigli was, nevertheless, aware that the various districts of the banate were occasionally subsumed for purposes of provisioning and recruitment within the *ispán* of Timiş's office. He thus constructed a second banate, the banate of Timiş, which he used to explain the occasional subordination of parts of this region to whichever warlord or county *ispán* was encharged with the border's defence. Or, to put it another way: Marsigli identified the eight districts of the Severin banate with Oltenia. He connected the historic banate of Severin with the contemporary Romanian banate of Craiova and blurred the two institutions. Nevertheless, in order to explain contrary evidence of a banal authority west of the Danube, Marsigli had necessarily to invent a banate of Timiş and to present this institution as quite separate from the banate of Severin.

It cannot be demonstrated that Marsigli was responsible for the designation of Banat. His *Danubius Pannonico-Mysicus* was published ten years after the first appearance of the term of Banat and any influence Marsigli may have had on the selection of the name can only have been indirect. Nevertheless, Marsigli's error illumines both the confusions which attend name-giving and the circumstances whereby an unhistorical name may rapidly acquire a false but distinguished pedigree. In view of the purposes to which the name of Banat would be put in support of Habsburg policies of 'divide and rule', it is not surprising that the unwitting misuse of the historical past should have so provoked the ire of one of this region's most distinguished scholars.