

SOME REMARKS ON THE PANNONIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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During the past few years an ever increasing intensity of Marxist research in the classical studies throughout the democratic countries has been developing. There is no doubt that the Marxist-Leninist historiography has been able to establish and to solve the fundamental problems of the economic and social evolution of ancient societies. At the same time it must be stated, however, that by the immense production of bourgeois historiography on antiquity a great deal of valuable work has been accomplished, the lasting usefulness of which to our own investigations is evident. It would be quite wrong, therefore, to reject strictly the results of bourgeois historiography, though certain tendencies to it appeared some time ago. On the other hand, however, we must warn against their being accepted uncritically and without an analysis of the methodology of their authors. The same applies to the history of the Danube provinces of the Roman Empire.

In my book "Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire"¹, which was published in Czech last year and the English version of which is being prepared, I had, of course, to treat in detail the work of Andreas Alföldi, which is for the study of Pannonian history of exceptional importance. Alföldi is the author of a large number of studies in the field of history, archaeology (including art history), inscriptions and numismatics, making a valuable contribution to the interpretation of the sources and the analysis of different aspects of life in Pannonia. Alföldi is not contented with critical research into separate problems, but attempts a synthesis, an all-round view of the history of ancient Pannonia. Besides this research, Alföldi has devoted much time to the organization of research in Pannonian history, archaeology and epigraphy, the results of which have been published particularly in the series of monographic studies, *Dissertationes Pannonicae*. We may say that it was Alföldi's work as scholar and organizer that laid the firm foundations for research into the historical development of ancient Pannonia.

¹ P. Oliva, *Pannonie a počátky krize římského impéria*, Praha, 1959.

I cannot give an exhaustive analysis of Alföldi's work here, but I want to bring a critical assessment of those writings, which deal with the history of Pannonia during the Principate.

Several of Alföldi's studies written during the thirties deal with this period. The earliest is a popular pamphlet about the nations which inhabited Pannonia under the Roman Empire, in which the author's conception, continued in his later writings, is already clear. Alföldi regards the history of Pannonia — and of the Roman Empire as a whole — from the viewpoint of the governing Roman circles and the highest strata of the provincial population, those who helped to carry out the Romans' policy in the regions conquered by Rome. It is no mere coincidence that as early as 1934, Alföldi declared (although he quoted the previous words of V. Kuzsinszky) that "occupation of an area covering the old Hungarian monarchy right to the Carpathians, as a defence for the West, was the idea of Marcus"¹.

One of Alföldi's most extensive studies is a Hungarian article on the romanization of Pannonia, where he deals with the changes in Pannonia under the Principate. He considers the economic development of the province, the growth of craft production and that of trade in particular; he notices changes in the organization of the original inhabitants, the growth of towns and the spread of roads, and, starting from these and other aspects of the life of the people of Pannonia, he attempts to show the effect of the establishment of the province on the development of the whole territory of Pannonia. It is of value that Alföldi was the first to consider the problems of Pannonia as a part of the whole Empire, and to attempt to answer them; but, in spite of his profound erudition and wide knowledge, the shortcomings of his method and approach prevented him from answering them successfully. For instance, when dealing with the organization of the original Illyrian-Celtic inhabitants, Alföldi does not consider the changes in this organization as the consequences of the process of formation of a class society. This of course means that he considers the provincial population as a single mass with single aims, which are identical with those of the Roman Empire. It is also typical of his view of the romanization of the province that he places primary stress on the work of the Roman governors of Pannonia, who in fact were only enforcing in the province the policy and interests of the ruling circles of Rome. When dealing with the social and economic development of Pannonia, Alföldi touches on the question of slavery. He makes no attempt to explain the phenomenon, however, confining himself to the remark that slavery was common to the development of the Roman Empire everywhere, and that he is concerned here only with specifically Danubian phenomena. Yet the study of the particular development of slavery in Pannonia is very important for assessing the economic and social history of the province. Alföldi states that judging by some of the epigraphic evidence the fate of slaves in Pannonia should not be taken too tragically, but he fails to point out that the fate of the "imperial" slaves (who usually held administrative functions in the provinces, such as positions in the customs offices) cannot possibly be compared with the life of the slaves on the farms and in the workshops, which was certainly not an enviable one².

¹ Alföldi A., *Magyarország népei és a római birodalom*, Budapest, 1934, p. 28. Cf. also his study: *Studi ungheresi sulla romanizzazione della Pannonia*, in: *Gli studi romani nel mondo II*, Bologna, 1935, 280 ff.

² Alföldi A., *Pannonia rómaiságának kialakulása és történeti kerete*, Századok LXX, 1936, 1-37, 129-162.

A brief account of the history of Pannonia during the Principate was given by Alföldi about the same time, in a short article on the Danubian provinces during the early history of the Empire, published in the *Cambridge Ancient History* (CAH). This article sums up the conclusion of the work mentioned above. Here too his conception can be clearly seen, when he declares that "the excellent military material of Illyricum, impregnated with Roman civilization during the second century, became the last bulwark, with few intellectual pretensions, but strong and sure, of Rome and of Western culture in the ancient world"¹.

Alföldi returned to some of the basic problems of Pannonian history in articles written during the second world war for a detailed history of Budapest. Almost the whole of the two large first volumes were devoted to the history of Budapest in antiquity, that is to say, the history of Aquincum. From Alföldi's pen were particularly the chapters on the history of the original inhabitants of Budapest and the vicinity, on the place of Aquincum in the Roman Empire and on the campaigns fought on the Danubian *limes* at the end of the second and during the third and fourth centuries. The account given here is not confined to the strict history of Aquincum alone, and has not without justice been described as a provisional substitute for the history of Pannonia still to be written². This work, too, shows the shortcomings criticized above. Alföldi lays special stress on the role of Pannonia in the defence of the Danube frontiers in the third century, and declares that at this time the Roman Empire was really saved by the "*Genius Illyrici*, in which the magnificent military traditions of Rome were revived to combine with the sturdy self-confidence of the exemplary fighting spirit of the Illyrian and Celtic tribes"³.

Alföldi had already expressed similar views in earlier writings dealing with the crisis of the third century. The first of these dates from the end of the twenties. The author considers it is useless to seek the causes of this crisis. He believes that the most important thing is to determine why the signs of decay which had already been manifest for some time, should suddenly take the form of a crisis. The decline of the Empire is said to be due to the fact that „there was no strata of the imperial population ready to sacrifice everything in the interests of the state and capable of forming the backbone of the new world-wide empire instead of the exhausted Italians". In the first half of the third century, the army of the Danube provinces became a decisive force in the affairs of the Empire, the commanders enjoying considerable political influence. But the strength of the Danube legions was sapped by constant fighting, and the importance of Pannonia was further weakened by the policy of the Emperor Gallienus, who entrusted the leaders of neighbouring "barbarian" tribes with defence of the Danube *limes*. In this way Alföldi judges the crisis of the third century from the standpoint of the ruling clique in the Empire and that of the most conservative aristocratic elements in Pannonia itself⁴.

¹ A. Alföldi. *The Central Danubian Provinces*, Cambridge Ancient History, IX, 1936, 540—554.

² B. Saria, *Noricum und Pannonien*, Historia, I, 1950, 443.

³ *Budapest története*, I, Budapest az ókorban, Budapest, 1942 (2 volumes); cf. mainly p. 705.

⁴ A. Alföldi, *Die Vorherrschaft der Pannonier im Römerreiche und die Reaktion des Hellenismus unter Gallienus*, 25 Jahre Römisch-germanischer Kommission, Berlin-Leipzig, 1929, p. 11—17.

Alföldi devoted a separate study to the problem of the crisis in the third century. Here he finds the chief reason for the decline of the Empire in the fact that the influence of the masses of the people was growing during the third century, at the expense of the individual personality. He even introduces the irrational element into his explanation of the causes of decline. In his view the problem of the crisis in the Roman Empire is part of the broader "eternal" problem of human life. „Here we are up against the eternal problem of the relationship between the mass and the individual”, writes Alföldi, “the former based on the mechanical forces of being, the latter on the organic forces. An analysis of these two great sources of being, the organic and the inorganic is constantly forced upon us. Indeed, divine Providence willed a double chemical composition for the elements, according to whether an organic or an inorganic compound was to emerge. Above all, let us not imagine that such speculations could only lead to nebulous theories; on the contrary, the whole of the past, the whole of our present reality is thus our subject”¹.

One of Alföldi's latest studies takes up an extreme idealist position: it deals with the *Moral barrier on the Rhine and the Danube*. It correctly points out the difference between the moral standards of the world of Rome and those of the „barbarian” tribes which were then living on the Rhine and Danube frontiers. But the author does not go to the historical roots of this difference, and does not attempt to find the real basis of the different ethic conceptions held by the slave-owning society of Rome and the tribal societies of the Germans, Sarmatians and others outside the boundaries of the Empire, because he regards the moral principles of these two different worlds as primary and definitive. In his view „all the grandiose fortifications on the Roman frontiers — and not only on the Rhine and the Danube — with all their alterations and developments, are simply the secondary consequences and the reflection of that moral isolation. All the remains of the iron curtain which the archaeologists uncover are simply the outward and visible signs of a series of crimes against morality, breaches of faith, and complete disregard of the laws which must govern nations and peoples as they govern individuals”².

In his latest general study of the history of the Roman Empire, Alföldi repeats an old view of his, when dealing with the reign of the Severi, maintaining that in this period the decline of the individual personality had a deleterious effect³.

There is no doubt that the task of assessing Alföldi's contribution to research and organizational work in the field of Pannonian history must fall to Hungarian scholars.

In this short contribution, I have only tried to point out the main shortcomings of Alföldi's approach, which must be borne in mind when studying his vast published work, essential in any historical study of Pannonia.

¹ A. Alföldi, *La grande crise du monde romain au IIIe siècle*, Antiquité classique, VII, 1938, 5–18. To this study cf. also: J. Pečírka, *Teorie buržoasních historiků o pádu říše římské* (Theories of bourgeois historians on the decline of the Roman Empire), Listy filologické, 1953, 92 f.

² A. Alföldi, *The Moral Barrier on Rhine and Danube*, The Congress of Roman Frontiers Studies, 1949 (Edited by Eric Birley), University of Durham, 1952, p. 1–16.

³ A. Alföldi, *Römische Kaiserzeit*, in: *Historia mundi* IV, Bern, 1956, 227.