

# Project for a Slavic Ethnological Atlas

Mojmír Benza

Benza, Mojmir 1995: Project for a Slavic Ethnological Atlas. – *Ethnologia Europaea* 25: 87–90.

The present time in Central and Eastern Europe is characterised by two seemingly opposing trends: a striving for profound knowledge of one's own nation and a striving for identification with the rest of Europe. A contribution to both types of striving could be ethnological atlases of European regions, one of which could be a Slavic Ethnological Atlas. It would aim at presenting a picture of selected phenomena of the traditional culture of Slavic nations in their entirety as well as in their ethnic variety.

This picture could establish preconditions for the definition of what is common Slavic for every Slavic nation as well as what is ethnically specific for each. At the same time the Atlas could help to define what connects the Slavic nations with other nations living in Europe. The data presented in the Atlas would either confirm or deny the unity or affinity of traditional cultures of Slavic nations. It has already been unambiguously proved that their languages are cognate.

*Ph.Dr. Mojmir Benza, Ustav etnológie, Slovenská akadémia vied, Jakubovo nám. 12, SK-813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia.*

The present period in Europe, especially in its Central and Eastern part, is characterised by two apparently opposite tendencies: the deepening of the national self-consciousness of individual nations, and their striving for identification with the rest of Europe. Ethnological Atlases, not only of single nations, but of European regions, and of Europe as a whole, could contribute to both sides. In the mid 1960s, work on the Ethnological Atlas of Europe began on the initiative of well-known European ethnologists, but in spite of regular meetings from 1966 to 1978, and work on the preparation of some selected themes, only one map for the atlas, devoted to seasonal bonfires, was prepared and published (*Ethnologischer Atlas Europas* 1979). In the 1980s work on the Ethnological Atlas of Europe gradually stopped. The project definitely ended in 1990, when it was decided not to continue with its preparation in the same form.

In relation to the extremely heterogeneous character of ethnology in the individual countries of Europe, it is not realistic to renew work on the Ethnological Atlas of Europe. What appears more realistic, however, is to look at the idea of European regional atlases. One of these could be a Slavic Ethnological Atlas. In ethnically

cally and culturally close or neighbouring countries, the differences in the character of ethnology are substantially smaller and therefore the pre-conditions for cooperation and for a common approach are much greater. The two published volumes of the Historical-Ethnographic Atlas of the Baltic Region (*Istoriko-etnographicheskiy atlas Pribaltiki* 1985, 1986) shows the viability and effectiveness of this route. The results up to now of the use of the ethnocartographic method in individual Slavic countries are shown especially in ethnological atlases (*Etnograficky atlas* 1978, 1991, *Etnoloshki atlas Jugoslavie* 1939, *Moszynski* 1934, 1934, 1936, *Polski atlas etnograficzny* 1958, 1964, 1965, 1968, 1971, 1974, 1981, *Russkie* 1967, *Etnograficky atlas Slovenska* 1990) and documentation archives, which were assembled in their preparation.

The volumes so far published of the Slavic Linguistic Atlas (*Obshchieslavianskiy lingvisticheskiy atlas* 1978, 1988), were the main stimulus for me to develop the idea of a Slavic Ethnological Atlas. If linguists are able to unite and work together, I do not see any reason why a similar project cannot be agreed by ethnologists.

It is necessary to seek the earliest origins of the idea of a Slavic Ethnological Atlas at the beginning of the 1960s. At the International Conference of Slavists in Sofia in 1963, Professor M Rabinovich gave information about the Historico-Ethnographic Atlas of the Russians. He mentioned that it was also conceived as a regional enterprise, which together with similar atlases of other Slavic countries and their neighbours, could form a series of generalised or newly worked out series of questions on Slavic ethnology and the ethnology of Europe as a whole (Rabinovich 1963). In 1973, in Ochrid, under the aegis of the editorial board of the periodical *Ethnologia Slavica*, a symposium was held on ethnological atlases of individual Slavic countries. The idea of a joint Slavic atlas also appeared here. At the symposium, Professor B Bratanić stated that in spite of the great cultural differences and great distances between them, the Slavic nations are still always much more strongly linked to each other by language than other European nations. This offers the possibility of comparing the cultural differences with linguistic relations, and producing a wide range of ethnological conclusions (Bratanić 1976). A form of challenge to Slavic ethnologists is found in the words of Professor V Sedov who maintains in his work 'The Origin and Early History of the Slavs' that unfortunately up to now, ethnologists and folklorists have done very little to solve the ethnogenesis of the Slavs, although after two centuries they have sufficient material. It is only possible to make a study of Slavic ethnogenesis after producing Slavic and regional atlases (Sedov 1979).

The aim of a Slavic ethnological atlas should be to give a picture of the chosen features of the traditional culture of the Slavic nations in their entirety and in their ethnic and regional variety. The main aim should be to seek the causes and connections of their unity and differentiation. Such a picture would create conditions for the definition of what is common to all Slavic nations, the national specifics of each Slavic nation, and at the same time identify what connects the Slavic nations with the other nations of Europe. The results of a Slavic ethnological atlas would either confirm or deny the unity or relatedness of the traditional culture of

the Slavic nations, of which linguistic proximity is an unambiguous sign.

The Slavic ethnological atlas should be conceived as a European regional atlas based on the ethnic principle. Its object should be all the nations speaking Slavic languages, which live in Bielo-Rus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechland, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Germany, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia and the Ukraine. The object of its interest should not be Slavic minorities living in other European states, or non-Slavic nations which live in the above-mentioned states. To obtain more complete knowledge and clarification of Slavic culture, it is necessary to give an overview of its related and unrelated surroundings. It is impossible to study the traditional culture of the Slavic nations in isolation and from the traditional cultures of their non-Slavic neighbours. However, in the interests of preserving the basically ethnic character of the atlas, information about the traditional culture of the non-Slavic neighbours of the Slavic nations will not form a part of it, but will be used in interpretation of the results obtained.

A basic question determining the character of the atlas is the time-scale to be covered. The majority of ethnological atlases in Europe have one time limit not earlier than the middle of the 19th century, and the other is usually determined by the year of starting the work. In the framework of this time-span, the periodisation of the development of the researched phenomena is also determined. I recommend a time-span from the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century. It is most probable that the majority of phenomena will be studied in the period around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, or at the beginning of the 20th century.

The thematic areas, questions and their number and extent are other factors which determine the character of an atlas. In this respect the Slavic ethnological atlas should be significantly different from national atlases, in which it is mainly the differences in the contexts of one nation or one country that are researched. The Slavic atlas must above all be concerned with researching those phenomena which have a pan-Slavic importance, or which are common to more than one Slavic nation.

The majority of ethnological atlases research themes only from material and spiritual culture. The selected phenomena are researched in isolation, separated from their relationships to other features of traditional culture. I recommend that the Slavic atlas research phenomena in a wider way, that is, where features of material culture are concerned, also to look at associated features of spiritual culture, and vice versa. The atlas should cover the following thematic areas: agriculture, spinning and weaving, food, clothes and shoes, building and housing, related technology, family ceremonies and customs, anniversary customs. Every thematic area should be worked out into questions, the number of which should not be too great. The whole atlas should not have more than 40 or at most 50 questions. Apart from these general principles, for deciding on the setting or non-setting of questions, the existence of similar questions in the ethnological atlases of Slavic countries and the working out of problems in synthesising or monographic works should also be taken into account.

The main sources for the atlas should firstly be maps from the national atlases of Slavic countries and documentary archives, which were collected during their preparation. Published literature and museum collections should be important sources of information. I place special field work carried out for the needs of the atlas in the last place. It should cover blank spaces, which have not been filled by data from the main sources. It should also be possible to use some of the research materials from the Slavic linguistic atlas for the needs of the atlas.

The collection of material should be done with the help of questionnaires, which should fulfil two roles: to unify the data from different sources, and to ensure the completeness of the data. Compilers of questionnaires for individual thematic areas should be experts in the appropriate subject. In setting questions for the questionnaire, they should respect the fact that the main role of the atlas is not the basic collection of material from the field, but the concentration and use of already existing and known material, which enables the achievement of the main aim of the atlas. Therefore the questions should be formulated very specific-

ly, asking for the form and function of a phenomenon, its name, the period of its origin, existence or disappearance.

Clearly, tables and drawings should be part of the questionnaire.

In relation to the extent of the territory to be studied, and the uneven availability of documentary archives and sources, I consider that there should be a free choice of research localities, that is among those with available material. The free choice of localities will be applied mainly at the national level of work. Only generalised data for the squares measuring 30 x 30 minutes in geographical length and breadth into which the working maps will be divided, should be handled on the working maps of the atlas. These should be on a scale of 1:6 million with divisions into about 800 squares. The Slavic linguistic atlas also has a similar scale and number of points.

Work on the atlas should be divided into two levels: national and pan-Slavic. Each of these has some independent, successive stages. The compatibility of the results from the national level, and the conceptual unity of the results from the pan-Slavic level should be secured by maintaining a standardised methodology in the work, which will be worked out for each level independently.

On the national level, a list of sources, a select thematic bibliography and extracts from sources and literature could be made for use with the questionnaire. During cartographic processing at the national level, maps could have various scales, but with the pre-determined grid of vertical and horizontal lines for entering the data obtained. A commentary which would explain and comment on both the results shown on the maps and those aspects of the studied phenomena which are not shown on the maps should be part of the cartographic processing. Every question worked out for the atlas on the national level should also be published in its national environment.

The maps submitted from the national level would be unified on the pan-Slavic maps. A narrower choice of those maps which have a content fulfilling the aims of the atlas, would be made from the collection obtained. Commentaries, and studies of a synthesising character

would be worked out for the chosen maps, and published with them. I think that it will not be possible to publish the atlas as a whole, but only in sections. Each of these should be devoted to one thematic area.

The basic principles for cooperation on the atlas should be voluntary, based on interest in the work, and flexibility, which means that each of the stages of the work may be carried out by another worker. I ascribe greater importance to personal relations and contacts. In the initial work I do not necessarily assume an institutional sponsorship role, which could arise after the first results of the work. At the same time, the official centre for the Slavic ethnological atlas would then be formed. In the near future it is necessary to address the expert public to work out supplements to the project on the basis of its suggestions, make a choice of questions and compose the questionnaire, and work out a standardised methodology for the work.

## Note

Thanks are due to Professor Alexander Fenton for improving the English in the manuscript.

## References

- Bratanić, Branimir 1976–1977: Ethnologische Kartographie und die Slawischen Völker. In: *Ethnologia Slavica*, 287.
- Ethnologischer Atlas Europas und seiner Nachbarländer* 1979: *Die Termine der Jahresfeuer in Europa*, Göttingen.
- Etnologický atlas* 1978: Opera ethnologica 8, CSAV, Praha.
- Etnologický atlas* 1991: Opera ethnologica 12, CSAV, Praha.
- Etnografski atlas Slovenska* 1990: Bratislava.
- Etnološki atlas Jugoslavije* 1989: Zagreb.
- Istoriko-etnografski atlas Pribaltiki* 1985: Zemledelie, Vilnius.
- Istoriko-etnografski atlas Pribaltiki* 1986: Odeja, Riga.
- Moszynski, Kazimierz 1934–1936: *Atlas kultury ludowej w Polsce*, I–III, Krakow.
- Obshch斯拉vianskiy lingvisticheskiy atlas* 1978. Vstupitelniy vypusk, Moskva.
- Obshch斯拉vianskiy lingvisticheskiy atlas* 1988: Seria fonetiko-gramaticheskaya I, Beograd.
- Obshch斯拉vianskiy lingvisticheskiy atlas* 1988: Seria lexiko-slovoobrazovatel'naya I, Moskva.
- Polški atlas etnograficzny* 1958: Zeszyt probny, Wrocław.
- Polški atlas etnograficzny* 1964, 1965, 1968, 1971, 1974, 1981: Volume I–IV, Warszawa.
- Russkie 1967: *Istoriko-etnografskiy atlas*, Moskva.
- Rabinovich, M G 1963: Istoriko-etnografskiy atlas Russkie. Principi i metodi sostavleniya. In: *Istoria, folk-lor, iskustvo slavijskikh narodov*. Dokladi sovietskoy delegacii. V. mejdunarodniy syezd slavistov, Moskva: 446–447.
- Sedov, V V 1979: *Proishozhdenie i rannaya istoria Slavian*, Moskva: 38.