

THE KINGDOM OF THE SERBS, CROATS, AND SLOVENES

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN RELATION TO NATURAL REGIONS

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[With separate maps, Pl. II, facing p. 82]

The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was created of territories formerly existing under a variety of political régimes: the independent kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro; Bosnia-Hercegovina, annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908; Dalmatia, parts of Styria, Carniola, and some communes of Carinthia, pertaining to Austria; the autonomous Hungarian province of Croatia-Slavonia; and parts of Baranja, Bačka, and the Banat, pertaining to Hungary proper. The necessary administrative reorganization was provided for in the Constitution of the new Kingdom. In accordance with Article 95 the country "should be divided into regions by law, taking into consideration natural, social, and economic conditions." A time limit was specified, with provision that if the law were not passed in this time the Ministerial Council should be empowered to effect the administrative division by ministerial decree. As the National Parliament did not pass the law within the time limit, the division was effected by decree promulgated in the *Sluzbene Novine* (the Official Gazette) No. 93, of April 28, 1922.

By the above-mentioned decree the former departments of Bosnia and Hercegovina were made regions. Montenegro of 1913, with the district of Bocca di Cattaro, in Dalmatia, and without the departments of Pljevlje and Bijelo Polje, constituted one region. Dalmatia was divided into two regions, Split (Spalato) and Dubrovnik (Ragusa), formed by joining together existing political districts. Croatia, Slavonia, and Srem (Syrmia) were divided into four regions (the Littoral, Zagreb, Osijek, Srem) by the union of smaller administrative wholes—departments, districts, and municipalities. Kranjska (Carniola) and southern Stajerska (Styria) were divided into two regions, Ljubljana and Maribor. Baranja and the larger part of Bačka made one region, Bačka. The other part of Bačka and the Banat were made into counties by connecting them with regions in Serbia on the right bank of the Danube. In Serbia, within her boundaries of 1913, certain former departments were made into regions; others were constituted by the union of existing administrative units, departments, and districts. Altogether 33 regions (see map, Fig. 1) were constituted. Before commenting on this division we shall refer to the natural regions and population of the country (see Pl. II.)



FIG. 1—Map of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes showing the administrative districts created in 1922 with the official centers.

Natural Regions¹

THE ADRIATIC REGION

The Adriatic region is a narrow strip stretching from the Gulf of Fiume (Rijeka) in the northwest to the mouth of the Boyana River in the south-east. It is composed essentially of limestones (Cretaceous and Eocene) and marls and sandstones (Eocene), folded and faulted longitudinally. Sinking of the land has been effected along faults; but it is also due to the flexed folding of the whole country, by which process the lower or southwestern part was depressed, while the upper or northeastern part was raised. Numerous harbors, offering excellent natural protection, have been formed as a result of the movement of depression. Where important land routes converge upon such harbors, trading settlements have sprung up. Commercially they have been very active, especially at an earlier date. The numerous islands along the coast made possible an early development of

¹ See also Yves Chataigniez: *La Yougoslavie, Ann. de Geogr.*, Vol. 30, 1921, pp. 81-110.

seafaring, both legitimate trade and, in the early days especially, piracy.¹ Fishing is developed, sardines being the chief catch.

The region has a Mediterranean type of climate and vegetation with characteristic production of vine, olive, and fig. The summers are dry and warm, the winters mild and rainy; the maximum rainfall, however, occurring in autumn and spring. Since the coast is bounded on the north-east by high ridges, large quantities of meteoric water are condensed upon them from the prevailing westerlies of the rainy season. Following the rains many springs and rivulets, dry in the summer, reappear. In order that the sudden rush of water may not wash down the soil the gardens are walled and terraced. In winter the barometric minimum tends to lie over the sea, while the barometric maximum overlies the cold mainland on the northeast. As a result of this difference in pressure a cold strong land breeze blows in winter from the land towards the sea. As it blows from the high mountain barrier, by which the coast is bounded on the northeast, this wind is not felt so much on the Dalmatian coast but is stronger on the Italian shores which in winter have the lower temperatures.

The character of the vegetation is influenced not only by dryness of the summers but also by lack of surface water over considerable areas in this typical karst country. The limestones are traversed by fissures. Chemical erosion by meteoric water produces such forms as *lapiés* and *dolines*.² The fissures broaden below into channels and lead to subterranean caves and passages. The water drains off vertically, and consequently a very small amount of water or none at all is left at the surface, although the rainfall is considerable.

In the limestone districts pasturages and shrubwood are rare and limited to fissures, where *terra rossa* has been formed. The *flysch* beds, however, are impermeable, and here we have surface drainage. By the weathering of these rocks a layer of soil is formed, possessing a luxuriant vegetation. On account of summer drought, irrigation is needed for some cultivations. Hydro-electric energy from the falls of the Krka and Cetina has encouraged a certain degree of industrial development.

THE DINARIC REGION

Inland lies the Dinaric region. Its northwestern part comprehends the long and relatively narrow upland zone of the *bilos* and *poljes*. The *poljes* have been formed by karstic and fluvial erosion. The wide areas between, the *bilos*, consist of parallel ridges and limestone coves. Although the rainfall is here considerable, the *bilos* as a rule are always dry. Water appears in springs on the border of the karst *poljes*. During the autumnal maximum of rainfall the lower parts of the *poljes* may be submerged, hence the villages are not situated in the central parts of the *poljes* but on their

¹ See Jovan Cvijic: *The Evolution of Lapiés: A Study in Karst Physiography*, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 14, 1922, pp. 26-49.

rims. These flooded areas are given over to meadows, for the water drains off in spring too late for cultivation.

The cool summers of this region are due to high altitude, winters being cold and snowy. In the Pleistocene some of the highest peaks bore small glaciers. Such is the case, for example, with Šator and Cincer. Triglav, on the northwest and the highest peak, was the center of an intense glaciation, exhibited in the topography with its well developed cirques, troughs,



FIG. 2.—The coast to the southeast of Dubrovnik (Adriatic region).

moraines, and fluvio-glacial terraces in the valley of the upper Sava. The altitude limits cultivation. In the poljes are meadows, pasture, and small areas of barley, rye, and oats. Every polje has its own town as an agricultural center. The limestone bilos afford pasture grounds. In the coves there are meadows. In summer the inhabitants of the poljes go to the bilos to mow and take thither their sheep. Here are huts for the shepherds and sheepfolds.

In the lower course of the Neretva (Narenta) River and southeast from it are the regions of Humina and Rudina. The former is characterized by conical limestone hillocks, the latter is constituted by low plateaus. These regions are composed of purer limestones (Cretaceous and Eocene). Here are seen poljes of a smaller size. Their bottoms are covered with alluvial deposits, while on the sides of the poljes and the lower ridges, which separate them, lapiés and dolines are developed.

The Humina-Rudina region is in proximity to the coastal zone and lies at a lower elevation. Here we have the characteristic summer drought

that necessitates transhumance. The village folk then take their sheep high up into the mountains to the northeast, where above the upper limit of the forest region are the summer pasturages, bringing them down at the beginning of the autumnal rains. Because of warm summers and mild winters, here in the vicinity of the seacoast, vine, tobacco, and the fig tree flourish.

To the northeast of Humina and Rudina lies the highest part of the mountainous Dinaric barrier. It consists of *povrshi* and *brda*. The *povrshi* are the elevated, extensive areas of limestones: the *brda* are ridges rising from the plateau surfaces. The *povrshi* are deeply incised by canyons, reaching a depth of several hundred meters, and are covered with dolines. From them rise ridges and ranges glaciated in the Pleistocene. In the cirques are snow masses, which remain there late into the summer. Here there is almost no vegetation, nor any abodes. On the elevated plateaus is pasture, scarce on the limestone tracts, but luxuriant on the morainic deposits. Here we have *katunes*, the summer abodes of the shepherds. The *povrshi* are here and there under pine forest, while in the valleys are deciduous forests.

In the valleys the underlying schists are often bared. They produce mild forms of relief and by weathering give rise to a layer of soil whence they are under a cover of vegetation. The milder climate of the valleys permits the successful cultivation of fruits and maize. The villages here are not migratory.

THE PANNONIC AND TIMOK BASINS

Between the Alps and the Carpathians is the extensive Pannonic basin, the site of a lake in Neogene times. In the Pontic stage this lake reached its highest level when it covered the lower valleys of the Morava and Sava on the southwest. Stages in the northward retreat of the lake are marked by a succession of steep banks or cliffs and shore terraces. These have been observed throughout the whole region that stretches from the Zlatibor and Stolovi Mountains (near the Ibar River, in southwestern Serbia) right up to the Sava and the Danube. In the valley of the Sava the lacustrine relief has been observed near Zagreb and Karlovats, in Croatia, while in the valley of the Drava it has been found on the eastern rim of Mt. Pohorje.

After the regression of the lake the rivers continued their courses across the dry lacustrine bottom and deepened their valleys. South of the Sava and the Danube the valleys slope towards the north, on which side they are open. The influence of the continental Pannonic climate and vegetation is felt far up the valleys. The valleys have also served as highways for the diffusion of central European culture.

East of the Great Morava, beyond the broad limestone barrier that stretches from the Danube towards the south, lies the basin of the Timok River. It was occupied by an arm of the great Neogene lake of the Ruma-



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

FIG. 3—The limestone country with sink-holes (dolines) to the southeast of Trebinye and Popovo Polje (Rudina in the Dinaric region).

FIG. 4—Cirque of the Kučki Kam (Dinaric region).



nian basin and hence has a terraced relief similar to that of the Pannonic basin. But the bottom of the basin consists for the greater part of volcanic cones.

The Timok basin is somewhat drier than the Pannonic border, since it is farther from the westerly source of rainfall. Opening towards the northeast, it is exposed to a cold wind, the *koshava*. The soil, formed by weathering of the volcanic rocks, is particularly fertile, and the basin itself is increasingly important agriculturally, with pastoral industry on the surrounding



FIG. 5—The confluence of the Sava and Danube (Pannonic region).

mountains. On the limestone barrier separating the Timok from the Morava basin, cattle raising is important.

To the north of the Sava and the Danube lies the broad Pannonic plain, the central portion of the Neogene lake, floored with thick deposits of sand and loam. The *koshava*, which blows here from the southeast, has built up considerable sand dunes, whose direction is southeast-northwest. Such is the case in the Deliblat and Baja-Subotica (Szabadka) sand areas. Here deep wells have to be sunk before water is found. In recent times, however, agriculture has been developed even in these sandy districts.

The lake sediments are for the most part responsible for the material to which the origin of the loess plateaus, both higher and lower, is due. The plateaus themselves are dry, and deep excavations have to be made before water is reached, which lies on impermeable clays. The loess plateaus are under wheat and represent the best wheat-growing districts in the country. The inhabitants are mostly agriculturists, and so the industry is also chiefly agricultural, gristmills being numerous. Agriculture ensures the great density of the population. But the products of agriculture serve also as food for cattle and sheep, and consequently the pastoral industry is progressing.

The large rivers meandering over the Pannonic plain are navigable, whence many towns are situated on their banks. The population of these

places may be engaged in commercial and industrial pursuits, as well as in various mechanical and other crafts, but very often agriculture and fishing are their chief occupations. Hence in many respects the towns resemble the villages. The villages of the plains and the loess plateaus are of a compact type.

Between the Sava and the Drava, hills composed of the older rocks rise from the plain like islands from the sea. Their slopes are covered by forests, which lend themselves to easy exploitation, and on the lower portions are



FIG. 6—A lacustrine platform in the basin of the South Morava (the southern rim of the Pannonic basin).

vine orchards. The Pannonic rim with more varied relief is more varied economically. Wheat is cultivated less, maize more, especially in the valleys. Large areas of forest have been cut down, and agriculture is plainly in the ascendancy.

THE MORAVA-VARDAR REGION

South of the Pannonic border there is in the lower valley of the Morava an extensive region that stretches from the Jastrobac and Zhelyin Mountains towards the south as far as the northern rim of the Salonika plain. It is crossed by the upper Morava and the Vardar almost in a north-south direction and so may be called the Morava-Vardar region.

It is composed of a series of basins or troughs, dropped down between faults. In the Neogene they were occupied by lakes. All the lakes situated in the valley of the Vardar have been dried up or considerably reduced in size. Lacustrine deposits and terraces now remain. The lakes were connected with one another by outlets which were cut down more deeply as the lake waters subsided. The starting point of this lowering was the Vardar River, whence it spread to all the tributaries. Thus today we have basins connected by deep gorges or by cols, the ancient outlets of the lakes. These gorges permit the passage of Mediterranean influences in climate and vegetation from the Salonika plain to the north. In the basins north of the

Shar Planina and the Skopska Crna Gora (Kara Dagh) wheat and maize are cultivated. That is the case also in many of the higher basins south of these two mountains but to the west of the Vardar, for example in the basin of Tetovo. The basins round the Vardar, however, are lower, and the influence of the Mediterranean climate is here prevalent. Instead of wheat and maize we have here tobacco, vine, mulberry, and in marshy places rice.

On the mountainous horsts some forests have been preserved, but as regards man's economy their chief use lies in the broad pastures. Here the shepherds feed their flocks during the summer, at the beginning of winter taking them down into the plain of Salonika.

Population

THE DENSITY OF POPULATION

The density of population corresponds in general with the relief zones, the zones of least density coinciding with regions of greatest altitude, the compactly populated areas corresponding with regions of low relief.

The mountainous Dinaric region, which stretches from Triglav in Slovenia towards the southeast, in which direction it gradually attains its greatest width, is a region of minimum density. Here it is everywhere below 40 to the square kilometer (about 100 to the square mile). In the region of the elevated bilos and poljes the density, as for example in the district of Glamoč, is less than 15, and similarly in the region of the povrshi and brda, in the basins of the Piva and Tara Rivers. The lower bilos and poljes on the southwest, near Livno and Duvno, have a density of 15-25, while the low plateau in northern Dalmatia shows a density of 25-40. These regions are transitional between the poorly peopled bilos and poljes and the thickly populated coast districts. But the lower regions to the northeast of the mountain barriers in the middle courses of the Una, Vrbas, Bosna, and Drina Rivers, transitional in character between mountain and plain, have a greater density (25-40).

The density of population along the coast is greater than 40, in some parts reaching 70. On the Dalmatian islands it averages 55. However, along the coast there are two districts whose density of population is less than the average. Where the escarpments of the Velebit drop sharply to the sea the density is below 40, in places below 25. The other poorly peopled coast district is the marshy area at the mouth of the Neretva, where the density again falls below 40.

The lowlands on the northeastern side of the mountain barrier are also a region of greater density. Densities are similar to those on the coast. In the basin of the Sava the density is over 40 and in some parts reaches 70. In the middle course of the Drava, however, the density is less than it should be in this fertile plain. This is especially the case in the

southeastern corner of Baranja, between the Drava and the Danube. The anomaly can be explained by the existence of many large estates.

The most densely populated areas are in the upper courses of the Sava and the Drava and in the districts that lie between these two rivers. Here the density reaches 100 to the square kilometer (260 to the square mile), in



FIG. 7.—Lake Petrusko on the southeast of Bitoly (Vardar region).

some parts exceeding that number. This is a result not only of highly developed agricultural and pastoral industries but also of mining and manufacturing: here is the richest coal field of the country, and considerable lead and zinc as well as iron ores are found here. The Pannonic plain between the Danube and the Tisa is also thickly populated, averaging somewhat below 100. The same agricultural region stretches east of the Tisa, but the density here is less—below 70 and about 55. This again is to be attributed in part to the number of large estates and in part to the marshy character of the undrained country.

A section cutting transversely across the valleys of the Morava and the Timok shows very clearly the reversed relation between relief and density of population. The hilly regions bordering the valleys of the Morava and the Timok, and particularly the mountain barrier separating these two valleys, are sparsely peopled; the lowlands of the two rivers are more thickly populated. The fertile basin of Nish shows a dense population. The same conditions obtain in the upper courses of the Morava and the Vardar.



where the mountain troughs or basins have a greater density, e. g. the basin of Bitolj (Monastir), over 55, and the Skoplje basin, over 40. The mountain blocks between the basins are much less populated, the density reaching below 40 and even 15.

THE ETHNIC GROUPS²

According to the census of 1921 the total population of the country amounted to 12,017,323. Of this number 9,974,110, or 83 per cent, are Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

The Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were settled in their present lands by about the beginning of the eighth century of our era, having come from the plains east of the Carpathians. It was natural that as an agricultural people they should occupy the lowlands, plains, and basins suitable for agriculture. The earlier inhabitants, on the west the Illyrians, on the east the Thracians, retreated to the mountain regions, in time becoming assimilated and accepting the Slav language. On the west, in the Dinaric region, this process of assimilation went on throughout the Middle Ages. The Prokletije Mountains (North Albanian Alps), stretching from Scutari in a northeastern direction, acted as an effective barrier against the southward progress of the Slavs. The present people of Albania are descendants of the ancient Illyrians. On the southeast, in the basin of the Vardar, there still exist small oases of Arumani, descendants of the ancient Thracians. They inhabit the mountains and are occupied in sheep rearing.

The South Slavs, settled in their present territories, were influenced by contacts with Mediterranean and Central European peoples. The coast population of Dalmatia participated during the Middle Ages in the economical and cultural development of the Mediterranean region as a whole. The people inhabiting the Morava valley on the southeast were open to the influences of the Byzantine civilization, as a result of which the characteristic Slav traits were weakened. Later on, during the Turkish rule, the people lived under the strong pressure of the feudal régime. The more recent cultural influences from Central Europe have contributed towards the material and spiritual progress of the population inhabiting the Pannonic region, especially the Slovenes. But all these cultural influences affected feebly the populations of the mountain districts, especially those of the Dinaric mountain barrier, which separates the coast from the basin of the Sava. Here the population have best preserved their traditions, both local and national, their customs, and language. The characteristic social forms, as for example the *zadrugas* (large kinship groups living under the same roof and cultivating their lands in common), and the tribal communities have also been preserved.

The South Slavs form one ethnic group, the unity of which is shown by the fact that their various dialects gradually pass one into another. With

² See also Jovan Cvijić: *The Geographical Distribution of the Balkan Peoples*, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 5, 1918, pp. 345-361; M. S. Stanojević: *The Ethnography of the Yugo-Slavs*, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 7, 1919, pp. 91-97.

the exception of the Slovenes on the northwest, the Croats and Serbs have practically a single spoken and literary language. The only difference lies in the use of the prevailing Latin alphabet on the west and the Cyrillic, derived from the Greek, on the east.

The other nationalities within the Kingdom comprise less than a fifth of the total population. Among these the Germans, Hungarians, and Rumanians live on the north and northeast, the Albanians and Turks on the southwest and southeast. The Germans and Hungarians settled in these parts mainly in the eighteenth century at the instigation of and supported by the Austro-Hungarian government. The Rumanians came down into the plain from the Banat Mountains, but many Rumanians immigrated here at the end of the eighteenth century from the present Kingdom of Rumania, where an oppressive feudal system then prevailed. Southeastern Jugoslavia was invaded by Albanians at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when these parts were abandoned by the Serbs, who fled from the Turkish yoke and in two great northward migrations crossed the Sava and the Danube. During the long Turkish rule many Turks settled in the Vardar valley, which served as an important route for traffic to the north.

THE RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The distribution of religions does not coincide with the distribution of peoples, but the geographic influences are evident. The Eastern Orthodox faith, coming from the Byzantine Empire on the east, occupies most of the regions to the south of the Sava and the Danube. On the east, as a result of the Serb migrations, it has extended well into the region on the left bank of the Danube, while on the west it has not reached the basin of the upper Sava. Out of the total number of the population 5,648,000, or 47 per cent, belong to the Eastern Orthodox faith. This faith is professed mainly by the Serbs and the Rumanians.

The Roman Catholic population is compact in the basins of the upper Sava and the Drava and next is well represented in the Pannonic plain. It is also strongly represented on the west in the coastal districts, whence it penetrated eastward. There are 4,687,000 Roman Catholics, or 39 per cent of the population. The faith is professed by Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, and Hungarians.

The Mohammedans include, beside the true Turks settled along the Vardar, a considerable proportion of Albanians and Serbs. The latter were Islamized during the Turkish rule. Mohammedanism is strongest in the districts which up to 1912 belonged to Turkey, and especially in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Thus there are two Mohammedan groups, the southeastern and the southwestern. The latter group shows the most northerly Mohammedan influences existing today in Europe. The Mohammedans number 1,322,000, or 11 per cent. The Evangelists are mainly the German immigrants.

The Administrative Divisions

In the administrative divisions as at present constituted strong religious and political party influences can be discerned. The Mohammedans of Bosnia and Hercegovina, nearly all of whom form a single political party founded solely upon religious grounds, have succeeded in embodying a clause in the Constitution according to which the former departments of Bosnia and Hercegovina become regions, and the combination of the various parts of the Bosno-Hercegovinian regions, whether within the boundaries of Bosnia and Hercegovina or beyond them, has been made very difficult. Thus the numerical relations between the Mohammedans and Eastern Orthodox in these regions have remained the same. Within the boundaries of the former Kingdom of Serbia the former administrative units have been largely retained by political influence. Although Article 95 of the Constitution provides that attention shall be paid to natural and economic conditions in subdivision of the country into regions, these have in fact been ignored.

On the west of the Kingdom, as already described, the coasts and their hinterland largely complement each other economically. This has naturally led to the interchange of products, though, because of the great barrier presented by the Dinaric Alps, commercial movement developed tardily—to the great disadvantage of both the coastal and inland populations. Such being the case it is particularly unfortunate that any man-made barrier should be allowed to intervene. Where coast and inland districts form an economic whole they should also be an administrative whole.

For instance, it seems most disadvantageous that the two coastal regions, those of Split and Dubrovnik, should comprise only the narrow strip of littoral. The Split region would benefit economically by the addition of a large part of the bilos and poljes of karstic Bosnia. These poljes are in active economic relations with coasts of Split and Šibenik, their exports going chiefly through these harbors, especially Split. On the other hand this part of karstic Bosnia has practically no connection at all with Travnik, now the central town of the region. The case of the Dubrovnik region is still more unnatural as it now consists of only a very narrow coastal strip. It should make one compact district with the Humina region of Hercegovina.

Apropos of the situation of Šabac on the lower Sava and of Belgrade at the confluence of the Sava and the Danube, Norbert Krebs remarked, "How much more active the traffic on both rivers [Sava and Danube] would be, how much more rapidly the towns on their banks would grow, if the rivers were not at the same time the frontiers."⁴ And in another passage, having traveled across Serbia in 1916 at the request of and with the assistance of the Vienna Geographical Society and the Vienna Academy, he reiterates the same opinion.⁵ In the first-mentioned work (p. 697)

⁴ Norbert Krebs: *Serbien und der serbische Kriegsschauplatz*, *Geogr. Zeitschr.*, Vol. 20, 1914, pp. 689-701; reference on p. 697.

⁵ Norbert Krebs: *Beiträge zur Geographie Serbiens und Rasclous*, Stuttgart, 1922, p. 20. Reviewed in this number of the *Geographical Review*.

Krebs points out how the small towns of Focha, Gorazde, and Vishegrad in the Drina valley "are in a better position to make use of their region from a transport point of view," because the frontier between Austria-Hungary and Serbia did not in this case follow the Drina, "than the places situated on the middle and lower Drina," where the frontier follows the same river. As the political frontiers on the lower Drina and Sava, as well as on the Danube, have now been abolished it means that the towns on these rivers will be fully able to carry out their natural functions, becoming transport centers for districts on both banks of the rivers. When the districts on either side of a river have one and the same economic center and compose a complete transport system they should constitute an administrative whole. But by the new administrative division this has been effected only in the case of Belgrade and the Danubian region. The river Drina, for instance, has continued its old rôle as a boundary between the counties of Bosnia and those of Serbia, while the Sava separates the regions of Bosnia and those of Slavonia. The towns along the Drina and the Sava are economic centers for the population living on both banks of the rivers, but they are not also their administrative centers. Such examples occur also on the Danube, Vrbas, Bosna, Morava, and Vardar.

Geographers have long urged the revision of administrative units with reference to geographical and economic factors, but such reforms come slowly. In the case of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes we must admit that religion and party politics have still proved the decisive factors in the new subdivisions of the country.

