

<https://doi.org/10.18778/2084-140X.12.20>

## THE MOBILITY OF SERBS IN EARLY MODERN TIMES SOME REMARKS ON THE MARGINS OF ILONA CZAMAŃSKA'S NEW HISTORY OF SERBIA

ILONA CZAMAŃSKA, *Historia Serbii. Od pojawienia się Serbów na Bałkanach do 1830 roku [History of Serbia. From the Arrival of the Serbs in the Balkans to 1830]*, vol. I, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2021 [= Biblioteka Europy Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej], pp. 280\*.

In 2021 a long-awaited monograph devoted to the history of Serbia from its beginnings to 1830 appeared on the Polish publishing market<sup>1</sup>. Its author, Ilona Czamańska<sup>2</sup>, set herself a challenging goal of presenting the “real and not mythical” (p. 7) situation of the Serbs over the centuries. The presentation of the history of this South Slavic nation seems justified; until now, no Polish-language publication discussed *in extenso* the position of the Serbian population in various eras, and it has been almost four decades since the last edition of the monograph *Historia Jugosławii* by the doyens of Polish historiography Waclaw

Felczak and Tadeusz Wasilewski<sup>3</sup>. A synthetic study of national history requires the author not only to introduce the facts correctly, but also to take into account the latest historiographical findings.

The reviewed work has a chronological and problem-based structure, which is the most appropriate system for this type of study. It consists of fifteen segments of different lengths, depending on the analyzed issue. The author begins her narrative by describing the beginnings of Serbian statehood in the 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this context, she rightly refers to the Byzantine account of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, which is one of the earliest descriptions of the Serbian presence in the Balkans<sup>4</sup>. I. Czamańska thus introduces the reader to Zagorje Serbia, Duklja and Zeta.

Subsequent parts of *Historia Serbii* focus on a detailed recounting of the origins and causes of the collapse of the Nemanjić state (pp. 29–116). The author provides thorough profiles of such figures as Stefan Nemanja (St. Simeon),

\* This text was created as part of the project financed from the funds of the National Science Centre, Poland, granted under decision no. DEC-2019/32/C/HS2/00452 (*Cultural implications of the migrations of Serbs in the early modern era*).

<sup>1</sup> The introductory section of the monograph announces a second volume on the history of Serbia since 1830, whose author will be Jędrzej Paszkiewicz (p. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Ilona Czamańska is a renowned scholar of medieval and early modern history of Central and South-eastern Europe. Her most important works include *Moldawia i Wołoszczyzna wobec Polski, Węgier i Turcji w XIV i XV wieku*, Poznań 1996; *Drakula. Wampir, tyran czy bohater?*, Poznań 2003; and *Wiśniowieccy. Monografia rodu*, Poznań 2007. In 1998, her translation of *Latopis Ziemi Moldawskiej* by Miron COSTIN (1633–1691) was published.

<sup>3</sup> W. FELCZAK, T. WASILEWSKI, *Historia Jugosławii*, Wrocław 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. KONSTANTYN PORFIROGENETA, *O rządzeniu państwem*, [in:] *TNDS.SG*, vol. III, ed. A. BRZÓSTKOWSKA, W. SWOBODA, Warszawa 1995, p. 426–477; P. KOMATINA, *Konstantin Porfirogenit i rana istorija Južnih Slovena*, Beograd 2021, *passim*.

Vukan, Stefan the First-Crowned, and Rastko (St. Sava)<sup>5</sup>. In her reflections, she pays particular attention to the role of *zdužbinas* (foundations – places of eternal rest and prayers for the soul of the ruler), which were vital to preserving awareness of Serbian statehood at a time when Serbia lost its independence.

Moreover, I. Czamańska characterized one of the most prominent medieval Serbian rulers, namely Stefan Dušan (pp. 64–71). She highlighted many aspects of his reign, beginning with the struggle for the throne, through the wars waged (with Hungary and Byzantium) and the imperial coronation, and ending with his legislative activities. Devoting considerable space to this ruler seems well-founded because it was during his reign that the Serbian state was at the height of its power. After his death (1355), Serbia fell into a political crisis, while increasingly frequent Turkish incursions into the Balkans led to significant territorial losses. The culmination in Serbian-Turkish relations was the Battle of Kosovo Field (1389), which – as the author of the reviewed book rightly notes – *led to a complete change in the political forces in the Balkans* (p. 115), and in Serbia, to shifts at the top of power.

While the scholarly literature on the medieval history of Serbia is satisfactory, the same cannot be said of the early modern period, which is marginalized not only in Polish, but also in general historiography. This state of affairs probably stems from the difficulties faced by any researcher exploring the history of a population that lost its statehood, as was the case with the Serbs in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The South Slavic lands came under Ottoman domination, and it is the sources of this provenance that offer the most information about the Serbs at that time. From a reliable researcher, this requires not only knowledge of the realities of High Porte, but also the ability to decipher Ottoman sources.

The author of *Historia Serbii* therefore tries to put the fate of the Serbian population into the general context of the functioning of non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire. For

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. SZEFLIŃSKI, *Trzy oblicza Sawy Nemanjicia. Postać historyczna – autokreacja – postać literacka*, Łódź 2016.

this reason, she familiarizes the reader with the Ottoman administrative, legal and fiscal system (pp. 170–173). She makes an effort to describe the complexity of the concept of *millet* and ties it to Serbian realities. Additionally, she demonstrates the role played by the Serbian Orthodox Church during this period. This is because in 1557, the Patriarchate of Peć was revived, and its head was the official representative of the entire Serbian community in the Ottoman state. The patriarch was therefore not only a spiritual leader, but also possessed powers characteristic of secular authority. In each case, the scope of the rights and duties of the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church was regulated by the *berat*. In her book, Czamańska mentions one such document, issued to Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta (1698–1748). She also points out that annual fiscal burdens during the reign of this patriarch amounted to 70,000 aspers<sup>6</sup> and continued to grow (p. 174). However, research by the Serbian historian N. Šuletić challenges her findings. According to him, until 1690, the patriarch had been obliged to contribute 100,000 aspers to the central treasury, and due to the economic crisis of the Patriarchate of Peć from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this sum was reduced, and in the time of Arsenije IV, it totaled what the author of *Historia Serbii* reported<sup>7</sup>.

An important contribution of Czamańska's work to Polish historiography is the attention paid to the mobility of the Serbian population throughout history, with a special focus on the events of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the foreword, we read that *the Serbs are a nation [...] which on many occasions had to leave their land: individually, in groups, tribes and sometimes almost as an entire population* (p. 9).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ferman sultana Mahmuda, sina sultana Mustafehana, srbskom patrijarhu Arseniju od godine turske 1143, a posle Hrista 1731*, GDSS 11, 1859, p. 181–182; *Turski dokumenti za istoriju Srpske pravoslavne crkve. Fond Gliše Elezovića*, ed. Lj. ČOLIĆ, Priština 1996, p. 47–48; *Jugoslovenske zemlje pod turskom vlašću (do kraja XVIII vijeka). Izabrani izvori*, ed. B. ĐURĐEV, M. VASTIĆ, Istočno Sarajevo 2005, p. 168–172.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. N. ŠULETIĆ, *Berat patrijarha Kalinika I, ZMSI 83*, 2011, p. 97–104; *idem*, *Poreske obaveze Pečke patrijaršije u vreme patrijarha Kalinika I (1691–1710)*, ZMSI 88, 2013, p. 9–23.

The relocation of Serbian political and cultural centers to lands north of the Sava and Danube was linked to the Ottoman expansion and subsequent reprisals against the Serbian population by Ottoman authorities<sup>8</sup>.

In the early modern era, three major migratory waves of the Serbian ethnoscapes can be distinguished. The first two were related to the wars (1683–1699 and 1737–1739) fought between the Christian states – mainly the Habsburg monarchy and Venice – and the Ottoman Empire. I. Czamańska especially concentrated on the first migration (pp. 178–182), which is known in historiography as the Great Exodus of Serbs (Serbian: *Velika Seoba Srba*). This event was triggered by the collapse of the Balkan front and the Austrian army having to withdraw from the areas inhabited by the Serbian population, which – along with its Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević – actively supported the Christian troops. The Serbs, fearing retribution from the Ottomans, decided to flee north, initially to the vicinity of Belgrade, and after it was captured by the Turks, they migrated further into the lands of the Habsburg monarchy, reaching Buda, Szentendre, and even Komárno. They enjoyed certain privileges extended to them by Emperor Leopold I. At this point, however, it ought to be noted that the author's discussion of the documents issued by Leopold I is not exhaustive. Essentially, Czamańska presented the most important one from 1690, entirely omitting those from 1691 and 1695<sup>9</sup>. The author of *Historia Serbii* also offered an approximate number of participants in the Great Serbian Exodus, which she believed was 40,000 to 70,000 people (p. 181). As she aptly noted, due to insufficient source material documenting the mobility of Serbs in late 1689 and early 1690, the figures given above should be considered only as an estimate.

In the book, the second migration of the Serbian community is also thoroughly discussed

(pp. 187–189). The author drew attention to the role Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta and his brother-in-law Atanasije Rašković played in these events. What was missing, however, was a clear statement that the second *seoba* was of smaller proportions compared to the first, and that the Serbian exodus took place at specific intervals during the war of 1737–1739. Nonetheless, Czamańska touched on a very important problem that is marginalized by many researchers, namely the social structure and organization of the Serbs during this period. It had an ancestral-tribal character, which translated into the specifics of this population's displacement. As a result, entire families (e.g., the Arbanasi, Klimenti) rather than individuals migrated from vulnerable areas. In this part of *Historia Serbii*, the author acquaints the reader with the Military Commander of the Kingdom of Serbia (German: *Militärkommandantur des Königreich Serbien*), which was of great importance, despite being an Austrian administrative ephemera (1718–1739). It was then that Serbs entered the orbit of the modern state and economic apparatus.

The third wave of migration involved several thousand Serbs who emigrated from the Habsburg monarchy to Russia in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the reconstruction of the Military Frontier, which greatly diminished the privileges of the Serbian population living in the area. This migration destination was also influenced by the idealized image of Russia, which from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had sought to present itself as the protector of the South Slavic Orthodox population living in both the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy. With this aspect in mind, Czamańska's outline of the broader context of Russian-Serbian relations is even more valuable. And although Serbs in Russia settled in two provinces – New Serbia and Slavonoserbia – they underwent complete assimilation there. Consequently, it is hard to concur with the author's statement that *their descendants still live in the areas where they settled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century* (p. 191). This is contradicted, for example, by the case of the Piščević family. Simeon Piščević (1731–1797), a representative of the first generation to resettle in Russia, was aware of his ethnic identity,

<sup>8</sup> For more on Serbian cultural centers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see M. FIN, *Centri srpske kulture XVIII veka*, Novi Sad 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. RADONIĆ, M. KOSTIĆ, *Srpske privilegije od 1690 do 1792*, Beograd 1954; D. DAVIDOV, *Srpske privilegije carskog doma habzburškog*, Novi Sad–Beograd 1994.

while his son Aleksandar Piščević (1764–1805) felt fully Russian<sup>10</sup>.

In an attempt to present the beginnings of the modern Serbian state, I. Czamańska synthesized two important events: the Karadorda Uprising (1804–1813) and the Second Serbian Uprising (1815–1817) (pp. 209–222). The author showed the complexity of these national liberation uprisings, as well as the rivalry between Đorđ Karadord and Miloš Obrenović.

The qualities of the reviewed book are indisputable. These include, first of all, an extremely clear and accessible narrative, but also a number of peritextual elements, such as illustrations (over a hundred photographs), numerous maps, simplified genealogical tables, and the author's use of rich and multilingual literature on the subject (mainly Serbian and Polish). Additionally, the organized subject indexes (people, geographical names, researchers) certainly make it easier to navigate through *Historia Serbii*. It is my reviewer's duty, however, to point out that the captions for photographs no. 85 and 86 are incorrect; illustration no. 85 features Dositej Obradović, while illustration no. 86 shows Sava Tekelija.

As intended by the author, the book can be recommended to a wide range of readers interested in the history of the Balkans (p. 7). Undoubtedly, it will also find use in university didactics as important, if not compulsory, reading for Slavic studies and history majors.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. PIŠČEVIĆ, *Memoari*, Beograd 1963; A. PIŠČEVIĆ, *Moj život. Uspomene*, Novi Sad 2004.

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