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European Borders in Serbian History

Abstract: This paper looks at the typology of borders which have traversed the Balkan lands for centuries. They have been diverse – geographical, political, economic, ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural. As a result of their length of duration, consequences and importance, they led to phenomena which can hardly be fully appreciated. Serbs lived along those borders, be they already existing or created over time. This research is focused on two borders. The *one* created by the division of the Roman Empire (395) and strengthened by the schism of Christianity (1054), and the *other*, completely different, created by the Ottoman conquest of the Balkan lands in the fifteenth century. Local Balkan borders, on the other hand, have never acquired a broader significance in the culture of this region.

Keywords: Roman Empire, Serbs, Ottoman Turks

When medievalists venture to take part in a conference devoted to more recent historical events, then they clearly are dealing with phenomena of long *durée* which passed through a medieval phase and continued into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and through to the present. Migrations are a big theme of European and Serbian history. Europe itself is the product of migrations. It is common knowledge today that there practically is no people that did not migrate to the area it now inhabits and no people that remained unchanged in the process. As a social phenomenon, migrations involve many aspects – a set of causes, changes brought about by the abandonment of a particular territory, transformations of the social community on the move itself, changes in the economic, political, cultural and geographical setting it comes to settle in. Some borders are given up, others are acquired, not without huge consequences, of course. Many phenomena are reflected there. From that aggregate of immensely important elements, I would like to single out the concept of “border”, focusing on just one part of that broad complex.

It is well known that borders are diverse – geographical, political, ethnic, economic, cultural, linguistic etc. The list can hardly be exhausted. The memory of the Great Migration of 1690, when Serbs, fleeing from the threat of Ottoman reprisals, left the Balkans, i.e., crossed a major European border, inspired me to look back into the past in search of major borders that had an impact on the history of the Serbs. In order for the subject of this research to

be defined more clearly, it should be noted that only *one type* of borders will be discussed here, those that came into existence independently of the historical development of the Serbian people but powerfully influenced its course. Those are the previously existing or newly-created borders, however the “border” may be construed geographically – as a line of demarcation or a particular zone. The medieval notion of borders was very different from today’s. In earlier medieval periods in particular, it usually referred to a belt of land, an area of separation, whenever it was possible.

This inquiry, in order for it to remain valid, has its chronological framework – it deals with the medieval period but, in view of Serbian history, the period is understood more broadly: it covers a good part of the sixteenth century as well. I would call attention to major European borders cut into the history of the Serbs. Some of them take us to Szentendre/Sentandreja, Hungary. I would like to remind of some known facts so as to be able to add some new ones.

The major borders in the area in which Serbian history unfolded were determined by its geography. Seacoasts – the Adriatic and the Aegean – and the Danube Valley (*Podunavlje*) constitute the undisputable frame of the Balkan areas in a part of which the Serbs were building their state. They themselves pushed across the Danube border of the Eastern Roman Empire while arriving.

The borders of the Serbian state changed over time. They expanded or shrank according to circumstances. But they never became “European”, established enough and meaningful enough to a broader region to be able to change the picture of South-East Europe. This goes for the other Balkan peoples, too. For example, the Serbo-Bulgarian political border, very shifting in the pre-Ottoman period, left no lasting consequences. In the ninth century, it was in the area of Ras (present-day Novi Pazar), according to Constantine Porphyrogenitus.¹ Later, in the reign of the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon in the tenth century, it moved far beyond that area and in subsequent periods the two states bordered one another in the Morava River Valley (*Pomoravlje*) or in eastern Serbia.² However dramatic changes to this border may have been in some periods, they did not change the overall situation to the point of being considered important on a European scale. It is noticeable that the political border between Serbia and Bulgaria as a rule did not coincide with the language barrier that separated the two peoples.³ After all, both peoples grew to maturity in the same cultural orbit, Byzantine and Christian Orthodox.

¹ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, Eng. transl. R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington D.C. 1967), 154.

² *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. I, 152–162 (S. Ćirković); 453, 545, 575 (Belgrade 1981).

³ P. Ivić, *Srpski narod i njegov jezik* (Belgrade 1971), 18–24.

In contrast to this type of border stand major European demarcation lines in the Balkan Peninsula. Some of them very old. In the late Roman Empire, ever more frequent divisions changed the boundaries of administrative units. The turbulent events of the fourth century first led to the creation and then to the division of the Prefecture of Illyricum. More lasting than the rest was the division introduced shortly before the death of Emperor Theodosius (395). His eldest son Arcadius was given control of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, in which two dioceses, Dacia and Macedonia, formed the Prefecture of Illyricum, while the Diocese of Pannonia was incorporated into the western half of the Empire as part of its central prefecture.⁴ The Roman Empire outlasted this division for some time although its unity was increasingly challenged by many internal difficulties further aggravated by the invasion of Germanic and other peoples. With time, the crack left behind by Emperor Theodosius took on the meaning of a rift. The fate of the eastern half of the Empire, tied to the imperial court in Constantinople, increasingly diverged from that of the western half. The fifth century marked a decisive moment in that process. The Western Roman Empire succumbed under the pressure of Germanic peoples, while the Eastern Roman Empire survived despite serious challenges it faced. Although Theodosius's border had lost all meaning by the early middle ages, especially with Slavic settlement, it became built into the European perception of the Balkan cultural area through Roman tradition. It can be found in all types of historical literature, in synthetic overviews of the past, in textbooks, in historical maps, in encyclopaedias, briefly, in all works the educated people of Europe relied on for building their understanding of their own history.⁵ Looked at from afar, this border has been drawn quite vaguely along the line that starts roughly at Sirmium and runs through the central part of the former Yugoslavia to the Gulf of Kotor.⁶

The Byzantine Empire, which grew in the territory and tradition of the Eastern Roman Empire, inherited much from the previous period. The Serbian state, which gradually developed in its territory, thus found itself in an area invisibly divided into the eastern and western halves of the former Roman Empire.

⁴ E. Stein, *Geschichte des spätrömischen Reiches*, vol. I : *Vom römischen zum byzantinischen Staate (284–476)* (Vienna 1928), 353; E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'Empire romain (395–410)* (Paris 1951), 142ff; J. R. Palanque, "La préfecture du prétoire d'Illyricum au IV^e siècle", *Byzantion* 21 (1951), 5–14; V. Grumel, "L'Illyricum de la mort de Valentinien I^{er} (375) à la mort de Stilicon (408)", *Revue des études byzantines* 9 (1951), 5–46; P. Lemerle, "Invasions et migrations dans les Balkans depuis la fin de l'époque romaine jusqu'au VIII^e siècle", *Revue historique* 211 (1954), 265–273.

⁵ R. Folz et al., *De l'Antiquité au monde médiéval* (Paris 1971), 44–45; *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. I: *The Christian Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1975), with maps; G. Duby, *Atlas historique* (Larousse 1978), esp. 27–28.

⁶ K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, vol. I (Belgrade 1952), 27.

It developed in the western borderland of the Eastern Roman Empire and the eastern borderland of the Western Roman Empire. Belonging to the space of both, Serbia found itself at the dangerous crossroads of medieval civilizations.

It is not unimportant to note that Theodosius's dividing line did not coincide with the line separating the Hellenic and Latin worlds in the Balkans. The latter ran from the city of Lezha, Albania, on the Adriatic coast and across northern Macedonia towards Sofia, which remained in the Greek zone, and then across northern Bulgaria towards the Black Sea.⁷ In other words, those are two different borders, however closely they may be defined, more of a transition zone than a clear-cut line. Although one should be seen as more important by its effects, the other, Theodosius's border, albeit initially temporary, became permanently entrenched in the European mindset. This is exactly where its importance lies. It emerges as a major subject of academic interest, because it imposes the principle of Roman divisions on the fundamentally different circumstances of later Balkan history.

Theodosius's border, however, is usually associated with the line of ecclesiastical demarcation (1054) between the western, Roman Catholic, and the eastern, Orthodox parts. This creates a historically erroneous impression that there was in the middle ages a fateful border between East and West stretching from Sirmium to the Gulf of Kotor. Facts, however, reveal a different picture. Demarcations in the middle ages ran along different lines.

In the early eleventh century the Byzantine Empire fought large-scale wars and re-established control over the Balkan Peninsula, including, among other areas, all Serbian lands and most of Dalmatia.⁸ Emperor Basil II championed the unity of state and church interests and in 1024 offered the Pope to start negotiations about demarcation between the Byzantine and Latin Churches. Patriarch of Constantinople Eustathius proposed, through an embassy to Pope John XIX, that Constantinople retain under its jurisdiction all that there was within the Byzantine state borders, and that Rome get all of the West. The negotiations failed, mostly under the pressure of increasingly influential monastic communities in Italy and France.⁹ What could not be achieved by mutual agree-

⁷ K. Jireček, "Romani u gradovima Dalmacije tokom srednjega veka", *Zbornik Konstantina Jirečeka*, vol. II (Belgrade 1962), 16–17; V. Popović, in *Villes et peuplement dans l'Illyricum protobyzantin* (Rome 1984), 208–209.

⁸ G. Ostrogorski, *Istorija Vizantije* (Belgrade 1959), 296 and map on pp. 288–289; J. Ferluga, *Vizantijska uprava u Dalmaciji* (Belgrade 1957), 93–95.

⁹ V. Grumel, *Les registres des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. II (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1936), 245; V. Grumel, "Les préliminaires du schisme de Michel Cérulaire ou la question romaine avant 1054", *Revue des études byzantines* 10 (1962), 17–19; J. Kalić, "Crkvene prilike u srpskim zemljama do stvaranja Arhiepiskopije 1219. godine", in *Sava Nemanjić – Sv. Sava* (Belgrade 1979), 44–45.

ment ended in the schism of the Christian world in 1054, but under much more unfavourable circumstances for the Byzantine side, because the Empire was in a deep crisis. In the West, by contrast, the papacy was on the rise owing to, among other things, large-scale reforms within the Catholic Church. This rise reached its peak under Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085). He established a system of vassal states under papal suzerainty. One of them was Croatia.

If we look for the boundary marking this schism in the Balkans, we can observe, however, that in reality there was not *only one boundary*. There was in the middle ages an area under papal jurisdiction, i.e. under the administration of Roman Catholic bishops, in coastal cities (Split, Dubrovnik, Bar). The borders of their dioceses changed according to circumstances. On the other hand, there were territories covered by the Byzantine ecclesiastical organization with its bishoprics in Sirmium, Ras and Prizren on the Empire's western border.¹⁰ The subsequently founded Serbian autocephalous Church (1219) fully negated any border that would have run from Sirmium to the Gulf of Kotor.

In other words, the division into the Roman Catholic and Orthodox worlds, and, in this case, cultural orbits, knows not of a single boundary line. Life in the middle ages followed a different course. There were large zones of mutual influence and interaction. The entire hinterland of the Adriatic Sea, all the way to the Sava River, Ras and Prizren, was open to influences coming in various ways. There is an abundance of evidence for the presence of diverse cultural traditions, occurring in succession and in combination. Here is a relatively recent example, not far from the medieval monastery of Sopoćani: a Byzantine-Serbian fortress of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was excavated as well as a late medieval settlement around it whose layout follows the coastal urban tradition (a regular pattern of stone houses, a piazza etc.), and whose inhabitants were Serbs, churches Orthodox and inscriptions Cyrillic.¹¹

A quite different border was carved by the Ottomans. Another major civilizational border on Serbian soil. From 1371 on, it constantly changed and moved, with tremendous consequences. If looked at from the European perspective, the chronological boundaries of its genesis seem different from those widely accepted in historiography. The prevailing view in Serbian historiography is that the 1371 Battle of Maritsa was decisive in the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans. As far as the history of the Byzantine Empire and the directly affected regions is concerned, this is certainly true. But it was only the 1389 Bat-

¹⁰ I. Božić et al., *Istorija Jugoslavije* (Belgrade 1972), 42 (S. Ćirković),

¹¹ J. Kovačević i saradnici, "Istraživanje kompleksa Rasa 1971–1972", *Zbornik Istorijaskog muzeja Srbije* 10 (1973), 3–15; M. Popović, "Nalazi novca kralja Radoslava na utvrđenju Gradina u Rasu", *Novopazarški zbornik* 1 (1977), 37–54; V. Jovanović, D. Minić and S. Ercegović-Pavlović, "Nekropole srednjovekovnog Trgovišta", *Novopazarški zbornik* 14 (1990), 19–43, with earlier literature.

tle of Kosovo and, particularly, its consequences that caused serious larger-scale turbulences. As early as 1390 the Ottomans reached two “European” borders in the Balkans – they penetrated into the Danube Valley and the hinterland of the Adriatic coastal cities. They attacked Golubac,¹² engaged Hungarian forces, and caused alarm and fear in Dubrovnik. As early as 1390, and thereafter ever more frequently, the Dubrovnik government discussed the acceptance of refugees, accommodating them, whenever possible, in Pelješac and Ston.¹³ The Ottoman problem ceased being only a Balkan and Byzantine one, it spilt over the boundaries of the Orthodox world. The West was directly threatened, and not only its economic interests in the Levant but also at the door to its own living space. It was only then that a serious anti-Ottoman policy began to take shape, with Hungary under Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387–1437) as its leading figure. From 1411 he was also the elected Romano-German King, and from 1433 Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

The post-Kosovo situation in Serbia meant that the Ottomans had a free road towards the Danube. There was no one left to stop their advancement. This forced Hungary to make a radical political shift. A crusade against the Ottomans was mounted, the first fought on European soil and the last of that scale. In 1396 aristocratic armies from France, Burgundy, Germany, Italy, Poland and Hungary were routed at Nicopolis, on the right side of the Danube, in Bulgaria. Only seven years after the heavy losses sustained by the Serbian armies at Kosovo, European knights themselves were decimated on the Danube. Ottoman units broke through into Srem (Syrmia) and the Banat.¹⁴ Europe abandoned the idea of crusading and for nearly half a century there was no such undertakings (1396–1443). Lonely and endangered, Hungary turned to Serbia in search of an ally. Under these changed circumstances, the Serbian ruler, Despot Stefan Lazarević, believed he saw a way out of the bondage into which, as he said himself, he had fallen after the Battle of Kosovo.¹⁵ He swore allegiance as vassal to King Sigismund (in early 1404 at the latest) and began fighting against the Ottomans, as King Sigismund reported, not without appreciation.¹⁶ This coincided with a period of internal crisis of the Ottoman state.

¹² S. Ćirković, *Golubac u srednjem veku* (Požarevac 1968), 9–11.

¹³ V. Ćorović, *Historija Bosne* (Belgrade 1940), 332–333; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku* (Belgrade 1952), 10.

¹⁴ Cf. more recent S. Runciman, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Munich 1983), 1234–1241; Lj. Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi* (Sremski Karlovci 1927), 113.

¹⁵ Konstantin Filozof, “Život Stefana Lazarevića”, ed. V. Jagić, *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 42 (1875), 272.

¹⁶ M. Dinić, “Pismo ugarskog kralja Zigmunda burgundskom vojvodi Filipu”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke* 13–14 (1956), 93–98.

The early fifteenth century saw the consolidation of a new border in the Balkans. This in fact was a wide belt made up of Hungary's vassal states which stretched from the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea via Bosnia and Serbia.¹⁷ In this borderland zone, both Hungary and Turkey defended their interests. A Eurasian border, but Serbian battlefields.

But Stefan Lazarević's frequent allying with Sigismund of Luxemburg had a deeper significance and considerable consequences. It was then that the border in the Danube Valley was opened for the first time. The war fought as early as the time of Stefan's father, Prince Lazar, and even more intensely after his death, died down. By concluding an agreement with King Sigismund, Despot Stefan made it possible for his subjects in Belgrade to move freely across Central Europe. Serbs enjoyed not only the freedom of movement in Hungary but also considerable economic privileges.¹⁸ This new situation is known mostly from the history of Belgrade. It can only be understood if looked at as part of a broader development – rapprochement between the two neighbouring countries. Citizens of Belgrade now travelled to Hungary and other nearby lands not clandestinely but with their own identity documents ("a sealed letter"), as recorded by a contemporary.¹⁹

Even today, when we think of Serbian migrations towards Central Europe, we should take into account these movements as well, which were the result of the agreement reached by the two rulers. There is no doubt that they helped the two milieus get to know one another.

Serbian migrations had begun earlier, towards the end of the fourteenth century at the latest. The scale of that process remains unknown. Among more prominent émigrés were the sons of King Vukašin (Mrnjavčević), DMITAR and Andrejaš, who found refuge and service in Hungary.²⁰ If the number of such cases can no longer be determined, the implication is clear – Serbian society was dividing, some left, some stayed. Of course, peacetime migrations are very different from wartime ones, when they are a matter of life and death. The set of changes involved in the former includes all regulated forms of movement, of settlement even, frequently serving to meet the military needs of Hungary and Turkey. At any rate, the migrations that were taking place during the existence of the Serbian state (until 1459) were considerably different from those that would take place later, under Ottoman rule.

¹⁷ *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. II (Belgrade 1982), 52 (S. Ćirković).

¹⁸ J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku* (Belgrade 1967), 85–87.

¹⁹ Konstantin Filozof, "Život", 287–288.

²⁰ S. Ćirković, "Poklad kralja Vukašina", *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta XIV-1* (1979), 153–163.

In the reign of Despot Stefan Lazarević (until 1427), and partly of his successor, Djuradj Branković, Serbs had other incentives to move to Central Europe. It is well known that Despot Stefan had huge estates in Hungary, in the counties of Szatmar, Saros, Szabolcz, Bihar and Torontal, and also in southern Hungary. In his service there, there were also Serbs. Their number cannot be established because our sources are quite patchy. The estates undoubtedly were rich (mines, marketplaces etc.), which would have been attractive to people from Serbia. At any rate, the Despot's Hungarian policy was lastingly focused on maintaining strong ties with Hungary. Not at all by chance, Stefan Lazarević was the first Serbian ruler who had a residence outside Serbia, in Buda. It was situated in the very heart of the capital city, not far from the cathedral, in Italian Street (today 9, Orszaghaz utca). The beautiful building in the late-Gothic style, with sumptuous niches and a large reception hall on the upper floor, still stands, in a somewhat altered form.²¹

In other words, there were in the early fifteenth century favourable circumstances for individuals to leave for Hungary in various ways. Sources mention one hundred horsemen escorting Despot Stefan on one occasion.²² People were leaving drawn by the prospect of serving on his estates, or by commercial interests, or for any other reason. Hungary was no longer an uncharted land. The Despot's era made Hungary more familiar to Serbia. Cultural interaction was productive. The excavated remains of the Despot's destroyed palace in Belgrade reveal Central European influences in many details, including late-Gothic stove tiles with Western-style heraldic symbols, with symbols of the Order of the Dragon, whose member the Despot himself was, objects crafted in the best Hungarian court workshops, luxury goods imported from Danubian markets. All of this is a telling sign of a period of open borders and the European tastes of Serbian customers.²³ The residence of the Metropolitan of Belgrade with its Gothic arches and decoration belongs to the same cultural orbit. The appearance of the medieval Orthodox cathedral, situated in the so-called Lower Town of Belgrade Fortress, will regrettably remain known only in general outline. It was blown up and completely destroyed by the Austrians in 1717.²⁴

²¹ J. Kalić, "Palata srpskih despota u Budimu", *Zograf* 6 (1975), 51–58.

²² T. Ortway, *Oklevelek Temesvármegye és Temesvárvarós története* (Pozsony 1896); S. Ćirković, *Istorija bosanske srednjovekovne države* (Belgrade 1964), 240; M. Purković, *Knez i despot Stefan Lazarević* (Belgrade 1978), 101.

²³ M. Bajalović-Hadži Pešić, "Ugarski pećnjaci u beogradskom srednjovekovnom dvoru", *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 23 (1976), 19–33; M. Bajalović-Hadži Pešić, *Srednjovekovnim Beogradu u pohode*, exhibition catalogue (Belgrade: Muzej grada Beograda, 1977), 50, 60; M. Bajalović-Hadži Pešić, *Keramika u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji* (Belgrade 1981), 125–138 and passim.

²⁴ M. Popović, "Srednjovekovna crkva Uspenja Bogorodice u Beogradu", *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu* 9–10 (1979), 508.

A telling sign of the profound change in the notion of state borders in the early fifteenth century is the urban architecture of Belgrade. The city was defended by strong fortifications on the inland, east and south, sides, the usual direction of Ottoman attack. The tall double city walls with strong towers, the use of stone scarps on the exterior face of the walls, wide ditches encircling the fortress, all of that stood in contrast to the quite modest defences along the Sava and Danube rivers. The Serbian ruler defended Belgrade from the south and opened it towards the north. It was only later, when the Ottomans mastered the Danube, that Belgrade received stronger riverfront defences.²⁵ In Smederevo, too, initially the greatest attention was paid to the defence of the overland approaches to the city.²⁶ A generation of builders clearly marked out the enemy border on their soil.

The border position of Serbia at the European demarcation lines entailed many dangers, especially in times of war. At the Byzantine instigation, in 1423 negotiations about the creation of an anti-Ottoman Christian alliance began in the West. The negotiation process was slowed down by the rivalry between Venice and King Sigismund in the Adriatic and Dalmatia. The lively diplomatic activity had much trouble overcoming the obstacles on the road to agreement. The negotiations continued into 1424 and 1425. Stefan Lazarević took part in them. And as the haggle over the exact terms of military cooperation was still underway (the number of soldiers and ships, timeframes, financing, the issue of a separate peace etc.), the Sultan attacked Serbia. His units penetrated the Danube basin in the area of Kruševac. Dubrovnik encouraged its citizens in Serbia to hold on amidst the calamity that befell the country.²⁷ Hungarian military aid was sent timely, but the enormous damage the attack caused could not be prevented.²⁸ The anti-Ottoman plans of the European powers were still at the negotiation stage. The negotiations continued into 1426, with little regard for what was going on in Serbia. In early 1427 the situation became critical. The tireless Despot Stefan, who made peace with the Ottomans whenever it was impossible for him to wage a war, had no hope left. In January 1427 he anticipated the possibility of exile and death in a foreign land.²⁹

After the death of Despot Stefan Lazarević (1427), the survival of the Serbian state depended even more on the important border that separated

²⁵ M. Popović, *Beogradska tvrđava* (Belgrade 1982), 65–101.

²⁶ J. Nešković, *Smederevski grad* (Smederevo 1975), 11–12.

²⁷ M. Dinić, "Srebrnik kraj Srebrenice", *Glas SKA* 161 (1934), 190–192.

²⁸ J. Gelcich and L. Thallóczy, *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae Ragusinae cum regno Hungariae* (Budapest 1887), 309–310; S. Stanojević, *Pipo Spano. Prilog srpskoj istoriji početkom XV veka* (Belgrade 1901), 11.

²⁹ D. Anastasijević, "Srpski arhiv Lavre atonske", *Spomenik SKA* 56 (1922), 15.

Christian Europe from Islam. It traversed the Balkans and Serbia, never along a permanent line but rather along a transition zone of influence, variable over time. The events surrounding the attempts at reunion of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches in the fifteenth century offer some interesting data. The basic negotiations were conducted between Byzantium and the Pope, or the church council called at Basel in 1431. The endangered Byzantium hoped for Western military aid to fight the Ottomans and thus agreed to negotiations. Embassies were sent to Serbia for the purpose of negotiations (1433–1435).³⁰ An important role in this was played by Ivan Stojković, John of Ragusa, a distinguished Dubrovnik-born Dominican and professor at the University of Paris, one of the leaders of the Basel synodists.³¹ Constantinople expected the Serbian Despot to have understanding for the whole effort, for the needs of the moment.³² Despot Djuradj Branković received the embassies, those from Byzantium more warmly than the others, but eventually decided against participating in the reunion council in Italy.³³

The negotiations on Christian reunion had from the outset been seen by the Ottomans as hostile, and with good reason. The Byzantine rationale was clear. Hungary also had its agenda. It was articulated by Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg himself in late 1436. He sought to change the venue of the council of prelates from Basel to Buda, arguing that it would ensure better control of the Hussite movement in Bohemia and of the Ottomans. It would, Emperor Sigismund signalled to the synodists in Basel, boost his prestige in the eyes of the Orthodox Christians in the Balkans, and so the Serbs, whose participation was indispensable in the military campaign against the Ottomans he personally intended to launch in the summer of 1437. Sigismund's proposal met with little response from Basel,³⁴ but Serbia was heavily affected by his military operations (1437). Directed against the Ottoman possessions in the Despotate, they led to Murat II's counterattack and the state of Despot Djuradj was finally forced into

³⁰ J. Haller, *Concilium Basiliense. Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte der Jahre 1431–1437*, vol. I (Basel 1896), 332–333; Bertrandon de la Brokijer, *Putovanje preko mora* (Belgrade 1950), 131.

³¹ A. Krchnak, *De vita et operibus Ioannis de Ragusio* (Rome 1960), with earlier literature: Ioannis de Ragusio, *Tractatus de ecclesia*, ed. F. Šanjek (Zagreb 1983); cf. W. Brandmüller, *Papst und Konzil im Grossen Schisma* (Paderborn 1990).

³² V. Laurent, *Les "Mémoires" du Grand Ecclésiastique de l'Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence (1438–1439)* (Paris 1971), 122.

³³ Laurent, *Les "Mémoires"*, 164, 598.

³⁴ W. Altmann, *Regesta Imperii XI. Die Urkunden Keiser Sigmunds* (Innsbruck 1896), 389.

submission in 1437, 1438 and 1439.³⁵ The major European border reached the Danube, and Golubac and Smederevo became strongholds of the new power.

The Serbian state, restored somewhat later (1444), once again played the role of a transition zone, which separated the Roman Catholic world from the Ottomans. Only temporarily, of course, because the Ottomans were in the phase of expansion. Hungary tried a few times to reorganize its anti-Ottoman system of defence. An important role in it was assigned to the Serbian Despotate (1435),³⁶ and when the latter fell to the Ottomans (1459), a Banate of Belgrade was established to defend the border at its most vulnerable section.³⁷ The Ban of Belgrade was vested with distinctive powers and the duty to accept refugees from Serbia, admit them to military service and grant them smaller landholdings, often in the borderland zone. This, too, was a form of regulated settlement, usually of people from Ottoman-held areas. Moreover, more massive migrations of Serbs in wartime years became more typical.³⁸ All of that completely derailed the normal course of life in the wide borderland zone.

This look at the major civilizational borders in Serbian history would not be complete without understanding the real causes of human migrations. We sought to answer this question through two comparatively designed research projects: 1) the investigation of the Ras area in the pre-Ottoman period, and 2) the investigation of the Belgrade area (suburban settlements). These are smaller geographical units which make it possible to work on reconstructing the history of each settlement through historical, archaeological and anthropological research. Particular attention was paid to the toponym–church–cemetery relationship. The idyllic picture of Ottoman tolerance could not be found. It is contradicted by the following examples of the discovered phenomena.

1) In the late fourteenth century, the Ottomans slowly but surely took the major places in the *Župa* (Region) of Ras and surrounding areas (the area of present-day Novi Pazar). They took Zvečan and Jeleč; there is a reference to them as holding Gluhavica (1398). The system of dual government was established – Serbian-Ottoman administration. The Ottoman boundary is blurry, but it is visible in everyday life. The prosperous village of Deževo in the fertile area along the Pnuća River (present-day Deževska Reka) had a church round which a cemetery grew in the fourteenth century (with burials of both sexes and all ages).

³⁵ J. Kalić, "La Serbie et le Concile de Ferrare et de Florence", *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* 21 (1989), 131–140.

³⁶ P. Rokai, "Poslednje godine balkanske politike kralja Zigmunda (1435–1437)", *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu* XII-1 (1969), 89–108.

³⁷ J. Kalić-Mijušković, "Prilog istoriji Beogradske banovine", *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu* VIII-1 (1964), 535–540.

³⁸ *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. II, 432ff (S. Ćirković).

The systematic excavation of the church has shown that it was destroyed before 1413, most likely towards the end of the fourteenth century. The demolished and burnt-down church was never restored. The cemetery remained in use and burials were also performed inside the destroyed church. In the mid-fifteenth century the cemetery also fell in disuse, exactly at the time of the first Ottoman cadastral survey (1455) of the border administrative unit governed by Isa Bey Isaković (*İshakoğlu İsa Bey*). The life of the Serbs in Deževu was brought to an end, there were no living left to lay their dead to rest round the church. That the reason was violent is shown by the Muslim settlement founded in the vicinity of the church. Remains of a material culture of Oriental origin with no models in the local production have been discovered. Moreover, luxury artefacts, imported from the East, testify to the prosperity of their users. They were Muslim settlers, not Islamized inhabitants of Deževu.³⁹ The abandonment of the Deževu churchyard can tell us nothing of the fate of the vanished villagers – were the Serbs driven out, did they move to other places, were they murdered? All of this took place in a settlement which has retained its name to this day. Continuity of village names has hitherto usually been interpreted as resulting from continuity of village life through centuries. The reasons for the survival of the toponym might be discovered by future research, which requires that all surrounding places be investigated as well.⁴⁰

2) Another example of the same phenomenon comes from the village of Postenje, some six kilometres from Deževu, today on the edge of the urban area of Novi Pazar. The village is in the immediate vicinity of the church of St Peter, the medieval cathedral of the Orthodox Bishop of Raška. The first phase of Ottoman consolidation – the period, then, when this was a borderland zone – saw a wave of destruction in Postenje, too. There, on the left bank of the Pnuća River, was an Orthodox church. Its excavated remains (narthex and part of the naos) show that it, too, was demolished and burnt down.⁴¹ It is known today as the “Latin church”, although it unquestionably was a Serbian Orthodox church (as evidenced by the remains of medieval frescoes). Its present-day name dates from the Ottoman period, when this church, like some others in Serbia, was given over to Roman Catholics.

3) The face of the medieval settlement on the site of present-day Novi Pazar was also changed completely. If the history of Serbian churches is seen as an

³⁹ J. Kalić and M. Popović, “Crkva u Deževu”, *Starinar* 36 (1985), 115–147; anthropological analysis: S. Živanović, “Ostaci skeleta sa nekropole pored crkve u Deževu”, *Starinar* 36 (1985), 151–160.

⁴⁰ J. Kalić, “Prilog metodologiji proučavanja srpskog srednjovekovnog društva”, *Istorijski časopis* 35 (1988), 5–20.

⁴¹ D. Aleksić-Premović, “Latinska crkva u Postenju”, *Novopozarski zbornik* 9 (1985), 55–66.

indicator of change in the structure of settlements, the Ottoman period emerges as extremely unfavourable to Christian population. The church at the so-called Grain Market in present-day Novi Pazar was converted to a mosque as early as the fifteenth century, and the Altun-Alem mosque in the Jeleč *mahalle* seems to have been built on the foundations of an earlier building.⁴² If the information about the churches in Novi Pazar provided by Ottoman and West-European travel writers is situated into the historical space, all indications are that only those beyond the central urban area survived, such as St Peter's or the one in Naprelje. Given that no active Christian church was allowed in the vicinity of mosques,⁴³ and mosques in Novi Pazar proliferated, reaching the number of twenty-three in the mid-seventeenth century,⁴⁴ it is clear that the Serb population was pushed to the fringes of the urban area.

This conclusion regarding the topographic picture of Novi Pazar in fact points to profound changes in the economic and social structure of the area – carried out, of course, over a longer period of time. This is confirmed, independently of the distribution of religious buildings, by the Ottoman tax registers of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They show that Serbs were mostly engaged in rural occupations, paid the taxes typical of the agrarian population, whereas the Muslim population is usually found categorized in groups engaged in trade and crafts.⁴⁵ The new city–suburban settlement–village relationship reflects the relationship of the conqueror to the conquered population. This can be seen in the agrarian area of the *Župa* of Ras. If the historical and archaeological evidence of the destruction of settlements (Deževo, Postenje etc.) is situated into the concrete geographical space, then it becomes clear that Serbs were driven out of the most fertile areas as early as the end of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century. Their place was taken by settlers whose material culture did not have its roots in Serbian society (Deževo). There lie the causes of Serbian migrations from the borderlands with the Ottomans, and of those later, taking place over the centuries.

The investigations in the areas of Ras and Belgrade show two phases of the Ottoman border gradually cutting into the fabric of Serbian society. In Ras, serious changes began as early as the end of the fourteenth century, in Belgrade not until half a century later. The difference is not merely chronological, it is

⁴² Evlija Čelebi, *Putopis* (Sarajevo 1979), 265–266; A. Andrejević, "Altin-alem džamija u Novom Pazaru", *Novopazarski zbornik* 1 (1977), 124.

⁴³ K. Binswanger, *Untersuchungen zum Status der Nichtmuslime im Osmanischen Reich des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Munich 1977), 64ff.

⁴⁴ Evlija Čelebi, *Putopis*, 265.

⁴⁵ H. Čar Drnda, "Osnivanje Novog Pazara i njegov razvitak do kraja XVI stoleća", *Novopazarski zbornik* 8 (1984), 83–97.

fundamental. The area of Belgrade belonged to the sphere of European Ottoman policy, Ras did not. Early geographical maps, especially those that can be attributed to prominent Viennese cartographers and their associates, provide abundant source material for the final phase of the phenomenon discussed here. Serbian migrations were already visible to the great powers. The famous cartographers Georg Tannstetter (1482–1535), Cuspinian (1473–1529) and Jacob Ziegler (1470–1548) of Bavaria considerably contributed to the drawing of maps of the lands the Habsburgs had political interest in. Thus, a disciple of Tannstetter's, Lazar, collected valuable material on Hungary in the early sixteenth century. His material was used for the oldest surviving map of Hungary (*Tabula Hungariae*).⁴⁶ The analysis of its content shows that its makers, or those who commissioned the map, had lost interest in conquered Serbia, but still kept an eye on Belgrade. What was carefully recorded in the European fifteenth-century maps of the Balkans⁴⁷ can no longer be found in those drawn in the sixteenth century.

The geographical maps record the fate of the major border with the Ottomans, the border that left the territory of the Serbian state but not the fate of the Serbs. Instead of place names and hydrography in the areas south of the Sava and Danube rivers, they more frequently show regional names – Rascia, Rassen, Servia etc. Judging by Lazar's map (c. 1529), the number of Serbs who had resettled in Hungary by his time was already so large that he used the name of their land of origin – “Rasse” (Raška) – not only for Srem but also for Slavonia. Such data are aggregate, of course. Shall we ever be able to establish exactly when and under what circumstances those people arrived in the new areas? This means that we do not really know how well trodden the path was along which Patriarch Arsenije III (Čarnojević) led his people in 1690.

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⁴⁶ L. Imédi-Molnar, “The Earliest Known Maps of Hungary”, *Imago mundi* 18 (1984), 53–54; *Kodexek a középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest 1985), 170; K. Kuchar, “Lazarova mapa, najstariji mapovy obraz Slovenska”, *Sbornik Československe společnosti zemepisne* 62 (1957); L. Bendefy, “Wer war der Autor der ältesten Ungarnkarte?”, *Mitteilungen der österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 117 (1975), 424–426; J. Kalić, “Najstarija karta Ugarske (*Tabula Hungariae*)”, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 24–25 (1986), 423–433.

⁴⁷ *Monumenta Cartographicae Jugoslaviae*, vol. II (Belgrade 1979), 27–29, 83–85ff.

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