

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

LII



2021

BALCANICA

J. KALIĆ, *European Borders in Serbian History* · D. PRERADOVIĆ, *The Reception and Interpretation of Jerome's Description of Two of St Hilarion's Epidaurian Miracles in Dubrovnik-based Sources and Tradition* · N. S. ŠULETIĆ, *Usurpations of and Designated Successions to the Throne in the Serbian Patriarchat. The Case of Patriarch Moses Rajović (1712–24)* · M. KOVIĆ, *Liberalism and Imperialism: Croce and d'Annunzio in Serbian Culture 1903–1914* · A. BASCIANI, *A Late Offensive. Italian Cultural Action in Belgrade in the Last Phase of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1937–1941)* · T. SANDU, *Le fascisme roumain dans un contexte centre-européen : historiographie et problématiques* · R. YEOMANS, *Weddings of the Dead: Ustasha Funerals and Life Cycle Rituals in Fascist Croatia* · M. CUZZI, *The Refractory Community: Yugoslav Anti-communists in Post-war Italy* · S. MIŠIĆ, *Serbian Orthodox Church Municipality in Trieste in Yugoslav-Italian Relations 1954–1971* · A. ĐURIĆ MILOVANOVIĆ, *"Hidden Religious Landscapes": Religious Minorities and Religious Renewal Movements in the Borderlands of the Serbian and Romanian Banat* ❧

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

UDC 930.85(4.12)

BELGRADE 2021

ISSN 0350-7653
eISSN 2406-0801



John Zametica, *FOLLY AND MALICE: THE HABSBURG EMPIRE, THE BALKANS AND THE START OF WORLD WAR ONE*. London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2017, 416 p.

Reviewed by Miloš Vojinović*

Ever since the historiography on the First World War began, with the publication of documents selected by governments to justify their conduct while the guns were still firing, the Balkan entanglements of Austria-Hungary have played a significant part in explanations of the origin of the war. John Zametica's book comes to grip with a story that was told and retold many times. *Folly and Malice* does not lack a polemical aspect, though. Zametica claims that "In many important respects, however, the story of the clash between Habsburg imperial strategies and South Slav aspirations has been, and continues to be, misunderstood or misinterpreted" (p. xv).

Unsurprisingly, the core of the book revolves around the relations between Austria-Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbia. Occasionally storytelling goes as far back into the past as the 1870s but most of the time it depicts the decade prior to the outbreak of the war. As we get closer to 1914, the chapters offer progressively more detail. The parts covering 1914 and the protagonists of the July crisis make up almost a half of the book.

Folly and Malice is clearly a product of long and meticulous research. The number of different archives, as well the abundance of published sources and literature perused for this study is nothing short of impressive. This comes to light most obviously in the parts about the Sarajevo Assassination. A good case in point is the fact that the author was able to locate four different recollections of the conversation between Franz Ferdinand and his entourage in the Sarajevo town hall after the first assassination attempt on 28 June (pp. 502–512). However, the sheer amount of detail does not necessarily help the clarity of argument. Zametica's intention

to always provide background explanation is laudable, but numerous scrutinized descriptions sometimes lead to long excurses about events that hardly determined the Habsburg Empire's Balkan policies.

What is there in Habsburg Balkan policies that is misunderstood or misinterpreted? In other words, what are the main arguments of *Folly and Malice*? Firstly, Zametica argues that a part of recent historiography overlooks the aggressive nature of Habsburg diplomacy towards its south-eastern neighbour in the years prior to 1914. Above all, he points to the years 1905–1906. The blame is laid on Agenor Maria Gołuchowski, the foreign minister of Austria-Hungary. Zametica maintains that Gołuchowski used every issue that arose to exact absolute submission of the Kingdom of Serbia. He writes: "the rise of the Austro-Serbian discord, it has to be said, was very much his [Gołuchowski's] deed. His bullying tactics were unnecessary at a time when carrot could have done so much more than stick: all the relevant factors in post-1903 Serbia, from the Court camarilla to Pašić himself were quite flexible in their foreign policy orientation" (p. 216). Moreover, Zametica points that even Gołuchowski's successor, Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal, deemed Gołuchowski's policies on Serbia "excessive" (p. 218). Unlike much of historiography which links Austro-Serbian antagonism to the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zametica goes a bit further into the past and points to the Ottoman Empire – conflicting ambitions were what initially sparked bad blood between Belgrade and Vienna. Zametica writes:

* Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

“The post-1903 worsening of relations between Belgrade and Vienna arose in part because, after Mürzsteg [agreement], Serbia perceived what it considered *its* [original emphasis] territories in Old Serbia (i.e., Kosovo and Metohija) and Macedonia to be threatened by Austria-Hungary. The latter’s overall threat in the region, imagined or real, was labelled ‘*Drang nach Saloniki*’” (p. 201).

The question that looms large above studies of Austro-Serbian relations remains the same: was a different kind of Austro-Serbian relations possible? Given the scope of the question, it is not surprising that Zametica’s answer is sometimes convoluted. On the one hand, he demonstrates that it is wrong to look from the July crisis back into the past and to understand the arrangement of relations in 1914 as the only possible outcome. He does this most potently by pointing to the numerous episodes of inharmonious relations between Serbia and Russia – from Russia’s attitude towards the so-called conspirators’ question and its tacit approval of the Habsburg annexation of Bosnia to the lack of support in St. Petersburg for the Balkan states prior to the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. On the other hand, in the chapters that cover the time when Habsburg foreign policy was led by Aehrenthal (1906–1912), Zametica asks: “But was there really ever a chance for an Austro-Serbian reconciliation under Aehrenthal?” (p. 218). His answer is – no.

Zametica argues that for Aehrenthal it was not possible to think about foreign policy without thinking about the Habsburg internal complications. In other words, Aehrenthal, who wrote extensively about constitutional arrangements within the Empire, pursued foreign policy with internal political goals in mind. He saw the dangers of a potential grouping of South Slavs around a centre outside the Monarchy. Consequently, he was in favour of an independent Albania, supported cordial relations with Montenegro, hoped for an enlargement of Bulgaria, but Serbia had to be prevented

from gaining any kind of economic or territorial gains. This is how Zametica reads Aehrenthal’s schemes in the Ottoman Empire (the sabotage of Serbia’s railway project, the proposal of Austro-Hungarian own rail scheme, and Janus-faced attitude of the Monarchy towards reforms in Macedonia) and, in part, the desire to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina. All things considered, Zametica sees how relations could have developed differently, but also points to the power of conflicting assumptions. Due to its internal politics, Austria-Hungary, a Great Power with a population of fifty million, felt the need to subdue and encircle Serbia, a tiny and underdeveloped kingdom with a population one-fifteenth of its own. Serbia, conversely, hoped to achieve enlargement and national unification.

Even though some readers might be put off by Zametica’s language which is often judgmental – no doubt that neither the “unlikely” Habsburg heir presumptive, Franz Ferdinand, nor the “corrupt” Serbian prime minister, Nikola Pašić, are among his favourites – his richly documented book makes a valuable contribution to the study of the events that led to the First World War. Zametica’s book, together with the recently published translation of Vladimir Ćorović’s book *The Relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary in the 20th Century*,¹ makes the English language body of literature on Austro-Serbian relations significantly more substantial.

¹ V. Ćorović, *The Relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary in the 20th Century* (Belgrade: Archives of Yugoslavia, Hoover Institution, Institute for Balkan Studies, 2018).

ISSN 0350-7653



9 770350 765003 >