

## REVIEWS

### AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY: DUŠAN T. BATAKOVIĆ'S TRILOGY ON KOSOVO AND METOHİJA

*KOSOVO I METOHİJA U SRPSKO-ARBANAŠKIM ODNOSIMA* [KOSOVO AND METOHİJA IN SERBO-ALBANIAN RELATIONS], BELGRADE: ČIGOJA, 2006, pp. 393; *DEČANSKO PITANJE* [THE DEČANI QUESTION], BELGRADE: ČIGOJA, 2007, pp. 355; *KOSOVO I METOHİJA. ISTORIJA I IDEOLOGIJA* [KOSOVO AND METOHİJA: HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY, BELGRADE: ČIGOJA, 2007, pp. 470

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The recent release of the second edition of three volumes by Dušan T. Bataković devoted to the past of Kosovo and Metohija makes a significant contribution to contemporary historiography. This outstanding trilogy, reflecting the major area of the author's decades-long research into Serbian history, constitutes a rare example of scholarly comprehensiveness and breadth in studying the modern and contemporary history of the region known as the heartland of medieval Serbia in the Balkans. Namely, this trilogy addresses the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, perceived by the author as one of the thorniest Balkan problems, as well as Serbo-Albanian relations in a more recent past, covering the whole period of pre-war and post-war Yugoslavia, up to her violent dissolution. The fact that this is not merely a second but also an enlarged and updated edition testifies to Bataković's long-term concern with the Kosovo issue. As shown by all the scholarly work Bataković has done since he embarked upon this particular field of study some twenty-five years ago, he has proved himself not only a major authority

on the subject but also a very gifted writer of history. Bataković's trilogy, covering a wide-range of Kosovo-related topics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from feudal anarchy under the Ottomans to a refined analysis of the communist period, is worthy of being read. Reading it makes the long-term nature of processes in the Western Balkans much clearer and shows that the current, often controversial political and ideological developments can be better understood if their previous history is thoroughly studied and interpreted in a balanced manner.

In the first place, author has elucidated one of the most dramatic periods in the past of Kosovo and Metohija, a period when pressures and pogroms against the Serbian population reached such proportions that their resolve to survive against all odds can be explained by an exceptional endurance rather than by any rational motive. The period in question intervenes between the Congress of Berlin (1878) and the Balkan Wars (1912-13).

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As best shown by the volume *Kosovo and Metohija in Serbo-Albanian Relations (Kosovo i Metohija u srpsko-arbanaskim odnosima)*, Bataković's research into the past of a region where Serbia's interests competed and intertwined with those of the great powers, notably Russia and Austria-Hungary, begins with the year 1878, even though this book, as well as the other two, offers an impressive introductory study going back to the medieval and early Ottoman periods and demonstrating the writer's ability to select relevant information and to synthesize numerous data into an overall historical account. The year 1878 was indeed a momentous date in modern Serbian history. It is not difficult to concur with Bataković's analysis that the wars of 1876–78 disturbed the balance in Kosovo and Metohija and the adjacent areas of Old Serbia (*vilayet* of Kosovo). Namely, it turned out that they produced fateful consequences which lingered on throughout the century to come. The prominent Serbian scholar and statesman Stojan Novaković described them more than once as most tragic events in modern Serbian history, referring, *inter alia*, to the right given by the great powers to Austria-Hungary to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to clarify that, Bataković begins his account of the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin with the founding of the Albanian League in Prizren, an organization whose activity marked Kosovo and Metohija until 1881 and inspired several subsequent Albanian national movements. Author places a rightful emphasis on the League's anti-Slavic orientation, obvious from many contemporary sources, such as the notes of the Russian consul in Prizren, Ivan S. Yastrebov, or the letters of Ilija Stavrić, Dean of the Serbian Orthodox Seminary in Prizren, to Belgrade, warning about the Albanians' preparations for assaulting the local Serbian population, even for an offensive on Belgrade. Bataković's assess-

ment of yet another consequence of the decisions of the Congress of Berlin also seems significant, namely the ethnic imbalance that arose immediately after 1878 and continued to increase until 1912. It was produced by the influx of large groups of Albanians from the areas Serbia had liberated from the Ottoman Empire (South Serbia, former *sanjak* of Niš) and their resettlement in the north and east of Kosovo. Thus many Albanian settlements grew along the new Ottoman border with Serbia making a new barrier between Serbia and larger Serbian settlements in Kosovo and Metohija. Bataković's contention that the imbalance was planned rather than spontaneous seems perfectly accurate. It finds corroboration in the fact that Ottoman authorities had settled the border with Serbia with Circassians as early as the 1860s, but the settlers obviously failed to perform their role as a bulwark. Settling Muslim Albanians after 1878 in the border areas and among the Serbian settlements further south apparently proved much more effective. Muslim Albanians were reliable border guards and the Ottoman Empire generally relied upon them for military support. Their feudal and tribal leaders belonged to upper strata in the decaying Ottoman system and were not an insignificant factor in its preservation. Thus the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija, deprived of both legal and political protection, were practically left at their mercy. However, several more facts should be added at this point. The local Muslim Albanians, most often fully armed, were more prone to rebellion and outlaw activities than to fulfilling military and fiscal obligations towards the Ottoman government, and the Sublime Porte in turn showed leniency and was willing to tolerate their excesses. That is the reason why revolt, disarray and strife were to mark the period until the Balkan Wars. The situation may be defined as anarchy, and its main victims were the local Serbs,

torn between struggling to survive on their land and leaving their homes to find refuge in Serbia. Even though the Serbs, unarmed and deprived of legal protection, were generally a resilient population, their increased forced emigration orchestrated by Albanian brigands was one of the main consequences of this inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife. One more factor should be mentioned, however. I tend to agree with Bataković that post-1878 Serbia opted for using a single instrument, peaceful and legal, in her attempt to help the Serbian population's survival in Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia focused on an intensified religious and educational effort by opening schools and reading rooms, building churches, dispatching teachers and priests, all of which required good relations with Ottoman authorities, in other words, a pro-Ottoman foreign policy. This policy did bear some fruit, given that the Sublime Porte occasionally met Serbia's requests, though with much delay and reluctance. What was important as well is the fact that the elite of Serbian diplomacy served as envoys in Constantinople, a major international centre where the agendas of the great powers could best be deciphered, and as consuls in Priština, Skopje (Uskub), Thessalonica and Bitolj (Monastir). For instance, Stojan Novaković served two terms as Serbian envoy in Constantinople, and was succeeded by Sava Grujić, Vladan Djordjević, Čedomilj Mijatović, while a term of consulship in the abovementioned towns was served by noted diplomats: Svetislav St. Simić, Mihailo G. Ristić, Vladimir Karić, Miroslav Spalajković, Branislav Nušić and Milan Rakić. Some of them believed that in order for Serbs to be able to survive pogroms in Kosovo a comprehensive political understanding with Albanians needed to be reached. Such suggestions are found in their official reports, but the prevailing conviction both in the political leadership and in the general public in

Serbia was that the rift between the two peoples, claiming the same territory, was insurmountable. I would like to point to an example. A high official of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited Kosovo in 1892. He noticed right away that the fear of Muslim Albanians was widespread among the Orthodox Christian Serbs whilst smuggling and anarchy reigned supreme. The most illustrative example was the case of Priština, where only smuggled tobacco was available. What he was told there made a strong impression on him: If things in Kosovo go on like this, in ten years there will be no more Serbs here. In his report to the Ministry upon returning to Serbia, he suggested, however, that one should get to know Albanians better and that "something [meaning a kind of agreement] should be worked out with them".

I would like to call special attention to *The Dečani Question*, an extremely useful and highly interesting case study in every respect. The facts it contains demonstrate vividly that the situation in the Balkans was so intricate that even modern researchers have trouble disentangling it, which means that a Serbian politician at the time must have found it extremely difficult to devise appropriate solutions. Bataković's analysis, however, appear to meet the highest standards of scholarship. A seemingly minor issue, which was raised in 1903 by the legal handover of the Serbian monastery of Visoki Dečani (until then under the jurisdiction of the Serbian bishop of the Raška-Prizren Bishopric) to the Russian monks from the *Kellion* of St John Chrysostom on Mount Athos, and which lingered almost until the Balkan Wars, has provided Bataković with an opportunity to look into major Balkan issues relating to Kosovo and Metohija, to reveal the roles of various foreign factors in the region, in particular the often covertly pursued agendas of Russia and Austria-Hungary, and to clarify the activities and achievements of Serbian diplomacy.

In order to help the reader understand what lay at the core of the Serbo-Russian dispute which is the subject of Bataković's book, I would like to point to some previous developments. Namely, until the First Balkan War Serbia did not have any legal instrument for protecting the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija, let alone the use of military force. In his address to the Serbian Parliament in 1904, Nikola Pašić said that it was Serbia's duty to forestall forced Serb migration from Kosovo and Metohija, but that the stance of the great powers made her military intervention absolutely unfeasible. As the Ottoman political system gradually dissolved and the central authority grew weaker, the role of the Muslim Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija grew stronger whilst their self-willed rule went unpunished. Bataković clearly underlines this fact, quoting numerous sources in corroboration. Throughout the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century all Serbian Kosovo-based institutions, in particular churches and monasteries, suffered brutal violence from Albanian brigands. Occasional pogroms launched against the Kosovo Serbs called for the Belgrade government's firm-handed protection. The archimandrite of Dečani reported in October 1887 about "fiercest and wildest brigandage reigning supreme". Neither the Serbian Orthodox Church nor Serbian nationality were officially recognized within the Ottoman Empire. Therefore the Serbs were not a legally defined group and did not enjoy a status that would enable them to defend themselves or to obtain protection. Unlike the Greeks, who had a patriarchate, and the Bulgarians, who had an exarchate, from 1766 the Christian Orthodox Serbs were deprived of their autocephalous church, the Patriarchate of Peć, and came under the jurisdiction of the Greek-dominated Patriarchate of Constantinople and not always well-intentioned Greek bishops;

for example, the Church of St Saviour in Skoplje was taken away from the Serbs despite protests of the local Serbian community. Stojan Novaković, in his treatise "The Patriarchate of Constantinople and Orthodoxy" published in 1895, considered Prince Miloš's struggle for obtaining autonomy for the Serbian Church in the newly-created autonomous Principality of Serbia to have been a mistake, because in that way the Serbian population in Old Serbia was left outside its jurisdiction. It was on that ground that Serbia, upon independence in 1878, ensured autocephalous status for her Church in 1879. Novaković believed, however, that it would have been better if Serbia had obtained the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć because in that way all Serbs would have remained under its wing. The Patriarchate would have been recognized by the Ottoman Empire, as two other Orthodox Churches were, and the Serbian people would have been better protected by the state. What Serbia was left to do, therefore, was to struggle for the right to appoint Serbian bishops in the bishoprics of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Turkey-in-Europe. In that connection, Bataković highlights a major problem which Serbia was to face and which required a considerable financial and diplomatic effort, namely her goal to obtain the appointment of Serbian bishops to the mainly Serb-inhabited bishoprics of Veles-Debar and Skoplje. In that struggle she was occasionally supported by Russia, but the support was extended cautiously in order not to provoke Bulgarian discontent as Russia harboured the ambition to control the Bulgarian-inhabited east of the Balkan Peninsula. Hence a tone of resignation in the words of the statesman Jovan Ristić: "If Šumadija [Central Serbia] were in the hinterland of Constantinople instead of where it is, our friends" — he meant Russians — "would support us more strongly."

In explaining the situation in Kosovo and Metohija prior to the Russian takeover of Dečani which triggered the dispute, Bataković demonstrates an admirable knowledge of the period, namely a period when the Ottoman Empire was under pressure to carry out reforms in its European provinces and significantly improve the situation of its Christian subjects. The Muslim Albanians, on the other hand, strongly opposed any change, and subjected the Serbian population, churches and schools to brutal violence. It seems important to remind that Bataković had already written several noted scholarly contributions about that particular period, and that his latest assessments are firmly founded. The Monastery of Dečani needed Russian monks as a guarantee of protection from Albanian-organized pogroms, but the Serbs soon came to consider the Russian monks as usurpers rather than protectors. In addition, Bataković gives a sound analysis of the roles played by Austrian agents and the Catholic Church. By supporting the Albanians and spreading Austria-Hungary's influence in Kosovo and Metohija, both sought to weaken Serbia and to contain Russian influence even though imperial Russia and the Dual Monarchy were mandated to jointly oversee the implementation of the reforms in Turkey-in-Europe (1903–1908). The author also sheds light on how the Dečani question caused a split within the local Serbian community as well as in the Kingdom of Serbia, in a way Serbs tended to be divided over other important issues. This finds corroboration in many other examples from a remote and more recent past.

The period in question has been much written about in Serbian historiography and a bulk of relevant facts is available. There is no doubt, however, that the interpretations Bataković proposed in *The Dečani Question*, basing them on the hitherto rarely used Russian and Serbian

sources, provide a more complex analysis of both diplomatic and political rivalries. Namely, historians have been mostly concerned with reform processes in the Ottoman Empire and with resistance to them. It has gone almost unnoticed that Serbia, although vitally interested in getting Russia's support for reforms in Kosovo and Metohija, ventured into a dispute with her over the Russian monks, whom she believed went beyond the role they were meant to play in Dečani. Bataković's interpretations lead to the conclusion that both Serbia and Russia tended to refer this, and not only this dispute, to a lower level in order not to damage their bilateral relations. Instead of being settled by Belgrade and St Petersburg, such open questions were relegated to the Serbian and Russian diplomats in Constantinople. Facing a serious threat of an Austro-German alliance potentially opening a new crisis in the Balkans, Serbia and Russia let the bilateral dispute on Dečani simply die down on the eve of the Balkan Wars.

The fact that Bataković's conclusions are amply corroborated by many other sources, which I have had the opportunity to study, is one more reason for accepting his interpretations as firmly founded. To the modern reader, these studiously written and highly readable volumes, just like Bataković's other historical works on Kosovo and Metohija, not only hold interesting lessons to be learnt from history but also lessons that should be carefully pondered. They assign their author among leading scholars of Serbian history.