



A BRIEF POPULATION HISTORY OF THE VOJVODINA 1683-1718

Bruce Mitchell

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London Senate House, Malet Street,
London WC1E 7HU, England

Saša Kicošev

Institute of Geography, University of Novi Sad Trg Dositeja Obradovića 3, 21000 Novi Sad,
Yugoslavia

Abstract

The complex ethnic structure of the population in the Vojvodina has come about through the combination of numerous historical circumstances. Of key significance are a chain of events dating back some three centuries. A devastating and unremitting series of wars fought between the Turkish disaster at Vienna 1683 and the Peace of Passarowitz (1718) effected an almost complete depopulation of the southern part of the Pannonian Plain. Subsequently, spontaneous and major planned migrations occurred for economic, political, and social reasons, producing an ethnic medley which has reflected the various administrations which have held sway over the territory up to the present day. This paper limits itself to provide an overview of key historical events related to the development of the population in the Vojvodina in the period 1683 – 1718

Key words: Chain of events, population history, Banat and Bačka

The Habsburg Advance, 1683 - 1718

In the late summer of 1683, the Ottomans' Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa, led a huge army to the gates of Vienna. As the siege reached its climax and relief armies closed in from the north, an estimated 30,000 captives were slaughtered without mercy and irrespective of age or sex, the villain-in-chief being Ahmed Pasha, Beglerbeg of Timi var (Preyer, 1995). Following a disastrous defeat at the Kahlenberg, the shattered Turkish forces fled to the border town of Raab (Gy r). It was in the new year that the newly-forged Holy League, including Venice and Poland, with Papal finance, began the pursuit. After see-saw fortunes, a second major defeat for the Turks came in June 1686, when Apafi, Prince of Transylvania, came under Habsburg protection. Buda was lost in September and the Turkish forces were pushed ever further to the south. A second battle of Mohács in 1687 ended disastrously for the Sultan, compounded by the loss of vital Belgrade the following year.

At this point, Louis XIV of France, alarmed at the extent and speed of the Habsburgs' conquests, began a series of devastating campaigns against the western Habsburg provinces which would last until 1692. Almost every German castle along the Rhine and other waterways (e.g, Heidelberg a. d. Neckar) was systematically destroyed. The insecurity this engendered in the inhabitants of these regions would soon have unforeseen consequences. In the hope of pressing home his advantage with now reduced means, Emperor Leopold II encourage a rising among the Balkan Serbs. In 1689, Habsburg troops reached as far as Kosovo and Metohia, but both the rising and his generals failed, and the year saw the beginnings of a Turkish resurgence. Leopold found himself obliged to offer

Serbs asylum and certain religious and political privileges (Popović, 1952) in return for their support against the Turks.

Assisted by Louis XIV, the ‘Most Christian King’, the Turkish recovery meanwhile continued under a new (*Köprülü*) Grand Vizier. The reorganised Turkish army drove to the Save and Danube and, in 1690, Imperial indecision and tactical woolly-headedness permitted the Ottomans to recover Belgrade. The initiative soon passed back to the Habsburgs, however, and 1691 saw a Habsburg victory at Niš and the Grand Vizier killed in battle at Slankamen (19th August 1691).

Sarajevo fell temporarily into Habsburg hands in 1697 and, in the same year, initial Turkish successes in the Banat, were succeeded by their crushing defeat at Zenta (Senta, on the Tisza), despite the Habsburg armies being hampered by limited revolts and even defections of whole units to the enemy. The Peace of Karlowitz (today, Sremski Karlovci; 26.01.1699) confirmed a still unstable situation, wherein the Bačka and central Hungary, Transylvania and Slavonia, along with the important towns on the fringes of the Banat, went to the Habsburgs, while Belgrade and Temesvar was retained by the Porte. The Habsburg military frontier was further expanded.

In 1703, however the tide of Habsburg conquest was interrupted by the outbreak of the *Kuruzzen*-rising, known to Hungarians as the ‘War of Liberation’. This, under the leadership of Rákóczy Ferenc II, was an index of Hungarian dissatisfaction with increasingly domineering Habsburg officialdom, and offered great scope for the free operation of bands of outlaws and brigands such as the *Kuruzzen*. Much of the ensuing devastation was wrought in the southern counties of Hungary. The Peace of Szatmár which brought an end to the rising in 1711 paved the way for the full incorporation of Transylvania into Habsburg Hungary (1713).

Meanwhile, Ottoman successes against Russia (1711) and Venice (1715) encouraged the Sultan to refuse to acquiesce in a Habsburg demand to restore the *status quo ante*. The war that followed ended disastrously for the Turks. In early August 1716, Prince Eugène of Savoy won a great victory at Peterwardein (now Petrovaradin) and decided to head straight for Temesvár. The siege began in mid – August. The fortress was defended by 18,000 men, including 5,000 Hungarians under the command of Imre Thököly, onetime leader of the Kuruzz rebels and the Turks’ increasingly unfortunate candidate for the Principality of Transylvania (Rieser, 1992). Initially, ‘*when requested to surrender, the Pasha who was defending the place replied that he knew perfectly well that he couldn’t win, but that he felt it his duty to contribute to the Renown of Prince Eugene by making his victory more arduous and glorious*’ (Magris, 1990). Prince Eugene himself accepted that the Habsburg capture of Temesvar was not achieved without inflicting heavy damage: the heavy bombardment of the timber-built city appears to have been sufficient in itself to bring about its surrender 13th October. The suburbs had been burned down, and the interior of the fortress reduced to matchwood (Rieser, 1992). Five days later, the Turks were given free passage from the city. August 1717 saw a further Habsburg victory at Belgrade, The Peace of Passarowitz (Požarevac) that followed in July 1718 confirmed earlier Habsburg gains and additionally detached the whole of the Banat from the Ottoman Empire. Five districts of Little Wallachia (Oltenia) and northern Serbia, also came under the Habsburg Empire, in a punitive peace which would hold until the disastrous Austro-Turkish war of 1738-41.

Contemporary Developments in the Populations of Banat and Bačka

As the Habsburgs advanced through Hungary, their administration became aware of the extent of the depopulation that had been wrought in the country by effects of their long rivalry with the Ottoman Turks. The Habsburgs had also already had a long acquaintance with the independent spirit of the Hungarian nobility, and the Reformation had created a further division between the now preponderantly Protestant Hungarians and their new Catholic rulers. Fear of Magyar

resentment of the now rapidly growing Habsburg influence in Hungary, and the consequent danger of this being exploited by the Turks, led Cardinal Leopold Graf Kollinich to suggest that the rebellious Hungarian blood 'needed to be tempered by the German'. As only four decades had elapsed since the end of the Thirty Years War, differences of confession also were no trifling matter. In the same month as the capture of Buda (16.9.1686), the *Hofkriegsrat* in Vienna therefore decided not accept 'unbelievers', i.e. non-Catholics, as colonists to Hungary: this date came to be taken as the official 'birthday' of the *Donauschwaben*, a collective term for German colonists along the middle and lower Danube. The first Catholic colonists came from the ranks of the Habsburg armies themselves. Within a very few years however, civilian colonists were being encouraged to travel from the German lands eastward to the 'liberated' territories. Already in 1689 '*K.u.k.Impopulations-Patent*' foresaw the importance of organizing the colonisation the newly conquered territories, and stimulated a small wave of German colonists until 1692.

The Bačka (i.e. Bács and Bodrog counties of the former Hungarian kingdom), already in Habsburg hands since the Peace of Karlowitz (1699), was inhabited almost exclusively by refugees who had immigrated only a few years, or at most, decades earlier. Those Catholic Serb settlements in the Bačka dating from the beginning of the 17th century had been broken up by the fighting. While the wars were still raging (1687), a body of 5,000 Bunjewatzi and Shokatzi (Catholic Serbs) reached the Bačka from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Dalmatia. They were settled by the Habsburgs as militia around Szeged, Subotica, and Baja. In response to Emperor Leopold's 1689 offer of protection and religious freedoms, the Serbs', Patriarch, Arsenius III of Ipek led many thousands of families northward from Albania and South Serbia who were settled mainly in the Bačka and Srem (Szeremség, Sirmium) territories. A smaller part settled along the Maros from Szeged to Arad, and others in Bečej and Bečkerek. Other Serbs arrived in Veršec in 1690. While the conflict with the Ottoman Empire continued, the present population was exposed to eviction and destruction from all sides, and many moved into the fortress-towns or joined the military. Around 1690, Osman Aga described the Bačka as an uninhabited desolation, and Sombor, the main town, as deserted (Evliya had earlier described it as boasting fourteen mosques, but not a single fountain (**Kreutel, Spies, Griesbach**) (1954), p. 21. Also *ibid.*, reference to Evliya). The first German colonists in the Bačka were artisans attached to the army, settled in Peterwardein fortress by 1694. The first civilian colonists were settled in Neu-Futak (1702) and Neusatz (1709), also military bases (**Lotz**, 1966). The banks of the rivers Danube, Tisza and Maros were allocated to various Slav-dominated Military Frontier units.

The trans-Danubian connections of the Bačka had been developing since at least the fourteenth century, and were now so strong that they could no longer be broken. Only a few of the returning Hungarian landowners were able to realise their claims. In 1698, Bács megye (county) was nevertheless re-established, and the Archbishop of Kalocsa reinstalled as Obergespann (Petersen et al, 1933). The Tisza and Danube banks were allocated to various Slav-dominated Military Frontier units. 1699 saw the re-establishment of Bodrog megye in the 'as good as uninhabited' north-eastern part of the Bačka – which had not been part of mediaeval Bodrog (Petersen et al, 1933). The civil administration of the two counties was nevertheless hampered by their proximity to the border and the defining voice of the military authorities. In the Bačka, the Kuruzzen-rising brought about the general destruction of the Habsburgs' various Serb colonists. Being important allies of Vienna – having defeated the Kuruzzen at Halas – they attracted the attention of Rákóczy Ferenc II himself who, in 1704, devastated the Bačka and drove them to Srem and Slavonia (Weidlein, 1964). Their return was hindered by the Kuruzz general Balogh and, after the Peace of Szatmár (1711), by the resumption of German colonisation.

Meanwhile, the heavy demands of the Turkish military from before 1683 had broken the economy of the Banat of Temesvar. The formerly flourishing province had been brought low by the wars since 1683, and the captured interpreter Osman Aga, from the city, described the environs of

Temesvar as early as Summer 1688 thus: 'about three hours short of Temesvar we camped in a forest, as most of the Ra'aya of the province of Temesvar had even at this early date fled in all directions, and their villages lay there abandoned. The whole area was as though extinct and also most unsafe' (Rieser, 1992). In the Banat, the Habsburgs used "Scorched Earth" tactics, particularly around Temesvar, which they had isolated between September 1688 and October 1690. Driven by scarcity of food, wolves were even attacking people close to the city (*Der Löwe von Temeschwar*, 28, in Rieser, 1992). Much of the territory was in consequence chronically under-cultivated. Up until 1690, a proportion of the 'respected Islamic citizens' remained, but by 1708, they had been supplanted by mere 'rabble' and refugees (probably from the Kuruzzen- rising (Ibid. 68)). In 1705, about 8,000 Hungarians had certainly taken refuge in the Temesköz (Banat) from the Habsburgs and Serbs of the Maros march-land. They settled mainly in the easterly Lugos-Caransebe Banat, but some in the Turkish-occupied territories (Buchmann, 1936). The Ottomans did what they could to encourage this 'colonisation' until 1711. At the time of the Banat's conquest by the Habsburgs, the population is estimated as being around 80,000. In the years immediately after, that figure is said to have declined. At this point, the term "Banat" needs some clarification. Within the mediaeval Hungarian kingdom, The *Szörény Bánság* extended from the Resica area eastward to the line of the Olt in Wallachia. In the Ottoman period, a Lugos-Caransebe i Banat was subordinated to Transylvania, and was thus under Turkish suzerainty only. Its status during the Rákóczy rising is unclear. After the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), Temesvar and its hinterland remained in the hands of the Turks, while the Monarchy held the peripheral towns (Lugos, Karánsebes, Lippa, Csanád, Törökkanizsa, Törökbecse, Becskerek (Hungarian spellings)). The final Habsburg capture of Turkish Timi var (Temesvár) in 1716 had permitted the establishment of a Temeser Banat, while the highlands continued until 1718 to be viewed as constituting the Severin Banat. Thereafter, the term 'Banat' refers to the area covered after the reincorporation with Hungary by the Hungarian counties of Temes, Torontál and Krassó-Szörény.

In the later history of the Banat and Bačka, economics would play a crucial role. In the context of 18th century mercantilism, the newly conquered lands were colonized as fast as possible. Some of the first were specialist miners brought in from Tirol, Styria and Bohemia, to exploit the mineral resources of the Banat mountains. Others came to excavate the canals and to control the chaotic rivers. German farmers came and were usually settled on the best land, as they were more trusted to get the best out of it. Mercantilism, the then dominant strain of economics, held that the power of a state was a direct function of the ability of each province to contribute more to the treasury than it absorbed by way of subsidy. The greater the productive population, the more tax revenue would result. Growth in the population should by all means be encouraged (Jordan, 1967). With Temesvar at last safely in his hands, and in the knowledge of the rich mineral deposits in the Banat highlands, the Emperor, on 30th December 1716, declared the Temeser Banat a *Kron- und Kammerdomäne*.

In the light of the earlier Rákóczy rising - or War of Liberation, depending on viewpoint - (1703-1711) and the unstable situation brought about by the Habsburgs' conquest of both Turkish Hungary and Transylvania, it was deemed unsafe to transfer such a mineral-rich and strategically vital province to the Hungarian Kingdom. At the time, Austria was struggling to resist the hegemonial aspirations of France, whose eastern frontier was ever closing up to the left bank of the Rhine. Austria's wars with Turkey - a French ally - had been accompanied by a French attack in the west. Another Hungarian rising could have embroiled the Habsburgs, on the verge of becoming a Great Power, in a devastating three front war. It was felt that the establishment of a Catholic crown land between the Calvinist Hungarians and the Muslim Turks would hinder their cooperation. On 12th July 1718, the Banat therefore became a special crown land subordinated directly to the Kaiser (Karl III), and a test-bed for mercantilist theory came into being (Diplich, 1967). This special status lasted until lasted until 1779, and during this period, the repopulation and economic recovery of the province was entrusted to the military. The first military and civil governor appointed on 1st November 1716, General Count Florimund Mercy, established the *Banater Bergeinrichtungs-*

Kommission (1717), which revived mining activity in the highlands by introducing skilled Tyrolean, Styrian, Zipser and Bohemian labour. It appears, however, that mining operations had already begun in Oravica as early as 1703 (Baumann, 1989, 16)

The Habsburg Empire was suffering from an acute shortage of precious metals, made the more embarrassing by the wealth continuing to accrue to the Spanish, Portugese, English and French through their possessions in the Americas. General Mercy's *'banatische Einrichtungprojekt'* (1718) introduced a determined campaign to restore some resilience to the Banat which would in turn strengthen the frontier marches. Between 1718 and 1734, his Mercy's progressive governorship gradually transformed the province. The first of three waves of German immigration to the Banat, the *'erster Schwabenzug'*, which lasted from 1722 to 1726, brought in about 13,000-15,000 almost exclusively Catholic persons from various parts of Germany proper. The fortress of Temesvar was at first barred by Prince Eugène to settlement by Serbs and Jews. Colonists were assisted by the *Staatliche Kolonistenanwerbungs- und Speditionsbüro* in Worms and Regensburg and attracted by substantial tax concessions. In the period 1716 - 1738, a considerable amount of engineering work would also be undertaken to secure the communications of the mining districts. Fortresses had to be repaired and modernized, roads and bridges had to be established, and a great amount of drainage and river-control undertaken. In this early (Carolinian) period of Habsburg control, conditions in the Banat and Bačka were still far from ripe for agriculture. In this early period of colonization, most new settlements were established in the highlands, or along the principal communications routes.

Remarks on the Ottoman Legacy

The later Ottoman Empire was formerly portrayed as a purely destructive force, serving merely to set back the history of the peoples with whom it came into contact (for instance Serbs, Romanians and Hungarians). *"With the Turk, there could be no talk of understanding, consensus or the balancing of opposites. There was only one motivating force: hatred"* (Temesy, 1939). This is very much a case of the pot calling the kettle black, especially. – when one considers that it was not Turks who compelled Dózsa György's starved lieutenants to rip and eat roasted flesh from his still-living body. Another assertion is that *'whatever culture had remained from the past was definitely lost during this period'* (1552 – 1716) (Petersen et al, 1933). There is an underlying assumption that the Turkish culture was inherently at a lower level than those cultures that it overran and absorbed. One may of course ask which of those cultures – with perhaps the sole exception of Byzantium itself – produced any- thing which could match 16th – 17th century Constantinople. The Ottoman Empire was an enormously complex organism with initially – huge energy and a very different but cohesive set of morals. Like all organisms, however, it decayed and its patterns of life became more disrupted over time. Life nevertheless continued.

The condition of the Banat and Bačka upon their capture by the Habsburg armies, and the allocation of responsibility for that condition is a matter of some interest. In much German and Hungarian literature, Ottoman maladministration alone is blamed for the decline of the Banat and Bačka. Thus *'the Turks' relentless exploitation turned the flourishing region into a desolation. The marshes stank all the way from the Maros to the Danube'* (Temesy, 1939) is a fairly typical collocation of ideas. The 1995 *postscriptum* to Preyer's monograph, by Dr. Ioan Hagan, however, puts it in a nutshell: *'The opinion that, on the conquest of the Banat, the region was in a catastrophic situation as a result of Turkish rule, is an historical untruth which corresponded to the ideological views of the House of Habsburg'*. This *Denkweise* tends to ignore the natural conditions which had prevailed before the Ottomans arrived, and treat the marshes as a new phenomenon. There always had been marshes in the Banat (Temesköz), even in Roman and Byzantine times. There appears to be little evidence of effective pre-Ottoman flood-controls, so it may be unfair to blame Ottomans for

neglecting something which had no previous existence. The endless wars deprived the population of any permanence, of long-term perspectives and of incentives to plan. It is therefore most probable that small, local flood-controls did become neglected, resulting in further areas being lost to marshland, but this was due not primarily to the administration. The real cause of the desolation was the recurring wars between Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. The Principality of Transylvania was often involved, even when it was not the apple of discord, and its soldiery, as well as the feared Haiducks and Kuruzzen – i.e. Hungarians – also added to the general scorched earth, rapine and slaughter.

It is not unusual for the loser to be saddled with all the blame for and perhaps the costs of war-damage. What is unusual is that in this case the conventional wisdom of the 18th century has survived almost unchallenged to the present day. The Habsburg picture of the recovered Banat and Bačka was from the outset bound to be distorted by the simple fact that they had been ‘liberated’ from ‘the Turk’ by ‘Christian’ states. Furthermore, the benefits of Habsburg administration and mercantilist policy could be exaggerated if the initial culture-base were reported as being lower than it actually was and the blame for this ascribed wholly to mismanagement by the previous regime/economic system without taking into account the depredations of the Habsburg armies. It is therefore credible, as claimed by ome an, that General Mercy actually consciously exaggerated the number of abandoned villages (343) (ome an, 1939). It is however a fact that the advance of the Christian Habsburg was not seen as an undiluted boon by all their co-religionists, and some of these even chose to pass back under the rule of the Turks. The real and great achievements of the coming German colonisations would therefore come to be inflated by ambition and pride.

References

- Bodor, A.** (1914).: *Délmagyarországi telepítések története és hatása a mai közállapotokra*. Stephaneum Nyomda R.T., Budapest.
- Buchmann, K** (1936): *A délmagyarországi telepítések története. I: Banat*. Budapest.
- Diplich, H.** (1952).: *Das Banat - die Porta Orientalis dreimal zerstört*. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Tschanad-Temeschwarer Diöcese, 1030-1950. Verlag Christ Unterwegs, München,
- Diplich, H.** (1967): *Die staatrechtliche Stellung des Banats im 18.ten Jahrhundert*. Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter; München.
- Fassel, H.; Schmidt, J.** (Jahreszahl?).: *An Donau und Theiß: Banater Lesebuch*. Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben. Ort?
- Kocsis, K.**: (1989). *Etnikai változások a mai Szlovákia és a Vajdaság területén a XI. századtól napjainkig*. ELTE, Budapest,
- Kocsis, K.**: (1995). Contributions to the Ethnic Geography of the Hungarians in Vojvodina. Lecture held at 7th Hungarian-Croatian Geographical Symposium, Mljet Island.
- Dioszghy, E.** (Ed.): (1995) *Kulturraum mittlere und untere Donau. Traditionen und Perspektiven des Zusammenlebens*. Museum für Geschichte des Kreises Karasch-Sewerin, **Reschitza**, in Verbindung mit dem Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde, **Tübingen**, und der Universität Babes-Boyai, **Klausenburg**. Re i a,
- Jordan, S.** (1967).: *Die kaiserliche Wirtschaftspolitik im Banat im 18. Jahrhundert*. Buchreihe der Südostdeutschen Historischen Kommission, Band 17. Verlag Romanian. Oldenbourg, München.
- Lotz, Friedrich** (1966): *Die ersten deutschen Kolonisten der Batschka (Futak, 1702, Neusatz, 1709)*. Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter, ? München.
- Magris, C.** (1990): *Danube*. Collins Harvill, London.
- Petersen, Scheel, Ruth, Schwalm** (Hrsg.) (1933): *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums*. Verlag Ferdinand Hirt, Breslau.
- Popović, G.** (1952): *Srbi u Bačkoj do kraja 18. veka*. SANU, Beograd.

- Preyer, J.N.** (1995): Monographie der königlichen Freistadt Temesvar / Monografia Ora ului liber Craiesc Timi oara. Editura Amarcord, Timi oara.
- Rieser, H.** (1992): *Temesvar. Geographische Beschreibung der Banater Hauptstadt.* Schriftenreihe des Instituts für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde. Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Sigmaringen.
- Somesan, L.** (1939): *Die Theisebene: eine natürliche Grenze zwischen Rumänen und Ungarn,* geographische und geopolitische Studie. Sibiu/Hermannstadt.
- Spies, O., Hrsg. (Kreutel, Spies, Griesbach)** (1954): *Leben und Abenteuer des Dolmetschers Osman Aga: eine Türkische Autobiographie aus der Zeit der großen Kriege gegen Österreich.* Bonner orientalische Studien, Bonn
- Steinacker, Harold, Hrsg.** (1964): Südostdeutsches Archiv, VII. Band. Verlag R. Oldenbourg, München,
- Szentkláray, J** (1879): *Száz év Dél-Magyarország újabb történetéből (1779-től napjainkig).* Tekintettel a III. Károly és Mária Terézia Korabeli előzményekre. Temesvárott.
- Temesy, G.** (1939): *A temesközi vizsabályozások a XVIII században.* In: Földrajzi Közlemények, LXVII k-tet, p. 494-509. A Magyar Földrajzi Tarsaság, Budapest.
- Weidlein, J.** (1964): *Die ungarische Flüchtlingsbewegung in der Türkenzeit.* Südostdeutsches Archiv, VII. Band Verlag R. Oldenbourg, München.
- Wolf, J. et al.** (1995) *Materialien 5 / 1995.* Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde, Tübingen,