

URBANIZATION AND TRADE AT THE TURBULENT BORDER: SERBIAN TOWNS ON THE DANUBE 1402–1459

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After the battle of Kosovo in 1389, Serbia fell under dependence of the Ottoman Empire and the northern parts of the country became the scene of fighting between the Ottomans and the Hungarians for the supremacy in the Danube region. However, the situation changed after the Battle of Ankara (1402), when a temporary internal crisis started in the Ottoman Empire. Serbian ruler Despot Stefan Lazarević (1389–1427) turned to Hungary, made peace with King Sigismund of Luxembourg and became his vassal (1403/1404), and a period of relative calm appeared on the Danube frontier. The despot received Belgrade and a part of the Banate of Mačva (Macsó) south of the river Sava from the Hungarian king, and in those years he also gained the fortress of Golubac on the Danube, which had previously been occupied by the Turks. In such a way, the despot's authority was strengthened on the banks of the Danube and the Sava, from the river Drina in the west to the mountain Miroč in the east. The newly obtained territories and towns were of great importance for the Serbian state. Because the Ottomans had been advancing from the south, it was necessary to relocate the state seat as far to the north as possible. This is why Despot Stefan chose Belgrade as the new capital and immediately began its extensive rebuilding.¹

In the coming years Serbia was not spared of the consequences of fighting among the Bayezid's sons, into which their Balkan vassals were also drawn. However, Despot Stefan benefited from the temporary weakening of the Ottoman state. With the Hungarian support, he started settling affairs in the country, taking back lost territories and building up his authority. The period of relative calm after 1413 enabled the economic and social development, which had been started in Serbia, to be continued and it was characterised by the improvement of mining and trade, tied with the rising of towns and local citizenry. The areas along the Sava and the Danube, which were less perished in the previously fighting than the southern parts of the country, and through which were maintained economic relations with Hungary and Wallachia, progressed demographically and economically. These areas were also administrative and political centre of the despot's state. The border cooperation along the great rivers was more intense than ever before – people were crossing from Hungarian to Serbian towns “*as from home to home*,” as the despot's biographer Constantine the Philosopher wrote. Despot Stefan also implemented a series of measures to strengthen the defence capability of the country. He introduced a new administrative system, the so-called “*vlasti*” (“the

¹ Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 82–84; Kalić 1982a, p. 64–68, 71–74; Spremić 1994a, p. 52–54; Veselinović 2006, p. 115–116; Engel 2005, p. 232–233; Ćirković 2004, p. 85–89.

authorities”), which were commanded by the voivodes. Military obligations of the population also increased, new fees were introduced for equipping the army and the fortifications were built across the country.²

Belgrade had the central place in despot's efforts to renew the state, and it was methodically turned into the biggest and most powerful fortress in the country, as well as into a well-inhabited town and an important economic, ecclesiastical and cultural centre. At that moment when Belgrade came under the despot's rule in 1403/4, it was “*devastated and deserted*”.³ Archaeological excavations of the Belgrade fortress in the past decades enabled insight into the appearance of Belgrade in the Middle Ages to a considerable degree. They showed the size of the construction activity of Despot Stefan and his effort to form Belgrade not only as a strong fortification, but also as a developed urban settlement. The old Byzantine castle on the hill above the confluence of the Sava and the Danube was fundamentally reconstructed and therein the despot's court was situated. The Western Lower Town on the Sava was strengthened by the construction of a fortified port.⁴ Then a new fort was built, *Gornji grad* (The Upper Town), with a rectangular base, measuring 300 × 160 meters. The castle with the court complex was integrated in its western corner. *Gornji grad* had double walls with a total of eleven towers, and on the east, south and west sides the fort was surrounded with the trench. On each side there was a gate with movable bridges over the trench. The main entrance was on the south side, in the direction of the Constantinople Road. In addition to the military garrisons, in the Upper Town houses of nobility and personalities closed to the court were located. The last phase of construction of Belgrade during the despot's rule was the building of *Donji grad* (The Lower Town) in the area between the Upper Town and the Danube. Its walls protected the new urban centre that had developed in this area. The big port on the Danube was located along the north-eastern rampart of the Lower Town.⁵ Under the Hungarian rule after 1427, the Belgrade fortress was only partially rebuilt and strengthened, especially after the sieges of 1440 and 1456. The focus of work was aimed at increasing the fire-power of the defence.⁶

The medieval Serbian towns did not have uniform organization: while the communes in the southern Adriatic had broad autonomy, the cities in the south, which were seized from the Byzantine Empire in the 14th century, were largely subordinated to the central government. Mining centres, which were developed under the influence of the German law and towns whose rise began in the late 14th and the first half of the 15th century, enjoyed certain autonomy. In addition to the ruler's representative *kephalia*, or the *voivode* in the 15th century, these towns were governed by the count (*knez*) and the city council of 12 citizens (*purgari* < Germ. Bürgern). The jurisdiction of the voivode was military affairs, defence and protection of the town and its district, or the territory of the “*vlast*”. The voivode had the highest judicial authority in matters reserved for the ruler's court (grave crimes). The responsibility of the count was primarily inner affairs of the town and its suburbs, related to trade and everyday life. The city administration was undeveloped, and the count and the burghers had only a few officials. In such situation, certain

² Konstantin Filosof, p. 311; Dinić 1968, p. 237–244; Kovačević/Kojić 1982, p. 100–108; Blagojević 1997, p. 291–297; Kalić 2001, p. 98–107; Veselinović 2006, p. 221–230, 253–260.

³ This formulation originates from the unsaved charter of Despot Stefan for Belgrade, which was quoted by Konstantin Filozof, p. 272. On the history of Belgrade until the beginning of the 15th century see: Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 24–81; Kalić 2003, p. 92–95.

⁴ Konstantin Filosof, p. 286; Broquière, p. 211–213; Kalić 1974, p. 450–452; Marjanović/Vujović 1974, p. 302–306; Bajalović/Hadžić/Pešić 1997, p. 67–88; Popović 2006a, p. 85–96.

⁵ Konstantin Filosof, p. 286–287; Kalić 1974, p. 448–450; Marjanović/Vujović 1970, p. 22–29; Popović 2006a, p. 97–121.

⁶ Popović 2006a, p. 131–157.

administrative and judicial functions in these towns were transferred to tax collectors or lessees of royal revenues (mines, mints, fines, duties, market fees, etc.).⁷

There are very few data on the legal organisation of Belgrade and the city administration at the time of Despot Stefan Lazarević. As the despot's court was situated in Belgrade, the court officials and representatives of the state administration had to stay in the city. Speaking of the despot's court and the courtiers, Constantine the Philosopher compared them with the "celestial hierarchy", mentioning three ranks: the "chiefs of the affairs", the bodyguards and the "outer" rank. There are no direct data about the existence of the voivode in Belgrade, but his presence in the city is quite certain. The castle, where the despot's palace was placed, had a special commander.⁸

The charter which Despot Stefan issued to Belgrade has not been preserved, and we cannot have a comprehensive picture about the specific content of the city's privileges. However, from the report of Constantine the Philosopher, who inserted a part of the Belgrade charter in his biography of Despot Stefan, it is known that the citizens got wide privileges. They were exempted from various monetary and labour duties that were owed to the monarch, as well as from the payment of customs and tolls across the Serbian state. Despot Stefan made an effort to obtain privileges for Belgrade's traders from foreign rulers, primarily from the Hungarian king, which enabled them to have intensive economic ties with neighbouring regions north of the Sava and the Danube. The despot also encouraged populating of the new capital, especially attracting wealthy people, traders from all parts of his country, who, according to Constantine the Philosopher, were dignified as the twelve apostles. It should be interpreted as a reference to the formation of the city council⁹

The city was the seat of the Orthodox metropolitans. In addition to the Cathedral dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, which was renewed and partially expanded, Despot Stefan erected the churches of the Three Hierarchs and St. Nicholas, next to which was the hospital and the shelter for the weak. In the Lower Town there was also the Church of Saint Paraskeva, where the relics of the saint were held until 1521.¹⁰ One of the Orthodox churches stood outside the city walls, and was destroyed during the siege of 1456. At the same time, Belgrade was the seat of the Catholic bishopric, and there were several Catholic churches and the Franciscan monastery in the Lower Town. One Catholic Church was located outside the walls, in the suburb.¹¹ The suburb was placed in front of the fortress, a bowshot away from the city walls, and it stretched from the Sava riverside to the bank of the Danube. Judging by the testimony of Burgundian traveller Bertrandon de la Broquière, the suburb had a rural appearance and it was inhabited by Serbs.¹²

Despot Stefan was building Belgrade up to his death in 1427. He probably hoped that the city would remain in the hands of his successor, for whom he chose his nephew Đurađ (George) Branković. However, through an agreement with King Sigismund, which was reached in May 1426, the despot had to agree that after his death the Banate of Mačva, Belgrade, Golubac, as

⁷ Blagojević 1992, p. 71–72; Blagojević 1997, p. 293–296; Ćirković 1997, p. 266–269; Veselinović 1992, p. 125–136; Veselinović 2006, p. 254–259.

⁸ Konstantin Filosof, p. 283; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 90–91; Ćirković 1997, p. 431.

⁹ Konstantin Filosof, p. 285–288; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 84–101; Kalić 2009, p. 188–197.

¹⁰ The relics of Saint Paraskeva were brought to Serbia from Veliko Tarnovo by nun Eugenia (Princess Milica), the mother of Despot Stefan, in 1398: Popović 2006b, p. 287–293.

¹¹ Konstantin Filosof, p. 287–288, 322; Broquière, p. 212; Dinić 1958, p. 16, 54, 70; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 90–93, 306–309; Popović/Bikić 2004.

¹² Broquière, p. 212; Popović 1978, p. 122–125; Simić 1980, p. 40–41; Antonović 2010, p. 36–41.

well as despot's lands west of the river Drina should be returned to the Hungarian crown.¹³ Faced with the offensive of the Ottomans, who occupied one-third of his state, Đurađ Branković (1427–1456) recognized the sovereign authority of King Sigismund and turned Belgrade over to him at the end of September 1427. For citizens of Belgrade it was very hard to accept that the city was given away to the Hungarians, as many of them had to leave the capital. The king brought Catholic population to Belgrade, at the same time prohibiting Serbs to access the greater part of the fortress. In order to keep Belgrade as strong economic centre, he had already given its inhabitants privilege at the beginning of November 1427, and called traders from Dubrovnik (Ragusa) and artisans from Sopron to come into town and to continue their business there.¹⁴ Over the next nine decades under Hungarian rule, Belgrade was a key point in the defence system of the Kingdom.¹⁵ As for other lands that were to be returned to the Hungarian crown, they stayed under Đurađ Branković's rule, while the fortress of Golubac was surrendered to the Ottomans in the late autumn of 1427 by its renegade commander.¹⁶

Having lost Belgrade and other important towns such as Golubac, Niš and Kruševac, which were occupied by the Ottomans, Đurađ Branković was forced to build a new capital. He chose Smederevo at the confluence of the river Jezava and the Danube. That settlement was also located on the Hungarian border, where the Serbian monarch could quickly get help and where he could escape in the case of trouble. The construction of the new city, which was going to become the largest Serbian medieval fortress, started in 1428.¹⁷ The fortress of Smederevo was emerging gradually, with high burden of material and human resources. Firstly, *Mali grad* (The Small Town, the castle) was built until 1430, and the despot's court was located there. After that *Veliki grad* (the Great Town), which protected the urban settlement that was developed by the court, was built, too. These two parts of fortifications were designed to make a unique urban and defensive unit. The fortress had triangular base: its two sides were protected by the river banks, and on the third, the land side, in front of the walls was the trench filled with water. Dimensions of the fortress are large: the length of the side towards the Danube is 550 meters, to the Jezava 400 meters and to the hinterland 502 meters. The space inside the walls covers an area of about 10 hectares. Six towers guarded the castle and nineteen were placed on the walls of *Veliki grad*. Although Smederevo was a classical medieval fortress by its shape and the defensive concept, the thickness of the towers and walls (up to 4.5 meters) was determined by the new method of warfare with the use of artillery. The wall panels were about 10 meters height, and the towers more than 20 meters. The castle originally had three gates, and the main linked it with the Great Town. The Great Town had five gates, some of which were designed for the passage of wagons and others for pedestrians and horsemen. In front of the gates there were movable bridges over the trench.¹⁸

The court with the despot's official and private rooms ("*curia domini despota*", "*polata*") was situated in the castle (*Mali grad*). Four Gothic windows, which belonged to the great hall, still exist on the wall facing the Danube. The remains of the court buildings, some of which may

¹³ Fejér *CD X/6*, p. 809–813; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 101; Kalić 1982b, p. 215; Spremić 1994a, p. 70–71; Ćirković 1994, p. 64–66.

¹⁴ Gelchich/Thallóczy 1887, p. 328–330; Krstić 2012, p. 27–29, 33–34; Broquière, p. 211–216; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 102, 106–107; Rokai 1969, p. 89–90, 93; Spremić 1994a, p. 97, 103–105.

¹⁵ About the history of Belgrade under Hungarian rule until the Ottoman conquest in 1521, in detail: Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 105–238.

¹⁶ Konstantin Filosof, p. 319–323; Stojanović, 1902, p. 81–82; Stojanović 1927, p. 228–229; Thallóczy/Áldásy 1907, p. 74–76, 112; Spremić 1994a, p. 90–94; Veselinović 2006, p. 129; Krstić 2012b, p. 125–126.

¹⁷ Ćirković 1970, p. 61–62; Spremić 1982a, p. 224–226; Spremić 1994a, p. 124–134.

¹⁸ Cunjak 2011, p. 19–34, 73–114; Popović 2013, p. 14–73, where the previous works of this author are also cited.

originate from Ottoman times, are placed next to the two other walls of the castle. The town with houses, churches, shops and warehouses was in the spacious *Veliki grad*, where the surrounding population could shelter at the time of the siege. In front of the walls a large suburb stretched, encircled by earthen ramparts with palisade and a trench. The buildings in the suburb, but also in the city, were built mostly of wood. The risk of fire was high, especially during the siege. Therefore, the roofs were covered with mud and the suburb was often preventively burnt.¹⁹ Smederevo was the seat of the central authorities and the residence of the highest state dignitaries. The city was the centre of the administrative unit called “*Smederevskavlast*” with the voivode at the head, as well as the new seat of the Metropolitan of Braničevo and Kučevo. Numerous military garrison and the despot’s armed escorts stayed in the fortress. One of the despot’s mints was also situated in Smederevo. The city population consisted of nobility, wealthy burghers and the common folk. The citizens of Smederevo had their municipality (“*università di populi*”). The city was not only the political and economic, but also the cultural centre of the state of the Serbian despot. There were transcribed and translated books, and the original literary works were created. Despot Đurađ and some educated Greeks and citizens of Dubrovnik who lived in Smederevo possessed their private libraries.²⁰

However, the strong fortress of Smederevo was not able to fulfil the purpose of its creation and stop the invaders. The Ottomans occupied Smederevo for the first time nine years after its construction (1439). After the “Long campaign”, Despot Đurađ managed to regain his state and the capital in 1444, and the next fifteen years were a period of intense urban and economic development of Smederevo. Unfortunately, further strengthening of the Ottoman military pressure also strongly affected the regions along the Sava and the Danube. After unsuccessful besieged in 1454, 1456 and 1458, Smederevo submitted to the Sultan Mehmed IInd in June 1459.²¹ Thus the medieval Serbian state ceased to exist and the city became the administrative centre of the Smederevo *sancak*, until the Ottoman occupation of Belgrade in 1521.²²

The other Serbian towns on the Danube of this period are far less known today. In contrast to the period from 11th to 13th century,²³ the data about the town Braničevo provided by historical sources from the 15th century are very scarce. It seems that the town was declining during the late Middle Ages. However, when the Ottomans forced Despot Đurađ to give them Braničevo in 1437, according to estimates from Dubrovnik, it was still very rich town (“*oppulentissimum oppidum ... vocatum Branizevo*”).²⁴ The despot had regained Braničevo in 1444, but the Turks finally occupied it in 1458. The fort was probably destroyed then, and its role in the defence of the Ottoman border on the Danube took over the fortress Ram in 1483. In the second half of the 15th century, the settlement had the status of the village. Braničevo was erected next to the mouth of the river Mlava into the Danube, in the wider area of the ancient Viminacium. The fortress consisted of two parts: the square-planned *Mali grad*, with four towers at the corners, which occupied an area of about two hectares and *Veliki grad* of irregular shape, with an area of

¹⁹ Ćirković 1970, p. 67; Krstić, 2011, p. 312.

²⁰ Lascaris 1936, p. 184; Makušev 1882, p. 115; Ćirković 1970, p. 63, 65–68; Dimitrijević 1970, p. 71–86; Spremić 1994a, p. 389, 391–393, 512–513; Ivanović 2010, p. 437–449; Ivanišević 2001, p. 192, 297, 299, tab. VIII; Ivanišević 2011, p. 425. About the Serbian court and the court dignitaries in the time of despots see: Veselinović 2006, p. 241–250; Blagojević 1997, p. 169, 182–184, 192–195, 202–203, 236, 239–245.

²¹ Spremić 1982b, p. 254–267; Spremić/Kalić 1982, p. 289–302; Spremić 1982c, p. 303–313; Spremić 1994a, p. 206–546; Krstić 2011, p. 308–320.

²² On the history of Smederevo under the Ottoman rule in second half of the 15th and in the 16th century see: Zirojević 1970, p. 193–200; Miljković/Bojanić 2004, p. 146–149; Katić/Popović 2013, p. 79–113.

²³ Dinić 1978, p. 90–101; Antonović 2006, p. 7–17; Krstić 2010, p. 54–55.

²⁴ Gelchich/Thallóczy 1887, p. 405; Radonić 1934, p. 392–393.

about 2.5 hectares. The suburban settlement was located east of the fort, on a ridge between the Danube and the Mlava.²⁵

The fortress of Golubac was built on a rock on the bank of the Danube, in the place where one could effectively control the navigation and crossing the river. The fort was constructed in several phases and it was mentioned in the sources from 1335 as Hungarian stronghold. Due to its great military significance, Golubac played a prominent role in the wars of the late 14th to the early 16th century, when Hungarians, Serbs and Turks struggled for its control. The attempt of King Sigismund to capture Golubac in 1428 had almost ended fatally for the Hungarian ruler. The fortress, which was the base of the Ottoman Danube river flotilla, remained in the possession of the Sultan until 1444, when he returned Golubac to Despot Đurađ along with his whole country. During the period when it was in the hands of the Serbian despot, Golubac was also the centre of the military-administrative unit called “*Golupskavlast*”. The Ottomans finally occupied Golubac in August 1458. In the second half of the 15th and early 16th century the fortress served as a base for the *akinci*'s incursions in Hungary, which caused Hungarian counterattacks (especially in 1481). There are no preserved data on military crew and settlement, population and economic life of the town in the first half of the 15th century. Such data exist only for the period when Golubac became the Ottoman stronghold in the second half of the 15th century.²⁶

The most mysterious medieval Serbian town on the Danube was Višesav. Although it is certain that this fort protected the north-eastern Serbian border, its position has not been definitely determined yet. It is believed that Višesav was located near the confluence of the Poreča Reka with the Danube. Recent archaeological researches in this area have revealed a medieval village built on Roman foundations and the fortress constructed probably during the 14th century. It was first mentioned in historical sources during the Ottoman-Hungarian struggle over Golubac in 1428, when monks from a nearby Serbian monastery took refuge in this fortress. Višesav was possessed by the Ottomans for the first time in 1438, to be finally conquered two decades later. Its further fate is unknown, but was likely to lose its military function.²⁷

After the final Ottoman conquest of Serbia (1459), Serbian towns gradually obtained an oriental appearance and predominantly Muslim population. The fortresses on the Danube: Smederevo, Golubac, as well as Kulič, on the conflux of the Velika Morava, and Ram, north-east of Požarevac, erected in 1483, served as bases for attacks against Hungary. At the same time, these towns played an important role in cross-border trade.²⁸

The development of towns and urban economy in Serbia during the first half of the 15th century brought an increasing number of local business people. Merchants from Hungary were also involved in cross-border trade on the Danube, but due to the nature of the surviving sources we are most familiar with the business of the Ragusans. Namely, as the Serbian medieval archives were mostly destroyed during and after the Ottoman conquest, the idea on economic activity at

²⁵ Popović/Ivanišević 1988, p. 125–179; Spremić 1994a, p. 209; Miljković/Krstić 2007, p. 34, 75–77; Krstić 2011, p. 317.

²⁶ Čirković 1968, p. 7–32; Miljković/Krstić 2007, p. 79–81.

²⁷ Stojanović 1902, p. 81–82; Stojanović 1926, p. 86; Stojanović 1927, p. 243; Novaković 1883, p. 157–164; Dinić 1978, p. 99–101, 108; Janković/Janković 1978, p. 155–168; Minić 1983, p. 293–296.

²⁸ Zirojević 1967, p. 233–246; Zirojević 1970, p. 193–200; Zirojević 1974, p. 119–122, 129–131, 142–146, 148–150; Miljković/Bojanić 2004, p. 133–135, 136–137, 143–144, 146–149; Miljković/Krstić 2007, p. 77–81; Katić/Popović 2013, p. 79–115.

the territory of Serbia during the Middle Ages could be acquired primarily through the documents from Dubrovnik and, to a lesser extent, from other Dalmatian cities. Thus, the resulting image is largely distorted and one-sided, but often, unfortunately, the only possible. The activity of business people from Dubrovnik in the Danube and the Sava region clearly demonstrated the extent to which the both sides of the great rivers were economically linked. Already in the 13th century, the Ragusans were present in Serbia and Bosnia as traders and entrepreneurs, and by the end of the same century they expanded their activities in Hungary. However, the highlight of their economic activity in Serbia was in the 15th century, during the rule of despots. Although Ragusan economic activity was largely tied to the Serbian mining centres, their presence in the Danube and the Sava region was significant during the 15th and early 16th centuries. The colony of Ragusan citizens in Sremska Mitrovica, the first and largest of their colonies in Hungary, was in full flourish in the period from 1356 to 1396, when the city suffered from the Ottoman ransack. Then Ilok became the centre of Ragusan activity in Srem, and it maintained that status for the entire period up to the battle of Mohács (1526). The citizens of Dubrovnik restored their colony in Sremska Mitrovica, which never reached its size of the second half of the 14th century.²⁹ In the southern Banat, Kovin was the centre of their operations, where some Ragusans had already stayed as permanent residents before 1377. Between 1409 and 1412 almost thirty merchants from Dubrovnik lived in this town, including members of the nobility, especially from the family Bobaljević.³⁰

During the reign of Despot Stefan, Ragusan traders also resided in Belgrade. The transition of the city under the Hungarian rule did not interrupt their activity, because King Sigmund endeavoured to ensure and expand the business of Ragusans in Belgrade. By 1440, the names of 73 citizens and 15 nobles who lived in Belgrade were recorded. The Ragusans who went to Hungary via Belgrade were mainly those who had business in Serbia. The Ragusan merchants from Belgrade, Sremska Mitrovica, Kovin and Smederevo were in intensive mutual business relationships, and such relationships they also had with their countrymen from towns across Serbia, Bosnia and Hungary (Timisoara, Oradea, Buda, Baia Mare and Saros).³¹

In the last period of existence of the Serbian state (1444–1459), the largest Ragusan colony was in the capital Smederevo. First Ragusans had already appeared at this place in 1411, prior to the construction of the fortress, but until 1445 their presence in Smederevo was not significant. After the temporary liberation of Smederevo, the colony of merchants from Dubrovnik in the city increased to the total of 350 known members, who stayed in the Serbian capital for longer or shorter time. About a third of these were members of the nobility. The actual number of Ragusan businessmen in the capital of the despot was probably higher. The Ragusan patricians Paskoje Sorkočević, Damjan Djurdjević, Junije Gradić and Alviz Rastić entered the service of Despot Đurađ and made successful careers at his court.³² In the first decades after the Ottoman conquest the interest of the Ragusan merchants to do business in Smederevo dropped sharply. The Ragusan colony in Smederevo was renewed in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.³³

²⁹ Ćirković 1969, p. 63–68; Hrabak 1980, p. 57–66; Dinić/Knežević 1986, p. 14–16, 59–71, 176–178.

³⁰ Hrabak 1980, p. 60–61.

³¹ Dinić 1958, p. 14–66, 73, 80–82; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 293–299, 302–304; Kalić 1970, p. 55–58; Kovačević 1970, p. 107–114; Spremić 1994a, p. 602–603; Spremić 1994b, p. 95–103.

³² Data on Ragusan merchants mainly arising from the litigations conducted before the authorities of Dubrovnik and before the judicial collegia, which were composed of the citizens of Dubrovnik, who did business in Serbia: Kovačević 1970, p. 103–119; Kovačević/Kojić 2011, p. 257–262; Spremić 1994a, p. 353, 407, 413–415, 463, 528–529, 542. About the autonomous Ragusan judiciary in Serbia see: Veselinović 2006, p. 272–277.

³³ Popović 1970, p. 143–148; Popović 1992, p. 144–146; Zirojević 1970, p. 190–191; Miljković/Bojanić 2004, p. 270.

The export trade became more and more branched out in the era of the Serbian despots, and by the volume and value reached hitherto unknown proportions. The traditional agricultural products: livestock, beef, sheep and other leather, cheese, cereals, wax and furs continued to be exported from Serbia.³⁴ In the last years of the existence of Serbian state the trade of crimson (“*crvac*”), the material for textile dyeing, was related to Smederevo in considerable degree.³⁵ However, the main export product of Serbia was silver, not only exported to Dubrovnik, and through it to other countries, but also to Hungary. Giving the right to mint silver coins to Pressburg (Bratislava) in 1430, King Sigismund allowed the import of silver “*de Rascia*” to this city.³⁶ Responding to the efforts of Despot Stefan to restrict the export of silver and gold from Serbia, the authorities of Dubrovnik told him in 1417 that luxury goods, which their merchants brought to the bigger markets of the Serbian state and to his court, had to be paid with precious metals and jewels. These were different types of fine fabrics: silk, velvet, gold brocade, damask and others.³⁷ In addition, woollen fabrics of poor quality were also imported as the durable consumer goods. Of the all Ragusan companies that were doing business in Serbia at the time of Despot Đurađ, 20% of them traded fabrics, which were mostly sold in Smederevo after 1444.³⁸ The Ragusan fabrics were exported to Hungary via Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, Belgrade, Rudnik, Smederevo and other places.³⁹ The import from Dubrovnik to Serbia and Hungary was not confined to a variety of fabrics and garments. It was traded with gold and silver jewellery, pearls, products of gold and silver, silverware, pins, ropes, salt, spices, perfumes, oils, citrus fruits, fine wines, medicines, sweets, horse equipment, leather products, glass windows and glass objects, paper, cold weapons, firearms and gunpowder.⁴⁰ After the Ottoman conquest of Serbia, the Ragusans continued to sell the aforementioned goods and artisanal products, which weremade in Italy and other Western European countries, mainly to the Ottoman administrative and military officials.⁴¹

The intensification of cross-border trade on the Danube during the reign of Despot Stefan was indirectly confirmed by the mention of the “Riverside customs”, which were given in the lease to the entrepreneurs from Dubrovnik (1404, 1415).⁴² Smederevo customs were leased to the Ragusan noble Vuk Bobaljević and his several compatriots in 1446. Their attempt to introduce innovations in the collection of custom revenues immediately caused a strong and successful resistance of the authorities of Dubrovnik.⁴³ Beside the Ragusans, the Serbian merchants also participated in the trade with the Hungarian border areas. Their presence in Kovin is testified by the charter which Emperor Sigismund issued to this Danubian city in 1435.⁴⁴ The importance of

³⁴ Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 89–90; Kovačević/Kojić 1982, p. 102; Spremić 1994a, p. 636–638.

³⁵ Spremić 1994a, p. 638–639. The dye was made from the dried bodies of the females of the scale insects known as the scarlet worms (*coccus ilicis*), which were collected in Serbian and Bosnian forests and mainly imported to Dubrovnik: Radojčić 1967, p. 30–31; Lorger 2011, p. 53–62.

³⁶ Fejér, *CD X/7*, p. 199; Hrabak 1980, p. 63; Kalić 1970, p. 57, believes that domestic, Serbian traders were likely involved in the silver trade with Hungary. On the export of metals from Serbia at the time of Despot Đurađ see: Spremić 1994a, p. 624–636.

³⁷ Stojanović 1929, p. 220; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 89.

³⁸ Kovačević 1970, p. 112; Spremić 1994a, p. 643.

³⁹ Dinić 1958, p. 58, p. 72–73; Dinić/Knežević 1982, p. 257; Spremić 1994a, p. 529, 644, 656.

⁴⁰ Dinić 1958, p. 21, 54–55, 58, 65, 69–70, 72–73; Dinić 1934, p. 84; Kalić/Mijušković, 1967, p. 90, 302; Kalić 1970, p. 58; Spremić 1994a, p. 314, 354, 649–650.

⁴¹ Božić 1952, p. 97, 227–228, 272–277, 290, 298–307; Hrabak 1971, p. 59, 465, 478–479, 486, 495; Kostić 1974, p. 35, 39.

⁴² Mladenović 2007, p. 40–41; Fostikov 2012, p. 124–125; Dinić 1978, p. 111–112; Kalić 1976, p. 81–82; Veselinović 1984, p. 13, 17–18; Veselinović 2006, p. 226.

⁴³ Veselinović 1984, p. 33–34; Spremić 1994, p. 620.

⁴⁴ Magdics 1888, p. 14–15. About Kovin in the 15th century and its privileges see: Dinić/Knežević 1988, p. 25–30; Krstić 2006, p. 33–39.

trade exchange across the Danube for the economies of the countries which were bordering and clashing on this river was also demonstrated by the provisions of the peace agreements. The proposal of the Hungarian-Ottoman truce made by Despot Đurađ in 1449, which was not accepted by the Hungarian diet, predicted that the Ottoman merchants were free to come to Belgrade, Kovin, Haram (Banatska Palanka), Turnu Severin and Caransebeș, while the despot would designate towns on the Ottoman territory which Hungarian traders could visit.⁴⁵ The agreement on the Hungarian-Ottoman three-year truce from the end of 1451 contained a provision on the free movement of traders and envoys, which were free to return to their country after the truce expired.⁴⁶ Similar provisions on cross-border trade on the Danube also occurred in the peace agreements from the second half of the 15th and early 16th century, after Serbia had come under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷

Data on turnover of goods across the border on the Danube for the period up to 1459 can be supplemented by those which provided the Ottoman *kanuns* for the river crossings at Smederevo, Kulič, Ram and Golubac from the first decades of the 16th century. At that time, livestock (sheep, pigs, cattle, workhorses) arrived from Hungary to the Danubian markets, partly by the trade, partly as war booty. Slaves arrived to these markets in the same way. The salt from Transylvania was transported to Smederevo, Ram and Golubac along the Danube.⁴⁸ The goods from the interior of Serbia and the Balkan Peninsula were also brought to the towns on the Danube along the Velika Morava, as well as over the land routes. On the basis of the mentioned *kanuns*, it can be concluded that trade involved wheat, fish, cattle, wine, lard, honey, cheese, salt, butter, oil, olives, eggs, fruit, vegetables, sheepskin, iron products, clothes, cloth, fabrics, hemp, firewood, boards and timber, wooden shovels, kindling and tarn the markets of Smederevo, Kulič, Golubac and Ram.⁴⁹

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⁴⁵ Teleki 1853, p. 243–244; Hurmuzaki 1890, p. 760–761; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 121–122; Kalić 1970, p. 59; Spremić 1982b, p. 267; Spremić 1994a, p. 348.

⁴⁶ Teleki 1853, p. 305–312; Iorga, 1897, p. 23–27; Ćirković 1971, p. 104–106; Spremić/Kalić 1982, p. 290; Spremić 1994a, p. 366–367.

⁴⁷ Fraknoi 1895, p. 273–275; Hurmuzaki 1891, p. 20–23; Theiner 1860, p. 626–628; Kalić/Mijušković 1967, p. 227–228, 237–238, 306; Kalić 1970, p. 59.

⁴⁸ Bojanić 1974, p. 17–18, 21–23, 34–35, 39, 43–44. At the end of the 14th century, the imported Hungarian rock salt was also being stored and sold at the market in Bovan near Aleksinac (north of Niš): Mladenović 2007, p. 295, 319; Dinić 1978, p. 109–110; Veselinović 1987, p. 60; Rokai 1983, p. 141; Mišić 2009, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Bojanić 1974, 18–23; Miljković/Krstić 2007, p. 237–239.

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URBANIZATION AND TRADE AT THE TURBULENT BORDER:
SERBIAN TOWNS ON THE DANUBE 1402–1459
(Abstract)

Due to the Ottoman invasion at the end of the 14th century and the Serbian-Hungarian alliance at the beginning of the 15th century, the centre of Serbian state shifted to the north, in the Danube and the Sava region. The population migrated to the north, and these areas became much more densely populated than before. The last period of the existence of the medieval Serbian state was characterized by economic growth, especially by the rise of mining, and development of towns. At that time, the towns on the Danube became particularly significant, including the last Serbian capitals Belgrade and Smederevo. Serbian ruler Despot Stefan Lazarević (1389–1427) was given Belgrade from Hungarian King Sigismund (1403/4), but after the despot's death, the city had to be returned to the Hungarian ruler (1427). Therefore, the successor of Despot Stefan, Đurađ (George) Branković (1427–1456) built a new capital in Smederevo (the first phase of construction was finished in 1430). Thanks to the comprehensive and methodical activities of Serbian despots, these two cities became not only the largest Serbian fortresses, but also political, economic, cultural and ecclesiastical centres. In addition to the local citizenry, there were significant colonies of merchants from Dubrovnik. The other Serbian towns on the Danube of that period are far less known today. Golubac and Višesav were important fortresses, but there are no preserved data about their population and economic life. It seems that the old and well-known town Braničevo was declining during the late Middle Ages.

Strong political ties with Hungary was followed by the rise of economic cooperation, of which, due to lack of preserved historical sources, we still cannot obtain a complete picture. However, the activity of business people from Dubrovnik in the Danube and the Sava region clearly demonstrated that the both sides of the great rivers were tightly economically linked. The Ragusan merchants from Belgrade, Sremska Mitrovica, Kovin and Smederevo were in intensive mutual business relationships, and such relationships they also had with their countrymen from towns across Serbia, Bosnia and Hungary (Timisoara, Oradea, Buda, Baia Mare and Saros). However, further strengthening of the Ottoman military pressure also strongly affected the regions along the Sava and the Danube, especially in 1439–1444, when the Serbian state for the first time fell under the rule of the Ottomans. After the final Ottoman conquest of Serbia (1459), Serbian towns gradually obtain an oriental appearance and predominantly Muslim population, and fortresses on the Danube (Smederevo, Kulič, Hram, Golubac) served as bases for attacks against Hungary. At the same time, these towns played an important role in cross-border trade.

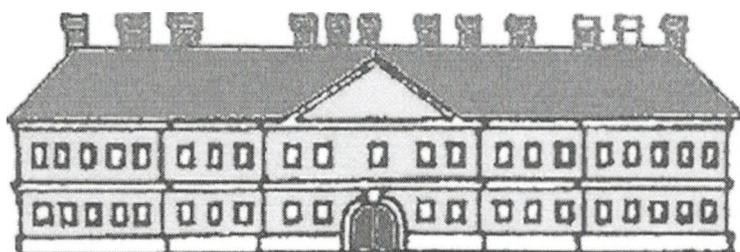
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