

## THE SERBS AND THEIR STATEHOOD FROM THE SETTLING TO THE BALKAN PENINSULA UNTIL THE FIRST SERBIAN UPRISING: AN OVERVIEW

Ema MILJKOVIĆ\*; Ionuț COJOCARU\*\*

**Abstract.** The aim of this paper is the overview of the Serbian history since their migration to the Balkan Peninsula in the 7<sup>th</sup> century until the First Serbian Uprising in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The authors wanted to present the development of the Serbian history from the tribe (7<sup>th</sup> century) to the state (9<sup>th</sup> century) and then to the statehood (12<sup>th</sup> century). The special attention has been paid to the period under the Ottoman rule, since it was a period of the lost statehood, but the Serbs, as well as the Romanians, although in the different circumstances, managed to maintain their national identity and religion. The First Serbian Uprising presents the beginning of the modern statehood in the Serbian history.

**Key words:** The Serbs, Serbian History, Serbian State, Serbian Statehood, Nemanjić Dynasty, the Ottomans

The history of the Slav tribes could be followed since 5<sup>th</sup> century A.C. when the first Slavic groups had settled themselves on the left bank of Danube. However, the history of the tribe called the Serbs could be followed from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, while the first Serbian state was founded in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century with prince Višeslav. The real development of the Serbian statehood began with the rule of Great Župan Nemanja (1166-1196). This paper will try to elaborate briefly the history of the Serbian people, its state and statehood, but the special attention would be given to the Ottoman Period, since that it was the time with the erased statehood. However, despite that fact, the Serbs had managed to preserve their national identity and their religion, and to accomplish the Revolution Process started with the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, one of the mile stones of the modern Serbian history.

As it was already said, the first group of Slavs had placed themselves on the border of the Eastern Romanian Empire, close to the Danube Panonian bank in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. They had perpetuated the attack on the territory of the Eastern Romanian Empire, but without the intent to conquer them; they were satisfied to

\* Ph.D., Department of History, Faculty of Philology, Niš University, Serbia Honorary member of Academy of Romanian Scientist

\*\* Ph.D., Lumina University, Bucharest, Romania

gather the war prey and to return to their previous positions. There was no trace of ethnic diversity among them at the time.<sup>1</sup> However, the conditions for the formation of the Serbian nation, according to famous Serbian historian of the medieval time, Sima Ćirković, could be traced at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when a part of Slavic tribe called the Serbs had settled on the territory of the Romanian province of Dalmatia.<sup>2</sup>

It is very important to emphasize that, at the beginning of their spreading to the Balkans, there were no real differences among the Slavic tribes. It is not known; even less documented by the relevant historical sources what was the base for their differentiation.<sup>3</sup> The only acceptable methods were and still are the linguistic researches and reconstruction, which, based on the later divisions have drawn the line: the Timok river<sup>4</sup>, the mountains of Osogovo<sup>5</sup> and the Šara mountain<sup>6</sup>, which divide the western South Slavic and eastern South Slavic dialects and vernaculars.<sup>7</sup>

Since the relevant historical sources for history of the Serbs in the period between 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century are very rare, one of the most relevant ones is the script of the highly educated Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913-959) *De administrando Imperio*. Although of the later date, *De Administrando Imperio* has been considered one of the most relevant historical sources for the early history of the Slavic tribes, including the Serbs.<sup>8</sup>

According to Constantine Porphyrogenetos both Croats and Serbs had settled on the Balkan Peninsula later than the first Slavic groups, and their history as already been mentioned could be followed since the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

According to already mentioned Serbian historiographer, late academician Sima Ćirković, what had differed both Serbs and Croats from the other Slavic groups was „continuation of their development in the years that followed, the old names brought from their old homeland, wider territory, although in those early centuries it was considerably smaller than later Serbian or Croatian state.“<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Ćirković, *Srbi u srednjem veku*, Beograd 1995, 9.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ćirković, *Usponi i padovi srpske kulture*, U: Istorija srpske kulture, [http://www.rastko.org.rs/isk/isk\\_02\\_c.html](http://www.rastko.org.rs/isk/isk_02_c.html), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Timok is a river in eastern Serbia, and for last 15 km of its run goes a border between eastern Serbia and western Bulgaria.

<sup>5</sup> Osogovo mountain chain is situated between southwestern Bulgaria (Kyustendil Province) and northeastern Macedonia (municipalities of Kočani and Kriva Palanka).

<sup>6</sup> Šara mountain is situated in the border of southwestern Serbia (municipality of Prizren, province of Kosovo) and western Macedonia (municipality of Tetovo).

<sup>7</sup> For more details see: P. Ivić, *Srpski narod i njegov jezik*, Beograd 2002.

<sup>8</sup> De Administrando Imperio. Ed by Božidar Ferjančić, Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije II, Beograd 1959. 9-74.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ćirković, *Srbi u srednjem veku*, 12

The memories of the territories from which Serbs and Croats had come to the Balkan Peninsula are very vague and imprecise. Although there has been some information regarding the territories called „White Serbia“ and „White Croatia“ situated west from the Franc state, primarily based on the linguistic research majority of the historians stand at the point that the fatherland of both Serbs and Croats was north of the river Dnjepar.<sup>10</sup>

There is very little information regarding to the events concerning the Serbs positioned south of the river Sava during the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that they lived under the prince (*knez*) who led their migration from the northern territories. They had lived there approximately until 680 A.C when the Proto-Bulgarians had crossed onto the territory of the lower Danube and conquered the provinces inhabited by the Slavs.<sup>11</sup>

At the Balkan Peninsula, the Slavs had created certain number of principalities, which were known by the Byzantine writers describing that epoch, with the common name of „Sclavinia“.<sup>12</sup> The members of the Serbian tribe had participated in the formation of several principalities, out of which only one was called Serbia, spreading among the river Sava and the Dinaric mountains, with the border of the river Ibar<sup>13</sup> on the east and the river Vrbas<sup>14</sup> on the west. The other Serbian principalities were known under the following names: Neretva, Zahumlje, Travunia, Konavle, Duklja.<sup>15</sup>

All those mentioned provinces, as well as the other created by the different Slavic groups, had been under the constant threat of their neighbours: the Avar tribe from Panonia, Byzantine Empire, as well as Bulgaria, which was at the peak of its power in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century. That period was also marked with the constant struggle between Byzantine Empire and Bulgarian Empire, ended in 1018, when the borders of the Byzantine Empire had been widened up to the rivers of Sava and Danube.<sup>16</sup>

That was the important moment for the history of the Serbs as well, since the territories inhabited by them had been divided into the provinces under the direct Byzantine control, eastern from the line Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica of today) –

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>13</sup> The Ibar is a river that passes through Montenegro and Serbia. It starts in the northern part of Montenegro, runs through Kosovo and then flows into the river Zapadna Moarava (Western Morava) near Kraljevo, central Serbia.

<sup>14</sup> The Vrbas is a river in western Bosnia and Herzegovina. It runs through Banja Luka, capital of Republic of Srpska.

<sup>15</sup> S. Ćirković, *Srbi u srednjem veku*, 12.;Idem, *Usponi i padovi u srednjem veku*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> G. Ostrogorski, *Istorija Vizantije*, Beograd 1969, 212/323; Istorija Srpskog Naroda (=ISN), knj. I, Od najstarijih vremena do Maričke bitke (1371), Beograd 1981, 109-251; S. Ćirković, *Usponi i padovi u srednjem veku*, 3.

Ras (Novi Pazar) - Prizren, and western from that line, which were controlled by the local rulers.<sup>17</sup>

The Slavic tribes, Serbs and Croats included, had come to the Balkan Peninsula with the pagan beliefs. The process of their Christianization had begun in 7<sup>th</sup> century, but the various tribes had converted in different times. The Serbs and Croats both mainly converted into the Christianity in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The territories under the direct control of the Byzantine Empire, populated by the Serbs, had been subjected to the independent Archbishop in Ohrid, thus the Serbian lands even before the official split among the Christian churches that occurred in 1054, were divided between the church jurisdiction from Constantinople, on one and from Rome, on the other side.<sup>18</sup>

The information regarding the first Serbian rulers are immensely scattered. Although, as was already mentioned, the first Serbian state was established in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, the real increase of Serbian power and statehood begun with the Nemanjić dynasty, starting in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and then continue with the Lazarević dynasty until the final fall under the Ottoman power in 1459.<sup>19</sup>

The rise of the Serbian state had started with Great Župan (Dux) of Serbia, Stefan Nemanja (1166-1196), head of province called Raška, who had used in his favor the weakness of the Byzantine Empire, and widened his territories up to the rivers of the South (Južna) and Great (Velika) Morava rivers, then on the territories of Kosovo of today, great plane around lake Skadar and litoral towns on the Adriatic between Kotor and Skadar.<sup>20</sup> Raška province with the center at the town of Ras (nearby Novi Pazar of today) had been a precedent to the Kingdome of Serbia proclaimed in 1217, and also of the Serbian Empire established in the 14th century.

That was really the time when Byzantine Empire and Kingdome of Hungary had started their struggle over their influence upon the newly born Serbian state.

The son of Nemanja, Stefan Nemanjić (1196-1227) who had masterly used the weakness of the Byzantine Empire after the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders in 1204 and turned toward the West. He managed to evade the danger to his still vulnerable state coming from the Kingdome of Hungary, Latine Empire, renewed Bulgaria and autonomous rulers in the Byzantine provinces; yet he managed to make his state stronger and more influential by obtaining the crown of the King from the Pope in 1217.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> S. Ćirkovć, *Usponi i padovi u srednjem veku*, 3; Idem, *Srpski narod u srednjem veku*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> For more details see: M. Blagojević, *Nemanjići i Lazarevići i srednjovekovna srpska državnost*, Beograd 2004.

<sup>20</sup> M. Dinić, *Srpske zemlje u srednjem veku*, Beograd 1978, 33-44.

<sup>21</sup> S. Ćirkovć, *Usponi i padovi u srednjem veku*, 5.

Nemanja's younger son Rastko, had also played very important role in this period. Grace to him, the church circumstances in the Serbian state, who had, as already was mentioned, double practise: Catholic on the Adriatic coast and its neighbourhood, under the jurisdiction of the Archbishops seated in Bar and Dubrovnik, and Orthodox on the territory of the Archbishop of Ohrid, with the Bishop seats in Ras, Lipljan and Prizren. Although obtained the crown from the Pope,<sup>22</sup> the newly crowned king had supported the Orthodox tradition in the whole state.<sup>23</sup>

Rasto Nemanjić, who had become a monk and took a name Sava, had traveled to Nicaea, center of the Byzantine Greeks, who had kept the traditions of the Patriarchate in Constantinople and tried to renew the Byzantine Empire, had succeed to obtain for himself, thus for the Serbian church, the rank of Archbishop in 1219. That was the immense step forward in strengthening both of the state and statehood.<sup>23</sup>

Both 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century were the period of increase of the strength of the Serbian state. Out of Nemanja descendants should be mentioned Radoslav (1227-1234) and Vladislav Nemanjić (1234-1243) in whose time the mining production in Serbia has begun. The German miners, of the Sas origin had come to Serbia to secure the beginning of the mininig production which would become in the years to follow the base of the Serbian economy.<sup>24</sup>

Also very important period is the period of rule of the king Dragutin (1276-1282) who obtained the northern parts, Belgrade with the province of Mačva, and his brother king Milutin (1282-1321) who widened the territory of Serbia to the south, by conquering northern and central Macedonia (up to the town od Demir Kapija of today).<sup>25</sup>

However, the time of biggest glory of the Serbian Medieval State is the period of the reign of King and later Emperor Dušan (1331-1355). He accomplished to increase the Serbian state to the rank of Empire and to enlarge its territory down south to the Corinth Isthmus. One of his accomplishments is also obtaining the rank of Patriarchate for the Serbian Church.<sup>26</sup>

But, those glorious times did not last long. Almost immediately after his death in 1355 (some of the historians think it was a murder, but there is no proof in the available historical sources), his heir Uroš, known among the Serbs under the nickname Nejaki (Faible) showed incompetence to keep the state created by his father. During his reign had begun the strengthening of certain Serbian

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> S. Ćirković, *Usponi i padovi u srednjem veku*, 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> ISN I, 357-372 (M. Blagojević); For more details about the minning production, see: S. Ćirković, D. Kovačević – Kojić, R. Ćuk, *Staro srpsko rudarstvo*, Beograd 2002.

<sup>25</sup> ISN I, 437-449 (Lj. Maksimović); M. Dinić, *Srpske zemlje u srednjem veku*, 123-145.

<sup>26</sup> ISN I, 496-511 (B. Ferjaničić).

noblemen who became real rulers into their provinces. They began to fight each other, thus weakening the state part by part. Also, at that time the new danger from the East had come to the Balkan door: the Ottoman Turks. The last Serbian Empor Uroš Nejaki died in 1371, in the same year when the first big battle with the Ottomans, the Maritsa battle had occurred.<sup>27</sup>

The Ottomans had waited for the best moment for them to conquer the South-Eastern Europe. First, they decided to take offensive at the time of the civil war in the Byzantine Empire which was fought among John V the Paleologue and John Cantacuzene. The Ottomans were in fact asked to help Cantacuzene side, which faced the danger to be expelled from Adrianopolis (Edirne). The troops of Orhan (sultan from 1326 to 1362) had crossed the Dardanelles and conquered the fortress of Tzimpe. After the big earthquake in 1354, they had conquered Galipolis either. The struggle for the Balkans had begun.

Although the period from 1371, from the Maritsa battle, when the Serbs were badly defeated by much stronger Ottoman Army, under the final fall of the Serbian capital town Smederevo into the Ottoman powers many events, battles and even peace periods had occurred, it is important to describe one battle which maybe did not change the Serbian history, but changed forever the historical mind of the Serbs, thus creating the famous Kosovo legend and importance of Kosovo in the historical mind, but also heart of the Serbs.

The Kosovo battle occurred after the victory of the Serbian army led by prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, who had ruled the central parts of the Serbian state (valley of the river Velika Morava), with the capital in Kruševac. He defeated the Ottomans in 1386 in the battle of Pločnik near Niš, and latter in 1388 the Ottomans were again defeated near Bileća (Herzegovina) by the Serbian army led by prince Vlatko Vuković.<sup>28</sup>

The Kosovo Battle took place on 28<sup>th</sup> June (Serbian Church Holiday called Vidovdan, day of St. Vid) 1389 in the waste plane near Priština of today. The place of the battle is today known as Gazi Mestan (Tur. Heroes Place). The Serbian Army was led by prince Lazar and the Ottoman Army by sultan Murat I. It is very hard to estimate precisely the number of the soldiers on both sides, but it is historical fact that the Serbs were highly outnumbered by the Ottoman Army.<sup>29</sup>

Although there are many reconstructions of the battle itself, none of them is highly accurate, since there is a lack of the primary, relevant historical sources. However, one thing is certain: both rulers and army leaders were killed in the battle. Presumably, prince Lazar was killed during the battle and sultan Murat I

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 511-524 (M. Blagojević); 524-541 (S. Ćirković, R. Mihaljić). Also see: M. Šujica, *Nemirno doba srpskog srednjeg veka, Vlastela oblasnih gospodara*, Beograd 2000.

<sup>28</sup> M. Blagojević, *Nemanjići i Lazarevići*, 277-303.

<sup>29</sup> For more details about the Kosovo battle, see: *Kosovska bitka u istoriografiji*, collection of works, Beograd 1989.

later on, when one of the Serbian nobleman, whose identity has not yet been confirmed in scientific historiography, had approached his tent and cut his head in front of his suite. Thus, according to the medieval standards of warfare the result was even: both rulers were killed. Some news of the Serbian victory had even reached Italy and France.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the logical question rises itself: how is it possible that the Kosovo battle has been remembering in the Serbian tradition as one of the greatest, biggest and saddest defeats. What created the whole Kosovo legend and Kosovo myth still livid with the Serbs.

The only plausible answer could be found in the aftermath of the battle. Prince Lazar had not have the mature son to replace him, thus his spouse princess Milica took his place. She was forced to accept the vassal status toward the Ottoman State, to accept the marriage of her daughter Olivera to the new Ottoman sultan, Bayazit I and also her oldest son Stefan had to join Ottoman Army in the forthcoming battles. It is interesting to mention that he showed great spirit of chivalry and courage in those battles, even trying to save Bayezit I from the Ankara battlefield (1402).<sup>31</sup>

The historical circumstances would also allow him to renew the Serbian state, now under the title of Despotate and his rule from 1402 to 1427 had been remembered as the years of economic and cultural prosperity of Serbia.<sup>32</sup>

However, the four following decades had shown that no one of the state that existed on the Balkan Peninsula at the time (Byzantine Empire, Serbia, Bulgaria, Vlaška, Moldavia, Bosnia) had the power to resist the Ottoman force. Until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century those state had either been vassals to the Ottomans or under their power. The small part of the Byzantine Empire, as well as Bosnia had preserved the independence, but however in the next half of century both those states would be erased from the historical map of Europe and the world.

In the world historiography, the Ottoman State has usually been described as the most centralized one, especially in its classical age. Although the main decisions had been made in the house of the ruler, with participation of the sultan and his closest dignitaries of the Empire, the deeper historiography analysis shows that the centralization was not the absolute principle of ruling the Ottoman State and that some of the provinces had certain level of autonomy, in order to provide stable and long-lasting government on the very large territory, which was not an easy tasks, especially bearing in mind the lack of the technical and technological achievements.

<sup>30</sup>ISN II, Beograd 1994, Doba borbi za očuvanje i obnovu države (1371-1571), 36-47 (R. Mihaljić).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 47-64 (S. Ćirković).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, 64-75 (J. Kalić).

The struggle of the Serbian state against the Ottomans had lasted for almost a century, since the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century until the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Although the Serbs had given the very strong resistance, they did not have neither the strength nor the position to stop the Ottoman conquerors. The Serbian state, since the Kosovo battle in 1389 had been in the vassal position regarding the Ottomans and the battlefield as well. By the high amount of the *haraj* tax, the Ottomans had firstly destroyed its economy, after which had followed the robberies, arsons, crimes against the civilians...the towns had been destroyed. In 1459 the Serbian medieval state, only one century earlier being the strongest state in the Balkans, had ceased to exist. By the fall of its capital, Smederevo on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1459 the centuries of the Ottoman domination had begun.

This paper and its aim do not allow to discuss the Ottoman administration and society in the ex-Despotate of Serbia in length. However, it is important to explain how did the Serbs manage to maintain their national identity, religion and idea of statehood in the long centuries of Ottoman domination which followed the fall of Smederevo in 1459.

The Ottoman administration, in almost all its territories, administrated its rule only to the level of village autonomies, not paying attention to the real behavior of *reaya* population, as long as they obey the rules for non-Christians provided by the *sharia* law and pay their taxes regulary. Thus, the Serbian *reaya* could maintain their religious practice as long as it was along the *sharia* rules for the *dhimmi* population.<sup>33</sup>

The very important fact which should be emphasized is the organization of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the pre-Ottoman times. Getting its autonomy in 1219, as it was previously said, until the Ottoman time it was really well organized institutions, which Ottomans could not have and it seems did not want to destroy easily.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the ex-Kingdome of Bosnia where the church situation was rather complicated in the pre-Ottoman times (with three confessions: Orthodox, Catholics and so called Crkva Bosanska i.e. Bosnian Church which was considered heretical both from the point of view of the Orthodox and Catholic church, and not a single one was really strong and good organized<sup>35</sup>), this was not case at all with the Serbian Orthodox Church on the territory of the former Serbian state. After it was institutionally renewed by the Ottomans in 1557 the net of its eparchies had worked really well and the people had their own church to

<sup>33</sup> Dhimmi was the name for Non-Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire, followers of the other monotheistic religions (People of the book). They have special status in the Empire, not asking from them to join the Ottoman Army and to forcible convert to Islam, in exchange for their fully proper subject attitude and paying of the tax called *haraj*. More on this subject, see: E. Miljković, *Mehmed II Osvajači i pitanje verske tolerancije u Osmanskom carstvu*, Sveti car Konstantin I hrišćanstvo I, Niš 2013, 645-654.

<sup>34</sup> More on the position of the Serbian church: ISN III/2, Beograd 1993, 7-105 (R. Samardžić).

<sup>35</sup> More on the matter, see: N. Filipović.

rely on. That was also how the remembrance of the Nemanjić dynasty had been preserved and certainly played role in the process of struggle for the independent state during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Ottoman conquest in the Balkans, and in Serbia as well, had, without any doubt, created the new cultural circle, known under the name of Oriental Culture. This new culture, visible even today, especially in the Balkan (Serbian) cuisine and language, had as its main consequence the local population that converted into Islam, today generally known as *Bosniaks*.<sup>36</sup>

The process of conversion into Islam was stronger in Bosnia, than it was in Serbia or Montenegro. The historians usually explain this phenomenon as the consequence of well-organized Orthodox church both in the today's territories of Serbia and Montenegro, but malfunctioning of both Orthodox and Catholic churches on the territory of Bosnia.<sup>37</sup>

It should also not be forgotten that the Grande Porte did not insist, at least in the Classical Age of the Empire (1300-1600) on the forced conversion to the Islam. French historian of the Romanian origin, Nicoara Beldiceanu had calculated that if the Porte, by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, forced all non-Muslim population of Rumelia (European parts of the Ottoman Empire) to convert to the Islam, the Ottoman treasury would have loss of 2.800 kg of gold per year. Thus, their policy of so-called religious tolerance had been strongly founded in material benefit.<sup>38</sup>

However, it does not mean that there was no conversion at all on the territory of Serbia, but certainly on the smaller scale regarding to Bosnia. Since the elaboration of this problem would demand not even a paper but a book, the authors want to emphasize the fact that the process of conversion into Islam mainly occurred in the towns, which very soon after the Ottoman conquest got the oriental shape, while the rural surroundings had stayed mostly Orthodox and keepers of the tradition.<sup>39</sup>

The territory of Serbia, since the main Ottoman attacks, had been a stake in the warfare between Ottomans and the Hungarians, and then, after the defeat of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, at the battle of Mohacz, between the Ottomans and Austrians. Those animosities had reached its peak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when four Austro-Turkish wars had been led on the territory of Serbia and for the

<sup>36</sup> The name *Bosniaks* is now generally used for population that converted into the Islam on the territories of Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro. Although the name has been disputed, since it might refer only to the people originated from Bosnia it is accepted today for the Slavic Muslim population in Serbia and Montenegro, as well.

<sup>37</sup> For further detail see: M. Vasić, *Islamizacija na Balkanskem poluostrvu*, Istočno Sarajevo 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Istorija Osmanskog carstva, ed. R. Mantran, Beograd 2004, 161.

<sup>39</sup> More on the process of conversion into the Islam: M. Vasić, *Islamizacija na Balkanskem poluostrvu*, 13-29.

victory over Serbia. In the Serbian historiography, they are also known as „The wars for Serbia“.<sup>40</sup>

The first war was led between 1683 and 1699 and it had started with the Ottoman unsuccessful siege of Vienne, after which the Austrian had made a conquest of Budapest (1686), Belgrade (1688) and Niš (1689). However, the Ottoman Army had regrouped and with the help of the Tatars and Albanians from the mountains regained some of the lost territories. The new border, by the Peacy Treaty in Karlovci had been drawn upon the line the rivers Sava and Danube. The territories on the other side of those rivers were never Ottoman again. For the Serbs, it meant a lot more than a war led on their territory. During the Austrian offensive, the Serbs supported the Austrians in a wish to regain a national state (which was not on the Austrian agenda at the time). But, when the Austrians had to withdraw from the territories of Serbia (with Kosovo, but without Vojvodina) they had left the Serbian people to the full mercy of the Ottomans. The Tatars and Albanians had started to commit the crimes against the Serbian civilians, especially on the territory of Kosovo, making impossible for them to continue to live there any longer. That is the reason why the Serbian Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević had organized the movement of the Serbs in 1690 on the territory of the Habsburg Empire. That is the crucial moment when the ethnic structure of Kosovo began to change: the Albanians had taken the houses that Serbs had left and slowly starting to become a majority in the Kosovo region.<sup>41</sup>

The next big war and change of borders between Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire was led from 1716 and 1718. It had ended with the Peace Treaty of Passarowitz, in 1718, according to which the Habsburg Monarchy had taken over the administration of the northern Serbia, with the following borders: Miroč mountains in the east (eastern Serbia of today), then it followed the run of the Južna (Southern) Morava river to the town of Stalać (central Serbia of today). From Stalać it went westward to the town of Čačak (central Serbia of today), and then on the Drina river. The border followed Drina until its confluence to the Sava river (northern and large part of central Serbia of today).<sup>42</sup>

Although Austria had introduced some modern institutions into the Serbian society, especially in the field of education, this was not really a period of prosperity for northern Serbia, since the Austrians, very strict in their demands put the pressure on population to accept the union of the Catholic and Orthodox church. That was the reason why one Serbian delegation, in 1738, led by the knez

<sup>40</sup> For more details, see: ISN IV/1, Srbi u XVIII veku, Beograd 1986.

<sup>41</sup> For more details see: G. Stanojević, *Srbija u vreme Bečkog rata*, Beograd 1976; B. Bešlin, *Evgenije Savojski i njegovo doba*, Novi Sad 2014; T. Katić, *Tursko osvajanje Srbije 1690.godine*, Beograd 2012; E. Miljković, *The population of Kosovo and Metohija under the Ottoman rule, Kosovo and Metohija: past, present, future*, Beograd 2006, 5-17.

<sup>42</sup> *The Peace of Passarowitz, 1718* (Eds. C. Ingrao, N. Samardžić, J. Pešalj), Indiana University Press 2011.

Bogosav from Barajevo (near today's Belgrade) and *knez* Jovica from Nemenikuće (Kosmaj district, central Serbia of today), had submitted themselves to the Grand Vezir Yegen Osman-Pasha and again, this time willingly, accepted Ottoman authority.<sup>43</sup>

That situation did not last long, since the new war disrupted in 1737, and ended two years later in 1739, again with the northern Serbia as a part of the Ottoman Empire, according to the Peace Treaty of Belgrade.<sup>44</sup>

However, that was not the end of the Serbian intentions to liberate themselves and create modern, independent Serbia state.

The new opportunity rised in 1788 when the new Austro-Turkish war had broken. The majority of Serbs had joined the units of the Austrian army called *frajkors*, and fight on the Austrian side with the wish to liberate Serbia from the Ottoman dominance. The whole war has been known in the Serbian historiography under the name *Kočina Krajima*. Koča Mihajlović was a wealth Serbian merchant who had joined the Austrian army and held the front line in central Serbia for several months in 1788. Although his unit did not last to the Ottoman attacks for long, they showed to the Serbian people, maybe for the first time, that someday in the near future it would be possible to win the war against the Ottomans.<sup>45</sup>

The war with the Austrians ended with the Peace Treaty of Svištof in 1791, with no changes of borders, but this whole war influenced very much the decades to come. Sultan Selim III had realized that the Serbs and their particular position were of the immense importance to the whole Ottoman Empire. Thus, he started with the wide circle of reforms, mainly on the territory of the *Pashalik* of Belgrade.<sup>46</sup> Those reforms, starting with the dissolution of the *janissary* units, and creation of the National Militia consisting of the Serbs on the territory of the *Pashalik*, was a big step forward for the Serbs living in the Empire. They were allowed to wear the arms, were organized in units, which calmed down the population and made possible for them to organize themselves for the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising.

### Summary

The first Slavic tribes had settled on the Balkan Peninsula in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Serbs, although being a part of the Slavic tribes did not settled

<sup>43</sup> ISN IV/1, 333 (R. Samardžić)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 106-163 (R. Veselinović).

<sup>45</sup> For more details see: ISN IV/1, 351-425 (S. Gavrilović).

<sup>46</sup> The Pashalik of Belgrade was the Ottoman Administrative Unit that founded in 1686 encompassing the territory of the sanjaks of Srem and Smederevo with the *nahiye* (municipality Niš), as well as certain towns of the sanjak of Kruševac: Paraćin, Ražanj, Aleksinac and Kruševac, as well as the town of Šabac, which was a part of the sanjak of Zvornik. For more details see: R. Tričković, *Beogradski Pašaluk 1687-1739*, Beograd 2013.

themselves until 7<sup>th</sup> century, according to the available historical sources. At the beginning there were many Slavic provinces in the Balkans, but those of Serbs and Croats differed among them by their larger territory and state organization. It is important to mention that the only differentiation between Slavic tribes at this early stage could be researched on the basis of the language: dialects and vernaculars. Both Croats and Serbs had brought their name from their fatherland, most probably around the river Dnjepar.

The history of the Serbian state could be followed from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, almost at the same time as the beginning of process of Christianization. However, the real Serbian ascendant and state power, thus statehood began with the Nemanjić dynasty in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century were the period of enlargement of the Serbian state, as well as of its economic development based primarily on the mine production. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century with the king Dušan (1331-1355), Serbia had reached the rank of Empire and Patriarchate for its church.

However, his heir was not strong enough to keep his father's heritage and the state was divided among the local rulers. At the same time appeared the new danger from the East: the Ottoman Turks.

The battle for Serbia, with changing results, lasted almost 80 years. But finally, in 1459 the Serbian capital of Smederevo fell under the Ottoman rule. Although it was the period of lost statehood and sovereignty, grace to the Ottoman system, but also to their strong remembrance of the medieval heritage, the Serbs managed to preserve their national identity and religion and to win their state back. The first step toward a creation of the modern Serbian state was the First Serbian Uprising in 1804.