

studies

Kosovo's Territorial Characteristics from the Roman Empire to the Fall of the Medieval Serbian State

LÁSZLÓ GULYÁS, GÁBOR CSÜLLÖG

One of the most significant features of the more than 20-year long agony of the communist state in Yugoslavia in relation to the Kosovo question is the Serbian-Albanian conflict. The Serbians in general consider Kosovo as an ancient Serbian land and they object to its secession from Serbia. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the Albanians in Kosovo (over 90%) want to secede from Serbia, that is, Serbian historical interests oppose Albanian ethnic interests.

The aim of our research partnership was to outline the history of the area called Kosovo today, and to analyse its characteristics from the age of the Roman Empire up to now. This study is to introduce the results of the first phase of the research. As it is suggested by the title, the history of Kosovo as a region is outlined in it, from the age of the Roman Empire to the fall of the medieval Serbian State (1458).

The geographical space, in which Serbian statehood was formed, is the less clearly definable central region of the Balkan Peninsula. The emerging Serbian state included the West Balkan areas, extending from the Adriatic Sea through the inner valleys of the mountainous area, to the wider valleys and basins of the Morava River, running into the Danube, as well as its tributaries. Examples of these areas include Metohija Polje and Kosovo Polje.¹ These areas had more favourable features for settlers, than the inner areas of the West Balkan Mountains. At the same time, the location of the emerging Serbian state was to a great extent influenced by its neighbours, such as Byzantium, having a changeable impact on the Serbian state, the short-lived Bulgarian state, being on the point of fulfilling its empire-building role, and, eventually, the empire-building Kingdom of Hungary,² incorporating the neighbouring Kingdom of Croatia as well.³

¹ The polje is a Slav geographical name: a elongated basin in a mountains.

² The Kingdom of Hungary was formed from the previous Principality of Hungary with the coronation of Stephen I in 1000.

³ In 1102.

Our research was also aimed at describing Kosovo's 2000-year-old history from historical, political and geographical points of view. The migration routes between areas of power, the spatial development of various states and the historical spatial structures, which can be built on the formerly mentioned characteristics were our starting points, which were all helpful when interpreting the historical correlations of the 'Kosovo problem'.

Balkan State Spaces within the European Migrational Space

The migrational routes between political centres have played a significant role for several millennia in the formation of Europe's historical spaces. These routes, characterised by migrations of varying intensity in different historical periods, have mediated significant cultural, economic, and most importantly, political influences. Their intersections have become centres for emerging new states. The elementary roots of medieval states go back to the Roman Empire, a state, which linked the Mediterranean region to Western and Central European continental states. From the 2nd-3rd centuries A.D. the migration of peoples in Europe intensified and thus, the continental routes became more and more significant. The most outstanding of those were the so-called linking routes, connecting the Rein, Danube, Morava and Marica rivers. It was along these routes that migrations of great significance took place towards Western Europe and Asia Minor. The Balkan routes were major sections of these roads; they were capable of preserving their significance in the Middle Ages and during the Crusades as well, and then, from the 15th century onward, they gained an all-European significance with the Osman expansion.

In the period, which is in the focus of our current research, the Balkan area featured several state-forming characteristics, typical of great empires and of small states as well. The special spatial feature of great empires was that they were built on significant European migrational zones and they were able to dominate as well as connect the migrational centres for a long time. Essentially, their spatial system was formed from smaller states emerging in these areas, thus it was in their interest to rule them for a long period. Due to expansions they can be characterised by the emergence of buffer zones on the peripheries, while their inner boundaries were regulated and operated according to their interests in the smaller states, now called provinces.

The smaller states came into being independently in various sections of the migrational zones, or, partly, independently of them. Their areas and the degree of their sovereignty varied, depending on the impact of great powers; occasionally they got restructured even spatially. When the influence of great empires was weakening, the states, being formed at the cross sections of the population influx, intended to acquire as large as possible areas and enclose them with boundaries. On the other hand these smaller states were not able to counterbalance the influences by great powers and maintain local procedures of their own interests for long. This is why the locally organised states existed only temporarily in the shadow of great empires and only for a short period of time; mainly in the periods of the transformation and/or the fall of great empires. The medieval Serbian state was a typical example of this kind of statehood. A brief survey into the spatial structures of the Balkan Peninsula might serve as a guide to understand how the Serbian people could form, expand and then lose the independent state of their own.

Kosovo's Key Position in the Spatial Structure of the Balkans

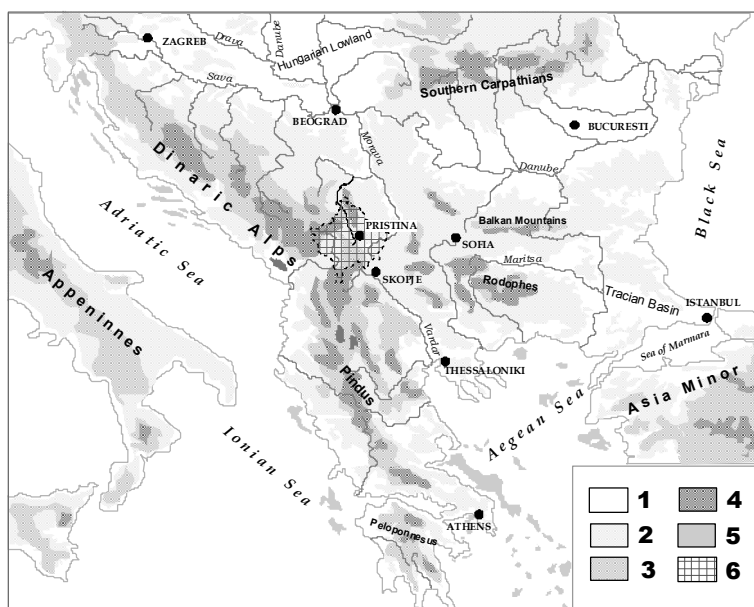
The Balkan is a peninsula and this geographical feature has for long been decisive in historical processes.

The narrow seaside strip of land, which is linked to the Mediterranean, is bordering on the high Dinari Mountains from the west, while the southern part of the peninsula is dominated by the Hellenic Mountains. In the southeast, between the seaside and the mountains, there are the semi-basins and the fertile plains of the Vardar, Struma, Mesta and Marica rivers. Its eastern half is less closed; the Rodope, Pirin and Rila Mountains stand out from the river plains. Its continental border is shorter; it is actually the bed of the Sava and Danube rivers, flanked by larger plains. The inner spaces in the Dinari Mountains are dissected by the Kupa, Ung, Vrbas, Bosna and Drina Rivers, with all of them running into the Sava River. The two detached basins of Kosovo and Metohija Polje can be found in the middle of the peninsula, to the east of the Dinari Mountains. The Morava River, running into the Danube, and its two branches, the South Morava and the West Morava, are also located here. (See Map 1) It was these geographical characteristics that determined the differences in settlement and in the peoples' use of the land. The larger basins, the wider river valleys and plains by the rivers, as well as the seaside semi-basins

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were more densely populated, since the features of these places could support more people. On the other hand, in the mountaneous regions and along the indented coastline, the population density was lower and the settlements came into being in narrow inner valleys and smaller basins, where, when compared with the former areas, the environment was not able to support that many people.⁴

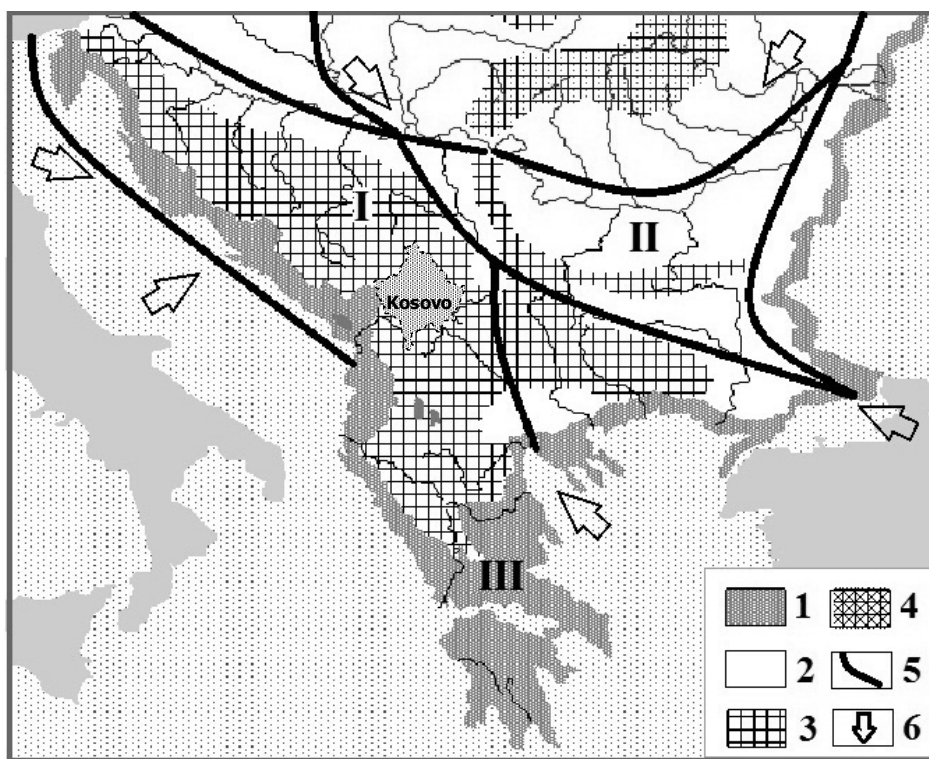


Map 1: Physical map of Balkans

1. Plain; 2. Low highland; 3. Mountain of medium height; 4. High mountain; 5. Island, 6. Today's Kosovo area. Source: The author's compilation

The above components – coastlines, seaside semi-basins, closed mountain ranges, open plains and river valleys – all appear in the Balkans, but in varying proportions at certain places. This is why the structure of Balkan societies and the birth of the Balkan states were also varied. On the basis of the above, three different, easily recognisable areas can be distinguished: the seaside (Aegean), as well as the East and West Balkans. (See Map 2)

⁴ J. KOVÁCS, E. DOBOS, *The Natural Environment*, in: K. KOCSIS (Ed.), *South Eastern Europe in Maps*, Budapest 2007, pp. 11–25.



Map 2: The historical spatial structure of the Balkans

1. Seaside zones; 2. Plains, river valleys; 3. Highlands; 4. Today's Kosovo area; 5. Migration lines; 6. Exterior effect directions; I. West Balkans; II. East Balkans; III. Aegean Balkans. Source: The author's compilation

In this latter place the components are more regular: at the western edge of it one can find the seaside migrational route, due to which the Aegean influences were to be felt; closer to the centre of the peninsula there are closed mountain ranges with river valleys and smaller basins, while in the valleys and basins in the very centre, the influence of seaside cultures cannot be felt. In the centre of the peninsula one can find river valleys and basins, together with the migrational zone linking Central Europe and Asia Minor. The mountains closed the area from influences by other countries from the west and from the south as well. Kosovo and Metohija polje, which are located in this region, therefore, represent areas of key significance in the Balkans.

The area of Kosovo within the Roman Empire

Before the Romans the West Balkan and the area of today's Kosovo were ruled by various Illyrian, occasionally Celtic tribes. The first more serious state influence came from the Kingdom of Macedonia and the Macedonian Hellenistic state in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C. Most sources mentioned the area of ancient Kosovo as Dardania and describe it as a place populated by Illyrian and Thracian peoples.

It was only in the first centuries A.D. that the whole area was conquered by the Romans, although the areas of the Greek states on the Balkans as well as the Illyrian coastal areas had become Roman provinces as early as the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. The inner area (with Metohija and Kosovo Polje in it) became important for the Romans, when they conquered Pannonia and other areas along the Danube and the Sava rivers. It was necessary for them to control as well as be able to use the routes between the Danube and the Aegean Sea, and in order to do that they needed to rule the area between the Morava River and its tributaries. In fact this was the reason why Moesia, later the province Moesia Superior came into being at the beginning of the 1st century A.D. On the basis of the available historical sources, it is difficult to decide whether Kosovo was part of the province of Moesia, or, it belonged to the province of Dalmatia.

3rd century changes within the Roman Empire, Diocletianus's tetrarchy, as well as the foundation of Nova Roma upgraded the Balkan area for Rome. The empire was divided into two parts at the end of the 4th century, and first the border between them ran in the West Balkan, but later almost the whole peninsula got under Roman rule. Thus the area of Kosovo became part of the Illyric Prefecture, and as such, it was part of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Buffer Zones in the 7th–11th Centuries

Due to the Slavic expansion, from the 6–7th centuries onward, following the barbarians' invasion, the power relations of the zone became more complicated. In addition to safeguarding Byzantine interests of varying intensity first it was the Bulgarian Turks who appeared as a new power element in the region; they soon became slavified and founded a state of their own. The struggle of the Kingdom of Bulgaria and of the Czar had a

significant influence on the foundation of the states of various Slavic peoples, including the Serbians and the Croatians.

It was around the 7th century that the Serbs appeared on the Balkans, and then in the 8th century they converted to Christianity. They had six centres and attempted to establish their state on several occasions, but they were not able to organise a state similar to that of the Kingdom of Croatia until as late as the 12th century. In the 11th–12th centuries the Byzantine Empire became stronger and the West Balkan areas, including Dalmatia, the Kingdom of Croatia, Sirmium and Dyrrachion, were still present in its spatial structure, but their dependence, especially the dependence of the first two areas, was already nominal.

The Hungarians and the Kingdom of Hungary in the north were new candidates for power. The Kingdom of Hungary pursued the politics of expansion and thus they controlled the Kingdom of Croatia, a significant section of the Danube valley, as well as the lower sections of the rivers running into the Sava from the south. Hungarian politics in many cases weakened the Byzantine and the Bulgarian influences, thus allowing the Serbian state to take shape.⁵

By the 11th century, due to the weakening of the Byzantine and Bulgarian influence on the West Balkan, local features were gaining significance. In addition, religious differences also played a motivating role in the emerging local structures. This process led to the emergence of buffer zones of significant size between the different areas inhabited by diverse ethnic groups. As a result, because of its intermediary position and its exposure to different influences, the West Balkan region from the 12th century onward became divided. It took place despite the linguistic majority of its Slavic population; in this case the geographical identity became more decisive than the linguistic. This characteristic feature also explains why the Serbian population did identify with Kosovo both historically and geographically.⁶

⁵ G. CSÜLLÖG, *The Changes of the Spatial Structure in the Carpathian Basin*, in: A. VAISHAR, J. ZAPLETALOVÁ, J. MUNZAR (Eds.), *Regional Geography and its Applications*, Brno 2003, pp. 20–25.

⁶ K. KOCSIS, *Territory and Boundaries*, K. KOCSIS (ed.), *South Eastern Europe in Maps*, Budapest 2007, pp. 26–36.

Kosovo and the Emerging Serbian State (12th–13th centuries)

The lack of stability and the processes of disintegration in the Balkans resulted in the emergence of geographically shifted areas. This situation can be seen when examining the emergence and the expansion of the medieval Serbian state. Serbian statehood was born in several phases on the ruins of former, disintegrating structures and it was gradually gaining independence from them. The Serbian state was formed in the main zone of migration, which was continually exposed to the influences of great powers, thus an instable and inconstant structure came into being.

In the 11th century the attempts for the foundation of the Serbian state are detectable in two places. One of them was Zeta (today called Crna Gora) and the other was Rascia (the southwestern part of modern Serbia).⁷ From these two attempts it was the fortress of Raš (in the vicinity of the town of Novi Pazar) that became the centre of Rascia, the medieval Serbian state in the second half of the 12th century.⁸ Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (ruled from 1168–1196) is considered to have been the founder of the Serbian state. This emerging Serbian state was part of Byzantium, still, it was largely an autonomous state.

Having ruled for 30 years, in 1196 Stefan Nemanja abdicated and became a monk. It was his second-born son, also called Stefan, who succeeded him. Stefan ruled his country as Grand Prince until 1217. That year he was crowned as Serbian king by the name Stefan Nemanjić I.⁹ From this event onward – that is, the time, when the Serbian rulers adopted the title of a king – the medieval Serbian state can be considered independent. The coronation ceremony was performed by the legate of Pope Honorius III. At this point Serbia seemed to be belonging to the Latin Church and to the world of Latin Christianity. But in 1219, two years later, the other son of Grand Prince Nemanja, St. Sava – who belonged to a monastic order on Mount Athos – turned to the patriarch in Constantinople, who wanted to gain the sympathy of the Serbs in his fight with the Holy Empire, and the patriarch gave his permission to establish an independent church.¹⁰ As a

⁷ J. JUHÁSZ, *Volt egyszer egy Jugoszlávia*, Budapest 1999, pp. 8–9.

⁸ B. JELAVICH, *A Balkán története*. I. kötet, Budapest 2000, pp. 25–26.

⁹ Stefan Nemanjić I, the first Serbian king 1217–1228.

¹⁰ P. KAPRONCZAY, *A koszovói konfliktus történelmi, politikai és kulturális háttere*, in: T. KRAUSZ (Ed.), *A Balkán háborúk és a nagyhatalmak. Rigómezőtől Koszovóig*, Budapest 1999, pp. 23–36.

result, Serbia became part of the Orthodox world. It was a turning point in Serbian history, having an impact on Serbian history up to now.

In the opinion of Serbian historians,¹¹ as well as of English and American specialists,¹² the area, today called Kosovo, was part of Rascia, the emerging Serbian state, as early as the 12th century. (See Map 3). Several Hungarian historians, who investigate the history of the Balkans, disagree with this point.¹³ It is thought by them, that in the 12th century Kosovo was not yet part of the Serbian state. The authors of this study also share this opinion and they agree that it was only in the 13th century that Kosovo got integrated into the state of Serbia.

The spatial structure of Kosovo can be described as an area consisting of two basins. One of these is Metohija Polje – Dukagin¹⁴ in Albanian – and the other is Kosovo Polje. Stefan Nemanja I and his successors¹⁵ tried to strengthen their power and invade new areas in the smaller basin, called Metohija Polje.¹⁶ The most significant event of the Serbian expansion was that in 1253 the autocephal archbishop of the Serbian church moved his seat from Žiča in central Serbia to Peč in Metohija Polje. This act proves that in the mid-13th century the Metohija basin was already part of the Serbian state.

The other basin, Kosovo Polje was annexed to Serbia in the late 13th century by Stefan Uroš II Milutin of Serbia.¹⁷ The process of Serbian expansion can best be seen by the multiple monasteries that were built in the area. The three most significant ones included the monasteries of Banškja (1261), Gračacina (1321) in Kosovo Polje and Decani (1327) in Metohija.

The Golden Age of the Medieval Serbian state and Kosovo

The reign of Stephen Dušan (1331–1355) represented the golden age of the medieval Serbian state.¹⁸ He significantly enlarged the area of his

¹¹ S. K. PALOWITCH, *Serbia. The History behind the Name*, London 2002, pp. 2–3.

¹² J. R. LAMPE, *Yugoslavia as History*, Cambridge 1996, p. 17.

¹³ M. TAKÁCS, *Kosovó/Kosova földje a középkorban*, in: *História* 2007, No. 2, pp. 3–6.

¹⁴ P. GARDE, *Balkáni beszédek (szavakról és emberekről)*, Budapest 2008, p. 220.

¹⁵ Stefan Radoslav 1228–1234, Stefan Vladislav 1234–1243, Stefan Uroš I 1243–1276, Stefan Dragutin 1276–1282.

¹⁶ N. MALCOLM, *Kosovo. A Short History*, New York 1999, pp. 49–50.

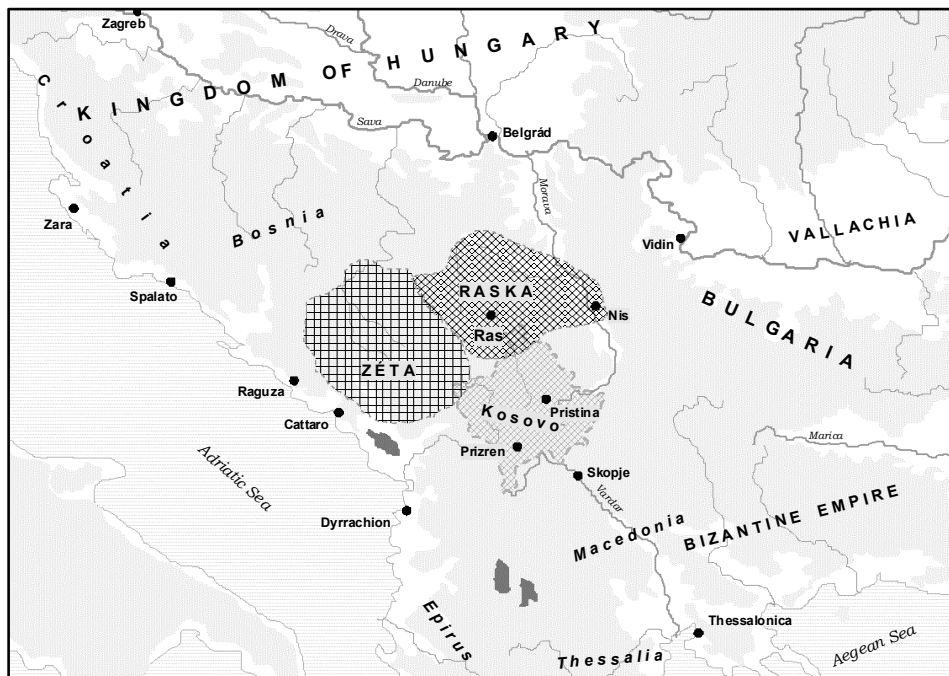
¹⁷ Stephan Uroš II. Serbian king 1282–1321.

¹⁸ PAVLOWITCH, pp. 4–7.

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kingdom, occupying the following areas: Albania, Epirus, Macedonia, Thessaly, and, in the north, Mačva. His kingdom covered the area from the Sava River to the Adriatic and the Aegean Seas (See Map 4).



Map 3: Territory of Serbian state (Rascia) at 1196

Source: The author's compilation

It can rightfully be stated that under his reign Serbia was the greatest power on the Balkans. In 1346 he was crowned in Skopje as Czar of all Serbs, Greeks and Albanians. He raised the Serbian church from its status as autokephal archbishopric to the rank of patriarchy.

Under Dušan's reign Kosovo became the central part of the Serbian state. When investigating the political sphere, it can be stated, that the political centre was moved from Raš to Priština, then to Prizren, eventually to Skopje. In the sphere of religious life the foundation of monasteries was continued, and, in addition, the existing monasteries were also enlarged.



Map 4: Territory Dušan's state at 1355

Source: The author's compilation

In addition to these features, Kosovo played a significant role in the economic life of the Serbian state as well. In the mountains surrounding Kosovo, silver and lead ore were mined by Saxon miners, who had been invited from Hungary (Transylvania). The first mines opened in the northern part of Kosovo, in Zvečan and Trepça (in the vicinity of the modern Kosovska Mitrovica). Novo Brdo, another mining settlement of significance, sprang up in the eastern part of Kosovo polje.¹⁹ The ore was transported by traders from Ragusa (Dubrovnik) to the Adriatic coast, from where it was carried in boats. Kosovo was not only a region, rich in resources, but it had an excellent geographical location as well, especially from the point of view of transport options. It was in Kosovo, where the main transport routes of the Balkans ran through.

In summary, it can be stated that during the reign of Czar Dušan Kosovo had a significant role in the political, religious, cultural and eco-

¹⁹ TAKÁCS, p. 5.

conomic life of the Empire. This period is actually to be considered the golden age of Kosovo.

The Fall of the Medieval Serbian State (1371–1558)

Dušan brought about a large and powerful empire, but after his death a chaotic period followed. His successor and only son, Uroš²⁰ was only 19 when he got to the throne. During his entire reign he had to fight with the feudal lords of the country, who had divided the country's lands among themselves.²¹ Still, he found the time to establish a monastery, the Saint Archangels Monastery²² in the vicinity of Prizren, i.e. in the area of modern-day Kosovo.

Uroš had to fight with his external enemies as well. Lewis I (the Great) of the Kingdom of Hungary took back Mačva in 1359. But, the real danger came from the Turkish Empire that commenced to occupy significant areas in the Balkans. It was in 1354 that the Turks took in Gallipolli, the first European settlement, then they commenced to conquer other parts of the Balkans. In 1371 the Turkish Army broke into Serbia and in a battle by the Marica River they defeated the Serbian army. Not long after this battle (in December 1371) Uroš IV died and his death also meant that the Nemanja dynasty died out.

The enormous area that had been ruled by Czar Dušan broke up into smaller areas. Zeta, (modern-day Crna Gora) was acquired by the Balšić family and they started a new ruling dynasty. The Balšić dynasty continually had to fight with the Turks for the survival of their state from 1385 onward. On the other hand it was Vuk Branković who had established a smaller Serbian state in Kosovo. Also, the third part of the former Serbian state – the area by the Morava River – went into the hands of Lazar Hrebeljanović (See Map 5).

Prince Lazar²³ turned to Hungary for help in his struggles with his inner enemies and the Turks. He recognised the supremacy of Hungary, and, in return, he got back Mačva from King Lewis I. The Serbian areas by the Morava River and Mačva are together called Lazar's Country.

²⁰ Stefan Uroš IV. Serbian king 1355–1371.

²¹ L. HEKA, *Szerbia állam – és jogtörténete*, Szeged 2005, pp. 34–35.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 18.

²³ Lazar Hrebeljanović. Serbian prince 1371–1389.

It was in 1389 that the Turks attacked the state, ruled by Prince Lazar. The Serbian troops of the prince, as well as his Albanian and Bosnian allies met the Turkish troops in the battle of Kosovo Polje (near present-day Priština). First it was the Serbian troops which fought in more favourable conditions: Serbian warrior, Miloš Obilić sneaked into the Turkish military camp and killed the Sultan, Murad I,²⁴ but Bayezid, his son kept the murder in secret. Eventually it was the Turkish army that defeated the Serbians. Bayezid caught Lazar and had him executed.

In the battle of Rigómező (Kosovo Polje) Serbia lost its independence and it became a vassal state of the Turkish Empire. Prince Lazar had two sons, one of them was the two-year-old Stefan²⁵ and the other was Vuk, who was even younger. Since Stefan was underage, it was his mother, Milica, who reigned instead of him. In 1390 Milica went to see Sultan Bayezid²⁶ and agreed on the country's status, which thus became a vassal state. The agreement was reinforced by a marriage, too. Bayezid married Milica's daughter, Mileva Lazarević.²⁷ The status of the country can best be illustrated by the fact, that the Serbian state paid heavy taxes into the treasury of the Turkish Empire. When in 1402 the Mongol troops of Timur broke into Anatolia, the Serbian troops fought on the Turkish side in the battle of Ankara. Timur's victory over the Turks meant some days of grace for the Serbian state, since there was a Civil war going on in the Turkish Empire from 1403–1414. It was only under the reign of Mehmed²⁸ I that the Turkish army went again for the Balkans.

When in 1405 Stefan Lazarević turned 18, he took over the ruling tasks and became a vassal ruler of the Serbian state, which was located by the Morava River. In addition, he had to share these tasks with Vuk Branković, who had been given Sitnica from the Turks as his feudal estate. This was the irony of fate, that since Stefan Lazarević had no sons, in 1425 he named Durad Branković, Vuk's son, as his successor.

When in 1427 Durad Branković occupied the throne of Serbia, Murad II²⁹ announced, that since he had been married to Mileva Lazarević, he looked upon Serbia as his inheritance. Durad Branković had no intention of abdicating from the throne of Serbia, and he braved the Turks.

²⁴ Murad I. Turkish sultan 1362–1389.

²⁵ Stefan Lazarević ruled 1405–1427.

²⁶ Bayezid I. Turkish sultan 1389–1402.

²⁷ HEKA, p. 36.

²⁸ Mehmed I. Turkish sultan 1413–1421.

²⁹ Murad II. Turkish sultan 1421–1451.

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He asked for and got help from the monarchs and the leading politicians of Hungary, his great northern neighbour, including kings Sigismund,³⁰ Albert Habsburg,³¹ Vladislaus I,³² Ladislaus V³³ and noblemen Ulrik Czillei and János Hunyadi. Thus the entire period of his reign (1427–1456) consisted of fights, and a variety of diplomatic acts. Sometimes he made an alliance with Hungary against the Turks, sometimes he helped out Turkey against Hungary. His diplomacy can best be characterised by the fact, that in 1433 he married Mara, one of his daughters, to the Turkish sultan, Murad. At the same time, in order to link up with the Hungarian political elite as well, his second daughter, Katalin was married to Count Ulrik Czillei, brother-in-law of King Sigismund of Hungary.



Map 5: Serbs states after Dušan
Source: The author's compilation

Following the second battle of Rigómező (Kosovo Polje), that took place in 1448 and in which János Hunyadi, an ally to Branković, suffered a defeat, the southern part of the Serbian state, i.e. Kosovo, got under Turkish rule. The northern area, ruled by Durad Branković, was gradually

³⁰ Hungarian king 1387–1437.

³¹ Hungarian king 1437–1439.

³² Hungarian king 1440–1444.

³³ Hungarian king 1445–1457.

shrinking. This point is illustrated by the fact that Branković moved his seat to Szendrő, a castle in the Lower-Danube region.

Despite all his diplomatic manoeuvres and János Hunyadi's victory at Nándorfehérvár, when Durad Branković died in December 1456, the majority of the Serbian state had already been occupied by the Turks. His son and successor, Lazar Branković³⁴ ruled only in a small area around the castle of Szendrő (Smederevo). He did not rule for long. When in June 1458 the Turks took the castle, the medieval Serbian state ceased to exist. With the fall of Szendrő (Smederevo) Serbia – as well as – Kosovo – got under Turkish rule for almost 500 years, until 1912.

Conclusions: Kosovo and the Medieval Serbian State

The area, which is called Kosovo today, used to be a central part of the medieval Serbian state. Kosovo was rich in raw materials and it had excellent geographical conditions for transport. Due to this fact mining and trade of significant dimensions could develop in the area. Considering these factors it was a rationalistic move of the rulers of Rascia that, having occupied Kosovo, they moved their state's political, religious and economic centre to this area. This fact concretely meant that the capital was moved from Raš to Priština, then to Prizren, and eventually to Skopje. A lot of money was spent on building out the adequate system for the inhabitants to be able to practise their religion. The centre of the Serbian church was moved to the town of Peć; several monasteries were also built, including Banskja, Gračacina, and Decani. The power of the Serbian church is illustrated by the fact that one of Kosovo's two basins got the name Metohija, which means 'the land of the church'.

On the basis of the above, it is understandable that the Serbians have always been tightly linked to Kosovo; they consider it the cradle of Serbian statehood. One of the most important manifestations of this fact is that they celebrate the battle of Rigómező (Kosovo Polje) on state level as well.

This point might explain the true roots of today's Serbian-Albanian conflicts. At the beginning of the Turkish rule (1458), Kosovo was doubtlessly a Serbian land with a Serbian majority. Due to the 500-year Turkish rule, the ethnic composition radically changed by the early 20th century.

³⁴ Serbian king 1456–1458.

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Kosovo became an area with Albanians as majority. Today the situation can be described as follows.

In the Middle Ages Kosovo was the scene for the most important events of Serbian history and culture, while today it is an area with Albanians in majority (with their proportion exceeding 90%).

The question to be answered is as follows: How can medieval Serbian history be reconciled to the modern-age ethnic situation?

Abstract

One of the most significant features of the more than 20-year long agony of the communist state in Yugoslavia in relation to the Kosovo question is the Serbian-Albanian conflict. The Serbians in general consider Kosovo as an ancient Serbian land and they object to its secession from Serbia. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the Albanians in Kosovo (over 90%) want to secede from Serbia, that is, Serbian historical interests oppose Albanian ethnic interests.

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Our research was also aimed at describing Kosovo's 2000-year-old history from historical, political and geographical points of view. The migration routes between areas of power, the spatial development of various states and the historical spatial structures, which can be built on the formerly mentioned characteristics were our starting points, which were all helpful when interpreting the historical correlations of the 'Kosovo problem'.

Keywords

History of Kosovo, History of Balkan, History of Serbs, History of Albans