

Sociocultural changes as a consequence of the Ottoman wars. Archaeological examples in modern continental Croatia

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Summary

Due to the increasing Ottoman military pressure on the Croatian Kingdom from the 15th to the end of the 17th century, it is possible to detect strong demographic changes in both historical sources and archaeological finds. This period is characterized by depopulation and the migration of the indigenous (medieval) Catholic population and the formation of a border defense system gradually colonized by new populations from different parts of the Balkans under Ottoman rule. Despite the common historiographic theory about the breakdown of the medieval sociocultural

system during the Ottoman wars, it is possible to define several different models of socio-religious changes in the borderland using archaeological finds. Various degrees of cohabitation of different populations and a complete replacement of the population indicate transregional cultural processes in their own way. Also, in this case it is not possible to find proof of cultural homogenization despite the formation of a new territorial realm that lasted for almost four centuries.

Keywords: Military Frontier, Vlachs, Borderland, Trans-regional Cultural Processes, Regional Identity

1. The Ottomans and the Military Frontier

Ottoman intrusions and attacks on Croatian lands intensified after the fall of Bosnia in 1463, but their major progress was stopped by the organization of a defense system by King Matthias Corvinus. (fig. 1) The Battle of Mohács in 1526 symbolically marked the escalation of the increasingly fierce and well-organized Ottoman campaign under Suleiman the Magnificent on the one hand and the complete collapse of the medieval defense system on the other. The defense capacity was further weakened by the political instability and a ten-year civil war between the supporters of Ferdinand Habsburg and John Zápolya, which resulted in the Ottoman conquest of the eastern and southern parts of modern-day Croatia. The lack of financial, military and political capacity for the successful defense organization among the Croatian nobility resulted in the progressive influx of professional soldiers financed by the Habsburg duchies of Styria, Carinthia and Carniola. This process resulted in the gradual formation of small fort-based defense zones followed by the construction of a regional border system, financed and commanded by the Habsburg Inner Austrian duchies, also known as the Military Frontier.¹ In

the second half of the 16th century this defensive system included the borderland from the Adriatic Sea to Transylvania (fig. 2).

Habsburg military strategy was based on military capabilities and focused on defensive actions and the avoidance of major conflicts with the Ottomans. The key success factor regarding the defense organization and military buildup was the financial sustainability and the backbone of that strategy was the increasing use of unpaid soldiers.²

Throughout history there has been a continuous effort for more efficient management of war resources, because war finance is one of the most important elements of military affairs. To better understand the Military Frontier concept of using unpaid soldiers, it is important to understand the nature of warfare in Croatia during the Ottoman wars. Except for the larger and well-organized Ottoman campaigns, which were not common due to the standing peace treaties between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs, most of the warfare was based on raids and a continuous state of low-intensity conflict characterized by smaller skirmishes, looting, devastation and kidnappings. For almost two centuries, the so-called small war transformed vast border territories into a wild, unsecured and scarcely populated no-man's land with a unique code of conduct and an

¹ For more on the Military Frontier, see KASER 1997; ŠTEFANEK 2011; KRUHEK 1995; HOLJEVAC/MOČANIN 2007; MAŽURAN 1998; PÁLFFY 2000; PÁLFFY 2012.

² ŠTEFANEK 2011, 273–274.

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Figure credits

Fig. 1–3, 8, 10: Petar SEKULIĆ

Fig. 4: after Ana AZINOVIĆ BEBEK 2019, fig. 12

Fig. 5: after Andrej JANEŠ 2017, fig. 64

Fig. 6, 7: after Ana AZINOVIĆ BEBEK 2019, fig. 13

Fig. 9: Ana AZINOVIĆ BEBEK

Soziale und kulturelle Veränderungen als Folge der Osmanischen Kriege. Archäologische Beispiele im modernen Kontinental-Kroatien

Aufgrund des zunehmenden militärischen Drucks des Osmanischen Reiches auf das Kroatische Königreich im Zeitraum vom 15. bis zum Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts lassen sich sowohl in historischen Quellen als auch in den archäologischen Funden starke demografische Veränderungen feststellen. Dieser Zeitraum ist geprägt von Abwanderung und Migration der einheimischen (mittelalterlichen) katholischen Bevölkerung sowie von der Bildung eines Grenzverteidigungssystems, das allmählich von neuen Bevölkerungsgruppen aus verschiedenen Teilen des Balkans unter osmanischer Herrschaft kolonisiert wurde. Trotz der gängigen historiografischen Theorie des Zusammenbruchs des mittelalterlichen sozial-kulturellen Systems während

der Osmanischen Kriege ist es anhand der archäologischen Funde möglich, mehrere verschiedene Modelle sozial-religiöser Veränderungen im Grenzgebiet zu definieren. Verschiedene Grade des Zusammenlebens unterschiedlicher Bevölkerungsgruppen oder der vollständige Austausch der Bevölkerung weisen jeweils auf transregionale kulturelle Prozesse hin. Auch in diesem Fall ist es nicht möglich, Beweise für eine kulturelle Homogenisierung zu finden, trotz der Bildung eines neuen territorialen Herrschaftsgebiets, das fast vier Jahrhunderte lang dauerte.

Schlagworte: Militärgrenze, Walachen, Grenzland, Transregionale kulturelle Prozesse, Regionale Identität

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