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## **Political Developments and Unrests in Stara Raška (Old Rascia) and Old Herzegovina during Ottoman Rule**

**Abstract:** During the centuries of Ottoman rule the Tara and Lim river valleys (or *Potarje* and *Polimlje* respectively), the Pešter Plateau and Old Herzegovina saw much turbulence, wars, rebellions, population migrations. This chaotic situation was combined with the arbitrary and repressive conduct of local Ottoman feudal lords. Migrations, interethnic contacts and mixing of populations as well as an intensified Islamization process caused by a number of factors greatly complicated the situation. Albanian northward penetration along the Lim and into Pešter as well as the expansion of the Vasojevići tribe into the Upper Lim valley added to the complexity of the ethnic and demographic picture of the region. Perpetual rebellions against the Ottoman occupation eventually led to the liberation of the Serbian Orthodox population of these areas.

**Keywords:** Stara Raška (Old Rascia), Brda (Highlands), Old Herzegovina, Ottoman Empire, rebellions, migrations

### *Introduction*

For the sake of clarity let us first define some terms used in this article. *Stara Raška* (Old Rascia) is the old name for the area between the rivers Drina and Ibar, the Tara and Zapadna (West) Morava. The backbone of the area is the river Lim, Pešter Plateau and Mt Zlatar. The area was the nucleus of Serbian statehood and culture both in the middle ages and later, and it has been known as a “link” connecting Serb-inhabited areas. *Brda* or Highlands is the old name for the area of present-day Montenegro between the rivers Lim and Tara in the north and the rivers Žeta and Morača in the south. It encompassed the tribal territories of Bjelopavlići, Piperi, Rovčani, Moračani, Kuči, Bratonožići and Vasojevići. The name became established in the eighteenth century for the areas of those highland tribes that did

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not manage to unite with the semi-autonomous region known as Nahiye Montenegro. In his *History of Montenegro* of 1754, the Montenegrin ruler and metropolitan Vasilije Petrović Njegoš describes the river Morača as the boundary between Montenegro and Brda. Piperi and Bjelopavlići united with the semi-autonomous Montenegrin state in 1779 de facto and in 1796 formally. By 1878 all Brda tribes were integrated within the Principality of Montenegro.

Until the conquest of Buda in 1541, the Ottoman Empire's Balkan possessions formed part of the eyalet of Rumelia with its centre in Sofia, and subsequently were divided into several newly-established eyalets (pashaliks). Pashaliks were subdivided into sanjaks, and these into smaller subdivisions such as kazas and nahiyes and administrative areas administered by mutesellims. Judicial districts, kadiliks, were considerably larger than nahiyes. Urban settlements were classified by importance and size into sehers, pazars and kasabas.

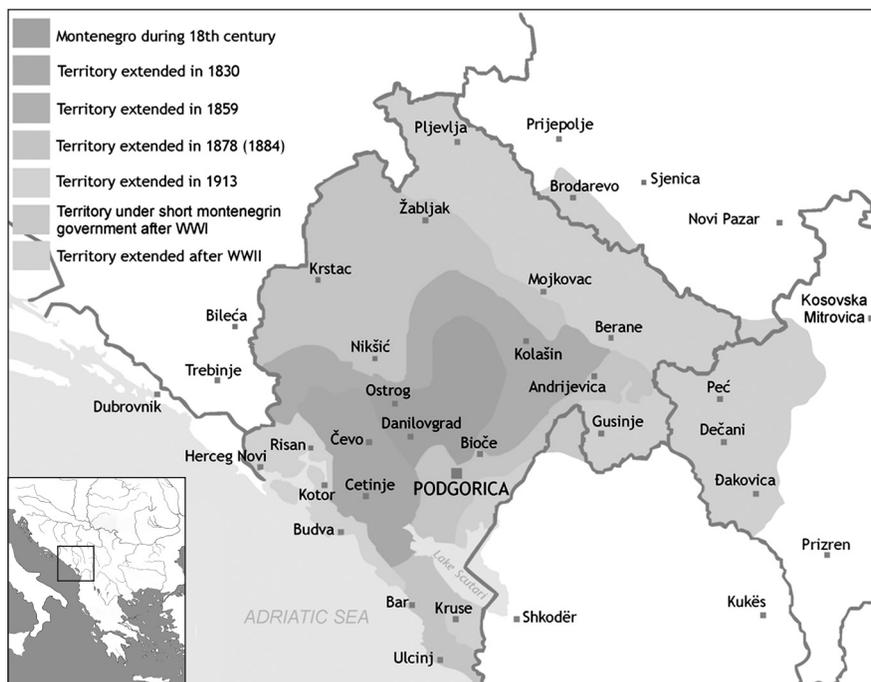
By the end of the fifteenth century Ottoman rule in the Lim (*Polimlje*) and Tara (*Potarje*) river valleys had been consolidated.<sup>1</sup> The process of consolidation was accompanied by the construction or renovation of towns and fortresses which were to serve as administrative and military centres. The town of Brskovo had been taken in 1399, Bihor in 1455. In 1530 the Bihor garrison held eight timars, and the town developed and became the centre of the kadilik of Bihor. Livestock breeders in the area between the rivers Piva and Tara and in the Middle Lim valley were organized into the nahiye of Nikšići or Linski Nikšići.<sup>2</sup> It was registered as a nahiye within the landholding of Isa Bey Isaković. The Upper Lim valley at first was incorporated into the sanjak of Prizren.<sup>3</sup> Tarski Nikšići encompassed several villages gravitating towards the river Tara.<sup>4</sup> It may be assumed with much certainty that the Kuči tribe recognized Ottoman authority after the fall of the fortified town of Medun in 1457, and that Ottoman rule in Zeta and Brda was consolidated after the conquest of Scutari.

<sup>1</sup> In the fifteenth century in these regions the construction of tribal society began on the ruins of the medieval Serbian feudal system. The organization of Ottoman rule in the tribal areas was based on lower self-governing units: *nabija*, *knežina* and *village*. Cf. Branislav Djurdjev, "Postanak i razvitak brdskih, crnogorskih i hercegovačkih plemena" (Titograd: CANU, 1984), 156.

<sup>2</sup> Hazim Šabanović, *Bosanski pašaluk* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1959), 34.

<sup>3</sup> Miomir Dašić, *Vasojevići od pomena do 1860. godine* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1986), 99.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. the villages of Tvrtkovići, Bistrica, Stričina, Bobanovići, Gojakovići, Bratojevići, Zorojevići, Kulizići, Lepenac, Obod, Cer, Ravna Reka. Cf. Žarko Šćepanović, "Pregled prošlosti Bijelog Polja i okoline do 1918. godine", in *Bijelo Polje* (Belgrade: Stručna knjiga, 1987), 105.



Territorial expansion of Montenegro

After the Ottoman conquest the town of Pljevlja was renamed Taslija. The Slavic name Bijelo Polje was translated into Ottoman Turkish and so it figures in Ottoman administrative and court documents as Akova. Over time it developed as an extension of better-known Nikolj-pazar.<sup>5</sup> During the seventeenth century it grew into a major commercial centre of Bihor, and in the eighteenth century had the status of a kasaba (palanka, varoš). Documents of 1707 and 1717 already refer to the fortress of Akova, its garrison and commanding cadre. In 1707 its military commander was Captain Suleiman Agha, and later documents make mention of the kadi of Bijelo Polje.<sup>6</sup> The Orthodox merchants of the economically well-developed commercial quarter of Bijelo Polje had good commercial connections and traded in wax, hides, wool, livestock and furs. They would take their goods to the markets of Scutari and Dubrovnik (Ragusa), and return with weapons, clothing and copper. It has been estimated that their share of the wool im-

<sup>5</sup> I. Stjepčević and R. Kovijanić, "Prvi pomeni Nikolj-pazara i Bijelog Polja", *Istorijski zapisi* 7.10 (Cetinje 1954), 610–611.

<sup>6</sup> *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III (Titograd: Istorijski institut, 1975), 519.

ported into Dubrovnik in the eighteenth century was at least ten per cent.<sup>7</sup> The nahiye of Komarani was in the Middle Lim valley, occupying most of today's Bijelo Polje and Prijepolje areas.<sup>8</sup>

Budimlja was from the beginning of Ottoman rule the centre of the eponymous nahiye and kadilik, as well as the seat of an Orthodox bishopric. In 1477 it was referred to as being situated in the sanjak of Herzegovina, in the kadilik which had its seat at Prijepolje. Somewhat later, it was incorporated into the sanjak of Prizren, and in the seventeenth century became the seat of a kadilik.<sup>9</sup> In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources it figures as a pazar, or market place. Retaining a rural character, it never became developed enough to be granted the status of a kasaba and eventually lost all importance and was reduced to an ordinary village.<sup>10</sup> There were in the Upper Lim valley three nahiyes: Budimlje (or Komnin), Plav and Zla Rijeka (or Zlorečica). Upon the establishment of the sanjak of Scutari, the nahiye of Budimlja, the abovementioned nahiyes and the nahiye of Komarani constituted the kaza of Bihor. At the end of the seventeenth century the kadi of Prijepolje had jurisdiction over Budimlja and the nahiye of Vraneš. Therefore Budimlja belonged to the sanjak of Herzegovina at the time, and later, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, to that of Scutari.<sup>11</sup>

Rožaj (Trgovišće) figures as a fortification in the first half of the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century as a strong, heavily garrisoned fortress, especially during the Austro-Ottoman war of 1718–1739.<sup>12</sup>

The town of Plav was built in the early seventeenth century, by the order of the Ottoman central authority, on the site where the caravan route from Kotor to Metohija intersected with the road that ran along the river Lim and across the Prokletije Mountains to Scutari. The newly-built fortress, whose construction had been overseen by Bosnian Mustafa Pasha, had a permanent garrison tasked with watching and keeping in check restive tribes in northern Albania and Brda.<sup>13</sup>

Fortress Gusinje built in 1611 was subsequently enlarged, and in the eighteenth century had a permanent garrison with aghas and a captain.

<sup>7</sup> V. Vinaver, "Trgovina Bara", *Istorijski zapisi* 6/9, 2, p. 472; M. Lutovac, *Privreda, saobraćaj i naselja u Rožaju i Bihoru* (Belgrade: Državna štamparija, 1930), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 100.

<sup>9</sup> Šabanović, *Bosanski pašaluk*, 165.

<sup>10</sup> *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 518.

<sup>11</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 99, 100, 211.

<sup>12</sup> Gligor Stanojević, "Pokret brdskih i albanskih plemena uoči Kandijskog rata", *Istorijski zapisi* XVII (1960), 523–522; N. K. Kostić, *Naši gradovi na jugu* (Belgrade: Državna štamparija, 1922), 77.

<sup>13</sup> Evlija Čelebija, *Putopis* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1957), 261, 262, 385, 404.

Over time the village below the fortress grew into a small town thanks to its position on a caravan route.<sup>14</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Gusinje was not only a military but also a political and administrative centre of the whole Upper Lim valley controlling the Vasojević tribal area.

The fortress of Kolašin in the nahyie of Nikšići built by the Ottomans in the mid-seventeenth century had a permanent garrison which was supported by the yearly tax (jizye) levied on the Christians of the nahyie of Peć. In judicial terms, it belonged to the kadilik of Prijepolje.<sup>15</sup> The building and garrisoning of Kolašin strengthened the Ottoman feudal class in the Tara valley, creating “a fierce and deadly Muslim frontier” which exerted a strong pressure on the Orthodox areas of Rovca and Morača.<sup>16</sup> There was also an Ottoman fortification on the Tara, on the site where the river was crossed by the trade route running from Risan via Onogošt and Jezero to Pljevlja. It was referred to as the Tower of the Bridge of the river Tara. In 1707 its garrison numbered some fifty soldiers and, until the mid-nineteenth century, it enjoyed the status of captaincy.<sup>17</sup>

Prijepolje was the centre of a kadilik and a transit area on the “Bosnian road” between the south-eastern Morava–Ibar and north-western Bosnian regions.

In early 1470 the conquered territory in Herzegovina was formed at first into a vilayet, and then a sanjak. Incorporated into it was also the market (town) Pljevlja as the seat of the nahyie of Kukanj. The kadilik of Pljevlja was established in the early decades of the sixteenth century and in the late seventeenth century encompassed three nahyies: Krička, Poblacé and Podpeč.<sup>18</sup> In 1576, until 1833, the seat of the sanjak of Herzegovina was moved from Foča to Pljevlja.<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century the kadilik of Pljevlja encompassed the nahyies of Pljevlja, Kukanj,

<sup>14</sup> *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 521.

<sup>15</sup> G. Elezović, “Kolašin na Tari i Kolašin na Ibru, *Južni pregled* 1 (Skoplje 1931), 19, after *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 522.

<sup>16</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> “Turski popis gradova, kula i palanki bosanskog vilajeta iz 1707. godine” (ANU BiH, p. 113), after *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 525.

<sup>18</sup> After *Istorija Pljevalja* (Pljevlja 2009), 91, 92.

<sup>19</sup> T. Popović, “Kada je sedište hercegovačkog sandžaka premešteno iz Foče u Pljevlja”, *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 10–11 (Sarajevo 1961), 267–270, after *Istorija Pljevalja*, 92.

Vraneš, Krička, Poblacé, but Ottoman documents also mention the nahiyes of Drobňjak<sup>20</sup> and Bukovica.<sup>21</sup>

Tribes generally evolved from livestock breeders' villages and summer pasture camps, as pastoral communities based mainly on kinship, for defence and economic purposes. Livestock-breeding population that settled in agricultural lowland areas in the first century of Ottoman rule sought to preserve their tax privileges (filuri tax paid per household and not per head). The "vlach" herdsmen had even greater privileges than previously enjoyed in the medieval Serbian state, at least in the initial period of Ottoman consolidation in this area. Because of that policy, the ethnic picture of the Lim, Tara and Morača river valleys and Old Herzegovina (part in present-day Montenegro) remained largely unaffected,<sup>22</sup> although some demographic change took place over time.<sup>23</sup> But if the Ottomans did not interfere much in the life of pastoralists scattered in mountainous regions, which were not a promising source of revenue anyway, they treated differently the population that inhabited more fertile agricultural areas. Therefore the transition of pastoralists to the agricultural way of life marked the beginning of the reduction of their former privileges. During the Ottoman-Venetian War of Cyprus, 1570–73, the tribes of these regions fought against the Ottomans. The end of the sixteenth century saw a broad rebellion led by *vojvoda*

<sup>20</sup> The area occupied by Drobňjak can be traced only from the second half of the fifteenth century, i.e. from the Herzegovina defter of 1477, which is when the area was seized by the Ottomans. Drobňjak or the nahije of Komarnica for the most part overlaps with the Drobňjak tribe in the nineteenth century. Cf. Žarko Leković, *Drobňjak u prvoj polovini 19. vijeka* (Podgorica: Grafo Crna Gora, 2007), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Within the broader historic area of the Drobňjak tribe there eventually formed four groups and entities: Drobňjak, Šaranci, Jezera and Uskoci tribes. For more see Jovan R. Bojović, "Petnjica – postojbina Vuka Karadžića", *Istorijski zapisi* (1987), 4; Šabanović, *Bosanski pašaluk*, 230; and *Istorija Pljevalja*, 150.

<sup>22</sup> Herzegovina encompasses areas from Duvno and Prozor in the west to the Lim in the east (Banjani, Piva, Drobňjak, part of sanjak of Novi Pazar, the Nikšić area etc.). Its boundaries generally coincide with the former boundaries of Herceg Stjepan's lands. Regardless of administrative and political divisions, the local people were aware of the historical ties, psychological traits and customs which distinguished them from Bosnians and Montenegrins, cf. J. Dedijer, "Hercegovina", *Etnografski zbornik XII* (1909), 6. After the death of emperor Dušan in 1355, the region of Drobňjak, Piva and Onogošt (Nikšić) was successively ruled by the Vojinović family, Nikola Altomanović, Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, Sandalj Hranić (end of the fourteenth century), who was succeeded by Stefan Vukčić Kosača in 1435, until the fall of Herzegovina to the Ottomans in 1482. Cf. Leković, *Drobňjak*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Miomir Dašić, "Političke i društvene prilike u oblastima današnje Crne Gore u drugoj polovini XIV i prvoj polovini XV vijeka", in *Kosovski boj u istoriji, tradiciji i stvaralaštvu Crne Gore* (Titograd: CANU, 1990), 63.

Grdan.<sup>24</sup> The Cretan War inspired further rebellions of Christian subjects against Ottoman rule and a broader cooperation with the Republic of Venice. Yet, occasional tribal alliances during the rebellions did not have any stronger support of Venice, even though the tribes of Herzegovina and Brda saw Venice as liberator and were ready to unite with it. Venice, for its part, pursued its own interests and saw the Balkan Christians merely as a tool against the Ottoman Empire, ignoring their liberation aspirations.<sup>25</sup> Russian influence in the region began to grow at the beginning of the eighteenth century, especially after the 1711 mission of the Russian emperor's envoy, Captain Miloradović. The geopolitical developments and conflicting interests of the great powers only added to the everyday tribulations of the Christian population.<sup>26</sup>

*The processes of islamization and population migration, rebellions and unrests*

The ethnic composition of the population of the Lim river valley remained largely unchanged until the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>27</sup> The Ottoman conquest kicked off the process of islamization, which reached its peak in the eighteenth century. It should be noted that the acceptance of Islam was not only religious but also a state issue because it required of its adherents not to separate religion from politics. Conversion to Islam was expected to improve one's financial position (e.g. exemption from taxes levied on non-Muslims) and bring greater personal and legal security.<sup>28</sup> Some families converted to Islam either to preserve or to acquire privileges, but it was not at all unusual to find Orthodox Christian and Muslim family members living together in the same household or extended family community. A reason for conversion to Islam was also to avoid the so-called blood tax

<sup>24</sup> Leković, *Drobnjak*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> The War of Candia (1644–1669) marked the beginning of a Venetian-Montenegrin military and political alliance which would last until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Cf. *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 115.

<sup>26</sup> In the first half of the eighteenth century these areas were ravaged by famine and plague, and the emigration rate was high. Cf. Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia; hereafter AS], Zbirka Andrije Luburića [Andrija Luburić Collection; hereafter: ZAL], N.P. 408.

<sup>27</sup> Vujadin Rudić, "Istorijsko-geografske karakteristike bjelopoljskog kraja", *Zbornik radova Geografskog fakulteta* 45 (Belgrade 1995), 61–62.

<sup>28</sup> Petar Vlahović, "Etnički procesi i etničke odrednice muslimana u Raškoj oblasti", in *Etnički sastav stanovništva Srbije i Crne Gore i Srbi u SFRJ* (Belgrade: Geografski fakultet & Stručna knjiga, 1993), 28.

(devshirme), levy of Christian boys taken away from home for training in the imperial administration or the janissary corps.<sup>29</sup>

According to the 1485 Ottoman census, there were no Christian converts to Islam in the nahiye of Linski Nikšići and Bihor, while in the nahiye of Budimlja, which included the market place and 28 surrounding villages, there were 858 Serbian and four Muslim (Turkish) houses. According to the 1582/3 census, there were in the nahiye of Budimlja 32 villages with a total of 530 households, five heads of villages or group of villages (*knez*) and seven musellims. The 1614 report of a Venetian public servant and native of Kotor, Mariano Bolizza (or Marijan Bolica) also claimed that the number of Christians converts to Islam in this area was small. After the 1690 migration of Serbs led by patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević the process of islamization gained momentum as a result of the strong influence of some Muslim families who had resettled in the largely depopulated Bihor area from the parts of Montenegro and the areas on the other side of the Sava and Danube rivers recaptured from the Ottomans.<sup>30</sup> The process of islamization in Bihor and Korita ran at a fast pace in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and members of one family of both faiths often lived side by side, even in the same household.<sup>31</sup> Non-islamized Serb population tended to migrate mostly to Serbia, especially during the Cretan War (1645–69) and the Austro-Turkish wars of 1690, 1714 and 1737.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire found itself in a crisis due to the declining authority of the central government and considerable territorial losses after the Treaties of Karlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718). This led to a rise, often unlawful, in taxation by unruly local authorities. The Orthodox population revolted, notably during the Austro-Turkish war of 1737. One of the inspirers and organizers of the uprising was the Serbian patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta. In late July 1737 he and chiefs of the Vasojevići and other Brda tribes went to join the Austrian forces led by Field Marshal Seckendorff whose headquarters was in the village of Tešić near Niš. The Austrians soon took Niš and entered Novi Pazar. The metropolitan of Raška Jefimije (Damjanović), in cooperation with Atanasije Rašković, the *knez* of the historic region of Stari Vlah, stirred Orthodox Christians of his diocese to rebellion. They drove the Ottomans out of Novi Pazar, suffering a loss of eighty men. The *oberkapetan* Staniša Marković Mlatišuma and his Serbian militia entered the town on

<sup>29</sup> Šćepanović, "Pregled prošlosti Bijelog Polja", 104.

<sup>30</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 246.

<sup>31</sup> Milisav Lutovac, *Bihor i Korita* (Belgrade: Naučno delo, 1967), 40.

28 July. They were joined by *knez* Rašković with his 1,500 insurgents and two Austrian colonels with their forces.<sup>32</sup>

The local Ottoman authority in the Upper Lim valley and Bihor was quickly broken down. The new situation encouraged the insurgents from the Vasojevići, Kuči, Piperi and Bratonožići tribes, i.e. from the region of Brda, led by the Kuči *vojvoda* Radonja Petrović, to head for Stara Srbija (Old Serbia) to meet the Austrian forces.<sup>33</sup> When Arsenije IV and some 3,000 Highlanders arrived in Novi Pazar, the town was empty because the Austrians had withdrawn a day earlier. Fearing the Ottomans, the patriarch chose to catch up with the Austrian army and a part of the chiefs and people of Brda. The rest of the Highlanders chose to return. In the general confusion Vasojevići and Kuči plundered and burned Bihor.<sup>34</sup> The rebels attacked Bijelo Polje, and “cut down Turks, and partly destroyed their fortresses from Brodarevo to Prijepolje”.<sup>35</sup>

There are some data about the clergy of the Metropolitanate of Belgrade from the 1730s, i.e. the short-lived period of Austrian rule over northern Serbia, mentioning priests from the environs of Bijelo Polje, Pećarska, Bihor and Vraneš.

The building and growth of Kolašin as a fortified place was one of the reasons for the emigration of Orthodox population because it put an end to their relatively free way life and movement in the Tara river valley. The villages in the Mojkovac area found themselves trapped between the Ottoman fortified towns of Kolašin, Bijelo Polje and Pljevlja, and local population mainly migrated to the area of Ibarski Kolašin, Jasenica and Kosmaj.<sup>36</sup> Along with emigration from the Lim and Tara river valleys, there was a constant inflow of settlers from Brda, most of all from Morača, Rovci, Drobnjaci, Bratonožići and Piperi. From the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a steady increase in Muslim population in this area. Many landowning Muslim families resettled there from the territories across the Sava and Danube rivers that the Ottoman Empire had lost, such as Hajdarpašić, Šehović, Ćorović beys and others. Mehmed Ćor-Pasha came to Bihor from Osijek in Slavonia in the late seventeenth century, and was given a grant of

<sup>32</sup> *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. IV-1 (Belgrade: SKZ, 1994), 149 (KA, AFA, 1737, 11, 25v, f. 393).

<sup>33</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 281.

<sup>34</sup> M. Kostić, “Ustanak Srba i Arbanasa u Staroj Srbiji protiv Turaka 173–1739 i seobe u Ugarsku”, *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva* 7-8 (1930), 208–210, after *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 294

<sup>35</sup> *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. IV-1, 150.

<sup>36</sup> Šćepanović, “Pregled prošlosti Bijelog Polja”, 112.

land as compensation for the property he had held in Slavonia.<sup>37</sup> The defeat of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslim forces, among which were a considerable number of sipahis and members of distinguished bey families from the Lim and Tara river valleys, by the Russians at Ochakov in 1737 made a strong impression in the region. From 1757 to 1831, the Upper Lim valley was part of the pashalik of Scutari.<sup>38</sup>

Due to the deterioration of the traditional Ottoman feudal system, the subjugated population bore the burden of ever heavier taxation, which gave rise to rebellions and banditry. It was recorded that in Bijelo Polje in 1690, during the Great Turkish War, “people died from the plague in such numbers that the living could not manage to bury the dead”.<sup>39</sup> What remained of the Christian Orthodox population after migrations from this area was subjected to Ottoman reprisals. The late-twelfth-century church of St. Peter in Bijelo Polje, known for its founder’s famous illuminated manuscript, Miroslav’s Gospel, was converted to a mosque named Fethiye, or “victory mosque”, and was not reconverted until liberation in 1912.<sup>40</sup> It was in that period, more precisely in 1738, that the Šudikova monastery near Budimlja, which had an important scriptorium, was burned down.<sup>41</sup>

The main factors that affected the demographic, ethnic and religious situation in the Middle and Upper Lim valley in the seventeenth and eighteenth century are: the construction of a line of Ottoman fortified towns: Akova (Bijelo Polje)–Bihor–Trgovište (Rožaj)–Plav–Gusinje; the building of mosques and the bringing of religious officials from elsewhere, which helped the process of conversion to Islam; unrests, rebellions and emigration of Christian Orthodox and immigration of Muslim population; the beginning of the process of settlement of north-Albanian tribes; the rise and territorial expansion of the Vasojevići tribe from the area of Lijeva Rijeka into the Lim valley, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century. The expansion of such a robust and numerically strong tribe led to their conflicts with the Klimenti/Kelmendi who were being pushed out of the Middle Lim valley. The settlement of the Vasojevići and other Brda tribes and their mixing with the native population gave a boost to the Orthodox element, raising its spirits, strengthening internal cohesion and military power, the effects of which would be manifest in the nineteenth century leading to definitive liberation from the centuries-long Ottoman

<sup>37</sup> Lutovac, *Bihor i Korita*, 16, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 211, 278.

<sup>39</sup> Šćepanović, “Pregled prošlosti Bijelog Polja”, 109.

<sup>40</sup> Jovo Medojević, *Crkve u bjelopoljskom kraju* (Prijepolje: Muzej u Prijepolju, 2000), 22.

<sup>41</sup> Mirko Barjaktarović, “Etnički razvitak Gornjeg Polimlja”, *Glasnik cetinjskih muzeja* 6.VI (1973), 178.

occupation. The expansion of the Vasojevići from the mountainous area into the fertile Lim valley also caused rivalries with the native Orthodox population (*Srbljaci, Ašani*). As a natural reaction to the aggressiveness of the better-organized Vasojevići, native population began to form groups. Such alliances were not an exception considering that tribes in Old Herzegovina, such as Banjani, Pješivci and Grahovljani, were formed from unrelated members under similar conditions.<sup>42</sup> The defence of the Upper and Middle Lim valley against aggressive inroads and violent immigration of Albanian tribes helped the Vasojevići to become stronger as a tribe and to expand to the north, along the Lim, as far as the river Lješnica.

The years 1737, 1738, 1768 and 1790 stand out by the extent of brutality and destruction inflicted to the Upper and Middle Lim valley.<sup>43</sup> After the war years 1737/38 there was a mass emigration of Orthodox population from this area. At the end of 1737 Hodaverdi Pasha Mahmudbegović (Begolli) ravaged the Vasojević area. In 1768 Kariman Pasha Mahmudbegović attacked the area with a force of some 15,000 men (which was equal to the total population of the area)<sup>44</sup> from three directions, ravaging and plundering the villages of Trepča, Trešnjevo, Zabrdje and Slatina, Šekular, Dapšići and Polica. The region was also ravaged by the Bushatli Pasha of Scutari in 1790.

#### *Rebellions and the oppression by local Ottoman feudal lords and Albanians*

Domestic historiography has tended to focus on *hajduks* as a phenomenon associated with the Orthodox Christian reaya seen as a symbolic indicator of the people's patriotic consciousness and aspiration for liberation and socio-economic emancipation from the Ottoman Empire. However, no less important was the predatory behaviour of Muslim population, as the dominant class, especially because it frequently caused local rebellions and unrests. It was a clear sign of the profound economic and social crisis of the declining Ottoman Empire, and of the political decomposition of the state and society. Every new rebellion further weakened the Empire.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, this area was afflicted by a wave of Albanian brigandage. As is well known, in 1700 the unruly Kelmendi/Klimenti<sup>45</sup> were resettled by Hodaverdi Pasha Mahmudbegović

<sup>42</sup> Petar Šobajić, "Bjelopavlići", *Srpski etnografski zbornik* 27 (1923), 257, 314, 326.

<sup>43</sup> Radovan Bakić, "Stanovništvo opštine Berane", *Tokovi* 2 (2009), 51.

<sup>44</sup> Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 288, 302.

<sup>45</sup> Klimenti (Alb. *Kelmendi*) is a region in Albania (Alb. *Mali i Kelmënit*) and the name of the eponymous tribe whose members live in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo. According to their tradition recorded in 1685 (August Theiner, *Vetera monumenta Slavoo-*

to the Pešter Plateau<sup>46</sup> in order to separate them from the tribe's rebellious core. But they did not abandon their previous lifestyle as *eshkijas*, brigands, and the practice spread into the future sanjak of Novi Pazar. The resettled Kelmendi were under constant pressure to convert to Islam. The Ottoman census of 1703 mentions two villages near Plav inhabited by Kelmendi: Novšići and Martinovići.<sup>47</sup> Some researchers believe that the Kelmendi met with strong resistance from local Serbian population, and even were pushed out, and that they therefore began to settle in the neighbouring region of Rugova.<sup>48</sup> Albanian plundering raids into the Upper Lim valley started from their core lands, but they also had bases in the villages of Zabrdje, Slatina and Trešnjevo in the environs of present-day Andrijevica. In 1708 they attacked many houses in Bihor and Trgovište (Rožaje), killing many inhabitants, and they robbed travellers travelling from the direction of Kosovo towards Bosnia. Nine years later, in 1717, the aghas of the fortresses of Rožaje, Plav, Bijelo Polje and Kolašin, and local ayans, submitted a petition to the Sublime Porte begging that the brigands be caught and appropriately punished.<sup>49</sup> The area around the source of the river Ibar, Rožaje and its environs began to be settled by Kuči, Klimenti and Hoti, Kuči mainly on the left and Klimenti on the right side of the Ibar. This is why these areas were popularly known as "Kučnija" and "Latinija" (from "Latin", because

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*num Meridionalium historiam illustrantia*), the Kelmendi are of Serbian origin. They claim their descent from a single ancestor who moved there from the upper Morača river valley, married a woman from the Kuči tribe and had a son, Kliment, whose descendants founded two villages with Serbian names and after whom the tribe was named, Klimenti. The ancestor who had moved from Morača was an Orthodox Christian. Under the influence of the bishop of Scutari and very active Catholic missionaries, his descendants converted to Roman Catholicism. The missionaries taught them not only to see the Turks as enemies but also not to see the Orthodox as friends. In 1685 they helped the sanjak-bey of Scutari Suleiman Bushatli to defeat the Montenegrins at the Battle of Vrtijeljka, where the famous hajduk Bajo Pivljanin was killed. In 1692 they helped him to take Cetinje from a joint Montenegrin and Venetian force. Cf. Jovan Tomić, *O Arnautima u staroj Srbiji i Sandžaku* (Priština: Panorama, 1995; 1st ed. Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1913); Georg von Gyurkovics, *Albanien, Schilderungen von Land und Leute* (Vienna 1881), 160; Janez Rotar, "Slavensko-albanski nacionalni odnosi prema našoj putopisnoj literaturi (do 1914)", in *Stanovništvo slovenskog porijekla u Albaniji* (Titograd: Istorijski institut Crne Gore, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Tomić, *O Arnautima*.

<sup>47</sup> *Spomenik Srpske akademije nauka* 42 (1905), 64, 74; after Barjaktarović, "Etnički razvitak Gornjeg Polimlja", 177.

<sup>48</sup> Andrija Jovičević, "Plavsko-gusinjska oblast", *Srpski etnografski zbornik* 21 (1921), 407.

<sup>49</sup> Bogumil Hrabak, "Nemirno stanje u kasabama na sjeveru Crne Gore u doba krize i naseljavanja (XVIII vek)", *Istorijski zapisi* 4 (1987), 64–66.

the Klimenti were Roman Catholic at the time of settlement).<sup>50</sup> “On the entire left side of the Ibar are Kuči, a huge islamized clan, and on the right side, a smaller, much smaller part which descends from Klimenti” (Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Srba*, vol. 1). Over time, Kuči prevailed, and so Klimenti and Hoti, although Albanians, came to speak Serbian as their first language. Jovan Tomić observed that by 1765 almost all resettled Albanians of Catholic faith in the area of Pešter and Rožaje had converted to Islam.<sup>51</sup>

In 1725 some Muslims of the Bijelo Polje area engaged in banditry crossed into the kadilik of Bihor and attacked the local courthouse, took all the money and humiliated the kadi.<sup>52</sup> Local feudal families, keen on having local affairs under their own control, did not look benevolently to the Porte’s sending officials from elsewhere to fill vacant positions. It is known, for example, that the former agha of the Rožaje martolos Ibrahim and his son Omer were engaged in illegal activities. They not only refused to comply with the imperial order to appear in court, but they killed the new martolos agha, managed to attract some fifty nefers (soldiers) of Albanian origin from Rugova (they themselves probably were of the same origin) as well as thirty Christians, and the gang besieged the fortress of Rožaje. A weak central government in murky times provided much opportunity for abuse of power on local level, the brunt of which was borne by the Orthodox reaya. Military commanders in small towns were linked with representatives of the feudal apparatus, sipahis and zaims. Thus, in 1730 in the kadilik of Prijepolje the reaya who lived on the zeamet of zaim Mehmed, in the village of Žudže, revolted against payment of taxes. They attacked the fortress in Morača because its aghas and soldiers raided their villages, pillaging and carrying out violence. The trouble for the Porte was in that the rebelled reaya fomented unrest among the Orthodox population in neighbouring areas. In order to calm down the situation the Porte ordered the governor of Hercegovina and the kadi of Prijepolje to conduct an investigation.<sup>53</sup>

There is evidence for the Empire’s troubles with ruthless Albanian settlers around the fortress of Onogošt (present-day Nikšić) as well.<sup>54</sup> At the time, Onogošt was in the nahiye of Drobniak and under the jurisdiction

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<sup>50</sup> Barjaktarović, “Etnički razvitak Gornjeg Polimlja”, 193.

<sup>51</sup> Tomić, *O Arnautima*, 91–92; Dašić, *Vasojevići*, 247.

<sup>52</sup> Jovan Tomić, *Crna Gora za Morejskog rata* (Belgrade: Srpska kraljevska akademija, 1907), 249–274, after *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. III, 558.

<sup>53</sup> Hrabak, “Nemirno stanje u kasabama”, 70 (Komisija za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine pri ANBiH, inv. no. 139/6).

<sup>54</sup> After a failed siege of the fortified town of Nikšić (Onogošt) by Hercegovina and Brda tribes in 1789, the Orthodox population experienced much hardship and Trebešani from its surroundings emigrated to Upper Morača. Cf. M. Vujačić, “Dvije

of the kadi of Pljevlja. As reported to the Porte by the Bosnian mutesellim, a few Albanian families that had moved there from the troubled Albanian mountains would go on the rampage and rob Muslim families. Rioting, thefts and robberies were also recorded in the area of Kolašin fortress. In 1776 Kolašin Turks became so swollen-headed that they refused obedience to the Porte, and were ruthlessly sowing fear and causing bloodshed. The Porte ordered the Bosnian vizier to punish the lawbreakers severely. The vizier passed the sultan's order to Džafer Pasha Čengić. With the help of Herzegovina tribes (Drobnjaci,<sup>55</sup> Pivljani, Grahovljani, Banjani), Čengić defeated the renegade Kolašin Turks. Ten of them were hanged on the spot, and another forty somewhat later, in Travnik.<sup>56</sup> Rožaje, which belonged to the sanjak of Prizren, was a veritable nest of Albanian bandit groups. By robbing and murdering travellers and traders they made the roads in the area of Bihor and Stari Vlah that led to the vilayet of Bosnia unusable,<sup>57</sup> and all traffic had to be moved to less vulnerable routes. Thus, in the eighteenth century, trade from Bihor and Bijelo Polje to Podgorica and Scutari was re-directed from the Adriatic road which ran via Brskovo to the route through the Lim and Cijevna river valleys. Abuses by fortress garrisons in rural areas did not stop even in the middle of the century: in 1744 the captain of the fortress in the kadilik of Budimlja reported criminal behaviour of some from the fortress under his charge.

Those prone to abuse of power, theft, robbery and violence used their belonging to the state religion or the state's military or administrative apparatus to pursue their own unlawful interests. The end of the eighteenth century was a period of chaotic circumstances in the European part of the Ottoman Empire, a period of a noticeably weakening central government, unrests and rebellions. At that time the feudal Bushatli family became virtually independent in northern Albania and sought to enlarge territory under its control. Mahmud Pasha Bushatli sent his commander Hasan Hot to attack Sjenica, Prijepolje and Pljevlja, while Bijelo Polje was under his control. A unit of Sarajevo soldiers, from the expedition sent against Hasan

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razure Trebešana i postanak plemena Uskoci u Crnoj Gori", *Glas CCLXXX* (Belgrade: SANU, 1971), 267.

<sup>55</sup> Drobnjak is a tribe in Montenegrin Herzegovina. Its eastern boundaries, finally established in 1860, are Šaranci and the upper Morača valley, in the south Nikšićko Polje and Župa, in the west the river Piva, and in the north the river Tara. For more see Leković, *Drobnjak*, 11; Svetozar Tomić, "Drobnjak, antropogeografska ispitivanja", in *Srpski etnografski zbornik* 4 (1902), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Leković, *Drobnjak*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Hrabak, "Nemirno stanje u kasabama", 80 (Komisija za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine pri ANBiH, inv. no. 139/5, p. 212-213).

Hot, was harrying the area of Vraneš.<sup>58</sup> In 1786, representatives of Akova and other towns in the sanjak of Scutari along with people from Plav and Gusinje submitted a petition begging the sultan to pardon Bushatli and let him retain his position, claiming that “the population of these areas are prone to troublemaking and feuding” and that it was the Bushatlis who had succeeded in suppressing disorder and banditry.

Expeditions against Brda were often sent from the Lim river valley, such as those carried out by the Ćorovići of Bihor which were even sung about in epic poetry. A major one was carried out in 1796 during Mahmud Pasha Bushatli's second campaign against Montenegro.<sup>59</sup> An Ottoman force mustered in the Lim valley, Pljevlja and Kolašin was sent to Bushatli's aid in the direction of the effectively independent Katun nahiye. However, in the village Lopate near Lijeva Rijeka they were engaged and routed by a joint Vasojevići, Moračani and Rovčani force. The metropolitan of Cetinje Petar I proved to be an exceptionally capable organizer of the struggle of Montenegrin, Brda and Herzegovina tribes, their unifier and conciliator. Two important victories in 1796, at Martinići and Kruši, allowed the unification of the Bjelopavlići and Piperi tribes with the four Montenegrin nahiyes. In that period Uskoci, Vasojevići and Moračani repulsed the attack of an Ottoman Herzegovinian force at the Battle of Lopate.<sup>60</sup>

The introduction of the chiftlik system and abuse by Ottoman authorities had been exerting increasing pressure on the Brda and Herzegovina tribes, causing people to resist. *Ćetovanje* (from *ćeta*, a small armed unit) was not uncommon both as a subsistence strategy and as a liberation struggle, and it became more widespread in the region of the Lim and Tara valleys. In the area of Bihor, Rožaje and Tara valley the chiftlik system had become dominant in the first half of the eighteenth century and eventually prevailed in the Lim valley towards the end of the century.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was slowly declining despite occasional recoveries. The well-advanced process of converting land into chiftliks, unrests, general social insecurity and gross disregard for all law by local military and judicial officials created a state of anarchy which paved the way for a popular uprising at the beginning of the

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<sup>58</sup> Šćepanović, “Pregled prošlosti Bijelog Polja”, 117.

<sup>59</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century, eastern Herzegovina suffered much in Mahmud Pasha Bushatli's campaign. Cf. Arhiv SANU, Belgrade [Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts], Legacy of Ignjat M. Žugić, p. 504.

<sup>60</sup> In February 1794 an assembly of the heads of Herzegovina and Brda tribes at the Morača monastery voiced their grievances to the Montenegrin *guvernador* (governor) Radonjić and Austrian General Vukasović as to the plight of their tribes. Cf. Nikola Tomić, *Pleme Drobnijak* (Temekula, 1980), 73.

following century. The Empire was going from one socio-economic crisis to another, and the attempts to fill the imperial coffers by levying additional taxes directly affected the peasantry, primarily the Christian reaya. Amid these crises, the Empire's military power was also declining. The lack of central control encouraged the ambitions of local lords, even some pashas appointed to high positions in the Balkan provinces mostly from the ranks of prominent Albanian feudal families. Having acquired a wealth through plundering and corruption, they created their own mercenary armies attracted by the prospect of loot. Occasional riots and mutinies of janissaries only added to the anarchy. This situation, which particularly affected the Orthodox population, created additional religious tensions and class antagonisms, inevitably leading to a general popular uprising.

### *Towards final liberation*

The First Serbian Uprising, or Serbian Revolution, which broke out in 1804 resonated widely and strongly in Montenegro and in all neighbouring areas in which it had a political or any other influence. It was then that closer political ties and cooperation between the two national states in the making were established. The great interest in the First Serbian Uprising among the tribes of Brda and Herzegovina also stemmed from the fact that it opened the opportunity for settlement in uninhabited and fertile areas in Serbia with no feudal obligations.

The alliance between the tribes of historic Stara Crna Gora (Old Montenegro) and Brda, patiently and persistently built in the struggle against the Ottomans throughout the eighteenth century, would eventually grow into a small national state, in fact a union of tribes. This union was achieved by Petar I Petrović, and with pleas and curses rather than through the exercise of his authority as a ruler. The society of the Montenegro of the time, which was touched by the wave of the First Serbian Uprising, especially the northern and north-eastern area of present-day Montenegro, had not been integrated into a single community. There was Old Montenegro (four nahiyes) on the one hand and Brda on the other as two geographic and historic regions which would figure in the name of the state (*Crna Gora i Brda*) until the 1880s. The Brda tribes, especially the Vasojevići, Moračani, Drobnjaci and Rovci, established firmer links with insurgent Serbia.

A glimpse of the situation in the Lim and Tara valleys at the time is provided by an inscription on the wall of the Morača monastery dated 1803. According to the anonymous chronicler, there was a great hunger and

a “great bloodshed” and “worse than hunger was unrest”.<sup>61</sup> From the testimonies left by contemporaries in the books of the monasteries of the Holy Trinity in Pljevlja and Nikoljac in Bijelo Polje, it appears that the previous year, 1802, had hardly been any better. The Kolašin captaincy was the site of bloody fighting, instigated by local Muslims. Villages waged wars with one another, clans with clans, and all of them together with local authorities. Robberies, thefts and murders were a daily occurrence. The chaos in the Kolašin captaincy stirred unrest in Bijelo Polje and Pljevlja as well. During the First Serbian Uprising the unrests ceased because the feuding Muslims came to see the Uprising as a threat to them all. Until then alliances were not uncommon between Orthodox Christians and Muslims against some other village, be it Orthodox or Muslim. However, after the Uprising broke out, religion prevailed as the criterion for their grouping together.

That Petar I Petrović was informed of preparations for an uprising in Serbia is evidenced by a letter he sent to the hegumen of the monastery of Dečani on 10 January 1804: “Montenegrins and, on the part of Belgrade, Serbs have the intention of rising to arms against the Turks.”<sup>62</sup> Apparently the Vasojevići tribal leaders were also familiar with the preparations for a general uprising. There are indications that the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi maintained close ties with the monasteries of Morača, Ostrog, Piva and especially with those of the Patriarchate of Peć and Visoki Dečani. The Vasojevići also maintained direct communication with some leaders in Serbia, primarily those of their tribal origin, which would play a marked role in the course of the Uprising. A similar role was played by the Drobnjak leaders with respect to Herzegovina.

The First Serbian Uprising echoed broadly in the Lim valley and among the Brda tribes from the beginning of the armed conflict with the renegade janissary leaders (*dahi*), in the pashalik of Belgrade. The Uprising was also of great importance for relations between the Montenegrins and Brda tribes because it contributed to their closer cooperation. News about the rebellion of the Serbs in the pashalik of Belgrade in February 1804 was brought to the Lim valley by herdsmen and some hajduks who were spending winter in Serbia: Karadjordje’s rebels had seized a few thousand sheep from some herdsmen from the nahiye of Gusinje, and the herdsmen returned home empty-handed in early spring.<sup>63</sup> The Uprising stirred up guerrilla actions and brigandage in the Lim and Tara valleys. The tribes

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<sup>61</sup> Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, vol. II (Belgrade: Državna štamparija, 1903), no. 3805.

<sup>62</sup> Miomir Dašić, *Ogledi iz istorije Crne Gore* (Podgorica: Istorijski institut Crne Gore, 2000), 85.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 86.

of Brda and Herzegovina were ready to fight the Ottomans as early as the first half of 1804, and their chiefs only waited for a signal and support from Prince-Bishop Petar I. But as a result of Russia's strong diplomatic pressure on Petar I through the emissary Marko Ivelić, their urges bore no fruit. Petar I was unable to take any serious step without Russia's approval. Russia, the protector power of the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire, had a treaty of friendship with the Ottoman Empire since 1774. Petar I and his Montenegrins, as well as the Brda tribes in which he had a great influence, were advised to remain neutral. The Russian intelligence service controlled communication between Karadjordje and Petar I and channels of communication between Serbia and Montenegro on the one hand and Brda and Herzegovina on the other. The calming down of rebellious ferment in Brda was certainly the consequence of Montenegro's political reliance on Russia. At war with France, Russia sought to maintain peace with the Ottoman Empire in order to avoid being engaged on two fronts.<sup>64</sup> For these reasons, Montenegro could not even in 1806 provide assistance to the Serbian uprising, which had by then grown into a large-scale military conflict. Prince-Bishop Petar I was in a delicate position. The Serbs in Serbia and also in Herzegovina expected his (Montenegrin) participation in the struggle against the Turks. Aware of his position, and advised by Russia to maintain peace with the Ottoman Empire, the Prince-Bishop was reproached by Karadjordje: "We always have it in our heart and our mind that you will be, at some point, big and powerful support to the Serbian people and liberation."

In the summer of 1805 the insurgent ferment in Brda and Herzegovina grew into an open rebellion of some tribes.<sup>65</sup> The vizier of Scutari Ibrahim Pasha quelled the unrest in the areas under his responsibility by arms. Conflicts between Brdjani (Highlanders) and Turks were a normal occurrence at the time. In the Lim valley and Brda, hajduk groups flourished. This social phenomenon, a combination of guerrilla warfare and brigandage, resulted both from the dysfunction of local Ottoman authorities and from the need to survive. Among the Muslim population in the Lim and Tara valleys there was a feeling of great uncertainty and insecurity, as indicated by a contemporary reference to the situation in Bijelo Polje in 1806: "That summer we were building fortifications around Bijelo Polje, and the poor suffered much hardship and oppression, and we guarded border posts all

<sup>64</sup> AS, ZAL, b. IV, no. 32.

<sup>65</sup> In 1805 the Russian Consulate was opened in Kotor. Chiefs of Brda and Montenegrin tribes wrote to it about frequent border fights with the Turks. Cf. Arhiv i biblioteka Državnog muzeja, Cetinje [Archives and Library of the State Museum; hereafter, ABO DMC], Petar I, 1804, 983.

year long”.<sup>66</sup> Hajduk bands in the Lim and Tara valleys and the area of Stara Raška in general were highly mobile. They were robbing and raiding Ottoman territory, crossing into Šumadija and fighting there against the Ottomans under Karadjordje’s banner. According to some data, several hundred hajduks from the Lim valley and Brda tribes fought in the 1806/7 battles for Belgrade alone, and in those years many families emigrated from these areas. In March 1807, the insurgent Serbian army began an offensive from southwest Serbia towards Bosnia and the river Lim, but there was no contact between the Montenegrin and Serbian forces.

In the spring of 1809 Karadjordje launched an offensive in the direction of Sjenica, Novi Pazar, the Lim and Tara rivers, hoping to rouse to arms the entire area to the border of Old Montenegro and northern Albania. The beginning of a Russo-Turkish War in 1806 had created favourable conditions for a closer cooperation between Cetinje and Karadjordje’s Serbia. The Serbian Orthodox population of the Lim and Tara valleys and the surrounding Brda and Herzegovina tribes followed the insurgents’ liberation struggle with much sympathy. Only direct communication and synchronized military operations of Serbians, Montenegrins, Brda tribes and Herzegovinians<sup>67</sup> had a real chance of success. Therefore Karadjordje asked Petar I to take his Montenegrins and instigate the people from Brda to join the fight against the Turks, proposing that they meet somewhere on the Lim or the Tara.<sup>68</sup> He also believed that the time had come to join forces and strike out at the enemy together. Karadjordje addressed Bishop Petar I again: “For that reason we recommend that You too show love for the Christian people and strike out at the enemy and, advancing towards us, stir up all fellow Christians so that we could all strike out at the unbaptized enemy from all sides.”<sup>69</sup>

The truth is that it did not take too much trouble to rouse the Orthodox population of the Lim valley to rebellion in 1809 because the area had already been in ferment. Large-scale fighting took place in April 1809, when Karadjordje’s offensive towards Sjenica threatened fortified Novi Pazar, Sjenica and the *Imperial Road* that connected the eyalet of Bosnia with Constantinople. He tried to take advantage of the fact that the bulk of the

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<sup>66</sup> Ž. Šćepanović, *Srednje Polimlje i Potarje* (Belgrade: SANU, 1979), 175.

<sup>67</sup> In 1805 a large army under the command of Suleiman Pasha was sent from Bosnia to quell the rebellious tribes of Herzegovina. Cf. Arhiv Istorijskog instituta u Podgorici [Archives of the Historical Institute, Podgorica; hereafter: AIIP], folder no. 134.

<sup>68</sup> Gedeon Ernest Maretić, *Istorija srpske revolucije* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1987), 177.

<sup>69</sup> The region gained in geostrategic importance with the spread of the First Serbian Uprising to the south because it threatened to cut off the eyalet of Bosnia from the rest of the Ottoman Empire. Cf. ABO DMC Petar I, 1804, 1026.

Ottoman army was engaged on the Russo-Ottoman front to drive out the Ottoman forces from the territory of Old Montenegro. His war plan envisaged major operations in the direction of the Lim and Tara rivers, where his forces were supposed to meet with the Brda and Montenegrin rebels. He was convinced that the Orthodox population would take to arms as soon as his army entered Stara Raška. That fear reigned in the region seems to be evidenced by Karadjordje's letter to Russian Field Marshal Prozorovsky, commander of the Army of Moldavia engaged in fighting on the Danube: "in some places the Turks, when they heard I was coming with an army with many guns, did not even dare wait for me but fled, leaving many places empty, and those that stayed waiting for me were destroyed by our arms."<sup>70</sup>

In the first phase of the offensive the insurgents liberated Sjenica and Nova Varoš and reached the Lim near Prijepolje, as evidenced by Karadjordje's letter to *vojvoda* Antonije Pljakić dated 23 April 1809: "Turks are nowhere to be seen all the way to the Lim."<sup>71</sup> Ottoman sources also confirm that in April 1809 Karadjordje's army took Nova Varoš and Sjenica, and besieged Prijepolje. Thus the road between Bosnia and Constantinople was cut off, and the insurgent army's next goal was to advance further in order to join forces with Montenegrins. The advancement, however, was halted because the Ottoman forces in the region of Raška had in the meantime received reinforcement with troops from Bosnia and Peć. This compelled Karadjordje to withdraw from the environs of Sjenica on 29 April and return to Belgrade to confer with the Governing Council about further military and political action. The insurgent military leaders, *vojvodas*, Vujica Vulićević, Miloš and Milan Obrenović remained in the Sjenica area in order to proceed towards Prijepolje and Pljevlja. *Vojvoda* Milan Obrenović received a delegation from Vasojevići. The *vojvoda* of Stari Vlah Hadži-Prodan Gligorijević, a Vasojević by origin, was assigned to lead an insurgent force from Stari Vlah to Bijelo Polje and Bihor, and to call the Orthodox population there to rise to arms. The operations of the insurgents around Sjenica and Novi Pazar had caused ferment among the Christians of the Lim and Tara valleys. Hajduks and others who had been keeping track of the developments since the beginning of the Uprising now set out to rouse people to arms. At the same time, the Ottoman authorities in Scutari, through Plav and Gusinje beys and aghas, put pressure on the recruited Christians who fought against the insurgent army that was moving towards the Lim. The pressure was particularly strong on the chiefs of the Vasojević tribe, who were required to prevent the spread of the uprising in their respective areas.

<sup>70</sup> M. Djordjević, *Srbija u ustanku 1804–1813* (Belgrade: Rad, 1979), 265.

<sup>71</sup> Dašić, *Ogledi*, 102.

In the second half of May Karadjordje returned to the position near Sjenica to resume operations for the liberation of the area between the Lim and Ibar rivers. Even though the Russian military headquarters raised objections to his placing the focus of operations on that area, he kept considering the offensive in the direction of Old Montenegro as his priority. Immediately upon his return to the environs of Sjenica, he had to prepare defence against an attack of the Bosnian army which had held back the Serbian forces on the river Drina.<sup>72</sup> In the area between Sjenica and Prijepolje he first defeated the Bosnian army, and then, on 27 May 1809, at Suvodol, Numan Pasha's (Mahmutbegović) forces that were heading from Pljevlja to the aid of the Ottoman Bosnian army. The defeat of two Ottoman armies within a short span of time gave further boost to the insurrectionary movement in the area of Bihor, Bijelo Polje and Vasojevići. The news of Numan Pasha's defeat at the Battle of Suvodol was received with joy in the Lim valley. A contribution to the success of the rebel army was made by units from Brda, Vasojevići and Morača, which attacked the Ottomans in the rear. During the Battle of Suvodol forcibly conscripted Orthodox men from Bihor and Korita deserted from Numan Pasha's army and, led by *oborknez* Jovan-Sava, joined Karadjordje and contributed to the Ottoman defeat.

Shortly after the Battle of Suvodol, more than 350 rebels from Brda arrived in Karadjordje's headquarters in the environs of Sjenica. As evidenced by the letter of archimandrite Spiridon (Filipović) to Bishop Petar I dated 30 May 1809, and the testimony of a participant in the battle, Antonije Protić, Brdjani, Vasojevići and Moračani arrived in the rebel camp. Karadjordje received the Brda tribal chiefs and informed them about the plan for further operations in the direction of the Lim valley and Brda. He confirmed their old tribal titles and conferred new titles and ranks on some of them. In any case, this meeting convinced him that his insurgent army could count on full support of the population of the Lim valley and Brda. The rebel army's victories fuelled ferment in the area between the rivers Ibar, Lim and Tara. The cutting off of the imperial road between Rumelia and Bosnia had been confirmed by French sources as well. In fact, it seems that a French messenger sent by General Marmont to Constantinople was forced to give up his mission because the road was cut off by insurgents.<sup>73</sup> It was only in the late summer of 1809 that the Ottomans retook control of the road between Constantinople and Sarajevo, which was celebrated by Muslims in the whole of Bosnia. Battles and turbulence in the Lim and

<sup>72</sup> Stojan Novaković, *Vaskrs države srpske* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1986; 1st ed.: SKZ, 1904), 112.

<sup>73</sup> Petar Popović, *Francusko-srpski odnosi za vrijeme Prvog srpskog ustanka* (Belgrade 1933), 105.

Tara valleys, Stari Vlah and Brda made all land routes between Bosnia and Scutari impassable, so all traffic was carried out by sea via Dubrovnik. By the Treaty of Pressburg signed in December 1805 Austria had ceded the Gulf of Kotor to the French.

In the entire area between Old Montenegro and the border of insurgent Serbia Ottoman forces were completely distraught. The pashas sent from Albania to the aid of the commander of the Ottoman Bosnian army Suleiman Pasha, fearful of the strong rebel movement in Brda, the Lim and Tara valleys, withdrew from Donji Kolašin without fight. According to a French source, Suleiman Pasha, having been defeated between Sjenica and Prijepolje, retreated to the vicinity of Bijelo Polje and encamped there for more than two months in anticipation of the outcome. This concentration of forces prevented the insurgents from liberating Bijelo Polje in the summer of 1809, although they controlled all of Bihor and the Middle Lim valley.

After his first meetings with the Brda tribal leaders, Karadjordje sent troops to the Lim valley, Vasojevići and Morača, which greatly encouraged the uprising in the Lim, Morača and Tara valleys. The establishment of direct military cooperation between Karadjordje's insurgents and Brda tribes boosted the combative spirit in the whole area towards Montenegro. In early June 1809 Karadjordje's troops arrived in the Lim valley together with the 350 soldiers from Vasojevići and Brda who had joined him near Sjenica in late May. On their way, these forces liberated Pešter, Korita and Bihor. Some Muslim clans, such as the Muratbašić of the village of Godijevo, joined the insurgents, and the insurgent army spared their homes and property.<sup>74</sup> This apparently was not the only case of Bihor Muslims' crossing to the side of the insurgents, especially considering that the process of islamization was still on-going and that Islam in this area had not been deeply rooted. The Orthodox population of Bihor and Korita hailed the uprising en masse. After the Ottoman defeat at Suvodol, the insurgent units in this area were led by *oborknez* Jovan Sava, a native of the village of Crnča, whose earlier title was confirmed by Karadjordje on account of his joining the insurgents' side during the Battle of Suvodol. There are indications that Karadjordje personally led the insurgent army through Bihor and, in the village of Crnča, met members of his own clan, the Gurešić. Tradition has it that on that occasion Karadjordje gave his relatives a gift of arms and ammunition. What of all this is true is difficult to establish because there are no written sources. However, there are indications that Karadjordje's ancestors had moved from the Lim valley to Šumadija during the Austro-Ottoman war of 1737–39, where he was born as Djordje Petrović (later nicknamed

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<sup>74</sup> Dašić, *Ogledi*, 103.

Karadjordje or Black George), the family name Petrović being derived from his father's name Petar.<sup>75</sup>

It is quite certain that following the Ottoman defeat at Suvodol rebel forces penetrated into the Upper Lim valley via Korita and Bihar. This is confirmed by a succinct contemporary record that in the summer of 1809 "Vasojevići and Has turned renegade and Šijaci [Serbians] arrived in Vasojevići and people from Vasojevići and Has burned down and looted Bihar". Vasojevići welcomed Serbian rebel forces at Polica in a ceremonial manner and under arms. Karadjordje's *vojvodas* convened several popular assemblies in Vasojevići, explaining the objectives of the general uprising to people. The *vojvodas* bestowed insurgent banners on some of the most prominent Vasojević leaders and clans, which were then, as well as later, seen as symbols of the liberation struggle in this area. Karadjordje's seven banners were kept there until the mid-nineteenth century, when, according to the research done by Pavle Rovinski, ten banners were bestowed on Vasojevići and their area became the centre from which the movement for the liberation of Brda and Old Herzegovina spread. A part of the insurgent forces was transferred from the Lim valley to Lijevo Rijeka, Morača and Brda to strengthen the insurrectionary movement. The other part remained in Vasojevići until autumn 1809. In this phase, Russia was content with the movement and encouraged cooperation between Karadjordje's and Montenegrin insurgents, expecting that their joint effort against the Ottomans would prove successful. In June 1809, a Russian army officer, notified that Karadjordje's army had reached the Lim valley, wrote to Petar I advising him to take his army to Karadjordje's aid. Karadjordje's commanders were in contact with Petar I through Vasojevići and Moračani. The rebel army assigned with operations in the direction of the Lim valley and Brda was quite large by contemporary standards: about 9,000 men with artillery and sufficient amounts of ammunition; or as many as 20,000 men according to some sources. At that point, the bulk of the rebel army was on the move towards the Tara with the intention of taking Kolašin and proceeding to operations for the liberation of Brda and Herzegovina. The rebels' base camp was in Has, probably at the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi. This is also suggested by Vuk Karadžić's statement that Karadjordje also came to the Lim valley at the time.<sup>76</sup>

The military expedition against the insurrectionary movement in the Lim valley launched in May and June by the vizier of Scutari Tahir Pasha apparently failed to produce the desired result, because all indications are that the rebellion in the region was general and that it was given a boost by

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<sup>75</sup> Momir Jović, *Srpske zemlje i vladari* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1990), 156.

<sup>76</sup> Dašić, *Ogledi*, 109.

the arrival of Karadjordje's army units. However, Karadjordje had to stop his operations in the southwest direction and to rush to the eastern border where the insurgent army had suffered a defeat. The defeat of the rebel army near Niš proved much worse than it seemed at first, and therefore Karadjordje was not able to realize his plan to join forces with Petar I on the Tara to liberate fortified Kolašin. Namely, the rebel army leaders, having been defeated at the gates of Niš on 19 May 1809 and, to make things worse, quarrelling with each other, had begun to retreat before the Ottoman army. Karadjordje was thus compelled to abandon operations in the direction of Brda and to transfer the bulk of his army from the Lim valley to Deligrad. In his letter of September 1809 Karadjordje informed Petar I about these events and explained him why he had been forced to leave the liberated Lim valley. He expressed his gratitude to the Montenegrin, Vasojević and Brda rebels for managing to hold back the Ottoman, Scutari and Herzegovina army and thus prevent it from reaching Serbia when it was due.

The rebel army's defeats on the eastern front led to the weakening of the liberation struggle in the Lim valley and Brda and to Petar I's conciliatory attitude towards the Ottomans in Herzegovina. The withdrawal of the rebel army from the Lim valley encouraged the vizier of Scutari to launch a campaign against the liberation movement in the region. The aim of the campaign was to force the rebels into submission. Faced with such a threat, Vasojević tribal chiefs managed to win over some leaders of the Krasniqi and Hoti tribes who then persuaded other Albanian local leaders to give up the attack on the Lim valley. After Karadjordje's withdrawal, the liberation movement in Vasojevići had been losing the initial self-confidence and enthusiasm, and in September was already in the phase of subsidence. A considerable number of insurgent families from the Lim valley, Bihor, the Tara valley and other areas of the sanjak of Novi Pazar had withdrawn with Karadjordje. Some insurgents stayed in the area of Morača during the autumn of 1809, and together with Brdjani looted Turkish spoils. They only returned to Serbia in 1812, and by sea, via Austria.<sup>77</sup> In the autumn of 1809, fearing Turkish reprisals, many Orthodox Christians of Bihor moved to Karadjordje's Serbia under their leader, *oborknez* Jovan Sava Bihorac, which weakened the Orthodox element in the area. There also was a mass migration from Donji Kolašin and the Middle Lim valley to Stari Vlah. It appears that the brotherhood of the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi and their hegumen also fled to Serbia. During the winter of 1809/10 the uprising in Brda and the Lim valley quieted down. As we have already seen, in late 1809 the vizier of Scutari managed to re-establish his authority in the Lim valley. The pre-uprising chiftlik system was also re-established and the peas-

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 113.

ants had to pay their overdue taxes to the state and landowners. Petar I wrote to Karadjordje about the dire situation of the Orthodox population in Brda and Old Herzegovina and about his inability to help them because these areas were completely surrounded by enemies. However, the fear that the entire Orthodox population would move to Karadjordje's Serbia forced the Ottoman authorities to show some lenience. In 1810, when the fortunes of war tilted towards the rebels owing to a stronger Russian force deployed in Serbia, the insurrectionary spark in the Lim valley and Brda was rekindled. The local Orthodox population were convinced that the Serbian rebel army would once again reach their parts and made secret preparations to greet it. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that in 1810 hajduk and smaller rebel groups, mainly those composed of men that had fled to Serbia the year before, were very active in the Lim valley, but we have no information about any large-scale movement.

After the conclusion of the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812 and Napoleon's Russian campaign, Karadjordje's Serbia was left to cope with the Ottoman army by itself. Petar I's preparations for recapturing the Gulf of Kotor with his Montenegrins, which he would achieve in 1813, also contributed to the dwindling of insurrectionary ferment in Brda and the Lim valley. That is why a strong Ottoman force was able to be sent from Herzegovina and the sanjak of Scutari against Serbia in 1813. The First Serbian Uprising was militarily defeated in 1813.

The collapse of the First Serbian Uprising echoed gloomily in Brda and the Lim valley. In the following years the Ottomans consolidated their power and stepped up the exploitation of the Orthodox population, especially in the Lim and Tara valleys, which led to further islamization and Orthodox emigration. But popular resistance did not cease altogether even then. Many remained in the woods and formed hajduk bands. It was quite certain that some hajduk bands from these regions took part in Hadži-Prodan's Revolt in 1814. The restoration of the Ottoman feudal system and administrative organization meant the restoration of local *nahiye* and *knežina* self-government in this area. Those who opposed Ottoman authorities in any way were subjected to rigorous measures, which blunted resistance. For these reasons, neither Hadži-Prodan's Revolt in 1814 nor the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815, which was the continuation of the 1804 revolution, found a stronger echo in the Lim valley and Brda.<sup>78</sup> Correspondence between Prince Miloš Obrenović and Prince-Bishop Petar I

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<sup>78</sup> The Tara and Lim river valleys at the time were an area where interests of three pashaliks intersected: those of Herzegovina (the area of Mojkovac, Šahovići, Vraneš and Ravna Rijeka), Bosnia (Bihor) and Scutari (which included Bijelo Polje). Cf. Leković, *Drobnjak*, 105.

offers no evidence of concrete cooperation, it only reveals their views on contemporary political developments.

The temporary liberation of the Lim valley and part of Brda in 1809 with the support of Karadjordje's forces left a deep impression in the minds of the local population. The memory of Karadjordje's stay in this area lingered on for a long time, as evidenced by a number of toponyms, folk songs and the keeping of Karadjordje's flags as symbols of the joint struggle against the Turks. After the collapse of the First Serbian Uprising the population of the Lim valley and Brda would carry on the liberation struggle mainly with reliance on Montenegro.

The experience from cooperation with leaders of the Serbian Uprising was important for broader political strivings and prospects of the liberation struggle. After the defeat of the Ottoman campaign against Morača and Rovca in 1820/1, these tribes formally became part of effectively free Montenegro, which exerted a strong liberation influence on the Tara valley and the sanjak of Novi Pazar.<sup>79</sup> Rivalries among Ottoman notables and local feudal lords' breaking away from the central authority affected the Ottoman towns of Scutari and Kolašin as well. The year 1830 was a bad one for the Herzegovina tribes, especially the Drobnjaci and Uskoci, who suffered severely from Ottoman attacks. The period from 1831 to 1851 was marked by the Ottoman central government's military intervention against unruly local feudal lords. It was also the period of the reign of Petar II Petrović Njegoš, who sought to bind the Herzegovina and Brda tribes to Montenegro. He established political ties with Husein-kapetan (captain) Gradašćević through the hegumen of Djurdjevi Stupovi Mojsije (Zečević) for joint action against the sultan. After the death of Ismail Aga Čengić at Mljetičak, the following years, especially 1847/8, were also marked by conflicts between Christians and Ottomans in this region.<sup>80</sup> During the liberation wars of 1875–78 and 1912, these regions were finally liberated from the centuries-long Ottoman occupation.

### *Conclusion*

The centuries of Ottoman occupation left an indelible mark on these areas manifest in demographics, religious diversity, cultural heritage, customs, many words of Turkish origin, epic poetry. The long-standing liberation struggle was inspired by the memory of the powerful medieval Serbian

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<sup>79</sup> AS, Knjaževa kancelarija [Prince's Chancery], XXXII, 78, 79.

<sup>80</sup> "Typical of these areas was četovanje which differed from hajdučija in that četniks did not leave their homes, whereas the hajduks would be absent from home for several years." Cf. AIIP, printouts from Bogišić's library in Cavtat, folder 233.

state, the Battle of Kosovo, and over time Russia came to be idolized as protector. The Serbian Orthodox Church subsisted through those centuries, acting as a pillar of identity and traditional customs but also as the focus for popular rallying and inspirer of the hope of liberation. The tribal division created after the Ottoman invasion was a source of some peculiarities by comparison with other areas of the Balkan Peninsula. The Lim and Tara valleys, Old Herzegovina and Pešter were the source of constant migration of population to western, southern and central Serbia, Šumadija. On the whole, the period from 1455 to 1912 was marked by a permanent struggle for liberation, although some areas had been gradually liberated even before or were semi-free.

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