

THE STORY ABOUT GORANIES*

Let us begin the story of Gora and the Goranies by setting down some historical facts that, I hope, will be a good beginning in clearing up misconceptions and unknowns about the origin of the Goranies.

In order to start the story of the inhabitants of Gora, we must first take a look at the importance of this region in historic perception.

Due to their importance, Gora and the entire pasture-rich Šar Mountains (local name: Šar-Planina) have frequently changed rulers.

With the withdrawal of the Byzantine Empire Bulgars (A.D. 1204) occupied these areas and the whole Prizren basin only in order that shortly, in 1275, Prizren and the surrounding župas (roughly: districts) should fall under the rule of Stefan Prvovenčani (English: Stephen the First-Crowned) of the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty.

Under Nemanjić rule, Gora saw rapid development but, on the death of Tsar Dušan (English: Dushan), the territories were swooped down by many rulers of small principalities created with the disintegration of Dušan's Empire.

Jovan and Konstantin Dragaš (of the Dejanović clan) ruled the areas until the early Turkish conquests. Just before the Battle of Kosovo (1389), Vuk Branković regained jurisdiction over Prizren, Gora and other župas on the northern slopes of the Šar Mountains.

Fearing loss of power, Konstantin Dragaš became a Turkish vassal and killed his brother Jovan, ruler of the western slopes of the Šar Mountains, for refusing to accept Turkish suzerainty.

Konstantin Dragaš fought in the Battle of Kosovo with his army in an effort to consolidate his power and win Sultan Murad II's trust.

The Dejanovići (Dragašes) had tried earlier, too, to consolidate their power through marriage ties, giving their sister Jelena to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus.

Historical records show that, in the early 14th century, Gora was ruled by Governor Pavle, whose daughter Jefimija married Prince Andrei II Muzaka (1218-48), ruler of Albania.

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Obviously, the rulers of Gora had before this promoted useful family connections with the rulers of the neighbouring provinces in order to expand their power and influence outside the borders of the Gora of the day.

Gora and the Goranies were important also to mediaeval Serbia. This is evident from the fact that Bishop Basil II (Slayer of the Bulgars) set up in Gora's town of Brod one of his sees, which held sway over the entire Prizren region.

However, the coming of the Turks to Prizren in 1455 significantly changed the situation in Gora.

Trade routes that had linked the Adriatic Sea to the Aegean and Black seas swiftly lost in importance because of a general insecurity of trade caravans. Towns and localities along the routes suddenly stopped growing.

Gora became a nahiyah (Turkish: tract) in the sanjak (Turkish: district) of Prizren, and yet the Goranies successfully resisted Islamisation.

Gora and the Goranies underwent major historical changes following Austria-Hungary's abortive thrust south (1699).

Austro-Hungarian General Piccolomini marched into Prizren and the surrounding nahiyahs in October 1689.

Of course, Goranies, as Slavs, gave him help and cooperation, hoping to be finally rid of the Turks. However, the Austro-Hungarian army stopped its advance on the Šar Mountains, whose western slopes were menaced by Louis XIV.

Piccolomini, who had come to Prizren infected with the plague, known in the Gorany language as the chuma, soon died, and the surrounding areas were recaptured by Turkish troops.

Learning about the people's cooperation with the Austro-Hungarian army, the Turks launched a punitive campaign, doing untold atrocities against Goranies. Entire villages were put to the sword and the torch, and were wiped off the face of the earth. The first great migration of the Serbs, led by Patriarch Arsenije III Černojević, began.

However, the migration did not affect Gora to any great extent, which had a compact Slavic population, as different from other areas, where the process of Islamisation and settling of non-Slavs had already begun.

In the late 18th century, Gora was swept by two parallel changes, which would in the subsequent period greatly reduce the size of the population and even lead to the obliteration of entire villages.

The first of these was Islamisation, and the other, the plague. The settling of Albanians began in the Prizren area in 1815.

In 1886, Gora and the Goranies were the subject of research by Russian consul Ivan Stepanovich Yastrebov. Yastrebov wrote that some people in Gora had told him that Granny Božana, the last Christian woman, had died "a score of years" before.

It is interesting, according to Yastrebov, that the same was told to his colleague Anastasy, who had been to Gora thirty years before Yastrebov. This

means that the people of Gora, Goranies, want to believe in the cult of Granny Božana, who in this case symbolises Christianity, and to keep alive their memory of it.

Despite their Islamisation, Goranies alone have retained to this day the autochthonous Serbian language, culture, traditions and customs.

"I have never learned the new religion, and I have never forgotten the old," Captain Sul, a Gorany haiduk (patriotic outlaw), said on his deathbed in 1909.

In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Goranies were exempted by royal decree from paying taxes because of their position and importance.

After World War II, in 1949, ethnic Albanian officials in the Yugoslav government, headed by Fadil Hoxha, launched a drive for a forced assimilation of the Goranies.

However, all they succeeded in doing, and that under duress was Albanising Gorany names.

It is wrong to say that the Gorany language is similar to Macedonian. No! Goranies simply speak the Old Serbian štokavski dialect, which Macedonians also use.

Since it suited the purpose of the ethnic Albanian officials in the post-war era that there should be as few Serbs as possible in the province of Kosovo and Metohija, their censuses made no mention of Goranies at all.

It is absurd and wrong of some politicians to define Goranies as an ethnic minority. Goranies simply cannot be an ethnic minority, because they have no state other than Serbia.

Today, there are close to 64,000 Goranies living in Gora, Kosovo and Metohija, and scattered in towns throughout Serbia.

Goranies today are organised in the Gorany Homeland Society, which operates at state level as an organisation whose membership and leadership comprise people of different political persuasions, while the society itself is a non-party organisation.