BALKAN UNITY/DISUNITY:

MANZIKERT TO LEPANTO AND THE MEDITERRANEAN TRADE

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Abstract:

This paper deals with so far unnoticed side of Balkan peoples' participation in the recovery effort after the Battle of Manzikert (1071) and 500 years later after the Battle of Lepanto (1571). As members of the cosmopolitan Byzantine and Ottoman societies and especially as such in the "professional" ecumenical communities that resulted from the establishment of Mediterranean commercial networks, the population of the Balkan Peninsula contributed to and participated in bringing to an end of the political, economic and financial crises that threatened to shatter those empires. Both states were not only able to fend off crisis by supporting the status quo in the region as a part of the Mediterranean trade system but their policies and population, including the people of the Balkans, contributed to the preservation of the Mediterranean commercial integrity in the wake of a disaster.

Keywords: ecumenical communities, Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, Battle of Manzikert, Battle of Lepanto.

The Balkan Peninsula is known as an area of endemic conflict; consequently, unity there has been rare. Since the early middle ages, when new peoples settled in the region it has become a patchwork of various ethnic communities. Due to population diversity – indigenous peoples, newcomers and later additions - the polities those people constructed lacked stability and were plagued by

fluctuating borders[1]. Therefore, political unity could be achieved only by a military strong and politically stable power, such as the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires[2].

Byzantium has controlled the Balkans before the arrival of the new peoples and remained always there at least with its capital Constantinople. By the end of the first millennium the Empire began recovering its Balkan territories lost to the Slavs and other peoples. After a series of defeats, by the early eleventh centuries Byzantine rule over the peninsula was restored[3]. But with the weakening of the Empire by mid-eleventh century that control became problematic, especially because various Turkic tribes descended on western Eurasia[4].

In late eleventh century, Seljuq Turks' invasion in the Asian part of the Byzantine Empire resulted in the Battle of Manzikert, 26 August 1071; Byzantium was defeated and soon lost most of Anatolia. Withdrawing to its European provinces the Empire strengthened the control and exploitation of the Balkan lands. When the capable members of the Komnenoi dynasty ascended the throne, Balkan unity was maintained for another century. Yet the crisis in the late twelfth century brought a restoration of the ethnic states that have existed in the area during second half of the first millennium[5].

The independent existence of those states ended with another takeover, this time by the Ottoman Empire, which between the late fourteenth and fifteenth century reestablished unity over most of the Balkan territories turning the occupied states into Ottoman provinces. During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) when Ottoman expansion challenged the Mediterranean world a Christian alliance responded with an attack on the growing Turkish maritime power. The

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[1] Out of the abundant bibliography on medieval and Ottoman Balkans here are quoted only the most recent or most general works such as the book of M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans.* Oxford University Press, 1997.
[2] "*The idea of European Community in History*" has been discussed more than ten years ago at a Conference held in Athens, the proceedings of which are published in two volumes. Among the contributions most relevant to our time period and region are those of E. Chrysos, J. Koder, L, Maksimovic, P. Schreiner and I.K. Hassiotis.
[3] J. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkan,* Ann Arbor, 1983, The University of Michigan Press; В. Тъпкова-Заимов, *Долни Дунав – гранична зона на византийския запад*, София, 1976; P. Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier.* Cambridge, 2000, Cambridge University Press; *Idem,* Balkan Borderlands (1018-1204*),* In: J. Shepard, *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500-1492,* Cambridge, 2008, Cambridge University Press, p. 664-691.
[4] D. Korobeinikov, Raiders and Neighbors: The Turks (1040-1304), In: J. Shepard, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire,* p. 692-727.
[5] J. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans.* Ann Arbor, 1987, The University of Michigan Press, p. 1-59; M. Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou, *Oi Balkanikoi laoi kata tous mesous xponous,* Thessaloniki, 1992; M. Angold, Belle Epoque or Crisis? (1025-1118), In: J. Shepard, *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire,* p. 583-626; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of the Komnenoi (1118-1204), Ibid.,* p. 627-663.

Battle of Lepanto, 7 October 1571, was an Ottoman defeat in which the Empire lost its navy, but all imperial territories, including its Balkan lands, were preserved[6].

Thus the 500 years period between the two turning-point-battles in the eastern Mediterranean world, the Battle of Manzikert and the Battle of Lepanto provoked crises: military, political and financial, but the imperial unity of the Balkans in their wake was not shattered; both powers redirected their expansionistic efforts towards internal consolidation, necessary for the imperial survival. And their Balkan provinces preserved a traditional role of bread-basket for the capital city of those empires, - Byzantine Constantinople succeeded by the Ottoman Istanbul – feeding the courts, bureaucracies, armies and supplying both domestic and international trade.

Economically, during the period 1071-1571, the Balkan lands underwent a major economic transformation. The Byzantine political unity had brought new agricultural techniques and requirements to the area as well as active involvement in the long-established Byzantine networks of exchange. The outcome was a faster development of the regional towns and cities together with an introduction of monetary economy through the collection of taxes in cash[7].

The accelerated economic growth of the Balkans under Byzantine suzerainty, especially in the twelfth century, was followed by the adoption of new economic relations based on the peace and security of living in an empire. This boosted regional prosperity, urbanization and exports; originally foodstuffs were dispatched to Constantinople, later to most of the Mediterranean and Western Europe. And the new middlemen of the Italian maritime republics included the Balkans into the Mediterranean trade system they helped create[8].

Competing with Byzantine, Arabian, Syrian, Armenian and Jewish merchants, Italian sailors and traders benefitted from the established long-distance trade sea routes while gradually setting such of their own to connect to Mediterranean outlets of their preference. Balkan lands and communities were included in the Mediterranean commercial networks of Christian and Jewish traders since

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[6] H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600.* Aristides D. Caratzas Publisher, New Rochelle, New York, 1973, p. 3-40; H. Inalcik and D. Quataert, (ed.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914.* Cambridge, 1994, Cambridge University Press, p. 179-575.

[7] A. Laiou and C. Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy,* Cambridge, 2007, Cambridge University Press, p. 90-165.

[8] The most recent collection of papers on the Mediterranean trade is J. Stuckey (ed.), *The Eastern Mediterranean Frontier of Latin Christendom*, Volume 6, The Expansion of Latin Europe, 1000-1500, Ashgate, Variorum 2014.

before the eleventh century, replaced by Italian monopoly using the assistance of local middlemen, to which later were added the Ottoman merchants as well[9].

Once Byzantine economic practices were adopted by the Balkan coastal population under Byzantium, they remained in place during the period of political fragmentation: even when Serbs, Bulgarians, et al., achieved political independence economic unity (or at least similarities) in the region with unsubstantial modifications was preserved until the fall of the native states to the Ottomans. Despite resistance the imperial control underwent adaptation thus preserving in many ways the economic *status quo* that assured stability in the region[10].

In accordance with the contemporary practices Italian merchants founded colonies where they were regular visitors. Foreign merchants' settlements at places of commercial interest in the Balkans were often temporary, but novel practices were introduced there involving local people, thus enriching their experience, knowledge and wealth. More importantly, colonial agents relied on locals to facilitate contacts with producers and to deliver cargo from the hinterland or from anchorages to port facilities. Also, Mediterranean agents often resorted to native interpreters who assisted their negotiations and transactions[11].

When exchanges lasted long time - sometimes for centuries - in localities of particular interest, regular cosmopolitan communities were formed by people with common interests in the regional commerce; these unformal communities helped overcome linguistic, cultural, even professional differences in the experience and preparation between locals and foreigners. Contacts were often formalized by agreements with the foreign entrepreneurs which regulated both political relations and commercial practices[12].

Few Balkan natives were independently involved in the Mediterranean long-distance trade. Besides Byzantine Greeks, only the traders of Dubrovnik (Ragusa) are known to have developed

[9] D. Valerian, The Medieval Mediterranean, In: P. Horden and S. Kinoshita (ed.), *A Companion to Mediterranean History,* Wiley Blackwell, 2014, p. 77-90; M. Greene, The Early Modern Mediterranean, *Ibid., p. 91-106.*

[10] D. Jacoby. Les Latins dans les villes de Romanie jusqu'en 1261: le versant mediterraneen des Balkans, In: M. Balard, E. Malamut, J.-M. Spieser (ed.), *Byzance et le monde exterieur: contracts, relations, echanges Byzantina Sorbonensia 21,* Paris, 2005, Publication de la Sorbonne, p. 13-26 ; Also, most of D. Jacoby's collections of studies on medieval Mediterranean trade and society, published so far in five volumes are very informative about connections, networks, trading commodities and communities.

[11] A. Laiou, Regional Networks in the Balkans in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period, In: C. Morrisson (ed.), *Trade and Market in Byzantium,* Washington D.C., *2012,* Dumbarton *Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia*, p. 125-146.

[12] V. Gjuzelev, *Три етюда върху българския XIV век (Three Studies on the Bulgarian Fourteenth Century),* Sofia, Paradigma Publ., 2009.

a merchant marine that was engaged in the Adriatic from an early date. In 1205 Dubrovnik was made Venetian tributary and naval base – a situation that lasted until 1358, when under Hungarian supervision Dubrovnik established a republic: for several centuries this small republic was the link between east and west in diplomatic and commercial relations.

Dubrovnik traders, active both in maritime and overland trade, operated in Balkan towns and cities since the twelfth century. Records of transactions are confirmed by the treaties of Ragusa with regional states. Thus agreements with Serbia were signed in 1186, 1215, 1222, 1228 etc., with Bosnia in 1189 and 1234, with Bulgaria in 1230 and Epirus in 1206, 1230, 1234 etc. The merchants of Dubrovnik opened markets in the heart of the Balkans exporting agricultural surpluses and metals while suppling regional markets with commodities, including bullion for minting coins, and maintaining connections with the local elite and professional traders[13].

In 1458 the Adriatic republic became a tributary state of the Ottoman Empire and its citizens remained free, while the majority of the Balkan people were subjects to the sultan. The merchants of Dubrovnik were regular in the Balkan markets building up networks for overland trade while using their merchant marine for maritime operations. Dubrovnik traders became a major force in the region serving the Ottoman Empire as intermediaries in the Mediterranean exchange, especially at time of war, when neutral Dubrovnik was supplying both side of the conflict, thus increasing its wealth and prestige[14].

Socially, recent scholarship of Mediterranean interconnectedness has traced commercial networks paying more attention to the human factor. The invisible links between localities, necessary for trade became important element for the cohesion of state and society. Analyzing the commercial contacts of the Ottoman Empire in searching for the reasons of the end-sixteenth century "Crisis" Suraiya Faroqhi proved that it has been overcome because of the existence and function of various "ecumenical communities" created by commercial (and not only commercial but fashioned in the same manner) networks crossing political borders[15].

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[13] B. Krekic, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) et le Levant au Moyen Age,* La Hague, 1961 ; Idem, *Dubrovnik in the 14th and 15th centuries: a city between East and West,* Norman Publ., 1972; F.W. Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa): a classic city-state, London and New York, 1972.*

[14] H. Inalcik, Dubrovnik and the Balkans*,* In: H. Inalcik and D. Quataert (ed.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,* p. 256-270.

[15] S. Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World around It,* London, I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2004, p. 1-219.

Furthering Braudel's concepts of "world economy", "world empire" and "one (common) world" due to the unity and coherence of the Mediterranean during the sixteenth century[16] Faroqhi considered the common material environments, similar technologies and people living largely in agricultural societies as participants in the "proto-world system" or the "one world" of complex multiregional markets constructed by "ecumenical economic communities". To the well-known Mediterranean trade system Faroqhi added the existence of contacts among other professionals, such as religious and political agents, travelers, pilgrims and the military with which boundaries were transcended that provided opportunity for cooperation[17].

The concept of "ecumenical communities" was embraces by social and economic historians of the early modern period and became a paradigm in setting frameworks for mediation between different ethnic, religious, cultural and political communities in preventing a collapse - even a setback - of the established order after a military defeat followed by economic and financial crises. Faroqhi has studied this for the Ottoman Empire after the Battle of Lepanto but it is plausible for the aftermath of the Battle of Manzikert as well[18].

Reasons to consider an existence of "ecumenical communities" 500 years before Lepanto in Constantinople and elsewhere in the Byzantine Empire including the Balkans are the comparable political, economic and social conditions. Despite problems, by that time southeastern Europe was gradually included in the Mediterranean trade system; in addition to merchants and diplomats there were mercenaries, such as Russel Balliol, or intellectuals such as John Italos, not to mention the passage of the Crusaders on the way to the Holy Land. Without downplaying Komnenoi achievement, the involvement of heterogeneous people in the international economic relations contributed to the survival of the Byzantine Empire[19].

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[16] F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* New York 1975, Vol. II, Chapter VI – Civilizations, p. 757-835 et passim.

[17] V. Costantini and M. Koller (ed.), *Living in the Ottoman Ecumenical Community. Essays in Honor of Suraiya Faroqhi,* Leiden, Brill Publ., 2008.

[18] A. Laiou.The Foreign and the Stranger in the 12th Century Byzantium: Means of Propriation and Acculturation, *In: Studien zur Europaischen Rechtsgeschichte,* 1991, N 50, p.71-87; Eadem and D. Simon (ed.), *Law and Society in Byzantium, 9th-12th Centuries,* Washington D.C., *1994;* S. Neocleous, Greeks and Italians in the Twelfth Century Constantinople: *Convovenci*a or Conflict? , In: B. Crostini and S. La Porta (ed.), *Negotiating Co-Existence: Communities, Culture and Convivencia in Byzantine Society,* Trier, 2013, WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, p. 221-250.

[19] P. Frankopan, Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period, In: J. Haldon (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium*, Wiley Blackwell, 2009, p. 112-142; J.-C. Cheynet, Implantation des Latins en Asie Mineure avant la Premiere Croisade, *See note 21.*

Politically, as a part of the Byzantine Empire the Balkans did not experience a shock in the wake of the imperial defeat in 1071; only the weakening of the Byzantine Empire in the late twelfth century and especially after the Fourth Crusade led to the political fragmentation of the region. In the process of political consolidation the newly instituted states fought one another, invading and occupying others' lands and forging empires of their own. Such was the character of the Bulgarian expansion during the reign of the Tsars Kaloyan (1198-1208) and John II Asen (1218-41), or that of Serbia under Stephan Dusan (1331-55)[20].

In the late medieval period no Balkan state was an ethnic community or a political organization of only one people: most probably only the political elites belonged to the dominant ethnos, culture and language. As a matter of fact, even the Bulgarian state at the time of its formation in 681 was ruled by a proto-Bulgarian elite while the majority of the population was of Slavic descent, including Byzantines and other residents. As the Byzantine practice of resettling people was regularly used since the seventh century, the result was a mosaic of ethnicities and minorities to which intermarriages contributed resulting into a complex ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities of states' populations – a fertile ground for the creation of cosmopolitan ecumenical communities[21].

Culturally, the medieval Balkans were a patchwork of old and new, of autochthonous and imported by visitors, settlers and temporary occupiers; its forms and features, selected and elaborated by individuals with unordinary skills and mental capacity, supported by rulers and magnates, produced masterpieces of literary and artistic work which later became models for generations to come, emulated and refined. Not all works were similar across the territory, even in each individual state or empire; yet there was a unity in style and subject matter consistent with the priorities of the time.

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[20] J. Fine. *The Late Medieval Balkans,* p. 80-90; 124-133; 286-337, and more recently L. Maksimovic, La Serbie et les countree voisines avant et apres la IVe coisade, In: A. Laiou (ed.), *Urbs capta, The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences. La IVe Croisade at ses consequences, Paris, 2005, Lethielleux, p. 269-282.*
[21] P. Charanis, The Transfer of Population as a Policy in the Byzantine Empire, *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 1961, vol. 3, N 2, p. 140-154 (P. Charanis, *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire. Collected Studies,* London, 1972, Variorum Reprint, III; see also there II – *Ethnic Changes in the Byzantine Empire in the Seventh Century,* DOP, 1959, N 13, p. 25-44). More modern detailed studies of migration are published by V. Tapkova-Zaimova. Migrations frontalieres en Bulgarie medieval, In: M. Balard and A. Ducellier (ed.), *Migrations et diasporas mediterraneenes (Xe-XIVe siecles)*, Paris, 2002, p. 125-132 ; and J.-C. Cheynet, Implantation des Latins en Asie Mineure avant la Premiere Croisade, *Ibid.,* p. 115-124.

Hagiographic works and religious sermons or legal codes were quite common genres in the Balkans: developed in Byzantium these kinds were emulated in Bulgaria, Serbia, and elsewhere. Literary works were produced regularly when (and where) there was a strong political power and rich elite but this was not a rule - even when the Balkan territories were under Byzantine control in the eleventh-twelfth centuries Bulgarian translations and original works in Old Church Slavonic continued to be written and copied there; in addition, many Bulgarian manuscripts were exported to other Slavic countries, including Russia.

Similar was the situation with the fine arts: buildings, architectural decorations, manuscript illumination or music were initially imitations of Byzantine originals, but by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Balkan artists added their own vision and talents to the existing models with which they surpassed established patterns and produced masterpieces, including realistic images of humans and nature in wall-paintings and icons long before the Italian Renaissance[22].

Christianity and the Christian Churches, Catholic in the west and overwhelmingly Orthodox in most of the Balkans, shared the loyalty of their membership and preserved independence from each other and from engagement in government politics. Church officials sustained equity and morality, taught literacy, religion and ethics; sponsored artistic and spiritual expressions, or the fighting against Bogomils (Cathars), Hesychasts and other heretics.

Both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches organized pilgrimages and were in constant contact with the Orthodox monastic republic of Mount Athos; they were negotiating with the Catholic crusading armies passing through the region on their way to the Holy Land or with foreign high rank church officials travelling across the land together with carrying correspondence between religious potentates and local leaders and officials. Furthermore, local and visiting the area clergy provided a link between various ecumenical religious communities[23].

In a way of conclusion: medieval polities, such as Byzantium and its neighbors, just as the early modern Ottoman Empire were systems of different ecumenical communities rather than only political communities. Often the former were cross-border communities engaged in frequent

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[22] J. Milojkovic-Djuric. *Balkan Cultural Legacies,* Boulder, Co, 2010, East Europe Monographs, N 771.
[23] J. Shepard, Slav Christianities, 800-1100, In: *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 3, Early Medieval Christianity c. 600-c.1100,* Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 130-155; Vol. 5, M. Angold (ed.), *Eastern Christianity,* Cambridge, 2006, p. 3-209.

contacts and supporting interaction between communities of various kinds, especially ethnic, and supporting the concept of "one world" with numerous links between its different parts[24].

Just as commercial networks of merchants and traders were easily crossing political borders when acting in and around the Mediterranean, in interregional trade or trade among heterogeneous agents using networks of their own, these communities engaged the Balkan populations with peoples living in different places along the Mediterranean shores; in the same way various social, religious and cultural networks existed and acted independently beyond states' boundaries, preserving and transmitting the knowledge and experience of their members to individuals residing in various countries[25].

Through their overlapping and interactions these invisible "supra-national" communities were often more resilient, flexible and powerful than a centralized state and kept together everything that mattered for their survival and evolution. Yet disasters such as the Battle of Manzikert or the Battle of Lepanto, introduced new ways of interaction based on individual responses in overcoming crises, no matter how united or divided they were politically.

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[24] M. Koller, Introduction, In: *Living in the Ottoman Ecumenical Community,* p. 1-14.

[25] D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean,* Oxford, 2011, Oxford University Press, Part Three: The Third Mediterranean, 600-1350, p. 241-369 and Part Four, The Fourth Mediterranean, 1350-1830, p. 373-541.