CHAPTER 5

Variation Within: Regional Differences in Household Structures in Mid-Nineteenth Century Rural Serbia

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1 Introduction

Studies of household structures in the eastern half of Europe still represent only a small proportion of the body of research on household structures in Europe. The reasons for this situation are manifold, including a lack of sources, less interest from Western scholars, and less orientation to international research among scholars from the region. Generally, impressions of the region have been based on ethnographic studies or scattered quantitative studies of a few villages or cities. The absence of databases covering the whole country, with the notable exception of Albania, makes it very difficult to paint a picture of the whole of Southeastern Europe based on quantitative results. Published statistical data in a highly aggregated form did not seem to provide researchers with enough evidence for calculating rates for different kinds of households. But recent results on the spatial variation in household structures in 19th-century Germany have shown that aggregate data can in fact be used for this type of research. Another aspect is spatial variation, which has not yet been intensely investigated. Because the only in-depth studies have concentrated on small areas, the general view of the region is based on these scattered studies, ethnographic evidence, and mere assumptions. In the following, we will use Serbian data to conduct a more detailed analysis based on the census of 1866.

Our goal in this chapter is to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Can we distinguish between different regions of household structures in rural Serbia in 1866?

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• Which factors were responsible for regional differences in household structures in rural Serbia in 1866?

2 Household Structures in Rural Serbia

2.1 Definitions of the Joint Family Household in Serbia

The work of Karadžić remains important for research on household and family in Southeastern Europe, largely because he coined the term ‘zadruga’ for the Serbian type of a joint family household in his dictionary of the Serbian language. This term was increasingly used because no term existed before to distinguish this kind of household from nuclear families. Following his work, the interest of researchers was often directed towards very large and complex households, because Karadžić had, for example, found evidence for a household with 62 members, 13 couples, 1,400 sheep and goats. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, many ethnographers asserted that the number of joint family households was declining. They published studies about single large joint family households, and therefore helped to create and perpetuate a certain image of this kind of household. Such publications were also common later in the 20th century. Large and complex households were often used as examples, even at the end of the 20th century: a household with 13 men, 12 women, and four servants served as an illustration of the Serbian census of 1863: “This extended family, heavy in lands, properties and financial assets, employing several living-in servants, is of the type around which the notion of the powerful, influential zadruga was based.”

The term had different connotations, and was often seen as a national custom or an essential characteristic of Slavic culture. The zadruga as national custom was postulated for Serbs (by Serbian scholars) or Croats (by Croatian scholars) and connected with many positive attributes of the own rural

2 Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, Lexicon serbico-germanico-latinum (Vienna, 1818) (p. 191).
3 See e.g. Milan Karanović, “Nekolike velike porodične zadruge u Bosni i Hercegovini” [Some Large Joint Families in Bosnia and Herzegovina], Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja, 42 (Sarajevo, 1930), 133–56; Mirko R. Barjaktarović, “Die Sippenhausgemeinschaft Osmanaj im Dorfe Djurakovac”, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 85: 2 (1960), 214–27.