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The Socio-Economic Structure of the Urban Population in Northern Croatia During the Early Industrial Period (Before World War I)*

Introduction

After the Middle Ages, the historical role of North Croatian cities as a factor in the economic life of the region stretching from the Danube basin to the Adriatic coast took on new characteristics as a result of the fundamental change caused by the incursions of the Turks in this region.

The growth of Turkish conquests in the Balkan peninsula and in the Danube basin brought about a sudden interruption of the positive development of Croatian cities. Previously flourishing towns on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, as well as the free royal cities of the Croatian hinterland were no longer able to act as economic and cultural mediators between the Pannonian region and the Mediterranean world as a result of territorial loss and internal dissociation. Several of these towns were subjected to domination by the Turkish conquerors, while others went into decline as a result of an overall weakening of economic activity—while many even had to exchange their former socio-economic role for a new, defensive one along a constantly disturbed border with their eastern adversary.

During the era of the wars with Turkey, the traditional routes for carrying on the exchange of goods between the Danube basin and the Adriatic region, an area in which the North Croatian region played an especially significant role, were either interrupted or changed. This affected even those towns such as Zagreb and Varaždin, for example, which were not directly involved in the defense of the frontier.

The pressure of Ottoman expansion was felt in Northern Croatia particularly in the sixteenth century. The growth of the Ottoman Empire in the direction of Habsburg possessions and Central Europe reached its zenith during the “long” or Fifteen-Years War. The war, which began with battles near the fortress of Sisak, was concluded in 1606 by a treaty signed at the mouth of the river Žitva. This treaty established a status quo for the first time between the two opposing sides. The weakening of Turkish incursions during the seventeenth century did not, however, greatly change the general situation, and it was only after the successful outcome of the so-called “Great War of Liber-

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ation" in 1699 that the military and defensive function of the towns of Northern Croatia was finally replaced by a trade economy.

The treaty of Srijemski Karlovci in 1699, followed by the treaty of Požarevac in 1718, significantly increased the territory of Croatia (Banska Hrvatska): Slavonia and Srijem in the east, and Lika in the southwest were added to the Habsburg dominions, and the entire Hungarian plain was freed from Turkish domination. Intermittent clashes with the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth century no longer upset the economic development of the region for any long period. Since it was located along the routes leading from the fertile plains of Hungary and the Vojvodina to the ports on the northern Adriatic, Croatia was in a position favorable for the development of transit trade. As might be expected when considering the state of transport technology at the time, as well as the current development of various means, trade routes usually followed the navigable courses of the rivers flowing into the Danube, and then to the Adriatic coast. In this way, North Croatian towns along the Danube, Drava, Sava and Kupa, as well as ports on the Adriatic coast, revived. In these trade centers, a trading bourgeoisie, largely of local origin, began to accumulate capital. Centers of particular importance included Osijek and Varazdin on the Drava River, then Zemun, Mitrovica, Brod, Sisak and Zagreb on the Sava, Karlovac on the Kupa, and the ports of Rijeka and Senj on the Adriatic.

When examining the development of urban centers, it should be noted that during the period of wars with the Turks, some of the Croatian magnates and nobility settled in the cities of Zagreb and Varazdin, where they built many palaces for their residence there. This became even more marked during the eighteenth century. It must be emphasized that even after the end of the wars with the Turks, the internal governmental and political organization of Northern Croatia remained very disunited. Only a group of districts (zupanija) in Croatia proper were under the rule of a civil governor (ban) and a council (sabor), representing the feudal classes which maintained the political and legal continuity of medieval Croatia. These areas were increased in 1745 by the re-incorporation of Slavonia, which included three locally reconstituted counties (zupanija). A broad strip of territory bordering the Ottoman Empire remained separate as a military frontier, under the direct control of central Habsburg authority; indeed, a region between the rivers Drava and Sava, which by the eighteenth century was located far from the actual border, remained under this special jurisdiction. In addition, throughout this entire period, the important port city of Rijeka was also separated from the immediately surrounding Croatian hinterland; until 1776 it was under Austrian jurisdiction, and after that its status became that of a corpus separatum under the jurisdiction of the central Hungarian government.