

The Impact of Migrations on the Transformation of Serbian Religious Art in the 18th Century

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Abstract: *The failure of Austrian troops in battles against the Turks in the Balkans in the Great Turkish War caused the expulsion of the large number of Orthodox Christian Serbs from Ottoman empire. In 1690 they migrated to Hungary under the leadership of the Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević, where they mainly inhabited the southern parts of the state, around the Danube and Sava rivers, creating a new parish and diocesan network called Metropolitanate of Karlovci. An important aspect of the revival of the church life was related to religious art, which patterns were transferred from the Ottoman state. However, the old pattern of visual iconography did not correspond to the changed political and cultural circumstances. Therefore, in the first decades of the 18th century, church officials began to reform the traditional religious forms of post-Byzantine art and to adapt it to the current religious needs. Under the patronage of the next Patriarch Arsenije IV Jonanović, it became mandatory for the church officials to follow the new models in icon and wall painting. This paper is analyzing the relations of impact of migrations of people on the changes in attitude toward traditional forms of piety and religious art.*

Keywords: Migrations, Religious art, transformation, piety, the Balkans, Orthodox Church, Serbian people, Habsburg Monarchy, Ottoman Empire.

During the 17th and the 18th centuries South-Eastern Europe saw a considerable number of big political and military conflicts which led to large population migrations. One such migration happened at the end of the 17th century in the Danube basin, turning thus this river into a natural border across which different cultures met and mixed, but also came into conflict with each other. In that way the Danube played the role as a contact point in the inter-church relations of the Orthodox people of the Balkans, and the way in which this became obvious in the change of the cultural and artistic models.¹ The main arguments of this paper are that: 1) the migrations and the demographic changes had direct impact on the culture and arts, something we can in the first place see in the religious art; 2) although the Danube represented the border

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¹ O. Katsiardi-Hering, "Southeastern European Migrant Groups between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires. Multilateral Social and Cultural Transfers from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," in H. Heppner and E. Posch (eds.), *Encounters in Europe's Southeast. The Habsburg Empire and the Orthodox World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Bochum, 2012, p. 140–141; W. Telesko, "Der Donauraum als „Kulturraum“ in der Frühen Neuzeit," in H. Heppner and E. Posch (eds.), *Barocke Kunst und Kultur im Donauraum*, Bd. 1, Petersberg 2014, p. 78–87.

which separated different states, it served at the same time as a communication bridge for the cultural and artistic transfers.²

The Great Turkish War (1683-1699) between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire which ended with the Peace of Karlovci (1699) dramatically altered political and demographic circumstances, which inevitably impacted the development of culture. Austrian military losses in the Balkans led to the migration of a large number of Serbs, who left their homeland and moved to the Habsburg territories during 1690.³ Led by patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević, they settled mostly in the southern Hungary, along the Sava and the Danube, and created there a new Orthodox Metropolitanate of Karlovci. Emperor Leopold I granted political and religious privileges to the newly settled people who were thus able to establish a certain type of autonomy under the guidance of the patriarch, i.e. the metropolitans of Karlovci, who were held in high esteem and had considerable power. The privileges provided protection from the proselytism of the Catholic Church and made it possible for the Serbs, and some Greeks, Aromanians and Romanians to organise their religious and cultural life, build and repair churches, and maintain their old traditions and religious customs.⁴

However, despite the privileges, the Serbs were faced with the pressure from the hostile Catholics, mostly members of the court administration and the Hungarian nobility. Already in the first decades of the 18th century they turned to Russia, seeing in the Emperor Peter the Great and his heirs the powerful rulers-protectors of the Orthodox faith. For their own political reasons the Russian rulers replied to the petitions of the Habsburg Serbs, and soon started to send help in the form of teachers, money, books and icons.⁵ However, these ties did not suit the other political players, Viennese Court, the Catholic church,

² N. Makuljević, "Migrations and the Creation of Orthodox Cultural and Artistic Networks between the Balkans and the Habsburg Lands (17th–19th Centuries)," in Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Maria A. Stassinopoulou (eds.), *Across the Danube. Southeastern Europeans and their Travelling Identities (17th-19th C.)*, Leiden, Boston 2017, p. 54–55; J. Todorović, "Dunav – prostor oblikovan idejama (Koncepti i percepcija prirode u putopisima i topografiji XVIII i XIX veka)," in *Dunavom od Bezdana do Beograda*, ur. Đorđe S. Kostić, Beograd 2012, p. 57–67.

³ R. L. Veselinović, "Srbi u Velikom ratu 1683–1699," in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, III (1993), no. 1, 561–564; V. Simić, "Gnädiger Kaiser" und "treuer Untertan": dynastic patriotism and Orthodox subjects in the eighteenth-century Habsburg monarchy," in H. Heppner and E. Posch (eds.), *Encounters in Europe's Southeast. The Habsburg Empire and the Orthodox World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Bochum, 2012, p. 26–27.

⁴ I. Točanac-Radović, "Nastanak i razvoj institucije Srpskog narodno-crkvenog sabora u Karlovačkoj mitropoliji u 18. veku," in Dejan Mikavica i Drago Njegovan (eds.), *Tri veka Karlovačke mitropolije 1713–2013*, Sremski Karlovci, Novi Sad, 2014, p.127–138; V. Simić, *Za ljubav otadžbine: patriote i patriotizmi u srpskoj kulturi XVIII veka u Habsburškoj monarhiji*, Novi Sad. 2012, p. 423–447.

⁵ V. Simić, *Romanovi i Srbi: recepcija slike ruskih vladara u umetnosti XVIII veka*, Novi Sad, 2018, p. 13–28.

even the Ottomans who were worried that the ties with Russian Court could lead to political problems with their own Orthodox subjects. Even the Ecumenical patriarchate in Constantinople did not approve of these ties between the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and the Russian court, as it saw it as a sign of their own diminishing influence. On the other hand, the Orthodox population of the Habsburg lands was by no means unified, as it consisted of the members of various ethnicities, who were all guided by different interests.⁶

This became fully apparent during the 1740s, at the time of the first significant migrations (from the Habsburg lands) towards Russia. Embittered by the constant pressure of the Catholic clergy, as well as by the reluctance of the Emperor to take them into protection, the Serbs started to leave the Habsburg lands, first gradually and then in growing numbers. Russian spies, agents and emissaries encouraged the Habsburg Serbs to move to the empty plains of the Ukraine, offering economic and political benefits. What is more, the Serbs who became Russian subjects were then employed as mediators who were sent to organise moves of the Orthodox population not only from the Habsburg lands, but from the Ottoman Empire (Bosnia, Montenegro, Dalmatia) as well.⁷ Although at first the Viennese Court showed little interest in these happenings, it soon realised the dangers of the depopulation of the southern border. Thus Vienna introduced a series of restrictive measures in order to stop the emigration. For several reasons the church hierarchy and the Metropolitan of Karlovci also opposed the migrations to the Ukraine. The peak in the number of departures coincided with the death of patriarch Arsenije IV and the election of Pavle Nenadović to the metropolitanate in 1748.⁸ Nenadović acted decisively to stop the outflow of the Orthodox population, and thus very quickly earned the reputation of a difficult opponent at the Russian court, which spread the rumours that he had accepted Roman Catholicism and renounced the Orthodox faith. Metropolitan Nenadović had the support of the Viennese authorities, but he soon came under fire from many other directions. It looks like the Ecumenical Patriarchate had similarly negative opinion of him, and spread it among the Orthodox of both the Ottoman and the Habsburg lands. This complex situation led some Habsburg subjects to openly complain against metropolitan Nenadović. Thus even the metropolitan's court clerk Zaharija Orfelin, one of the men of letters of the early Serbian Enlightenment, anonymously published, in the printing-shop of Dimitrije Teodosije in Venice, a poem *Serbia's Cry* (Pláč Serbije) in which he lamented over the sad fate of the Serbs under both the Ottomans and the Habsburgs, and criticised the church

⁶ P. F. Sugar, "The Nature of the Non-Germanic Societies under Habsburg Rule," in *Slavic Review*, XXII (1963), no. 1, p. 2–8.

⁷ Stedoje Lalić (ed.), *Seoba Srba u Rusko carstvo polovinom 18. veka*, Novi Sad, 2005; M. Kostić, *Nova Srbija i Slavenosrbija*, Novi Sad, 2001, p.45–58.

⁸ N. Ninković, *Mitropolit Pavle Nenadović*, Novi Sad 2017, p. 66–77.

hierarchy for their behaviour.⁹ The epistle that Evgenios Vulgaris, the famous greek writer and theologian, wrote in Constantinople and sent to the Serbs, in which he reprimanded them because they had abandoned the Orthodox traditions in favour of political freedoms, has been interpreted by the Serbian historiography in this context. Vulgaris thought that the church reforms, based on the Russian model, already initiated by metropolitan Vićentije Jovanović and continued even more determinedly during metropolitan Nenadović's times, had led to the changes in the liturgical practice and iconography. Vulgaris found the church hierarchy of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci responsible for the disunity of the Orthodoxy and the rapprochement with the Catholic church. He thus joined a sizeable group of metropolitan Nenadović's enemies.¹⁰

This whole picture was made additionally complex by the presence of the Protestants and the close ties the Serbian church hierarchy maintained with them. A considerable number of both Lutherans and Calvinists who had studied predominantly at the University of Halle, continued their professional careers as professors at the protestant colleges and schools throughout Hungary. A large number of Serbs, and not only from Hungary, studied in Halle and Pressburg, and thus spread the ideas of the Pietist education and piety.¹¹ Metropolitan Nenadović sent his own nephew to the Lutheran lyceum (lycée) in Pressburg. Visarion Pavlović, bishop of Bačka, played an even bigger role in the promotion of the Pietist model of education. He founded a lyceum/academy in Novi Sad, organised on the model of Pietist/Lutheran schools, and employed among others Slovak professors who had studied in Halle. He had especially close contact with the Russian, Simon Todorski, once a student of A. H. Franke himself, and later the bishop of Pskov and Narva, and the confessor of the young empress Catherine. Todorski was one of the 'routes' through which the Habsburg Serbs, on the one hand, maintained close relations with the Ukraine and Russia, but, on the other, through which they accepted the ideas of the Enlightenment.¹²

The bishop of Bačka was the main instigator behind the arrival of Jov Vasiljević and Vasilije Romanović, two well-known painters from Kiev

⁹ B. Čalić, *Zabarija Orfelin*, p. 7–22; L. Čurčić, *Knjiga o Zabariji Orfelinu*, Zagreb, 2002, p. 140–157.

¹⁰ I. Carras, "Topos and Utopia in Evgenios Voulgaris' Life and Work," in *The Hellenic Review*, I (2004), p. 134.

¹¹ E. Winter, *Die Pflege der west- und südslavischen Sprachen in Halle im 18. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Geschichte des bürgerlichen Nationwerdens der west- u. südslavischen Völker*, Berlin, 1954, p. 165–173; M. Kostić, "Srpski studenti na univerzitetima u Haleu, Lajpcigu i Getingenu u XVIII stoleću," *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, VII (1991), p. 23–25.

¹² E. Winter, "Einige Nachricht von Herrn Simeon Todorski. Ein Denkmal der deutsch-slavischen Freundschaft im 18. Jahrhundert," in *Zeitschrift für Slavistik*, I (1956), p. 80–82; V. Simić, "Uticao pijetizma na srpske intelektualce sredinom XVIII veka: okviri za interpretaciju ranog prosvetiteljstva kod Srba," in Drago Roksančić (ed.), *Hrvati i Srbi u Habsburškoj Monarhiji u 18. stoljeću: interkulturalni aspekti "prosvijećene" modernizacije*, Zagreb, 2014, p. 163–167.

Spiritual Academy, to Novi Sad in the late 1730s.¹³ We suppose that his main contact in Kiev was Todorski, who had lived in Novi Sad and Belgrade in the 1730s where he most probably taught Greek, before he accepted the position of a professor at Kiev Spiritual Academy and moved back.¹⁴ This is roughly what the migration and communication processes among the Serbs settled along the Danube looked in the mid-18th century, and they inevitably had impact on religion, culture and arts.¹⁵

The traditional forms of religious painting were a part of the cultural capital that the Orthodox Serbs brought to the Habsburg Lands. The term „traditional painting“ or as it is sometimes called „post-Byzantine art“ is the syntagm which points to a whole series of influences which overlapped on the territories of the Central Balkans to create one hybrid style with regional variations.¹⁶ This traditional style of painting contained elements of the Baroque, taken from the Italo-Cretan art, and more importantly from the religious art which developed on the Ionian Islands during the last decades of the 17th century. The additional influence came from the Venetian Baroque art, transmitted through the powerful Greek colonies all the way to the Serbian communities along the Danube. Another influence was the religious art of Wallachia, spread among the Serbs by travelling artists.¹⁷

The best example of a painter who belonged to the group of „traditional“ painters was Hristofor Džefarović, originally from Dorjan region in Macedonia. As a young man he set off to travel and learn painting, and thus came to Belgrade, at that time of the Habsburg rule, where he did some artistic work on Belgrade Orthodox church.¹⁸ In 1735 he crossed into Hungary, where he was noticed by Visarion Pavlović, bishop of Bačka, who employed him to paint the church of Bodjani monastery, at that time the see of the diocese of Bačka. After that he started the work on the iconostasis, but had to stop at the request of bishop Visarion. The iconostasis was finished by Jov Vasiljević and Vasilije Romanovič, the painters recently arrived from the Ukraine. They quickly obtained numerous other commissions, and we can assume that the bishop of Bačka engaged them to decorate the recently built Cathedral church in Novi Sad. This points out to the changed expectations of the church elite

¹³ M. Timotijević, *Srpsko barokno slikarstvo*, Novi Sad, 1996, 74–77; B. Todić, *Srpski slikari: od XIV do XVIII veka*, knj. 1, Novi Sad, 2013, p. 246–251.

¹⁴ M. Kostić, *Simon Todorski kao učitelj među Srbima godine 1737/8*, Beograd, 1951, p. 110.

¹⁵ V. Vukašinović, "Ruski i maloruski uticaji na bogoslužjenje Srpske pravoslavne crkve u XVIII i XIX stoleću," in *Srpsko-ruski odnosi od početka XVIII do kraja XX veka*, urednik Mihailo Vojvodić, Beograd 2011, p. 29–39.

¹⁶ M. Timotijević, "Tradicija i barok: (tumačenje tradicije u reformama barokne piktoralne poetike)," in *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti*, XXXIV-XXXV (2003), p. 201–209.

¹⁷ M. Timotijević, *Srpsko barokno slikarstvo*, p. 131–149; Lj. Stošić, *Srpska umetnost 1690–1740*, Beograd, 2006, 93–100.

¹⁸ B. Todić, *Srpski slikari: od XIV do XVIII veka*, knj. p. 2, 221–232.

regarding the visual expressions of the Orthodox faith. Very soon, Džefarović was promoted in major engraver on the court of patriarch Arsenije IV, for whom he executed many engravings with political and religious thematic, but he was very rarely engaged to paint the churches or iconostasis.¹⁹

At the same time, around 1741, Jov Vasiljevič moved to Sremski Karlovci at the invitation of patriarch Arsenije IV to become his court painter. Soon afterwards the patriarch sent a decree throughout the Metropolitanate in which he explicitly forbid the Orthodox parishes to engage any painters to work on churches if they had not passed through Jov Vasiljevič's school/workshop in Karlovci. He went on to invite all the painters who would like to be given work on painting the churches of the Metropolitanate to come to Karlovci and go through Vasiljevič's school.²⁰ This is where they were to improve their icon-painting skills, to correct any iconographic or stylistic mistakes which they were making, and which had in the mean-time trickled down into the Orthodox iconography. The patriarch thought that this would be the way to strengthen the Orthodox faith, as he would clean it from the mistakes and irregularities which had accumulated over time. His actions also tied firmly the official religious art of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci to the development path of the Russian and Ukrainian iconography. Of course, the patriarch's letter caused dissatisfaction both among the communities, who were used to the traditional iconography, and among the painters who had establishes templates and widespread business networks. For these reasons patriarch Arsenije's decree had only a partial effect which was mostly felt in the parishes closest to Karlovci and therefore under his strictest control, in the first place those on the territory of the archdiocese. The dioceses on the border of the metropolitanate, e.g. Diocese of Buda, continued to employ the icon-painters of the old 'traditional' school, who were cheaper and considerably more numerous than those trained by the Ukrainians.²¹

However, Jov Vasiljevič's court workshop worked at a full pace, and soon started to produce painters who worked according to the principals of the reformed baroque Ukrainian iconography, e.g. Dimitrije Bačević, Vasilije Ostojić, Janko Halkozović, Nikola Nešković, Stefan Tenecki, etc.²² The group, led by Jov Vasiljevič, were immediately given the opportunity to do the paintings for the church of Krušedol monastery, the most important Serbian monastery in the Habsburg lands, and the first see of the Metropolitanate of

¹⁹ D. Medaković, *Srpska umetnost u XVIII veku*, Beograd, 1980, p. 16–24; D. Davidov, *Srpska grafika XVIII veka*, Beograd, 2006, p. 127–157.

²⁰ B. Todić, "Jov Vasiljevič u Karlovcima 1743–1744. godine," in *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja*, XVIII (2007), no. 2, p. 179–188.

²¹ D. Medaković, *Srpska umetnost u XVIII veku*, p. 25–36.

²² O. Mikić, L. Šelmić, *Majstori prelaznog perioda srpskog slikarstva XVIII veka*, Novi Sad, 1981, p. 5–9.

Karlovcu. This opened the way for the next generations of painters who passed through the court painting's school and continued to work in the similar style, thus putting the new style into the centre of the Serbian religious painting within the Habsburg lands. Several painters who studied in Karlovcu decided to go back to the Ottoman Empire, and thus took the seeds of the new style across the border. For example Teodor Stefanović Gologlavac went back to Valjevo, his birthplace, and continued to paint in the churches across Serbia and Bosnia.²³

What is more, during the second half of the 18th century the Ukrainian model of religious painting played an important role in the defence of Orthodoxy from both the heresies which spread through the folk religiosity, and the proselytising activities of the Catholic church. During the period of the Josephinist reforms and the increased German influence among the peoples of the Monarchy, Serbian elite embraced the new trends which came from Vienna, which inevitably left its traces in the art.²⁴ From the 1760s the number of painters who studied at the Academy of Arts in Vienna grew rapidly. Upon their return they received increasingly important commissions. By this time the Ukrainian style of painting had become a norm among the more traditionalist painters, and thus in a certain way a means of a defence against the Germanization and the Catholic advances. Thus in time the Ukrainian artistic model became the artistic confirmation of the „correctness” of an icon, which had already acquired the confidence of the majority of the population.²⁵

So, it's clear that the external framework such as political consequences of migratory events had much greater significance to the changes in religious art than simple stylistic or artistic reasons. Religious art of the Habsburg Serbs in the mid-18th century was influenced by the migration processes which happened after the 1690s, because that changed both the political and the cultural frameworks.

²³ B. Todić, *Srpski slikari: od XIV do XVIII veka*, knj. 2, p. 204–206

²⁴ V. Simić, *Za ljubav otadžbine: patriote i patriotizmi u srpskoj kulturi XVIII veka u Habsburškoj monarhiji*, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 285–316.

²⁵ A. Kučeković, "The reception of traditional themes on the early baroque iconostases in Slavonia. At the contact point of Southern Balkan and Ukrainian influences," in Lidija Merenik, Vladimir Simić and Igor Borozan (eds.), *Imagining the Past: the reception of the Middle Ages in the Serbian Art from the 18th to 21st Century*, Belgrade, 2016, p. 39–45.