

ECONOMY, POPULATION AND SETTLEMENTS ON ŠAR MOUNTAIN AS DESCRIBED IN STUDIES OF RUSSIAN CONSUL IN PRIZREN I.S. YASTREBOV*

I

Ivan Stepanovich Yastrebov⁸¹ (b. 1839, d. 1894), as a consul of the Czarist Russia, spent some ten years in Shkoder and Prizren, mostly before the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-78. He spent much of his term of office travelling with the purpose of studying the Arbanasi in northern Albania and Serbs in Macedonia and the adjacent areas of Old Serbia. Especially fruitful in this respect was his posting to Prizren from 1 April 1870 to 18 August 1874. As he was fluent in Turkish, and understood also Albanian, he had no communication problem with Turks, the Arbanasi and Serbs, which stood him in good stead in his research. The result of this research was his magnum opus, *Стара Сербія и Албанія (Serbia in the Olden Days and Albania)*⁸², which is considered to this day to be one of the best guides to the understanding of these lands, both from the geographical and historical point of view, as well as from the ethnographical and cultural one.

Yastrebov made a special study of Šar Mountain, as a magnificent mountain ambience, with its several economic and geographic units known in Serbian as *župas* (roughly: districts), whose population was for the most part stock-farmers, farming not only for their own needs, but also for trade, exporting mostly sheep.

Yastrebov was among the first European researchers to make a study of the living conditions of the Šar Mountain populations. He had established, even before (the first Serbian geographer) Jovan Cvijić, the existential importance of the anthropogeographical factor: that the geographical environment of this highland determines the type of economic activity of the people, but that man's activity lends to this geographical area its economic importance on a wider production plane. The *župas'* favourable climate and vegetation enabled human

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⁸¹ Бован В. (1996), **Јастребов у Призрену**, Призрен, стр. 1-300.

⁸² Ястребов И.С. (1904), **Стара Сербія и Албанія, путевые записки**, (*Old Serbia and Albania – Travel Hnotes*), Споменик СКА XLI, Београд.

habitation on high altitudes and the people's subsistence on animal husbandry. They were mostly into sheep farming, less into cattle (and horses), rearing good breeds of high quality animals, which resulted in high demand and a high price. Yastrebov⁸³ was also among the first to stress the high market value of Šar Mountain sheep as a commercial commodity, and the importance of Šar Mountain as an economically active geographical region.

II

Yastrebov studied Šar Mountain, or rather the region and its population - Serbs and Arbanasi - and settlements, and described them from several points of view: natural-geographical, anthropogeographical, ethnographic and cultural-historic. His historical research into the past of Metohia and Šar Mountain - the main development outline - furnished the first accurate and comprehensive facts, with a critical verification of facts and folk traditions. He also furnished a more accurate and detailed natural and geographical characteristics of Šar Mountain and placed historical and cultural landmarks dating back to the mediaeval Serbian state. Thus, he was the first to give a picture of the historical past of the region of Šar Mountain. As a geographical locality, it was the watershed for three drainage areas: the Vardar and Lepenac rivers draining into the Aegean Sea; the Nerodimka (and the Sitnica), into the Black Sea; and the Prizrenka Bistrica and the Gora rivers - tributaries of the Drim - into the Adriatic Sea. Anthropogeographically, Yastrebov established by the comparative method the existence of a historical continuity for many Šar Mountain settlements from the Middle Ages to his day. He was an authority on Serbian mediaeval charters and numerous toponymic documents. The situation was similar where the origin of the populations of the Šar Mountain *župas* and the remnants of Serb cultural wealth was concerned. He was especially interested in churches.

Yastrebov⁸⁴ painted an especially detailed picture of the contemporary position of the Serb population on Šar Mountain. He gave details of the ethnic and demographic situation and presented the ethnic and religious relations between the Orthodox Christian and Muslim populations. He established - and illustrated with a large number of examples - the process of Islamisation of Orthodox Christian Serbs and their forced Albanisation. In substantiation, he quoted the fact that the so-called Arnautashi had largely retained their Serbian language, many customs, even their old family names. This was especially the

⁸³ Лилић Борислава, **Тодор Станковић, савременик И.С. Јастребова** (*Todor Stanković, Contemporary of I.S. Yastrebov*), paper submitted at a symposium on Ivan Stepanovich Yastrebov, Prizren, 31 October-1 November, organised by the Institute of History of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Prizren District and the Prizren Municipality.

⁸⁴ Стојанчевић В., **И.С. Јастребов у своје време** (*I.S. Yastrebov in his day and age*), paper submitted at the symposium on Ivan Stepanovich Yastrebov, Prizren, 31 October -1 November, organised by the SANU Institute of History, the Prizren District and the Prizren Municipality.

case with Muslim women, who long retained many Serbian Orthodox Christian customs. Yastrebov claimed that these Islamised - Turkicised - Serbian women long spoke Serbian (not Albanian), especially in the Šar Mountain *župa* of Gora, where Albanisation had failed to destroy the Serbian language to this day.

III

In addition to Prizren, Yastrebov described all four Šar Mountain *župas*: Sredska, Sirinić, Opolje and Gora. He determined their geographical location, size of the villages and populations, directions of communication, orographic and hydrological features of Šar Mountain. He paid special attention to the description of specific features of Gora and Sirinić.

The Sirinić *župa* on the western slopes of Šar and (what was then believed to be) its highest peak of Ljuboten comprised 13 villages with 465 households, with a majority (about 75%) Serb population. The biggest locality in Sirinić was the village of Štrpce, with 150 Orthodox Christian families. It was about five hours' walk away from the peak of Ljuboten. The path to the top led through first beech and then pine forest, above which - as if divided by a clear line - is a stretch quite devoid of trees. This is the area, according to Yastrebov, "where snow lies during the winter, and grass, studded with wild flowers, grows in the summer" ("... а наступаеь мьсто, гдь зимой лежить сньгь, а льетомь растеть трава съ дикими цвьтами").

From the peak of Ljuboten a gentle slope leads down on the Kačanik side, while the one on the Štrpce side is precipitous. From Ljuboten, writes Yastrebov, "the view stretches in all directions... In front of you is Kačanik, far in the distance is Skopje, underneath you is the field of Tetovo, Gostivar," i.e., the fertile Polog plain. Below Ljuboten are the foothills of Šar. Visible from Šar Mountain are "all of the Drim valley, Dečani (Monastery), Peć, Djakovica, Priština, Gnjilane." Yastrebov asserts with authority: "There is no better place than Ljuboten from which one could see all of Old Serbia, with Ljuboten at the centre of this Serbia" ("Лучшаго нть мьста для того, чтобы видьть всю Старую Сербю, Люботень какъ бы средняя точка той Сербіи").

Yastrebov gives a beautiful description also of the famous mountain lake just below Ljuboten, one hour away from the peak. He says: "The lake is not large, no more than 15 fathoms in length, and 15 in width; the depth has never been sounded. The water is pure and limpid. From the lake springs the Lepenac river ..." The villages of Sirinić were poor, and the chief industrial branch was sheep-farming ("единственно небоишія стада овец"). Villagers were migrant workers, and the chief trade was carpentry, mainly joinery. It was similar in the *župa* of Sredska.

Yastrebov's great merit was that he drew attention to the over-exploitation of the forests, felled mostly for fuel, rather than for clearing land for farming or pasture. The people of Sredska cut wood also for charcoal, which they sold in

Prizren as fuel. He drew attention also to an incipient drought in some areas due to deforestation, which could jeopardise grazing and reduce stock farming. He blamed this partly on the Turkish administration, which did not have forestry management or forest rangers, and partly on the fact that neither Turks nor the Arbanasi cared very much about protecting natural resources ("Турки примъровъ своимъ научили и християнъ не заботиться о будущемъ. Туркиа а особенно Арнаути не живутъ прошедшимъ и не думаютъ о будущемъ").

Momčilo Ivanić, through whose efforts Yastrebov's text *Стара Сербія и Албанія* was published in the *Spomenik* (Remembrance) series of the Royal Serbian Academy in 1904, as the XL1st *Spomenik*, wrote in the preface: "He well knew Šar Mountain and climbed more than once its lofty peaks, which recalled to his mind the fond childhood memories of the mountains of Caucasus." I would add that he did it, too, out of love for the Serbian people and their past, which he had studied well. His work remains, therefore, as a living legacy in the Serbian historiography, especially of Old Serbia and its biggest mountain - Šar Mountain.