SERBIAN MEDIEVAL TOWNS AND THEIR TOURIST POTENTIALS

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Abstract. Serbian medieval towns differed in the time and type of their formation. the time of Serbian medieval state, period that lasted almost 300 years, experiences the development and changes in society and thus in the towns as well. This work introduces main historical conditions for the formation of Serbian towns, their development and causes of their disappearance. However, they still have the possibility to revive themselves after many centuries but their function would not be a defending but a tourist one. This work presents their tourist potentials and compares them to an efficient tourist valorization that was carried out across Europe. The biggest problem is found in their poor conditions and lack of consciousness of Serbian cultural and historical heritage.

Key words: towns, Middle Ages, Serbia, tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Medieval towns in Europe appear at the turn from slaveholding to feudal society. This transition was a rather gradual process and varied with each region. Although the physiognomy of medieval towns is recognized in slaveholding period, towns become the centres of feudal power after the development of trade and political system in the states.

Medieval Serbia experienced the development of town later than Central of Western Europe. Since the formation and development of towns overlaps with the creation of politically organized country, it can be concluded that in Serbia it was in the second half of the 12th century i.e. during the reign of Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (1166-1196). That is the time when Serbia gets its first contours and defined borders while the town of Ras
becomes the capital. Compared to the other Serbian towns built in the 14th and 15th century, Ras shows rather simple architectural lines.

Ruins belonging to 201 medieval towns were found on the territory of old Serbia which covers the present territories of Serbia, Montenegro and FYR Macedonia. Many of them have been wrecked for a very long time. Consequently, this work will describe and analyze only those that presently are in such a condition which allows proper tourist valorization.

2. CONDITIONS FOR THE FORMATION OF TOWNS

Serbia gets stable borders and strong political system in the second half of the 12th century. Although it is a fact that its frames were present even in the 9th century during the reigns of Vlastimirovic and Vojislavljevic dynasties, frequent wars and constant conquers of Byzantines, Bulgarians and Hungarians made this region often change rulers from dynasties of these three nations which made an organized integration of Serbs at that time rather impossible (Haldon, 1999). The example of medieval Belgrade represents the example which shows how many rulers one town that can change only in one century and how frequent enemy conquers can affect its physiognomy (Hirt, 2009).

The area of Serbian medieval towns was the field of many conflicts between the strong states of that period. Fertile ground as well as the area important for the trade between Europe and Asia influenced the fact that this part of Europe has been quite politically unstable since the old times.

In the Middle Ages, Old Serbia’s northern sections spread to the Sava and Danube. It bordered the mouth of Timok into the Danube on the east from where it went south until today’s Svrljig and further to Pirot and Nis. The border then curved towards west and a significant mining center of Novo Brdo. From there it went further west over Prizren and the Prokletije mountains up to Drivast and Skadar and the Adriatic Sea. The province Zeta, which now belongs to Montenegro, was at that time on the territory of Serbia. The border spread further north towards Travunija and Zahumlje, i.e. today’s south Herzegovina. The western border followed the valley of the Drina River up to its mouth into the Sava. Serbian medieval state under Stefan Nemanja was much smaller than this previously described territory. However, almost 200 years later, his descendant, Tsar Stefan Dusan expanded the state towards the south all the way to the Bay of Corinth and Thessaloniki, including today’s Albania, FYR Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly and peninsula Chalkidiki (Blagoev, 1989).

When Slavs came to the Balkan Peninsula and during the reigns of first Serbian dynasties and until the end of the 12th century, towns differed little from villages. The only significant difference was that the towns were encircled with wooden walls. The building material was wood. Towns could have been used for the defence of a mine or a residence of a ruler. Rulers from the House of Nemanjić, that reigned Serbia from 1166 until 1371, had a habit to live in castles that very often consisted of only one building built in a style of Donjon tower. That is as well proven by the fact that during the 13th and 14th century Serbia did not have one distinct capital and rulers preferred to live and perform their state duties in a number of towns (Jirecek, 1981).

Most of the citizens in those times lived in villages. Towns in peaceful times did not have a lot of military defending them. However, during the times of wars, weak village population ran into mountains while the capable population closed itself in the towns that
were the centres of the areas they lived in. It is obvious that all European medieval towns, which means Serbian as well, were much smaller than today and that life and activities in them have to be observed from a completely different viewpoint (Smith, 2010). Although they were of much smaller dimensions, they had a great gravitational area.

By the end of the 12th century, towns are starting to be built of stone, their walls are being strengthened and defense towers built. However, towns in this period of history are made of just one part which differs from some later periods when they consist of so-called Upper Town and Lower Town that represent separate units and were separately as well defended.

3. CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TOWNS

The number of Serbian medieval towns grew parallel with the strengthening of the medieval Serbian state. Their number was much smaller until 1200 than in later centuries. The ruins of 201 towns were found and located on the territory of old Serbia. For only 74 of them we can say with certainty which period they belonged to (Deroko, 1950) and that is the period before the Ottoman conquest in 1459. Only 22 of them existed in 1200.

![Fig. 1. The growth in the number of Serbian medieval towns in period between 1200 and 1450](image)

Serbian state, in an economic sense, made a rather slow progress in the first half of the 13th century, especially in the period between 1230 and 1250. That is proven by the fact that in 1250 there were only 25 medieval towns. The Mongol invasion of the Balkan Peninsula in 1242 additionally contributed to this. In the 50 years to come, the number of towns grew rapidly due to the development of trade and mining especially after the settling
of the German ore miners, known locally as Sasi, around the region of Novo Brdo. The greatest growth in the number of towns is registered in the period between 1300 and 1350. That is the time when Serbia reached its territorial peak, portraying itself as the heir of the run-down Byzantine Empire. 17 towns, for which we know the time of their of formation, were built in this period.

There were 13 new towns formed in the second half of the 14th century. That is the time when Serbian empire fell apart and the state was split into several regions. Towns were in this period primary built as a reaction to the rise of the Turks. The towns in the first half of the 15th century were built in similar circumstances and out of the same reasons as in the second half of the 14th century. 10 new towns were formed in this period. In 1450, almost one decade before the Ottomans seized the entire Medieval Serbia, there were 74 towns for which we know precisely which period in history they belonged to.

Serbian medieval towns suffered a lot during the reign of the Turks. Neglect and lack of reparation contributed to the fact that there are only 37% of the total number of towns for which we know exactly which period they belonged to.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF TOWNS

Serbian medieval towns differed among themselves in the time of their formation and in the appearance. As the economic power of the state grew, thus the towns became more solid and complex. Towns consisted of several units. The most striking parts were Upper Town and Lower Town which can be seen on the examples of Smederevo, Golubac, Belgrade and Novo Brdo. The Upper Towns were smaller but rather strongly built. They had more defence towers which provided ruler with a shelter during the war times. Towns in earlier periods were not split into different parts but had Donjon towers which represented the residence and the main shelter for a ruler. The most renowned Donjon tower is in Krusevac.

Craftsmen and traders lived in the towns. Agricultural population lived in part of the town under the fortification where they sought shelter during the war times. After the enemy attacks, these lower parts were in most occasions demolished and burnt. Houses and stores were built in wood, while stone was used as a building material only in coastal areas. Some later periods witness the existence of the houses whose ground floors were made of stone and where cattle was kept while the first floors were made of wood and used as a residence (Curcic, 1992).

Unfortunately, no part of the town under these mentioned fortified places has been preserved as whole since they were mainly built of weak material or wood. On the other hand, fortresses were built of „cracked“ uneven stones. Walls were of different thicknesses with added hot lime and tiny rocks. The smallest thickness of walls was to be found in the town of Ras where it ranged between 1.6 meters and 2 meters while Smederevo fortress had walls even 4.5 meters thick. The wall height in the town of Ras did not exceed 7 meters while in Smederevo fortress it was 10 meters and even higher (Petronijevic, 2006). This makes possible to become aware of the development of medieval towns in period of 150 years, which is the period between the formations of Ras and Smederevo.

Only walls and some towers are preserved today, especially because of the material the dwelling buildings were made of.
5. DISAPPEARANCE OF TOWNS

There are several reasons of the decay of medieval towns in Europe as well as in Serbia. The first reason was the transition of economic and social relations from the feudal into the capitalist system. The middle-class community developed itself more and more and became equal with the landed gentry. However, medieval Serbia did not experience this phenomenon greatly due to the reason that the Ottoman Empire, despite its power and the peak it reached in the mid 16th century, was quite falling behind because of the still prominent feudal system and sharia law (Kunt, 2003). While the countries of the Western Europe began their great geographical discoveries and made fortunes from newly-discovered resources, the Ottoman Empire still preserved the feudal system of organization which means that the towns on its territory kept their medieval look and character which, in the counties of the Western Europe, was already either abandoned or modified.

The second cause of the disappearance of medieval towns is the invention and development of the firearms whose power could not be resisted not even by medieval fortifications. It is considered that, from the end of the 15th century, Western Europe did not build towns in the same manner as they were built in the Middle Ages (Deroko, 1950).

According to the above mentioned, it is concluded that the towns in medieval Serbia did not vanish due to economic reasons but because they were conquered and changed by the Turks who later did almost nothing on their improvement and modernization. When Serbia was conquered by the Ottoman power in 1459, most of the towns were damaged or ruined. Turks did little on their revival, especially in the inner parts of the country, because there was no need to protect the towns that did not have anyone to attack them. A great majority of Serbia population emigrated towards north, across the Sava and the Danube.

After the conquest, Turks began to build their redoubts, military barracks, mosques while the majority of the material was taken from medieval towns that after that remained empty and useless (Kunt, 2003). However, towns that Turks did not ruin and did use as fortifications were built in a completely new way. Because of the development of the firearms, especially after the 15th century, towers were made lower and nearer to the ground to make them a less potential target of the attack.

It was also the local Serbian population that took the building material from the medieval buildings because they built their houses now of stronger materials. Turkish authorities did not care much for the dilapidation of the Serbian medieval towns (Deroko, 1950).

Causes of the decay of Serbian medieval towns should be searched for in newer history as well, especially in World War I and II. Smederevo fortification, since it served as ammunition dump, was seriously damaged after the air strike.

6. REVIVAL OF MEDIEVAL TOWNS IN THE EYES OF TOURISTS

The greatest enemy of the physical look of one cultural good is time and neglect. Wars and destructions had smaller effect on the condition of the fortifications than centuries to precede. History made its influence. During the reign of the Turks, towns slowly died out, losing their importance and original function. Moreover, they did not receive care and
attention they deserve even after the Ottomans left the area. The greatest cause for that lies in the conscious people have of the importance of these objects. With the development of tourism, tourists become new people to revive these objects. Their interest for the spirit of the past times, that still „lives“ in the area of medieval fortifications, encourages public and private sector to finance the revival of these silent witnesses. The functions of these towns change; instead of the defending one they receive tourist function, thus becoming attractive tourist localities.

The present state of medieval cultural resources is characterized by weak level of affirmation and unused potentials. The treasure is great and there is a great potential for the development of tourism. Favourable geographical position, the vicinity of Corridor X, Ibar highway and Danube Pan-European Corridor VII contribute to this. Unfortunately, the importance of such a favourable position is lessered by a poor level of infrastructure and superstructure.

Examples of well-affirmed medieval cultural resources are numerous and can be seen across Europe. Successfully valorized cultural and historical entities are to be found in England (Windsor, Lincoln castle, Dover castle etc.), in Scotland (Bothwell castle, Caerlaverock castle, Edinburgh Castle), Ireland (Blarney Castle, Dublin Castle), Wales (Caerphilly, Conwy), France (Avignon, Foix, Mont-Saint-Michel etc.), Spain (Alcazar, Castillo de Coca etc.), Italy (Bari, San Gimigniano, Fenis, Sacra di San Michele etc.), Germany (Neuschwanstein etc.) and Eastern Europe (Ciechanow-Poland, Karlstein-the Czech Republic, Bran-Romania) (http://www.medieval-castles.net/castles.htm).

Good example of well maintained medieval object is represented by Windsor Castle in England, Berkshire County. Windsor is the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world and the Official Residence of Her Majesty The Queen of England. Its rich history spans almost 1000 years. The Castle covers an area of about 5 hectares (13 acres) and contains magnificent State Apartments furnished with treasures from the Royal Collection, St George's Chapel (one of the most beautiful ecclesiastical buildings in England and the burial place of 10 monarchs), and Queen Mary's Dolls House, a masterpiece in miniature. Due to these circumstances Windsor became a major tourist attraction in England. Windsor’s annual revenue from tourism is 360 million pounds. It employs about 11.000 (http://www.windsor.gov.uk/site/home/statistics-and-data/windsor-visitor-survey-2009 ). Moreover, the concepts of both sustainable development and environmental protection play key roles in this tourist destination.

The most striking Serbian representatives among medieval fortifications are Kalemegdan, Smederevo and Golubac. The most developed locality, from the point of view of tourism, is Kalemegdan. Smederevo also does a lot on the improvement of its tourist offer, especially after the engagement of Tourist Organization of Smederevo in this issue in 2007. Golubac, at this time, represents one unused tourist potential. With better development of the mentioned localities and creation of cultural itinerary, other, less visited fortifications, could become real and interesting.

The number of visits to these places can be statistically processed on a small scale only. Present records are inadequate and there are problems with its keeping. For example, Kalemegdan fortress represents one open complex which makes the measuring of the visit records rather impossible. Partial records are made by the security on the locality itself. Golubac has no records at all. Tourist Organization of Golubac estimates that the number of visits is between 10.000 and 12.000 visits a year. The most complex record keeping of
Tourist flow is in Smederevo, thanks to Tourist Organization of Smederevo. Tourist circulation was analyzed only for the years of 2008 and 2009 since that is when the Organization took the initiative of tourism development on the locality. The number of visits in 2008 was 26,918, which made annual revenue of 1,571,750 dinars. 29,609 tourists visited the fortification in 2009 which made revenue of 1,694,550 dinars. The fortress in Smederevo is mostly visited by tourists from Vojvodina (37% of the total number of tourists), then from Belgrade (20%), central Serbia (19%), West Serbia (13%), South Serbia (7%) and East Serbia (4%). Tours to Smederevo fortress are mostly organized by travel agencies from Vojvodina (31% of the total number), then come travel agencies from central Serbia (20%), Belgrade (19%), West Serbia (18%), while the agencies from East and South Serbia contribute with 6% each (Tourist Organization of Smederevo).

The possible further plan for the development of these important witnesses of past times should include different methods. A good start would be observation and analysis of foreign examples of conserved and maintained medieval objects. When we talk about the development of tourism on the examples of cultural heritage, especially the one from some historical period and which implies the way of life that a present tourist can not experience, an important role is played by the concept of interpretation. Tilden (1977) defines „interpretation“ as „An educational activity, which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”. Same author sees the role of interpretation as being a way of encouraging visitors to take a less unquestioning and passive approach to their visit. Uzzell (1989) states: „If interpretation is to be a source of social good then it must recognize the continuity of history and alert us to the future through the past. Interpretation should be interesting, engaging, enjoyable, informative and entertaining. But now and again it has to be shocking, moving and provide a cathartic experience“. Both authors emphasize the importance of interpretation when the presentation of cultural heritage is in focus. Present tourists do not want to be silent observers but want to actively take part in a well-organized programme, i.e. they want to “experience” it.

Creation of cultural route would certainly contribute to the development of tourism among medieval fortifications. What is needed is them being united in one unique tourist destination with specifically determined programme. The programme could include knight simulations which would enable tourists enjoy the skills of medieval knights. A good example of the reproduction of the way of life among medieval knights was demonstrated by association „Svibor“ on the manifestation „Dani evropske kulturne baštine“ (Days of European cultural heritage) in Bač in 2007. MacCannell (1976) defines „re-presentation“ as being „an arrangement of objects in a reconstruction of a total situation... Re-presentation aims to provide the viewer with an authentic copy of a total situation.“ One example of this is the re-presentation of so-called „living history“. The creation of such routes would employ additional branches in a number of different activities such as: creation of diffuse museums that would cover one historical period through the exhibitions of arms, tools and ethnographic elements, animation in tourism through simulation of the life of a man from Middle Ages and involvement of tourists in such programmes, presentation of old gastronomic specialties from the region of the locality. Archeological part Viminacium successfully applies the mentioned methods, offering tourists food and wines made as it was to be made in Roman times. They also perform animation where most of the staff employed in the activities with the tourists is dressed in Roman togas. Moreover, fortifications could
be used as the locality for numerous manifestations and some fortifications do have manifestation values. However, those events should be organized all year round so that fortifications could represent additional stimuli for tourist visits.

CONCLUSION

Serbian medieval towns are witnesses of some past times and represent the remnants of one part of the Serbian history. Medieval towns witnessed the birth of Serbian state and its journey towards independence. Literacy and culture of Serbian people emerged inside their walls.

Medieval towns are nothing like the present ones. Due to that reason, their morphological structure should be thoroughly scrutinized. Unlike other countries that nourish their cultural and historical monuments, Serbia behaves quite neglectful towards its own. Towns are neglected and can not be found on tourist maps. However, they have quite a potential whereas their valorization is of primary importance. Good international example is Windsor Castle in England which is visited by 7 million tourists every year (30% of which are foreigners). By following this kind of examples, Serbian medieval towns can become an important part of Serbian cultural heritage and development of tourism industry.

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