

**Byzantino-Serbian Border Zones in Transition:
Migration and Elite Change in pre-Ottoman Macedonia (1282–1355) [FWF P 30384-G28]
Final Project Report**

1. Report on Research Work

1.1 Information on the Development of the Research Project

The respective project lasted from 1 October 2017 until 31 March 2022. It aimed, based on the project application and its scholarly concept, at doing research in a holistic approach on (1) the confrontation of Byzantine and Serbian medieval political concepts and actors in Byzantine Macedonia (2) and the change of power starting from the expansion of the Serbian medieval Kingdom to the South under the King Stefan Uroš II Milutin until the death of the Tsar Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (i.e. from 1282 until 1355). For this reason, two interrelated research questions were addressed in two distinct work packages. The project has drawn primarily upon published Serbian and Byzantine charters as main corpus of relevant written sources, which have proven to have the capacity to shed new light on several aspects of border and migration in Byzantine (i.e. pre-Ottoman) Macedonia.

The title of *Work Package No. 1* is “Rivalling Political Concepts – Byzantium and the ‘Medieval Serbian Oecumene’”, while *Work Package No. 2* is entitled “Cross-Border Societies and Elite Change in Byzantine Macedonia”. Consequently, our project team (i.e. Vratislav Zervan, Bernhard Koschiček-Krombholz and Mihailo St. Popović) have structured the project’s work plan in the initial project application accordingly and have followed exactly the respective work plan throughout the entire duration of the project.

The crucial question from the viewpoint of the *Work Package No. 1*, which at the same time represents the macro-level, has been, whether the existence of the “Byzantine Oecumene” would exclude the existence of any other “Oecumene” in Byzantium’s (former) sphere of influence? Would Byzantium’s universality render a “Medieval Serbian Oecumene” impossible from the start?

The research on the *Work Package No. 2* is closely connected to the area of research itself, here on the micro-level. The area of research comprises five target areas (i.e. of the Strumica Valley, Lesnovo, Skopje, Ohrid and Prilep with their respective surroundings) in today’s Republic of North Macedonia. The correlation of the dynamics of settlement patterns and of changing borders is evident. Several scholars have tried to reconstruct the course of the border between the Serbian medieval Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire on a macro-level in Byzantine Macedonia. However, these approaches have so far neglected to use data on the development (for example from hamlet to village) or on the degradation (for example from village to deserted village) of settlements deriving from medieval Serbian and Byzantine charters in order to comprehend the dynamics of the respective borders on a micro-level.

There have been no changes in the research orientation between the beginning and the end of the project. We have followed our initial concept. Regarding the workflow, we were forced to adapt our plans in two points due to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in March 2020. Firstly, we tried to fulfil a survey in the area of research (here M. St. Popović, B. Koschiček-Krombholz) in order to localise micro-toponyms deriving from the sources, but we were not able to achieve this task due to three consecutive COVID waves and respective

lockdowns in Austria as well as in North Macedonia. Therefore, we have reacted by expanding our cooperation with Prof. Dr. Toni Filiposki (Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje), who held a scholarship of *Joint Excellence in Science and Humanities (JESH)* from 1 April 2019 until 31 July 2019 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and was cooperating closely with our project in this period on the micro-toponyms in the area of research. We have published a respective peer reviewed article “Über das Verhältnis von Herrschertiteln und Räumen: eine Fallstudie zu Makedonien unter dem König und Zaren Stefan Dušan (1331-1355)”. The second task, which we had to adapt because of the pandemic, was the planned concluding International Conference in Vienna with the presentation of the achieved results. Here, we used the *digital* International Medieval Congress Leeds 2021 and the International Medieval Congress Leeds 2022 *in situ* to promote our scholarly results to a wide audience, thus substituting fully the concluding conference in Vienna.

Luckily, we were able to hold a Working Meeting (International Workshop), as envisaged in the submitted project’s work plan. It was organised by our project team on 17-18 October 2019 in Vienna, right before the pandemic, in order to present a substantial part of our hitherto achieved results after two years and to facilitate their thorough discussion. We invited international and national experts in order to discuss respective issues. The meeting consisted of three sessions, i.e. “Weltanschauliche Konzepte nach der Eroberung”, “Die Menschen der Grenzzone nach der Eroberung” and “Digitale Aspekte der Visualisierung der Grenze” (cf. https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/static/repository/Arbeitsklausur_ByzantinoSerbianBorderZonesWienOktober2019.pdf). Papers delivered by our team were discussed thoroughly in responses delivered by the experts and via questions of the audience. Thus, they supported the project team to evolve new ideas and research questions, which have been implemented in the third and fourth year of the project.

1.2 Most Important Results and a Brief Description of Their Significance

The results of our project contributed significantly to the advancement of the research field in the following ways: we have systematically addressed *Work Package No. 1* “Rivalling Political Concepts – Byzantium and the ‘Medieval Serbian Oecumene’” by publishing two peer reviewed articles “The ‘Fatherland’ of the Serbian Kings Milutin and Dečanski or Some Additional Thoughts on the ‘Medieval Serbian Oecumene’” and “Über das Verhältnis von Herrschertiteln und Räumen: eine Fallstudie zu Makedonien unter dem König und Zaren Stefan Dušan (1331-1355)”. Therein, we have come to the conclusion that an own local concept of Oecumene was emerging during the reigns of Stefan Uroš II Milutin and Stefan Uroš III Dečanski between 1282 and 1331. Hereby, we relied on Serbian medieval charters, inscriptions and the Lives of the Serbian Kings and Archbishops by archbishop Danilo II and his disciple. We have recognised a clear antithesis between the “fatherland” and “the Serbian Land” of the Serbian King on the one hand, and “Great Romania” and the “Greek Empire” of the Byzantine Emperor on the other. The written sources clearly prove that it is not possible to notice the concept of universality in Milutin’s politics. Inspired by the research of Paul Nick Kardulias, we have considered the Kingdom of Serbia as a self-contained space. From the World System Analysis perspective, sources from the reign of Stefan Uroš III Dečanski paint a slightly different picture. They most probably illustrate the transition from a self-contained space to a novel approach towards the Byzantine neighbour. Here, one may argue that Stefan Dečanski’s victory at Velbužd in 1330 constituted a turning point in the development of the Serbian realm towards an own local concept of Oecumene. Then, we have also

focused on the semantic level of the use of Slavic equivalents to the Greek word *οἰκουμένη* and the expressions *отѣбствїѣ* and *отѣбство*. The key concept of the “fatherland” still lacks a comprehensive analysis of the respective sources. Two forms, *отѣбствїѣ* and *отѣбство*, have been defined in Church Slavonic. Over time, the ambivalence of both forms has merged into a concept that implied the meaning of “family”, “genus” and “generation”.

In a second step, regarding the macro-level of our research questions, we have addressed the possible existence of a “medieval Serbian Oecumene” in addition to the “Byzantine Oecumene” in our second article (see above). This hypothesis has been discussed by us in detail by introducing a rich variety of Greek, Roman and Byzantine texts, which are outlining the Roman/Byzantine perception of space and the definition of the borders of the Roman/Byzantine Empire. The titles and related geographical entities in the intitulations as well as signatures of the Serbian King and Emperor Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (reigned 1331-1355) in Serbian charters have been analysed in order to understand and reconstruct the perception of space in the expanding Serbian realm during the first half of the 14th century. Historical regions, which are mentioned in the charters, have been put in relation to the Serbian expansion in Byzantine Macedonia. Finally, the source-based evidence has been connected to the toponymy of Byzantine Macedonia. Toponyms, which are containing “Car” (i.e. “Emperor”), have been identified and localised in order to discern a pattern of imperial power and presence in the region. This fourth aspect has to be understood as a fresh and novel approach towards toponomastic aspects in the region, which shall stimulate further research in the near future.

The crucial prerequisite to address the *Work Package No. 2* entitled “Cross-Border Societies and Elite Change in Byzantine Macedonia” has been the in-depth analysis of Byzantine and Serbian charters of the 13th and 14th centuries on the aforesaid five target areas. For this reason, four clusters of medieval charters have been mainly examined, i.e. the charter clusters of Skopje, of Lesново, of Prilep and of Strumica, by especially taking new editions of the charters into account. Following a catalogue of catchwords on settlements, military facilities, economic sites, boundary marks, topographical entities, ritual place and infrastructure, which has been predefined by the project team through intensive discussions (especially at the Working Meeting, see above 1.1) and which are attested in the written sources, data has been extracted and embedded systematically into our *TIB Balkans OpenAtlas Database*.

B. Koschiček-Krombholz has collected scholarly interpretations of borders in Byzantine Macedonia in historical atlases on South-East Europe in the Middle Ages, which were published in the 20th and 21st centuries. An integral part of our approach is constituted by methods and (new) tools deriving from Digital Humanities (OpenAtlas, GIS, Least-Cost-Path calculations, georeferenced map layers, WebGIS, etc.). This becomes visible by the fact that B. Koschiček-Krombholz has georeferenced the aforesaid maps with QGIS, which has enabled a systematic comparison between the different border interpretations in the secondary literature and has highlighted areas for our in-depth research. In the following, he (with M. St. Popović) has also integrated data on the medieval road system (based on medieval written sources, Early Modern maps, archaeological remains, GPS tracks deriving from surveys and Least-Cost-Path calculations) and on the fortresses on the territory of North Macedonia.

V. Zervan has extracted biographies from the *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit (PLP)* concerning especially the Byzantine and Slavonic border-warlords, administrative personnel and local aristocrats, who were most affected by the guerilla warfare and the progressing expansion of the Serbian Kingdom. He has corrected and augmented their biographies, written new biographies on persons to be found solely in Slavonic medieval sources, embedded the entire data in our database and published articles on this subject matter.

All of the project's data can be queried freely and maps of the results can be downloaded via our Frontend "Maps of Power: Historical Atlas of Places, Borderzones and Migration Dynamics in Byzantium (TIB Balkans)" (<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/atlas>).

B. Koschiček-Krombholz has programmed an individual web interface for our project data, which enables an open access to our data and offers a download function: <https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/balkan/digital/explore>

All publications of our project can be freely accessed and downloaded as pdf via:

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/subprojects/borderzones#publications>

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/balkan/subprojekte/borderzones#publikationen>

Moreover, a complete list of papers delivered on the results of our project can be found via:

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/subprojects/borderzones#presentations>

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/balkan/subprojekte/borderzones#vortr%C3%A4ge>

Finally, the database software OpenAtlas is open access (open source) and can be found via:

<https://github.com/craws/OpenAtlas>

Our project is of huge relevance for many areas of research, namely for Historical Geography, Byzantine Studies, South-East European Studies, Social History, Geography, Cartography, Geocommunication and Digital Humanities. It contributes to all of these fields through its scholarly results and digital tools as well as applications, thus being itself transdisciplinary and fostering transdisciplinarity.

1.3 Information on the Execution of the Project

The project lasted from 1 October 2017 until 31 March 2022. While V. Zervan started to work for the project on 1 October 2017, B. Koschiček-Krombholz joined the project team on 1 December 2017. They both worked in the project until its very end on 31 March 2022. No major items of equipment were purchased, and there has been no significant deviation from the original plan. Regarding the workflow, we were forced to adapt our plans in two points due to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in March 2020, which has already been outlined above (cf. 1.1).

2. Career Development

The respective scholarly co-workers have been provided the opportunity to participate for a longer period in the research activities of the Division of Byzantine Research of the Institute for Medieval Research (Austrian Academy of Sciences), to gain additional experience in research and to develop their scholarly careers.

V. Zervan had the possibility to present various papers on his research and to publish own as well as collaborative articles. Based on his research in the project, he has started to prepare a monograph with the working title "Contribution to the Prosopography of the Borderzone. Migration and Elite Change in Pre-Ottoman Macedonia" for the series *Studies in Historical Geography and Cultural Heritage* (Vol. No. 5;

<https://histgeo.oeaw.ac.at/publications-in-progress/>), where he is gathering all the relevant prosopographical data on the noble families mentioned in the aforesaid sources. This monograph could serve to start the process of a “Habilitation” at the Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia). After the project’s end V. Zervan has joined a scholarly project at the Institute for Art History, which is the organisational unit of the Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.

B. Koschiček-Krombholz has started to write his MA thesis with the working title “Die digitale, geoanalytische Aufarbeitung von Grenzen, Orten und Verkehrswegen im Nordmazedonien des 14. Jahrhunderts” at the University of Vienna (supervisor M. St. Popović), which is strongly connected to our project. He has begun to work as a software engineer in another project of M. St. Popović [“Beyond East and West: Geocommunicating the Sacred Landscapes of “Duklja” and “Raška” through Space and Time (11th-14th Cent.)”, FWF-DFG I 4330-G] and has also joined the *OpenAtlas* team of the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage (ACDH-CH) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which is an important step in his career development.

The project’s significance for the project leader M. St. Popović consists of a methodical development of the discipline of Historical Geography and Digital Humanities. Our project has without doubt raised the awareness for the TIB Balkans in the scholarly community as well as in the interested public (<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/balkan/>). That is why M. St. Popović has been invited to deliver a Plenary Paper on Historical Geography and new methods at the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Venice and Padua (August 2022; <https://byzcongress2022.org/>), which is indeed an honour.

3. Effects of the Project beyond the Scientific/Scholarly Field

Our project has engaged actively in public dissemination by communicating scholarly results in an understandable way to a wider audience via the *StoryMaps* in our Frontend “Maps of Power” (<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/atlas>; Stories). The users can freely access four *StoryMaps*, which explain the historical context, introduce research questions and digital tools, show the value of the database as well as its data and offer interpretations.

Moreover, M. St. Popović has been teaching 12 courses (Vorlesung, Proseminar, Seminar) on Historical Geography, History of the Medieval Balkans and Orthodox Church History at the University of Vienna (<https://ufind.univie.ac.at/de/person.html?id=37351&teaching=true>) during the duration of the project (2017-2022). He also taught at an online doctoral workshop entitled “Searching Digital: Methods, Tools, and Standards of Research in Digital Humanities” organised by the Centre for the Study of the Balkans (Goldsmiths University of London, June 2021).

In all of these he introduced the sources, the methods, the workflow, the digital tools and the results of the project to the students and engaged with them in fruitful discussions.

4. Other Important Aspects

Eighth articles deriving from our project have been published. Five articles are in press at the moment. Moreover, a monograph by V. Zervan is in preparation (cf. above, 2.).

All publications can be freely accessed and downloaded as pdf via:

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/subprojects/borderzones#publications>

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/balkan/subprojekte/borderzones#publikationen>

28 papers have been given at conferences and workshops by our project team specifically on our project.

A complete list of papers can be found via:

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/subprojects/borderzones#presentations>

<https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/balkan/subprojekte/borderzones#votr%C3%A4ge>

Finally, we have organised a Working Meeting (International Workshop) in Vienna in October 2019 (cf. above, 1.1).