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The Zadruga: An Anglo-American View of Balkan Social Structures

Joel Halpern, *university of massachusetts, Amherst*

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Joel M. Halpern / USA /

THE ZADRUGA: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN VIEW

This paper concentrates on the South Slav extended family as viewed by observers writing in English, principally British and American. Specifically included are the writings of nineteenth century travellers and, in the twentieth century, the observations of ethnographers, sociologists and anthropologists. These are compared to analyses made by Slavic scholars. Most of the material is from Yugoslavia, and data from Bulgaria is also included.

The main focus of this presentation is the question of social change as it has been occurring over the past century in both urban and rural areas. In discussing how village life is being reformulated and urban life modified, and the significance of the urbanization of the village and the peasantization of the town (as an example of a world-wide process), a number of important categories of change must be considered. These include the nature and structure of social relationships within the nuclear family, the extended family, and the household, of which groups are included within the concept of the zadruga and aid us in defining this social unit. Also considered are forms of political and economic organization beyond kinship and residence units, specifically their relationships to local communities, towns, counties and ultimately the national state. An important factor here is the changing nature of the relationship between the zadruga unit and the state in terms of the services which the former was expected to provide for the state and the extent of the obligations which the national state assumed with respect to the zadruga. The increasingly close reciprocal relationships between the two have been commented on by many observers and are discussed in this paper, particu

larly with regard to the impact of the state's assumption of services formerly provided by the zadruga unit for its members.

In addition there are the physical settings in which the zadruga has operated and the ways in which ecological patterns have changed over time. A crucial factor here is the extent to which communities have been planned by state action, or their form determined by political as distinct from ecological pressures. Involved here are the social consequences of the spatial arrangements of communities, be they villages or towns.

An obvious division against which to measure change is that between the pre- and post-war periods, but in order to gain perspective it is necessary to extend the pre-war period back approximately a century, when industrial development had not yet begun and urban life was relatively little developed (that is, the administrative, trade and religious functions existed but were limited), with the majority of the population being primarily subsistence farmers.

The process of modernization has greatly altered the traditional structure of the patriarchal household in the town as well as in the village. This paper touches on the ways in which the zadruga has changed in response to differing historical and ecological factors, being given new life by the Turkish conquest, adapting to mountain pastoralism, frontier guard duty and urban trade as well as being a source of migratory labor. Modern pressures toward an urban-focused society are irreversible, and the function of kin relationships is altering in a fundamental way. The paper concludes with an attempt to assess this situation.