

**Ante Bećir: “Review of Z. Nikolić Jakus (ed.), *Povijest Hrvata: Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu. Hrvatske zemlje u ranome srednjem vijeku (oko 550 – oko 1150)*”**

**Ante Bećir**

Faculty of Croatian Studies  
University of Zagreb  
[ante.becir@gmail.com](mailto:ante.becir@gmail.com)

Zrinka Nikolić Jakus (ed.), *Povijest Hrvata: Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu. Hrvatske zemlje u ranome srednjem vijeku (oko 550 – oko 1150)*. Biblioteka Povijest Hrvata 1. Matica hrvatska: Zagreb, 2015, pp.656; ISBN: 9789531509428.

In November 2015, the first volume of the new edition “*Biblioteka Povijest Hrvata*” came out of print. The volume was solemnly presented at the premises of Matica hrvatska on February 10, 2016, as part of the celebration of the Day of the Matica hrvatska. Eighteen prominent scholars, primarily historians, employed in various scholarly institutions in the Republic of Croatia<sup>1</sup> participated in its realization. The Editor-in-Chief of the volume is Zrinka Nikolić Jakus, while Zoran Ladić is the editor of the entire edition.

At the very beginning of the volume there are two prefaces (pp. xiii-xxx). The first preface by Zoran Ladić is about the edition, while the other, by Zrinka Nikolić Jakus, considers the volume. Zoran Ladić emphasizes the importance of specialization in historiography that led the editorial team to gather more scholars. The main influences were two Croatian syntheses from the series *Hrvatska i Europa*, and *Povijest Hrvata*.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the *New Cambridge Medieval History* synthesis served as a great model. He also notes that the editorial office has taken the stand against any political pressure, an obvious example of which, according to Ladić, is *Historija naroda Jugoslavije*.<sup>3</sup> Given that the authors are members of the younger or middle generation of historians, the use of contemporary historiographical trends is not surprising. Zrinka Nikolić Jakus states that the uniqueness of this volume also lies in the opening of topics that have so far been neglected in

---

<sup>1</sup> The only exception is Dr Magdalena Skoblar from the British School at Rome.

<sup>2</sup> Supičić (1997); Šanjek (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Grafenauer, Perović & Šidak (1953).

historiography. It is about environmental issues, everyday life, economy, law, military, spirituality and family.

The first thematic unit contains papers that present general historical overview (pp. 1-341). It begins with the contribution of Hrvoje Gračanin entitled 'Kraj antike na hrvatskim prostorima' (pp. 3-32). The author presents in detail the political situation in the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia from the 370s to the 560s. Afterwards comes the chapter 'Pregled političke povijesti Hrvata u ranom srednjem vijeku' (pp. 37-71) by Ante Birin. At the beginning Birin deals with the first Slavic migrations in the period from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The author briefly addresses the theses about the migration of the Croats and switches to the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the paper is related to the process of the creation of the Croatian Principality in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and its further political development (a Kingdom from the 10<sup>th</sup> century) and characteristics until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the coming of the Hungarian Arpad dynasty to power. In the chapter 'Razvitak hrvatskog etničkog identiteta' (pp. 73-87) Neven Budak discusses different theses about the origin of the Croats and possible outlines of early medieval Croatian ethnogenesis. Chapters 'Razvoj političkih ustanova' (pp. 89-120) and 'Društvo' (pp. 123-131) are the work of Damir Karbić. The author, in the first paper, follows the development of the Principality's institutions of the 9<sup>th</sup>, and the royal authority of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In the second paper, the most basic insight into early medieval social structures is presented. The chapter of Florence S. Fabijanec is entitled 'Gospodarstvo' (pp. 133-157). The author summarizes early medieval branches of economy that largely followed the Roman/Mediterranean tradition. In the chapter 'Ustroj hrvatske vojske u ranome srednjem vijeku' (pp. 159-171) Ante Nazor provides a basic insight into how the Croatian early medieval army worked.

The following two chapters, 'Pokršćavanje i rana kristijanizacija Hrvata' (pp. 173-199) and 'Crkva i vjerski život' (pp. 201-235), are authored by Trpimir Vedriš who addresses 'the eternal topics' of Croatian medievalists. He clearly separates formal baptism from a long and reversible process of Christianization. Vedriš thinks how the questions of who and from where the Croats migrated represent only one possible approach to the problem. The indigenous population and thus the continuity of Christianity in the Roman province of Dalmatia, which eventually transformed into Peter Brown's 'micro-Christendoms', should be also taken into account. However, only after the Frankish expansion can a targeted and comprehensive restoration of the ecclesiastic organization be traced. Vedriš also discusses archaeological research of the pre-Christian Slavic past. Damir Karbić and Branka Grbavac wrote the chapter entitled 'Pravo i pragmatična pravna pismenost' (pp. 237-252). The early Middle Ages inherited the law which

experienced two editions in the late Roman Empire (*Codex Theodosianus* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and *Corpus Iuris Civilis* in the 6<sup>th</sup> century) and were the starting point for later reception. Particular attention is paid to the development of canon law, judicial procedure and the notary institution, as well as the importance of the chartulary as a source for the early Middle Ages. 'Intelektualni i kulturni razvoj. Latinska pismenost hrvatskoga ranog srednjeg vijeka' (pp. 255-269) is the work of Mirjana Matijević Sokol. Based on epigraphic and written sources, the author chronologically follows the development of Latin literacy in the Croatian area in the early Middle Ages. Tomislav Galović then deals with the topic of 'Hrvatska glagoljička, ćiriljska i latinička pisana kultura u ranom srednjem vijeku' (pp. 273-292). Similar to the previous work, the author mainly follows the development of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic literacy of the Croatian early Middle Ages. 'Likovna umjetnost i arhitektura' (pp. 297-320) by Magdalena Skoblar is the next topic. The paper begins with Roman architectural activity in the 5<sup>th</sup> and especially the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The period between the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century remains insufficiently known as it is very difficult to detect building activities. The architectural activities resumes with the appearance of the Franks and the establishment of the Croatian Principality at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Skoblar follows the development of early medieval Croatian architecture and art and the appearance of the Romanesque in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Benedictines had a great role in these events, and Benedictine churches in Kvarner, Nin, Zadar and Split are also analysed. The final work in this unit is 'Privatni život' (pp. 333-341) by Zrinka Nikolić Jakus. The paper deals with aspects of everyday life: family, nutrition, housing, clothing and jewelry, the health of early medieval people and various kinds of games for entertainment.

The next thematic unit deals with regional histories (pp. 345-490). The first work in the sequence is 'Sjeverozapadna Hrvatska u ranome srednjem vijeku' (pp. 345-364) by Hrvoje Gračanin and Silvija Pisk. The authors study the area of northwestern Croatia in the Avar period (the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century) and, since 796, the period of Frankish rule. They particularly focus on Croatian-Hungarian territorial delimitations in the early Middle Ages. Hrvoje Gračanin also writes on the topic of 'Sjeveroistočna Hrvatska u ranome srednjem vijeku' (pp. 367-382). The chapter is conceived in the same way as the previous one, but it deals with northeastern Croatia. In the next chapter 'Istra i Kvarner u ranome srednjem vijeku' (pp. 385-412) Maurizio Levak emphasizes the militarization of Istrian and Kvarner society in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century due to the increasingly dangerous Slavs. For this reason, they have, through time, united civil and military functions in the figure of the *magister militum* in Istria. The author also describes the Frankish government and the period of German and Venetian dominance. In

the chapter 'Gorski kotar, Lika i Krbava' (pp. 415-425), Ante Birin, starting from the thesis that *dux* Borna was the leader of the Guduscani people, describes the area of Gorski kotar, Lika and Krbava as the first seat of the early medieval Croatian state and as an area of great political importance later. The next paper 'Sjeverna i srednja Dalmacija u ranome srednjem vijeku' (pp. 427-458) was written by Ivan Basić. The author chronologically follows the historical events from Justinian's reconquista until the appearance of the Arpad dynasty on the Croatian throne. The paper is focused on changes in political history, but it devotes attention to social, administrative and cultural aspects. The next chapter entitled 'Južna Dalmacija' (pp. 463-476) was written by Ivan Majnarić and Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar. The authors emphasize the continuity of settlements in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. They describe the first Sclaviniae (Slavic Principalities) in the area of southern Dalmatia and the organization of the church life. The last work of this unit is 'Bosna i Hum/Hercegovina' (pp. 479-490) by Goran Bilogrivić. Bilogrivić provides an insight into the position of medieval Bosnia and Hum in the period of Avar rule, Frankish expansion, the establishment of surrounding Slavic political formations, and explains the limited influence of the Hungarian kings.

The last thematic unit deals with Croatia in the wider geopolitical context (pp. 495-628). It begins with the work of Hrvoje Gračanin, 'Bizant na hrvatskom prostoru u ranome srednjem vijeku' (pp. 495-512). The author depicts the political and military presence of the Eastern Roman Empire / Byzantium in the Croatian area from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Ivan Majnarić compiled two successive chapters, 'Karolinško, Otonsko i Sveto Rimsko Carstvo' (pp. 517-530) and 'Papinstvo' (pp. 533-549). In the first paper, Majnarić presents the characteristics of the Carolingian Empire: the self-respect of the Franks as a chosen people, and the emperor as a Christian ruler in charge of the salvation of the *ecclesia* – the Christian world. The need for the baptism of pagan peoples led to the territorial expansion and, to some extent, the stability of the Empire. The Carolingian ruler concept was taken over by the later Holy Roman Emperors. In the second paper, the author gives an overview of the history of the Papacy and early medieval Biblical interpretations of universal papal authority. Then follows the work of Lovorka Čoralić under the title 'Venecija' (pp. 549-562). The paper deals with the Byzantine roots of Venice at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> century, which was then organized as a military dukedom. The paper chronologically tracks the ever greater degree of independence of Venice in opposition to Constantinople. The emphasis is on Croatian-Venetian relations throughout history. Zrinka Nikolić Jakus wrote the chapter 'Južna Italija' (pp. 563-578). The author focuses on the early medieval Southern Italian-Slavic relations between the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It

underlines the significant presence of Slavic toponyms and anthroponyms in certain areas of southern Italy, particularly on the Gargan Peninsula. After this appears the chapter of Trpimir Vedriš under the title 'Balkanske sklavinije i Bugarska' (pp. 581-606) analyzing Balkan Slavic political creations with a special emphasis on Bulgaria. The author tries to show their mutual relations, as well as the special connection between Bulgaria and Byzantium. Finally, the last work in the aforementioned thematic unit and the book in general is 'Ugarska' (pp. 609-628), written by Zrinka Nikolić Jakus. The chapter provides a concise overview of Hungarian history from the Hungarian relocation (9<sup>th</sup> century) to the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. The author also refers to the Croatian-Hungarian 'Slavonian issue', that is the question of the control of the Drava-Sava interfluve in the early Middle Ages. The volume also contains Indeks of personal names (pp. 631-643, compiled by Ivan Šutić), Indeks of geographical terms (pp. 643-655, compiled by Goran Budeč) and List of contributors (p. 655).

After reading this volume, it is easy to notice the interdisciplinarity, comparative approaches, the shifting focus from political history to other, neglected, historiographical issues, and the use of other contemporary historiographical methods. It can be said freely that it introduces a lot of freshness into Croatian historiography and it also shows how medievalistics have once again proved to be a historiographical 'avant-garde'. All in all, the volume is recommended to anyone interested in medieval Croatian history.

### **Bibliography:**

**Grafenauer, B., Perović, D. & Šidak, J.** (eds.) (1953) *Historija naroda Jugoslavije*, Vol. 1 (Zagreb).

**Supičić, I.** (ed.) (1997) *Srednji vijek (VII.-XII. stoljeće). Rano doba hrvatske kulture*. Hrvatska i Europa. Kultura, znanost i umjetnost 1 (Zagreb), also published in English as *Croatia in the early Middle Ages: A cultural survey*. Croatia and Europe 1 (London & Zagreb, 1999).

**Šanjek, F.** (ed.) (2003) *Povijest Hrvata 1: Srednji vijek* (Zagreb).