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MIGRATIONS IN THE SKOPJE VALLEY IN THE 19TH CENTURY – BETWEEN JOVAN F.
TRIFUNOSKI’S ANTHROPOGEOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND
THE HISTORICAL SOURCES

Abstract: In the paper, the comparison is drawn between Yugoslav anthropogeographer Jovan F. Trifunoski’s anthropogeographic research done in the Skopje Valley from the late 1940s to the late 1960s and the published authentic census archive material from the period of the Ottoman rule. Trifunoski’s research is thorough and detailed. However, regarding migrations, especially the migrations of the Albanian population, inevitable imprecision and mistakes can be noted. The migrations and the locals’ oral tradition concerning these processes are illustrated in several Skopje villages. Compared to the Ottoman census records of the 1830s and the 1840s, this information is frequently blurry and imprecise, and at times inaccurate.

Keywords: migrations, anthropogeography, Skopje Valley, Ottoman censuses, Jovan F. Trifunoski

Jovan F. Trifunoski (1914–1997), a scholar that is little known to the broader academic community today, was one of the most industrious and dedicated scholars and researchers in Socialist Macedonia. He lectured at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Skopje and was one of the founders of the University in Skopje. Born in the village of Vrutok in Gorni Polog, he graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje before the Second World War and obtained his Ph.D. degree from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Institute of Ethnography in Belgrade in 1950. (Радовановић М. 1998: 173–174). Trifunoski was one of the followers of Jovan Cvijić’s school of anthropogeography. Together with a number of his colleagues, throughout his entire career, he stayed committed to Cvijić’s efforts and the scholarly idea of studying the population of the Balkan Peninsula “from village to village.” At the turn of the 20th century, in society and academia, anthropogeography was defined as a “national discipline” expected to set the course of the established national ideology.

The academic environment in Belgrade had a decisive influence on Trifunoski’s scholarly and ideological views that he retained throughout his life. His discourse as a researcher and scholar was not always in tune with the official ideological narrative in Socialist Macedonia. It was not until the 1990s in Belgrade that he overtly published some of his ideological and political opinions. (Трифуноски, 1995). Upon retiring, he left for Belgrade, where he died.

His decades-long anthropogeographic research began before the Second World War in the regions of Kumanovo and Preševo. He then used the results of his early work for his doctoral dissertation “Crna Gora of Kumanovo and Preševo,” (Трифуноски 1951), which he defended at the Serbian Institute of Ethnography in 1950. In the early 1940s, he also studied the Kačanik Gorge. (Трифуноски 1950). The second half of the 1940s and the 1950s were the most fruitful period of Trifunoski’s “research campaign.” In the prime of his life, having accumulated experience as a researcher, he traveled on foot the length and breadth of the Skopje Valley, Polog, Pelagonija, and Ovče Pole in Macedonia parts of Southern Serbia. He had a zeal for research until the end of his professorship. In the following decades, the 1960s and the 1970s, he researched the Kočani Valley, the region of Veles, the region of Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka, Debarca, the region of Ohrid, and the region of Struga.¹

Based on his research, Trifunoski published numerous papers, articles, contributions, as well as several monographs. Most of his monographs were published in the edition “Насеља и порекло становништва” of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU),² while some were published in Zagreb in “Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena”. Only very few of his monographs were published by his alma mater. (Трифуноски 1952; Трифуноски 1958).³

He studied the Skopje Valley from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. His findings were published in several articles and six monographs. (Трифуноски 1952; 1954; 1955; 1958; 1964; 1971). Today, Jovan Trifunoski’s anthropogeographic research of the Skopje Valley is an outstanding source of information on the economic history, migrations, toponymy, family structure, etc. As in the other areas in which he did research, Trifunoski attempted to investigate migrations in great detail, particularly the migrations of the Albanian population in the Skopje Valley, which were an integral part of his scholarly interest.

Data on people settling and leaving were collected from every village. Information date back to the end of the 18th century, the furthestmost period that the local population’s family history and tradition reached. The more recent migrations closer to the research period have also been confirmed in the historical sources. We are going to cite several examples from the published research on the migrations of the last Christian households in the second half of the 19th century from the villages of Glumovo, Dolno Svilare, and Nikištani, which were also confirmed by the Ottoman census records of 1832–

1 The anthropogeographic research in Macedonia by Serbian scholars began before the Balkan Wars (Томић 1905). The research continued in the period between the two World Wars in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia (Радовановић В. 1924; Смиљанић 1925; 1935; Филиповић 1935; Јовановић 1935). After the Second World War, this research in Macedonia was continued not only by Trifunoski but also by Professor Branislav Rusić, whose undertaking, however, remained largely unpublished. (Ристески 1997; Илиевски 2015).

2 His paper “Битољско – прилепска котлина” was posthumously published by SANU. (Трифуноски 1998).

3 He privately published some of his papers, which was not common in Socialist Macedonia.

1833,⁴ according to which there were seventeen Christian households in these villages.⁵ In the following decades, the local Christians gradually moved out, mostly to the neighboring Christian villages. Trifunoski recorded the households that relocated from Glumovo to Vučidol (Volkovo), from Dolno Svilare to Kučkovo and from Nikištani to Novo Selo and Brazda. (Трифуноски 1964: 94, 98; 1971: 74).

However, there are numerous examples where the information collected through field research does not coincide with the authentic census material the Ottomans had gathered and does not coincide either wholly or partly with Trifunoski's chronology of migrations. In this paper, we will cite several of the numerous examples in the Skopje valley.

Characteristic is the example of the village of Studena Bara.⁶ Trifunoski conducted field research in the village in 1953. Based on his findings, he wrote: "In the beginning, Studena Bara was an Orthodox Slav village. Most of whom were originally from Albania (for example, Debar and other parts), started to settle in the early 19th century. As a result, most of the longtime residents left the place... In the middle of the 19th century, there were seven autochthonous Christian and eighty Muslim houses." (Трифуноски 1964: 54).

However, the Ottoman census records of the 1830s and the 1840s provide a completely different picture of the ethnic and religious structure of the population and its migrations. In 1832–1833, 13 Muslim households with 39 male members, or approximately 78 residents (assuming there were just as many females), and 41 Christian households with 134 male members, or approximately 268 residents, were recorded in the village. (Akin Zorba 2018: 31; Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 224–225). Based on Trifunoski's findings, one could expect the structure of the population in the village to have changed by the time of the next census. However, the next census of 1844–1845⁷ revealed a relatively similar structure of the population in the village. This time around, in Studena Bara, 28 Christian households were recorded, which means their number had indeed dropped but not by as much as Trifunoski said, and there were 12 Muslim households, (Ѓорѓиев 2019: 11 - 50) the number of which noted only a slight decline instead of notably climbing up.

4 The primary source of information on the size and structure of the population of Skopje Valley in that period is the Ottoman census taken in 1831 and the registers of the population run by the Ottoman authorities. The modern Ottoman counting statistics began with the census of 1831, when the first general census of the male population in the country was held. (Karpat 1985: 20; Shaw 1978: 325 - 326)

5 In the early 1830s, 6 Christian households were recorded in the village of Glumovo, 5 in Dolno Svilare, and 6 in Nikištani. (Akin Zorba 2018: 33–35; Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 275, 280, 438). In these villages, Albanians professing Islam were the majority of the population. In all three villages, 58 Muslim households were recorded.

6 The village is close to the Pčinja river, geographically in the Skopje Valley but administratively in Kumanovo. Until 1912, the village was part of the Skopje Kaza.

7 It was a population census where information was collected about every resident of a particular administrative unit possessed. The records are known as "Temettuat defteri" (Ѓорѓиев 2002a: 31)

In the 1830s and the 1840s, one would expect a considerable number of Muslims to have settled in the village so that there would have been eighty Muslim households by the middle of the century. However, such migrations did not happen and were not recorded in the Ottoman register of the population, which took note of all the migrations of the Muslim population in and out of the Skopje Kaza between 1832 and 1836. The Ottoman authorities meticulously recorded the migrations in and out of all the villages of the Kaza, including those occurring from one neighbor of the city of Skopje to another. In the village of Studena Bara, in the period mentioned above, no such migrations took place.

Similar is the example of the Skopje village of Mojanci, at the southeastern foot of Skopska Crna Gora. Trifunoski did field research in the village in 1954. After talking to the residents of Mojanci and the neighboring villages, he wrote: “In the first half of the 19th century, about 135 years ago (c. 1820, or ten years before the Ottoman census B.I.), the Macedonians took in an Arbanasi to work as a cow keeper. His name was Adem. He married a local Macedonian girl. He thus started the Arbanasi tribe known today as Demovci. In the middle of the century, the ancestors of another Arbanasi tribe known as Idrizovci or Ashani settled in the village. As the Arbanasi community rapidly grew, all Macedonians eventually left Mojanci. The last Macedonians are said to have left Mojanci one night during the Serbian-Turkish War in 1878. They went to Serbia.” (Трифуноски 1964: 23)

As in the previous example of the village of Studena Bara, in this case, the Ottoman census records of 1832–33 and 1844–45 provide a completely different picture of the religious and ethnic structure of the village of Mojanci and the local migrations. No Christians were counted in the village during these censuses. In other words, only Muslims were recorded in the village. (Akin Zorba 2018: 32; Ѓорѓиев 2019: 464–480). Hence, Trifunoski’s statement that the last Macedonians left the village in 1878 is not accurate, not confirmed by the authentic census records.

In the register of the population of 1832–33, all the Muslim male residents of the village of Mojanci were recorded. If we trusted what Trifunoski wrote, we should expect the village to have had one Muslim household, that of the Adem mentioned above, the founder of the oldest Albanian tribe in the village, who settled sometime around 1820. However, a total of 17 Muslim families were recorded in the register. Adem is not found in the records. However, the names of five males are recorded, those of Bektash, Husein, Mehmed, Emin, and Iljaz, Adem’s sons, who lived in three families. (Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 242) At the time, they were aged 28 to 44, and they were likely the sons of Adem, the man from Trifunoski’s research, who had already died by the time the census was taken. Taking all this into consideration, Adem most probably settled in the village at least 40 years earlier.

However, it cannot be confirmed with certainty that it was Adem that Trifunoski wrote about who settled in the village because the register frequently recorded the origin of the settled tribes, too. Thus, for example, in the records of 1832–33 for the village of Mojanci, the last recorded family is that of 30-year-old Omer, son of Tahir, about whom it is also said that he was initially from Pristina. However, no such information is given about the sons of the possible “founder of the village.”⁸

8 There are several examples of the origin of the family being also recorded. In the records for the village of Kaplanli, present-day Katlanovo, three families are described as originally being from

A similar tradition of Albanians settling in Macedonian villages is also connected with the village of Raštak, which, according to Trifunoski, was a purely Macedonian village by the middle of the 19th century. The local population's oral tradition led him to conclude that the ancestor of the first Albanian tribe in the village came from the region of Gnjilane in the middle of the 19th century as a cow keeper (similar to what happened in Mojanci). In this case, too, the sources contradict the tradition and oral history. In Raštak, in the early 1830s, in addition to the 27 Christian households with 109 recorded male inhabitants, or approximately 218 Christian residents, there were also 8 Muslim households with 35 male inhabitants or approximately 70 Muslim residents. (Akin Zorba 2018: 32) The census records show that Muslims were in the village before the chronological frame that Trifunoski established based on the local tradition. We cannot say exactly when they settled, yet the families are fairly branched. According to the census records, there were also Muslims who left the village, undoubtedly for economic reasons, that is, due to agrarian overpopulation. For example, of the three brothers aged 25 to 38 who, with their families, formed a single household, one left in 1834 and settled in Skopje. (Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 32)

Let us also look at the Skopje village of Batinci, in the basin of the Markova Reka river. According to Trifunoski's research of 1950, the Macedonians, who lived in the village as tenants (*çiftçi*), started relocating towards the middle of the 19th century. Muslims called Arbanasi, and Macedonian Muslims called Torbeši began settling in the village about 90 or 80 years before Trifunoski did his research, sometime between 1870 and 1880. (Трифуноски 1958: 117 – 119). In this case, the Ottoman census records of the 1830s confirm what Trifunoski wrote about the relocation of the Christian population, mostly to the neighboring Skopje villages. However, as was the case with the earlier cited examples, the set timeframe – the 1870s – for settling the Muslim population does not coincide with the authentic census records. In 1832–33, in the village of Batinci, 9 Muslim households with 31 male members, or approximately 62 Muslim residents, and 14 Christian households with 43 male members, or approximately 86 Christian residents, were recorded. (Akin Zorba 2018: 34; Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 341–343).

There are similar examples in several villages in the valley of the Kadina Reka river, too. In the village of Dejkovec, according to Trifunoski's research, the first Albanian households settled around 1830 (120 years before he did his research), that is, at the time the Ottoman census was taken. (Трифуноски: 1952, 72). We should expect the village to have had a Christian population and only recently settled Muslim households. However, the census statistics reveal a different structure. In the village recorded as Dejkova, there were 19 Muslim households. (Akin Zorba 2018: 35). There were no Christians in Dejkovec in the early 1830s. Undoubtedly, the migrations that Trifunoski wrote about – the settling of the Albanian tribes and the relocation of the Macedonian tribes – took place long before the first half of the 19th century, that is, considerably earlier relative to the chron-

the Veles Kaza. In the records for the village of Adzarlar, present-day Miladinovci, two families are described as originally being from the Štip Kaza. In the village of Rašče, Skopski Derven, one family is recorded as originally being from Dolni Debar. It was recorded that in 1834, in this same village, Mustafa, son of Hasan, came with his sons from Debar. In the village of Kovačevica, in the nahia of Kačanik, the 70-year-old Ahmed, son of Husein, was originally from Shkodër (Skadar). (Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 208, 244, 402–403, 457).

ological frame that he established for the settlement of many Albanian tribes in the region of Skopje.⁹

In the anthropogeographic research, there are also chronological inconsistencies as far as the relocation of the Slav population is concerned from the villages largely populated by Albanian Muslims. Trifunovski says that the Latinski tribe settled in the village of Radišani from the Kačanik village of Palivodenica. Based on the provided genealogy chart, we can conclude that this tribe settled in Radišani around 1860. (Трифуноски 1964: 8). However, no Christian population was recorded in the village of Palivodenica in early 1830 (Akin Zorba 2018: 36), which leads to the conclusion that the relocation of the Slav population from the village was taking place before the period that Trifunovski wrote about.

Very indicative is also the example of the village of Orlanci, in the northeastern part of the Skopje Valley, where anthropogeographic research was conducted in 1963. Most probably following the tradition in Orlanci and the neighboring villages, Trifunovski wrote: "...around the middle of the 19th century continuous conflicts began between the Muslim Arbanasi and the Christian Macedonians. The Arbanasi emerged victorious from this conflict. Because they could not live there anymore, the Macedonians left Orlanci. In the second half of the past century (19th century), this village, too, thus became an Arbanasi settlement." (Трифуноски: 1964, 25). As in most of the previous examples, in this case, the research does not coincide with the Ottoman census records of the 1830s and the 1840s. According to the census register of 1832–33, in the village of Orlanci, there were 9 Muslim households with 36 male members or approximately 72 residents. No Christians were recorded in the village. (Akin Zorba 2018: 32; Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 239–240). The demography was similar according to the census of 1844–45, too. Eight Muslim households were recorded in the village. There was no Christian population in Orlanci in the middle of the 1840s either. (Ѓоргиев 20026: 388–394). Hence, the conflicts in the village of the middle of the 19th century that Trifunovski wrote about probably happened much earlier or were the result of the local population's "made-up history."

⁹ Characteristic is also the example of the neighboring village of Dobrino in which, according to Trifunovski, the Albanian population settled in the first half of the 19th century, around 1820, from "the direction of Debar." (Трифуноски 1952: 77). According to his research in 1951, the first tribe that settled in the village was Lale or Salioski. It was Isen and his four sons, Sali, Alija, Emin, and Memish, that settled first. Isen was the great grandfather of 70-year-old Islam, who we assume provided his family history information. Sali is not found in the census records, but there is information on his brothers, Memish, age 42, Ali age 32, and Emin, age 28, sons of Abdulfetah, who lived together in a family community (zadruga). This case illustrates best how the foggy family tradition, that is to say, the oral history and "one's memory," can be unreliable. According to the census of 1832–33, the name of the four brothers' father was Abdulfetah and not Isen, whom Trifunovski designated as the founder of the oldest tribe in Dobrino and founder of the village. There is indeed information on the family in the census records of 1832–33, as mentioned above. However, these records reveal a completely different picture of the demography of the village of Dobrino where, according to Trifunovski, there should have been only a few recently settled Muslim households. However, the Ottoman census registers record as many as 24 Muslim households (Akin Zorba 2018: 35; Бислими, Шериф, Ибраими 2020: 292–294). As in the case of Dejkevce, the migrations in and out of Dobrino were taking place considerably earlier than the first decades of the 19th century.

Bearing these examples in mind, the question emerges of when and how Albanians settled in the Skopje valley. The research was done by anthropogeographer Jovan F. Trifunoski in the Skopje Valley after the Second World War (about 120 years after the first modern Ottoman census) is an important source of information for the area. However, his information about the chronology of migrations, particularly about the settling of the Albanian population in this area and about the age of the tribes, often cannot be confirmed in the demographic sources of the 1830s and the 1840s. J. Trifunoski insists on the prominent positions that also concern Polog, (Трифуноски 1976: 73 – 74), the Kačanik Gorge (Трифуноски 1951: 31) and other neighboring areas, according to which the Albanian population started settling in the Skopje Valley mostly from present-day Northern Albania in the last decades of the 18th century and the process continued until the middle of the 19th century. (Trifunoski 1988: 11, 19 – 29). Undoubtedly Albanian migrations to the Skopje Valley and the neighboring areas did happen during that period. However, this claim and the identified chronology of migrations are frequently mismatched for many villages and tribes. They are not always corroborated by the historical sources and the census registers, in which, among other things, the migrations that occurred at the time were also recorded.

Considering all this, we can conclude that Trifunoski and the confidence of his predecessors, while doing his research, made the methodological error of relying solely on the oral tradition and the locals' memory of their family history. Trifunoski usually marked the most remote ancestor that the locals could remember as the founder of the tribe that settled in a specific place and did not take into consideration the tribes that relocated or died out. Also, while doing some of his anthropogeographic research, Trifunoski did not make good use of the available historical sources. Scholarly papers today increasingly often focus on all of this (Шешум 2016: 37 – 51; Илиевски 2020: 131 - 149). Also, we cannot entirely exclude the impression that certain anthropogeographers were also under the influence of certain ideologies in studying migrations.

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