

■ **Die Serbisch-Orthodoxen in der  
habsburgischen Herzegowina**

*Heiner Grunert, Glauben im Hinterland. Die Serbisch-Orthodoxen in der habsburgischen Herzegowina 1878–1918 (Religiöse Kulturen im Europa der Neuzeit; Bd. 8), Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 2016, 588 S., 90,00 €*

The 1878 Treaty of Berlin reshaped the political map of the Balkans – but to what extent did it affect the lived experience of

the populations that were the objects of this transformation? Heiner Grunert's *Glauben im Hinterland*, the published version of his 2015 dissertation, takes up this important question for one particular group of people (Orthodox Serbs in Herzegovina) from one particular angle (confessional practice). During the forty years Grunert's work examines, Herzegovina was under Austro-Hungarian rule: from 1878 through 1908, the Habsburgs occupied and administered the still-officially-Ottoman territory, and in 1908 they annexed it outright and ruled it until the empire's collapse in 1918. The region's population was mostly Orthodox, with Catholic and Muslim minorities, making it somewhat of an outlier in the majority-Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Grunert divides his work between two distinct subjects. The first half of the book considers everyday religious practice: how the average Orthodox Serb experienced religious life under Habsburg rule. In the second half of the book, Grunert turns to the question of organization and leadership: how the church was reorganized and how the clergy worked within this new situation. Both halves are meticulously researched and plentifully illustrated, drawing on extensive source material from archives across the Balkans. Grunert relies on a combination of ecclesiastical and Habsburg administrative records, together with contemporary ethnographic and journalistic accounts of the region – which, as he rightly asserts, had their own ideological agenda but are rich descriptive sources, especially when it comes to reconstructing the ordinary lived experience of religion in the region.

As far as that religious *Alltag* is concerned, Grunert highlights three aspects of particular significance: holidays and festivals; family relationships, including mixed marriages; and interactions with religious Others. He argues that at the outset of Habsburg administration, all three of these areas were characterized by a conspicuously low level of official ecclesiastical involvement or instruction; religious life centered on the extended family,

rather than the parish. Over time, however, concerted efforts on the part of local priests and the church hierarchy – with Habsburg support – brought many rituals into the fold of the church. This was often not welcomed by the faithful and was also understandably accompanied by a sharpening of the boundaries between Orthodoxy and other local religious communities.

The first half of this book leaves the reader with the impression that the changes that were wrought to Serbian Orthodox life in Herzegovina after 1878 could plausibly have occurred even without the Habsburgs' arrival, and the impact that the Austro-Hungarian administration did have was indirect: only insofar as they hastened the arrival of »modernity« to the region. When it came to organizational structures, however, the Habsburgs' contribution was much more immediate.

This, then, is the story of the book's second half: the fundamental changes made after 1878 to the structure of the Orthodox Church in Herzegovina, from the highest levels of church hierarchy to individual parishes. Here we find chapters on the relationship between bishops and the Habsburg administration; the changing role of parishes in city and rural life; and the transformation of parish clergy into »religious experts«. By juxtaposing the gradual (though accelerating) changes to everyday religious life and the top-down imposition of structural change, Grunert's study reveals the complex interactions between these forces.

Indeed, the changes wrought by the arrival of Habsburg rule bore certain consequences that were not necessarily what officials had intended. Grunert suggests that Austro-Hungarian officials sought to standardize and professionalize the Orthodox Church as a counterweight to nationalism; accordingly, the first major push towards strengthening the church hierarchy followed on the heels of a popular uprising in 1882. But, as Grunert argues, »der Wandel religiösen Lebens der Orthodoxen der Herzegowina zwischen 1878 und 1918 zeigt anschaulich, wie imperiale Religions-

politik, eparchiale Kirchenreformen als auch politisierte städtische Laien mit oft gegensätzlichen Intentionen einen starken Ausbau von Kirchenstrukturen bedingten«. Eventually, as in several cases across the Austro-Hungarian realm, this strategy on the part of the Habsburg authorities largely backfired, as the clergy became an important driving force behind the national movement. In 1905, tensions between the clergy and the Habsburg administration on this point had grown so severe that the administration felt compelled to grant an *Autonomiestatut*, freeing the church from much close government oversight. These tensions grew even more acute, however, during the First World War, when the Habsburg government resorted to harsh repressive measures against the church and its faithful; Grunert devotes the final chapter of his book to these wartime developments.

The juxtaposition of the evolution of everyday religious life and changes to church structures and leadership that Grunert presents elucidates the greatest shift brought about the arrival of the Habsburgs in 1878: »Eine solche wechselseitige Stärkung der kirchlichen und staatlichen Verwaltung, die mit der Vereinheitlichung und Rationalisierung von Religion einherging, beschleunigte Konfessionalisierungsprozesse.« What makes Grunert's case study particularly well-chosen and useful for any scholar of religious history is that it is highly illustrative of the general trends in confessional practice in 19th century Europe – condensed into a tighter time frame thanks to the Habsburgs' presence in the century's final two decades. The codification and standardization of religious structures and practice is central to the history of Christianity in its many forms in 19th century. The concept of confessionalization that was first applied to the early modern era has fruitfully been adopted by scholars of 19th century religious history, and Grunert here helps identify what confessionalization might mean when the ruling government was in many ways uncomfortable with the confession they were attempting to regulate.

This case study of Herzegovina also speaks to the value of a complex understanding of the processes of secularization: »Laisierung und Profanisierung in weiten Bereichen« went hand in hand with the strengthening of the church as an institution. This meant a significant change in the role religion played in individuals' daily lives: as the role of the parish priest grew and he sought to bring traditional rituals under church control, the faithful's level of commitment to these rituals decreased. But that did not mean that the parish priest ceased to be an important figure in the community: it was just that now his importance stemmed as much from his involvement in education and family matters as from his more traditional religious functions.

*Glauben im Hinterland* is a valuable contribution to the burgeoning body of literature that reconsiders the realities of religious life in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the turn of the 20th century, especially as the Habsburgs struggled to integrate the Balkans. Grunert admirably demonstrates the challenges and contradictions of Habsburg policy towards non-Catholic populations; beyond this contribution to the field of Habsburg history broadly conceived, his rich descriptions of religious and social life in newly-Habsburg Herzegovina will be of interest to any scholar of the history of the Balkans.

KATHERINE YOUNGER  
(VIENNA/NEW HAVEN)