

SEASONAL SETTLEMENT

IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY
MODERN COUNTRYSIDE

edited by PIERS DIXON & CLAUDIA THEUNE

RURALIA XIII



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Transhumance in medieval Serbia

Examples from the Pešter Plateau and northwestern slopes of the Prokletije Mountains

*Uglješa Vojvodić**

Abstract

Extensive animal husbandry was one of the main economic branches in the medieval Serbian state. Its development was enhanced by the favourable geographic and climate characteristics of the region. An important role was also played by the availability of common pastures to all social groups up to the mid-14th century. These circumstances influenced the development of transhumant movements of livestock breeders – *vlachs* (as a social category) – from summer mountain pastures and winter abodes in river valleys and the Adriatic coast, where a favourable Mediterranean climate was predominant. Certain changes occurred in the 13th and first half of the 14th century, when Serbian rulers removed high-altitude pastures (*planine*) from the body of common lands collectively owned by villages and incorporated them into the monastery estates of their endowments. In addition to high-altitude pastures (*planine*), the monasteries were also given groups of *vlachs*, who thereby became tied to a certain territory. This was certainly a contributing factor in the founding of semi-sedentary livestock-breeding settlements at the foot of the designated pastures. A part of the population remained in these settlements over the summer and gradually took up agriculture. Although the question of *vlachs* and *vlach* settlements (*katuni*) has been thoroughly examined in Yugoslavian historiography and ethnography, unfortunately no relevant efforts have been made so far to discover the remains of winter and summer settlements used for animal husbandry and subject them to archaeological research. Over the last two years, smaller-scale archaeological surveys in the area of the Pešter and Sjenica Plateaus and the northwestern slopes of the Prokletije Mountains have been done. This research has shown in the example of the Pešter village of Gračane that archaeological methods can be used to determine the cattle-herding character of a medieval rural settlement. On the other hand, the survey of the slopes of Prokletije Mountains has supplemented previous knowledge of the organisation of summer pastures at high altitudes. Specifically, it has discovered the existence of clear boundaries between summer settlements as well as the parcelisation of space within a single *katun* between the constituent families.

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Keywords: *medieval Serbia, common lands, semi-sedentary settlements, transhumance, vlachs, katun, sedentarisation.*

Résumé

La transhumance sur le territoire de la Serbie médiévale – deux exemples : les hautes plaines du plateau de Pešter et la partie nord-ouest de la chaîne des montagnes de Prokletije

L'élevage extensif présentait une des activités commerciales fondamentales du système politique de la Serbie médiévale. Les spécificités géographiques et climatiques favorables de ce territoire influençaient son développement comme la disponibilité des pâturages communs à toutes les catégories sociales de la société jusqu'à la moitié du XIV^e siècle. Ces circonstances exerçaient une influence importante sur le développement des déplacements saisonniers des éleveurs – valaques (comme catégorie sociale) – entre les pâturages montagneux d'été et les pâturages hivernaux dans les bassins fluviaux et la côte Adriatique, avec un climat méditerranéen favorable. Un changement important a eu lieu au XIII^e et au début du XIV^e siècle quand les seigneurs serbes ont exclu les pâturages de haute montagne de la propriété commune, les offrant en cadeaux aux monastères sous leur patronat. A la même occasion, ils les offraient également à des groupes des valaques, les rattachant ainsi, autrefois nomades, à un terrain bien précis. Cela influençait sans doute la formation des communautés semi-sédentaires d'élevage (*katuni*) aux pieds des montagnes offertes. Une partie de la population valaque restait dans ces communautés pendant l'été et commençait avec la cultivation de la terre. Bien que la question des valaques et de leurs communautés d'élevage a été bien traitée en détail dans l'historiographie et l'ethnographie yougoslave, les recherches archéologiques afin de retrouver les sites précis d'élevage hivernales et estivales font encore défauts. Or, pendant les deux dernières années, des prospections archéologiques pédestres ont été effectuées sur les champs de Sjenica et de Pešter ainsi que sur les versants nord-ouest de la chaîne des montagnes de Prokletije. Ces prospections montrent, à l'exemple du village Gračane de Pešter, que cette méthode archéologique nous permet de déterminer les caractéristiques d'élevage d'un site rural médiéval. En plus, la prospection pédestre aux versants de Prokletije nous a enrichi des connaissances sur l'organisation des pâturages d'été à une grande altitude. On y a su déterminer l'existence des frontières très strictes entre les différentes communautés (*katuni*), et même une répartition exacte du terrain entre les familles appartenant à une communauté (*katun*).

Mots-clés : Serbie médiévale, biens communaux, semi-sédentaires communautés, transhumance, valaques, katun, sédentarisation.

Zusammenfassung

Transhumanz im mittelalterlichen Serbien – Beispiele aus der Pešter (Peschter) Hochebene und aus dem nordwestlichen Gebiet des Prokletije-Gebirges

Extensive Viehzucht gehörte zur wirtschaftlichen Grundlage im serbischen mittelalterlichen Staatswesen. Die Entwicklung wurde durch günstige geografische und klimatische Bedingungen in der Region gefördert. Eine bedeutende Rolle spielte auch der Zugang zu den gemeinsamen Weideflächen für alle sozialen Schichten der Gesellschaft im Zeitraum bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts. Diese Umstände führten zur Entwicklung von transhumanen Bewegungen der Viehzüchter – Walachen (als soziale Kategorie) – zwischen den Weideflächen im Gebirge während des Sommers und dem Winterlager in den Flussniederungen sowie dem adriatischen Küstengebiet, wo ein überwiegend günstiges mediterranes Klima herrschte. Zu gewissen Veränderungen kam es im Laufe des 13. und in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts, als die Weideflächen im Hochgebirge von den serbischen Herrschern aus dem Gemeinbesitz ausgenommen und den im Klosterbesitz befindlichen Stiftungen geschenkt wurden. Zusammen mit den Regionen im Hochgebirge bekamen die Klöster Gruppen von Walachen zugeteilt, die man auf diese Weise an ein bestimmtes Gebiet gebunden hatte. Solches führte jedenfalls zu halbsesshaften sog. Katunen (*katuni*) als Gemeindeformen (*comune*) oder Gemeinschaften (*compagnia*) für Viehzucht in den vorgeschriebenen Gebirgsfußgebenden. Ein Teil der walachischen Bevölkerung verbrachte den Sommer in diesen Siedlungen und begann schrittweise Land zu bearbeiten. Trotz der *en Detail* erfassten Fragestellungen zu den Walachen und den walachischen Katunen in der jugoslawischen Geschichtsschreibung und Ethnografie, wurden bis dato keine bedeutenden Anstrengungen unternommen, um Reste der Viehzuchtsiedlungen in der Winter- und Sommerzeit aufzufinden und archäologisch zu untersuchen. In den vergangenen zwei Jahren wurden archäologische Surveys kleineren Umfangs auf dem Gebiet der Ebene um Sjenica und der Peschter Hochebene sowie der nordwestlichen Ausläufer des Prokletije-Gebirges unternommen. Diese Untersuchungen zeigen am Beispiel des Dorfes Gračane (Gratschane) auf der Peschter Hochebene, dass es archäologisch möglich ist, den durch Viehzucht geprägten Charakter einer ländlichen Siedlung im Mittelalter zu belegen. Andererseits ermöglichte die Begehung der Prokletije-Ausläufer eine Ergänzung der bestehenden Kenntnisse zur Organisation der im Hochgebirge befindlichen Weideflächen im Sommer. Es wurde nämlich zweifelsfrei festgestellt, dass unter den Katunen klare Grenzen herrschten, dass aber auch der Raum innerhalb eines Katuns unter den Familien, aus denen es gebildet wurde, aufgeteilt war.

Schlagwörter: Serbischen mittelalterlichen Staatswesen, gemeinsamen Weideflächen, halbsesshafte Siedlungen, Transhumanz, Walachen, Katun, Sedentarisation

Introduction

Based on recent research, seasonal movements related to production, distribution, trade, etc. were carried out all across Europe and other parts of the world (*Costello – Svensson 2018*). Certain differences are observed based on the regional geographical and climate distinctions. In order to deal with the mining, cattle breeding, fishing, beekeeping, etc., transhumant movements were significant for the economy of medieval Serbia. Despite that fact, transhumant movements and temporary settlements associated with seasonal economic activities were outside the range of past archaeological research. Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of research conducted by historians and ethnologists, and presents an attempt to include previous and newly obtained results of archaeological surveys and excavations in the debate. Since the scale and frequency of all seasonal movements in medieval times is beyond the scope of this paper, the emphasis will be on the extensive cattle breeding and seasonal movements of sheepherders in the area of medieval Serbia.

Previous research

Transhumance and the question of the professional herders – *vlachs* (*vlasi* in Serbian) – have been the main topic of several academic conferences and papers written by Yugoslavian historians and ethnographers. Although earlier scholars did outline the method and main course of research (*Jiriček 1879; Novaković 1965; Dedijer 1914, 1916*), a significant upturn was achieved during the multidisciplinary symposia held in Sarajevo in 1961 and 1973 (*Sarajevo 1963; Sarajevo 1983*) and in Belgrade in 1975 (*Belgrade 1976*). Significant recent research has also been conducted by historian Zef Mirdita (*2004, 2009*). Animal husbandry and *vlachs* in the medieval period and during Ottoman rule have recently been the topic of a local journal (*Braničevski glasnik 2010*). This previous research on transhumance was largely undertaken by historians. Based on comparative analyses of data provided by written sources preserved from medieval and Ottoman times, these studies were focused on the interpretations of legal provisions and prohibitions for *vlachs* and their rights and duties to the ruler. Though providing many new insights into the life of the *vlachs* and cattle breeding during the Middle Ages, this scholarship unfortunately remained purely paper based: field research was neglected, and no attempt was made to locate medieval seasonal settlements.

The reduced scope of archaeological research of medieval rural communities and their settlements in Serbia also affected the investigation of these ‘marginal’ locations and poorly preserved remains of seasonal settlements. That was the result of unrepresentative and chronologically unspecific artifacts discovered in few excavated rural

houses. Another contributing factor to this situation were difficulties in the chronological identification of the remains of seasonal settlements, due to the chronological insensitivity of simple residential structures and the lack of movable archaeological evidence in them. More recent small-scale surveys, jointly undertaken by experts from the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade and the Museum of Novi Pazar, represent some of the pioneering attempts to include archaeologists in the research on seasonal animal husbandry in this area. They will be presented in the following text, along with an overview of the results of research undertaken so far.

Much significant ethnographic research was carried out in the 20th century. A particularly relevant part of this research was carried out in the regions where the tradition of transhumant pastoralism still survives. The most relevant are Milisav Lutovac’s written reports about 19th- and 20th-century livestock herding in the area of the Pešter and Sjenica Plateaus and the northwestern parts of the Prokletije Mountains (*Lutovac 1933, 1962, 1973, 1977*).

Vlachs in medieval Serbia

The people predominantly engaged in animal husbandry in the territory of the medieval Serbia were named *vlachs*. Even though the debate about medieval *vlachs* in the Balkans is extensive and as such lies beyond the scope of this paper, it is of particular importance to note that the term *vlach* was also used for the Romanised inhabitants of the Balkans (*Cvetković 2012, 20, 30; Maksimović 2017, 402*). Some scholars argue that the origin of these nomad cattlemen is to be found in Roman and probably prehistoric times (*Mirdita 2009; Gušić 1962*). An examination of the modern calendar of herdsmen from the Prokletije Mountains conducted by Branimir Gušić showed that the traces of pagan rituals can be recognised in the customs of modern sheepherders (*Gušić 1962*). In view of that, it is important to highlight the significance of a gradual influx of a Slavic element into *vlach* groups during the Middle Ages (*Mirdita 2009, 50; Kursar 2013, 117*).

The name *vlach* referred to all herdsmen over the course of the Middle Ages, regardless of their origin, as Stojan Novaković, one of the greatest Serbian historiographers emphasised (*Novaković 1965, 29*). This claim is generally accepted and has been verified based on the data contained in available written sources, mostly from preserved monastic charters from the 13th and 14th centuries, as well as other medieval documents that defined the rights and duties of *vlachs*. In other words, the term *vlach* was used during the Late Middle Ages to define a social category that, within the medieval Serbian society, meant cattlemen

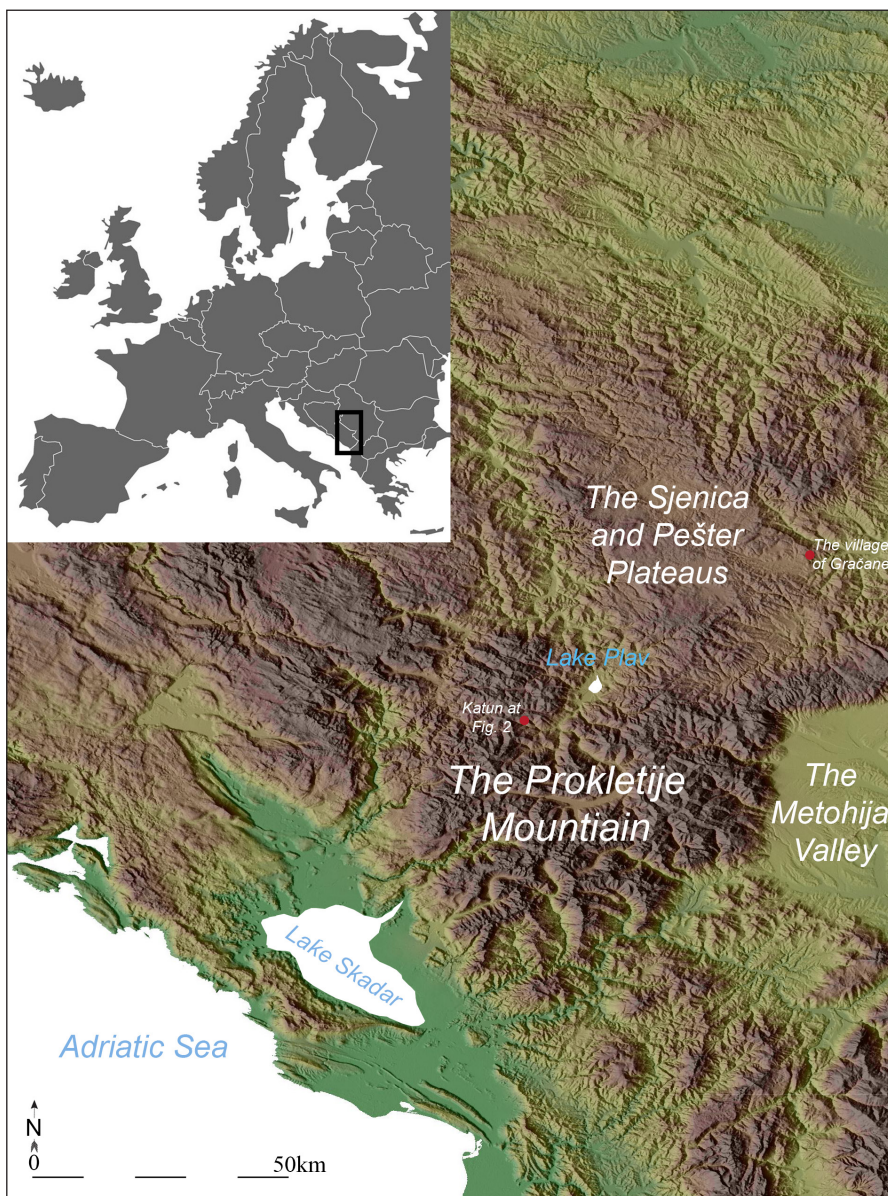


Fig. 1. Map of the examined area
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who lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic life (Maksimović 2017, 402). Their settlements, usually located at higher altitudes, were called *katuns* (*katuni*). During the 14th century, *vlachs* started to establish their *katuns* in the parish among agricultural villages, which will be discussed later. According to medieval written sources, in addition to their lifeways, they differed from farmers in terms of the taxes they paid and the duties they had towards their feudal lords (Mihaljčić 2006, 41-42, 103-104, 128, 131, 190-192; Mišić 2010). Most of their duties were related to military service, the transfer of goods, and professional pasturing, and these stemmed from the existing internal social stratification of the *vlach* population (Mišić 2010). As we know from written sources, the *vlachs* had similar obligations to

the Byzantine Empire in the 10th and 11th centuries (Cvetković 2012, 30-32).

Positive preconditions for cattle breeding

The development of livestock breeding in the territory of medieval Serbia was facilitated by favourable geographical and climate conditions in the Balkans. A significant factor in that process was also the accessibility of common pastures to all social strata of the Serbian medieval society (Blagojević 1966, 4; Gušić 1976; Ršumović 1976). Based on the historical data, these common pastures existed before the middle of 14th century, positioned within the parish or on the surrounding mountains (Novaković 1965; Blagojević 1966, 5). As previous research has pointed out,

during the medieval period two different terms were used for grazing land. Pastures above 1000 m were called *planine* and those at lower altitudes were called *pašnjaci* (Jiriček 1952, 163; Blagojević 1966, 8-15). Pastures, especially those in the mountains (*planine*), could be bestowed by the ruler upon his monastery endowments or upon noble lords (*Dečanske brisovulje* 1976, 56). It seems that Serbian rulers excluded those pastures from common lands before donations. That process started at the turn of the 13th century, when the founder of the ruling Serbian dynasty Stefan Nemanja, with his son and successor Stefan the First-Crowned, donated two mountain pastures to the Hilandar Monastery (Blagojević 1966). During the 14th century, this practice became common. Following the example of their ancestors, Serbian rulers donated at least ten mountain pastures to newly founded monasteries (Blagojević 1966; Maksimović 2017, 403). The peak of this process is reflected in a stipulation recorded in the chrysobull of Dečani, which declared all *planine* property of the king (Blagojević 1966, 35-36). After the said provision was enacted, common pastures at high altitudes could be used with the payment of a special toll – the so-called *travnina*. The possibility of accessing pastures was regulated in a similar way in other parts of medieval Europe (Stagno 2018).

Livestock types

In higher-altitude zones, the *vlachs* were mainly engaged in sheep and goat herding. Based on the earlier ethnographic research in the area around the Prokletije Mountains, the breeds of sheep were moved seasonally (Lutovac 1933). In other words, herded sheep flocks differed between the areas of the Metohija valley, Lim valley, around Lake Plav and the Gusinje valley and Lake Skadar and the Adriatic coast (Fig. 1). For example, livestock, mostly sheep and goats, which arrived on the Adriatic coast from other areas quickly fell ill and died, since the breeds herded in these areas were not used to the type of grazing land and climate prevalent in the Adriatic (Lutovac 1933). At lower altitudes cows and cattle were more common, as were pigs in the zones of oak forest (Trifunovski 1963, 32-33; Katić 1978). Based on historical sources and preserved toponyms, in the area of the Metohija Valley the breeding of buffalos was especially widespread (Lutovac 1933, 36-37; *Dečanske brisovulje* 1976). The obligations and duties of the *vlachs*, which included military service, transport of goods and salt, also affected the breeding of horses and mules.

As is well known, the livestock bred by *vlachs*, previously bestowed by the Serbian rulers upon their monasteries, were prepared and served for the monastic community. As shown by recent archaeological studies on the animal bones discovered in the trash pits at the Studenica Monastery, the age structure of the animals

indicates that the young were less frequently used in the diet. Such a trend is especially representative of cattle, which were, according to the aforementioned results, primarily bred for milk, hauling, and ploughing (Marković 2015, 406-407). Archaeozoological studies have also pointed out that all species of domestic animals were of a slightly smaller stature than in Roman times, which was also the case in other parts of Europe (Marković 2015).

Transhumance types in medieval Serbia

On the basis of available data, several variants of the shepherds' seasonal movements can be identified. In the earlier periods, up to the second half of the 14th century, shepherds under obligation to the Serbian rulers mostly lived as nomads, ascended with their flocks to altitudes between 1000 and 1600 m and stayed there in *katuns*, and then during the autumn they descended to the parish or remote coastal areas with a Mediterranean climate. That form of animal husbandry, practised in the area of medieval Serbia and the Balkans, could be defined as Braudel's 'inverse transhumance', which implies movements of people based with their flocks in the high mountains down to overwinter at more-clement altitudes (Costello – Svensson 2018, 4). This model of transhumance practised in that way is also attested by information from historical sources, which report that the stockbreeders paid for keeping their livestock on the Adriatic coast and on the shores of Lake Skadar during the winter (Đurđev 1960, 13, 16; Pavković 1976). In other words, they did not have permanent settlements at a lower altitude.

As in other parts of Europe, it is not possible to make a clear distinction between transhumance and shorter seasonal movements in medieval Serbia. According to 14th-century written sources, Serbian rulers bestowed high mountain pastures (*planine*) and *vlach* groups on their endowments (Maksimović 2017, 403). These *vlachs* had the duty of guarding and feeding the monastic herds. Written records also indicate that in that period the settlements of the *vlachs* – *katuns*, with clearly defined boundaries – were situated in the parish alongside agricultural villages (Miljković 2010, 19-20). One part of the *vlach* population gradually began to engage in agriculture and hay harvesting, while the other, bigger part continued to make their seasonal movements. They still covered significant distances on their way to summer pastures but, before winter, they would return to the same village. This type of movements could be characterised as middle-range transhumance (Fernandez Mier – Tente 2018). Also, the sedentarisation of nomadic groups made tax collecting easier for the ruling class. The shepherds' seasonal movements continued in the second half of 14th century and later on, though on a smaller scale.

In their transhumant or middle-range seasonal movements, the herdsmen drove their herds through sedentary villages. This is indicated by a provision in Emperor Dušan's Code (1349), where village residents are required to provide a passage for livestock in their farmland (Blagojević 1966, 21-23; Bubalo 2010, 90-91, 176-178). Similar pasture zones, up to 300 m wide, where ploughing for agriculture was not allowed and that served for the passage of livestock, are known in Italy – *tratturo* – and in Sicily – *trazzera* (Antonijević 1976, 61-62). In addition to the aforementioned provision, another one in Emperor Dušan's Code regulated the movement through sedentary villages: only one family from a given *vlach* group was allowed to lead their herds through those settlements at a time (Novaković 1965, 40; Bubalo 2010, 90-91, 176-178). In this way, an attempt was made to protect common pastures at lower altitudes from overgrazing. The existence of certain laws that controlled transhumant movement through agricultural rural areas suggests that there was a significant number of these movements during the 14th century.

Beside transhumant movements, which could last for weeks, there were also shorter, everyday movements practiced by herders from agricultural villages. Those became common mostly after the pastures at high altitudes (*planine*) were excluded from common lands and attached to the large monastic estates during the 13th and first half of the 14th century. Restricted short-distance movements to the common pastures at lower altitudes certainly caused a shift in the economy of the parish farming villages in the form of herd reduction and an increase in hay-producing meadows inside village boundaries. Written records from the 14th century testify that meadows started to become common between ploughed fields in that period (Blagojević 1966, 52, 58).

Location of herders' settlements – *katuns*

The herdsmen's summer settlements with pastures, huts, and dairies were called *katuns* (Đurđev 1963, 144-145). Later studies of medieval historical sources, mainly the founding charters of monasteries, showed that under suitable circumstances *katuns* existed in the lower regions inside the parish, alongside farming villages (Ivanović 1955, 401-402). Such cases are especially common in areas that were not suitable for agriculture, like hills and karst fields with a favourable climate. Based in a parish, these *katuns* had borders like other rural settlements. That was the case on the property of the St. Archangels Monastery recorded in King Milutin's Charter from AD 1316, where the shepherds' settlements were placed in the 'flat part of the estate' (Ivanović 1955).

The locations of mountain *katuns* were primarily influenced by the presence of a drinking water source,

which was necessary for the life of the herd. Small plateaus below mountain peaks, moraine deposits, or undulating terrain were mainly chosen, with care being taken to ensure that the slope was protected from wind and had a sufficient amount of sunlight (Trifunovski 1963, 30). The *katuns* were made up of several families gathered around a chief or a leader. They erected sheepfolds and houses made of light material with a stone substructure (Filipović 1963b, 45). Short distances between these structures led to the formation of a kind of hamlet. The gathering of a few families was influenced by a number of factors such as kinship, personal insecurity, and other interests (Kojić 1958, 77; Trifunovski 1963, 31). Based on data provided by written records, *katuns* had 30 families on average.

Previous studies did not provide significant data on the organisation of summer grazing lands, except for those ethnographic studies conducted on 20th-century seasonal settlements at high altitudes. The aforementioned small-scale surveys conducted in previous years indicate that summer settlements on the mountains had their boundaries. The natural contours in the relief were used as boundary objects, such as the sharp-crested serrate ridge (*arête*) in the example of the northwestern parts of the Prokletije Mountains, while the *katuns* were located in opposing valleys – *cirques* (Fig. 2a). However, there is also evidence of the existence of parcelisation within summer pastures. Drywall structures served as pasture fences with the purpose of dividing grazing space between families (Fig. 2b). Similar drywall constructions were built with the same purpose in other parts of Europe (Andres 2018).

Territorialisation of medieval *katuns*

As previously emphasised, the favourable geographic and climate conditions of the Balkans, certain toll privileges compared to the farming population, as well as the rise of medieval Serbia, all had a huge influence on the development of transhumance in the 13th and 14th centuries. As we learn from written sources, the expansion of existing *katuns* and the emergence of new ones started from the middle of the 14th century (Kovačević 1963). The beginning of the transition from transhumance to the sedentary way of life started very soon after that expansion. This suggests that previously mentioned stipulation recorded in the chrysobull of Dečani about the exclusion of high-mountain pastures from common lands in favour of the *vlaachs'* being bestowed upon the monasteries might be the result of process of competition for common lands between farmers and cattle breeders (Hardin 1968). Known as territorialisation in Serbian medieval studies, this process began from the end of the 14th and middle of the 15th century (Trifunovski 1963, 36). Directed by the ruler to certain mountains where they could feed their



Fig. 2. a) View of the *katun* remains and its borders – a sharp mountain ridge, and b) detail of previous photo showing the drywall borders within the *katun* (© Uglješa Vojvodić).

flocks, *vlach* shepherds started to overwinter in a nearby parish more often. That was especially the case in areas away from the sea, where grazing land could be found late into the autumn and the snow would quickly melt in the spring. In addition to the aforementioned regulations by which herdsmen were tied to specific mountains, the gradual disappearance of nomadic routes influenced by the political circumstances in the Adriatic coast and the arrival of Ottomans to the Balkans had an impact on the process of territorialisation. The Ottoman conquest caused the disappearance of previously established socioeconomical relationships, despite the attempt to preserve some of them. With the disappearance of large monasteries and other feudal estates, the bearers of animal husbandry in medieval Serbia, the obligations

of *vlach* groups to them also disappeared (Blagojević 1966, 92-93). Although we agree with the statement that *vlach* groups and their genesis should be observed without the chronological dividing line of the Ottoman conquest (Miljković 2010, 8), an observation of the changes that occurred under Ottoman rule goes beyond the scope of this paper and exceeds its chronological framework. Nevertheless, for the study of the process of territorialisation of the medieval *katuns* in Serbia it is important to mention Ottoman cadastral censuses, which were created immediately after the conquest of these areas from AD 1455 to 1459. Particularly significant is the census of Isa-beg Isaković land property, in which two groups of *vlachs* are mentioned, one registered without a village, and the other registered

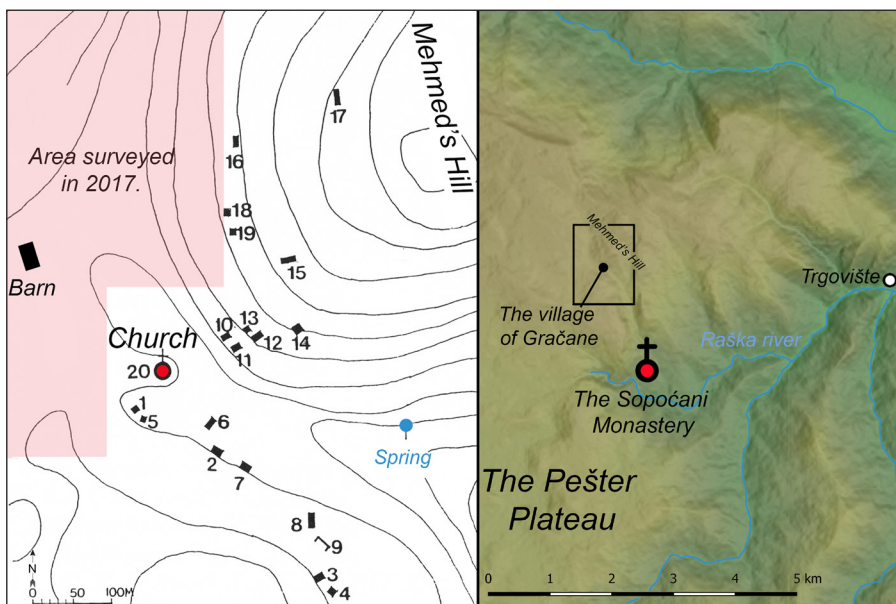


Fig. 3. a) Remains of the village of Gračane (© M. Popović 1993, Fig. 2), and b) position of the village of Gračane on a relief map (© Uglješa Vojvodić).



Fig. 4. Angular stones of the barn discovered during the field survey in 2017 (© Uglješa Vojvodić).

with villages and houses (Đurđev 1963, 148-149). These data certainly show that semi-sedentary and nomadic groups of *vlaachs* existed at the same time in medieval Serbia before the political changes.

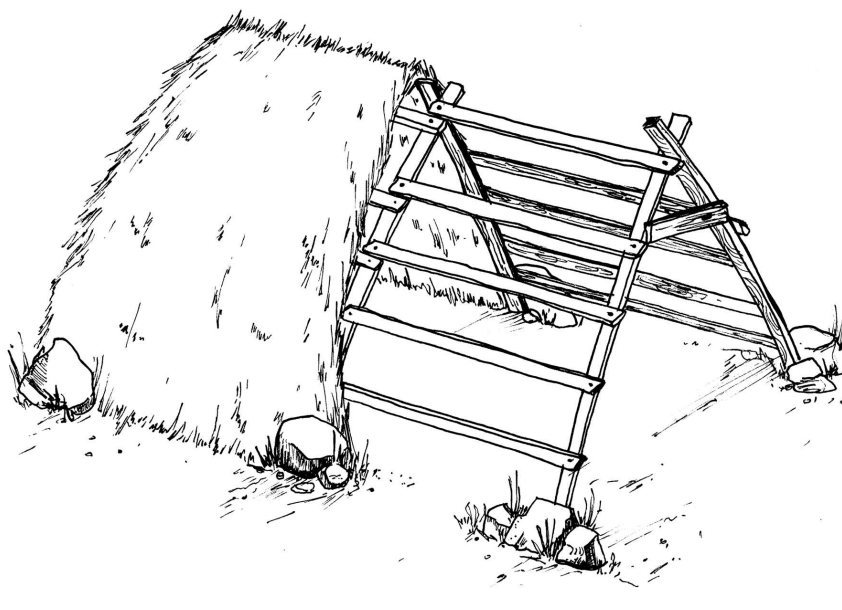
The medieval village of Gračani

Although the research on medieval rural settlements has so far been small in scope and overshadowed by the exploration of medieval fortifications, monastery complexes, and churches, in the early 1990s preliminary surveys of the village of Gračane near the Sopočani Monastery were conducted (Fig. 3). The settlement remains are located at the very edge of the Pešter

Plateau, on the sunny hillside away from arable land suitable for agriculture. About 20 houses, a watering place, and the remains of one larger building on the central plateau, which is believed to have been a church, were recorded in this area (Popović 1993, 8-11). House 2 and the church were the only structures subjected to archaeological investigation. Based on the portable archaeological material, house 2 was dated to the first half of the 15th century (Popović 1993, 11). The church was built in the period after the Ottoman conquest in the second half of the 15th century and was in ruins by the middle of the 16th century. Other archaeological findings of the excavations testify that the settlement lasted until the 17th century (Popović 1993). During



Fig. 5. a) Orthophoto of the barn (© Uglješa Vojvodić), and b) Hypothetical reconstruction (© M. Drobñjaković).



a survey of the same area carried out in 2017, a few angular stones were also registered that are most likely to be the remains of a livestock barn (Figs 4, 5). Such structures, which were made of lightweight materials, were used in this area and in other parts of Serbia until recently (Petrović 1984, 84-85; Findrik 1976). The aforementioned dating of the medieval remains of the village of Gračane is chronologically consistent with the process of transformation from transhumance to the territorialisation of shepherd communities and emergence of new *vlach* settlements before the Ottoman conquest (1455). The new examined data related to the Gračane settlement suggests that the positions of boundaries between the parish and karst fields, suitable

for grazing for almost the entire year, could have been the preferred positions of permanent herder settlements newly formed during the 14th and 15th century. The founding of settlements at locations like this enabled the herders to transition to short-range and mid-range seasonal movements.

Conclusion

In view of the facts stated above, the examination of the question of *vlachs* as a social category within the medieval Serbian state was mainly based on data provided by available written sources. On the other hand, the number of field studies devoted to the remains of *vlach*

settlements and activities, especially archaeological ones, are disproportionately small. Still, the results of recent pioneering research introduced in this chapter are encouraging and indicate the fruitful potential from which the need for further exploration of this topic arises. Therefore, future archaeological research should be focused on non-destructive field surveys followed by the creation of a GIS database containing the details of locations and appearance of the remains of these seasonal settlements in the high mountains. The selection of sites suitable for archaeological excavations should be made over time, as well as adoption of modern archaeological methodology suitable with the requirements for such sites.

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