

The Zadruga, a Century of Change

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RÉSUMÉ

A partir des données démographiques de la population d'Orašac, près de Belgrade, les auteurs décrivent les changements subis par la famille étendue slave.

The *zadruga*, or south Slav extended household unit, has played an important role in Balkan history and has been a subject of serious study for local and foreign scholars for over a century.¹ The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the *zadruga* in general terms, but rather, by using data from one specific micro-study based on a single community, to suggest some general questions which may be pertinent not only to the study of the *zadruga* but to other types of extended family units as well. Certain general types of change pertaining to the *zadruga* are clear; however, the precise ways in which they occurred, the intermediate stages and the nature of the end results are not equally apparent. This is particularly true with regard to the interrelationship between certain key demographic factors — increasing longevity and reduced fertility and their relationship to changing types of family patterns.

The village of Orašac, located in the ethnically homogeneous area of Sumadija south of Belgrade, is an excellent area in which

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to observe the transformations which have occurred over the past century and especially since the second World War. Not only is the area uniform with regard to nationality and religion, but up to 1945 the region was comparatively little urbanized and the village population consisted almost entirely of small landholders. General population statistics concerning the village reveal expectable patterns. Thus from the first records in 1784 until the end of the second World War there was a pattern of consistent growth reaching a recorded peak in 1948. The sole exception is for 1921, with a temporary decline, an epidemic and other due after-effects of the first World War. Since 1948 there has been a slow but steady decline in the village's population due to the rapid post-war rate of industrialization and general urbanization.² Similarly there has been a steady decline in average household size from 8.3 in 1844 to 4.5 in 1961 (Table I). These changes correspond to developments taking place in Serbia as a whole and in the Balkans generally.³

The earliest periods of growth in Orašac at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries reflect migration into the area of Sumadija from the mountainous regions in Montenegro and Hercegovina to the south and west. This was the period of the recolonization of the oak forests in central Serbia and a time of shifting from herding to agriculture as the primary source of subsistence. By 1839 during the reign of Aleksandar Karadjordjevic village boundaries were established and land was formally marked off into private, village and government sectors. During the remainder of the 19th century and into the early part of the 20th century the land filled up due to natural increase, since the cities grew at relatively slow rates. For example, Belgrade grew from 25,000 in 1867 to 35,000 in 1884, increasing to 90,000 in 1910. Before World War I, 87 per cent of the three million people of Serbia were villagers. The growth during the middle of the 19th

² If the temporary immigrant population is excluded, the impact of war losses on the 1948 population is evident in the negligible increase over the 17 years period from 1931. Migration is excluded as a factor in this case. The population decline dates then from 1953. (The 10.2% of the population in 1961 bearing names not present in the 1928 village register are not counted as immigrants).

³ For example, see *Stanovništvo Narodne Republike Srbije od 1834-1953* (1953).

TABLE 1. — POPULATION GROWTH IN ORAŠAC, 1784-1961

Year	Number of Households	% Increase Over Previous Census	Total Population	% Increase Over Previous Census	Average Household Size
1784	15				
1804	30	100.0			
1818	47	56.7	130 ¹		
1819	51	8.5	158 ¹		
1822	54	5.9	174 ¹		
1844	100	85.2	833		8.3
1863	131		1,082		8.3
1866	142	42.0 ²	1,185	42.3	8.4
1874	159	12.0	1,212	2.8	7.6
1884	188	8.9	1,320	18.2	7.0
1890	214	13.8	1,439	11.3	6.9
1895	225	5.1	1,538	5.0	6.9
1900	248	10.2	1,628	5.9	6.6
1905	278	12.1	1,835	12.7	6.6
1910	293	5.4	1,949	6.2	6.6
1921	282	-3.7	1,570	-19.4	5.6
1928	333		1,598 ³		
1931	344	22.0	1,894	20.6	5.5
1948	496	44.2	2,234 ⁴ (1,901) ⁵	17.9 .4 ⁵	4.5
1953	480	-3.2	2,179	-2.3 14.7 ⁵	4.5
1961	453	-5.6	2,023	-6.2	4.5

¹ All males between ages 7 and 80, based on head tax records.

² Based on increase over 1844.

³ Village council records for this period are believed to be incomplete.

⁴ In 1948 there were 333 temporary migrants, many of them Germans, who worked at the local mine. Most of them had left by 1953, all had departed by 1961.

⁵ The corrected population figure (2, 234-333).

Sources: Serbian Statistical Bureau; Drobnjakovic (1923:230); Gavrilovic (1846, XIII, 185); Petrovic (1898, II, p. 541).

century, once immigration had ceased, appears to have been due to a high rate of natural increase reflecting a high fertility. But by the early 20th century the birth rate had begun to decline and the continuing increase seems to have been due to a growing life span. On the basis of the village registers it is estimated that the birth rate declined from 39.5 in 1884-85 to 36.4 in 1921-31, decreasing most markedly to 24.5 in 1948-1953. In the same periods the death rate dropped to an even greater degree, from 22.2 to 15.6, and finally to 11.6 (Table I).

Judging by the available data on age distributions (Table 2) the life span had already begun to lengthen by 1890; at the same time it would appear, judging by the decline in the percentage of the population 10 years and under, that there was a lessening of fertility. That is, with an 1890 population a third greater than in 1863, the total number of children in this category remained almost exactly the same despite what seems to have been the larger number of women in the productive years. Comparing the age distributions at the ends of our continuum the changes are

TABLE 2. — AGE STRUCTURE OF THE ORAŠAC POPULATION

	1863	%	1890	%	1953	%	1961	%
0-10	456	42.3	457	31.8	430	19.7	358	17.7
11-20	221	20.5	340	23.6	383	17.6	302	14.9
21-30	189	17.4	215	15.0	412	18.9	271	13.2
31-40	114	10.2	170	12.0	200	9.1	346	17.0
41-50	53	5.0	117	8.0	301	13.8	177	8.6
51-60	39	3.7	89	6.0	232	10.6	268	13.1
61-70	10	1.0	42	3.0	146	6.7	190	9.4
71 and over	0	0	9	.6	78	3.6	111	5.2
TOTALS	1082	100	1439	100	2182	100	2023	100

(Percentages total 99+ due to rounding)

Sources: Serbians Statistical Bureau; *Statistika Kraljevina Srbije*, Vol. I, part 1, pp. 272-275.

striking. From a youthful population, almost two-thirds of which was under 20 and less than five per cent over 50, a century transformed Orasac into a village with a large proportion of old people, more than a quarter of whom are over 50. To put it another way, the mean age of the population rose from 20 to 36. The 5 per cent decline in the 21-30 age group in the recent eight-year period reflects growing urban migration.

The decline in average household size from over eight in the middle of the past century to four and a half today is indicative of the well noted trend in the decline in the extended family, but these overall figures do conceal some important differences. This is particularly true when we look at family size in terms of the number of people living in a particular size household (Table 3). In 1961 over one fifth of the population lived in households of six members, and a somewhat smaller number in five person kin groups. The predominance of medium-sized households of four to seven members is marked since 1928, rising from 46.8 per cent of all households in 1928 to 65.7 per cent in 1958 remaining constant at 64.4 in 1953 and finally rising to 72.3 in 1961. The predominance of this group is marked in the face of the virtual extinction of households of over 10 members, which in 1863 encompassed practically half of the population. Generally those of 8 or more members have shown a marked decline since the second World War just as those of two and three members have undergone a marked increase.

The trend has not been to nuclear families of parents and their children, as might be expected, or to old couples living alone. Rather, the zadruga persists in modified form, the decrease in size being mainly due to two factors, one involving a social structural change and the other a demographic transition. That is, the zadruga composed of several discrete nuclear family sub-units (brothers and their families, or married sons and their families) has virtually ceased to exist, and at the same time the number of children borne by individual mothers has declined markedly. However, due to increased longevity, lineally rather than laterally extended families have become more prevalent, and there are now more multi-generational extended family units, including at least one new type that was not formerly present.

TABLE 3. — POPULATION OF ORASAC BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 + TOTAL
1863: #	1	4	15	40	60	90	126	136	81	529
%	0.09	0.37	1.39	3.70	5.55	8.32	11.65	12.57	7.49	48.89
										100%
1928: #	63	58	123	156	185	204	203	136	180	290
%	3.94	3.63	7.70	9.76	11.58	12.77	12.70	8.51	11.26	18.15
										100%
1948:• #	15	38	156	288	390	302	168	128	108	170
%	.85	2.15	8.85	16.90	22.12	17.13	9.53	7.26	6.12	9.64
										100%
1953: #	36	90	198	348	350	426	280	208	72	171
%	1.65	4.13	9.09	15.97	16.06	19.55	12.85	9.55	3.30	7.85
										100%
1961: #	23	132	192	304	410	462	287	96	54	63
%	1.14	6.52	9.49	15.03	20.27	22.84	14.19	4.75	2.67	3.11
										100%

• Excludes those who are not related to families resident in the village in 1928.

Beginning in 1928 the four-generation household makes its appearance and increases in frequency, encompassing 7 per cent or 32 households in 1961 (Table 4). There were 12 great-grandsons and an equal number of great-granddaughters listed in 1961. There were actually a larger number of great-grandchildren since the preceding figures reflect only kinship terms relative to the household head. Thus in those cases where the household head had grandchildren and a still living mother or father, four generational households can occur. A marked increase over the past century has occurred in single generation households reflecting the small but growing number of single people and couples without children accounting for 16 per cent of all households in 1961 (Table 5). There has been a marked percentage decrease in the number of two generational households from almost two-thirds in 1863 to just slightly over one-third of all households in 1961. This has been paralleled by the decline in the relative number of nuclear households, from slightly under a third in 1863 to somewhat over a fifth in 1961 (Table 5). (Two generation households can consist

TABLE 4. — GENERATIONS AND HOUSEHOLDS

<i>Year</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
1863: #	5	80	46		131
%	3.82	61.07	35.11		100%
1928: #	85*	119	115	14	333
%	25.53	35.74	34.53	4.20	100%
1948: #	93	197	183	22	495
%	18.79	39.80	36.97	4.44	100%
1953: #	74	171	186	33	464
%	15.95	36.85	40.09	7.11	100%
1961: #	77	154	190	32	453
%	17.00	34.00	41.94	7.06	100%

* This is an artifact of the register which in some cases gives information only on the household head.

TABLE 5. — TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS

<i>Year</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
1863: #	1	3	2	41	69	8	7	131
%	0.76	2.29	1.53	31.30	52.67	6.11	5.34	100%
1928: #	63	8	19	77	129	26	11	333
%	18.92	2.40	5.71	23.12	38.74	7.81	3.30	100%
1948: #	59	17	30	113	191	55	30	495
%	11.92	3.43	6.06	22.83	38.59	11.11	6.06	100%
1953: #	36	25	33	107	219	37	7	464
%	7.76	5.39	7.11	23.06	47.20	7.97	1.51	100%
1961: #	23	16	50	101	214	39	10	453
%	5.08	3.53	11.04	22.30	47.24	8.61	2.21	100%

Key:

1. Single person
2. Widow(er) and children
3. Couples living alone
4. Nuclear
5. Married person heading extended family
6. Widow(er) heading extended family
7. Other (distant kin, e.g. aunts and nieces, grandparents and grandchildren or unrelated people)

of other combinations of relatives as well, e.g. daughter-in-law and mother -in-law and/or father-in-law. Such combinations may become increasingly common as the younger generation leaves the village.)

The increase in the percentage of three generation households (35 to 42 per cent for the two terminal years) is reflected in part in the stability of the larger category of extended family households (groups 5 and 6 in Table 5) which have remained proportionately constant over the past century. The constancy in this latter category is more apparent than real, since concealed within the extended family designation is the disappearance of the two generational household unit of brothers and their families. In 1863 there were a total of 27 married brothers who had a total number of 43 sons and 46 daughters; in 1928 despite a third increase in the size of the population, the number of brothers' children had declined over 50 per cent to 27 and 15 respectively. The number of nieces and

TABLE 6. — HOUSEHOLDS CONTAINING DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

 <i>Number of Daughters-in-Law</i>					<i>Number of</i>
	0	1	2	3	TOTAL	Households
1863: #	95	26	6	4	50	131
%	75.52	19.85	4.58	3.05	100%	
1928: #	221	75	28	9	158	333
%	66.37	22.52	8.41	2.70	100%	
1948: #	356	109	26	4	174	495
%	71.92	22.02	5.25	0.81	100%	
1953: #	309	155			190	464
%	66.59	33.41			100%	
1961: #	305	148			160	453
%	67.33	32.67			100%	

nephews in this category remained the same (42) in 1948 (although the individuals were different). This represented a relative decline since the population had increased approximately 20 per cent, but only five years later in a post-war 15 per cent spurt in population among the kin groups traditionally resident in Orašac large number of brothers split up, and the number of fraternal nieces and nephews was virtually halved to 23; and in 1961 there were only three left. In effect, fraternal *zadrugas* whose component nuclear families (brothers, their wives and children) who had composed over 13 per cent of the population in 1863 had ceased to exist in 1961, although only thirteen years previously they had been a small but significant component of the population.

A contrasting picture is the previously mentioned growth of the lineally extended family, i.e. that of three and four generations, but these are so-called stem families usually containing only one attached nuclear family (one son, with his wife and children). This development is indicated in Table 6, where both the number of households containing daughter-in-laws and their total number has increased while at the same time there no longer exist households containing more than one married son.

This change reflects two factors. First, the number of children produced by each married couple has fallen off, as reflected both in the age distribution (Table 2) and in the kinship categories (Table 7). In 1863, 209 women between ages 20-59 produced 633 children under 19, while 530 women in the same group in 1961 produced only 624 children. Actually the number of children borne by mothers in 1863 was probably proportionately much greater since there was a much higher infant and maternal mortality at that time, which does not show up in the above figures. Thus there are fewer families containing more than one son to begin with (Table 8), and in those cases where there is more than one, either the younger or older son, depending on individual circumstances, will tend to seek a career outside the village whereas formerly all sons remained on the land since the number of urban opportunities was limited. Second, there is a small but growing number of cases where all children leave, so that the number of older married couples living alone is increasing (Table 5). Of the 50 married couples living alone in 1961 only in 3 cases is the household head under 50, and in 60 per cent of the cases he is over 60.

TABLE 7. — POPULATION 19 YEARS AND UNDER, BY KINSHIP CATEGORIES, 1863 AND 1961, COMPARED

	Son	Daughter	Brother	Sister	Grandson	Grand-daughter	Nephew* Brother's Son	Niece* Brother's Daughter	Great Grandson	Great Grand- daughter
Age	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961	1863 1961
0-9	119 60	127 66	6	4	48 86	36 88	36	35	10	9
10-19	79 96	73 91	18 1	20 3	8 54	3 45	3	11 1	2	3
Total	198 156	200 157	24 1	24 3	56 140	39 133	39	46 1	12	12

* There are no sister's sons or daughters.

It is important in viewing the above discussion in perspective to remember that when dealing with family relationships there are three kinds of change: the family cycle reflecting the changing composition of both extended families and their component nuclear units, brought about by the birth, marriage, and death of individual members; those changes which are not part of the normal cycle but represent the decision, particularly in the case of the extended family, to divide due to the overall impact of modernization as, for example, in the often cited case of young women unwilling to subordinate themselves within the patriarchal extended family; and change reflecting the impact of the demographic transition of the past century, a subtle but nevertheless vital factor.

A closer inspection of Table 7 reveals an interplay of all three factors. Thus we note that in 1863 most of the sons and daughters were under 9, and in 1961 the reverse is true. In 1863 these proportions are in good measure explicable on the basis of mortality, but in 1961 the explanation is much more complex. Part of the explanation is that many of the children 9 years and under show up in the grandchild rather than the son or daughter categories

TABLE 8. — MARRIED SONS AND NUCLEAR FAMILY HEADS, RELATIVE AGES, 1863 AND 1961 COMPARED

Age	<i>Married Sons</i>				<i>Nuclear Household Heads</i>			
	1863		1961		1863		1961	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
10-19	1	2.1	1	.7				
20-29	33	70.2	46	32.2	6	14.6	9	8.9
30-39	11	23.4	71	49.7	13	31.7	36	35.6
40-49	2	4.3	17	11.9	16	39.0	24	23.8
50-59			7	4.9	6	14.6	28	27.7
60-69			1	.7			3	3.0
70-79							1	1.0
Totals	47		143		41		101	

TABLE 9. — PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS CONTAINING VARYING NUMBERS OF SONS AND BROTHERS (IRRESPECTIVE OF MARITAL STATUS)

Year	0		1		2		3		Total		Number of Households
	B	S	B	S	B	S	B	S	B	S	
1863: #	87	20	29	35	10	27	5	49	68	257	131
%	66.41	15.27	22.14	26.72	7.63	24.43	3.82	37.40	100%	100%	
1928: #	307	133	20	124	6	54		22	30	302	333
%	92.19	39.94	6.01	37.24	1.80	16.22		6.61	100%	100%	
1948: #	470	213	20	190	3	76	2	16	32	391	495
%	94.95	43.03	4.04	38.38	0.61	15.35	0.40	3.23	100%	100%	
1953: #	451	168	11	201	2	79		16	15	409	464
%	97.20	36.21	2.37	43.32	0.43	17.03		3.45	100%	100%	
1961: #	442	173	11	218		54		8	11	350	453
%	97.57	38.19	2.43	48.12		11.92		1.77	100%	100%	

because of the son status of their fathers. However, in their thirties and forties many of the married sons set up their own nuclear families, so that their children, now older, become sons and daughters. This is quite clear from Table 8 where in 1961, one third of the married sons are under thirty while less than 10 per cent of the nuclear household heads are in this category. If under forty becomes our criterion, 83 per cent of the married sons fall into this category. A number of the married sons also split off to form their own extended family households. These tendencies appear to have also been present in 1863 but offset to a great degree by the larger number of children produced by individual couples in nuclear households. Further, while the total population approximately doubled over the century there was a greater proportionate increase in the number of married sons. The greater number of grandchildren is explained by the fact that the grandfathers ceased to become household head, either through death or retirement, by the time they entered the next age group (this occurred much more in 1863 than 1961). Finally, the greater number of nephews and nieces in the youngest age category is explicable on analogous grounds. There was a natural splitting up of brothers as their respective nuclear families increased in size and their sons approached marriageable age. This last phenomenon is to be distinguished from the splitting off of sons. A century ago because of probable earlier mortality of the household head, sons were more likely to succeed to their fathers' position before their own children were grown. This also made the "natural" or cyclical formation of a *zadruga* composed of brothers and their nuclear families more likely and decreased both the length of time that children would remain as grandchildren and their potential numbers, assuming in the last instance that the birth rate remained constant.

These are only initial interpretations of the existing data. Subsequent planned research envisages comparative analysis with respect to villages in other areas of Yugoslavia for which the author has obtained similar data and also with respect to related writing of Yugoslav and East European demographers and ethnologists as well as data which exists for other culture areas. In another dimension, it is hoped to relate family size and changing household composition to land holdings and, in more recent times, with occupation.

In any case, it is already clear that even if the present type of household composition is but a transitional phase, nevertheless it is not possible to speak of the decline of the zadruga as part of any uniform process of a large extended family splitting up into nuclear households or old married couples, but rather that kin ties in the male line to the preceding generation are capable of taking on new meaning under altered demographic patterns. The decline in household size is indicative of reduced fertility and the splitting of the fraternal tie while the patrilineal one assumes new importance. Based on the Orašac data this new village type is more reminiscent of the stem family of rural Western Europe than of the urban nuclear family.

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