

The Dual Body Politic or the Myth of Power? The Ideology of sovereignty in the Orthodox Archbishopric within the Habsburg Empire

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The issue of the body politic is usually connected to the images of the absolutist power or at least to the visualizations of the grand sovereignty. This time-honored concept is most commonly associated with the power structures whose authority is unquestionable and constructed in such a way that that one only ponders how much of it is a political reality and how much a political fiction. The idea of the Body Politic through history was not the sole prerequisite of regal or monarchical institutions. It was also a mechanism, a formula of sovereignty that was often used not only to assert legitimacy but as the very tool of the legitimation itself, highly important for those entities whose existence on the European political scene was either uncertain or under a constant threat.

In this text I want to investigate one such instance where the Body Politic does not signify the absolutist or the ruling power. I would analyze the Body Politic belonging to a state within a state, existing under the wing of a much more powerful dominion. was the entity lead by the political and ecclesiastical leaders, the Orthodox Archbishopric of Karlovci situated in the Habsburg Austrian Empire.

The Archbishopric of Karlovci was created in the Austrian Habsburg Empire (figs. 1& 2) when the Serbian people with their Patriarch-Archbishop Arsenije III in 1690 made a Great Exodus from Serbia under the Ottoman occupation into Austrian lands. As any great state in Europe, the Austrian Habsburg Empire was presumably multinational and multiconfessional and welcoming different faiths and different peoples. The cloak of magnanimity shielded the greater needs of the Empire for which it used the entities existing under its protection. It was no different when the Serbs who arrived under its protectorate at the late seventeenth century. Prior to their exodus they had been generally promised the freedom of their confession and partial autonomy in the political sense.¹ The reasons that initiated the Great Exodus respectively involved both the interests of the

¹ For the subject of the Graet Exodus see Tomić (1902), pp.180-190; Davidov (1994), pp. 15-16; Grujić (1940), pp.2-10.

Serbs and those of Leopold I. In Habsburg protectorate they saw the protection against the Ottomans and preservation of their faith and their ethnica. The Emperor had different ideas, that mainly were linked with the population of his army and reinforcement of the existing military border.

In such a situation the leaders of the Orthodox Serbs had to construct their own form of the Body Politic and their own ideology of sovereignty. The very form of their political identity, and subsequently political behavior, was partially inherited from the position that they held in the in Serbia under the Ottoman rule, where the leaders of the Orthodox Church had developed their initial for of the Body Politic. Although nominally only sacred leaders of their flock, in practice the Orthodox high clergy had far greater jurisdiction. They were unofficial `temporal lords` to whose care and protection their congregation gladly subjected themselves.

This specific position was the least what Orthodox high clergy demanded from the Habsburg Emperor. Formally, they had been granted not just this virtual duality of power, but even more, the true sacred and temporal autonomy for their ethnica and its faith on the territories of the Most Catholic Sovereign. The basis for their political rights was founded in the document known as "The First Privilege" issued immediately before the exodus as a for of the Imperial guarantee. In the opening clauses of this charter, Leopold I gave final confirmation to all Serbian demands and legitimized the newly granted status of the Serbs in the Empire.

In this Charter the Emperor Leopold I announces that he has accepted the Serbian requests and decided that> [*The Patriarch thus elected is entirely free to manage the churches under his jurisdiction, he has the right to build their own churches and appoint priests to their parishes; therefore, they will stay leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its congregation; [the Serbian Orthodox Church] has the jurisdiction, according to these privileges and the former ones ... over the entire Greece, Raska, Bulgaria, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Jenopolj and Herzegovina, as well as Hungary and Croatia. And everywhere where the Orthodox Serbs exist, and as long as they are humble and loyal...*²

This document formed the primary foundation upon which Arsenije III and his high clergy would establish their new spiritual dominion in the Habsburg lands. Soon after

² Taken from the First Privliege of Leopold I. The original is kept in the Archiepiscopal Archive of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Scencies Sremski Karlovci 1690-1691 (B-21-1690). Published in facsimile in Davidov (1994), p.21. (italics mine)

their arrival the Orthodox Archbishops became aware that their protection was partially a false promise.³ They were confronted with fierce attempts of religious conversion and an increased diminishing of their legal liberties. Since then, the struggle for recognition of a minority religion in the Catholic Empire was a constant diplomatic battle.

Between the icon and the myth of power

Specific legal boundaries conditioned a peculiar understanding of the Orthodox Body Politic. It was both secular and sacred, but as we shall see further on it was partly political fiction and partly reality. The Serbian religious leaders needed to balance between the power of they really possessed and the power they desired in order to preserve the freedom for their populace and their faith. In this respect, they were no different from the other politico-religious leaders of Europe who tried to interweave their current position of power with the one they had aspirations for! These politics of presentation, and representation, had to be highly subversive in order to be used under the protection of the Catholic monarchy. One could say, it was a reality and a vision of the Body Politic, the one always existing on the borderline between the secular and the sacred.

Prior to their settlement in the Empire, and even more afterwards, the Orthodox high clergy gradually shaped their political body following two desired models, one for each aspect of their authority. The models chosen were the same ones that would mark the entire political and religious existence of the Archbishopric in the Empire – the Orthodox exemplified in the Russian and Ukrainian matrix and the Imperial-Catholic one that was perpetually displayed to the Serbian prelates in the Habsburg Monarchy. This `bifocality` of the Orthodox political vision was the very aspect that gave such a special form to the art and culture produced in the Archbishopric.

The sacred identity of the Archbishop was appropriated from the matrix created in the Catholic world after the Council of Trent but perceived through the Russian lens. This image of the ideal prince of the Church, endowed with all the cardinal and theological virtues, was only reshaped for the Orthodox needs. It was similar to the model given in the Catholic Reform by Carlo Borromeo: the ideal prelate was the one who follows the

³ Davidov (1994), pp.18-19; Tomić (1902), pp.195-196.

Christ in his personal zeal and who, above all, protects his flock and performs the ultimate role of the shepherd of the souls.⁴ The similarity between the Body Politic of the Prelate of the in the Catholic and the Orthodox Church is the most visible in the closeness of two texts that regulated the clerical conduct. The *Decrees of the Council of Trent* were almost mirrored in the ultimate *credo* of the Russian Orthodox Clergy *The Spiritual Regulations* by Peter the Great.⁵ It might seem surprising that the Orthodox clergy adopted the form of political existence, the political language from the very confession they were trying to refute, but this is only a superficial observation. This borrowing of the vocabulary of power was the only way they could establish themselves in the European political arena and confront their peers in the Empire. On the other hand, they came from the protected and trusted source of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The model for the temporal aspect of the Serbian Body Politic was, as we shall see further on in the state portraiture of the Archbishopric, even more overtly Western than the ecclesiastical side of their concept of sovereignty. It was directly adopted from the readily available sources they found in the Imperial and high clerical personae in the Habsburg Austrian Empire. In every aspect of his behavior, the Orthodox Archbishop presented himself as important and worthy of admiration as any member of the Imperial house that was of course not looked upon with kindness as an official of the Viennese court confirms:

Somehow the current Archbishop (Pavle Nenadovic) is not behaving in all matters in a way that would make one totally satisfied. Profiteering is not unknown to him and, even more, he is far too keen to expand his power and dignity, in front of his own people.⁶

Despite such highly informative accounts the best representation of the Archiepiscopal Body Politic is present in the state portraiture of the period. Especially since the very form of a state portrait as such was adopted only after the exodus to the Monarchy.

Beforehand the portraiture was only reserved for the images of regal or aristocratic patrons depicted in the grand fresco cycles of the Serbian Middle Ages. (Figs. 3&4) Such understanding of the role of the portrait was well grounded in the Byzantine art to whose

⁴ Jedin (1985), pp.81-85.

⁵*The Spiritual Regulation of Peter the Great*, A. V. Muller (tr. and ed.), University of Washington Press, Seattle & London, 1972; paragraph 14.

⁶ This letter is taken from Grbić (1891) p.66.

tradition Serbian Medieval culture was strongly linked, and even after the fall Serbia under the Ottoman Empire in 1459 the tradition had to be preserved. The preservation of tradition meant the preservation of Serbian ethnica and its identity – cultural, national and religious.⁷

But, the pivotal change came with the shift of political context after 1690. In order to endure as a separate ethnica in the Habsburg Empire, the Serbian high clergy had to present their Body Politic in the universally understandable manner. Even before the exodus, the Serbian Patriarch Arsenije III realized that he ought to have his Body Politic legitimized and confirmed in the contemporary form of the State portrait. He commissioned his portrait in Vienna in the early spring of 1690 (Fig. 5), several months before the exodus.

This portrait indeed presents a lifetime journey between two different political positions; one could even say, between two states of mind, as diverse as two cultures that the Serbs have had exchanged at that very instant – the Post-Byzantine and the Baroque one. These two worlds overlap, but never merge. One is visible in the figure and the other in the treatment of the background. The figure itself is highly iconic, the Archbishop faces the beholder but his expression does not yet signify that great conviction of power. He is dressed in his liturgical vestments and adorned with all insignia of his politico religious power, but he nevertheless seems at odds with the setting he is placed in. It is not just the lack of skill that produces such an effect. It is the effect that was not truly sought for – his true power had to lie in his own iconicity. He is flat, two dimensional, but he evokes the same formality and out-worldliness of Byzantine saints. . However, it was already understood that something had to change, and that, rather cautiously, was the background (Fig. 6). Instead of undefined, boundless space of the medieval icon and donors` portraits, Arsenije III is set against the grand pseudo-classical columns derived from the then-contemporary state portraiture. They do not only confirm that the cardinal virtue of Fortitude is the main aspect of his Body Politic, they also act as an `entrance` into the political arena of the early modern Europe.

It would be almost half a century for the fully defined image of the Body Politic to appear on the portraits of the Orthodox leaders. In this anonymous portrait of the Archbishop *Vikentije Jovanović* (1730s) (Fig. 7) we already have all the trappings of power and the familiar references to the Western concept of the Body Politic. The most

⁷ A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival*, London. 1981; A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, London 1986; John A. Armstrong, *Nations before nationalism*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: ethnicity, religion and nationalism*, Cambridge 1997; John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity*, Oxford Readers, Oxford University Press 1996.

apparent change in the representation of the head of the Orthodox Church is his relationship to the space in the portrait. Unlike his glorious predecessor his body takes up almost the entire space in the painting, despite the fact that this is only a half-length portrait. The entire composition is taken from the model established in the state portraiture of the period – the very matrix that was defined earlier in Titian’s portraits of the Habsburgs and carried over into the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In his confrontation with the beholder we see the momentous change that had occurred in the self-perception of the Serbian Body Politic. He now faces the beholder fully confident in his position in the Empire. This concept of reinforced power is officially confirmed in the insignia displayed in the portrait and even more in his official attire. He abandons the post-Byzantine tradition of liturgical vestments seen in the portrait of Arsenije III, and dresses in a manner unthinkable even a decade earlier for the Orthodox Archbishop. With his black and crimson robes he consciously evokes the attire of his Catholic peers, particularly in his red “cardinal-like” scull-cap. And the significations of his position are not only highly evident but also very eloquent in their rhetoric of the Orthodox Body Politic. Around his neck he is wearing a prominent bejeweled cross, the symbol of his sacred power, and with his both hands directs the beholders’ gaze onto the ornate crown, the denominator of his temporal authority. Such a great significance given to the temporal side of his rule presents the very position he desired to hold in the Catholic Empire. In this portrait we do not just face the finely defined image of Vikentiješ political persona but also perceive the matrix of power that would be laboriously repeated in the likenesses of future archbishops. (Figs. 8&9)

Creating the myth – the manipulation of history

For the representation of the Body Politic in the early modern Europe, and the Archbishopric was no exception, the principle of *exemplum* and of evocation of the past was crucial. As Machiavelli wrote in his *Prince* if one is prudent, one will enter up the tracks beaten by the truly great and follow the magnificent... The use of example was of course used all the way through the Middle Ages, they prove to be very useful for forming the image of both the Church and State. The absolutist states only continued this tradition and in the Baroque age it was combined with the notion of historicism so

characteristic for the Baroque frame of mind. The past, and its *exempla* were the main means for the defense of the present. The history could be shaped, modified, and even fabricated, all *in maiore Dei gloriam*. The same trappings of power were used by the Orthodox Archbishops to legitimize their own precarious position in the Empire. Only the past they referred to was considerably different than the one encountered in the Western visualizations of the Body Politic. Instead of the allusions to the great heroes of the antiquity they had their own past to look back upon. However, it was not the ecclesiastical tradition they were looking at, but the political one. Since under the Ottoman rule the temporal power was never officially recognized they turned to the glorious history of the Serbian Medieval Empire, the last epoch of power they truly experienced.⁸ The mechanism of historicism enabled them to create a virtual continuum of their history, the fabricated link that seamlessly connected the late fifteenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries. And this idea of the past-renewed and past-revisited had to make an integral part of their Body Politic. But this was not the part of the political reality, it was the political fiction we announced at the beginning of this paper. The reference to the past was made in official charters, in sermons, in letters to the Emperor, in the announcements and proclamations, in the renewal of the cults of the local saints, in the worship of the Serbian Medieval dynasty. Its most effective use was of course in the visualizations of the political personae. One of the most poignant representations of this historically based Orthodox Serbian Body Politic is the work of art that is a history print, but also a political manifesto. (Fig. 10) The engraving by Hristofor Žefarović *St. Sava with the saints from the Nemanjic dynasty* was commissioned by the archbishop Arsenije IV in 1741 as a gift to the newly enthroned Maria Theresia.⁹ It was to serve not only as his representation of his Body Politic, but even more as the political *credo* of his reign. In this print, which was done closely following the commissioner's instructions, a display of the Serbian Medieval saints is combined with the poem Arsenije IV wrote and dedicated to the new Habsburg Empress. This gallery of saints is led by the most illustrious of them all, St. Sava the first Archbishop of Serbia (1219) sanctified for his deeds. He is undoubtedly the ideal model for Arsenije IV, but also the reminder of the great Serbian

⁸ For the concept of the new image of the State see M. Timotijević, (2006) pp. 474-475; 543-544.

⁹ For the visual language of a political print see M. Umback, *Classicism, Enlightenment and the "Other"*, *Thoughts on Decoding Eighteenth-Century visual culture*, Art History, vol. 25, no. 3, (June 2002), 319-340.

past to the Catholic Empress. The saints are gathered in front of the table-altar where the liturgical objects are displayed on an equal level with the crown of the old Serbian Empire. Underneath the image, at the very centre of the page, and right underneath the table-altar where the symbols of power are exhibited, the coat-of-arms of the Nemanjic dynasty is proudly presented. This not only announces the political tone of the poem, but subtly represents the duality of the sacred and temporal that was in the essence of the Orthodox Body Politic in the Empire. If the image seems to refer mainly to the saintliness of the Serbian past, the poem predominantly speaks of the political power that Serbs had possessed. The Medieval Serbia is likened to the *white eagle under whose wings was almost the entire Balkans, the eagle that fed them all as its offspring*. And Arsenije IV states that under Habsburg protection the eagle *has regained its strength and the glory of the Medieval Empire shall return*...In this way Arsenije IV did not only state that the Medieval glory is an integral part of the Orthodox Body Politic in the Archbishopric, but that he counts on the new Empress for the reinforcement of his State! This is indeed the crucial part of grand political programme that Arsenije IV devised. He hoped to subject the entire Balkans under his, this time spiritual, jurisdiction and in that form reinvent the glory of the lost Medieval state. This, needless to say had remained forever in the realm of the political utopia.

Through this text I've tried to present how one state, even if subjected to a much greater power could develop a highly elaborate concept of the Body Politic. In order to retain the precarious balance of its political existence in the Catholic Empire, the Orthodox high clergy had drawn models for its self-presentation from Western and Eastern one and constructed its unique model of the archiepiscopal Body Politic.