

---

## REVIEWS

---

---

Antal Molnár, *Confessionalization on the Frontier: The Balkan Catholics between Roman Reform and Ottoman Reality*, Rome: Viella, 2019, 268 pp.

---

Antal Molnár is a former director of the Hungarian Academy in Rome and the current director of the Institute of History at the Research Center for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and an associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University (both in Budapest).

His latest book contains 268 pages, nine chapters and an introduction, a glossary of Ottoman and South Slavic terms, maps, a bibliography, and an index of names and places. It contains Dr. Molnár's most important studies and research conclusions regarding the Balkan Catholics in the early modern period. Although these studies have been published earlier, he expands on them here with additional information and historical resources.

The author begins the book with a short summary of his research and a bibliography on the Catholic Christians in the Balkans in the early modern period (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). This summary contains a short review of the author's PhD thesis, which he defended in both Hungarian and French in 1999 and 2002. He continues with research into Balkan and Western European historiographies of this topic. Research into the history of the Balkan Christian communities goes back more than a hundred years. The first period resulted in national and denominational historiographies. Orthodox and Catholic Church institutions took on a significant proto-nationalist identity to preserve their functions during the centuries of Ottoman rule, which culminated in the millet system in the nineteenth century. The author then reviews the most important historians from the 1990s who were researching and writing about this phenomena (Srećko M. Džaja, Machiel Kiel, Bernard Heyberger, etc.). Dr. Molnár also

presents the geographical range of his studies. The focuses of his research are the Slavic-Albanian world and Ottoman Hungary (the historical and geographical term for the areas of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary occupied by the Ottoman Turks. This area is now modern-day Hungary, Slavonia in eastern Croatia, and Vojvodina in the northern Serbia).

In the introduction (pp. 7–17), the author explains the historical phenomenon of confessionalization (*Konfessionsbildung*, *Konfessionalisierung*) in western historiography and in the history of early modern Europe. The model was an elaboration of Erns Walter Zeeden's thesis and was developed by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Shilling, who built on the classic work of Hubert Jedin. They studied the three classic confessions (Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic) in parallel and drew connections between the religious and political spheres. From this, they reached the conclusion that these three early modern systems of religious institutions developed along similar lines and gave similar responses to the challenges of the time, regardless of dogmatic differences. In this respect, they may be regarded as the harbingers of modernity. The confessional aspect predominated most manifestations of life in the period due to the Reformation and Counter Reformation of the Catholic Church in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Furthermore, as national monarchies and republics gathered strength, they recruited the early modern confessions into their own system and used them to increase their own power in an attempt to return to exclusively providing the confession regarded as the state religion within their countries. The confessionalization paradigm swept through European historiography, and it arrived in some countries or language regions later than others.

The author views applying the Western European confessionalization model to Catholic Church institutions in the Ottoman Empire as a means of providing important insights into the

European formation of the confessions. Here, the author's main research topic is the Catholic minorities in the Balkan Peninsula as the targets of the same attempts at confession-building that the Holy See and religious orders pursued all over Europe. The same can be said for the Protestant churches in Ottoman Hungary. Dr. Molnár also explains the key characteristics of Catholic confessionalization within the Ottoman Empire, where it developed with many more local idiosyncrasies, supportive and hostile, than it did in Christian states.

The circumstances of Ottoman rule left little room for the idea of political and confessional territorialization, and even the jurisdictional limits of church authorities and institutions of various kinds (dioceses and religious orders) were much more uncertain and permeable than in other regions of Europe. The religious orders running the missions, the secular priests, and the prelates became embroiled in serious disputes over diocesan boundaries, parish revenues, and the rights of patronage over the chapels at Catholic trading stations. The second characteristic of Catholic confessionalization in the Balkan frontier lands was the local structures' tenacious resistance to reforms prescribed by Rome and to missionaries sent from outside (this particularly applies to the brothers of the Franciscan Province in Bosnia). The third major feature was the influence of the merchant communities in the confessionalization process. Without a secular confessional state and a feudal Christian ruling class, the merchants who constituted the economic and cultural elite of Christian society became the social force that shaped religious developments. This led to what was, in many respects, a new type of confessionalization that differed from the feudal and territorial model.

The topics in this book explore in nine chapters these special features and illustrate each of them with a microanalysis of a well-documented processes. In the first chapter, *Bosnian Franciscans between Roman Centralization and Balkan Confessionalization*, pp. 17–31, the author presents the resistance of local institutions to the Roman attempts at reforms after the Council of Trent (1545–1563) through the

example of the Bosnian Franciscan Province, which was the most significant organization of Catholic Church in the Balkan Peninsula. The author presents the history of the Bosnian Franciscan Province from the thirteenth century until the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austro-Hungarian armies in 1878. The Roman Catholic Church was organized around the Franciscan monasteries in the medieval state of Bosnia, and it gave to these institutions Conventual character, which remained so under Ottoman rule from 1463 to 1878. Parallel with the development of the order, Bosnian Catholic merchants also prospered, and the influence of these merchants was extensive, not just in Bosnia but also in Belgrade and in Ottoman Hungary. However, the order didn't represent a homogenous block in Bosnia or in the Balkans. They were divided due to their relationship with Rome and its attempts at reform. The most extreme example was the Franciscan monastery in Fojnica. The Franciscan monastery in Olovo represented the moderates, although there were also the Franciscans of Slavonia, who were more regional. The author also traces the strong bonds between the Bosnian Province and the Bosnian merchants through historical sources dating from 1770s concerning these processes, and he tries to compare them with the Serbian Church to prove the paradigm of confessionalization. The order suffered greatly during the Great Turkish War (1683–1699) when the merchants were nearly destroyed. However, the order survived and remained predominant in the life of Bosnian Catholics until 1881.

Chapter 2, *The Holy Office and the Balkan Missions before the Foundation of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide (1622)*, pp. 31–47, and Chapter 3, *Venetian South-East Europe and Ottoman Hungary*, pp. 47–65, present the impacts on Balkan Catholicism from the viewpoint of the confession-shaping powers of the Holy See and the Republic of Venice. In drawing back the veil from the previously unknown involvement of the Roman Inquisition in the missions, the reader is able to gain insight into the conflict-ridden dynamic that characterized the Holy See's attempts to formulate proper forms of mission

governance. Poor relations between Venice and the Balkan missions illuminate the fact that the main power center on the Adriatic Sea, a city state with major interests even as far away as the Levant, was unable to maintain its position in the Balkans lands along the coast. In Chapter 2, the author writes about the missionary organization of the Roman Inquisition. Even after the establishment of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide (1622), the Inquisition never stopped coordinating Catholic missions in the Balkans. However, they were organized through the new institution of the Congregation. Dr. Molnár presents missionary activity in the Balkans during the papacy of Paul V (1605–1621), including the activities of the Order of Saint Benedict in Albania and Hungary, the arrival of the Jesuits in the regions of Hungary occupied by the Ottomans, and Franciscan missionary work in Bulgaria. After the reports of these missionaries were sent to the Inquisition, the Congregation decided to send Pietro Massarecchi (Mazreku) as an apostolic visitor to Belgrade.

As for the cultural and religious influence of Venice in the Balkans, in Chapter 3 the author analyzes the concept of a “Venetian Southeast Europe” formulated by Oliver Jens Schmitt. This is the idea that there was a realm of communication realm in which Venetian influence stretched from Dalmatia to the island of Crete. However, the author does not agree with Schmitt’s concept. He thinks that the Republic’s religious influence in the seventeenth century from the Adriatic lands to the Greek archipelago wasn’t powerful enough for this. Catholic missions from Dalmatia were rare and poorly organized. Moreover, the Catholic Church in Dalmatia did not undergo reforms according to the model of the Council of Trent. Also, the Venetian Republic lost much of its influence during the Cretan War (1645–1669).

In Chapter 4 (*Struggle for the Chapel of Belgrade 1612–1643*, pp. 65–123) Dr. Molnár writes about the struggle between the Jesuits and the Franciscans for the Catholic chapel in Belgrade, which lasted for decades. The Catholic chapel in Belgrade was a symbol of the Catholics and a Catholic base for launching missions into Ottoman Hungary. This struggle started between the Jesuits and the Franciscans from the Bosnian

Province, and lasted for quite a while due to the involvement of patrons on both sides (merchants from Bosnia and Dubrovnik). This is evidence that this struggle was not only religious, but also involved economic and power interests of merchants from both Bosnia and Dubrovnik. It is clear from the sources that their goal was to eliminate their rivals in Belgrade. This struggle was quite damaging for the Catholics in the city for a variety of reasons. They were weakened economically, and the survival of the Catholic diaspora and the missions was put in jeopardy. These events also reflected the Congregation’s unsuitability for resolving struggles between the missionaries and their supporters at the local level.

Similar actions are described in the fifth chapter, *The Struggle for the Chapel of Novi Pazar (1627–1630)*, pp. 123–135, in which the author focuses on the battles between the Republic of Dubrovnik as an Ottoman tribute state and the local Catholic bishops’ jurisdiction over the chapels in the Dubrovnik colonies (the chapels of chaplain Marin Jerković and the Bishop of Bar, Pietro Massarecchi). This struggle once again showed that the Congregation was unprepared to help broker a compromise between the bishops of Dubrovnik, who were the representatives of the economically weakened Republic, and their own missionary bishops.

In the next chapter (*The Catholic Missions and the Origins of Albanian Nation-Building at the Beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, pp. 135–157), the author presents the role of the Catholic clergy in the formation of national identity through perhaps one of the least-known examples—the history of the Albanian missions. The small number of Albanian priests trained in Rome, in addition to their pastoral work, created a serious struggle for a literary expression of the basic elements of Albanian identity. These re-emerged in a completely different context during the course of nineteenth-century nation building. Historical sources on Catholics in Albania from the late sixteenth century tell of intense ethnic struggles between the Albanian clergy and the Dalmatian church prelates. Dr. Molnár presents the reader with the biography and the main actions of the most important actor in this event,

Pietro Massarecchi, who was born in Prizren. Albanian students studying in Rome fought against Dalmatian Catholics over the jurisdiction of the eastern Adriatic coast. The efforts of these prelates were welcome to the Congregation as a promotion of the Catholic faith. However, this process of confessionalization ended with the Great Turkish War, and the Albanian Catholic community never became a key factor in the creation of an Albanian national identity.

Another emphatic statement is expressed in Chapter 7, *The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Attempts at Union with Rome in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, pp. 157–169, which places the ambitions for a Catholic union with the Serbs within the context of Balkan missions. As the author says, efforts to proselytize to the Serbs were always a peripheral objective for Balkan Catholic confession-building in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to the author, the only and most significant attempt at creating this union was the Marča church union. According to reports from the seventeenth century, it seems that not even the Catholic prelates believed in the success of a union between the Serbs and the Catholic Church. The sources provided in this book also confirm this, as the local Catholic prelates took the matter of these missions with reservations because the establishments of new episcopal sees would have weakened their positions.

The penultimate chapter, *The Balkan Missions under the Pontificate of Innocent XI (1676–1689)*, pp. 169–183, is devoted to centralizing missionary work during the time of Pope Innocent XI. This was a highly ambitious project that was meant to resolve the missions' issues that were mentioned in previous chapters. The main aim was to promote confessionalization through national sentiment. However, establishing the Holy League (1684) and driving the Ottomans out of Central Europe during the Great Turkish War only made the situation worse for Catholic institutions in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century.

The tenth and final chapter, *La Schiavona. A Bosnian Girl between Catholic Hagiography and Balkan Female Transvestism*, pp. 169–205, is a study conducted through the special lens of male-female transformation with elements that also

appear in Catholic female mysticism and Balkan folk tradition. The biography of Magdalena Pereš-Vuksanović is a truly unique source for seventeenth century Balkan history. It offers a glimpse into the closed and unknown world of early modern Bosnian women and draws attention to aspects of Balkan Catholicism that combine European and Balkan elements.

One hopes that this collection of studies and research conclusions will help shed some light on the unknown history of the Catholic missions and relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in the Balkans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This work was based on extensive scholarly research and resources from the Vatican Archives. This glimpse into archival and primary resources helps the reader better understand the bonds between the early modern Catholic institutes in Rome and the Catholic population in the Balkans and Ottoman Hungary, as reflected in the activities of Catholic missions.

**Attila Pfeiffer**

doi: 10.19090/i.2020.31.279-282

© Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, 2020

ISTRAŽIVANJA – JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES 31, 279–282

---

Karl-Peter Krauss, *Mord an der Donau. Leopold von Márffy und die deutschen Untertanen in Tscheb (1802–1812). Eine Mikrogeschichte der Gewalt*. Südosteuropäische Arbeiten 160. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018. 306 pp.

---

On a Sunday evening, September 20, 1812, fourteen men equipped with axes, clubs, and a rifle hid near Lipót Márffy's mansion in Čelarevo. Their hair was combed into their faces, their facial skin was darkened with soot, and their heads were covered with a long black cap. They were waiting for their landlord, the fifty-four-year-old Lipót Márffy, the former chief notary of Bács-Bodrog county. When the approaching of the carriage was reported, they came out of their hiding place, stopped the horses, and fired five times at the landowner. The victim was pulled out of his car, thrown to the ground and then inflicted further injuries. The perpetrators threw the gun into the Danube. An investigation and official proceedings