

[Comment 2]

Balkan Society under Habsburg Rule: Functional Differentiation in the Composite Monarchy

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In early modern Europe emerged so-called composite monarchies. A composite monarchy was not established as a homogeneous state like a modern nation-state but as a composition of kingdoms and provinces. These kingdoms and provinces retained, in most cases, their traditional rights and privileges. In that way, composite monarchies were accepted, or tolerated, by corporative constructed early modern society, as John H. Elliott depicted.

In composite monarchies, traditional kingdoms and provinces remained largely intact and autonomous. Therefore, composite monarchies could unwillingly lose components, if components at the same time wanted and were strong enough to leave monarchies. But, as a historical fact, many composite monarchies held their form through decades. How could composite monarchies hold their form?

So-called confessionalization or personal loyalty to the monarch may be seen as an integral factor, but this time I would like to focus on another integral factor, namely, functional differentiation within composite monarchies. Generally speaking, a large society has functionally differentiated components, and the more components become differentiated, the more they are dependent on whole society. A society which has highly interdependent components could be regarded as “integrated”. Then, we may see functional differentiation as an integral factor. Seeing the early modern Croatian society under Habsburg rule as an example, I would like to examine how functional differentiation worked on a composite monarchy and its components.

1. Composition of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy

The House of Habsburg split in the middle of the sixteenth century into Spanish and Austrian branches. The Austrian Habsburg Monarchy was made up of hereditary lands (Tyrol and Anterior, Upper, Lower and Inner Austria), the Lands of the Bohemian Crown (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) and the Kingdom of Hungary (comprised the Kingdom of Hungary in a narrower sense and the Kingdom of Croatia). Hereditary lands could be seen as fixed components of the Monarchy, but the lands which were obtained after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, namely, the Lands of the Bohemian Crown and the Kingdom of Hungary were elective polities and hence, in theory, loose components, though these lands, in practice, stayed in the Monarchy with a short interruption.

2. Defense against the Ottoman Empire

In the early stage of the Early Modern Era, the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy was threatened by many powers, but mostly by the Ottoman Empire. To protect lands of the Monarchy, the Habsburg should block the path, through that the Ottoman troops came, and the most important path went through the Kingdom of Croatia which was a highly autonomous component of the Kingdom of Hungary and located in the west of the Balkan Peninsula.

In order to stop the Ottoman troops, Croatia should be provided with adequate mercenary troops and fortresses,

but the Croatian finance was already ruined by the Ottoman invasion. To fortify devastated Croatia, other lands with relative healthy finance, namely hereditary lands, Bohemian lands and Hungary shared the cost. Here we can see a functional differentiation: Croatia was specialized in providing security, other lands specialized in civil production and paid for security.

3. Change in the Croatian society

In the course of fortification of Croatia, it turned out that the Monarchy could not cover the total cost. Then the Habsburg found another way to fortify Croatia. From the 1530s, the Habsburg settled refugees from the Ottoman Empire in provinces of Croatia. These refugees, called military colonists, had to do military service as unpaid soldiers and they, in return, enjoyed privileges (tax-exemption and freedom in faith). Jurisdiction over these military colonists belonged to the Lower (later Inner) Austrian military authorities. Croatia emerged now as a Monarchy's fortress or a barrack that was largely administrated by the Austrian authorities.

Conclusion

Croatia was extremely specialized in security-section in the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy. Highly armed, but in financial and administrative aspect crucially dependent on the Monarchy, Croatia was no more autonomous polity as it was in the Middle Ages. Croatia became an integrated component of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy. On the other hand, the whole Austrian Habsburg Monarchy may have benefited by Croatia which provided instant, low-cost, concentrated defense against the Ottoman troops.

It can be argued hypothetically as follows: Functional differentiation integrates a composite monarchy and benefits a composite monarchy as a whole, but (or and) undermines autonomous status of a single component of a composite monarchy.

Further investigation will be needed. Following two themes may be important:

- (1) How was attitude of the monarchs and each components of the composite monarchies toward functional differentiation?
- (2) How did the monarchies abandon the advantage of functional differentiation in the course of becoming modern homogeneous states? What was compensation for functional differentiation?