

## Opoja and Gora according to the Serb Author Milisav Lutovac

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### **Abstract:**

*Milisav Lutovac financially supported by the Serbian Academy of Sciences, stayed for two months during the years 1948, 1949, 1951 and 1953 in order to make ethnographic and geographic research in the provinces of Opoja and Gora. After the research and studies he had made on the ground he returned to Belgrade in 1955 and published the book: Gora and Opoja - anthropogeographic research. Engagement and interest of this author had a double aim, scientific and political.*

*He was correct in the description of the geographical position, natural characteristics, economy of the region, but when speaking about settlements and the population, this author writes based on panslavism ideology, adjusting his research to the Serbian goals and politics. Milisav Lutovac book "Gora and Opoja" consists of the following titles: Geographical position, natural features, economy, settlements and population in the province of Opoja and Gora, with a total of 141 pages.*

**Key words:** Gora, Opoja, settlements, Sharri, Lutovac, Jastrebov

### **LUTOVAC PRECEDING THE IDEOLOGICAL RESEARCHERS FOR OPOJA AND GORA**

For this region, it has been written more by foreign authors, a part of whom had been deliberately trying to distort the scientific arguments only to replete political goals of existing Serbian hegemonic regimes. The following authors wrote on

Opoja: Jastrebov, Cvijic, Lutovac, having a part of their writing put into the service of hegemonic politics for Albanians in general. Thus, based on the writings of Lutovac, in particular for the province of Gora, Serbia would engage historians, linguists, ethnologists, geographers from the "*Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA)*", respectively from the so-called "*Sector of Studies for Kosovo and Metohija*" and "*Geographic Institute "Jovan Cvijić"* in the framework of this academy. The three such volumes bear the same title: "*Zhupat e Bjeshkëve të Sharrit - Gora, Opoja dhe Sredska*" (Serbian, "*Šarplaninske Župe - Gora, Opolje i Sredska*“, English "*Zhupas of Sharri Mountains - Gora, Opoja and Sredska*").<sup>1</sup> The twin institution of SASA has been and remains "the Orthodox Church of Serbia", with which this academy has more than a century cooperating and coordinating their destructive, hegemonic and warmongering activities in relation with neighboring peoples and with Albanians in particular. The Serbian Orthodox Church, declaring Kosovo as "the heart and soul of the Serbian people," leaves "without hearts and souls" Albanians and other non-Serbs in Kosovo.<sup>2</sup> This is best explained by the renowned Albanian historian, Skender Rizaj in his history book, "*Kosova dhe shqiptarët dje, sot dhe nesër*" ("*Kosovo and Albanians yesterday, today and tomorrow*"), writing as follows: "*Experience of humanity has shown that every ideology or false policy, which aims to introduce itself in places where inappropriate in history, that is exactly what has been hit by its falsified theory, because it does not write history on the basis of historical sources, but does it based on what is dictated by the existing current interests*".<sup>3</sup> So instead of historians shedding light to the ethnic background of Gorani community in the municipality of

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<sup>1</sup> Bedri Halimi, Xhevat Hasani, Qasjet antishkencore për Gorën dhe goranët na Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Serbisë dhe na disa individë të instrumetalizuar na treva e Gorës – "Goranët", Sharr, 2012, p.103.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Skender Rizaj, *Kosova dhe shqiptaret dje, sot dhe nesër*, Prishtinë, 1992, p.43.

Dragash, because of their former politicians and some scientists of several countries of the region who were in service of acquisition politics, such background has continually become more unclear.<sup>4</sup>

## **GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF OPOJA AND GORA ACCORDING TO LUTOVAC**

Regarding the geographic position of Gora and Opoja, Lutovac wrote: There are two mountainous regions, located between high mountains of Sharri, Koretnik, Korabi Mountain and Galajic,<sup>5</sup> whose sea level exceeds 2.500 m. Gora represents the most elevated part of the Basin while Opoja is in the less elevated area. This limited geographical position is divided in two parts along the border with Albania which divides a part of Gora, inhabited by Serbs of Muslim religion.<sup>6</sup> This author, regarding Opoja and Gora writes as follows: "dominance of almost the entire region is of Slavic or better saying Serbian origin. During the medieval age their population was largely composed of Serbs, and this led to the transfer of sovereign Serbs in the Middle-Ages, who gave the villages of this area to monasteries".<sup>7</sup> It is clear that his opinion was unfounded, non-scientific and unacceptable because Albanian population of Opoja was entirely Albanian as it is today. While, Gorani were Slavic-speaking but were not Serbian.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF OPOJA AND GORA ACCORDING TO LUTOVAC**

Lutovac also wrote about the natural features of these two regions: "geological structure of this region is mainly formed of

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<sup>4</sup> Muharrem Qafleshi, *Opoja dhe Gora ndër shekuj*, Prishtinë, 2011, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Milisav Lutovac, *Gora i Opolje – antropogeografska proučavanja, odeljenje društvenih nauka SAN*, Beograd, 1955, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Milisav Lutovac, *Gora e Opolje...*, p. 85.

Paleozoic rocks with gaps made of granite in various places; nevertheless, the highest peaks are composed of limestone, marble and by a geological metamorphosis; in the depth of the basin, sand of water and river ice was found.<sup>8</sup> He also writes correctly regarding the elevation, writing as follows: the elevation has been affected by river and glacial erosion. In addition, the lake which flows for millions of years, during the floods in earlier stages, filled the low parts of basin leaving its traces there. As a result of petro-graphic construction and different geographical influences, different forms of elevation are also shown. The entire basin is affected by the expansion of erosion of fluvio-glacial layers and the slopes of the mountains where some of the terrains are extremely steep, and less steep on the other sides; in regions where rivers carry their sources to the bottom of Sharr mountain peaks, characterized by an extension of the bay from where glaciers along diluvium came down toward the surface of the Basin".<sup>9</sup> Although extended in the high mountains, this region in relation to its relative height, has a soft and quite stable climate. Therefore such an elevation protects this region from strong winds and in addition to it, the effects of the Adriatic Sea with its warm currents penetrate to some extent through the river Luma. The rainfalls that range from 1.200 up to 2.000 mm, reach their maximum in autumn and spring. Due to such distribution of humidity, it is insufficient for different crops, especially during the summer drought.<sup>10</sup> Especially water resources and flows are abundant in this region due to heavy rain and snowfalls and non-permeability of the terrain. All water flows are collected in Pllava (Luma) river, which flows into Drini i Bardhë river. Rivers have the highest level of water in spring and at the beginning of summer until snow and ice from the Sharri

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 85-86.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

mountain melts.<sup>11</sup> Flora has almost no interruption, but it ends only in the high peaks of the mountain whereas forests cover an area which is not so expanded. Sharr Mountains have been an inexhaustible source of pastures for many herds of animals not only for these parts but also for the neighbouring regions that somehow this has made that a number of shepherds have had an impact on the destruction of forests. The mountains of Gora, the way they are nowadays, so they were during the Middle-Ages, known as the richest of all the mountains of the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>12</sup>

### **ECONOMY OF OPOJA AND GORA ACCORDING TO LUTOVAC**

When writing about the economy of Opoja and Gora, he gives a clear and substantive description, and he says: Geographical natural features in Gora and Opoja, provide good conditions for livestock, because pastures provided the basis for economic life of these two provinces.<sup>13</sup> This region was well known in the later centuries for growth of the sheep, therefore this author provides important insights to cultivation of sheep, for example the village Restelica in Gora, in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had 96.000 sheep, which means that every household had in average 1.000 sheep.<sup>14</sup> The basis for such a high degree in growth of sheep were the rich pastures in this area and on the other side the pastures during the winter season in Macedonia and Thrace. As the farmers brought down the sheep herds during October and returned to their place by the end of April. They had their valuable pastures in the high mountains, for all types of livestock (sheep, lambs, castrated rams, horses, cattle). By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, farmers of Gora and Opoja practiced freely their movement to the mountain

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

houses.<sup>15</sup> But starting from this period, to the extent where the Albanian anarchy would begin its expansion, the growth of animals would fall soon. Albanians from the region of Luma would plunder the herds that were in the pastures in the mountain and those that were returning from Macedonia. For this reason the residents of these areas were forced to stop doing this work and began to deal with other, less risked activities. Residents of Gora became sellers of oriental sweets (pastry) throughout the entire peninsula.<sup>16</sup> According to Lutovac, Opoja and Gora people, at their early age would go abroad, and he wrote about this phenomenon as follows: "Balkan and Egypt, where residents of Opoja engaged as paid shepherds to take care of herds in Anatolia and Thrace. All adults, and especially the children from the age of 10, migrated temporarily out of their birthplace to find a job.<sup>17</sup> For the other economic branch he writes: regarding agriculture, it has never been so well developed in these parts, first and foremost because of the hilly-mountainous terrain of this region, and secondly, because of the density of the residents in this area. Among other things, the large growers and migrating workers did not pay appropriate attention. They planted a small quantity of oats, rye and barley every two or three years in the same fields. Short time ago they started to deal with the cultivation of potato, which has provided a high productivity in this region.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth mentioning the fact that a large number of inhabitants of Gora dealt with trading of weapons during the period of flourishing of caring for livestock. This was mainly found in villages of Rapçë, Baçkë, Vraniç, Krushevë, Zlipotok and some other villages which produced rifles and pistols of old type and some parts of the firearms. Residents of Gora used to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 15-16.

sell these products in Prizren and in all provinces of the Ottoman Empire. They also had their own workshops for production of weapons in many cities. This profession almost stopped existing entirely with the beginning of industrial production of firearms.<sup>19</sup>

## THE POPULATION OF GORA AND OPOJA ACCORDING TO LUTOVAC

In that paper he wrote that: "Under the current situation regarding the inhabitants of these areas, situation is not the same. Gora region is populated by Serbs of Muslim religion, whereas the population of Opoja belongs to the ethnic group of Albanian language. Residents of Gora have retained their national character of the Middle Ages to nowadays, thanks to the situation that the region involves with the high mountains and compactness of the population that was not included in the movements of the major migration of Serbs that took place by the end of 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th century".<sup>20</sup> Whereas regarding the thesis for Opoja becoming Albanian, Jastrebov wrote that "the Albanian colonists at the time of Kukli Beg acquired the areas belonging to Christians, who had migrated from there because of the pressure".<sup>21</sup> In addition, he writes about the number of Serb orthodox churches in the province of Opoja. During his research he found the existence of seven churches in territory of Opoja, as follows: in Brezne, Bresanë, Brrut, Zaplluxhe, Kapre, Kosavë and Pllajnik, and in the places where religious people had settled in mountains of Brrut and four old Orthodox cemeteries.<sup>22</sup> Also the other Serb author, Dusan Nedeljkovic, for residents who

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> Ivan S. Jastrebov, *Stara Srbija i Albanija*, Beograd, 1904, p.14.

<sup>22</sup> Milan Ivanović, Ivan Stepanović Jastrebov i crkveni i kulturni spomenici Gore i Opolja iz vremena pre njihive islamizacije, *Zbornik radova*, Prizren, 1997, str. 102.

have lived in the area of rivers (so called donjorekance) and Gorani have accepted Islam but they have maintained their language.<sup>23</sup> A similar explanation is also given by the other Serb author, Petar Kostic, writing that "all the names of the settlements and places are connected with the Serbian population."<sup>24</sup> So, in this case Lutovac and other Serbian authors do not write in an objective way and have political purposes, when they say that the population in Opoja and Gora are Serbs, with a difference that people from Opoja speak Albanian, so was established the basis of the thesis "arnautashe". Among others, this has also impacted the enrichment of livestock carers and the fact that they got married only with members of their community. But the Albanians were increasingly practicing religion, residents of Gora were seeking more suitable ways to maintain their nationality and eventually they had to embrace Islam.

The last Christian resident named Bozhana died in 1857 in Brod village. Residents of Gora always keep their old family names (Djuraskovci, Milevci, Beljanovci, Milenkovci, etc.). Their women, among others, respect the religious Catholic and Orthodox holidays as well as customs in this region, particularly during the holiday of the New Year. They maintain in their coffers, religious icons and saints, heads of their families, as well as other Christian relics. Women have also retained their old and precious costumes. Saying shortly, residents of Gora have embraced the Islam, but maintaining their language and all their relative customs of their old religion.<sup>25</sup> Autochthonous population of Gora increased from a small number of immigrants, who were settled here as livestock shepherds, as transitional travellers, seeking rescue because of blood revenges. But these seem to have assimilated soon,

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<sup>23</sup> Dušan Nedeljko, Torbeši i Gornjorekanci, "Učiteljski pokret", sv. 5-6, Skoplje, 1933.

<sup>24</sup> Petar Kostić, Crkveni život pravoslavnih Srba u Prizrenu i njegovu okolini u XIX veku, Beograd, 1928, p. 162-165.

<sup>25</sup> Vepra e cituar, Milisav Lutaovac, p. 41.

because they talked the same language - Serbian as locals did. With all religious fanaticism that mullahs - Muslim preachers were trying to inspire residents of Gora, they are fully aware that they belong to Serbian nationality, historical tradition of the Serbian state of Medieval age and disaster in Fushe-Kosovo, a feeling that has not ceased to exist yet in them. On the contrary, the region of Opoja has undergone a deep ethnic disorder. Having an easy access and a more fertile land than that of Gora, Opoja had attracted in the XVI century the Turkish victorious leader Kukli-Beg, who had constructed his fortress there - the centre of Islamisation. A part of the old Serb population that embraced Islam at that time and the other part that migrated as part of massive migration that occurred by the end of the 17th century

The gap that these migrants had left seems to have been filled by the Albanians who came from the already Albanian regions of Podrime, Has and Luma. The language had formed a mixture from the old base of Islamized Serbs and Albanian immigrants, where the language of the latter became the language of the privileged class being victorious finally. Due to this blend, residents of Opoja differ from Albanians of neighbouring regions. In addition, residents of Opoja resemble in the ethnic and psychological views with those of Gora, with whom they maintain friendly relations, however without wedlock between them. Residents of Gora and Opoja do not voluntarily abandon their region and not finally. This stems from the fact that in addition to agriculture and livestock, they also practice the temporary immigration to find work elsewhere. The biggest immigration occurred after the year 1912, while a large number of Muslims departed for Turkey, with whom they were united only through religious link. Their population also got rarefied because of poverty during Austro-Hungarian occupation during the period 1915 until 1918.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 40-56.

## SETTLEMENTS OF OPOJA AND GORA ACCORDING TO LUTOVAC

Ancient Illyrian settlements in the territory of Opoja with Sharr Mountains and rich pastures conditioned the development of life and human activity in Opoja and Gora developing the Albanian culture and identity of Opoja people and that of Gorani for those speaking Slavic. Milisav Lutovac regarding Opoja and Gora settlements wrote in his book as follows: Currently in Gora and Opoja are 36 settlements (18 villages in each of these two regions). In addition, 10 villages of Gora are part of Albania. Almost all the villages in the current set up are located in the same environment where they were during the Middle Ages. Some of these villages had remained abandoned because of the plague (Glivnik, Premenje, Marin Do) or their names were changed by the Albanian population who newly colonized (Rrenc, Zym, Blaç, Kapre and Burdos-Bozovci in Opoja). So, he begins with historical distortions because all these villager were and are Albanian. Villages of Gora are located in the plateaus of the mountains or in the course of the river basins where pastures can be used easily. Meanwhile, settlements of Opoja are mainly located by the fields near the slopes with pastures and near the flat terrains sowed with grain crops. In addition, some of these villages or their oldest parts are located in the hills, such as Shajne (Albanian village M.Q.), Radesh, Leshtan).

The choice to settle in this way was determined for strategic reasons. All villages of this region belong to the type of batched villages; they are divided into neighbourhoods, which are inhabited by more or less than an extended family. Located in the centre of the village is the square called "sredselo" (the middle of the village) - where in general we find: a fountain, boutique, cafeteria and mosque. This type of village by origin, undoubtedly is linked to social circumstances, first and foremost insecurity. The development of different houses by

type through these villages depended on natural and social factors. In the deforested Gora, homes are mainly built of stone, except in Kerstec, which is located near the forest. In Opoja, houses are mainly built by bricks (bricks made of clay dried in the sun, locally known as qerpiq) "plita" and covered by tiles (made of stone). The way of house construction in Gora changed constantly. For as long as its residents were dealing with livestock, it was very primitive. It consisted of a single piece and was surrounded by many annexes of the house that were called "klet - a type of cellar" - a type of cellar. But the house has undergone a very rapid change while its residents began to immigrate temporarily in cities to find work. These immigrants returning to their homes, they built their houses that resembled to those in the cities. This new home for most was a one floor house; ground floor, "klet - a type of cellar", is made of two parts that served as a basement; the first floor has two or three rooms, one kitchen and a bathroom (hammam). House in Opoja is similar to that of Gora, but in most cases it is less rich with furniture and other appliances, which is closely linked with the engagement and the degree of culture of its inhabitants. Generally, it can be said that the temporary immigration in many towns of the Balkan peninsula, has exerted a great impact to the standard of living of the inhabitants of these regions, especially that has been manifested in the region of Gora. In this part the author provides a geographical overview with the topographic nomenclature of every village separately, having materials that he presents in a separate part: situation and type of villages and the origin of the population.<sup>27</sup> Although the history of ethnicities and peoples should be written as it was in reality, not according to the ideological and political goals, Milisav Lutovac, one of the first researchers that dealt with the study of both ethnographic regions of Opoja and Gora was fully influenced by Serbian politics.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 57-84.

Beginning with the settlements to population of Opoja and Gora, the author presented them as Serbian, who accepted Islam by violence from the Ottoman invader. When talking about ethnic identity, language and faith of the inhabitants of these two territories, Lutovac asserts that this process had happened differently with the Opoja people who became Albanians by first accepting Islam religion and then the Albanian language, whereas Gorani had accepted Islam religion but had preserved the Serbian language, so that together with Jastrebov they laid the foundations of the thesis of "arnautashe". It is an anti-scientific and unsustainable thesis. Whereas, regarding the geographic description, natural characteristics and economics, he was correct.