

## THE “CHRONICLER OF HERZEGOVINA,” PROCOPY CHOKORILO AND RUSSIA<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract:**

The article is about Herzegovinian monk Procopy Chokorilo. He is the author of *The Annals of Herzegovina. 1831–57*. This work was first published in Russian. In the middle of the 19th century Chokorilo made a trip to Russia. He collected donations for the construction of a Church in Mostar.

### **Keywords:**

Herzegovina, Procopy Chokorilo, Mostar, A.F. Hilferding, Russia, *The Annals of Herzegovina. 1831–57*.

### **АННОТАЦИЯ: К.В. МЕЛЬЧАКОВА.** «“Летописец Герцеговины” Прокопий Чокорило и Россия».

В статье идет речь о герцеговинском монахе Прокопии Чокорило, авторе сочинения «Летопись Герцеговины. 1831–57». Впервые она была опубликована на русском языке. В середине XIX в. Чокорило совершил путешествие по России, в ходе которого ему удалось собрать средства на строительство храма в Мостаре.

### **Ключевые слова:**

Герцеговина, Прокопий Чокорило, Мостар, А.Ф. Гильфердинг, Россия, «Летопись Герцеговины».

In the mid-19th century, little was known in Russia about the Slavo-Turkic region of Herzegovina. In 1858 a small article, *The Annals of Herzegovina 1831–57*, authored by a hieromonk of Mostar, Procopy Chokorilo (1802–63), was published in the Slavophile journal *Russkaya beseda* (“The Russian Conversation”) and became one of the first works in Russian which dealt with this region of the Balkans.

We owe the publication of this work to the Slavist and diplomat Alexander Fyodorovich Hilferding (1831–72). As the Russian consul in Sarayevo (1857–58), he traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina and met Chokorilo. Hilferding recorded the Herzegovinian’s story and translated it into Russian. It later entered the third volume of his collected Slavic works. In the preface to the work, Hilferding wrote the following: “The author of the proffered chronicle of events that have happened in our time (...) is an Orthodox monk, a man from Herzegovina, telling what he saw and heard, and often participated in. This simple and true story is translated word for word. The picturesque simplicity with which it spilled out from the pen of a man with no literary education is one of its virtues.”

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It is noteworthy that the original work was not published in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The publications that appeared later are a translation from Russian.

Procopy Chokorilo took holy orders early, served in Lyubinye (Eastern Herzegovina) and then moved to Mostar. It was there that he became acquainted with Hilferding.

The “Chronicle” of Procopy Chokorilo is a heartbreaking story of the rise, rule of Herzegovina and fall of Ali Pasha Rizvanbegovich Stochevich (1783–1851). This story about the struggle for power is full of descriptions of violence and atrocities, betrayals, exploits and miracles. It is an important source for studying the history of Herzegovina in the 1830s–50s. Most of the work talks about a controversial individual, Ali Pasha, and its final pages succinctly report on his successors as governor of Herzegovina: Ismail Pasha, Mustafa Pasha and Isaac Pasha. It is noteworthy that in the story of the history of feuds of the local nobility, Chokorilo also mentions Russia. According to him, in the 1830s, wanting to attract Christians to the struggle, supporters of the power of the Sultan, noble-born Herzegovinians (Ali-aga Rizvanbegovich from Stolats, Hassan-beg Resulbegovich from Trebinje, Bash-aga Redzhepashich from Nevesinye, Smail-aga Chengich from Gatsko), composed firmans,” which only an expert could distinguish from genuine ones.” One side contained an appeal of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–39), which reported on the sending of troops to Bosnia from Rumelia, promising benefits to all who sided with the legitimate ruler. On the back of this there was an inscription in Serbian: “My Orthodox Christians! Rise up for an honest Cross, do not give yourself into the hands of the rebels! Stand strong, fight the enemy until I come with my army. Nikolay Pavlovich, the Tsar of Russia.” Such propaganda in part helped Ali Pasha gain power over Herzegovina.

A fascinating story illustrating all the hardships of the Christians living in Herzegovina, surrounded by “bloodthirsty Turks” (Muslims. — *K. M.*), was sure to attract the attention of the Russian reader. Moreover, Chokorilo himself had the opportunity to travel to Russia in order to raise funds for the construction of churches and schools in Herzegovina.

Chokorilo was chosen as a guide for the first group of boys from Bosnia and Herzegovina who, in 1858, went to Russia to get education. Among them was Jovan Picheta, the father of the famous Slavic scholar, Vladimir Ivanovich Picheta (1878–1947), who initiated the Slavic Studies sector of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the Department of History of Southern and Western Slavs at the M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University.



*Procopy Chokorilo*

In July 1858 Chokorilo arrived in Odessa. Here he left a group of students and headed to Kiev, and in early October reached Moscow. His stay in Moscow was not without problems. In a letter from the historian and Slavophile Peter Alekseevich Bessonov to the famous historian, publicist and publisher Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin, someone by the name of Vereshchagin, who was appointed to accompany Chokorilo, went on a drinking binge and ceased to fulfill his duties. Hilferding developed a plan to move the monk from Moscow to St. Petersburg and tried to arrange a cell for him in the St Trinity compound. The problem was resolved thanks to P. A. Bessonov, who procured a place for the hieromonk in Moscow from the Metropolitan of Moscow, Philaret.

According to the laws concerning the collection of alms, Chokorilo could not take money for his trip from donated funds and therefore he was in constant need of financial assistance. Russian Foreign Minister Alexander Mikhaylovich Gorchakov personally appealed to Emperor Alexander II with a request to issue Chokorilo funds for travel expenses.

In January 1859 Chokorilo arrived in St. Petersburg. Here he lived not far from St Isaac's Cathedral, in the house of Tischner in Demidov Lane. Countess Antonina Dmitrievna Bludova tried to help the guest from the Turkish lands. In a letter to the archpriest of the Russian embassy church in Vienna, Mikhail Fyodorovich Raevsky, dated 31 January 1859, she wrote: "The Herzegovinian monk Chokorilo is here now, to whom we are giving all the ready-made things for Herzegovina. Hilferding vouches for him." Bludova herself presented Father Procopy the gift of a medallion and an image depicting saints.

Hilferding's article, "A few words about Herzegovina and its churches," published in the St. Petersburg Gazette, helped Chokorilo raise as much money as possible. It contained a brief report on the history of the region and told about the plight of kindred Slavs under "Turkish oppression."

In 1860 Procopy Chokorilo returned to his homeland. Despite the difficulties in organizing the trip, he was very well received in Russia. Empress Maria Alexandrovna herself granted bishop vestments for the Church of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in Mostar. He brought to Herzegovina a significant amount, 4,000 gold chervonets, and for a long time parcels with donations collected in Russia came to Mostar. Residents of the Novgorod, Kursk and Tula provinces made a significant contribution to the total amount, from which the Holy Synod received considerable assistance for co-believers. With these funds, the construction of the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Mostar began.

Years late in 1867, the acting Russian consul in Mostar, Alexey Nikolayevich Kudryavtsev (1867–68), wrote in one of his reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Chokorilo's trip to Russia: "None of the Herzegovinians have ever seen or heard anything like this, that a simple monk could bring with him more than 4,000 gold chervonets. Society and the people have donated. The mighty Roman Catholic Church has lowered its head, while the Austrian and French Jesuits, who patronized it, have become depressed. "Never will all the Catholic powers collectively give as much money as Orthodox Russia has given!"

But then Kudryavtsev told a sad story about how this money had sown discord in the Orthodox environment of Herzegovina and, in his opinion, brought harm instead of benefit, blackening the name of Russia. The fact is that Chokorilo decided to personally dispose of all the funds collected. He believed that the money would be enough for the restoration of 20 churches in Herzegovina and the construction of a large cathedral church in Mostar. Meanwhile, rumors of Russian favors continued to spread throughout the region. The abbots of the monasteries of Duzhi, Taslidzhe, Zhitomylich and Kosierovo went to Mostar in the hope of receiving money for their parishes, but left with nothing. Complaints poured into the Russian consulate. Chokorilo would not yield, and offended abbots began to spread rumors of deception on the part of Russia.

Chokorilo's plan was also unsuccessful. The Herzegovinian architect Spaso Vulich was hired for the construction of the church, there was only enough money to build walls, one of which cracked. "Four walls now stand majestically on the mountain, pointing out to the people their insolvency, impotence, ignorance ...," wrote Kudryavtsev in 1867.

Procopiy Chokorilo planned to make another trip to Russia. However, this intention was not destined to be realized: on 18 July 1863 he died.

The construction of the cathedral was completed in 1873 under the guidance of one of the best architects in the Balkans: Andrey Damyanov. Russian masters assisted in the arrangement of the interior decoration of the church. In 1992 the church was destroyed; in 2010 its restoration began.

*Translated by Igor Kaliganov*

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