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## The history of South Slavs in West European literature from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

**Abstract:** *The history of South Slavs in West European literature from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

The aim of this article is to present the most important issues related to West European perceptions of the history of South Slavs in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time of an increased interest in Slavic history, a process that ran parallel to the development of the Enlightenment perception of history. The analysis shows that in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and the early 19<sup>th</sup> c., in the face of the increasing weakness of Ottoman Turkey, the local Slavic communities were rediscovered in the Balkans. Although West European historiographies were familiar with them, the invention of new historical tools and contexts in the Age of Enlightenment resulted in a selective treatment thereof. It made it easy to consider South Slavs as uncivilised communities which, contrary to historical facts, remained at a primitive, tribal stage of development.

**Keywords:** South Slavs; historiography; the image of the Balkans; Enlightenment

**Słowa kluczowe:** Słowianie południowi; historiografia; obraz Bałkanów; oświecenie

The image of the history of South Slavs, while not often addressed in literatures on the subject, is an issue of importance for the formation of the idea of the Balkans.

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Most studies focus on the period of forging national identities, i.e. from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>1</sup>. As far as earlier times are concerned, e.g. the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, South Slavic historiography was of course a subject of studies, primarily in the context of the history of historiography and literary history. In modern times, the works of Dalmatian humanists, including Vinko Pribojević, Mavro Orbini, and Ivan Lučić, have become one of the foundations for the historical identity of South Slavs<sup>2</sup>. The connections of Slavs with the legacies of ancient Greece, Rome and Byzantium, as well as descriptions of the glory days of the medieval dominions (Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, to name a few), have become an important part of South Slavic ethnic genetic legends and historical identity as such<sup>3</sup>. However, researchers have rarely addressed the dialogue between South Slavic and West European historiographies, apart from the former's fitting into a broader context of the development of European historiography. Meanwhile, the lack of in-depth reflection on the topic has been extremely problematic in the context of a better researched issue, namely presentation of South Slavs in the West European view of the Balkans, or Eastern Europe as such.

The aim of this article is to present the most important issues (and often paradoxes) related to the Western perception of the history of South Slavs in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period marked by increased intensity of West European observations on Slavic history. The process ran parallel to the development of the Enlightenment concepts of history. The outlined chronological framework is in part a reference point for a broader context, as references to historiography in describing the history of Slavs in a wider chronological range are required in order to elaborate on the extremely important issue of the sources used by Western observers.

Researchers who have formed the concept of the Balkans or Eastern Europe have pointed out that the process was inextricably linked to the discovery of communities previously absent from geographical textbooks or travel accounts<sup>4</sup>. In turn,

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<sup>1</sup> The exception here is undoubtedly John Fine's exhaustive study, but it deals not so much with the picture of history as with the identity of the Balkans in the days before the formation of nations. J. Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans: A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, Ann Arbor 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, pp. 223–254.

<sup>3</sup> A. Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-Old Dream?*, Manchester 2003, pp. 35–40.

<sup>4</sup> M. Todorova, *Imaging Balkans*, Oxford 2007; B. Jezernik, *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers*, London 2007.

this discovery was linked to political issues, namely the progressing weakness of Ottoman Turkey. Accounts of diplomats, military officers, secret agents and various envoys tasked with describing the territories passed from Turks to Venetia, Austria or France, revealed to Europe the truth that, apart from Turks, Greeks, Jews and Armenians, the Ottoman Empire was also inhabited by other communities, including Slavs, Albanians and Vlachs<sup>5</sup>.

Faced with the growing weakness of the Ottoman Empire and the European powers' progressive political and economic expansion into Turkey, the local communities became an object of numerous political and economic projects. In the case of the former, mention should be made of efforts by Russia and Austria to use the military potential of Serbs, Greeks and Montenegrins against Turkey<sup>6</sup>. As for the latter, the physiocratic agrarian reform projects in the borderlands between Dalmatia and Bosnia should be mentioned. They became Venetian territories in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. All these issues were also of interest to the French (who ruled Dalmatia and later also a part of Croatia between 1806 and 1813), and to the English, who, as a maritime power, were interested in controlling the Mediterranean trade routes<sup>8</sup>.

Back in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Turkey was perceived as a power, travellers on their way from Split or Dubrovnik to Istanbul focused primarily on describing the cities and the local Turkish elite. The Slavs and Vlachs inhabiting the Ottoman province were described in a perfunctory manner by means of ambiguous terms that could refer to a number of different groups<sup>9</sup>. By contrast, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were detailed descriptions of communities living in the European part of Turkey, ready to throw off the 'Turkish yoke'. The term was relatively new, the Turks having been portrayed in West European sources as „born rulers”<sup>10</sup>, effectively managing a multinational and multi-religious empire. The nega-

<sup>5</sup> M. Todorova, *Imaging Balkans*, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> H. Ragsdale, *Evaluating the Traditions of Russian Aggression: Catherine II and the Greek Project*, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66 (1988), 1, pp. 91–117; B. Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806–1914*, Cambridge 1991; V. Oliver, *La France, la Russie et les Balkans. Les plans de partage de l'empire ottoman (1808)*, [in:] *Les Provinces illyriennes dans l'Europe napoléonienne*, ed. J.-O. Boudon, Paris 2015, pp. 29–42.

<sup>7</sup> D. Božić-Bužančić, *Europski fiziokratski pokret u južnoj Hrvatskoj u drugoj polovici XVIII. stoljeća*, *Historijski zbornik* 45 (1992), pp. 111–124.

<sup>8</sup> J. Grainger, *The British Navy in the Mediterranean*, Woodbridge 2017, pp. 140–165.

<sup>9</sup> M. Šamić, *Les voyageurs français en Bosnie à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe et le pays tel qu'ils l'ont vu*, Paris 1960, pp. 42–54.

<sup>10</sup> A case in point is the opinion expressed by Voltaire in *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* where he referred to Ottoman Turks: „One could say of them what Virgil said

tive overtone of the despotic nature of their rule was therefore not unequivocal, and it was only as Turkey's image deteriorated (following its successive political defeats in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) that this image became more uniform<sup>11</sup>.

Discussions of the involvement of Slavs in the anti-Turkish uprising, projects for economic reform in the conquered territory at the expense of Turkey, went hand in hand with reflections on the nature of these communities. According to researchers into the formation of this image, the reflection was quite unequivocal, and classified Slavs as primitive communities that could be described as barbarians or savages<sup>12</sup>. The term „savage” was not necessarily negative, since it was treated as an anthropological definition of a certain degree of social development. It was also associated with a shift in thinking about human history, associated with the progress of civilisation – a concept that emerged in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in a discussion of modern culture as juxtaposed with ancient standards<sup>13</sup>. Interestingly, because Enlightenment anthropology developed in an attempt to organise the knowledge of human societies discovered in Africa and the Americas, the Dalmatian shepherds, known as Morlachs, could have been compared to the Wyandot people, the Iroquois, or the Khoekhoen<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, opinions on the customs of native Americans and Africans were standardised, as part of an anthropological reflection on human nature, and became a key to understanding the different behaviours of all communities perceived as less civilised. Thus, the failure of the Venetian, and later French authorities, to implement agriculture in Dalmatia was explained by the peculiarities of the population of shepherds which the Enlightenment anthropology perceived as

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of the Romans: Their art is to command” („On pourrait dire d'eux ce que Virgile dit des Romains: Leur art est de commander”) – Voltaire, *Essay sur l'histoire générale, et sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations: Depuis Charlemagne Jusqu'a nos jours*, Genève 1761, vol. 3, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> A. Cirakman, *From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (2001), 1, pp. 49–68.

<sup>12</sup> B. Jezernik, *Europe and its Other (i.e. The Balkans)*, *Perifèria* 6 (2007), pp. 1–17; M. Knezović, *Morlak kao prirodni čovjek u djelima Alberta Fortisa, Ivana Lovrića i Balthasara Hacqueta*, [in:] *Triplex Confinium (1500.–1800.)*. *Ekohistorija – Zbornikradova, Književni krug Split, Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu*, E. Ivetić, D. Roksandić (eds.), Split–Zagreb 2003, pp. 125–144.

<sup>13</sup> J. Schlobach, *Progrès*, [in:] *Dictionnaire européen des Lumières*, M. Delon (ed.), Paris 1997, pp. 1041–1045.

<sup>14</sup> M. Knezović, *Morlak kao prirodni čovjek*, L. Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Stanford 2001, pp. 129–172.

a less civilised occupation (typical of e.g. nomadic peoples)<sup>15</sup>. Only agriculture could provide the basis for at least partial independence from the vagaries of the weather and the accumulation of economic surpluses, the preservation of which was to lead to the self-organisation of societies into more advanced communities (e.g. urban communities and states)<sup>16</sup>. As I have already stressed, the very fact of referring to certain Slavic communities as savage was not unequivocally pejorative. On the one hand, these communities were ascribed a number of negative traits characteristic of the period of ‘human childhood’<sup>17</sup> (laziness, short-sightedness, emotionality). On the other hand, they displayed original virtues of the „noble savage” uncontaminated by corruption brought about by civilization (truthfulness, hospitality, devotion)<sup>18</sup>. These features, combined with the vivid descriptions of Slavic folklore, paved the way for the romantic fascination with Slavic culture<sup>19</sup>.

The perception of the Balkan Slavs as societies at a pre-state, tribal level of development, certainly reflected the idiosyncrasy of some patriarchal shepherd communities<sup>20</sup>. This perspective, however, ignored the obvious fact that Slavs were primarily farmers, and that in the Middle Ages Slavic communities had a differentiated structure within complex state organisms, which, if only under the rule of the Nemanjić dynasty, no longer had much in common with a tribal state<sup>21</sup>. Centuries of ignoring the development of Slavic communities is most evident in the light of another term by which the communities of European Turkey and its borderlands have often been referred to, namely ‘barbarians’.

<sup>15</sup> M. Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières*, Paris 1971, pp. 87–102.

<sup>16</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, [in:] *On the Origin of Language*, A. Gode (ed.), Chicago 1966, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> P. Saint-Armand, *The Pursuit of Laziness: An Idle Interpretation of the Enlightenment*, transl. J. Gage, Princeton 2011, pp. 58–59.

<sup>18</sup> An example is the opinion of engineer Lasseret, one of the many Frenchmen who arrived in Dalmatia in 1806 with Napoleon’s troops: „Ces Morlaques ont les bonnes et les mauvaises qualités des peuples à demi-civilisés. Ils sont francs, humains, désintéressés, constants dans leurs amitiés, exercent l’hospitalité, sont attachés à la religion et aux bonnes mœurs. On leur reproche d’être vindicatifs, superstitieux, intempérants, quant toutefois la misère ne les force pas au jeune” – Lasseret, *Mémoire à joindre à la reconnaissance militaire de la Dalmatie, par Lasseret, ingénieur-géographe, décembre 1806*, Service historique de la Défense, Département de l’armée de terre 1M 1590–1591, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> V. Gulin, *Morlacchism between Enlightenment and Romanticism (Identification and Self-identification of the European Other)*, *Narodna Umjetnost* 34 (1997), 1, pp. 77–100.

<sup>20</sup> M. Luković, *Sezonowe migracje pasterzy na Bałkanach: charakter, historia, transformacje*, *Res Historica* 40 (2015), pp. 61–95.

<sup>21</sup> D. Janković, *Istorija države i prava feudalne Srbije, XII–XV vek*, Beograd 1961.

In ancient and early medieval times, much of the Balkans was a part of the Roman Empire and Byzantium, for centuries facing invasions by communities described as barbarian. So, the pronouncement of Slavic barbarism did not need to have been merely metaphorical. This issue is evident, above all, in relation to descriptions of the areas where the most material remains of Roman or Byzantine times were found, e.g. Dalmatia. Significantly, in modern times most of the information concerning South Slavs came from this region. The political frontier of Turkey, Venice and Austria overlapped, of course, with the cultural frontier, which could be viewed in a broader historical context, e.g. as a junction between Asia and Europe. A case in point is the way in which the inhabitants of the Italian-speaking, urbanised Dalmatian coast perceived the population of the mountainous, Slavic-speaking interior. This perception included not only a certain set of characteristics (provincial residents were, for example, supposed to be simple, gullible as well as impulsive) but also a different historical background. While the inhabitants of Split, Zadar and Dubrovnik thought about themselves as descendants of the population of the Roman Empire, Slavs were identified with barbarians hostile to the Latin and Byzantine civilisations. Hence, as the 18<sup>th</sup> century Venetians noted, many of the Morlachs (as the Slav shepherds in Dalmatia were called) used slabs with inscriptions from Roman times as building material. This was regarded evidence of their enduring hatred of Roman civilisation over the centuries<sup>22</sup>. Significantly, this opinion was popular not only in Venice but resonated beyond its border, for example in Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*<sup>23</sup> and in Roman history as described by Edward Gibbon, an eminent English historian of the Enlightenment<sup>24</sup> who wrote:

The inland parts have assumed the Sclavonian names of Croatia and Bosnia; the former obeys an Austrian governor, the latter a Turkish pasha; but the whole country is still infested by tribes of barbarians, whose savage independence irregularly marks the doubtful limit of the Christian and Mahometan power<sup>25</sup>.

When, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, French troops entered Dalmatia, annexed to the kingdom of Italy created by Napoleon, in their reports French officers used similar expressions, according to which the inhabitants of Dalmatian towns were descen-

<sup>22</sup> A. Fortis, *Voyage en Dalmatie*, transl. M. Chapuis, Berne 1778, vol. 2, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> Voltaire, *Essay sur l'histoire générale*, vol. 5, p. 228.

<sup>24</sup> L. Wollf, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Stanford 2001, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London 1809, vol. 1, p. 25.



dants of ancient Romans, and the Slavs of the interior descendants of the barbarian Scythians<sup>26</sup>.

The French administration of the Illyrian Provinces dealt with the Croatian military borderland population in a very similar way. However, while the inhabitants of the Dalmatian interior were supposed to be barbarians, the residents of the Croatian borderland were thought of as partially civilised owing to the area's military administration which controlled every aspect of the society (e.g. forcing shepherds to become farmers). According to French observers, only military discipline had the power to change the nature of the local population and push it on the path of progress<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly, some observers noted that outside the border area, the structure of Croatian society was reminiscent of European societies, headed by a privileged stratum (the nobility)<sup>28</sup>. However, these observations did not affect the assessment of Slavs living in the Illyrian Provinces.

More general views of the Slavs can also be found in the 18<sup>th</sup> century reflections on specific communities inhabiting European Turkey. Claude-Charles de Peyssonnel, a French diplomat and historiographer, authored an analysis in which he argued that Slavs were closely related to the barbarian tribes that had invaded Europe from the east in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, including the Huns, the Avars, and the Pechenegs<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, in his opinion, the Slavic language was the lingua franca of the barbarians, so that the Huns, the Avars and Slavs could communicate with each other to plan attacks on Rome and Byzantium<sup>30</sup>. Interestingly, the recognition of Slavs as barbarians was questionable insofar as the term was clearly defined by, for example, Montesquieu who, in his monumental work *The Spirit of Law* clearly indicated that the term connotes only nomadic peoples, not farmers<sup>31</sup>. Edward Gib-

<sup>26</sup> Sorbier, *Dalmatie (reconnaissance du côtes de la)*, 4 juin 1806, in: 3 *mémoires du colonel Sorbier sur les côtes et les îles de l'Istrie et de la Dalmatie*, 4 et 6 juin 1806, Service historique de la Défense, Département de l'armée de terre 1M 1590–1591, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> A.-F.-L. Vieusse de Marmont, *Mémoires du Duc de Raguse: de 1792 a 1832: imprimés sur le manuscrit original de l'auteur*, Paris, 1857, vol. 3, pp. 484–485.

<sup>28</sup> *De la féodalité en Croatie Civile*, AN 138AP/149, dossier 1.

<sup>29</sup> C.-Ch. de Peyssonnel, *Observations historiques et géographiques sur les peuples barbares qui ont habité les bords du Danube et du Pont-Euxin; suivies d'un Voyage fait à Magnésie, à Thyatire, à Sardes, &c. Contenant une Relation de ce qu'il y a de plus curieux en Monuments Antiques, Inscriptions, Médailles, dont plusieurs n'étaient pas encore connus; & précédées d'une Dissertation sur l'origine de la Langue Sclavone prétendue Illyrique*, Paris 1765, p. XV.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXII.

<sup>31</sup> Montesquieu, *O duchu praw*, translation into Polish by T. Żeleński-Boy, Kraków 2003, p. 262.

bon was more restrained in classifying Slavs as nomads. Although he stated that „the wild people who dwelt or wandered in the plains of Russia, Lithuania, and Poland might be reduced, under the two great families of the Bulgarians and the Slavs”, only the first-mentioned people were said to have descended from the Huns and led a nomadic lifestyle „resembling the well-known picture of Tartar customs”<sup>32</sup>.

A characteristic feature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century descriptions of the Slavic past and contemporary Slavic customs was also a belief in their homogeneity. According to Larry Wolff, this homogeneity was later to become one of the pillars of the depiction of Eastern Europe, in contrast to representations of the West, which were to consist of various elements<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, in French, Italian and English references to Slavs, there are few remarks on the uniformity of their customs. In his account of a trip to Dalmatia, Alberto Fortis, an Italian naturalist stated that „as far as (the Slavic) language and customs are concerned, they seem to form a single people, inhabiting the area between the Gulf of Venice to the Ocean of Ice”<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, Marcel de Serres, a French diplomat who depicted the Habsburg monarchy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, believed that there was only one Slavic language divided into individual dialects, the sound of which depended on the influence of other languages, like German and Italian<sup>35</sup>. Interestingly, the view of the homogeneity of Slavs was also shared by many representatives of the elites of the emerging Slavic nations<sup>36</sup>. This train of thought will be developed later in the text but I should mention the testimony of Aleksander Sapięha, a Polish nobleman in the service of French diplomacy. At the sight of the customs of Dalmatian Slavs in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, he expressed his conviction that since they had not changed over the centuries of the Ottoman rule,

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<sup>32</sup> „According to the Greek writers, the former, who touched the Euxine and the lake Mæotis, derived from the Huns their name or descent; and it is needless to renew the simple and well-known picture of Tartar manners. They were bold and dexterous archers, who drank the milk, and feasted on the flesh of their fleet and indefatigable horses; whose flocks and herds followed, or rather guided the motions of their roving camps; to whose inroads no country was remote or impervious, and who were practiced in flight, though incapable of fear” – E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 4, p. 218.

<sup>33</sup> L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994, pp. 284–291.

<sup>34</sup> A. Fortis, *Voyage en Dalmatie*, vol. 1, p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> *Voyage en Autriche ou essai statistique et géographique sur cet empire (etc.)*, Paris 1814, vol. 4, p. 324.

<sup>36</sup> D. Dzino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat: Identity Transformations in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Dalmatia*, Leiden 2010, pp. 16–17.



Poles would not lose their nature under the Partitions<sup>37</sup>. In essence, this homogeneity was linked to the primordial nature and attachment to the a specific community which – as in Sapieha's case – could be perceived positively (the immutability of character guaranteed survival even in unfavourable conditions), but also negatively – reluctance to changing customs, including stepping up the civilisation ladder, stood in the way of the seemingly inevitable progress.

Only the most salient characteristics of the Enlightenment image of South Slavs have been listed above. To a large extent, they overlapped with the image of the Slavic dominion as such, although it was the history of South Slavs that placed itself territorially (and partly chronologically) in the Roman-Byzantine context, so important for building a broad perspective on the antinomy of barbarism and civilisation, as well as progress and backwardness. Many of these issues have already been discussed in literature on the subject, together with the reasons for the different characteristics including the change in thinking about history and the emergence of completely new sciences like anthropology and the related ethnology<sup>38</sup>. It was, after all, the enchanting customs of the Dalmatian shepherds and an attempt to interpret them that contributed to their place on the axis of human progress<sup>39</sup>. A question should be asked if, and to what extent, other information on the history of Slavic communities was confronted with the perspective of South Slavic historiography, and which parts of the history of Slavic communities were overlooked.

As for the former, most of the information concerning the history of South Slavs has been provided in modern times by intellectuals originating from Dalmatia, including Vinko Pribojević, Mavro Orbini, Ivan Lucić, and Andrija Kačić Miošić. Remarkably, all of the authors came from Dalmatian cities, which were then under the cultural influence of Italian countries, and it was there that most of their books were printed. For example, Pribojević's work *De origine successibusque Slavorum* was published in 1525 in Venice, and Mauro Orbini's *Il regno degli Slavi* in Pesaro (1601). In contrast, *De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae: libri sex* by Ivan Lucić was published in Amsterdam in 1666. An examination of the reception of these and other works, especially by Orbini and Lucić, shows that they were well known in the intellectual elites of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Europe<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> A. Sapieha, *Podróże w krajach słowiańskich odbywane*, T. Jabłoński (ed.), Novi Sad–Wrocław 1983, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> M. Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> V. Gulin, *Morlacchism between Enlightenment and Romanticism*.

<sup>40</sup> A. Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans*, p. 225; W. Sajakowski, *Obraz*

The first work, *De origine successibusque Slavorum* by Vinko Pribojević, provided a Biblical context for the eponymous „glorious origin of Slavs”<sup>41</sup> i.e. descendants of Noah<sup>42</sup>, a standard procedure in pre-Enlightenment historiography<sup>43</sup>. The context of the ancient Hellenistic world was also extremely important. Just as chronicler Wincenty Kadłubek placed the first rulers of Poland in the time of Alexander the Great, Pribojević linked the oldest Slavic history with this ruler. In his view, Slavs became the rightful inhabitants of the territories they occupied following a privilege that Alexander issued under the impression of their prowess<sup>44</sup>. However, they were not only skilled warriors for „they not only combined abundant physical strength with a noble spirit, but also with mental capacity to practice science”. This presumption was justified by the information that one of the most important philosophers of all time, Aristotle, was a Slav (as was Alexander the Great)<sup>45</sup>. This belief was justified by a very simple geographical argument: both Aristotle and Alexander the Great were born in a territory inhabited by Slavs<sup>46</sup>. Other information that was supposed to justify the legitimacy of the presence of Slavs in the Balkans and their connection with ancient culture was the idea of the ancient provenance of the Slavic alphabet, allegedly invented by Jerome of Stridon, a Roman of Illyrian origin (according to Pribojević, he too was a Slav)<sup>47</sup>. The theory that Saint Jerome supposedly invented the Slavic alphabet was later forwarded by Mavro Orbini who in his work *Il regno degli Slavi* (‘The Kingdom of Slavs’), from 1601 presented his own vision of Slavic history. In his view, Slavs came from Scandinavia and were of Germanic origin (he

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*ludów bałkańskiego wybrzeża Adriatyku*, Poznań 2013, pp. 72–79.

<sup>41</sup> Pribojević, as well as Orbini, presented a „patriotic” approach to writing history, typical of pre-Enlightenment historiography and described, among others, by A. Grabski, A. Grabski, *Dzieje historiografii*, Poznań 2006, pp. 7, 267, 203, 241.

<sup>42</sup> According to him, they should be attributed to Tiras, one of Noah’s descendants. The descendants of Tiras were said to have settled in Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Bulgaria – V. Pribojević, *O Podrijetlu i Zgodama Slavena*. (*De Origine Successibusque Slavorum*), transl. V. Gortan, Zagreb 1951, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> P. Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne*, Paris 1995, pp. 35–39.

<sup>44</sup> Pribojević justified his theory by citing this alleged document about East European Slavs, a gift by Alexander the Great to Slavs for their bravery and prowess in his army (*Privilege Alexandri Magnidonatum Populis Slavis*). The legend of Alexander and Slavs appears in many other South Slavic accounts – V. Pribojević, *O Podrijetlu i Zgodama Slavena*, pp. 132–133; H. Morović, *Legenda o povelji Aleksandra Velikoga u korist Slavena*, [in:] *Sastranica starih knjiga*, ed. H. Morović, Split 1968, pp. 109–124.

<sup>45</sup> V. Pribojević, *O Podrijetlu i Zgodama Slavena*, p. 147.

<sup>46</sup> J. Rapacka, *Leksykon tradycji chorwackich*, Warszawa 1997, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 143.

associated them with the Vandals, based on the testimony of Albert Kranz, a German historian)<sup>48</sup>. After migrating southwards, they arrived in south-eastern Europe, where they fought the ancient Illyrians and adopted their culture and language. In this way, Orbini linked the idea of the invasion of Slavs with the legitimacy of their presence in south-eastern Europe, since the Slavic language was supposed to have been spoken in the area long before their arrival as the speech of the Illyrians.

Despite their attempts to place Slavs in an earlier developmental context (Illyrian, Greek, Roman), both Pribojević and Orbini focused primarily on descriptions of their conquests. Orbini did not shy away from descriptions of the ruthlessness and cruelty of the Slav conquerors<sup>49</sup>. Both of them treated Slavs as a single community (which was, by the way, representative of other Dalmatian elites); it was clearly emphasised not only in the titles of their historiographic treatises (*De origine successibusque Slavorum* – „On the glorious origin of Slavs” and *Il regno degli Slavi* „The kingdom of the Slavs”), but also the content. For example, Orbini emphasised that Slavs were „the most powerful nation on earth” precisely because of their numbers and the territorial extent of the lands they occupied<sup>50</sup>.

Orbini’s work, published in 1601, provided an important context for other authors describing the Slavic past for at least two hundred years, as exemplified by the work of Andrija Kačić Miošić, specifically *Razgovor Ugodni Naroda Slovinskoga* published in 1756<sup>51</sup>. In his study on nomadic peoples in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, published in 1765, Charles-Claude de Peyssonnel chastised Orbini’s concept<sup>52</sup>. Part of this criticism stemmed from a change in thinking about and describing history from the late 17<sup>th</sup> and the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the period of the „crisis of European consciousness” described by Paul Hazard. Thus, Peyssonnel first criticised the theory of the biblical lineage of Slavs supposedly descended from Tiras, a descendant of Noah, which he compared to the genealogy of the giants in Rabelais’ work<sup>53</sup>. More significant, however, is the fact that he negated any connection between Slavs and the culture of the ancient Illyrians, treating them as a people hostile to any civilisation. He also stated that the language of Slavic barbarians was

<sup>48</sup> M. Orbini, *Il Regno de gli Slavi hoggi corrottamente detti Schiavoni*, Pesaro 1601, p. 7; A. Merrlis, R. Miles, *The Vandals*, London 2010, p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> M. Orbini, *Il Regno de gli Slavi*, pp. 15–16, 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> J. Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans*, pp. 288–289.

<sup>52</sup> C.-Ch. de Peyssonnel, *Observations historiques et géographiques sur les peuples barbares*, p. VII.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXXIV.

unsuitable for art and literature, which, he claimed, the intellectual elite of the Republic of Ragusa could not accept<sup>54</sup>.

Interestingly, Peyssonnel's criticism did defy most of the findings provided by Orbini, he merely reinterpreted them in the Enlightenment spirit. After all, from the time of Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, historiography was not so much to glorify victories on the battlefield (as described by Pribojević and Orbini) as cultural and scientific achievements, which, according to Peyssonnel, Slavs could not boast of, as war was their only occupation<sup>55</sup>. Interestingly, the sources on which modern historiographers (Pribojević, Orbini and Lucić) have relied, did not present the Slavic population in a favourable light. I mean not only the Byzantine testimonies (e.g. *De administrando impero* by Constantine Porphyrogenetus) but even a very important account like pope Duklanin's *Latopis*. According to Jan Leśny, the work's author shared the perspective of the population of the Roman cities of Dalmatia, who regarded the Slavic population (e.g. Croats) barbarian<sup>56</sup>. Most often, the differences between the perspectives on the history of Slavs did not result from a new source of information but from a new interpretation of the existing texts. For example, the recurring motif of the homogeneity of Slavic customs and their numbers may have been for Orbini a testimony to their power. However, for Peyssonnel it was a convenient justification for classifying them as an undefined mass of barbarian hordes.

It seems, however, that the Enlightenment presumption of Slavic barbarism was only partly related to historical inquiry, and largely derived from the modern image of Slavs found in travel literature and other documents: travel accounts, the press, encyclopaedic sources and dictionaries. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Slavs were often pictured as cruel soldiers and mercenaries, troops recruited in the Croatian military frontiers (a part of the Habsburg army), responsible for many of the atrocities of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). For example, this is how Friedrich Schiller, the famous German poet, philosopher and historian, portrayed them in the history of this conflict<sup>57</sup>. Similar opinions were expressed in numerous testimonies concerning the wars of the Austrian succession, the Silesian wars and the Seven

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. XXXIX.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> J. Leśny, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Historia królestwa Słowian czyli latopis popa Duklanina*, transl. J. Leśny, Warszawa 1988, p. 5; see also: J. Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans*, pp. 84–99.

<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Geschichte des dreißigjährigen Kriegs*, Frankfurt 1791, p. 213.

Years' War – all the conflicts in which Austria was involved<sup>58</sup>. It seems, therefore, that the Avars and Bulgarians described fighting each other in *Candide* (a metaphor for the Seven Years' War) with not merely an allegorical reference to the barbarism of the conflicts of the time, but a statement of the presence of real barbarians in the army of one of the parties at war<sup>59</sup>. Notably, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century European press often referred to the political situation on the European fringes of the Ottoman Empire, including Turkish battles against the Montenegrins and other groups described as *hajduks*. This contemporary context justified associating Slavs with the barbarians who had threatened Greece and Rome in antiquity<sup>60</sup>.

The above findings, however, do not explain why communities that, prior to the Ottoman conquest of south-eastern Europe, had created complex state organisms important to medieval political relations, were accused of barbarism. The history of these states was described by Mavro Orbni, Ivan Lucić and many authors well-known to European intellectual elites since the late 17<sup>th</sup> and the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. While in 1757 Andrija Kacić Miosić listed the Serbian and Croatian kings whose reign was a testimony to the glorious past of Slavs<sup>61</sup>, to Alberto Fortis (who wrote about the inhabitants of Dalmatia only a dozen years later), the former Slavic rulers were rather semi-legendary figures, heroes of folk songs passed down from generation to generation<sup>62</sup>. A question should therefore be posed if the existence of medieval statehoods – Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian – was noted in West European literature of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

First of all, attention should be drawn to the findings of Charles du Cange, a famous expert in Byzantium, who shed light on the history of the Balkan states before the emergence of the Ottoman Turks in his *Historia Byzantina*, an erudite study on the history of Byzantium, published in 1680. The work covers the existence of the Serbian Vlastimirović dynasty<sup>63</sup> and the House of Nemanjić<sup>64</sup>, the Croatian Trpimirović dynasty, the Bosnian Kotromanić dynasty<sup>65</sup>, the Crnojević from Mon-

<sup>58</sup> W. Sajakowski, *Obraz ludów bałkańskiego wybrzeża Adriatyku*, pp. 128–145.

<sup>59</sup> F. Dellfore, *Candide, roman de l'individu*, [in:] *To tou vasileōs stephanōma. The Kings Crown. Essays on XVIIIth Century Culture and Literature Honoring Basil Guy*, ed. F. Assaf (ed.), Leuven 2005, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> W. Sajakowski, *Obraz ludów bałkańskiego wybrzeża Adriatyku*, pp. 128–145.

<sup>61</sup> A. Kačić Miošić, *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga*, Zagreb 1967, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> A. Fortis, *Voyage en Dalmatie*, vol. 1, p. 134.

<sup>63</sup> Ch. du Cange, *Historia Byzantina*, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1680, pp. 270–273.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 334–339.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 327–333.

tenegro<sup>66</sup>, and the Albanian Kastriots<sup>67</sup>, even the mighty noble families whose existence was evidence of the complexity of Slavic communities<sup>68</sup>. Du Cange drew this information from a number of sources, including the works of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Procopius of Caesarea<sup>69</sup> and Andrea Dandolo<sup>70</sup>, as well as the mentioned works by Orbini<sup>71</sup> and Ivan Lucić<sup>72</sup>.

Du Cange's work was widely received, and it includes catalogues of many private libraries<sup>73</sup>; it was also very positively evaluated in *Journal des savants*<sup>74</sup>. In 1725, the journal reported on the publication of a new edition of a historical dictionary edited by Moreri, supplemented by entries on the history of the kingdoms of Dalmatia, Croatia and Serbia<sup>75</sup> and other states from the region. The entries were edited primarily on the basis of du Cange's findings. The dictionary includes, among other things, entries related to Croatian rulers: Budimir, Radoslav, Branimir and others<sup>76</sup>, and information on Serbian dynasties, e.g. the Vojislavljević and Nemanjić<sup>77</sup>. The information collected by du Cange to edit a very large number of entries in the most popular historical dictionary of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, later reprinted, was undoubtedly of enormous importance for the availability of information on the Slavic states in the Balkans before the Ottoman rule.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, pp. 339–348.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, pp. 351–352.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, p. 304.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, p. 273.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 270.

<sup>71</sup> Ch. Du Cange, op. cit., pp. 273–285.

<sup>72</sup> G. Lucio, *De Regno Dalmatiae et Scalvoniae, Libri Sex*, Amstelaedami 1666, pp. 303–309.

<sup>73</sup> I mean, for example, the collections of Cardinal Guillaume Dubois, the inter-marshal Victor Marie d'Estrées, the famous numismatist Claude Gros de Boze, the Saxon and Polish ambassador in Paris, Count Karl Heinrich von Hoym. L'abbé Bignon, *Bibliotheca Duboisiana, ou, Catalogue de la bibliotheque de feu de son Eminence Moneigneur Abbe Dubois*, La Haye 1725, vol. 1, p. 343; *Catalogue des livres de la bibliotheque de feu monseigneur le marechal duc d'Estrees*, Paris 1740, p. 192; J. Boudot, *Catalogue des livres du cabinet de M. de Boze* Par Jean, Claude Gros de Boze, Paris 1745, p. 222; G. Martin, *Catalogus librorum bibliothecae illustrissimi viri Caroli Henricomititis de Hoym*, Paris 1787, p. 383.

<sup>74</sup> *Journal des savants*, septembre 1712, p. 292.

<sup>75</sup> *Journal des savants*, octobre 1725, pp. 611–614.

<sup>76</sup> *Grand dictionnaire historique, ou le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane*, L. Moreri (ed.), Paris 1725, vol. 1, p. 535; vol. 5, pp. 323, 834; vol. 6, pp. 162–163.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, vol. 1, p. 916; vol. 5, pp. 323–325, 556, 661–662; vol. 6, p. 204.



*Illyricum vetus et novum*, a book published in 1746 in Pressburg (now Bratislava) is another important example of how information about medieval states in the Balkans functioned in European literature. At the time, Pressburg was the capital of the kingdom of Hungary, a part of the Habsburg monarchy<sup>78</sup>. The work is essentially a compilation, as much of it are excerpts from the work by Charles du Cange on the medieval Balkan families, supplemented by a preface and an additional chapter by Count Josip Keglević of Buzin, covering modern times<sup>79</sup>. The purpose of publishing this compilation was clear: to take the history of South Slavs out of the context of Byzantine studies, to treat them as a separate entity, deserving a historian's attention. This intention was very well read by the „Journal des Savants”, which in September 1749 pointed out that the history of the communities inhabiting ancient Illyria was „scattered through the works of historiographers of the late Roman Empire and Byzantium, scholars of Italian history, and, as regards later times, in works on the history of Hungary and Venice”<sup>80</sup>. This fragmentation had negative consequences, as the history of the „Illyrian peoples was thus misrepresented and the importance of these communities to history unduly belittled”<sup>81</sup>.

A review in the „Journal des Savants” might indicate that European historiography took note of the work published by Josip Keglević (presumably for patriotic reasons). However, the testimonies of Voltaire, Gibbon and Peyssonnel, discussed in this article, may attest to something quite different. For the sake of order, it should be noted that in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, encyclopaedias and dictionaries still reported the existence of states ruled by Slavic dynasties in the Balkans. In addition to the successive reprints of Moreri's dictionary, mention should be made, for example, of the French *Encyclopédie Méthodique*<sup>82</sup> (entry: Croatia). The genealogical key used in du Cange's erudite study of 1680 and repeated in Josip Keglević's

<sup>78</sup> Ch. du Cange, J. Keglević de Buzin, *Illyricumvetus et novum*, Posonii 1746, p. XI.

<sup>79</sup> J. Clarke, *Paisi and Bulgarian history*, [in:] *Teachers of history: essays in honor of Lawrence Bradford Packard*, ed. H. Hughes, Oxford 1954, p. 282.

<sup>80</sup> *Caroli du Fresne, domini du Cange – Illyricum vetus et novum*, Journal des savants, septembre 1749, pp. 1819–1820.

<sup>81</sup> „L'histoire de ces Peuples se trouve éparsée et comme semée au hazard, dans les Ecrivains du bas Empire, dans les Byzantins, dans les Historiens d'Italie, et pour les temps postérieurs dans les Historiens de Hongrie et de Venise; mais les Faits qui intéressent les Nations Illyriennes, n'y sont rapportés que par occasion, souvent ils sont altérés; les événements glorieux à ces peuples ont été supprimés ou considérablement diminués” – Journal des savants, septembre 1749, pp. 1819–1820.

<sup>82</sup> *Encyclopédie méthodique ou par ordre de matières: géographie moderne*, F. Robert (ed.), N. Masson de Morvilliers, Paris 1782, vol. 1, pp. 492–493.

compilation published in 1746 undoubtedly fostered dictionary entries dedicated to specific figures, but it did not offer a thesis that could meet the demands of the historiography of the Enlightenment.

The analysis shows that the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was in fact a time when, in the face of the increasing weakness of Ottoman Turkey, Slavic communities were rediscovered in the Balkans. Although West European historiographies had been knowledgeable about them, the invention of new tools and historiographic contexts in the Age of Enlightenment resulted in a selective treatment thereof. In addition, as late as in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Dalmatian and Croatian elites were still addressing this issue by referring to the Renaissance or erudite accounts of the Slavic past. They were easily dismissed and accused of being embedded in religious or legendary contexts, typical of the Renaissance.

It was only in the following century that Slavic elites, speaking, as it were, on behalf of the emerging modern nations (Croats, Serbs and Slovenes), began to participate more effectively in discussions concerning their own history. Interestingly, however, the idea of a „frozen history” of South Slavic communities survived in the imaginary of the Balkans until modern times. Indeed, the history of this part of the European continent was to be a static structure<sup>83</sup>, not concerned with the law of human progress, which was supposed to be the basic regularity explaining the history of the West. While this opinion was shaped in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was consolidated in the era of Romantic historicism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became apparent in the assessments of the causes of the Balkan conflicts, which were supposed to be due to the immutable ethnic and cultural conditions of the region.

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<sup>83</sup> Jenó Szűcs, a Hungarian historian, excluded the Balkans for this reason from his analysis in his well-known work *Three Historical Regions of Europe* – J. Szűcs, *Trzy Europy*, transl. by J. Kłoczowski, Lublin 2015, p. 107.

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