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The Dinaric Vlachs/Morlachs in the Eastern Adriatic from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries: How many identities?

The history of the Vlachs/Morlachs in the Dinaric Alps region between the Late Middle Ages and the end of the Early Modern period probably constitutes one of the most controversial polemics in the “shared history” of the South Slavs in the Dinaric Alps. It is the same whether it is about the “shared history” of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Venetian Republic or the Ottoman Empire in the same area of their multiple border encounters for a historically long period of time. In spite of the fact that Vlachs/Morlachs are always related to specific socioeconomic and socio-cultural “codes” beyond any political borderline, the history of these communities is itself always directly linked to the history of particular political realities in that region. One has to make a distinction between medieval and early modern policies in order to find out how each of these communities in each of these political realities define their legal status in secular and confessional terms, how they occupy available lands and migrate at the same time, how they integrate into the social hierarchies, how they participate in the production and distribution of goods, and how they contribute to the military power of their lords, etc. Namely, it is always about a comparative history of the Vlachs/Morlachs in the Dinaric Alps and the history of intercultural phenomena. Vlachs/Morlachs are related to “global societies” of their own in different ways. The same Vlach/Morlach communities are also perceived in different ways in distinctive political realities, which makes the problem of their distinctive identities an extremely complicated one. Either way, the concept of “multiple identities”, regarding these communities, is the most productive one.

Today, the Vlach challenge (and thus the Morlach challenge) is present in all modern south Slav traditions, especially when one considers national self-identification in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, the ‘Vlach challenge’ is a special case for the South West Slav peoples of the Dinaric Mountains, who today are Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Croats

and Serbs. Although in very different ways, these peoples are phenomena of the Adriatic mountain ranges and the Pannonian Plain, the question of what it is in their eco-history that makes them so structurally complicated, and their Dinaric connotative heritage – where that of the Vlachs is the most contested – requires special investigation. What is their essence?

The romantically inspired South Slav national ideology – which in the Croatian and Serbian cases was formed in the “long” nineteenth century – was pan-Slavic in origin. It was based on the assumption that all Slavic peoples came from a pre-Slavic nucleus, who in the first century A. D. shared a single pre-Slav language, as well as a unique Eastern European area. At the end of the sixth and seventh centuries, when the combination of different exogenic and endogenic influences stimulated the dispersal of this pre-Slavic nucleus, many tribes came into contact with the Eastern Roman Empire. Eventually, in both the presence and absence of Avarian influences, they settled in these areas, which were mainly made up of late ancient Illyria, or in other words Dalmatia. South Slavic romanticism favoured the premise that these recently settled areas, which were rarely parts of the Adriatic coast and islands, were formed out of devastated regions that had been virtually uninhabited. This was a position that was in line with ethno-linguistic “purism”, which was not a Slavic romantic invention itself. Nevertheless, it is incredibly important when trying to understand the relations of the above-mentioned South West Slav peoples, both between themselves and with others. This includes the “Vlach challenge”.

All the same, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, South Slav humanists, especially those of Croatian origins, had already taken an alternative perspective on the issue of the origins of the Slavs on the eastern Adriatic coast, or in other words in South East and Central Eastern Europe. By intellectually constructing a Slavic autochthonism in those areas where Slavs lived in that period, these humanists connected Slavs and pre-Slavs in a number of different ways, particularly those of Illyrian origins, ancient Slav culture and late Antique civilisation, as well as ancient Slav paganism and Christian religious culture and so on. (Research should overlook the point that the majority of these humanists came from Adriatic urban communities of a communal type, who were ethno-linguistically, and even more in cultural terms, a phenomenon of many centuries of Roman-Slav symbiosis!). This approach was later employed in various forms during the periods of Baroque Slavism and scholarly critical historical sources in the seventeenth century, as well as in Classicism in the eighteenth century, and continued all the way until the Enlightened/Romantic Illyrism of Croatian origins in the 1830's and 1840's. Although this heritage is by far the most visible in the

Croatian case, it also cannot be ignored in the cases of other South West Slav nations. However, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the German Romantic *Volksgeist* formula— with a series of contradictory impulses that had their roots in the entire Slavic world, or in other words their origins in the Habsburg monarchy and beyond its borders – at the same time stimulated the national integrational ideology of the Slav people to look for joint proto-Slavic sources, and towards the search for shared contemporary values and futures (for example, auto-Slavism vs. pan-Slavism). The development of the modern historiography of the Croats and the Serbs, and later of the Bosniaks and Montenegrins was based on critical written sources, as well as revitalized research contributions from scientists from other European countries in the last decades of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. This opened up many questions about their civilisation and cultural heritage in many complex contexts, and offered many rational assumptions. It is, of course, also valid for the earliest period of their history in South East and East Central Europe, where there is the least amount of sources, in particular written ones.

Today it is mostly taken as fact that Slav kin communities were unable to occupy the whole South East European area in the sixth and seventh centuries. Appositely, in many cases the hypothesis has been confirmed that the path of their colonisation was in definite proportion to the extent of Roman communications networks, where at the same time nothing was considered to be more important than “the natural earth, form and favourability of the land for the way of life that they led.”¹ Depending on how and where they appeared and with what needs and interests, urban and rural late ancient “enclaves” remained alongside them, although they were indeed, “reduced, watered down, and abandoned, but able to survive, where the Slavs had a chance to face them, some earlier and some later.”² This firstly involved

¹ Sima ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Srbi u srednjem veku*. Belgrade 1995, 11.

² *Ibid.* Nevertheless, the original pre-Slav population had very different ethnic origins, and was very unequally Romanised. As well as the Illyrians, there were the Celts, the Dako-Mizijaca, the Tračana, the Goths and so on, see Trajan STOJANOVIĆ, *Balkanski svetovi. Prva i poslednja Evropa*. Belgrade 1997, 159. There still remains the question as how it was possible that in the centuries that followed the Slav migrations the term “Vlach”, which most probably came from the name shared by the Roman Celtic tribe *Volcae*, was extended to more or less to all of the descendants of the nearly entirely Romanised pre-Slav inhabitants of South East and Central East Europe, see STOJANOVIĆ, *Balkanski svetovi*, 159. This name did not only extend between the Slavs, but also between the Germans and Greeks and so on. Bearing in mind the acculturative and assimilative processes of the members of the different Vlach communities from earlier times, especially after the Christianization of the Slavs, they started to “lose” amongst the members of the ethnic

re-Hellenised Romans, or in other words Byzantines. It was then followed by Romans of a different Latinity, inhabitants of the Adriatic towns and islands, as well as more or less Latinised inhabitants from the mountain interiors, Vlachs/Morlachs, who together with numerous Slavic migrants lived separated from urban centres. Those Vlachs/Morlachs and Slavs shared a style of life and a way of earning an income that was meant to independently fulfil their needs. Their conditions were similar to the Albanians/Arbanasi, who were then the most numerous in the mountain hinterland areas of Drač, and who were also the most different from the others due to being at a much lower level of Romanisation.

South West Slav relations with the Romans were for the most part mediated through Latin, about which the most articulate witness is the fact that they called the Greeks by the Latin term “Graecus”. As well, the Slav term ‘Car’ [Emperor] similarly came from the Latin word “Caesar”. There is further evidence that Slav communications with the Roman inhabitants in the mountain interiors started proportionally quickly after their settlement. The names of many Dinaric mountains, starting with Dinar itself, have indisputable Illyrian-Roman roots (Prenj, Velež, Majevisa, Varda, Mosor, Botunj, Romanija, Tmor and so on).³ Perhaps more important is the case of the most important rivers (Sava, Drina, Bosna, Neretva, Tara, Una, Vrbas, Buna).⁴ This was much rarer concerning the towns in the interior. Although it remains an open question as to what the different Slav communities could have got from the Roman inhabitants in the interior, and what came from those on the Adriatic coast, the fact is that there are a considerable number

communities that in different parts of these areas were holders of authority and power. Yet, when one also takes into consideration the point that all the way up to the 19th century those communities with Vlach attributes had frequently experienced demographic renewals and rises, it is possible to make the conclusion that for such a dispersed and weakly, or not at all, interrelated long standing traditional community the most important fact was that it engaged in transhumant animal husbandry and others, with the associated forms of economy. In various parts of the abovementioned European regions, long into the 19th century animal husbandry most reliably guaranteed human subsistence in existential border situations and frequently it was the most profitable style of economy: “For the Serbs between 1550 and 1700 (a period of strong increases in animal husbandry), just as with the Greeks in the eighteenth century (a period when the commercialisation of the economy sped up, especially concerning the Vlachs from the south), the expansion of animal husbandry most probably more than compensated for the losses related to assimilation, see STOJANOVIĆ, *Balkanski svetovi*, 160.

³ Sima ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Istorija srednjovekovne bosanske države*. Belgrade 1964, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.* For a more exhaustive list see *Istorija srpskog naroda*. Prva knjiga. Od najstarijih vremena do Maričke bitke (1371). Ed. Sima ĆIRKOVIĆ. Belgrade 1981, 127–132.

of terms from everyday life that also have Latin roots. Sima Ćirković offers the following Serbian examples: “ulje (*oleum*) [oil], ocat (*acetum*) [vinegar], kuhinja (*coquina*) [kitchen], furuna (*furnus*) [furnace], račun (*ratio/ne*) [bill], daska (*discus*) [board], robiti (*roba* = odelo) [robe], mator (*maturus*) [mature], paganin (*paganus*) [pagan]” and so on.⁵

The ways in which Slavs from different kinship communities, citizenships and jurisdictions from the sixth and seventh century onwards communicated with the existing inhabitants, before and after their own conversion to Christianity, still remains unanswered. Another unsettled issue is when the Vlach/Morlach name became the general name for everyone in the interior, which in a variety of ways had come from these proto-Slavic inhabitants. It cannot be denied that the Byzantines presented the greatest opposition to the political independence of the Slav territorial community, which raises the issue of how Slav communities received Byzantine civilisation and its cultural forms. On another level, there is the very complicated question of their relation with the Roman nucleus, who lived in towns along the length of the Adriatic coast and on the Adriatic islands. This is most important in terms of the Croatian case, but also the Serbian one. On the other hand, it is an entirely different case as to how these scattered Vlach communities, which after the ninth and tenth centuries had been more or less integrated with the Slavs, had been more or less acculturated or even assimilated with one another. It is more than certain that after the Christianisation of the Slavs, which in part was most probably the implicit result of Slav-Vlach acculturation and assimilation, these processes sped up: “The Latin roots of Slav Christianity are visible in church terminology, which is entirely Roman: oltar (*altare*) [alter], križ (*crux*) [cross], raka (*arca*), meša (*messa*) [mass]” and so on.⁶ The Christian South West Slav community was, after all, the largest part of the Latin clergy stretching along the urban centres on the eastern Adriatic coast. In the Croatian case, the intensity of secular and spiritual communications with these urban centres was the strongest and their effect the longest lasting. However, mass Christianisation greatly accelerated after the brothers Constantine/Cyril and Methodius from Thessaloniki constructed the necessary linguistic conditions, that of ancient Slav and public worship. Latin public worship obviously had its own limits amongst the Slavs, like the Croats, who were in direct contact with the Latin centres on the eastern Adriatic coast and who were irrefutably in the jurisdiction of the Papal domain.

⁵ ĆIRKOVIĆ, Istorija srednjovekovne bosanske države, 35.

⁶ Ibid., 37.

What could have changed in the different parts of the Dinaric mountain range between the seventh century and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, until the pre-Ottoman epoch? Were the Slavs always exclusively engaged in farming, and the Vlachs always exclusively engaged in animal husbandry? And was it like this until the division of labour was not legally regulated? Certainly such an assumption is not tenable. Although it is not possible to be certain about many things about Slav prehistory, whether about the pre-settled areas or about the European South East until the aforementioned period, all sorts of points are irrefutable. Certainly it is impossible to think of any form of Slav colonisation of South East Europe in the sixth and seventh centuries without livestock, just as it is impossible to think of their later agrarian economy without livestock. Similarly, one can state with certainty that proto-Slav inhabitants of the mountain interior of the Balkan Peninsula had no chance of survival if they had not had the opportunity to engage in farming, even if it was only on the land around their houses. Therefore, the issues of what animals and what form of husbandry, of what farming culture and what kind of farming were used both in the Slav and in the Vlach cases, remains an open question.⁷

Preserved legal sources of Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian origins from the Middle Ages, especially those from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, regularly refer to the Vlach “katun” communities in social and economic terms as engaging in animal husbandry, and also considering the style of husbandry as transhumant. They often had their summer pastures on the mountain meadows of the Dinaric Mountains, and their winter pastures in the Adriatic areas. However, as the pastures were cyclically exhausted, the Vlach communities moved in a south-east – north-west direction, from the central mountain ranges on the Balkan Peninsula to Velebit and Istria. Of course, there could be other reasons that influenced Vlach migration (hunger, epidemics, wars, etc). By the end of the Late Middle Ages, Velebit was a mountain that was already identified with the Vlach world “about fifty lengths [stadija] from the mouth (of the river Zrmanja – D. R.) there is a fortress with a settlement, and due to human effort excellently secured and located (placed on a hill). The Liburnians call it Obrovac, and it is, as they say, a very appealing place [...]. Looming in the background there is a very high mountain which has no footholds anywhere and it continues just beyond Obrovac before turning and heading to the north. The side facing the sea is formed entirely out of stone and because of its rockiness it is virtu-

⁷ Istorija srpskog naroda, 364–365.

ally impassable. The side facing north is gentler and shaded by trees. All its inhabitants call it by the name of “Morlach” (originally ‘Morolachi’ – D. R.). They look more like beasts than people, eat milk and cheese, and hide along the road to attack and rob foreign travellers. Above all else, they consider it to be the ultimate distinction to live from their prey. They call the mountains themselves “the Chain of the World” and believe that some form of border stretches from between the Alps to the Adriatic Sea.”⁸

In terms of Vlach history, Serbian tradition from the Middle Ages has the largest number of conserved sources. The first thing that is noticeable is that the largest land owners in the Middle Ages regularly included farmers and people who were engaged in animal husbandry. For example, at the end of the twelfth century “during the renovation of Hilandar, Simeon and Sava were offered full material support by the great parish priest Stefan Nemanjić. Nemanja, himself, gave the Vlachs a village in the Prizren area, and in this way created a nucleus of landowners, which Stefan enlarged as did their descendants later on.”⁹ The numerousness of such cases in different parts of the predominantly Serbian mountains leads one to conclude that it is difficult to compare Slav-Vlach relations from the first century after Slav colonisation, when communications were frequently restricted, with Slav-Vlach relations in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when their social and demographic composition in many local and regional situations was more conspicuous than in other cases. Considering that the social economic status of both groups remained different, there was an understandable resistance by the Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian governments to mix the Slav community with Vlach attributes¹⁰ during this period. The farming character of one and the animal character of the other were stressed in this period, and could have been an effect of the division of labour in what was then an al-

⁸ Paladije FUSKO, *Opis obale Ilirika*. Zagreb 1990, 91.

⁹ *Istorija srpskog naroda*, 265.

¹⁰ “The Serbian kings forbade women to marry into ‘the Vlachs’, by stating that women had to bring their husbands, in order to avoid the drainage of people into more liberal and more mobile livestock herders. Neither language barriers nor legal segregation were able to prevent the merger and immersion of the descendents of Romanised natives into the Slav environment. The most important processes were largely in the Early Middle Ages, but they did continue in contact zones afterwards. Their merger was easier when there was an absence of nobility and in those periods when the influence of the State was felt less. As warriors, the Vlachs and Arbanasi were infiltrated by the nobility and their social promotion was at the expense of their being Slavicised”, see ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Srbi u srednjem veku*, 72, 89–90).

ready developed feudal agrarian economy, rather than a sub-determined ethno-economic distinction.¹¹

With the development of trade, the arrival of agrarian market surpluses in continental South East Europe and the growth of the urban economy and trade in the Mediterranean, which also included the Adriatic towns from the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries onwards, the Vlach community became significantly more important in providing trade caravan services between the mountain interiors and the Adriatic coast. Considering that only horses and mules could be used for the transfer of goods in both directions, and that most of them were owned by Vlachs, the Vlach community was the only one that could move between greater distances, and their services became practically indispensable. On the other hand, they themselves produced many things that had trade appeal (for example furs, goats, dried meat, cheese etc). Rough, thick textiles (*rasse*, *schiauine*), used to make mats, coverings, tents, and similar, that were part of the Vlach economy, were a profitable export product on both coasts of the Adriatic Sea.¹² As a result of the increasing number of different methods and trading partners, the Vlach share of market participation grew rapidly after the middle of the thirteenth century, and this growth continued with peaks and troughs continuously until the fifteenth century. This was in tandem with the development of mining production in Serbia and Bosnia, and the trade that was related to it. The transfer of silver, gold, copper and lead from the interior of the Adriatic coast resulted in a significant boom of those Vlach *katuns*, which underlined their reliability in business, their skill to carry out frequently very demanding and very dangerous caravan ventures, especially during the periods of a weakening central government in Serbia and Bosnia. In such times, the Vlachs were

¹¹ There are many different examples of linguistic acculturation and assimilation in this period: "It is noted in sources from the Late Middle Ages that there were those who came from the Vlachs, and accepted the language, social organisation and style of life in the Slav environment, as was the case in Paštrovići, a tribal district near Budva. Alongside them actual Vlachs lived organised into *katuns*, and who had adapted linguistically. The list of householders in the charter of early Turkish *defters* shows a linguistic instability, and the significant use of Slav names alongside those of their own language. There was an analogical flow of the processes of symbiosis and assimilation of the Arbanasi, or in the other words the Albanisation of Slavs, who had settled in the flat regions of Central and Southern Albania, see ĆIRKOVIĆ, Srbi u srednjem veku, 72, 89–90.

¹² The term "rasse" is reminiscent of Raška, and "schiauine" of Slav handicrafts. Irrespective of the Vlach share of their production and sales, these names already lead to the conclusion that labels in the Vlach and Slav languages can be thought of as synonymous.

frequently better set up, with lifestyles and skills that were “predetermined” for different governing and state services – including the military.¹³

For some considerable time, historiography has been aware of the huge expansion of the Vlach *katuns* in the eastern Herzegovinian area in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and there are very well-known cases of individual Vlach *katuns* being long term partners of Dubrovnik merchants, both before and after the restoration of the Ottoman government. Considering that in the later periods of the Early Modern Age the same area in the entire Dinaric range had a disproportionately large role in terms of being a dispersion nucleus in Vlach migrations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there is nothing more that can be said about the trade booms in earlier epochs. It is also impossible to anticipate the role of Dubrovnik in eastern Herzegovinian Vlach history. This point is extremely contradictory from one particularly important position. Namely, with the relevant demographic changes, there was a large rise in the proportion of Serbian Orthodox Vlach inhabitants, and the number of Roman Catholics fell within the immediate vicinity of exclusive Roman Catholic Dubrovnik.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the issue still remains of what and how many economic booms there were in Serbia and Bosnia in the Late Middle Ages, and how much use individual Vlach *katuns* could have benefited from them. It should not be forgotten that for most of the interior the uniformity of the surroundings that were assumed for an agrarian economy were proportionately large, that this type of economy was the same or very similar, that most of the population had similar needs, and that the trade surplus was small. This meant that the exchange of goods whether between farmers and those engaging in animal husbandry, or between different areas was limited. In turn, this suggests that in times of economic boom the smallest part of the Vlach community had the largest share. Yet, on the contrary, the trade of salt never stopped, and this often involved its transfer over large distances and in different directions, with many middlemen. However, more is known only about its smaller part, that which is related to the Adriatic Sea.¹⁵

In the case of Croatia in the Middle Ages, the Vlachs “all of a sudden appeared on the surface of development and remained a distinct social entity in the heart of Croatian surroundings”. The first recorded source in

¹³ ĆIRKOVIĆ, Srbi u srednjem veku, 91; STOJANOVIĆ, Balkanski svetovi, 160–161.

¹⁴ It is not certain whether Dubrovnik traders were more effective than the Serbian Orthodox or Roman Catholic Vlachs as caravan participants within the interior of the Balkan Peninsular! As far as I am aware, this question has not been greatly researched.

¹⁵ ĆIRKOVIĆ, Srbi u srednjem veku, 89–90.

connection with this comes from 1322, when “Vlachs were found in the army of Mladen II of Bribir near Blizne.”¹⁶ The same writer thinks that after the divide in the sixth and seventh centuries, they were “scattered” throughout the Dinaric Alps and were “plunged into total silence” until the fourteenth century, when they appeared in sources as having been “Slavicised, Croatised long ago”. Their distinct Vlach organisation differentiated them from the Croats, and in the Early Modern Age was well known as the “Vlach Right”.¹⁷ In the most recent literature in Croatian historiography, which examines the history of the Late Middle Ages, it has once again been claimed, as it once was by Vjekoslav Klaić, that in the areas to the west of Neretva all the way to Istria, the term “Vlach/Morlach” in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was related to those inhabitants who came from the eastern areas of the Neretva and further towards the south east.¹⁸ The Vlach colonization of the Croatian region in the Late Middle Ages was unquestionably connected to the needs of the important Croatian nobility, especially Šubić of Bribir. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Ban Pavao Šubić governed the areas east of the Neretva, thus, in the period when the Vlachs became visible in the areas west of the Neretva, “there the population, which contemporary sources know by the Vlach name, had already appeared by the thirteenth century, and by the middle of the fourteenth century these areas were so highly populated by Vlachs that people from Dubrovnik started to use the general term of Vlach as a sign for the belt of the karst plain in the town’s hinterland.”¹⁹

Although today it is very difficult to explain how it is possible that there remain infinitely more written Vlach traces in Serbian and Bosnian history from the Middle Ages than in Croatian history, it is even more difficult to explain how in such a short time period, little more than a century, they became so numerous and evident in Late Middle Age society south of Kapela. “The Reckoning of king’s duty (*dika*)”, which began in 1470, shows evidence of a very large number of Vlachs and their respectable duty pay-

¹⁶ Tomislav RAUKAR, *Zadar u XV stoljeću. Ekonomski razvoj i društveni odnosi*. Zagreb 1997, 139.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* A very valuable source in relation to this is: “Zakon za hrvatske Vlahe županije Cetinske od g. 1436”, published by Radoslav Lopašić in 1894. See Radoslav LOPAŠIĆ, *Urbaria lingua Croatica conscripta. Hrvatski urbari. Svezak I*. Zagreb 1894, 1–12.

¹⁸ Mladen ANČIĆ, *Srednjovjekovni Vlasi kontinentalne Dalmacije*, in: *Dalmatinska zagora nepoznata zemlja*. Ed. Vesna KUSIN. Zagreb 2007, 161–167, here 162.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

ments.²⁰ In his research into the history of Zadar in the fifteenth century, Tomislav Raukar notes that the Vlachs were all the more numerous in the Zadar district in this period, which after 1409 became Venetian and a few decades later began to be infiltrated by the Ottomans in their destructive campaigns. Initially, the Vlachs rented large areas as pastures for their livestock, but they also purchased and worked on the land, which in that period was extremely hard to cultivate. Later, they engaged in the lease of oxen to serfs who didn't have them, and entered into trade – for example wine – with the other side of Velebit Croatia (with the entry of Zadar into the Venetian government, trade was significantly weakened with interior Croatia). They moved into Zadar and engaged in small businesses and similar occupations.²¹ It is worth asking to what extent the “appearance” of Vlachs in Croatian history in the fourteenth century is the result of the growth of the urban economy in the Adriatic towns, strengthened tribal estates that produced a trade surplus, and the development of trade with the Croatian interior. It also raises the question of the extent to which this referred exclusively to the Vlachs from the near interior. In short, by the fourteenth century the Vlachs were already “a desired element on the estates of the Croatian lords of the time, and to such an extent that Duke Ivan Nelipčić of Cetina entered into open conflict with peers from the Kurjaković family because they had tried to move two Vlach *katuns* from his estate to their estate.”²² The animal products of their economy were market orientated, they could be profitably exported to Italy, and they were valued in the military service of their country's lords, or governors.

One of the most debated issues in the discussions about Vlach identity in the Late Middle and Early Modern Ages concerns their religious culture. In doing so, it is often presumed that those Vlach communities, where the assumption about their late ancient autochthonism is not questioned, most probably converted to Christianity at the time of the Slav migrations. This means that, even when they lost contact with Christian areas, for example

²⁰ JOSIP ADAMČEK/Ivan KAMPUŠ, *Popisi i obračuni poreza u Hrvatskoj u XV i XVI stoljeću*. Zagreb 1976, 1–3.

²¹ RAUKAR, *Zadar u XV stoljeću*, 48–49, 67, 146–147, 164, 178, 256. See especially: “Whilst Dubrovnik's economic rise in the 15th century was based on a powerful breakthrough in the hinterland, by the founding of an entire colony of traders and merchants in Bosnia and Serbia in the Middle Ages who gained huge wealth from such activities. At the same time, Zadar in the Middle Ages experienced nothing of the sort [...]. As a result, the trade routes in Croatia-Zadar in the Middle Ages in the 15th century were almost constantly at the hands of the inhabitants of the hinterland” (Ibid., 276).

²² ANČIĆ, *Srednjovjekovni Vlasi kontinentalne Dalmacije*, 163.

in the Adriatic mountain ranges, they could preserve their Christianity in the form of religious folk practices. This could have been the case later on in different ways, after the Christianization of Slavs and the formation of a distinct church hierarchy in the east and west. Mladen Ančić also claims that the “Dubrovnik document in the fourteenth century shows how the Vlach *katuns* located in the area east of the Neretva have a very unusual understanding of Christianity, in terms of its organisation and the rituals connected to it. There, for example, tradition dictated that every *katun* had its own priest and that in principle this position was inherited from father to son. It can thus be understood that its connection with the universal hierarchy (in this case the Serb Orthodox church) was terminally unstable. There is no dispute that the first *katun* to pass beyond the Neretva and to start spreading out to the west maintained such traditions, which representatives of the Catholic Church probably tried to keep under control (rather unsuccessfully). The situation, however, in the 1460’s started to change [...] the pastoral care of the Vlachs was taken over by the Franciscans, who from 1340 were organised in the form of Bosnian vicarages.”²³ According to the same document, and the oldest list of Bosnian Franciscan vicarages from 1385 “already by the 1480’s, the entire area that was most intensively settled in had a dense network of Franciscan monasteries.”²⁴ Yet, according to Ančić, it is difficult to judge the extent of the effect of the Franciscan missions between the Cetina and the Neretva in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because “the regular hierarchy of the Catholic Church had great difficulties.”²⁵

Sima Ćirković presents the line of thinking that Serb members of lower social classes in the Middle Ages were distinct from their close relatives in Hungary in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and even more distinct from their distant relatives in the military service areas in the different imperial regimes between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, because they were not people who had a warlike mentality. In different types of liberal citizenships in Serbia in the Late Middle Ages, there were more and more people of Vlach and Albanian origin, who were much more acculturated to the call of war, and were therefore, unexpected mercenaries of western origins etc. Being owners of numerous horses, the Vlach and Albanian world served a purpose because they were needed in times of war. Wherever the Ottoman powers arrived, the Vlach *katuns* entered their service, certainly,

²³ Ibid., 166.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

under the condition that it guaranteed them the unusual “Vlach Right”. They were Slavicised in the period between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, which is visible in their onomastics and their written linguistic traces, as well in the artefacts of their traditions. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, some *katuns* in Herzegovina and Montenegro in the Middle Ages were restricted and turned into “tribes”, for example the Banjani, Drobnjaci, Bjelopavlići, Njeguši, Piperi, Vasojevići, Nikšići and others. In so far as their leaders rose socially, they had no difficulty in becoming “princes” or “dukes”, either due to their proximity, or by being equal, with nobility. Thus, it came to be that the territorial share that had developed up until the middle of the fourteenth century, a period of the governorship of Stefan Dušan, started to weaken and change after his death. In most cases, the ambitions of individual regional leaders followed the needs of the Vlach community, which engaged in transhumant livestock herding, by easing their “noble” form. The Ottoman takeover removed their noble status, but did not break up the Vlach communities. Quite the opposite, they were leaders in everything, especially in relation to the Serb Orthodox, and the Peć Patriarchate, and substituted knighthood for endowments to churches and monasteries and so on. It was not rare for Vlach leaders to receive “*Timar*” [a form of land tenure] and be included in the Ottoman military forces. Although not many of them could retain their status as Orthodox after the Battle of Mohács (1526), their kudos as “national champions” and “guardians” of tradition in the Middle Ages remained.²⁶ Nowhere else in the area of what is currently Bosnia and Herzegovina is there such a large number of ancient Orthodox Serbian churches as there is in eastern Herzegovina, and in the wider hinterland of Dubrovnik.²⁷ These Vlach leaders, who in the following generations secured their status in the Ottoman government, and did not leave Orthodoxy, were

²⁶ ČIRKOVIĆ, Srbi u srednjem veku, 200, 209. However, those Serbian Vlach elders, who because of a number of valid reasons were dissatisfied in Ottoman service or found themselves in dangerous life situations, did not hesitate to move to the Christian side, even in those times when it seemed that Ottoman victory was unavoidable. It was in such a way that the last Serbian despot in Hungary was a well regarded and influential deserter from the Ottoman side, Pavle Bakić, who on the Habsburg side immediately divided the nobility and their ample property. The despot’s death was noted in 1537 in a battle at Gorjan, which was crucial for the future of the Ottoman government in Slavonia.

²⁷ See the map in Ljiljana Ševo, Pravoslavne crkve i manastiri u Bosni i Hercegovini do 1878 godine. Banja Luka 2002. The cultural history of Eastern Herzegovinian churches and monasteries of Serbian Vlach roots are often intercultural phenomena because it is possible to see in them the Dubrovnik mediated west Christian tradition. See Sreten PETKOVIĆ: Srpska umetnost u XVI i XVII veku. Bgrade 1995 with an exhaustive bibliography.

to have a deciding influence in the renewal of the Peć Patriarchate in 1557. The Orthodox-Islamic *convivenza* [co-habitation] was most clearly revealed in the fact that when the Patriarchy was renewed in the time of the great Vizier Mehmed-paša Sokolović, his closest relative, Makarije Sokolović, became the first patriarch.²⁸

The Ottoman government in the sixteenth century succeeded in using the Serbian Vlach community in the aid of military service, who as Martolosi and as much for their unscrupulousness as for their brutality, turned into one of the most recognised symbols of the Ottoman destructive forces. Although it is a debated issue as to how much they earned this “fame”, it is certain that their utilisation was very violent and effective, and their loyalty seemed very unreliable. This was already noticeable in the sixteenth century when the Venetian leader in Dalmatia, Jacopo Foscarini, described the Sanjak of Klis, which on the coastal side included a large part of Dalmatia under the Ottoman government. When writing about Ottoman foot soldiers, he wrote that they were in the “large part Christian Morlachs, who were forcefully made to join the army. They raised one or two from every household. Besides this, the Morlachs had to guard the mountain routes and the towns under fortresses. Only a very small number were paid, and this was a low pay of at most only 2 *aspre* a day. They called them the Martolosi.”²⁹ Further: “Christian inhabitants belonged to the Serb religion (*di fede serviana* – D. R.), but they poorly prayed and poorly engaged in religion, so their religiosity was in aspersion. These Christians were warrior like and excellent soldiers, but they did not have a military education. They were physically very tough and were cloaked in blankets, with leather shoes [*opanak*] on their feet, and could travel very long distances with only a piece of bread in their bag. The Turks used them as foot-soldiers and made them enter Dalmatia, by collecting one or two from their houses according to their needs. When they called them, they went from house to house and warned them that those

²⁸ Đoko Slijepečević is unquestionably the best contemporary historian of the Serbian Orthodox church, and is extremely restrained when talking about the identity of the first Serbian Patriarch in the renovated Patriarchate: “Today it is difficult to say who this figure could be. The facts, that the first Patriarch of the renewed Serbian Patriarchy was the brother (or relative) of the great Vezir Mehmed-paše Sokolović shows one of two things: either the initiative for the renewal of the Patriarchate was given by Makarije himself or that his brother Mehmed-paše told him of the possibility, that in the newly formed circumstances, the Patriarchate could be renewed”, see Đoko SLIJEPEČEVIĆ, *Istori-ja Srpske pravoslavne crkve. Prva knjiga. Od pokrštanja Srba do kraja XVIII veka*. Belgrade 2002, 305–306.

²⁹ Nada KLAJIĆ, *Izvori za hrvatsku povijest III*. Zagreb 1959, 26–27.

who didn't respond would be impaled on a stake. They get no reward or payment for their services. [...] They (the Morlachs – D. R.) do not want anything else, and it is often said about them that in war they look like one strong Christian flag [*barjak*], which could be relied on. All of them would then rise to arms and take revenge on the Turks for all their violence. The Turks know this. [...].”³⁰

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were full of the movement of the Vlach community from one opposing side to another in a triangle that consisted of the Ottomans, Habsburgs, and Venetians. Although each side understood their “Vlach rights” differently, they expected the same from each of them, which was to achieve the greatest effect possible with the least amount of cost. Their situation fundamentally changed in relation to that of the Late Middle Ages when they engaged in transhumant animal husbandry and produced a market surplus, entered into different businesses, ensured social promotion over borders and so on. In the period of the decline of the Serbian state in the Middle Ages, the Orthodox amongst them had a truly great influence in the revitalization of Serbian Orthodoxy and its traditions. If they inherited a consciousness about their ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness, it is doubtful that for the majority of the sixteenth century this meant anything to the Serbian masses in the Ottoman area, who from their lifestyle alone were increasingly closer to the traditional Vlach form. Although many of them continued to remain transhumant livestock herders, it is unlikely that the steady annual rhythm between winter and summer could have been regular. If and when it was, it is certain that their transhumance was to a great extent militarized.

Many more important changes effected a change in their mentality. Those people whose ancestors had learned to work, trade, fight wars and even change in many culturally distinctive ways, became all the more valued as murderers, robbers, house burners, or in other words, people outside of the law and tradition. There were those who were persecutors and those were persecuted, in a permanently uncertain area, irrespective of which imperial side they were serving. If until the late fifteenth century they had shaped their identity in Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian traditions, in the developments that followed, the Ottoman occupations and the imposition of an imperial three border rule in the Dinaric area, all questions in relation to the self-understanding of this community must be asked again, and should be done within the parameters of the marginalization of a civilization, cultural barbarization and utter human degradation.

³⁰ Ibid, 30–31.

