

(In) The Name of the Morlachs

The Memory of an Identity Along the Centuries: Some Working Hypotheses

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KNOWN AS one of the most thought-provoking populations of the Balkans, the Morlachs (*Murlachi*, *Morlacchi*, *Mauroolachi*, etc.) have undoubtedly exerted a visible impact on the events that shaped their time, leaving an imprint on South-Eastern European historiography and not only. The large number of documents in which they are mentioned and the diversity of their activities, carried out especially on the territory of Dalmatia, during the 14th–19th centuries, turn the study of their past into a mandatory topic of investigation. The research review on the study of the Morlachs suggests that recent scholarly interest is also triggered by a series of political and personal implications associated with the researchers' ambitions to find the "desirable" or "comfortable" origin of this population. Unquestionably, the research of the history of the Morlachs relies on a heavy set of resources, interpretations, work methods and historiographic approaches designed to support and stimulate our interest.

The present study does not aim to definitively clarify one aspect or another of the history of the Morlachs, nor does it intend to provide a full description of the issue of their name as featured in the various sources which have been identified over time. The purpose of this study is to focus on the diversity of these sources and on the meaning of the term 'Morlach' as it emerges in these sources and, also, to highlight how such sources can impact our memory. Therefore, my objective is to provide insight on the evolution of an ethnonym (or identifier) and on its flexibility in a context of political, economic and social change, in Dalmatia.

Several methodological aspects need to be presented from the outset. Firstly, it is important to note that the timeframe covered by the selected sources goes back to the 14th century. On the one hand, the reason for this choice lies in the uncertainty surrounding the text of *Presbyter Diocleatis* (which will be briefly discussed below) and, on the other hand, it is related to the increasing number of Venetian documents that record the Morlachs' involvement in various aspects of the life of Dalmatia. Secondly, the gathered sources are typologically very diverse: official documents, reports, translations, chronicle fragments, press excerpts, travel narratives, novels etc. It becomes obvious that, within the limits of this article, such a selection does not claim to hold some general, absolute truth, but, instead, it urges caution regarding the (larger or smaller) body of references to the Morlachs in various contexts. Thirdly, as will be noticed, this study tends to give

center stage to the history of Venice and to the *Stato da Mar*¹'s historic legacy. My motivation is quite simple: the Venetians and the Italophones who were under Venetian influence are the ones who used and disseminated the term 'Morlach' with reference to an extremely mobile population from the rural and mountainous area of Dalmatia. Also, the role of Venice is irrefutable as Dalmatia was part of the Venetian Republic during 1409–1797 and fell under its sphere of influence for an even longer time span.

Thus, this study calls for a more increased focus on a pivotal aspect of the process of "historical recovery" of the Morlach communities in Dalmatia, more particularly, on the issues related to their designation. *Who are the Morlachs?* Perhaps this is one of the most frequent questions formulated by anyone investigating the history of this population. Such an interest is both a clear case of curiosity as it is the anticipation of a clear, definitive and "self-pleasing" answer. Considering the fact that no solution could possibly satisfy the full time extension attributed to the use of the term 'Morlach' in various sources, it is only reasonable to investigate its meaning across different periods.

IN THE field of historiography, there are chiefly two most popular explanations regarding the origin of the ethnonym 'Morlach.' According to the first explanation, the origin of the name 'Morlach' involves a Byzantine connection and the Greek term of *Maurovlachoi*. This theory relies on the explanations and documentary claims made by Ioannes Lucius (cr. Ivan Lučić, it. Giovanni Lucio) in his work *De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae*.² A renowned historian and humanist, schooled in Padua, where he obtained a doctorate in civil and canon³ law, Ioannes Lucius provided generations of historians with the first scientifically-based information regarding the origin of the Morlachs. In his analysis of different groups who shared the same territory in Dalmatia, he also spends a few pages on the description of the Vlachs. He explains the fact that "the name Vlach, for all Slavs, refers to the Roman and Italic Latins."⁴ What is more, the term 'Vlach' is also defined from an ethnic and social point of view, as Lucius identifies the Vlachs based on their "Romance ethnicity and language" as well as on their "social condition of shepherds in the mountainous regions."⁵ It is within this context of the origin of the Vlachs that Lucius makes reference to the origin of the Morlachs. In his view, they were the descendants of the ancient Roman provincials who took refuge in the mountains adopting a pastoral⁶ lifestyle, while the Slavs occupied the territory of Dalmatia. Their Roman origin is also supported by the similarity in name between the Morlachs and the inhabitants of Moldavia,⁷ as both designations were present in the Byzantine space. Therefore, Lucius lays the foundation of a theory regarding the origin of the Morlachs within the context of the Byzantine chronicles.

The popularity of Lucius' arguments, including his views on the origins of the Morlachs, is mostly due to the nature of the trailblazing source he resorts to, a chronicle of the history of the Slavs, *Regnum Slavorum*,⁸ assumed to have been written during the 12th century by a certain Presbyter Diocleatis. What can be retrieved from the chronicle is a brief reference to the Morlachs that locates them in a territory conquered by the Bulgarians. Apparently, they were the inhabitants of a Latin territory, they spoke a Romance language traceable to ancient times and their name meant Black Latins.⁹ The information that Lucius borrows from the text of the Dioclean priest allows him to expand the

explanation he had given about the origins of the Morlachs. The use of the phrase *Black Latins*¹⁰ by a 12th century man of letters in order to differentiate the Vlachs from the inhabitants of Italy justifies Lucius' endeavor to reconfirm the Byzantine influences and the frequent contacts with the populations from the vicinity of the Danube. The Venetians who, in their turn, had very close ties to the Byzantines, also adopted this name and used it to refer to the Vlachian shepherds from the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic.

Despite the fact that the chronicle of Presbyter Diocleatis became the topic of a very interesting research¹¹ aimed at (in)validating its veracity, the influence it bears on historiography is indisputable. Thus, Lucius and many other historians rooted their theories in the accounts of the chronicle and agreed that the term Morlach referred to the Dalmatian Vlachs who spoke a Romance language and who were a population of shepherds par excellence. Therefore, it was possible to argue for a link between the origin of the Morlachs and the Vlachian migrations in the Balkans, and to confirm the age and noble origin of a population who was in the direct lineage of a Roman administration controlling the territories conquered by the Slavs.

Another explanation endorsed by the scientific community, though less complex, is closer to the Serbian-Croatian theories aimed at establishing the ethnic origin of the Vlachs/Morlachs. According to these theories, the name of the Morlachs would be the result of a blending between the word *more*, which translates as *big sea* in Croatian, and Vlachs, designating the descendants of a former Romanized population from Illyria or other regions in the Balkans. Consequently, the Vlachs from the sea region acquire a great importance when ideas such as the civilizing impact of the Romanized civilizations over the barbaric Slavs are at stake, and when the purpose of the demonstration is to show the remote origins of a Dalmatian people, divided into an urban population, which is Dalmatian, and a rural, Morlach population.

Considering the fact that the whole debate revolving around the true origin of the Morlachs, and around their Vlachian, Roman or Romanian affiliation¹² exceeds the scope of this study, in what follows I will outline some of the sources that mention the Morlachs during the 14th and 15th centuries. It is also worth noting that the support of one cause or another, in its claim to a lineage of the Morlachs, is also beyond the scope of this investigation. One of the best arguments for my choice lies in the fact that the term 'Morlach' is an exonym, in other words, it is an identification tool attributable to an external community. In addition, it becomes clear that the term was preserved in the collective memory through the actions of its bearers and less through its ethnic meaning or through its remote Roman origin. Although it is not my objective to refute any of the ethnic equivalences mentioned above, my coverage of the selected sources is chiefly concerned with showing the diversity, the flexibility and permanence of the Morlach communities in the vicinity of the Adriatic and, respectively, with highlighting how the term contributed to the projection of these communities. As the sources have been selected based on the criterion of diversity, it would be erroneous to believe that they are a representative sample for the sources that mention the Morlachs. Consequently, all the references are more likely to be viewed as arguments for further research.

Given the aura of uncertainty that surrounds Presbyter Diocleatis' chronicle and also considering the scarcity of references to the term Morlach, especially for the 12th and 13th

centuries, the only available option is to trace the first mentions in the first half of the 14th century. However, there is one very interesting original exception worth considering. A document dated 17 August 1221, held by the State Archive of Pisa,¹³ records a sale-purchase agreement between *Uguccione del fu Montemagno* and *Guidotto del fu Ranieri*. The first sells several pieces of land to the latter, among which a place called Morlacchio. As it is presently impossible to establish a connection between the Morlachs in Dalmatia and the Pisan toponym Morlacchio, its significance and origins remain uncertain. However, it is extremely tempting to speculate over a series of similitudes and over a possible Byzantine origin of this toponym. There is ample room for further scholarly interest in this field that will determine whether such speculations were accurate or not.

Starting with the 14th century, the presence of the term ‘Morlach’ in an increasing number of sources can no longer be contested. They span a large area, comprising the Bosnian territory from the vicinity of Ragusa/Dubrovnik and Dalmatia. The diversity of the contexts where the Morlachs and the Vlachs appear simultaneously hints at a possible equivalence between the two eponyms. However, one must recall that they have been attributed to these communities and that, for the time being, there is no evidence which could provide an alternative of ethnic self-definition. The majority of available sources from the 14th century, out of which a few examples were selected for the purpose of this study, are documents issued by institutions from the Eastern coast of the Adriatic. Documents from the Ragusan and Dalmatian territory feature alternative mentions of the two terms, Morlach and Vlach. In the case of Ragusa, the presence of the Vlachs/Morlachs is predominantly related to commercial activities. They can be easily identified on the basis of the goods they produce or sell (November 1328: *formaedi vlacheschi*¹⁴; September 1336: *formadei vlacheschi*¹⁵), and also by the explicit presence of their ethnonym (19 December 1365: *Bogoslavus Bratolovich, vlachus domini bani de Bossina*¹⁶; 10 June 1379: *Ruya Junachovich moroblachus de Bagna*¹⁷; 5 May 1393: *Millos Nicoevich vlacus de li Bagnani*¹⁸). Contrary to the traditional definition mentioned above, the Vlachs who reach Ragusa in the 14th century do not engage exclusively in activities related to shepherding and animal breeding, even if these are indeed predominant. It is, however, certain that the Vlachs in Ragusa mostly come from the Kingdom of Bosnia and their identification is made by the association of a toponym with an ethnonym or by indication of their village of origin (27 June 1397: the village of *Stanichi Pertosevich*¹⁹; 27 May 1393: *Mirilovich*²⁰; October 1369: *Clapac Thomich*²¹ etc.).

In the case of Dalmatia, the alternation between the Vlach–Morlach ethnonyms can be explained by the identification of the issuer, at the very least. One possible hypothesis suggests: if the one who complains about damage done by the Morlachs comes from one of the coastal cities under Venetian influence, then the term used in the documents is ‘Morlach.’ In exchange, if the issuer of the document is either the Croatian ban or another nobleman faithful to the Hungarian Crown, then the recorded term is ‘Vlach.’ In this respect, it is noteworthy to consider the set of documents which attest the ownership rights of two villages of Morlachs on behalf of the family members of the former count of Knin, his wife, Vladislava, and his son, John. The Venetian document of 1344 mentions the *duos catuno Morolacorum*,²² and the one issued by the king of Hungary makes reference to the tenured lands inhabited by Vlachs and Croatians.²³ Another in-

interesting aspect for this period refers to the identification of both terms with the status of peasant, as can be seen in the use of *vel villani*,²⁴ and *sive catunari*,²⁵ respectively. A very special archival material, the document drafted by Ban Nicholas of Zech in March 1362, mentions the *gentis Morlachorum*,²⁶ therefore referring to the Morlachs who herd their sheep to the pastures of the inhabitants of Trogir, defying all bans and punishments.

During the 15th century the presence of the two ethnonyms is still mentioned and they designated the communities of shepherds who straddled the borders between the territories of the Hungarian Crown and the ones that, from 1409 onwards, belong to the Stato da Mar. The privileges, the complaints, the commercial agreements or the measures to control and restrict the presence of the Morlachs in Dalmatia perpetuate the same alternation between Morlachs and Vlachs. However, there is a significant growth in the number of sources that mention the term 'Morlach' and this could be viewed as a consequence of the establishment and consolidation of the Venetian administrative system. We find that, on a larger scale, the 15th century is an era of transition for the Dalmatian region, a shift from the Hungarian administration to the assimilation of the coastal cities into the Venetian state and to a new border with the Ottoman state. These events also led to the predominance of one term or another in documents that refer to pastoral communities, to those who cause damage, or to merchants. The selected examples focus on various forms in which the terms 'Vlachs' or 'Morlachs' are used in order to provide explanations. If the documents of May 1437²⁷ and, respectively, May 1439²⁸ mention *Vlachus seu Morlachus*, the one from 1455 refers to *Morlaccos sive Vlachos forenses*.²⁹ The latter document is included in the Statute of Zara/Zadar. It was drafted by Petro Basadona in the early days of his mandate as count of Zadar in the intent of confirming the privileges and status of the townspeople and also the unlawfulness of the raids and damage caused by the Morlachs. The association of the Morlachs to the rural world outside the walls of the city and, even more, to the world outside the Venetian territory is endorsed by several other mentions of the Morlachs under a different ethnonym. This is the case of a document from March 1450,³⁰ issued by the Noblemen's College of Šibenik, requesting the Venetian officials to cease granting safe-conduct letters to Morlachs and Croatians. The reason for such a decision was the large number of robberies and the damage that they caused once they were allowed to enter the city. It is during the same period that the Morlachs in Dalmatia are defined as peasants (*Morlachos sive rusticos*).³¹

The situation began to stabilize towards the end of the 15th century and in the early 16th century. The predominance of the term 'Morlach' is mostly due to the stabilization of the political relations between the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire. Usually defined by compromise, the interactions between the representatives of the two powers are quite peaceful during this century, except on two occasions when they mobilized for war (1537–1540 and 1570–1573). Strong efforts were made in order to preserve a common border and a good neighborhood in Dalmatia and this also involved keeping an eye on how the subjects of the two states acted within the boundaries of their common territory. The situation of the Morlachs is representative in the context of flexible borders and they set a viable example for the idea of coexistence, a situation which is also clearly mirrored by the sources in which they are mentioned.

Considering the fact that the 16th century has been the core of my previous research, I was able to do a survey of the frequency of the name ‘Morlach’ in documents, of its forms and explanations (where possible). Additionally, I took into account other terms which could be regarded as ethnonyms, while also focusing on the issuer and recipient of the document. Thus, out of approximately 350 original documents which have been identified in the Archives of the State of Venice for the interval 1500–1600, 167 documents contain an explicit form of the term ‘Morlach.’ The other documents refer either to contexts associated with the ‘Morlachs’ or to case studies that revolve around them. Out of the 167 documents, 84 offer no explanation or similitudes concerning the term ‘Morlachs.’ The name of this population merely occurs as object or subject of a dispute, of a commercial exchange or of border negotiations. Consequently, the documents record the term ‘Morlach’ to refer to those who cross from one territory to another (25 November 1517: *Morlachi che sono andati in Puglia*,³² September 1528: *murlacchi, quali transmigrano di loco in loco . . . dicemo impedirete et inibirete ditti murlacchi non permettendo che i occupino ne usurpino li loro confini*³³; 23 January 1540: *quando che li Murlacchi, che nella passata guerra turchescha si leverono dal Banadeg et venero ad habitar li territorii nostri*³⁴; 22 March 1561: *per la venuta a quella porta delli nuntii mandati dalli morlachi che sono in le ville 33*,³⁵ etc.), to shepherds (1553: *et che li Morlacchi vengono l’inverno con li loro animali a pascolare et quando li sudditi de Venetiani gli fanno resistentia, che non pascolin, li Morlachi voleno combatter con loro et gli batteno et alle volte feriscono*³⁶) and to people found guilty of various crimes (12 January 1581: *quel Morlacco per li tolleni falsi portati ad argentar da un orefice*³⁷). Interestingly enough, the analysis of these 84 documents does not allow the identification of a pattern concerning their issuer or recipient. Whether the Senate is addressing a letter to the officials in Dalmatia (23 cases), to the Bailo of Constantinople (25 cases), or to the Porte (3 documents), or whether the Bailo writes to Venice (3 documents), to the officials of the Venetian Dalmatia (21 cases) or to the Turkish officials (1 document), as in the case of translated documents issued by the Ottoman administration for the Venetian administration (8 situations), none of the cases feature any explanation regarding the origin or the ethnicity of the Morlachs.

Nevertheless, one cannot say that the authorities involved in the administration and preservation of a non-violent environment in Dalmatia were completely ignorant as to the necessity of clarifying the status or the “nature” of the Morlachs. The other 83 documents included in the survey testify as to the importance of this aspect. Out of the 83 documents, the majority (35 documents) mention the Morlachs as being Turkish subjects. One possible explanation can be found in the letters that the Senate sent to the Venetian officials (22 October 1538: *la laudabil operatione per voi fatta de condur dalla obediencia dei Turchi alla devotion nostra quelli subditi Turcheschi della Murlaccha con li figlioli, donne, animali et altri beni soi*³⁸), to the Bailo (24 January 1555: *che sono menate via da uscochi 22 anime de morlachi subditi di quel Serenissimo Signor*³⁹; 12 February 1568: *l’omicidio di dui murlacchi sudditi turcheschi*⁴⁰) or even to the Sultan (2 May 1562: *oltra dicio da alcuni anni in qua da Murlacchi sudditi di Vostra Maesta sono stata occupate al territorio nostro di Sibinico 33 ville*⁴¹). Similarly to the other documents, the selected examples mention the Morlachs as Turkish subjects, which confirms another evidence of that time: in the eyes of the Venetians, the Morlachs are primarily seen as individuals who come

from outside their administrative reach. The good cooperation with the central or regional Ottoman authorities also depends on finding solutions to the various problems caused by the Morlachs at the border. Or, from a Venetian point of view, the Ottomans played a very important part in controlling the Morlachs, who were their subjects.

In addition to this type of definition of the Morlachs, likely to reveal their political origin, I have also identified a series of documents associated to an ethnic definition. Nevertheless, as it can be noted, this archival information does not solve the question of the ethnicity of the Morlachs during the 16th century, quite on the contrary, it tends to complicate it. On 22 September 1523, amid warfare preparations against the Turks, the Senate of Venice asked its governors from the Gulf and Dalmatia to mobilize 3,000 men for the galleys, and the following nationalities were included: Istrians, Dalmatians, Schiavoni, Albanians, Greeks and Morlachs.⁴² It makes an equally plain distinction between these nationalities and the Gypsies,⁴³ who were also present on the territory of Dalmatia on various occasions.

The status of “outlander” progressively gains acceptance, as the following examples fully demonstrate. Remarkably enough, when translating into the Venetian dialect the documents submitted by the Porte to the Ottoman authorities from the vicinity of the Dalmatians, the Venetians use the term ‘Vlach.’⁴⁴ Or, when the sultan uses the term ‘eflak,’ to the Venetian dragoman it becomes obvious that the sultan particularly refers to the Morlachs, especially when the subject of the document is clearly stated and when it has an equivalent in the Venetian Archives (as in the case of the negotiations for the borderline states). Notwithstanding, the problems that arise due to the ethnic equivalence between the Morlachs and the Vlachs during the 16th century are far more numerous than documents can attest. Consequently, several questions are left pending: What did the term ‘Vlach’ mean for the Ottomans? To what degree was the term ‘Vlach’ Latin/Romance? Was the dragoman’s skill and his understanding of similarities and equivalences between the two existing terms an important factor to consider?

Furthermore, the distinction between the Morlachs and the Uskoks is another problematic aspect in our pursuit of the meanings associated with the term ‘Morlach.’ In the majority of cases, this is a sharp distinction, as we are dealing with two groups who inhabited different geographical locations. Unlike the Morlachs in Dalmatia, the Uskoks⁴⁵ settled in the region of Senj, in the Habsburg Empire, and their mission was to protect the southern borderland of the empire against Ottoman offensives. At the same time, the Uskoks waged a personal war against the Ottomans and seized every opportunity to conduct raids on Turkish ships and caravans. In contrast to the Uskoks, the Morlachs settled in the territories controlled by the Ottomans, but this did not prevent them from choosing to become Uskoks. The frequent interactions between the two groups can easily give rise to overlapping definitions, particularly in the case when the activities they carried out were far from being radically different.⁴⁶ This type of confusion was also fueled by the Archduke of Austria. In a document from May 1579, addressed to Venice, regarding the situation of several inhabitants from Trogir who had allegedly been forced to pay protection taxes to the Uskoks, the archduke confirms the fact that the Uskoks are Morlachs, and even implies that their origin would lie along the line of the Hungarian colonists.⁴⁷ However, there are numerous documents that illustrate the distinction

between the Morlachs and the Uskoks and they mainly reveal situations in which the first, as Turkish subjects, become victims of the latter.

Equally interesting are the documents that offer definitions of the Morlachs settled on Venetian lands and who complied more or less with the Venetian laws and organization. It is noteworthy to recall the case of the Istrian Morlachs⁴⁸ colonized by Alvise Badoer in Zadar, in 1538. They were regarded as *fidelissimi nostri Murlachi Istriani*⁴⁹ or they were designated by the term *gente*,⁵⁰ which was a recognition of their Venetian status.

Given the abovementioned circumstances, an implicit question arises: what is left of the definition of the Morlachs when all attempts to find a documented explanation fail? Also, there are still a lot of answers to be sought on similar issues: What were the activities of the Morlachs in Dalmatia and how did they influence the state of affairs in the region? Their involvement in quotidian activities cannot be denied and their flexibility and adaptability to political and administrative changes provide a springboard for further research. For the time being, an ethnic definition of the Morlachs is an impossible attempt. Left standing are all the other elements that define this marginal community: the practice of shepherding, the occasional commercial activities, their participation in raids conducted by the Ottomans as well as in the Venetian efforts of safekeeping the borderline, the emblematic illegal activities, their collaboration with the Uskoks or the times when they fell victim to the Uskoks, their status of immigrants from the Balkans, who found a route towards the unpopulated territories of Istria and Dalmatia. Within such a framework, it is essential to recall the fact that the term ‘Morlach’ is an exonym, it refers to the outlanders on the Venetian territory, those who reach Venice in view of a set of traditional activities. Faced with the administration of a heterogeneous empire, the Venetians gave priority to finding quick solutions to potentially high risk conflict situations in their relationship with the Ottomans, although the administrative discourse seemed to have adapted to the various ethnicities of its subjects (assuming that “ethnicity” had a similar meaning to what it represents today). Now, it is in the hands of historians to give “scholarly” explanations for a permanently changing reality, and starting with the 17th century these efforts reached their full potential.

The political changes in Dalmatia affecting the province during the years of peace after the War of Cyprus (1570–1573) and the new military conflicts that arose between the Venetians and the Ottomans (the War of Candia 1645–1669 and the Morean War 1684–1699) triggered significant mutations in terms of cohabitation and coexistence in what was left of the Venetian maritime state. The growing need for combatants and the decreasing demographic resources equally contributed to a subsequent inclusion in the military mechanisms of the state of all men able to bear arms against Ottomans. This is a time when the Morlachs stand out due to their skills as soldiers in the Venetian armies and to their violent response to the attacks of the Ottomans.⁵¹ Acknowledged for their bravery in the collective memory of Dalmatia, their reputation starts to spread beyond their area of action.

Several excerpts from the European press of the time might illustrate this particular aspect. The September issue of 1647⁵² of a Parisian newspaper outlines the specific role of the Morlachs during the Venetian offensive on Turkish territory. According to this source, 700 Morlachs were engaged in a support action of the Venetians. Moreover, the

September 1662⁵³ issue of the same publication highlights the presence of the Morlachs alongside the Christian soldiers, suggesting that the former were essential to the offensive in light of the raids they conducted on Turkish territory.⁵⁴

Similar information can be retrieved from *Il Corriere ordinario*, a periodical published in Vienna. Mentions of the Dalmatian Morlachs extended across several issues and placed them in the center of military events. They were renowned for having escorted the Christian troops en route toward the Ottoman territory,⁵⁵ for having brought up large masses of troops⁵⁶ and for their destabilizing actions against the enemy.⁵⁷

Their involvement in military campaigns is not overlooked by the ones who reported news about the course of events in Dalmatia to the *Serenissima*. Extremely popular at the time and providing highly valuable testimonials to the present day researcher, the *relazioni* gave extensive accounts about the bravery of the Morlachs. One example is the *Verissima e distinta Relatione della rotta data a tre mila Turchi dalle Armi della Serenissima Republica di Venetia in Dalmatia comandate dall'Eccellentissimo Signor Generale cavalier Girolamo Cornaro Con la morte di 200 Turchi e d'altretanti fatti Schiavi*. The title of this *relazione*, impressive both in size and in the degree of detail it provides, gives a suggestive picture as to its role and impact on the construction of a collective memory, relying extensively on the emotional charge it can deliver to the reader or to the owner of the text. It is important to underline that when the author reviews the participation of the Morlachs in the fight against the Turks, the text is often eulogistic. The vigilance, the courage and the force of the Morlachs are constant reminders to the Ottoman posted along the border that the Venetian Lion never sleeps.⁵⁸

Even if, during the 17th century, the activity of Ioannes Lucius is paramount to the formation of a historiographic opinion on the origin of the Morlachs, the presence of such diverse documents suggests that the memory of those who encountered the Morlachs, of those who fought beside them and who collaborated with them can largely contribute to a definition of their identity. Regardless of their religion, of their language or political affiliation, the 17th century Morlachs become known all over Europe and far beyond the borders of the Venetian republic for their bravery in the anti-Ottoman fight. The swift transition from the *Morlacchi sudditi turchi* to an image of the Morlachs viewed as highly esteemed soldiers of the Venetian armies is rooted in the reconfiguration of the province, largely affected by territorial loss, which led to a hastened inclusion of the Morlachs among the Venetians subjects. For these particular reasons, from the 17th century onwards, the Morlachs are more and more often defined as inhabitants of rural Dalmatia, a status which they share with the Western population travelling towards the Eastern Mediterranean during the 18th century.

Travel literature, an increasingly popular genre in the 18th century, also plays a role in reshaping the definition of the Morlachs from Dalmatia. One seminal work from 1774 probably had the largest impact on the study of the Morlachs as a social group in itself, with its own history. *Viaggio in Dalmazia* was published in Venice (1774) by a Paduan scholar, the abbot Alberto Fortis (1741–1803). A man of his time, Fortis had a vast interest in geology, paleontology, and religion. His preoccupations were at the core of his journey to Dalmatia and motivated his research on natural resources and on the economic potential of the region. Insofar as the Morlachs are concerned, Fortis takes on

the mission of exonerating them of the defamatory legend portraying them as “a ferocious people, inhumane, witless and capable of all crimes.”⁵⁹ To this end, Fortis embarks on a quest of the more noble origins of the Morlachs and, thus, tries to understand their decline as a consequence of the harsh conditions of their existence. He authors a theory according to which

*the Morlachs and the Vlachs must undoubtedly be the same nation. Or, the Vlachs speak a corrupted Latin and, when asked for a reason, they answer that they are Romans, just as our Morlachs are also Romans, even if their language is different from Latin.*⁶⁰

Owing to this perspective which explains the Roman-Vlach origin of the Morlachs and also to the ample description of their lifestyle, Fortis’ work has inspired numerous studies attempting to define the common origin of the Vlachs in Wallachia and of the Morlach Vlachs in Dalmatia. One must, nevertheless, bear in mind the fact that Fortis was rather inclined to ascribe to the Morlachs a local Latin origin and, as the quoted fragment suggests, to view them as remnants of the Romanized population in Dalmatia. He considers that Lucius’ etymology of the name ‘Morlach’ is purely fictional and exaggerated (“stretched like leather by a shoemaker”), the Morlachs being as white as the Italians.

Fortis’ work rapidly became popular in the Venetian intellectual circles and in Western Europe, due to the large number of translations. *Viaggio in Dalmazia* consecrates its author as a pioneer in the rediscovery and study of the populations and traditions from the region of the southern Slavs. He progressively becomes a mandatory source for anyone who wishes to travel and write about the countries of the Oriental Adriatic and about their culture.⁶¹ His work became influential due to the novelty of the aspects it brought forth, especially in the case of the Morlachs. He did fieldwork, he collected folklore samples, he described the elements of lifestyle and showed the European public an example of a community which satisfied the criteria of the “good savage.” Furthermore, *Viaggio in Dalmazia* generated a new literary trend known as *morlachism*.⁶² This term would come to define “an upstanding, uncorrupted humanity,”⁶³ as Charles Yriarte suggests in his *Le rive dell’ Adriatico ed il Montenegro*. This term marks the closing stage of the integration of the Morlachs into the European space of the Enlightenment. In his work, *Memorie inutili* (1797–1798), Carlo Gozzi provides a most revealing statement as to the impact of this process: “whoever reads Homer or Vergil can easily think of the Morlachs.”⁶⁴

The efforts to discover, understand and define the Morlachs in Dalmatia provide a very fertile ground for the nationalist spirit of the 19th century, flourishing in the Eastern coast of the Adriatic. In order to illustrate this aspect, a single type of sources were selected: an almanac published in Zadar between 1845 and 1850 entitled *Il Morlacco*. All five issues of the almanac contain a three-versions calendar (Orthodox, Catholic, Hebrew-Muslim), information related to laic or ecclesiastic holidays, but also a series of legends, stories, myths and historical narratives glorifying the past of the Morlachs. Cast in a heroic light, they are acknowledged for their noble origin (autochthonous Latin), for their diligence and hospitality and especially for their tremendous sacrifice in defend-

ing the Dalmatian land. In this sense, it is worth resorting to a most powerful example, the advice a mother gives her son on the eve of his departure, to fight in the armies of Napoleon: “Go and fight for your Prince; remember that honor summons you and if you don’t come back glorious, don’t show your face to your family anymore!”⁶⁵ A comment of the anonymous editor accompanies this example and compares the Morlach mother to the mothers of Sparta and ancient Rome, greatly admired by the classics who described them in the most sublime words.⁶⁶

A MORE RECENTLY published body of works are based on the in-depth research of the various forms that the identity of the Morlachs assumed inside the states where they settled. Whether they address issues like violence and the reactions to justice, as in the case of the work of Karen-edis Barzman,⁶⁷ or they examine how the image of the Western-Balkan Morlachs was constructed by resorting to travel accounts, to a vision of “savagery” and of rurality consecrated by the Enlightenment, as shown by Inoslav Bešker⁶⁸ and especially Larry Wolff,⁶⁹ or they promote the French model of construction and understanding of a political nation in progress, as illustrated by Wojcieh Sajkowski,⁷⁰ all the contributions mentioned above act as guiding documents for any research investigating the identity of the Morlachs.

As it clearly results from my work and from my endeavor to cast light on the meanings associated with the term ‘Morlach,’ there is great need for further similar research. Although it can be spelled out as an ethnic, social, emotional identifier or as a nickname, the term ‘Morlach’ unquestionably designates a population that thrives on turmoil in the West of the Balkan Peninsula. In a first phase (the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries), its survival relies on the specific lifestyle of pastoral transhumant communities and on the exploitation of various favorable commercial opportunities. Also, the Morlachs’ involvement in military operations triggered new elements on which they capitalized, as they made their way into the collective memory of the ones they came in contact with.

The identity of the Morlachs developed across time, but there is a set of powerful criteria that remained unchanged: their powerful character, their propensity to violence, their constant mobility, their openness to speculation of various opportunities and the rural space. History and collective memory preserve an image of the Morlachs that relies on their actions and less on one ethnicity or another. Granting that the present study does not exclude the possibility that future research may determine the affiliation of the Morlachs to one ethnic group or another, sharing the same space in the Balkans, I consider that the identity of the Morlachs is connected to a set of far more diverse aspects than the nationally established criteria based on which a human group is assigned to an ethnicity (language, religion, common origin). Until the publication of further research on this matter and pending the consolidation of our working hypothesis, I will follow the words of Andrew Gillett,⁷¹ who states that “true confusion is better than false clarity.”



Notes

1. Phrase designating the maritime possessions of Venice (Istria, Dalmatia, Albania, Crete, Cyprus), as opposed to Terraferma, which referred to the continental possessions located north of the Serenissima.
2. Ioannes Lucius, *De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae libri sex* (Amstelodami, 1666).
3. Simeone Gliubich, *Dizionario biografico degli uomini illustri della Dalmazia* (Vienna, 1856), 187.
4. *Ibid.*, 284.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*: *eiusdem Valachiae trans-istrianae partem majorem (nunc Moldaviam dictam) Maurovlachiam dixere Graeci, ut Codinus.*
8. *Ibid.*, 287–302; Joannes Georgius Schwandtner, *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum, Dalmaticarum, Croaticarum et Slavonicarum, veteres ac genuini*, vol. 3 (Vienna, 1748), 476–508.
9. Lucius, 288: *post haec totam Provinciam Latinorum, qui illo tempore e Romani vocabantur; modo vero Morovlachi, hoc est nigri Latini vocantur.*
10. Another known explanation for the use of black refers to the black coats worn by Vlachian shepherds. See Zef Mirdita, *Vlasi u historiografiji* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2004), 343.
11. See, for instance, Solange Bujan, “La Chronique du prêtre de Dioclée: Un faux document historique,” *Revue des études byzantines* 66 (2008): 5–38; Stefan Trajković-Filipović, “Inventing a Saint’s Life: Chapter XXXVI of *The Annals of a Priest of Dioclea*,” *Revue des études byzantines* 71 (2013): 259–276.
12. Anca Tanașoca and Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca, *Unitate romanică și diversitate balcanică: Contribuții la istoria romanității balcanice* (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației PRO, 2004); Adolf Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor: Istoria unei idei*, 2nd rev. edition (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1993).
13. Archivio di Stato di Pisa, Diplomatico, Roncioni.
14. *Monumenta Ragusina: Libri reformationum*, vol. 5 (1301–1336), edited by Josip Gelčić (Zagreb, 1879), 253.
15. *Ibid.*, 393.
16. Esad Kurtović, “Seniori hercegovačkih vlaha,” in *Zbornik radova s međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupavenczo* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011), 668.
17. *Ibid.*, 669.
18. Esad Kurtović, “‘Ad usum boni pasculatoris et boni viri’ (Uzgoj konja u dubrovačkom zaleđu kroz prizmu ugovora o uzgoju),” in *Spomenica Ibrahima Karabegovića: Zbornik Radova* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju u Sarajevu, 2013), 63.
19. Kurtović, “Seniori hercegovačkih vlaha.”
20. Kurtović, “‘Ad usum boni pasculatoris et boni viri.’”
21. Kurtović, “Seniori hercegovačkih vlaha.”
22. Šime Ljubić, ed., *Listine o odnosajih između južnoga slavenstva i mletačke republike*, vol. 2 (1336–1347) (Zagreb, 1870), 70.
23. Tadija Smičiklas, ed., *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 11 (1342–1350) (Zagreb, 1913).
24. *Olachy vel villani*; Tadija Smičiklas, ed., *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 12 (1351–1359) (Zagreb, 1914).

25. *Vlachi sive catunari*; Franjo Rački, ed., “Notae Ioannis Lucii,” *Starine* 13 (1881): 211–268.
26. Tadija Smičiklas, ed., *Codex Diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 13 (1360–1366) (Zagreb, 1915).
27. Šime Ljubić, ed., *Listine o odnošajih između južnoga slavenstva i mletačke republike*, vol. 9 (1423–1452) (Zagreb, 1890).
28. Document copied by Giovanni Lucio, *Memorie istoriche di Tragurio, ora detto Traù* (Venetiis, 1674), 456.
29. *Statuta Iadertina* (Venice, 1560), 121.
30. *Morlachis aut Hervatis/Morlachos et Chervatos*; Ljubić, vol. 9.
31. Šime Ljubić, ed., *Listine o odnošajih između južnoga slavenstva i mletačke republike*, vol. 10 (1453–1469) (Zagreb, 1890).
32. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter cited as ASV), Capi de Consiglio dei X, b. 280.
33. ASV, Lettere e scritture turchesche, fols. 1–2.
34. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 61, c. 63v–64r.
35. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni a Costantinopoli, reg. 2, c. 21r–v.
36. ASV, Bailo a Costantinopoli, b. 365.
37. ASV, Capi de Consiglio dei X, b. 280.
38. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Secreta, reg. 59, c. 93v–94r.
39. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Secreta, fol. 27.
40. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, reg. 3, c. 97v–98v.
41. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fol. 1.
42. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 20, c. 126v–127r: *per li proveditori nostri alla camera del armamento siino conducti alli stipendii de la Signoria Nostra galioti numero 3000 dele sottoscritte nationi cio e histriani, dalmatini, schiavoni, murlachi, albanesi et greci exceptuati quelli delle insule nostre di Candia et Cypri et Corphu.*
43. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Secrete, fol. 27: *ladri uscochi vestiti in habito musulmano . . . assaltarono doi musulmani . . . et doi murlachi et una morlacha . . . essendo venuti alcuni Cingani.*
44. ASV, Bailo a Costantinopoli, b. 365: *et in loro ville et castelli et luochi li huomini detti Vlachi veneno la invernata con le loro bestiamie et castroni loro a pascolare . . . predetti Vlachi danno delle botte et delle ferite alli nsotri sudditi di Sebenico.*
45. Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 2011); Philip Longworth, “The Senj Uskoks Reconsidered,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 57, 3 (1979): 348–368; Stevka Šmitran, *Gli uscocchi: Pirati, ribelli, guerrieri tra gli imperi ottomano e asburgico e la Repubblica di Venezia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008).
46. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 39, c. 338v sqq.: *che da quel rettor nostro siando condotti scochi overo Murlachi ducento con doi capi della loro natione con stipendio de ducati cento all’anno per uno et con ordine ad esso rettore che agli uscochi overo murlachi suddetti possa dare quel trattenimento che agli parera conveniente* (6 February 1570).
47. ASV, Capi del Consiglio dei X, b. 281: *nostra gens bellica Uschochi nominati in civitate Segnensi, aliisque circum locis in confinibus maritimis, Croatiem, incolas districturs Travinsisqui alias Murlachi nomine, sed re ipsa vetere coloni Ungarorum sunt.*
48. Case study published in “Migrații spontane și organizate în teritoriul Zarei (Zadar-ului) la mijlocul secolului al XVI-lea: Cazul morlacilor istrieni,” *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* (Bucharest) 34 (2016): 73–104.

49. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Secrete, fol. 40 (5 November 1569).
50. ASV, Senato Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 24, c. 179: *che numero et che sorte di gente murlacha dalla obediencia del Turco sia venuta alla devotione della Serenita Nostra* (7 December 1538).
51. Tea Mayhew, "Soldiers, Widows and Families: Social and Political Status of the Professional Warriors of the Venetian Republic (1645–1718)," in *Professions and Social Identity: New European Historical Research on Work, Gender and Society*, edited by Bertheke Waaldijk (Pisa: Plus, 2006), 89–101; ead., *Dalmatia between Ottoman and Venetian Rule: Contado di Zara 1645–1718* (Rome: Viella, 2008).
52. *Gazette* (Paris), 20 September 1647.
53. *Gazette*, 7 September 1662.
54. *Ibid.*: *mais les Morlaques s'estans trop avancez dans le Pais ennemi, pour y butiner, les Turcs.*
55. *Il Corriere ordinario*, 26 May 1684, no. 42: *essedno stati da i nostri Morlacchi scortati nel viaggio da quei lochi, che sono situati nelle vicinanze di Mustar fino a i confini veneti* (15 May).
56. *Il Corriere ordinario*, 26 May 1684, no. 42: *nell'azione predetta de'i Morlacchi hebbe di 5000 di essi la direzione il Colonello Canaietti, che scoro per 80 miglia di Paese nemico* (15 May); *Il Corriere ordinario*, 14 July 1694, no. 56: *mentre l'Eccellentissimo Signor Steffano Cappello Proveditor de'i Cavalli alla testa di 800 di essi pagati, et di 400 Morlacchi marchiava per Terra* (3 July).
57. *Il Corriere ordinario*, 16 June 1694, no. 48: *con lettere dalla Dalmazia si e havuto aviso, che doppo la scritta fortunata corsa fatta da'i Morlacchi a danni di Mustar, diretta dal Colonnello Canagetti, che cumanda le Truppe Morlacche.*
58. *Verissima e distinta Relatione della rotta data a tre mila Turchi dalle Armi della Serenissima Republica di Venetia in Dalmatia comandate dall'Eccellentissimo Signor Generale cavalier Girolamo Cornaro Con la morte di 200 Turchi e d'altretanti fatti Schiavi* (Venice, 1686): *credevano li Ottomani de I confine di Dalmatia di ritrovare addormentato il Veneto Leone, che custodisce cn occhi di Lince I suoi Stati o pure le squandre Morlacche diminuite de forze, o deboli di coraggio, ma ben sperimentarono l'opposto nell'arduo ricontro per dar effetto alle loro mal prefate resolutioni . . . e radunate in buon numero le Militie Morlacche, ingrossate da Poglizzani le spines et incamino buon numero di gente pagata sotto il Comando de General San Polo.*
59. Andrei Pippidi, "Naissance, renaissance et mort du *bon sauvage* à propos de Morlaques et de Valaques," *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires* (Bucharest) 2 (1979): 63.
60. Alberto Fortis, *Viaggio in Dalmazia*, edited by Eva Viani, introduction by Gilberto Pizzamiglio, digital edition by Patrizia Pascasio (Lecce: CISVA, 2010), 45: "Per appoggiare poi meno infelicemente la seconda parte di questa etimologia, trovando che la radice comune de'nomi nazionali Vlassi, o Vlaki, e Valacchi, è la voce vlàh indicante potenza, autorità e nobiltà, concluse primieramente che gli abitanti della Valacchia, e i nostri Vlassi doveano essere in tutto e per tutto la stessa cosa. Ma i Valacchi parlano una lingua che latineggie moltissimo, e interrogati del perché, rispondono d'essere originariamente romani; dunque anche i nostri, quantunque non latineggio tanto, sono romani."
61. Charles Yriarte, *Le rive dell'Adriatico ed il Montenegro*, edited by Noemi Melileo and Delia Solari (Lecce: CISVA, 2010), 22.
62. Marco Martin, *Il morlacchismo d'Omero di Giulio Bajamonti* (Lecce: CISVA, 2010); Flavia Giadrini, "Morlacchi e 'Morlacchismo,'" Ph.D. thesis at the Università degli studi di Padova, 1987; Valentina Gulin, "Morlacchism between Enlightenment and Romanticism

- (Identification and Self-Identifications of the European Other),” *Narodna umjetnost: hrvatski časopis za etnologiju i folkloristiku* 34, 1 (1997): 77–110.
63. Yriarte, 22.
 64. Apud *ibid.*, 23.
 65. *Il Morlacco: Lunario Dalmatino, Cattolico e Greco, Ebraico et Turco per l'anno 1846. Corredato di varie piacevoli ed utili notizie* (Zadar), 15.
 66. *Ibid.*: *L'eroica morlacca donna, che nulla mai seppe di Sparta o Roma, non la cede ad alcuna delle antiche madre, di cui ammiriamo le cosimili sublimi espressioni.*
 67. Karen-edis Barzman, *The Limits of Identity: Early Modern Venice, Dalmatia, and the Representation of Difference* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2017).
 68. Inoslav Bešker, *I Morlacchi nella letteratura europea* (Rome: Il Calamo, 2007).
 69. Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); *id.*, “The Enlightened Anthropology of Friendship in Venetian Dalmatia: Primitive Ferocity and Ritual Fraternity among the Morlacchi,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, 2 (1998–1999): 157–178; *id.*, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).
 70. Wojciech Sajkowski, *French Image of the Peoples Inhabiting Illyrian Provinces* (Warsaw–Bellerive-sur-Allier: DiG-La Rama, 2018).
 71. Andrew Gillett, “Introduction: Ethnicity, History, and Methodology,” in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in The Early Middle Ages*, edited by Andrew Gillett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 1–18.

Abstract

(In) The Name of the Morlachs:

The Memory of an Identity Along the Centuries: Some Working Hypotheses

Known as one of the most thought-provoking populations of the Balkans, the Morlachs, their origin, and their name have stirred the interest of researchers. The purpose of this study is to focus on the meaning of the term ‘Morlach’ as it emerges from the various sources which have been identified over time and, also, to highlight how such sources can impact our memory. The objective is to provide insight on the evolution of an ethnonym (or identifier) and on its flexibility in a context of political, economic and social changes, in Dalmatia. Thus, this study calls for a more increased focus on a pivotal aspect of the process of “historical recovery” of the Morlach communities in Dalmatia, more particularly, on the issues related to their designation.

Keywords

Morlachs, Venice, Dalmatia, ethnonym, exonym

