

Croatian Ethnogenesis and the Nomadic Element

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In this presentation we will attempt to indicate some connections between the historical territory of Croatia and the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe, briefly mentioning also certain developments before the arrival of the Croats. At the start, however, we must emphasize that this theme has rarely been addressed by Croatian scholars, which means that primary sources have not been fully analyzed and secondary interpretations are few. Nevertheless, as the title of our paper suggests, it seems that the steppe connection did in fact play some more or less significant role in Croatian ethnogenesis. Our presentation will review the problem of ethnogenesis and of ethnogenetic theories, with specific reference to Croatia. And in this general context we will review what is known, or what can be inferred about the "Eurasian connection" in Croatia.

Defining Croatian ethnogenesis is not an easy task. The first problem is to define ethnicity, or else determine what is an *ethnie*, as Anthony Smith labelled its manifestations. Various historical and sociological schools have offered different interpretations, and the implications of ethnicity have also changed through history, especially from the ninth century to the present day. Former images of the *ethnie* as a biological, cultural, linguistic and psychological unit (*Volksseele*), virtually unchanged and unchangeable in time, have been replaced by more dynamic and often relativistic theories, some of which practically deny the existence of *ethnies*, considering them to be pure societal constructs. Such relativism has at times resulted in denying the obvious, i.e., that *ethnies*, whatever their *differentiae specifica*, show great persistence in time, or to be more precise, communities continue to be identified or united under the same ethnonyms over long periods of time.

Taking the Croatian case as an example, there can be no doubt that in the early mediaeval period there existed a group of people that identified themselves, and were identified by others, as Croats. In the tenth century the Byzantine emperor-historian Konstantin VII Porphyrogenitus dated the arrival of the Croats to the early seventh century, in the reign of the Emperor Heraclius. This is probable; however the first direct mention of the Croat name in *domestic sources* dates from

the year 852, when prince Trpimir styled himself "by the grace of God, prince of the Croats" (*dux chroatorum munere divino*). This Latin form of the Croat ethnonym was later confirmed in a stone inscription, dating from the time of Grand Prince and King Držislav: I (...) CLV DVX HROATOR(UM) IN TE(M)PVS DIRZISCLV DVCE(M) MAGNV(M), and the form in the Croatian language is attested at the end of the eleventh century in the inscription from Baška on the island of Krk, which mentions the time of "Zvonimir, the Croatian king" (ЗВѢНМИРИЪ КРАЛЪ HRЪВАТЪСКЫЙ). Undoubtedly, this name refers to an ethnic entity that had acquired a political framework. Furthermore, as we know, this entity continued to develop, under the same the name, to the present day. In the later mediaeval period, it was explicitly identified with a "nation", i.e. the *natio Croatica*, although we know that the concept of nation at that time differed from the modern concept. Nevertheless, the continuity of interlinked forms of community, of the type of language and of certain cultural traits cannot be disputed. Yet the ingredients of this communality and its cultural traits have changed, and it is certain that the modern Croat *ethnie* incorporates populations whose ancestors in the medieval period would not have regarded themselves as Croats, just as it certain that mediaeval Croatia included populations that were at the time distinct from the Croat *ethnie*, although they were later assimilated into it.

Thus, a working hypothesis of ethnogenesis, in the Croatian case, would include two levels: (1) the process through which previous populations or *ethnies* came together and formed the community that emerged and defined itself as Croat at the beginning of Croatian history; and (2) the processes, shifts of identity, etc. that subsequently expanded and developed the Croat *ethnie* to its present-day form. In general terms, a working definition of ethnogenesis would imply; first, the initial emergence of the *ethnie* (a community or community network usually identifying itself under a specific name, i.e., an *ethnonym*), and second, the further development of the *ethnie*, as long as this development lasts. As a corollary to this, we might say that ethnicity can be viewed as the continuation of a community or sense of community through time, regardless of changes in the community's membership, language, and cultural markers.

Now, if we consider the specific ingredients in the Croatian example, the following elements, *component groups* or historical *component stages* - not counting the possible Eurasian nomadic element, which we will treat later - could be said to have contributed to the making of the Croat *ethnie*, or its basis, throughout time:

(1) The indigenous prehistorical component stems from the first modern human populations in the area, from the Stone Age onwards. Croatia was first populated by modern humans about 40,000 years ago, and certain analyses indicate that biological continuity has been preserved to this day with some Upper Paleolithic populations, especially on the Adriatic islands. Of course, these very ancient populations cannot be considered predecessors of the Croats, since they contributed likewise to the substrata of many other European peoples, yet biological continuity also implies some continuation of traditions, cultural patterns, perhaps mentalities and other elements that were later passed on, ultimately (also) to the

Croat *ethnie*. Nothing will ever be known about the ethnic names and divisions of these earliest populations (assuming that they had some sense of ethnicity), just as nothing will probably ever be known in this regard about relatively newer groups that arrived in the Neolithic period, probably from the Near East, for example the people of the Neolithic Danilo culture (6th millennium BCE). The same applies to one of the most important archaeological cultures in Croatia, the Eneolithic Vučedol culture from Eastern Slavonia (circa 3000-2200 BCE), although this culture somewhat loses its prehistorical anonymity, in the light of presuppositions that its linguistic affiliation was already Indo-European, or at least pre-Indo-European.

(2) *The proto-historical component*. This next pre-Croatian component stage is constituted by the first peoples identified by name in historical sources, although for the most part it remains on the verge of history. In regard to coastal regions of Croatia, Greek and Roman authors referred to Illyrians (= Ἰλλυριοί, *Illyrii*), both in a strict sense (*Illyrii proprie dicti*, according to Pliny), and in a broad sense, which included peoples such as the *Delmatae*, *Liburni*, *Iapodes* and even, in some cases, the *Pannonii* in the north. It is very doubtful whether all these *gentes* were ethnically identical, or even related. Whatever the case, archaeologists often date the "arrival" of the Illyrians with the spread of the Central European Urnfield culture and/or with migrations on the eve of the Early Iron Age. According to one theory, the Illyrian ethnonym may be linked linguistically to the name of the Vistula River in Poland, although this remains a conjecture. In the late Illyrian period (from the fourth century BCE), Greek colonies were established on some Adriatic islands (Vis, Hvar, Korčula, etc.), although there is also a possibility that Greeks were present along the Croatian coast already in Mycenaean times (although their influence at that time was probably minimal). Next, at least from the time of Alexander of Macedonia, Celtic groups were dominant in certain areas of Croatia, especially in the Pannonian plain. Strabo mentions that the Iapodes had become "half-Illyrian and half-Celtic". In the North the two main Celtic groups were the *Taurisci* in north-west Croatia and the *Scordisci* in most of Slavonia and in Sirmium (as well in surrounding parts of Serbia and Bosnia).

(3) *The early (=Roman) historical component*. The Roman conquest, completed under the Emperor Augustus, brought new ethnic groups to the area of present-day Croatia. The most notable contribution was made by Italic colonists, who often left their names on gravestones and other inscriptions. Besides this, given the extent and the relative high (internal) migration rate of the Roman Empire (especially among legionnaires), people from various countries and regions contributed to the ethnic composition of the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia. Yet as evidenced from the analysis of thousands of personal inscriptions, most Italic colonists were business people, craftsmen, oriental slaves, etc. – whereas practically no peasants migrated to the other side of the Adriatic. This would imply that villages and agricultural areas, on the whole, would have preserved a relatively stronger "pre-Roman" character. Yet in fact, the coastal area became thoroughly Romanised. This resulted in the formation of a specific Romanic language, "Old Dalmatian", which preserved certain archaic phonetic features. Al-

most nothing remained of the previous Illyrian language. All we know today of Illyrian is based on personal names, ethnonyms, toponyms, and one certain word, *sabaia* "beer".

(4) The central (medieval) historical component. In the Migration Period, which marked the end of the Roman Empire, the area of Croatia was subsequently invaded by many ethnic groupings, most of them identified as Germanic. In the classical interpretation of the *Völkerwanderung*, the dynamic force that set this series of migrations into motion was the Huns, whom we will mention later. On the basis of historical information, confirmed also by archaeological evidence, the most important groups that arrived in Croatia were the Visigoths and the Svevi, who moved further west relatively quickly, the Ostrogoths, Gepids and the Langobards, who left the greatest amount of material evident relating to their settlement. All the present Croatian lands became an integral part of Theodoric's Ostrogothic kingdom, and this fact was to have a further effect on theories of Croatian ethnogenesis. In the second wave that occurred in the Migration Period, starting from the sixth century, numerous Slavic-speaking tribes broke through the Danube *limes* and occupied most of south-east Europe, including Croatian areas. This process is often linked to another driving force, the Avars. At the end of these events Croats were already present at least in areas of Dalmatia (according to Porphyrogenitus).

(5) The final (medieval-to-modern) historical component. As to the possible elements that contributed to Croatian ethnogenesis after the arrival of the Croats in Dalmatia, the following elements could be noted. Franks appeared in the eighth-ninth centuries, Magyars from the late ninth century in East Slavonia. From the beginning of the High Middle Ages, various Western European groups settled in Croatian and Slavonian towns (French, Italian, German/Saxon, Hungarian, etc.) where they formed separate communities. After the Black Death in the fourteenth century and even slightly earlier, Croatian historical documents begin to mention nomadic "Vlach" herdsman. Finally, from the late Middle Ages onwards, the major process in Croatian ethnogenesis was the gradual full incorporation of Slavonia into the Croatian ethnic framework, which was intensified by Ottoman conquests of the southern historically Croatian lands (effectively the Croatian ethnonym "migrated" during this time to the western part of Slavonia, and Zagreb developed from a Slavonian town to the capital of Croatia). In the same period, the kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia provided refuge for thousands of Rascians or Serbs, and this was to have a particularly strong effect on the ethnic and religious composition of the country. After the Ottoman Period, and more intensely from the mid eighteenth century, eastern parts of the kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia were recolonized by large numbers of ethnic Germans, which was followed towards the end of the nineteenth century by immigration from all parts of the Habsburg monarchy. Although we should note that Croatian ethnic development continued even afterwards, in effect by the mid nineteenth century the modern Croatian *ethnie* was already formed.

All these five component groups or stages in Croatian ethnogenesis intertwined through the centuries and finally contributed to the formation of the Croat *ethnie* as we know it today.

And as one might have already guessed, the Eurasian nomadic element, which we have abstracted so far, also fits into some of the mentioned component stages, at least from the time of the first Indo-European migrations (if not earlier). However, in this respect, a few words should be said about the general physical topography of the Croatian lands.

The great Eurasian steppe, as is well-known, extends from Manchuria to Pannonia, with certain discontinuities or reductions in and around mountain regions; e.g. the Hinggan Range, the Altai-Sayan area and the Carpathians in the west. Beyond the Carpathians, the Great Hungarian plain (*Alföld*) has traditionally been a receptor of Eurasian nomad groups, and a part of Pannonian Croatia may be considered as being an extension of this area. We refer here to the area of East Slavonia and especially to Sirmium, which until 1918 was an integral part of the kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia. On the other hand, the rest of Croatia is overall a mountainous region, with a progressively more elevated topography from the north-west to the Dinaric region in the South. This topography also meant a compartmentalization of the area, which strongly influenced Croatian history (the spatial integration of the Croatian state, etc.). Eurasian nomadic groups that would arrive in the immediate vicinity of Croatia would usually penetrate into Sirmium and East Slavonia, yet only some splinter groups would make their way into the rest of the country, where they would be quickly assimilated, without leaving any obvious traces of their existence. Simply said, most of Croatia does not offer suitable conditions to sustain a Eurasian type of nomadic lifestyle. The only type of nomadism that did develop - to a great extent at that - was transhumance (sheep herding), which was practiced from the earliest times until the twentieth century. It was especially spread, from late medieval times, by Vlach herdsmen.

Subsequent waves of Eurasian nomads repeatedly reached the borders of Croatia at different times in history, but almost always broke apart against the pre-Alps and the Dinaric Range. Metaphorically, waves from the steppe splashed onto mountain shore, and particles dissipated far from the shoreline, leaving usually only slight traces of their origins.

One major exception was the Eneolithic Vučedol culture, whose centre was located in eastern Croatia. Marija Gimbutas and other archaeologists explicitly linked the Vučedol culture with the process of Indo-Europeanization of Central Europe, and this culture could also be incorporated into the Transpontic Metallurgical Province suggested by Evgenij Černyh. Specific to the Vučedol culture was a later extension both to the north, to the Hungarian Plain, and also to mountain regions in the west and south. However, although the Vučedol culture has been linked to the Kurgan complex in the steppe area, at this time the lifestyle of horse-nomadism that would later characterise many Eurasian nomads had not yet been developed. Wild horses were hunted in Vučedol, but cattle was the main livestock, followed (to a lesser extent) by pigs and sheep. Deer hunting was also widespread, especially at some locations of this culture.

The next Eurasian nomadic wave that *possibly* reached Croatia would be represented by Iron Age populations, such as the Scythians and Sarmatians, pre-

sumed to be of Iranian linguistic affiliation. Although direct archeological evidence for these groups practically does not exist on the territory of Croatia, some finds of Scythian arrowheads in the immediate vicinity, in neighbouring Slovenian Styria, indicate that such links could have occurred at the time when Scythian influences penetrated into the area of the Hallstatt culture. It is also more than likely that Iazyges or other Sarmatians were active in parts of northern Croatia during the devastation of Pannonia in the Marcomannic Wars of the second century CE. It is questionable whether or not there might have been any distant Iranian connection in the case of the Iasi people, who are mentioned from the third century BCE as inhabiting the area between Ptuj in Slovenia, Daruvar in Croatia and Lake Balaton in Hungary (*municipum Iasorum*, cf. *Aquae Iasae*, the Roman name for Varaždinske Toplice). The phonetic similarity is close in the ethnonyms of the Iazyges and latter Alans (= As, Jas, etc.). However, the historical context is problematic and most scholars consider the Iasi to have been an indigenous Pannonian people.

During the Migration Period (fourth-seventh centuries CE) the Eurasian nomadic element in parts of Croatia was much more evident, as is confirmed both in written sources and by the archaeological record. First of all, it is certain that the Huns infiltrated Croatia, both as raiders and as conquerors, especially in the East, starting from the fourth century. In 388 Hunnic and Alan federates participated in the battle of Siscia (= Sisak) in the context of internal power struggles in the Western Roman Empire. Later the region was traversed by the Visigoths, and in the following decades the Huns established themselves firmly in Pannonia. Sirmium fell to the Huns in 441, and at that time they destroyed Mursa (Osijek). Occasional Hunnic artifacts can be found in various places in Slavonia. The Ostrogoths, who entered Croatia in the fifth century, under Hunnic influence had also acquired a strong nomadic component, and were associated with groups of Alans and others (as were the Huns). When the Ostrogoth kingdom collapsed in the sixth century, much of Croatia was taken over by the Langobards, who left a very impressive archaeological record in almost all of Pannonian Croatia. Yet very soon, the most important nomadic element in (proto-)Croatian history entered onto the scene – namely the Avars.

The role of the Avars is emphasized by many scholars, and Avar artefacts and necropolises can be found throughout Croatia, both in the north and in the south. Since all of Sirmium was previously a part of Croatia, an inscribed brick from Srijemska Mitrovica is probably the most interesting archaeological item in the Archaeological Museum of Zagreb relating to the Avars. The brick, dating from the seizure of Sirmium by the Avar *khagan* Bayan, contains the following text in Greek: ΧΡ(ΙΣΤΕ) Κ(ΥΡΙ)Ε. ΒΟΗΤΙ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΛΕΟΣ Κ'ΕΡΥΕΟΝ ΤΟΝ ΑΒΑΡΙΝ ΚΕ ΠΥΛΑΕΟΝ ΤΗΝ ΡΩΜΑΝΙΑΝ ΚΕ ΤΟΝ ΓΡΑΨΑΝΤΑ. ΑΜΗΝ (= Christ Lord, help the city and repel the Avar and preserve Romania and the one who wrote this. Amen). Although Avar finds are, obviously, not so frequent in Croatia as in the Hungarian Plain and in Voivodina, important necropolises and cultural traces have been found in parts of Slavonia, in north-west Croatia (in Medimurje and near Zagreb) and in the Dalmatian *Hinterland* (as well as in adjacent parts of Herzegovina). Individual traces have even been found on the

Adriatic islands. There has also been much debate whether toponyms of the "Obrovac" type refer to Avar settlements. The alternative view is that they derive from the Slavic word *obrovati*, "to dig a circular trench", and that they are not necessarily linked to the Slavic name of the Avars (= Obri). Yet the Frankish term *hring*, used to denote the central Avar stronghold in Pannonia taken by Charlemagne's armies at the end of the eighth century, would suggest the same notion. The Frankish subjugation of the Avars occurred after the fall of the first Avar Khaganat, and the second Avar Khaganat had already been greatly influenced by the Bulgars - another Eurasian element in the general scheme. Thus, just a few decades after the Frankish destruction of the Second Kaganat, the Bulgars under Khan Omurtag occupied most of Pannonian Croatia. In the late ninth century the last-mentioned prince of Pannonian Croatia, Braslav, was still a Bulgarian vassal, prior to the arrival of the Magyars. What happened to the Avars in the meantime is a subject of debate. It is possible that some of them took refuge in Croatia, based on the information given by Porphyrogenitus that there are still some Avars in Croatia, and it can be seen that they are Avars (ΚΑΙ ΕΙΣΙΝ ΑΚΜΗΝ ΕΝ ΧΡΩΒΑΤΙΑ ΕΚ ΤΩΝ ΑΒΑΡΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΝΩΕΚΟΝΤΑΙ ΑΒΑΡΕΙΣ ΟΝΤΕΣ). Alternatively, Porphyrogenitus' statement may apply to the remnants of the Avars that had survived in Dalmatia, after the Croats had defeated them in the sixth century and taken over their land as federates of the Emperor Heraclius.

The last Eurasian nomadic group that could be identified in relation to ethnic developments in and around Croatia were the Magyars, who were present in Sirmium and eastern Slavonia after their arrival in Pannonia at the end of the ninth century. It is known that the Magyars carried out raids and destruction in this area in the tenth century and the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea* mentions their raids on Dalmatia. The latter source, written at the end of the twelfth century, is problematic in its historical content, but probably reflects earlier traditions. The same source notes battles between the Croatian king, Tomislav, and the invading Magyars. The great Mongol-Tatar invasion of the mid-thirteenth century can also be considered a Eurasian nomad invasion, yet its effects were short-lived, despite wide-scale destruction (e.g. the burning of Zagreb), population movements, and *de facto* conquest. There is practically no mention of Eurasian nomads in the sources after that date, although in the fifteenth century the Croat priest Martinac uses imagery previously applied to Tatars to refer to the invasions of the Ottoman Turks.

Thus, after having summarized the historical sequence as it can be reconstructed from historical sources and the archaeological record, we can now turn to the next topic - the way in which the "Eurasian connection" was treated by various Croatian and other authors in their interpretations of Croat ethnogenesis. This applies primarily to the problem of ethnogenesis *on the first level* - in other words, identifying the population groups that formed the basis out of which the Croat *ethnie* emerged. The "Eurasian connection" has been less treated in regard to ethnogenetic processes *on the second level*, namely within the context of the continuous process of ethnic development from the initial emergence of the *ethnie* to its final state. In the Croatian case, this second level would include identifying and explaining linguistic and cultural features of Eurasian origin that became asso-

ciated with the *ethnie* (e.g. some archaic West Turkic loanwords, probably derived from the Avar or Old Bulgar language).

Proceeding chronologically, the oldest Croat ethnogenetic tradition is recorded in Chapter 30 of Porphyrogenitus' *De administrando imperio*:

[...] the Croats (ΧΡΩΒΑΤΟΙ) at that time were dwelling beyond Bavaria (ΒΑΓΓΙΒΑΡΕΙΑ), where the Belocroats (ΒΕΛΟΧΡΩΒΑΤΟΙ) are now. From them split off a family of five brothers, Kloukas (ΚΛΟΥΚΑΣ) and Lobelos (ΛΟΒΕΛΟΣ) and Kosentzis (ΚΟΣΕΝΤΖΗΣ) and Mouchlo (ΜΟΥΧΛΩ) and Chrobatos (ΧΡΩΒΑΤΟΣ), and two sisters, Touga (ΤΟΥΓΑ) and Bouga (ΒΟΥΓΑ), who came with their folk to Dalmatia and found the Avars in possession of that land. After they had fought one another for some years, the Croats prevailed and killed some of the Avars and the remainder they compelled to be subject to them.

It is usually assumed that Porphyrogenitus, or whoever registered this account, received it from some Croat source, probably from a member of the Croat nobility.

The second Croat ethnogenetic version can be traced back to Thomas the Archdeacon of Split and also to the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea*. This version equates the origins of the Croats with the Goths, or in other words, Croats are simply descendents of Goths. This account also incorporates some elements, which possibly could have been derived from the previous migration account. For example, Thomas says that seven or eight noble tribes called "Lingons" arrived in Dalmatia from Poland led by the Gothic leader Totilla (*"Venerant de partibus Poloniae, qui Lingones appellantur, cum Totilla, septem uel octo tribus nobilium"*).

The third vision was the "indigenous Slavic" theory of Croat origins, which became very popular in the Renaissance. Representatives of this ethnogenetic approach were Vinko Pribojević and Juraj Šižgorić. There is no doubt that the Croatian language is Slavic, so in this respect the theory was true, yet it assumed that the Slavs were indigenous to Illyricum and that the ancestors of the Slavs were the ancient Illyrians. Vinko Pribojević, in his famous speech, traced the origin of all Slavs back to Noah's son Japheth, and also equated many ancient peoples, including Thracians and Macedonians, with Slavs.

With the development of modern Croatian historiography from the seventeenth century, this Slavic theory was developed in realistic terms, and it was assumed that the Croats were just another Slavic people that settled in their homeland during the Migration Period. Ivan Lučić (Lucius), the father of Croatian historiography, examined Porphyrogenitus' work and came to the conclusion that the Croats arrived from "White Croatia beyond the Carpathians", namely from "Sarmatia" (= Poland), and this was in accordance with references to Croats in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* in the context of the ninth-tenth centuries. The general opinion prevailed that these "Russian Croats" were also White Croats.

Yet one major difficulty with this "Slavic migration" theory was that the Croat ethnonym could not be derived from any Slavic root, despite some rather naïve attempts to do so. As another possibility, attempts were made to explain the ethnonym on a Germanic linguistic basis, especially from the Germanic name of the Carpathians, Old Nordic *Harfadafföll*. Likewise some scholars, such as the English

Byzantologist John Bagnell Bury, proposed a Turkic etymology. The idea of five brothers reminded Bury of the Bulgar story of the migration of Khan Kubrat's five sons, whereas the name of the eponymic Croat leader, i.e. Chrobatos, seemed to indicate Kubrat himself. Kubrat's name appears in various spellings (Κουβρατος, Κοβρατος, Κροβρατος, Κουβερ, Crobatus, Dhudbadr, Chubraat, Quetrades, Койр'тъ), some of which truly are quite close in sound and form to the name of the Croat leader. For this reason, Bury wrote: "This Croatian legend has a strong family resemblance to the Bulgarian legend of Krobat (or Kubrat) and his five sons, and I therefore think that we should hardly hesitate to take Krobat and Hrobat as the same prehistoric hero of the Hunnic people...". This Turkic-Bulgar theory was soon assimilated to an Avar theory of Croat origins, which was suggested based on the close association of Avars and Croats in historical records and on the assumption that the specific Croat title *ban* ("viceroy", "warden") was derived from the name of the Avar khagan Bayan (which Bury also accepted).

However in 1890, in the ruins of the Greek colony of Tanais at the mouth of the Don, the Russian scholar Vasily Vasilyevič Latyšev discovered two inscriptions dating from the second and third centuries CE which contained the personal name ΧΟΡΟΑΘΟΣ or ΧΟΡΟΥΑΘΟΣ. In 1902 the philologist Aleksandr Lvovič Pogodin identified this name with the Croat ethnonym, and from this point onward the Iranian theory of Croat origins gained increasing popularity. Yet a distinction should be made in the sense that some scholars used this theory only to explain the ethnonym itself, and not necessarily the original ethnic affiliation of the Croats, while others took this theory to the extreme, on which we will soon comment.

Theories on ethnogenesis may be more or less correct in the scientific objective (historiographical) sense, yet they often also have ideological implications. In this sense, they may become constructs, which in certain situations may have a supportive role in affirming the identity or legitimacy of a community. Thus, if we examine the chronological development of Croatian ethnogenetic interpretations, we might identify certain ideological motives.

The original tribal account of five brothers and two sisters is perhaps the least ideologically motivated. The names of these leaders are so strange that it is difficult to imagine that they could have been invented at the Byzantine court. Yet in general the image conveyed is not only that of an extended family, but also of the heterogeneous nature of ethnogenesis. In other words, it implies that various elements entered into the Croat *ethnie*. Heterogenesis would be also a typical model in the Eurasian steppe, and it is probably not a coincidence that Bulgar and Magyar ethnogenetic traditions also mention founding groups composed of several leaders. The specificity in the Croatian case is the presence not only of brothers, but also of two sisters. In fact, due to its rawness, this oldest ethnogenetic account probably best preserves elements that may be closest to the historiographical truth, or at least reflect the "possibilities of the period".

This cannot be said of the Gothic theory. Not excluding the *eventuality* that some Gothic remnants might have survived until the sixth century, and then entered into the Croat *ethnie*, all in all there is very little basis to identify the original

Croats with the Goths, or with any other Germanic people. Nevertheless, some medieval chronicles do make this explicit identification. Why? According to the late Croatian historian Nada Klaić, Thomas the Archdeacon hated Slavs/Croats and wanted to belittle them as barbarians by calling them Goths. However, we must stress that a negative image of the Goths was developed much later, only in the Renaissance. True, the Goths were always considered barbarians – but they were considered the “best of the barbarians”, as opposed to the Langobards, Avars, etc. In this sense, we should probably assume that the Gothic theory was an intentional construct of the Croat ruling dynasty of princes and kings in the ninth to eleventh centuries (named after prince Trpimir). These rulers were certainly aware of the difference between themselves and the Latin inhabitants of the Dalmatian cities, and that they were the descendents of newcomers, i.e. barbarians. And so, in constructing an identity it would have been best to identify with the “best of the barbarians”. In other words, the Gothic theory was probably developed as a legitimizing myth of the Trpimirović dynastic sometime before the end of the eleventh century, since afterwards the Croatian crown passed to the Arpad dynasty, which had a different dynastic myth, stemming from Attila the Hun.

Likewise the “indigenous Slavic” theory had a particular ideological and perhaps cultural role. By the time it developed, during the Renaissance, the word “Gothic” already had negative connotations, and on the other hand the descendents of the Croat/Slavic migrants and indigenous Latinized groups in Croatia had already mixed. Thus the “indigenous Slavic” theory was an expression of this new ethnic amalgamate.

The “Slavic migration”, Turkic-Bulgar/or Avar and the Iranian theories have also been used and elaborated in non-scientific terms. The first was obviously emphasized in various Pan-Slavic and South Slavic political contexts. In former Yugoslavia the “Slavic migration” theory was virtually official. The Turkic-Bulgar, or more precisely the Avar, theory, was revived several decades ago by authors such as Otto Kronsteiner and Walter Pohl, and was accepted in Croatia by Nada Klaić and for a time by Neven Budak (who later rejected it). One could say that Nada Klaić adopted it for iconoclastic purposes, since her most constructive role in Croatia historiography had always been to expose all “accepted truths” to a merciless critique. By equating Croats with Avars, the traditional “good/bad” imagery of Croatian history was totally shattered. Yet as Budak later emphasized, it is true that Croats and Avars are often mentioned in the same texts, but regularly as enemies. Moreover, the Turkic etymology of the Croat ethnonym offered by Kronsteiner, for example, was very problematic.

The Iranian theory, which similarly to the Turko-Bulgar/or Avaric theory, proposed a Eurasian nomadic origin for the first Croats, also received far-fetched interpretations. Either intentionally or not, it likewise undermined the official “Slavic migration” theory, even before World War II. In its most extreme versions it denied that Croats had anything to do with Slavs, and sought Croat origins throughout the Iranian-speaking world, especially in the Old Persian satrapy of Arachosia in Central Asia, whose Iranian name Harahwaiti, more or less sounded like the Croat ethnonym. Especially in recent years, this type of extremism led to

the rallying call "Croats are not Slavs", which was inspired by aversion to the overall political and cultural *milieu* of former Yugoslavia. The incorporation of Iranism into Croat ideology after the break-up of Yugoslavia resulted in a strange mixture of contradictions. For example, it was claimed that Croats are not Slavs, yet the Croatian language is Slavic; Croats supposedly originated several millennia ago on the East Iranian plateau, yet they were assumed to be culturally much more "European" or else western than their Eastern Slavic neighbours; sophisticated methods of scientific research were invoked, yet they were interpreted in a totally amateur fashion.

All in all, it is hard to imagine what useful role could be played today by extreme Iranist interpretations of Croat ethnogenesis, in view of the fact that the ideological need to provide support for a distinct Croatian national identity is no longer an issue. On the other hand, such interpretations have done harm to genuine scientific theories dealing with the probability of an Iranian contribution to Croat ethnogenesis. At times valid scientific theories in this respect have been ridiculed simply due to the "bad advertising" produced by amateur attempts to trace the migration of Croat from the depths of the Achaemenid Empire to their present homeland. Yet having said this, we should also describe what remains plausible in the Iranian theory of Croat ethnogenesis.

The Tanais inscriptions represent the keystone of the Iranian theory and also the furthest eastern limit to which the theory can be extended. They date from a time when the Greek colony of Tanais was definitely surrounded by Sarmatian tribes. Xorothos was the personal name of one of the city's archonts, not an ethnonym in the strict sense. Yet it is well-known that people migrating from their original ethnic environments to foreign places are often named according to their ethnic origins. Thus, given the historical setting around Tanais in the second-third centuries, as well as the *uniqueness* of the name in question, the person referred to in the inscriptions could have arrived in the Greek town from some Sarmatian tribe, whose ethnonym may have been the prototype of the future Croat ethnonym. In itself this assumption is too slight to sustain a valid theory, if other indications did not add weight to it. Oddly enough, the very fact that the Croats arrived in their homeland speaking a Slavic language actually provides support for the Iranian theory, instead of contradicting it. Namely, intense Slavic-Iranian contacts, especially in the Slavic group denoted in historical sources as Antes, have generally been accepted. Prior to the arrival of the Croats in their homeland, the Antes lived east of the Carpathians and along the lower Danube. This is far from Tanais, but movements from the area of Tanais or the Azov Sea in the direction of the Carpathians and the Danube were quite common in history: Sarmatian tribes, Huns, Bulgars, Magyars and other nomadic peoples or ethnic segments typically migrated along this route. In accordance with the "possibilities of the period", it is quite conceivable that an Iranian, probably Sarmatian, segment, identifying itself (or identified by others) by an earlier form of the Croat ethnonym, arrived among the Antes east of the Carpathians and ultimately passed on its name to the future Croat ethnic core. Now if we accept, purely on a linguistic basis, that an Iranian explanation of the Croat ethnonym seems possible *vis-à-vis* other options, then

technically two scenarios exist: a Slavic population could have been labelled by this name by neighbouring Iranians, or more plausibly an Iranian group or clan that had settled among the Slavs, could have been linguistically assimilated by them, while retaining its origin ethnonym, which the associated Slavic-speaking group would have eventually adopted.

All this remains conjecture, yet three further pieces of information transform such speculation into a scientific theory, despite many "missing links".

First, in 602 the Avars destroyed the Ante tribal group, and the appearance of the Croats in history just one generation after this event is best explained by assuming that they had developed earlier within the Ante group, and consequently the Croat-Avar war that resulted in the Croatian conquest of Dalmatia would have been a continuation of the previous Avar-Ante conflict. Such an interpretation, in regard to the Iranian theory, would place the predecessors of the Croats among the Antes, or in other words in a Slavic-speaking context that had been in contact with Iranian groups.

Second, historical sources confirm that the Croats indicated the cardinal directions by colours, in accordance with the Eurasian colour scheme, used by Iranian and other steppe peoples (as well as in ancient China). It is very unlikely that such a model would have been accepted without some "assistance" from steppe nomads. Moreover, even after the Croatian settlement of Dalmatia, according to the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea*, the western (or north-western) part of the country was called "White Croatia" and the southern part "Red Croatia". And as we said, Porphyrogenitus wrote that the Croats (= Xrobotoi) arrived in Dalmatia from the lands of the White Croats (= Beloxrobotoi), which later historians traditionally located beyond the Carpathians. Denoting these Transcarpathian Croat lands as "white" or western would be absurd in regard to Dalmatia, and logical only if some reference point existed in the east, which points us towards the general direction of Tanais.

Finally, we have emphasized the importance of the oldest Croat ethnogenetic tradition, recorded in the *De administrando imperio*. This tradition indicates a heterogeneous composition of the first Croats, and as noted includes not only men, but also two women among the leaders of the Croats. The latter detail may be indicative in view of the special status that women apparently enjoyed among Sarmatian peoples. Archaeological research has confirmed that women warriors did in fact exist among the Sarmatians, which has given some new weight to ancient Greek legends about the Amazons, and to Herodotus' account that the Sarmatians descended from a mixture of Scythians and Amazons. To this we may add that the Russian linguist Oleg Nikolayevič Trubačov explained the original Iranian prototype of the name "Croat" from the adjective **xar-va(n)t*, which would refer to women, or to a people ruled by women. This does not mean that we should immediately equate Croat origins with various perceptions of Amazons, yet we might mention that Paul the Deacon, in his *Historia Langobardorum*, wrote that on their way from the Baltic to Pannonia, while crossing some river, the Langobards can into conflict with "Amazons", and then with Bulgars (I: 15-17). The historical context in this case is the mid sixth century, before the arrival

of the Avars in Pannonia, and the location of a group identified as “Amazons” in east-central Europe at this time is at least curious in the light of Trubačov’s explanation of the Croat ethnonym.

Today in Croatia advanced techniques of DNA analysis are being applied to investigate the history and prehistory of Croatia’s population. So far analysis of Y-chromosome lineages has shown that the relatively most common lineage in the country is also typically the most frequent lineage in other Slavic-speaking countries. This tendency would seem to confirm the major role of the Slavs in the formation of the Croatia *ethnie*. However, several other lineages are also present, and on the whole the picture indicates a very complex ethnic history, with various degrees of continuity from all the component stages mentioned in the first part of this presentation, or, in other words, from all periods both before and after the historical “arrival of the Croats” in Croatia. Since the classification of these various lineages and their presumed antiquity remains a subject of discussion, we must (for now) avoid precise comments.

Nevertheless, in view of the theme of this paper, we might mention one intriguing result that was published in a paper a few years ago. Namely, besides confirming the Slavic “genetic tendency”, so to speak (i.e. a statistical congruence of some genetic markers between Croatia’s population and the populations of other Slavic-speaking countries), on the Adriatic island of Hvar the authors discovered the presence of a lineage that is virtually absent in Europe, but very common in central and east Asia. The explanation given was that this may be a remnant of the Avar influence in Croatian history, or alternatively a phenomenon linked in some way either to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, or to a genetic transfer along the ancient Silk Road). Obviously, DNA analysis of living populations shifts the focus of ethnogenesis from the first level to the second level. The processes leading to the emergence of the first titular *ethnie* become more difficult to determine, whereas the total population heritage leading up to the present state of the *ethnie* is shown in great complexity. On the other hand, until DNA analysis is conducted on sufficiently representative samples of skeletal material, i.e. previous populations, this type of reconstruction of the past will more often raise questions than provide answers to questions. DNA analysis is definitely an exciting and very promising form of investigating population histories, but so far in the Croatian case it seems only to confirm what seems obvious, that present-day Croatia is genetically a part of eastern or, more precisely, south-eastern Europe and that there is a relatively great similarity to other Slavic areas. However Croats would be a Slavic people regardless of the results of DNA analysis – since the essential criterion in this case is language, and the Croat language is by all accounts a Slavic language.

In conclusion, what can we say in reference to the title of this paper: “Croatian Ethnogenesis and the Nomadic Element”? Perhaps it would be best to generalize and say: Yes, more or less, indications do exist that such an element was present in the formation of the first Croats, and to a lesser extent in Croatian ethnic history as a whole. Apart from this, we might note that the theme of ethnogenesis is a valid scientific subject *per se*, since the search for origins has always been an es-

sential human passion. On the other hand, the theme of ethnogenesis has also served other functions and, at times, has been not a passion to know one's origins, but a fantasy about one's origins. The latter has often led to preposterous visions of megalomania. Yet occasionally, such as in art, even fantasies recognized as fantasies can have some value. For instance, if we look at several interpretations of the "Arrival of the Croats" by Croatian painters, we can appreciate their mythical quality, even despite our own aesthetic preferences or criteria. And in closing, we might add that the nomadic element has also been expressed in these representations, particularly in one late romantic painting by Celestin Medović, which depicts the Croats with the traditional imagery of Eurasian nomads.