

**THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SLAVIC IDENTITY OF  
THE SLOVENES IN THE 1980s. THE CASE OF THE  
VENETIC THEORY**

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## Abstract

The present thesis treats the issue of autochthonism which emerged in Slovenia in the 1980s, assessing its role in the shifts in Slovene historical identity that occurred during the transition from Communism to political pluralism.

In 1985, a group of Slovene authors launched a theory according to which the Slovenes were not descended from Slavs that settled in the East Alpine region in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, but from a proto-Slavic people they called Veneti who had supposedly colonized the Central European area in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.. The theory represented an ideological attempt to break away from the Yugoslav cultural and historical context. Although it was rejected by the scientific establishment, it won wide public support. It also launched a harsh controversy which dominated the Slovene public sphere for several years and remained present in the media for a whole decade. Its supporters gradually developed into a regular cultural movement which contributed significantly to the re-definition of the Slovene national imagery.

Since the early articulations of Romantic nationalism in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Slovene historical identity was repeatedly inserted into the context of a wider Slavic identity understood in a demotic and ethnicist way. After WWII, this frame was challenged by new social experiences, including the immigration from other Yugoslav republics. The massive success of the Venetic Theory uncovered the crisis of the Slavic and demotic-ethnicist frame of Slovene identity and acted as a catalyst for its dissolution. Although the authors of the theory renewed the theses of 19<sup>th</sup> century Pan-Slavists, they inserted it in a completely different discourse. It was this discourse that gave an important contribution to the redefinition of Slovene identity in the period after the secession from

Yugoslavia, marking the turning point between a modernist and postmodernist model of collective identity.

## Introduction

In 1985, a group of three Slovene amateur historians published a book claiming that the Slovenes were not descended from the West and South Slavic tribes that settled in the East Alpine region in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, as it had been established by the academic historiography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In their monograph, entitled *Veneti: Our Ancient Forefathers*, the three authors advanced a theory that the Slovenes were direct descendants of a pre-Roman people they called Veneti, which supposedly colonized the Central European area in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century BC.<sup>1</sup> Their theory – which soon became known as the “Venetic Theory” – was decidedly rejected by academic historians, as well as by other scholars, such as ethnographers and linguists. Nevertheless – or maybe partially precisely because of this – the book won wide public acclamation and launched a very harsh controversy which dominated the Slovene public debate until the early 1990s.

Since the very beginning, the critics of the Venetic theory pointed out its ideological implications. The Theory was recognized as an ideological attempt to break away from the Yugoslav cultural and historical context, launched in a period when the Yugoslav federation was entering the profound crisis which ended in its dissolution in 1991. There was however not much to unmask, since these ideological implications were not at all hidden by the authors of the theory, although not all of them were *a priori* adverse to the Yugoslav political project. As one of the three authors of the book *Veneti: Our Ancient Forefathers* wrote in one of the first articles advancing the theory, their aim was to show that “Slovenes have no historical or ethnical connection to the South Slavs”.<sup>2</sup> Spurned by the academic establishment, as well as by the major publishers and mainstream media, the Theory gained

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<sup>1</sup> Matej Bor, Jožko Šavli, Ivan Tomažič, *Veneti: naši davni predniki* (Vienna: Slovenski dom Korotan, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Ivan Tomažič, “Urednikov uvodnik.” *Glas Korotana* 10 (1985), 9.

an unexpected success. Their advocates entered in polemics with the scholarly community – mostly, but exclusively with academic historians –, and managed to transform the issue in a matter of public debate.

The Theory gradually developed into a regular cultural movement with a distinct an innovative approach to Slovene identity issues. This movement, besides introducing a radical change in the discourse of Slovene identity as it had developed since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, created, elaborated or re-appropriated several historical images which entered the collective imagery in Slovenia and have been since introduced into several contexts that highlighted their relevance for the national identity. The controversy that followed the theory developed in the first open public debate on Slovene identity after 1945 within the borders of Slovenia. It also served as a catalyst of numerous important changes in the public discourse regarding Slovene identity, among which the probably most important is the final dissolution of its Slavic frame.

For several reasons, the Venetic controversy also played an important role in the changes within Slovene mainstream historiography. In the first place, its stance managed to unmask many unacknowledged ideological premises of the so-called “Ljubljana School of Historiography”, which exercised an overwhelming hegemony within the Slovene historiographic community. By advancing their own views on the essence of Slovene identity, the authors of the Venetic theory triggered a reaction from members of the historiographic community, in which they gave away several of their own implicit presupposition on what the “proper Slovene identity” is or ought to be. Besides, the controversy took place during a generational shift within Slovene historiography, serving as the first public polygon for several influential Slovene historians of the younger generation. As such, it had an important impact in framing their professional experience; several of their

recent conceptualizations, with which they broke away from the previous generation, can be properly understood only in the background of the controversy stirred by the Venetic theory.

In my thesis, I will analyse the public controversy created by the Venetic theory and establish its relevance in the changes that occurred in Slovene identity during the 1980s and 1990s. Although some literature has been published on the issue, it has been almost exclusively centred on the content of the Theory – mostly trying to show its falsity –, while its historic significance has either been dealt with superficially or entirely neglected. Although most historians who dealt with the issue have pointed out the ideological nature of the Venetic theory, they have been so far unable to properly define the exact nature of its ideological program. Furthermore, almost all of the scholars who analyzed the Venetic theory had been engaged in the polemics over its content, and have thus lacked the proper distance to assess their own position within the controversy.

One of the aims of my thesis is to critically assess the controversy around the Venetic theory as a cultural phenomenon in Slovene history. In order to achieve this, I will analyze the discursive procedures, ideological implications and argumentative strategies of both sides – the authors and propagators of the Theory, as well as their opponents from the academic sphere – and place them in the proper political and ideological context. My main hypothesis is that both the Venetic theory and the controversy that sprung from it helped to produce an important re-definition of the Slovene national imagery. I will try to show the important and not yet assessed role of the Venetic controversy within the wider cultural phenomena which brought a shift in the classical Slovene national narrative in the 1980's, such as the popularization of the concept of Central Europe, the ecological movement, and the neo-avant-garde movements centred around the groups *Irwing* and *Neue Slowenische*

*Kunst*.<sup>3</sup> These movements, embedded in the civil society, ran parallel with the political process that brought to Slovenia's declaration of independence from Yugoslavia and helped to prepare its ground, as they changed the coordinates in which Slovenes were used to think about their identity and historical destiny.

Since the birth of modern Slovene national consciousness in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the identity of Slovenes was constantly and repeatedly put into the context of a wider Slavic identity. The relationship between Slovene identity and a wider, either Slavic or South Slavic identity was abundantly debated throughout this time, but their essential relatedness of the two was never, or very rarely, denied. After World War Two, however, this identity frame became more and more unsuitable for containing new social and political experiences, the most important being the immigration from other Yugoslav Republics, the demise of the Germans as the main "Other" against whom Slovenian identity was framed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and raising doubts whether Yugoslavia with its anti-western non-aligned policy was the most suitable form of institutional integration of the Slovene nation. The massive success of the Venetic theory uncovered the crisis of the "Slavic frame" of Slovene identity and acted as a catalyst for its dissolution.

One of the most paradoxical features of the Venetic theory was that it renewed the theses of 19<sup>th</sup> century Pan-Slavist activists, elevating them to a much higher level of consistency and credibility, but used it to achieve completely different aims. For the Slovene Romantic Pan-Slavists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the autochthonist discourse – that is, the claim that Slavs were the original settlers of Central and South-East Europe and not "barbarian newcomers" from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries – was a means to fight German nationalism and to assert the ancestral communion of all Slav peoples. The Venetic theory, on the other side,

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<sup>3</sup> For the latter, see Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach in NSK* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

vested itself in the ideology of pure Slovene identity: for its advocates, the re-discovered ancestral origin of the Slovenes should have served as an encouragement to get rid of the Yugoslav (or generally Slav) corset into which the Slovene historical narrative had been tightened until then. To put it shortly, the Venetic theory was the old autochthonism inserted in a completely different discourse. This discourse was so strong and overwhelming that it obscured the very content of the theory: in fact, many Slovenes who had never read the books and pamphlets published by the “Venetologists”, as they soon became called, believed that the whole controversy was revolving around the question, on whether “we are Slavs or Veneti”.<sup>4</sup>

It is therefore clear that it was not the Theory itself, but the discourse with which it was conveyed that gave an important contribution to the redefinition of Slovene identity. The historians who dealt with the Venetic Theory as a phenomenon, mostly concentrated themselves on its contents, only to conclude it was an untenable conjecture fuelled by clear ideological purposes.<sup>5</sup> They however neglected its discursive character and gave no emphasis to what Edward Saïd would call “the strategic location of the author’s position”, that is the “positioning of the author in a text in regard to the material on which he writes”.<sup>6</sup> In the present thesis, I intend to fill this research gap by producing an accurate analysis of the discourse employed by the most important Venetologists and give a proper account of the theses contained in the Theory, showing their implicit and not yet analyzed political and ideological connotations. My focus will not be so much the content of the theory, which has

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<sup>4</sup> This misperception can be for example seen in a recent article published by the renowned literary historian Miran Hladnik, which begins with the following statement: “The topic of my present article about the relation between Slovenes and Slavs in the tradition of the Slovene historical novel can also be seen as an answer to the amateur historians who use popular etymologies [...] in order to prove that we are not Slavs but something else: Vends, Veneti, Vikings, Etruscans, Illyrians, etc.” Miran Hladnik. “Slovani v slovenski zgodovinski povesti,” in *Podoba tujega v slovenski književnosti*, ed. Tone Smolej (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2005), 53.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Peter Štih, “Ej ko goltneš do tu-le, udari po konjih! O avtohtonističnih in podobnih teorijah pri Slovencih in na Slovenskem,” *Zgodovina za vse* 3, no. 2 (1996): 66-80.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

already been analysed and rejected by many scholars. I believe in fact that the key of understanding its success is not so much its content, but its ideological background, as well as the cultural and political context from which it sprung. It is only through this perspective that a proper evaluation of the extent of the rupture in the traditional framing of Slovene identity created by the Theory can be appreciated.

In order to show this rupture, I will focus mostly on its prehistory: I will describe the basic coordinates of the discourses of Slovene identity, concentrating myself to the historiographic discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to which the Venetic theory was a reaction. I will also make a general outline of the autochthonist theories prior to the Venetic theory, in order to ascertain the continuities and shifts between the two. I will show how the theory's discourse slowly established itself through the appropriation of different autochthonist and semi-autochthonist traditions. Without putting too much emphasis on the Venetic controversy, which was more or less centred around repetitive assertions and rejections on its concrete claims, I will show how the clash between the "official" historiography and the Venetologues was not only a clash on the content and methodology, but also a clash of two different identity discourses. In the conclusion, I shall establish the relevance of the subject in the wider Central European context. The Venetic theory, in fact, in spite or even because of its nationalistic connotations, formed part of the wide spectrum of the revival of Central European identity which reached its height in the 1980s. My final aim is to show how the Venetic theory inscribes itself in the point of division between the modern and post-modern model of Slovene national identity, marking the point of passage to what one could call a post-modern type of nationalist discourse.

The latter element makes my subject a paradigmatic case for wider phenomena, transcending its narrow regional interest. The redefinition of classical identitarian discourses is in fact a common trait in many contemporary European societies. Constant reframing

might be as well an intrinsic trait of identity in general. In any case, the Venetic theory is a good example of the agility with which nationalist (or, broadly speaking, identitarian) discourses are able to transform themselves in the face of new challenges. It also reveals the difficulty of the academia to grasp these changes and to cope with them. Not least important, it raises the perennial issue of the relationship between scholarly historiography and collective historical identities.

## 1. Early Autochthonist Theories in the Slovene Lands

The Venetic theory was not the first theory claiming that the Slovenes were not descendents of Slavic tribes which settled the Eastern Alps in the Early Middle Ages, but of some ancient people who inhabited the area prior to the Roman conquest. On the contrary, such claims, which were later dubbed with the generalizing name “autochthonism”, have been present in Slovene historiography since its very beginning. Paradoxically, both sides involved in the controversy around the Venetic theory emphasized this fact, with opposite intentions. For the academic scholars objecting the Venetic theory, the existence of a long sequel of authors who had advanced similar claims was just another prove for their unsubstantiated nature. The advocates of the Theory, they claimed, merely re-proposed scientifically already rejected claims, dressing them with new clothes. Exactly as had been the case with their predecessor the aim of the “Venetizers” – as they were sarcastically named – was not a scientific, but an ideological one: to boast the national consciousness of the Slovenes by providing them with glorious ancestors.<sup>7</sup>

The advocates of the Venetic theory – we shall call them Venetologists – saw the issue from a different perspective. In their view, the long tradition of autochthonism was the proved the continuity in the historical awareness.<sup>8</sup> Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, they claimed, more or less everybody was naturally convinced that the Slovenes were indigenous in this region. This conviction was largely inarticulate, and there was no real need for its articulation: it was a general, unchallenged awareness, which was shaken only by the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Peter Štih, “Ej ko goltneš do tu-le, udari po konjih! O avtohtonističnih in podobnih teorijah pri Slovencih in na Slovenskem,” *Zgodovina za vse* 3, no. 2 (1996): 66-80.

<sup>8</sup> Matej Bor, Jožko Šavli and Ivan Tomažič, *Veneti: naši davni predniki* (Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 1989), 87-92.

emergence of modern positivist science which claimed to have discovered “the real truth”. This new truth was however, the Venetologists insisted, nothing more than an ideological fabrication of Romantic nationalism, which suited the political interests of both the Pan-German and Pan-Slavic intellectual and political elites.<sup>9</sup> The new discoveries made by the Venetologists were now confirming the essential veracity of the old, insufficiently articulated autochthonist convictions, which had long been obfuscated by unsustainable ideological constructions.

What both sides missed in their recollections of the Slovene autochthonist tradition, were the paradigmatic and ideological shifts within it. To be sure, the academic historians – especially Bogo Grafenauer and his dauphin Peter Štih – noticed an all too evident paradox. The main ideological opponents of the Venetologists were the specter of Pan-Slavism and what they perceived as its surrogate, the idea of a South Slavic “community of destiny”; their theory was a very unequivocal attack on the perception of the South Slavs as a distinctive ethnic and linguistic whole, which was the basis of the Yugoslav idea.<sup>10</sup> Paradoxically, they not only resuscitated a theory that had been framed by outspoken Pan-Slavists, but they also used the “discoveries” of those Pan-Slavists in the field of toponymics as one of the main sources for their claims.<sup>11</sup> The academic historians rarely missed the occasion of pointing out this paradox, especially since were themselves accused by the Venetologists of defending a “Pan-Slavic construct”.<sup>12</sup> They did however not pay much attention to this detail, which they considered as just another element in the collections of absurdities within the “Venetizor movement”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Matej Bor et al., *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Tomažič, “Urednikov uvodnik.” *Glas Korotana* 10 (1985): 9.

<sup>11</sup> Matej Bor et al., *op. cit.*, 28-64.

<sup>12</sup> Bogo Grafenauer. “Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje” in *Paulus Diaconus: Zgodovina Langobardov - Historia Langobardorum* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> See above.

## 1.1. *The Discursive Shifts in Slovene Autochthonism*

The academic historians, as well as other scholars caught in the controversy, rightly rejected the Venetic theory as an ideological conjecture. They did however not analyze what kind of conjecture it was. They did not take it seriously as an ideological movement, nor did they bother to deeply inquire into the implicit nature of their claims. In their scientism it was enough for the academic historians to designate their opponents as “insolent dilettantes”.<sup>14</sup> Faced with the unexpected popularity of the Venetic theory, their reaction to it was a mixture of confusion, haughtiness, indignation, and personal disqualifications, as we shall see in the second chapter. They however failed to understand the Venetologists’ discursive logic, which was also the reason why, as we shall see, their critiques often missed the target.

The same can be said for their recollection of the history of autochthonism in the Slovene Lands. In 1996, shortly after the storm stirred by the Venetic controversy had subsided, the medievalist historian Peter Štih published an extensive summary of various autochthonist theories in the Slovene Lands.<sup>15</sup> In his article, which does not hide its polemic nature,<sup>16</sup> he made a comprehensive list of Slovene authors from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present, who advanced the idea that the Slovenes – or the Slavs in general – descended from ancient peoples who settled the area. It is interesting to note how Štih registered all the discursive shifts and changes in attitude present in the long history of Slovene autochthonism, but failed to draw any meaningful conclusions from it. Confronted with the need to summarize his findings, Štih wrote:

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Štih, “Ej ko goltneš do tu-le, udari po konjih! O avtohtonističnih in podobnih teorijah pri Slovencih in na Slovenskem,” *Zgodovina za vse* 3, no. 2 (1996): 71.

<sup>15</sup> See above.

<sup>16</sup> Štih’s article was written in the last wave of reactions against the Venetic theory, raised by publication of Jožko Šavli’s book *Veneti and Etruscans* in 1995. The polemic nature of the article is revealed by its very title (“Ej ko goltneš do tu-le, udari po konjih”), an interpretation of a supposed Venetic inscription found in the Dolomite Alps, advanced by Matej Bor, one of the three “founding fathers” of the modern Venetologic discourse. Bor’s “decoding” of the Venetic inscription, a classical example of his “methodology” described in the second chapter, sounds in fact as a parody of itself.

If we further analyze the autochthonist and similar theories among the Slovenes, we discover their common trait: their authors were all dilettantes. This is true at least for the period starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the establishment of the universities in the modern sense of the word – as a place where science was both formed and taught – opened the possibilities for an adequate scientific work. They [the autochthonists] were non-professional, very often self-taught individuals, unaware of the techniques, methods and rules employed by a particular science in order to discover and verify new findings.<sup>17</sup>

This claim is certainly true, but only insofar as it applies to the post-19<sup>th</sup> century autochthonism. Its tradition is however, as Štih himself properly pointed out, much longer. I think we can group the Slovene autochthonism prior to the emergence of the Venetic theory into six different stages. The first stage is represented by the tradition of medieval historiography; the second stage comes with the evolution of this tradition into a Humanistic *topos*, while the third is represented by its re-emergence in the Enlightenment period. The fourth stage emerged in the Romantic period and formed an integral part of the first phase of what is known as the “Slovene national revival”. This is also the first stage for which the term autochthonism can be properly used, since it was only then that it was consciously framed as a theory reacting to the prevailing convictions in the academia and in the public sphere. In the fifth stage, following the demise of the Romantic paradigm, the autochthonist discourse gets already completely marginalized: it is mostly put forward by few and isolated individuals, who however keep much of the Romantic tradition, especially its “methodology” and its Pan-Slavists connotations. In this stage, the autochthonist discourse, which had previously been both an acceptable mode of expressing national consciousness and a feasible (although not accepted) historical theory, evolves into a reaction against the prevailing convictions. The sixth stage is represented by the revival of

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 72.

autochthonism in the Post-World War Two period, crowned by the Venetic theory. Here, the discursive connotations clearly start to change, with autochthonism becoming an ideological weapon of Slovene autonomism against the project of Yugoslav integration.

In the next sections, I will make a short outline of the first three stages, which precede the emergence of positivist historiography and the correlative change in the prevailing discourse of Slovene identity. These stages are also the ones which are the most further away from the Venetic theory, not only in the chronological, but also in the discursive sense. They represent a forgotten tradition which was obfuscated by the emergence of modern historiography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Venetologists appropriated this tradition, but they were not so much influenced by it. The true roots of the Venetic theory can be found only in the Post-Romantic autochthonism, the one that framed itself in reaction to the prevailing historiography. I will therefore analyze the fourth and fifth stage of autochthonist theories in the second chapter, where I will show its relations to the “official” historiography, putting an emphasize on those of their features which already announce the discourse of the Venetic theory.

## ***1.2 The Medieval Tradition***

When one looks to the tradition of autochthonism, one can only confirm the claims of the Venetologists that the consciousness of a Slavic settlement of the Eastern Alpine area is a relatively recent one. It emerged only in the early Enlightenment period and it became a commonly accepted fact only at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is however true not only for the Slovene Lands, but to a large extent also for the east Adriatic coast and part of the west Balkans.

It is somehow surprising that the historical experience of the great population migrations was so quickly lost. Nevertheless, this was a common trait in Medieval Europe, where the intellectual tradition tried to establish links with the Ancient or even Biblical traditions also in cases where it did not exist. It is thus not surprising that the idea of the autochthonism of the Balkan Slavs was mentioned in the Christian tradition already in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In a letter to the Croatian king Tomislav, Pope John X. (914-928) mentioned the “fact” that the local Slavs had been christianized already in the Apostolic times.<sup>18</sup> This perception was apparently first popularized by the east Adriatic *glagoljaši*, promoters of the Old Slavic liturgy who claimed that the Glagolitic script had been invented in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. by St. Hieronymus.<sup>19</sup> This idea soon developed in a proper tradition, the traces of which can be found in all kind of Medieval documents, including the Russian Nestor Chronicle.<sup>20</sup> In the latter, the Slavic ethnicity of the pre-Roman Noricum state in the Eastern Alps is also mentioned.<sup>21</sup> Another source of the same autochthonist tradition can be found in the falsified document of Alexander the Great dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, according to which the Macedonian ruler donated to the Slavs an enormous territory extending to the north-west of his Empire.<sup>22</sup>

### **1.3 The Humanist Topos**

The Medieval ecclesiastical tradition of identifying the Southern Slavs (mostly Croatians, Dalmatians and Istrians) as Illyrians was later transformed into a *topos* among Humanist intellectuals, who expanded it and gave it a more clearly defined ethnical and

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 67.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Primož Simoniti, “Dekret ali pričevanje Aleksandra Velikega o Slovanih,” *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 44, no. 9 (1973): 225.

identitarian connotations. The Humanist texts spread this notion also in the secular reading public. During the Humanist period it became in fact very common for intellectuals to designate the South Slavic peoples as Illyrians. The designation might have had both a regional denotation (suffice it to recall the pseudonym *Illyricus* adopted by the Protestant theologian Matthias Flacius (1520-1575) from the Venetian Istria), as well as an ethnical one. This was undoubtedly the case with the Slovene Protestant preacher and author Primož Trubar (1508-1586), who signed his Catechism from 1550 as *Philopatridus Illiricus* (“Illyrian Patriot”), while in his Abecedary, published in the same year, he used the Slovene signature *Peryatil vseh Slouenzou* or “Friend of All Slovenes”.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, the two signatures were meant to signify the same ethnonym, with the adjective *Illyricus* being an intellectual counterpart of the popular *slovenski*.<sup>24</sup>

One of the first one to identify the Slavs with the ancient Veneti was the protestant philologist Adam Bohorič (or Bohorizh, 1520-1598) in his preface to the first grammar of the Slovene language, *Arcticae horulae*, published in Latin in 1584. In the text, he draws from the Medieval tradition,<sup>25</sup> but he shifts the emphasis from the Illyrians to the Veneti and Vandals.<sup>26</sup> The reason for this shift was quite clear. Throughout the Middle Ages until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most common designation for the Slovenes in the German language was *Winde* or *Windische*.<sup>27</sup> Bohorič identified this ethnonym with the ancient Veneti (which

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<sup>23</sup> Bogo Grafenauer. “Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje” in *Paulus Diaconus: Zgodovina Langobardov - Historia Langobardorum* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1988), 378.

<sup>24</sup> It has to be noted that the distinction between the terms Slav and Slovene did not yet exist at the time. It was introduced in the Slovene language only in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The question thus arises whether the signature meant “Friend of All Slovenes”, which is the traditional interpretation, or “Friend of All Slavs”. The adverb “all” would suggest that Slavs rather than Slovenes were meant, although the preface to the book, which clearly addresses Slovenes only, would suggest the first interpretation. In any case, it is clear that we are dealing with an established *topos*, not with a defined terminology.

<sup>25</sup> Darja Mihelič, “Karantanija v očeh zgodovinarjev od konca 15. do 18. stoletja,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 31 (1977): 305.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Bohorič. “Slovenci in Slovani,” in *Slovenska misel: eseji o slovenstvu*, ed. Jože Pogačnik (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1987), 10-18.

<sup>27</sup> The term emerged probably already in the early Middle Ages and was commonly used by various German tribes to denote their Slavic neighbours. To this day, it has survived is closely linked to the German denomination *Wende* for the Sorbs of Lusatia. The Magyars also took over the denomination from the German

was a right conclusion)<sup>28</sup> and with the Vandals (which was a wrong one), concluding that the Slavs had to descend from those two peoples. Symptomatically, he did not cease to use the term Illyrian as an alternative name for the Slavs in general and the Slovenes in particular. The identification of the Slovenes with the ancient Veneti can be traced also in the work *Historia rerum noricarum et forojuliensium* (“History of Noricum and Friuli”) published in 1663 by the Slovene Jesuit historian Martin Baučer (or Baucer, 1595-1668), who also mentions the Vandals as the ancestors of the Carinthian, Carniolan and Friulian Slovenes in his rather chaotic reconstruction of the ancient history of the region.<sup>29</sup> A late example of this identification is also the monograph *Slavus-Venedus-Illyricus; Abbildung und Beschreibung der südwest- und östlichen Wenden, Illyrer und Slaven* (“Slavs-Vends-Illyrians: A Sketch and description of the South-Western and Eastern Vends, Illyrians and Slavs”) by the French naturalist Belsazar (or Balthazar) Hacquet (1739-1815) who worked among the Slovenes of Carniola and in the Austrian Littoral.<sup>30</sup>

Much stronger than the identification with the Veneti was however the myth of Illyrian continuity, which was reinforced by the book *Il Regno degli Slavi* (“The Realm of the Slavs”, 1601) published in Venice by the Dalmatian Benedictine monk Mauro Orbini (around 1550-1614) from Dubrovnik (Ragusa). Orbini’s book was very influential, as it was used as one of the main sources for the Ancient and Medieval history of the South Slavs from Carinthia to Bulgaria.<sup>31</sup> More importantly, the book shows the first elements of an already rudimental Pan-Slavist ideology, which started to gain popularity among the

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language and it is still used as a common name for the Hungarian Slovenes (*Vend*, pl. *Vendek*). Cf. Bogo Grafenauer, “Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje” in *Paulus Diaconus: Zgodovina Langobardov - Historia Langobardorum* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1988), 409-411.

<sup>28</sup> The Germans ethonyms Wende, Wende or Windische, used to denote many neighbouring Slavic peoples most likely derives from the name of the Baltic Veneti, an non-Slavic Indo-European tribe which settled the area of present-day western Poland and Pomerania prior to the Slavic settlement of the region. The Baltic Veneti were very probably not of the same origin as the Adriatic Veneti. See the reference above.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Martin Bavčer, *Zgodovina Norika in Furlanije* (Ljubljana: Slovensko bibliografsko društvo, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Baltazar Hacquet, *Veneti, Iliri, Slovani* (Nova Gorica: Založba Branko, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Franjo Šanjek in *Mavro Orbini: Kraljevstvo Slavena* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1999).

Dalmatian and Croatian intellectuals of the time. A similar example was Vinko Pribojević's (around 1480-around 1540) less influential, but much more ideologically motivated book *De origine successibusque Slavorum* ("On the Origins and Successes of the Slavs", 1532), which argued the ancestral origin of the Balkan Slavs in the light of an already conscious cultural and even political Pan-Slavism.<sup>32</sup> Orbini incorporated Pribojević's speculations of the ancestral origins of the Slavs in his work, not only reinforcing the old *topos*, but combining it with a forthright vindication of the Slavic culture and language.

#### **1.4 The Enlightenment: Re-Emergence and Demise of the Autochthonist Topos**

It is thus not surprising that Orbini's book had an important influence on the intellectual movement in Carniola which launched the revival of the Slovene language in the Enlightenment period. In his famous defense of the vernacular language, published as the preface to the grammar book *Kraynska grammatika* (1768), the Slovene Augustinian monk Marko Pohlin (1735-1801) expressed the conviction of the Slavic origin of the Illyrian language, which emerged immediately after the Deluge.<sup>33</sup> Pohlin was also the author of what is considered the first historiographical book in the Slovene language, *Kraynske kronike* ("The Carniolan Chronicles", 1770), in which he clearly used Orbini's *Regno degli Slavi* as a source for his bizarre recollection of the regional history.<sup>34</sup>

Pohlin's defense of the language of 1768 is often considered a turning point of Slovene history, since it was the first conscious intellectual conceptualization and

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<sup>32</sup> Anita Peti, "Vinko Pribojević: De origine successibusque Slavorum," *Mogućnosti* 38, no. 1-2 (1991): 196-202.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 68.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

vindication of Slovene identity after more than one and a half century.<sup>35</sup> In the period in between, the written use of the Slovene language, which had been fully articulated and employed by the Protestant Reformation and (to a lesser extent) by the early stages of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, was largely marginalized.<sup>36</sup> From the early 17<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the intellectual scene in the Slovene Lands was dominated by the literary production in the German language with a strong regionalist character.<sup>37</sup> The local German writing authors, who very often adopted a manifestly positive attitude towards the Slovene-speaking population and the Slovene culture in general,<sup>38</sup> brought a completely different tradition of conceptualizing the origins of the local Slavic population: we could call it the “All-German” autochthonism.

The initiators of this tradition were two Lutheran historians, the Carinthian Michael Gothard Christalnig (1540-1595), author of the monumental *Historia Carinthiaca* (1579-1588) and the Swabian Hieronymus Megiser (1553-1618), who worked in Ljubljana and Klagenfurt in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and wrote an important treatise on the history of the Duchy of Carinthia and a German-Slovene dictionary. Both of them concentrated on the history of Carinthia, emphasizing the role of Slovenes in its political genesis, whom they saw as descending from the Vandals and forming one people with their German-speaking countryman. This conception of history was of course strongly linked to the interests of the Protestant-dominated Carinthian Provincial Estates, whose interest was to assert the specific individuality of the Duchy against the Habsburg absolutist tendencies. Christalnig and Megiser thus revived a very old *topos* present in the circles of the Carinthian nobility, which

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Peter Vodopivec, *Od Pohlinove slovnice do slovenske države* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Anton Slodnjak, *Zgodovina slovenskega slovstva* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 1968).

<sup>37</sup> Matjaž Kmecl, “Valvasorjev kulturnozgodovinski pomen,” *Glasnik Slovenske matice* 29/31, no. 1-3 (2005/2007): 5-9. Branko Reisp, Janez Vajkard Valvasor (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1983), 28-35.

<sup>38</sup> Martina Orožen, “Janez Vajkard Valvasor o slovenskem jeziku,” *Jezik in slovstvo* 39, no. 1 (1993/94): 3-12.

emphasized the Slovene (*Windisch*) origin of the Duchy as an assertion of its ancestral political privileges.<sup>39</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this conception of history, which saw the Slovenes as an odd German tribe descended from the Vandals, became rooted also in Carniola with the works of the historian Johann Ludwig Schönleben (1618-1681) and especially with the polymath Johann Weichard Valvasor (1641-1693),<sup>40</sup> one of the very few local German-speaking noblemen who was later fully incorporated in the Slovene national canon. This historiographic tradition tied together the avowal of the local Slovene population as the essential component of the regional identity with the assertion of its Germanic origins. The insistence on the latter was grounded in a very clear political agenda: these authors wanted to emphasize as much as possible the regional peculiarities which shaped the unique identity of their province, without in any way putting in doubt its role of an integral piece of the German Empire. They thus emphasized the Slovene element as the testimony of the province's peculiarity, at the same time framing them as being part of the Germanic family. For Schönleben and Valvasor, in fact, Carniola was not only politically, as part of the Empire, but also *ethnically* German. In order to prove this, they engaged in implausible historical reconstructions, according to which all possible pre-Roman peoples were seen as Germanic.<sup>41</sup>

It is precisely against this All-German tradition that Pohlin resuscitated the old humanist *topos* of All-Slavic autochthonism which he found in Orbini's writings. It was however not exactly a resuscitation, but a re-introduction in the Slovene discourse. It was a largely rhetoric move which had little success. Although Pohlin's call for the re-valorization

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<sup>39</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, *Valvasorjevo mesto v samospoznavanju Slovencev kot posebnega narod : ob tristoletnici Valvasorjeve Slave* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1990), 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, *Struktura in tehnika zgodovinske vede* (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani, 1980), 219.

<sup>41</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, *Valvasorjevo mesto v samospoznavanju Slovencev kot posebnega narod : ob tristoletnici Valvasorjeve Slave* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1990).

of the Slovene language was enthusiastically embraced by important segments of the local elite, his historical writings were completely rejected by his contemporaries.<sup>42</sup> The times were definitely changing and the improbable lists of illustrious ancestors were no longer acceptable for an emerging erudite and enlightened intellectual public.

One of the first ones to object the tradition of the Slavic continuity was apparently the Carinthian Slovene Jesuit historian Marko Hanzič (or Markus Hansiz, 1683-1766), who advanced the theory of the Slavic settlement of the Eastern Alpine regions in the early Middle Ages.<sup>43</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this view became widely acknowledged. It was accepted also by the Enlightenment historian Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756-1795) who included it in his monograph *Versuch einer Geschichte von Krain und den übrigen Ländern der südlichen Slaven Oesterreiches* (“An Essay on the History of Carniola and Other Lands of the Austrian South Slavs”), published in two volumes between 1788 and 1791. Linhart’s work became a crucial reference for all conceptualizations of Slovene history thereafter, which meant that the theory of the Slavic settlement of the Slovene Lands in the early Middle Ages became the mainstream point of view even before it was finally ascertained by the scholarly establishment of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is nevertheless interesting to notice how the same notion which was banished from serious historiographic discourse could still flourish in literature and various patriotic vindications of the vernacular language and of the specific identity of the local population. In the late 18th century, in fact, in the Illyrian ideologeme, which had been developed in a in the neighbouring Croatian and Serbian lands, started to penetrate the discourse of Slovene late Enlighteners. The focus of this new ideologeme, evolved from the Humanist *topos*, was not so much the early modern affirmation of ancestry any more, but the assertion of an

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 68.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 66.

ethnically loaded *amor patriae*. As such, the notion of Illyrianism was starting to lose its initial autochthonist implication and becoming a way to frame the still largely undefined idea of South Slavic kinship. In the following decades, it would become increasingly popular to refer to the lands inhabited by South Slavs as *Illyria* and to South Slavs as Illyrians. This use had a wide variety of connotations, not all of which were ethnic, and it did not in any case automatically imply the conviction the South Slavs are *really* descendents from ancient Illyrians.

Nevertheless, the tradition of autochthonism was apparently so strong that it remained attached to the Illyrian ideologeme for some time. The most striking example was the poet and versatile author Valentin Vodnik (1758-1819), who was inspired to write in Slovene by Pohlín himself.<sup>44</sup> In 1809, when the Napoleonic army occupied the region and established the Illyrian Provinces under direct French administration, Vodnik wrote an enthusiastic patriotic poem entitled *Ilirija oživljena* (“Illyria Reborn”), in which he praised Napoleon for having resuscitated the old Illyrian nation. The song was absolutely in the line with similar patriotic expressions among Croats and Dalmatian Slavs. The song has been since incorporated in the literary canon, but many do not realize that it carries autochthonist claims. In the first version from 1809, those claims were only implicit; not to leave any doubts, Vodnik took advantage of the publication of his collected poems in 1811 in order to expand his panegyric from two years before, adding an unequivocal assertion about the ancestral attachment of Slovenes to their homeland:

*Ilirsko me klizhe*

*Latinez in Grek,*

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 68.

*šlovensko mi pravijo*

*domazhi vse prek.*

*Od perviga tukaj*

*stanuje moj rod,*

*zhe ve kdo za drugga,*

*naj rezhe, od kod.*

I was known as Illyrian

To the Latin and the Greek,

All the locals around

Now call me Slovene.

Since the earliest times,

My race has lived upon this land,

If anyone knows of another one,

Let him say which.<sup>45</sup>

Funnily enough, the challenge invoked in the last strophe was answered by the author himself. Vodnik was in fact one of those who publicly endorsed the Linhart's views that the Slavs settled their present homeland only in the Middle Ages. He did it not once, but twice. First in 1798 in a long article entitled *Povedanje od slovenskega jezika* ("A History of the Slovene Language") published in the journal *Lublanske novize* of which he was himself

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<sup>45</sup> Valentin Vodnik, *Zadovolni Kranjc: izbrano delo*, ed. Jože Koruza (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1997), 22. The translation is mine.

the chief editor; he then repeated the same conviction in the book *Geschichte des Herzogthumus Krain, des Gebietes von Triest und der Grafschaft Görz* (“History of the Duchy of Carniola, the Territory of Trieste and the County of Gorizia”), published as a textbook for the Austrian lyceums and grammar schools in the Slovene Lands. To make the issue even more paradoxical, the book was published in 1809, the same year as he wrote the poem *Illyria Reborn*.<sup>46</sup> Nothing suggests that Vodnik ever repudiated his views expressed in the two works. I believe we have to understand this duality as the persistence of an old *topos*. In absence of any other rhetorical instrument to assert the Slavic identity and vindicate the local language, culture and history, Vodnik resorted to an old venerable tradition which was at that point already incapable of convincing anybody: apparently not even its author.

### **1.5 From Topos to Theory: Romantic Autochthonism**

In the Romantic era the autochthonist claims became increasingly marginal, not only in the sciences, but also in the public discourses. The *topos* of Slavic ancestry completely disappeared from the literature, as well as from public vindications of the vernacular language, which were now increasingly claiming their authority from the natural right of the peoples.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, there were important authors who clung to autochthonist claims. There are three distinctive features common to them that I find important, besides the fact that they were all nationalists and Pan-Slavists or at least openly sympathetic to the ideas of all-Slavic commonality. First, although their theories were marginalized in the public discourse, they as public were figures far from being marginal: in almost all cases, they were

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<sup>46</sup> Janko Kos, *Valentin Vodnik* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1990), 113.

<sup>47</sup> See Anton Martin Slomšek. “Dolžnost svoj jezik spoštovati,” in *Slovenska misel: eseji o slovenstvu*, ed. Jože Pogačnik (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1987), 30-38.

prominent members of the civil society, respected also by those who rejected their conjectures. Second, they all belonged to the first generation of the adherents to the Slovene national movement; they were linked to the so-called *Old Slovene* current within Slovene nationalism, which was socially and politically conservative. Third, since their ideas on the origins of Slovenes were not widely accepted, they had to demonstrate and prove their statements. The autochthonous discourse thus shifted from assertive to argumentative.

The majority of the Slovene Romantic autochthonists were born between 1780 and 1810, and they mostly wrote their works in the 1830s and 1840s. Many of them were renowned philologists and have in many cases been fully integrated in the national canon, although the memory of their autochthonism was suppressed.<sup>48</sup> Differently from their Humanist counterparts, they tried to demonstrate the validity of their theories by intense toponymic research. Many of them, especially the younger ones, were influenced by the Czech and Slovak Pan-Slavists, most notably by Pavel Jozef Šafařík (1795-1861). Following Šafařík's example, they searched (and found) traces of Slavic languages in river, mountain and place names throughout Europe and even in Ancient documents, concluding that the Slavs must have had been, along with the Basques and Etruscans, the original inhabitants of Europe.<sup>49</sup>

The most prolific and influential of these authors was a relative latecomer, a Liberal Catholic priest and publicist from the region of Styria called Davorin Trstenjak (1817-1890). As most of his autochthonist colleagues, he was ideologically close to the Croatian

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<sup>48</sup> Notable cases include the Carinthian philologist, ethnologist and linguist Urban Jarnik (1784-1844); the Styrian Church historian and ethnologist Anton Krempl (1790-1844), author of the first large historiographical monograph in the Slovene language; Jakob Zupan (1785-1852), one of the most prominent pupils of the famous linguist Jernej Kopitar (1780-1844), and many others. Cf. Bogo Grafenauer, "Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje", op. cit., 379-382. Peter Štih, op. cit., 68.

<sup>49</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, "Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje", op. cit.

Illyrian movement and expressed clear Pan-Slavist sympathies.<sup>50</sup> Most of his articles were published quite late, only in the 1870s, and were the most comprehensive collections of etymological “researches” of Slavic traces in European languages and toponymy, especially in Italy. He was probably the first of the autochthonist authors to put a particular emphasize on the Veneti rather than on the Illyrians, since he saw the ethonym Veneti – present throughout Europe – as a synonym for Slavs, drawing from the tradition of early Medieval chronicles.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, the narrative part of his autochthonist writings was rather poor and their cohesion barely existing. His articles included a short introduction in which explained the main features of his theory, which very often contradicted itself; their main corpus was formed by long lists of supposedly Slavic traces in foreign languages and toponymy, explained by rather dubious and not really convincing etymologies.

It is important to emphasize another feature of Trstenjak’s writings, which was completely overlooked by Peter Štih’s analysis where he writes about the “zeal with which he defended his autochthonist theory”.<sup>52</sup> What qualifies as zealous is of course a matter of interpretation. However, I can personally say I was surprised by the calm, unassertive tone of Trstenjak’s texts,<sup>53</sup> which is so strikingly different not only from the modern Venetologists’ emphatic assertion of their truth, but also from Vodnik’s almost threatening verses “Since the earliest times,/ My race has lived upon this land,/ If anyone knows of another one,/ Let him say which.” Evidently, Trstenjak did not perceive the opponents of his theory as ideological enemies (or at least not for the mere fact of being opponents to his

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<sup>50</sup> Igor Grdina. “Smrt najpoštenejšega rodoljuba,” in *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2001-2003), 141-142.

<sup>51</sup> About the relations between the ethonyms Slavs and Veneti, see Franc Kos. “Kdaj so Slovenci prišli v svojo sedanjo domovino,” in *Franc Kos: Zbrano delo*, ed. Bogo Grafenauer (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 63-102.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 69.

<sup>53</sup> I draw my conclusions from Trstenjak’s articles in the *Letopis Slovenske matice* (the yearbooks of the prestigious publishing house *Slovenska matica*) in the years 1874, 1875, 1876 and 1877. The articles were later compiled and expanded in the book *Slovanščina v romanščini* (“Slavic Elements in Romance Languages”), published in 1878 by the Klagenfurt-based Hermagoras Society (*Družba Sv. Mohorja*).

theory). His texts were published by the renowned publishing house *Slovenska matica*, which was also the most important institution for the propagation of science in the Slovene Lands. Indeed, Trstenjak's texts are written in a scholarly manner, where it almost seems that the exaggeratedly dry and unattractive style serves to conceal the groundlessness of the content.

In his last years of his life, Trstenjak renounced to his theory. In the private correspondence with the linguist and philologist Matija Murko (1861-1952), he admitted the scientific inadequacy of his research and defended himself by pointing out that he lacked the education available to the younger generations.<sup>54</sup> When he died, most eulogies praised his patriotism and work in the public field; his autochthonism was mentioned as being inadequate, but reasonable in the early period of the Slovene national awakening, when the people needed an encouragement to boast their self-confidence against German expansionism.<sup>55</sup>

Trstenjak's case is in many ways paradigmatic and shows the reasons for the demise of Romantic autochthonism. With the growing influence of the positivist paradigm in the sciences and the modernization of the nationalist discourse, the autochthonism of Trstenjak's type was seen as a relic of an early, ideologically inarticulate nationalism which tried to compensate its spiritual and political indigence with a megalomaniac discourse of self-importance, completely alienated from the factually experienced reality. Furthermore, the Romantic autochthonism lacked any original discourse: it was just an exaggeration of the Slavic demotic nationalism, its most radical and also its most phony. For this reason, its demise happened almost unnoticed. Many of Trstenjak's early followers, such as the famous

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 69. Bogo Grafenauer, "Franc Kos in njegovo delo" in *Franc Kos: Izbrano delo*, ed. Bogo Grafenauer (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica), 344.

<sup>55</sup> Fran Levec, "Davorin Trstenjak." *Ljubljanski zvon* (1890), 166-174. Simon Rutar, "Trstenjakov spominski večer." *Ljubljanski zvon* (1890): 256. Andrej Fekonja, "Davorin Trstenjak, slovenski pisatelj," *Dom in svet* 6, no. 2 (1893): 49-53.

writer and historian Janez Trdina (1830-1905) renounced to their autochthonism in the 1850s, not having to change their general ideological paradigm, but just accommodating themselves to the demands of an emerging “scientific era”.

The final blow to the autochthonist tradition was given by the first generation of Slovene positivist historians, who entered the public sphere in the 1880s. From then on, the claims of German nationalist historiography needn't to be fought with amateurism and improvisations; the Slovenes were now able to counter it on its own field and with its own weapons: science. The emergence of the positivist historical science also brought an adjustment of the Slovene identity discourse, within which the old autochthonist claims had no place any more. The autochthonist tradition was largely forgotten, obscured by a new emerging myth: the founding myth of the settlement.

## 2. Framing the Historical Identity: Slovene Historiography and the Issue of the Meaning in Slovene History

In his book *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Anthony Smith identified two types of ethnies in the process of modern nation building: the “aristocratic” ethnie and the “demotic” one.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that in such a distinction, the Slovenes would fall in the second category, where, according to Smith, the route towards the creation of the nation proceeds through “cultural revolution, vernacular mobilization and the politicization of culture”. Indeed, if one looks at what might be called the “classical frame of Slovene identity” which emerged with the Romantic nationalism in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one discovers that it was dominated by what Robert Pynset identified in his treatment of Slovak historiography as a “demotic-genealogical treatment of history”.<sup>57</sup>

According to this model, finally sanctioned in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the popularization of the Herderian paradigm among Slovene intellectuals,<sup>58</sup> the emerging Slovene nation was identified by the Slovene-speaking populace inhabiting the various provinces in which the Slovene Lands were subdivided. The largely German-speaking elites of those provinces were on the other hand increasingly identified as “Germans” or “German-lovers” (*nemčurji*).<sup>59</sup> This model which was seriously challenged only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had several corollaries, among which the most important were the idea of Slavic kinship, the myth of the settlement, and the serfdom myth. The latter served as a kind of quilting point, sewing together all the others in a consistent narrative. Modern Slovene

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<sup>56</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>57</sup> Robert Pynset, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (London-Budapest: CEU Press, 1995), 160.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Janez Markeš, *Točka nacionalnega nesporazuma* (Ljubljana: Promag, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Peter Štih, “Nacionalizacija zgodovine in nastanek sovražnih predstav o sosedih. Slovensko-nemški (avstrijski primer),” in *Avstrija – Slovenija: preteklost in sedanjost*, Ferdinand Mayrhofer-Grünbühel and Miroslav Polzer, eds. (Ljubljana-Klagenfurt: Cankarjeva založba – Wieser Verlag, 2002), 35-46.

historiography was not directly involved in forging those myths, but did play a significant role in sustaining them.

## **2.1 The Notion of Slavic Kinship**

The idea of Slavic kinship has a long history in the Slovene Lands. As we have already seen in the previous section, it entered the intellectual conceptualizations already during Humanist times. In the so-called Slovene national revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became an established *topos*. To be sure, the relation between Slovenes and other Slavs has been, in terms of identity, one of the most debated issues of Slovene intellectual history. The issue of the Slavic frame of Slovene identity is a rather complex one and it cannot be summarized in the present paper. Suffice it to say that despite ongoing discussions, the notion of Slavic kinship was an established and quite obvious feature in conceptualizations of Slovene identity prior to its demise after World War Two, especially after the 1980s.

The idea evolved in Romantic circles from the interaction of Slovene intellectuals with other Slavic intellectuals, mostly from other regions of the Austrian Empire. In their interest on the ethnological and linguistic aspects of the nation, the Romantics started to frame the Slavic linguist community as a “communion of brethren”. As I have written above, this notion had many different and competing versions: from Pan-Slavism, the quest for a cultural and political unification of all Slavic peoples, to Austroslavism, the notion that the Austrian Empire should evolve into an essentially Slavic homeland, going through all ranges of political or purely cultural and philological conceptualizations.

In the western Balkan region, the Illyrian Movement led by the Croatian activist Ljudevit Gaj (1809-1872) was framing itself as the vanguard of Slavism, calling for a

cultural and linguistic unification of all Southern Slavs. In the Slovene Lands this movement was relatively weak, but it nevertheless galvanized the public opinion – which was still quite small, to be sure – on the issue on whether the Slovenes should stick to their own specific identity or should they rather merge, in a way or another, with larger Slavic people, namely the Croats and Serbs. At the end of the day, the notion of Slovene national individuality clearly won the day against both the conservative Austroslavists led by the influential linguist Jernej Kopitar (1780-1844) and the radical sympathizers of Ljudevit Gaj's Illyrian Movement. Nevertheless, the idea of the Slavic kinship, which had a real and factual basis in the *république des lettres* of Slavic Romantic philologists, remained a strong feature in the Romantics' writings.

Let's take as an example the writings of the foremost Slovene Romantic poet, France Prešeren (1800-1849). Prešeren was one of the main opponents of the Illyrian Movement in the Slovene Lands. In a famous letter written in 1840 to the fellow Slovene poet Stanko Vraz (1810-1851), the major advocate of Illyrianism among Slovenes who finally adopted Ljudevit Gaj's Croatian literary standard,<sup>60</sup> Prešeren used the following words to reject the Illyrian project of linguistic unification of the South Slavs:

It would be very gratifying if *Slavism* was to perish from our lands, so its future coryphaei would be saved from the effort to study – I am sorry – to superficially take into consideration our dialect, which of course lacks many modern expressions but could still explain numerous derivations and constructions which are currently unknown to them. We “Upper Illyrians” are still very young regarding our literary language; it is only right that we wait and see what results your efforts bring. The Spanish dialect is probably not much more different from the Italian one than Slovene is from Serbian, the Czech from Polish, or the French from Italian

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<sup>60</sup> Tomislav Ceganec, *Stanko Vraz: Ilir iz Štajera* (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani, 2008).

and Spanish. They might as well merge into one dialect in the future, but until then I hope we will learn to speak Czech, Polish, Russian and of course Serbian; and if not speak it, at least understand it without the need of previous study. *Camoens* could have chosen to write, if not in *Pan-Romance*, at least in Spanish, since Spanish is probably as close or even closer to Portuguese than Slovene (the Slavic language in Carniola, Carantania [i.e. Carinthia] and Styria) is to *provincial Croatian*, and certainly closer than it is to an *eclectic Illyrian*. *Si Deus pro vobis, quis contra vos*; but remember [...] what Homer says: it is better to be a swine keeper than to rule over all the dead.<sup>61</sup>

Even Prešeren, who insisted not only on the distinctive Slovene ethonym (the phrase “we Upper Illyrians” in the letter must of course be understood ironically), but also on a specific Slovene identity and uttered the wish that the notion of Slavic communality (*Slavism*) would perish from the Slovene Lands, did not at all reject the idea of Slavic kinship. On the contrary, there are several poems in which he explicitly refers to it. In the fifth stanza of his *Zdravljica* (“A Toast”) from 1844, whose seventh stanza is now the national anthem of Slovenia, Prešeren wrote:

Let peace, glad conciliation,  
 Come back to us throughout the land!  
 Towards their destination  
 Let Slavs henceforth go hand-in-hand!  
 Thus again

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<sup>61</sup> In *Slovenska misel: eseji o slovenstvu*, ed. Jože Pogačnik (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1988), 6.

Will honour reign

To justice pledged in our domain.<sup>62</sup>

Prešeren made a similar appeal already nine years before in the epic preface to his *opus magnum* “Baptism at the Savica Fall” (*Krst pri Savici*, 1835). In an almost messianic passage of an otherwise rather non-messianic poem, the Slovene pagan leader, Črtomir, uses the following words to encourage his brethren to join him in the final battle against the Christian troops led by the Carantanian prince Valjhún:

*Narvéč svetá otrokom sliši Slava!*,

*tje bomo našli pot, kjer nje sinovi*

*si prosti vól'jo vero in postáve.*

Most of the World is inhabited by sons of *Slava!*,

We shall find the way to where her children

May freely choose their laws and faith.<sup>63</sup>

Prešeren was of course a Herderian libertine who used the idea of Slavic kinship as a call for emancipatory solidarity. As I have said, the idea of Slavic communality was however in no way confined only to the freethinking or liberal intellectuals. On the contrary, it was equally present and even more emphasized among their conservative Catholic

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<sup>62</sup> Translation by Janko Lavrin, retrieved from the webpage [http://www.preseren.net/ang/3\\_poezije/13\\_zdravljica.asp](http://www.preseren.net/ang/3_poezije/13_zdravljica.asp) (accessed May 21<sup>st</sup> 2008).

<sup>63</sup> The translation is mine.

counterparts, with autochthonism being one of its most radical expressions. According to the analysis of the literary theorist Taras Kermauner, the ideology of the conservative wing of Slovene Romantic nationalism was based on a “nationalist exclusivism which negated the Enlightenment tolerance”.<sup>64</sup> In these circles, the idea of Slavic kinship was, according to Kermauner, nothing but an extrapolation of ethnicist and exclusivist nationalism; for them, Slavic brotherhood was understood not as an inner liberation, not as emancipation as in Prešeren’s case, but as the affirmation of the Slovene-Slavic *genus* against the notion of a trans-national solidarity.<sup>65</sup>

The Slavacist model, employed and articulated by both the libertine and conservative Romantics, found wide diffusion in the literary texts and in rhetoric *topoi* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century public discourse. Let me give just some prototypical examples to show the extent to which this idea was diffused in the culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first historical novels in the Slovene language were written in the early 1850s by Josipina Urbančič Turnograjska (1833-1854), first wife of the powerful conservative nationalist politician Lovro Toman (1827-1870).<sup>66</sup> All of them strongly emphasize the idea of Slavic mutualism: of the six historical novels she wrote, only two are placed in Slovene environments, the other four are written on the basis of material from Bulgarian, Slovak and indefinable Slavic history and mythology.<sup>67</sup> This was by no means an isolated case: what is generally considered the first Slovene tragic play – *Tugomer*, written by Josip Jurčič (1844-1881) in 1875 – is placed in the early medieval context of Polabian Slavs. The popular poet Simon Gregorčič (1844-1906) wrote a long ballade celebrating the Bulgarian uprising, and his epigone Josip

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<sup>64</sup> Taras Kermauner, “Uvod v tretjo knjigo poezije slovenskega zahoda.” *Sodobnost* 41, no. 6-7 (1993): 615.

<sup>65</sup> Kermauner, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Nataša Budna Kodrič, “Zgodba Josipine Turnograjske in Lovra Tomana,” *Kronika* 51 (2003): 197-216.

<sup>67</sup> Keber, Katarina. “Josipina Urbančič Turnograjska: prva slovenska pisateljica,” *Gea*, June 2005, 72-75.

Pagliaruzzi (1859-1885) set most of his poems among the Balkan Slavs, Serbs and Bulgarians.<sup>68</sup>

This trend was only partially mitigated by the emergence of fin-de-siècle literature. Oton Župančič (1878-1949), one of the most powerful and prolific poets of Slovene early modernist literature, entitled his most famous patriotic song as *Duma* – a Ukrainian word for lyrical poems –, while his closest friend and refined fin-de-siècle poet Josip Murn (1879-1901) adopted the Russian-sounding pseudonym *Aleksandrov*. When in 1919 the famous caricaturist Hinko Smrekar (1883-1942) decided to draw a new design for the *tarock* cards in order to “visually nationalize” the most popular hazard game in the Slovene Lands, he did not choose local, but generally *Slavic* motives.<sup>69</sup> The widespread diffusion of Russian, Serbian and other Slavic personal names, absent from in the tradition of the Slovene countryside – such as Boris, Milan, or Bogomil – proves that the “Slavisation” of Slovene identity was far from being a purely intellectual fashion.

Furthermore, the *topos* of *Slava*, the personified notion of Slavdom which is in most Slavic languages also the word for glory, entered profusely in numerous patriotic songs written in the Post-Romantic period and have remained popular up to the present days. Let us take two typical examples, both from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first is the song *Domovini* (“To the Homeland”), composed by Benjamin Ipavec (1829-1908). The first stanza sings to the beauty of the *Slovene* homeland, while the second affirms:

*Tuje šege, tuja ljudstva,*

*so prijat’lji, bratje ne,*

*Slava le, slovansko čustvo*

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<sup>68</sup> Taras Kermauner, op. Cit.

<sup>69</sup> Milček Komelj and Peter Vodopivec, *Smrekarjev tarok* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1993).

*srce moje veseli.*

Foreign customs, foreign peoples

Are my friends, but brethren not,

Only *Slava*, the Slavic feeling

Brings joy into my heart.<sup>70</sup>

On the same lines, Simon Jenko (1835-1869), also known as the author of the first Slovene national anthem,<sup>71</sup> wrote in his song *Jadransko morje* (“The Adriatic Sea”):

*Buči, buči, morje Adrijansko,*

*nekdaj bilo si slovansko.*

*Ko po tebi hrastov brod*

*vozil je slovanski rod,*

*ko ob tebi mesta bela*

*naših dedov so cvetela.*

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<sup>70</sup> The translation is mine.

<sup>71</sup> Its title was, paradigmatically, *Naprej, zastava slave* or “Forward, the Flag of Glory/*Slava*”. It was officially replaced by Prešeren’s *Zdravljica* in 1990 by the last Socialist parliament as part of the constitutional changes necessary for the democratization of the republic. Since 1994, the song has been the official anthem of the Slovenian Army. The meaning of the word *Slava* is nowadays of course interpreted as “glory. The official provision regulating the symbols of the Slovenian Army doesn’t allow any ambiguity in this sense: the title of the song is written with the word “slava” in small rather than capital letters, which can be interpreted only as “glory”. Cf. *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* 3/95 (January 1995), 170. The melody for the anthem was composed in 1860 by the author’s cousin Davorin Jenko (1835-1914), who also wrote the melody for the Serbian national anthem *Bože pravde* (“God of Justice”, 1872).

Roar, roar, Adriatic Sea,  
Once you used to be Slav;  
When upon you on an oak vessel  
Sailed the Slavic race;  
When on your shores flourished  
The white towns of our fathers.<sup>72</sup>

## 2.2 *The Settlement Myth*

It seems that the latter song, written in the 1860s, still leaves opened the possibility for an autochthonist interpretation. However, as I have said in the previous section, the emergence of positivism in Slovene historiography in the 1880s gave the final blow to autochthonism. The influence and tenacity of autochthonism is shown by the fact that the leading Slovene positivist medievalist, Franc Kos (1854-1924),<sup>73</sup> had to indulge in a polemic with Davorin Trstenjak and write a long essay in order to prove the Slavic settlement in the early Middle Ages against the autochthonist claims.<sup>74</sup> The tone of the essay was rather cordial: it was after all a family dispute. The demise of autochthonist theories did in fact, as I have already written, not bring any significant shifts in the identity discourse.

It would be unfair to affirm that the first generation of Slovene positivist historians embraced the prevailing ethnicist-demotic paradigm of Slovene identity. If anything, it

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<sup>72</sup> The translation is mine.

<sup>73</sup> Bogo Grafenauer called Kos the Slovene counterpart of Franjo Rački and Ilarion Ruvarac. Bogo Grafenauer, "Franc Kos in njegovo delo", in *Franc Kos: Izbrano delo*, ed. Bogo Grafenauer (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 357.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Franc Kos, "Kdaj so Slovenci prišli v svojo sedanjo domovino?," in *Franc Kos: Izbrano delo*, ed. Bogo Grafenauer (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 63-103.

managed to curb it, at least to a certain extent, especially with their interest in the development of institutions, legal customs, local history etc.; in short, with their interest in the particular against the Romantic and Post-Romantic conjectures. Although in the long term their influence was substantial, none of them directly challenged the prevailing identity discourse which was framed by other agents. By conforming to it, however, their findings were taken in consideration without any significant objection and the national mythology was reframed in accordance to their findings. Since the 1880s, the myth of continuity – which was not a territorial myth but a corollary of the ethnicist Slavic frame of identity – was replaced by the myth of the historical break with the settlement.

To be sure, the problem of the Slavic settlement in the East Alps provoked many professional headaches for the positivists: for once, there were very few documents testifying it and all of them were either non-contemporary or circumstantial. Archeological proofs were lacking; up to today, very few remains of early Slav settlements have been found in the region. It had thus to be reconstructed from the known data for the arrival and spread of the Slavic tribes in the Balkan peninsula, and the few contemporary mentions of the Slavs in the East Alpine region. The main argument was the break in continuity between the late Antiquity and early Middle Ages which was provoked by the Slavic settlement. A crucial break in the ethnic composition of the territory, of the settlement patterns, the toponymy etc. was of course a *fact*, but it often had to be exaggerated for the sake of the argument; especially because it was the only argument.

This radical break had to be emphasized not so much against the local autochthonists: it was easier to reject them on the linguistic bases and by the opposite argument, that is by proving that the pre-Roman populations were not Slav and that in any case they had been Latinized by the late Antiquity. The main opponents were now increasingly the Austrian German nationalists who tried to the outmost to undervalue the importance of the Slavic

settlement of Carinthia, Styria, East Tyrol and Lower Austria by emphasizing the continuity in the history of the region from the late Antiquity to the incorporation of the region in the Frankish Empire.<sup>75</sup> It was against the German nationalist claims, which (mis)used fragments from erudite and positivist historiography in order to negate the fact the core of the modern Austrian Lands evolved from ethnically Slav territories, that the assertion of the Slavic settlement became almost a patriotic duty for Slovenes. The settlement began to be framed as “the birth hour of the nation”.<sup>76</sup> Increasingly, the elements of some kind of “right of conquest” and an estheticism of ruthlessness were added to it, as can be seen in the following quote by Franc Kos:

We are completely justified in claiming that the Slovenes [sic] which arrived in Pannonia and Noricum, were much more sanguinary and ruthless than the Lombards, the Goths and other Germanic nations. The former were pagan, while the latter were Arians, that is Christian. The Lombards, the Goths, the Franks and other Germanic nations subjected the autochthonous Romanic populations, they expropriated their land or at least a part of it, but they mostly kept them alive. The consequence was that the Lombards, the Goths and the Franks gradually lost their nationality: their former territories are now inhabited by Italians, Frenchmen and Spaniards, which belong to the Romanic race. The situation was different among Slovenes and other South Slavs. In the conquered lands, they mostly exterminated the autochthonous population [...]. If they had acted in a more gentle and indulgent manner, the Slavic language would not resonate today “from Triglav [the highest peak in Slovenia] to the Balkans”.<sup>77</sup>

Understandably, this kind of conceptualization was much more appealing to the non-Catholic or even anti-Catholic public. One of its last and stylistically most interesting assertions can be found in the book “How Is It Possible?” (*Kako je mogoče?*) written in

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Bogo Grafenauer, “Die Kontinuitätsfragen in der Geschichte des altkarantianischen Raumes,” *Alpes Orientales* 5 (1969): 55-79.

<sup>76</sup> The notion was still used by the historian Bogo Grafenauer in his polemics against the Venetic theory. Bogo Grafenauer, “Rojstna ura slovenskega naroda pred tisoč štiristo leti,” *Arheo* 10 (1990): 11-17.

<sup>77</sup> Franc Kos, *Izbrano delo*, op. cit., 79.

1969 by the famous essayist and playwright Jože Javoršek (1920-1990).<sup>78</sup> Javoršek wrote the book as a dialogue with his dead son who had committed suicide earlier in the same year. It was important not only because of its popularity – it became a bestseller –, but because it was, among other, a conscious framing of Slovene national and political identity from the perspective of the “partisan generation” in polemic against the young “baby boom generation”.<sup>79</sup> Despite the stylistic excellence of the essay and its emotional sincerity, almost the entirety of its historical reflections is made of classical and established *topoi* of Slovene historical identity, although expressed in an original and idiosyncratic way:

As for me, I couldn't have thought of a better environment for your spiritual and Slovene health than the milieu of your grandfather's home, where you made your first steps, where you learned to talk, where you opened your first book and where you built your own self-sufficient childhood world. For the milieu of your grandfather's home included all Slovene culture and traditions from the most ancient times to the present. [...] Your grandfather was there when the Slovenes in a distant land were caught by a strange, crane-like unrest, driving them to lift up and move with the sun towards west. He was there when our ancestors slaughtered the Illyrians and Celts in the present territory between Venetia and Vienna. He was there when they proudly gazed at their new estates, especially at the mountains which they had missed so much in the steppes. [...] He had – and he still has – secret encounters with vampires, nymphs, fates, with savage men and especially with water sprites, which treated him as brother, because he was so similar to them – and he still is. Besides, he was involved in

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<sup>78</sup> Javoršek (pen name of Jože Brejc) was a pre-war member of the intellectual circle of the Christian Socialist thinker Edvard Kocbek (1904-1981) who propagated a specific and highly idiosyncratic metaphysical nationalism; he later joined the partisan resistance and was worked in the Yugoslav diplomatic service until 1949 when he was convicted in a staged trial. After the release in 1952, he became an important playwright and stage director. He was one of the first to introduce the contemporary theatre of the absurd in Slovene theatres. He adopted a slightly critical, but openly positive attitude to the Communist regime. A highly controversial figure, he is regarded as one of the foremost Slovene essayists of all times. Cf. Jože Kastelic, *Jože Brejc – Jože Javoršek* (Ljubljana: Literarni klub, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> It is not a case that fragments from the essay were included by the literary historian Jože Pogačnik in a collection of forty most important conceptualizations of Slovene identity from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Slovenska misel: eseji o slovenstvu*, ed. Jože Pogačnik (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1987), 261-277.

mysterious errands, carried out by dwarfs, werewolves, gnomes and elves. Because of all his ancient skills he was sent by the god Perun to become the high priest in the temple of goddess Živa on the island on Lake Bled.<sup>80</sup>

It would be wrong to assume that such a gentilistic vision of the “birth hour of the nation” was shared only by agnostic nationalist or Nietzschean vitalists as Javoršek. The Catholic and moderate conservative Josip Mal (1884-1978), one of the major exponents of the second generation of Slovene positivist historians, also liked to imagine the early Slavs as ferocious and destructive pagans.<sup>81</sup> What is more: the settlement myth was finally fixed as part of the national mythology by the Roman Catholic priest and author Fran Saleški Finžgar (1871-1962), who in the years 1906/07 published a historical novel in two volumes entitled “Under a Free Sun” (*Pod svobodnim soncem*). The novel is a romanticized story set in the Balkans during the period of conflict between South Slavic tribes and the Byzantine Empire in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, which ends with a symbolic arrival of the Slavs at the gates of the Roman town of *Tergeste*, the modern Trieste – a concession to the nationalist spirit of the times. Finžgar’s novel, immediately included in the canon and part of the school curricula ever since, has had a major role in the affirmation of the settlement myth among Slovenes. It is no wonder that it was precisely in polemic against it that a new current of Slovene autochthonism started to emerge in the 1900s.

### **2.3 The Serfdom Myth**

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<sup>80</sup> Jože Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče?* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1969), 22-23.

<sup>81</sup> Janez Peršič, “Malovi srednjeveški spisi” in *Malov zbornik*, Oto Luthar et al., eds. (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 1996), 49.

One of the most powerful within the ethnicist-demotic frame of Slovene historical identity has been the so-called the “serfdom myth” (*mit o hlapčevstvu* or *hlapčevski mit* in Slovene). In the words of the historian Peter Štih,

This myth identifies the history of Slovenes as the history of a small and diligent people who had long been subjected to foreign masters and had to suffer under their yoke before it could get rid of this burden, achieve redemption and become a true nation, that is a people with its own polity.<sup>82</sup>

The traces of such a notion can be found already in the works of France Prešeren, who in the seventh stanza of his *Wreath of Sonnets* made this short description of Slovene history:

Where tempests roar and nature is unkind:  
  
Such was our land since Samo's rule had passed  
  
With Samo's spirit – now an icy blast  
  
Sweeps o'er his grave reft from the nation's mind.  
  
Our fathers' bickerings let Pepin bind  
  
His yoke upon us, then came thick and fast  
  
Bloodstained revolts and wars, the Turk at last –

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 35.

With woes our history is deeply lined.<sup>83</sup>

It is not surprising that this “negative” vision spread mostly among the freethinking intellectuals during the Metternich and the Neo-Absolutist period and later became a popular *topos* among the liberal nationalist *Young Slovenes*. It thus served as some kind of “liberal” counterpart to the conservative *Old Slovene* positive and self-assertive vision of Slovene history and identity, which included autochthonism as one of its most radical features. The ideological implications of the “serfdom myth” were in fact quite clear: if the whole national history is a dark sequel of humiliations, then the heroic emancipatory role of the current generation is even more emphasized. This feature is evident in Prešeren: in the very *Wreath of Sonnets*, he invoked the skies to send a new Orpheus to the Slovene people, the beauty of whose songs would inspire patriotism, help overcome internal disputes and unify all Slovenes into one nation again.<sup>84</sup>

A very similar strain of thought can be seen in the following passage written by the *Young Slovene* Josip Vošnjak (1834-1911), the undisputed leader of the Slovene national movement in Styria after the late 1860s:<sup>85</sup>

Our past is gloomy and sad, full of incessant fighting and suffering. The neighbouring nations pulled us apart piece after piece. While we were defending Europe from the attacks of the ferocious Turks, our western neighbours enjoyed a cultivated and abundant life. Our nation was dying out and the Germans had already started digging a large grave to bury us as they

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<sup>83</sup> Translation by Vivian de Sola Pinto, retrieved from the website [http://www.preseren.net/ang/3\\_poezije/76\\_sonetni\\_venec-08.asp](http://www.preseren.net/ang/3_poezije/76_sonetni_venec-08.asp) (accessed May 21<sup>st</sup> 2008).

<sup>84</sup> The invocation of Orpheus was, needless to say, a subtle assertion of his own envisioned historical role. The invocation is placed immediately before the quoted passage, which is an explanation why no great poetry had ever been made in the Slovene language: “*deeds of valour ceased in our past state/ And triumphs that our songs could celebrate*” (translation by Vivian de Sola Pinto, for source see the note above).

<sup>85</sup> Igor Grdina, “Smrt Josipa Vošnjaka,” in *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1996), 119-120.

had done with several other Slavic tribes. Our neighbours Italians and Magyars had also gathered around the grave to celebrate, but reckoned wrong. The death ringing which was meant for us awoke us from dream and summoned us to a new life.<sup>86</sup>

Of course, every generation which tried to frame itself as the “saviour” of the nation ultimately failed in its attempt, thus prolonging the list of inglorious defeats. Gradually, a true *via dolorosa* of the nation’s shame emerged. In the quoted article, historian Peter Štih tried to reconstruct these Stations of the Cross:

[t]he widespread perception of Slovene history, as it has been forged by myths and stereotypes which have for many decades dominated the media, literature, schoolbooks, occasional presentations etc. looks, with some exaggeration for the sake of the argument, more or less like this: the Slavs (or more often already the Slovenes) settled their present homeland as slaves or serfs of the Avars. In the fight against foreign enemies, they managed to liberate themselves shortly and establish their own state – Carantania. But already in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century the Avar yoke was replaced by the German one and the Slovenes became part of a foreign, German state, in which they vegetated and served foreign rulers for more than a thousand years. At first they were serfs, in the best of the cases poor peasants exploited by the feudal regime. They lacked their own nobility and bourgeoisie, since the social elite was made up by foreigners, mostly Germans or Italians. As a consequence, Slovene was the language of the peasantry which fought and died in wars fought by foreign rulers. As if they hadn’t had enough of domestic hardships, they were harassed by the Turks, too.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Josip Vošnjak, *Spomini* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 238.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Štih, *op. cit.*, 35-36.

Peter Štih wrote that the serfdom myth has been the most dominant stereotype fanning the Slovene historical consciousness.<sup>88</sup> This is to a large extent true, although one has to be aware that this myth has its own specific history. Štih points out that “the Slovene politics of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century largely contributed to the formation of the myth”,<sup>89</sup> but fails to specify that this was true only for one segment of the Slovene political establishment: the Liberal one. Quite logically, the myth was traditionally linked to the libertine, liberal and “left” political traditions. It acquired all its normative weight only after 1945, when it was taken over by the Communist regime which claimed to have transformed the Slovenes “from a nation of serfs to a nation of heroes”.

It would be unfair to accuse the Slovene historiography of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century to be the responsible for the diffusion of this myth in the public discourse, including – as Štih himself pointed out – in history textbooks. In this sense, historiography has played a minor role; the diffusion of the mentioned stereotype is much more linked to the interwar debates on the Slovene national character. Although historiography was not so much involved in the creation of the myth and its diffusion, it did play a relevant role in its tacit sustainment for political purposes. Two stories are significant in this sense. The first one is connected to the figure of the historian Ljudmil Hauptmann (1884-1868), founder of the chair for history at the University of Ljubljana in 1919, and the second has to do with the epistemological tradition of what has been called the “Ljubljana School of Historiography”.

## ***2.4 Modern Slovene Historiography and its Ideological Preconceptions***

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 35.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 37.

Ljudmil Hauptmann was a Slovene historian born and raised in Graz, where he studied at the local university under the supervision of the Czech medievalist Jan Peisker. As a member of the second generation of Slovene positivist historians, he was interested mostly in the issues of territorial and administrative history, publishing a crucial study on the genesis and development of the Duchy of Carniola, which was noticed and praised by Otto Brunner.<sup>90</sup> On the basis of the theories of Jan Peisker and Ludwig Gumplowicz he saw politics as instruments in a struggle between ethnically determined social groups. From this perspective, he devoted much of his scholarly efforts to provide empirical prove of the “servile condition” of the Slovenes. Already in the 1910s, he used analogies between ethnic and legal terminology present in medieval documents – which were later proved to be wrong –,<sup>91</sup> in order to demonstrate that the agrarian population of the Slovene Lands (equated by him with the Slovenes as an ethnic group) was personally un-free and that this personal un-freedom was linked to political subjugation.

On the same line of argumentation (equating ethonyms with terminologies referring to social roles), Hauptmann maintained that the early medieval Slavic principality of Carantania – seen since the enlightenment period as the first stage of Slovene political organization<sup>92</sup> – was in fact established by a Croat ruling elite. Reflecting on his “discovery”, Hauptmann developed what he himself called the “serfdom theory”. According to this theory, the Slovenes were unable of leading an independent political life, since their political and stately frames have always been established by foreign forces, first the Avars, then the Croatians and finally the Bavarian-German nobility. He saw a parallel in the social condition of the Slovenes, which formed only the lower strata of the Medieval and early

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<sup>90</sup> Peter Štih. “Ljudmil Hauptmann in raziskovanje slovenskega srednjega veka,” in *Ljudmil Hauptmann: Nastanek in razvoj Kranjske* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1999), 154-155.

<sup>91</sup> To put it short, Hauptmann put an equation between two recurrent pairs of peasant estates documented in medieval documents in the Slovene Lands and in Carinthia, the “hoba libera” vs. “hoba servilis” and “hoba bavarica” vs. “hoba sclavanisca”. Cf. Peter Štih, op. cit., 155.

<sup>92</sup> Igor Grdina, “Karantanski mit v slovenski kulturi,” *Zgodovina za vse* 3, no.2 (1996): 52-53.

modern society, while the elites belonged to foreign ethnicities. In his own metaphor, the Slovenes were “an anvil which at first received blows from the Avars, then the Croatians, and finally by the Germans”.<sup>93</sup>

The ideological implications of Hauptmann’s theory become much clearer when one takes into consideration his political views: he was a fervent adherent to the project of Yugoslav nation building. His theories were clearly providing a “scientific” support for the Yugoslavist claims that the Slovenes were an essentially non-political ethnic group who can only form part of a polity led by other ethnic groups. In the then prevailing discourse – and practice – in Yugoslavia, such a state-forming ethnicity were the Serbs, particularly those of the old Serbian kingdom, the *Piedmont of Yugoslavia*.<sup>94</sup>

Hauptmann’s theories on the Croat ruling class in Carantania raised the emphatic objection of the Lamprechtian cultural historian Josip Mal, Hauptmann’s Catholic and conservative counterpart, then the director of the National Museum in Ljubljana.<sup>95</sup> Not a medievalist himself – he was an attentive investigator of local history and empathic researcher of what can be called “history from below”, as well as author of popular historical syntheses for a wider public – Mal rejected Hauptmann’s conjectures from the standpoint of Slovene national pride.<sup>96</sup> Following the polemic, in which he complained that his purely scholarly position was being attacked by patriotic vanity<sup>97</sup> (which was of course partially true), Hauptmann left Ljubljana for Zagreb in 1926. After a period of void, his

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 159.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Leopold Lenard, *Jugoslovanski Piemont: zgodovina Srbije od Črnega Jurija do kralja Petra* (Maribor: Tiskarna sv. Cirila, 1920).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Oto Luthar et al., eds., *Malov zbornik*, op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 152-153. Janez Peršič, op. cit., 48-49.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 153.

chair was taken by a young historian from Gorizia, Milko Kos (1892-1972), the older son of historian Franc Kos.<sup>98</sup>

According to the self-narrative of modern Slovene historiography, the “ideological” strife between Mal and Hauptmann was suspended by Kos’ scholarly work, who instead of asking meaningless questions on “freedom” and “serfdom” of the Slovene populace during the Middle Ages, produced a detailed account in “how the Slovenes actually lived” during that period. Without doubt, Kos’ historical work was scholarship at its best. Following the trends in contemporary Central Europe, especially in Germany, Kos focused on the early and high medieval colonization and settlement patterns, producing a marvelously detailed picture of medieval and early modern population movements in the wider Eastern Alpine region.<sup>99</sup> He also wrote several syntheses of early Slovene history for the wider public, in which he made an important contribution to overgrow the narrow ethnicist-demotic narrative of Slovene history. No traces of the serfdom myth are present in his works, but the implicit Slavacist frame remained strong, with all its political implications.<sup>100</sup>

Kos’ influence on the public discourse on Slovene historical identity was however minimal at the time. He did not engage in any attempts of framing the national identity. The stage where the historical consciousness was being framed was still mostly in the political and artistic spheres, not in historiography. School textbooks, for their part, were regulated by the Yugoslav authorities and were propagating a crude Slavist and Yugoslavist ethno-nationalist vision of history.<sup>101</sup> The ideological load of these texts can be appreciated already from two short quotes, one from the chapters dedicated to “general history” and the other section on “homeland history”:

<sup>98</sup> Nataša Stergar, “Milko Kos,” in *Oddelek za zgodovino*, Matjaž Rebolj and Nataša Stergar, eds. (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, 2000), 35-36.

<sup>99</sup> Bogo Grafenauer et al, eds., *Kosov zbornik* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1953).

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Milko Kos, *Zgodovina Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Jugoslovanska knjigarna, 1933).

<sup>101</sup> Tatjana Rozman. “Ideološke vsebine zgodovine na Slovenskem,” *Nova revija* 89-90 (1989): 1240-1257.

In the State of Charlemagne, Romance and Germanic nations lived side by side. Clearly, such a community could not endure. Soon after Charles' death, the Frankish State was split into three parts.<sup>102</sup>

The German ruler gave his estates into feud to German noblemen. The foreign nobility settled German peasants on their estates [...]. All these actions accelerated the Germanization process in the Eastern Alps; the number of German villages was growing, the nobility soon became entirely German. Surrounded by German nobility, the remaining Slovene noblemen adopted German customs and German language, too.<sup>103</sup>

Looking from the perspective of the quote above, the role of Milko Kos and his historiographical school – frequently called the “Ljubljana School of Historiography” – appears however less innocent than at first sight. Kos' conception of history was very akin to the *Volksgeschichte* paradigm in contemporary Weimar Germany.<sup>104</sup> Like the historians of the *Volksgeschichte*, Kos turned from the issue of the state formation and elites to the research of the life of common people. As in the *Volksgeschichte*, however, this sociological emphasis was ethnically determined: the popular substratum towards which Kos turned his attention was of course identified with the Slovene nation/people, as opposed to the German-speaking elites forming the thin upper layers of society.

Furthermore, Kos' emphasis on the settlement patterns, colonization and population movements carried a clear implicit message which could not have been overlooked in the mid 1930s, when his main works were published: the message of a national struggle over

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1250. The text is from a schoolbook written in 1934 by the Serbian historian Vasilij Popović.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. The quote is from a textbook written in 1923 by the Slovene historian Josip Bučar and was used in high schools throughout the 1920s until the early 1930s.

<sup>104</sup> Georg G. Iggers, review of *Volksgeschichte: methodische Innovationen und völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft*, by Willi Oberkrome, *History and Theory* 33, no. 3 (October 1994): 395-400.

the territory. For Kos, the early medieval history was essentially a history of Germanization or, as he writes, of de-nationalization of Slovenes:

In the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century the great de-nationalization of Slovenes began, which was countered by very small Slovene national advances.<sup>105</sup>

By identifying all Slavs in the Eastern Alpine area – including those on the banks of the Danube in today's Lower Austria as *Slovenes*<sup>106</sup> –, Kos narrated a horrifying history of ethnic loss, in which “the Slovenes were shrunk to a mere third of their initial territory”. Although he did not in any way tried to imply that this was the result of a planned process, the language in which he describes it is often that of a military operation:

In the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Germans launched themselves with all force on *Carinthian and Styrian soil*.<sup>107</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, Kos had an important influence in the intellectual formation of a whole generation of younger historians, among whom the most important were Fran Zwitter (1905-1988) and Bogo Grafenauer (1916-1995). Although they were both born in central Slovenia, their parents came from north-western Carinthia, in what is now Austria. Like Kos himself, they were thus existentially linked to the border areas of Slovene settlement which were later incorporated in foreign states and submitted to a policy of forced assimilation. They both inherited Kos' extensive knowledge in medieval settlement

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<sup>105</sup> Milko Kos, op. cit., 115.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

patterns, which Grafenauer supplemented with studies in the development of the ethnic border since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it started – in his own military terminology – to “move” again. Zwitter, on the other hand, who also studied under Albert Mathiez in Paris, became a specialist in the national movements and nationality questions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Not unlike the German *Volksgeschichte*,<sup>108</sup> the Ljubljana School pursued a study of history which integrated geography, geopolitical notions, demography, statistics, the analysis of economic structures of everyday life (such as the patterns of agrarian ownership), and ethnology. It was a very modern conception of historiography which after the 1950s opened itself to the reception from the French *Annales* school, but it was also an ethnically centered vision of history which identified the ethnical social community with the nation. As such, it brought a “scientifization of the nation” in which the national characteristics were codified and objectified. This position was rendered even more acute by the lack of a critical distance towards their own ideological positioning.

In the same period when the German *Volksgeschichte* was forced to evolve into an “ethnically blind” social history after the downfall of Nazism,<sup>109</sup> the Ljubljana School rose to the pedestal of a “national historiography”. During World War Two, both Grafenauer and Zwitter had in fact collaborated with the partisan resistance and had later been drafted as experts for border issues by the Yugoslav diplomacy. This circumstance, as well as their willingness to find a *modus vivendi* with the official Communist ideology had an important role in the solidification of the epistemological principles of the Ljubljana School in the hegemonizing paradigm in Slovene historiography. The underlining conviction identifying the Slovene nation with the Slavic ethnic and linguistic substratum whose continuity could

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<sup>108</sup> Georg G. Iggers, op. cit., 396-397.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 398-399.

be retroactively traced until the Slavic settlement of the East Alps in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, thus became the only possible and allowable paradigm in Slovene historiography.

It would be wrong to assume that this identification of the Slovene nation with the ethnic substratum and the consequent fixation with ethnic boundaries was present only within the Ljubljana School. Suffice it to mention that one of the foremost researchers of the “movements” of the northern Slovene ethnic border was the democratic Catholic conservative politician Alojzij Kuhar (1895-1958). Kuhar achieved his PhD in history at Cambridge with a thesis entitled “The Conversion of the Slovenes and the German-Slav Ethnic Boundary in the Eastern Alps”.<sup>110</sup> The issue of the northern ethnic border<sup>111</sup> was in fact a widespread preoccupation among Slovene intellectuals since the 1870s, and it became a primary political issue after World War One. The notion of ethnic relations based on a fight over the territory was not an abstract conjecture or an evil construct of a ferocious ethnic nationalism: it was simply the result of a historical experience.

This experience however started to change after World War Two, precisely in the same period when the Slovene academic historiography was for the first time in history allowed to actively contribute in the creation of a common historical identity of the Slovenes. The Communist regime gave in fact a large degree of autonomy to the historians of the Ljubljana School, who were not only given funds to carry out noteworthy projects in the compilation of national history and publish important historical syntheses for the wide public, but were also offered to participate in the writing of textbooks.<sup>112</sup> In a period, to be sure, when schoolchildren learning about Slovene medieval history in 1979 could read the following line in their textbook:

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<sup>110</sup> Aloysius Kuhar, *Slovene Medieval History: Selected Studies* (New York: Studia Slovenica, 1962).

<sup>111</sup> The western one, as the historical narrative still repeats, “has remained almost invariable for more than a thousand years until 1945”.

<sup>112</sup> Tatjana Rozman, op. cit., especially the list of textbooks used by secondary high schools on p. 1256.

For the following 1000 years the history of the Slovene nation was the history of the Slovene peasant – serf.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 1251.

### 3. Framing an Alternative Discourse. Two Fragments of Post-Romantic Autochthonism

With the demise of Romantic autochthonism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, autochthonist theories did not completely disappear from the Slovene Lands. Individuals who continued to insist on autochthonism remained on the scene, but were largely marginalized. The foremost representative of Post-Romantic autochthonism was Davorin Martin Žunkovič (1858-1940), an officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army, born and raised in one of the Styrian villages in which Davorin Trstenjak practiced as priest.<sup>114</sup> Žunkovič was a prolific author of compilations of All-Slavic etymologies, written and published to the amusement of his contemporaries. Although there is to the present no evidence that anyone took seriously his work, he was instrumental in keeping alive the Romantic tradition of autochthonism.

That this tradition did not completely die out, is revealed by the memoirs of the national liberal mayor of Ljubljana Ivan Hribar (1851-1941), who entered the historical memory of Slovenes for having led the reconstruction of the Slovene capital after the earthquake of 1895.<sup>115</sup> In them, the aged politician and diplomat exposed, among many other things, also his belief in the theories of Romantic autochthonists.<sup>116</sup> The example proves that the old convictions were hard to die out. They must have however appeared odd to younger generations who not only were not used to hear their content, but were unaware of the existence of anything like an autochthonist tradition. It is not a case that virtually all

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<sup>114</sup> Peter Štih, "Ej ko goltnoš do tu-le, udari po konjih! O avtohtonističnih in podobnih teorijah pri Slovencih in na Slovenskem," *Zgodovina za vse* 3, no. 2 (1996): 70.

<sup>115</sup> And for having committed suicide in 1941, at the age of 90, in protest against the Italian occupation of Ljubljana by throwing himself in the Ljubljanica river wrapped in a Yugoslav flag.

<sup>116</sup> Ivan Hribar, *Moji spomini* (Ljubljana: Merkur, 1928).

of the few exponents of the Post-Romantic autochthonism were born in the decade between 1850 and 1860, at the same time that the first generation of Slovene positivist historians. Once the result of positivist historiography had been incorporated in the general discourse on historic identity, autochthonism fell out of the prevailing indentitarian paradigm.

In the period after the 1880s, an important shift can be seen in autochthonist discourses: they become increasingly a way of framing an alternative identity discourse. Another interesting feature is that since the 1880s, the vast majority of Slovene autochthonists – almost all – came from the western Slovene regions on the border with Italy; the same goes for all the three main authors of the Venetic theory and for the majority of its most pronounced followers. One can only speculate on the reasons for such a regional concentration, but its extent can barely allow the interpretation that it was just a coincidence. Most likely, it was a reaction – to a large extent an unconscious one – to the Italian nationalist-imperialist discourse, which was of course not autochthonist in the strict sense of the word, but frequently used autochthonist slogans in its anti-Slavic propaganda.

In the next sections, I will highlight two cases which had a direct influence on the development of the Venetic theory, although only one of them can be called autochthonist. Those are the cases of Henrik Tuma and Franc Jeza.

### **3.1 A “Cultural Turn” in Fin-de-siècle Autochthonism: The Case of Henrik Tuma**

One of the major exponents of post-Romantic autochthonism in the Slovene Lands was the Social Democratic politician, lawyer and mountaineer from Gorizia Henrik Tuma

(1858-1935).<sup>117</sup> Tuma was a notable public figure and one of the most prominent Austro-Marxist intellectuals in the Slovene Lands. Historian Peter Štih called Tuma “the only true Slovene autochthonist theorist”, since he claimed that the Slavs were the first settlers of the European continent.<sup>118</sup> Tuma based his theories on toponymic research in the Alpine region, personally collecting a huge amount of data from Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Slovenia.<sup>119</sup> Tuma’s collections of toponyms and his all-Slavic etymologizations served as the main source for the “toponymic sections” of the Venetic theory.<sup>120</sup>

Tuma was however no nationalist zealot. The Italian literary historian Claudio Magris, probably unaware of his autochthonist research which represented only a minimal portion of his intellectual endeavours,<sup>121</sup> described him as “an acute and equilibrate intellectual figure”.<sup>122</sup> Tuma had been collecting his sources for several decades before he decided to come forward and publicly expose his “discoveries”. Not by chance, he did so immediately after the publication of the first volume of Finžgar’s historical novel “Under a Free Sun” in 1906.<sup>123</sup> To be sure, Tuma was himself a convinced Yugoslavist<sup>124</sup> – in the 1920s and 1930s he was also supportive of the construction of the Yugoslav *political* nation – and did not in any way oppose the Slavic frame of Slovene identity.<sup>125</sup> What he opposed to, was the myth of the settlement. In a later article, published in the early 1920s, he wrote:

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<sup>117</sup> Petra Kolenc, *Dr. Henrik Tuma in njegova knjižnica* (Nova Gorica-Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2008).

<sup>118</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 69.

<sup>119</sup> Branko Marušič, “Starinoslovska srečanja Tume in Srebrniča,” *Jadranski koledar 1985* (1986): 106-107.

<sup>120</sup> Matej Bor, Jožko Šavli, Ivan Tomažič, *Veneti: naši davni predniki* (Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 1989), 32-64.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Claudio Magris and Angelo Ara, *Trieste: un'identità di frontiera* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1982), 65.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Štih, op. cit., 69.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Henrik Tuma. “Jugoslovanski in balkanski problem” in *Slovenska misel: eseji o slovenstvu*, ed. Jože Pogačnik (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1987), 84-93.

<sup>125</sup> Milan Zver, *Sto let socialdemokracije na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Veda, 1996).

The historical account that the Slovenes arrived in their present settlement area in the 6<sup>th</sup> century is a fairy tale. The Slovene toponyms tell us that the Slovene has cultivated his soil since ancestral times.<sup>126</sup>

For Tuma, the focus of autochthonism was not any more the ancestry of the *genus*, as with the Romantics, but the connection of the rural people to their soil, their ancient habits, their rootedness in the environment in which they lived and worked. In his highly influential book on alpinism, *Pomen in razvoj alpinizma* (“The Meaning and Evolution of Alpinism”) from 1930, he wrote:

There is something else that alpinism gave me! When I started collecting toponyms and terminology with the help of elderly shepherds, I discovered the link of the human thought with nature. I developed a clear and conscious love towards my native land, a love of respect for our simple people. Only the link with our land and with the simple people revealed to me the essence of nationality: the discovery of the virtues and singularity of a simple people, free on their own land. I found out that the Slovene shepherd in the silent corners of the mountain landscape retained all the virtues of a man living apart from the worldly culture, keeping apart from the turmoil of history.<sup>127</sup>

From these positions, the leap into autochthonism was short:

Nowhere in our Alps did I find traces of foreignness; all that is foreign derives only from the latest historical eras.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Branko Marušič, op. cit., 105.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Branko Marušič, op. cit., 105.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

The shift of the discourse was clearly towards some kind of “ecologist” vision of the remote countryside, which is the other side of Tuma’s pronounced, acute, skeptically realistic but always unambiguously affirmative vision of modernity and modernization. If we are to assess Tuma’s autochthonism in the light of his other writings, we could say that it is a reaction against imperialistic claims, against the conceptual separation of nation and territory. In short, Tuma was against what Hannah Arendt called “tribal nationalism”,<sup>129</sup> that is the chauvinistic notion of a *Volksgemeinschaft* based on race and not on territory.<sup>130</sup> Despite his pronounced Slovene patriotism, Tuma in fact regarded himself as an internationalist,<sup>131</sup> a Marxist and, despite his opposition to bolshevism, a Communist.<sup>132</sup>

Two interesting details might shed further light on the ideological backgrounds of Tuma’s autochthonism. In 1912, at the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, he published a manifesto in which he called for the collaboration of all Balkan Social Democratic parties in order to create – not a South Slav state, as many of his fellow party members were contemplating at the time – but a Balkan Federation, in which the common effort for the economic and cultural advance of a unified geographical region would put in the back the ethnic differences.<sup>133</sup> Three years before, Tuma rejected the so-called Tivoli Resolution of his Yugoslav Social Democratic Party, active mostly in Carniola and in the Austrian Littoral, which called for the cultural unification of all the South Slavs into one nation.<sup>134</sup> Tuma believed that the Slovenes should keep their language and culture and that in any case a merger of nations was impossible, and reproached the party – similarly as his friend and foremost Slovene author of the time, Ivan Cankar (1876-1918) – of having replaced

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<sup>129</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

<sup>130</sup> Suffice it to recall that Tuma ferociously opposed the integralist Yugoslav nationalism of the ORJUNA movement in Slovenia. Petra Kolenc, op. cit., 42.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Henrik Tuma, op. cit.

<sup>132</sup> Petra Kolenc, op. cit., 25. To be more accurate, he evolved from Austro-Marxist to Maximalist positions.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Henrik Tuma, op. cit.

<sup>134</sup> Milan Zver, op. cit.

Yugoslavism as a political revolutionary project of the creation of a new common socialist homeland for all South Slavs with an outdated bourgeois “literary nationalism”.<sup>135</sup>

The above hints suggest an interpretation that can be seen already in Tuma’s autochthonist texts. The move from abstract etymologies of the Romantics to a direct experience of the interconnection of toponymy and the everyday life and work of the people; the shift of focus from *race* to *landscape*: all this suggests a move from a “genealogical” to a “territorial” or “sociological” type of autochthonism. This is confirmed by a passage in the correspondence between Tuma and the philologist Matija Murko, in which Tuma rejected the etymologic fantasies of Davorin Žunkovič, but claimed he came to similar conclusions based on “a sociological and historical standpoint”.<sup>136</sup>

To be sure, Tuma’s “sociology” was of course not a scholarly one, but a result of observation and interchange with the people, such as the agrarian proletariat of eastern Friuli and the adjacent regions of western Slovenia, for the emancipation of whom he fought during his active life.<sup>137</sup> It was very probably from the experiences his activist life, that he drew the conclusion which he put as a motto on his autochthonist researches:

Look for the sources of human history away from archives, in its primary simple life in the touch with nature itself.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Branko Marušič et. Al., eds., *Henrik Tuma. Pisma: osebnosti in dogodki* (Ljubljana - Trieste - Duino: Zgodovinski inštitut Milka Kosa ZRC SAZU, 1996), 284.

<sup>137</sup> Petra Kolenc, op. cit., 24-25.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Branko Marušič, “Starinoslovska srečanja Tume in Srebrniča,” *Jadranski koledar 1985* (1986): 105-106.

### **3.2 Framing Anti-Jugoslavism from an Ethnicist Perspective: The Scandinavian Theory of Franc Jeza**

In Tuma's case, autochthonism was already a clear symptom of a differentiated discourse. But nothing more than that: a symptom. It was neither central in Tuma's overall intellectual profile, nor it was an instrument for shaping a different narrative on collective identity. The first time an alternative theory on the origins of Slovenes was consciously employed in order to convey a different narrative on the national identity was with the Slovene emigrant political activist, author and ethnologist Franc Jeza (1916-1984). Franc Jeza was born in Slovene Styria, in the same micro-region which was the homeland of the autochthonists Davorin Trstenjak and Davorin Martin Žunkovič. He studied ethnology in Ljubljana, where he joined the intellectual circle of the poet and Christian Socialist thinker Edvard Kocbek, composed of fervent opponents of Yugoslav centralism and unitarism, mostly from the Christian Left.<sup>139</sup> During World War Two, he joined the partisan resistance as member of the very first fighting unit.<sup>140</sup> After the war, shocked by the nature of Stalinist totalitarianism and disappointed with the *de facto* dismantling of Slovenia's political autonomy achieved during the "national revolution" in the anti-Fascist fight, he emigrated to Italy, first to Rome and then to Trieste, where he got employed at the local Slovene-language radio station sponsored by the Allies.<sup>141</sup> In his journal from 1952, his former mentor Edvard Kocbek characterized him with the following description:

[...] a tragic figure of an aspiring and ideologically penetrating humanist, who was confused by the iron reality of a dictatorship which cast him away on the shores of a powerless,

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<sup>139</sup> Marko Tavčar, ed., *Zbornik simpozija o Francu Jezi. Trst, 1994* (Gorizia: Goriška Mohorjeva, 1995), 69.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

embittered solipsism. [...] He is the living mirror of a truly emigrant mentality, lucid, desperate and absurd.<sup>142</sup>

Jeza, who was also a prolific and important novelist, completed his studies at the University of Graz. In 1967 he published a volume with the telling title “The Scandinavian Origin of Slovenes: An Ethnographical-Linguistic and Historical Study”.<sup>143</sup> In the book, Jeza used etymologic resemblances of Slovene words (many of them of early medieval German origin)<sup>144</sup> with Scandinavian ones, as well as similar ethnological features, in order to prove the Scandinavian ethnic origin of the west Slavic peoples (among which he included the Slovenes and the older, pre-Ottoman layers of Croat settlement), as opposed to the Slavic ethnicity of the eastern and southern ones. The historical narrative of the theory is rather poor and is based on a conjecture about the Nor-Vend and Sol-Vend division among ancient Scandinavians, of which the Nor-Vends would be the ancestors of the old Normans and modern Norwegians, while the Sol-Vends would be the ancestors of modern western Slavs (the *Vends*), the Swedes and of course of Slovenes (*Slo-venci*, as they are called in Slovene; without the dash, of course).

Jeza was however not famous only for his Scandinavian theory, but also as one of the first Slovene intellectuals who actively and emphatically campaigned for the independence of Slovenia. In emigration, he established contacts with all kind of Slovene emigrant groups which were critical towards Slovenia’s role in the Yugoslav federation, and in mid 1960s they established the so-called “Group Epsilon of Slovene Academicians” which published

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<sup>142</sup> Edvard Kocbek, *Dnevnik 1951* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2001), 393.

<sup>143</sup> Franc Jeza, *Skandinavski izvor Slovencev: etnografsko-jezikoslovna in zgodovinska študija* (Trieste: Franc Jeza, 1967).

<sup>144</sup> Bogo Grafenauer. “Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje” in *Paulus Diaconus: Zgodovina Langobardov - Historia Langobardorum* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1988), 382.

several manifestos calling for Slovenia's independence.<sup>145</sup> Their platform was not a nationalistic one: they used economic data arguing that Slovenia's economy and overall social situation would be better off in an independent setting. Their rational and factually sustained argumentation and a democratic and moderate program – they rejected nationalist chauvinism, sustained the need for the establishment of a multi-party system, called for the respect of human rights, and envisaged a possible collaboration with reformist Communists<sup>146</sup> – was accompanied by an intransigent and emphatic style. Jeza himself dedicated the last decades of his life to a zealous and restless proliferation of propagandistic material in favour of an independent Slovenia.<sup>147</sup>

Jeza's unique views on the Slovene ethnogenesis were of course closely related to his political views. His fervent strive for an independent Slovenia testifies to his conviction on the individuality of the Slovene nation, a conviction he must have gained already in the intellectual circles of Edvard Kocbek. The permanent managing the data and analyses on the social and economical conditions in Yugoslavia, must have strengthened his intuition that the different Slavic nations have little in common other than the linguistic affinity. In the vein of ethnicist determinism, he transposed those beliefs to his ethnological theories. His aim was now to prove that the ethnical-ethnological unity – and consequently the cultural unity – of the Slavic peoples was a myth, forged by Romantic historiography as an answer to the German Romantic glorification of Germanity.<sup>148</sup> The following quote speaks for itself:

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<sup>145</sup> *Slovenija 1968. Kam?* (Trieste: Tipografia A. Keber, 1968).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>147</sup> Boris Pahor. "Franc Jeza – skoraj zamolčani disident," in *Kultura in politika*, ed. Mateja Jančar (Ljubljana: Inštitut dr. Jožeta Pučnika, 2007), 117-120.

<sup>148</sup> Franc Jeza, *op. cit.*, 225.

The Romantic notions on the ethnic unity of Slavic-speaking peoples were hijacked by politics, since they could serve to the hegemonistic purposes of some larger Slavic nations over the smaller ones. Whole political ideologies have been based on this notion, many of them having a decisive influence on the fate of different Slavic nations in the last and present centuries. Such were the Pan-Slavic, the Illyrian, the Yugoslav and the Czechoslovak idea, but also the Soviet one, since the Soviet state is based on the Russian hegemony over the Ukrainians and Byelorussians, as was the Czarist one before it.<sup>149</sup>

The task of the modern scientist was thus to unveil the Romantic conjectures, to “gather enough courage, autonomy and interest”<sup>150</sup> to challenge the “official truths”, fostered by state-sponsored institutions – academies, universities –, which served the interests of their masters: either the hegemonic big nations or the idea of the unity of the state equated with nation. Until now, Jeza claimed, the official science has fled the duty to unmask the myth of Slavic kinship. For Jeza, this myth was based on the misconception of equating language affinity with the ethnological one:

Only the linguistic affinity was of course unable to hide the ethnic, racial and cultural differences. The same is valid in the modern world, even in the cases when two nations speak the same language, as the English and the Irish or the French and the Walloons. [...] It is therefore not a wonder that even today, we can still trace the dividing line between those Slavic nations which either descended directly from the Solvends (the Vandals) like the Slovenes [...], the Slovaks-Moravians and the Sorbs of Lusatia, or evolved from the mixing of Baltic, Dacians and Vandal ethnic elements like the Poles and the Croats, and those nations

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 226.

which have more or less directly descended from Sarmatians and Scythians like the Russians and other eastern Slavic nations [...].<sup>151</sup>

A “true ethnic and cultural abyss” separates the two groups of Slavic nations. This very same ethnical dividing line, which runs right through Yugoslavia, coincides with the divide between the east and the west, between the Catholic-Protestant culture and the Orthodox one. The differences, Jeza continues, can be seen in the collective values, in the psyche, in folklore and even in – economy:<sup>152</sup>

We can say that they [all these differences] are evident in the overall relation of those nations towards the surrounding world, towards life and even towards liberty.<sup>153</sup>

There can be little doubt that Jeza’s conjectures answered an existential experience: the experience of the different cultural settings of the various Slavic peoples that was becoming increasingly acute in Slovenia, especially with the beginning of the immigration from other Yugoslav republics from the late 1960s and especially from the early 1970s onward. The difference in the discourses of Slovene identity started to become palpable in the mid 1970s. Let me give a marginal, but eloquent example. In 1969 the essayist Jože Javoršek, whom I have quoted in the previous chapter, wrote with scorn about “this strange

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. In constructing his theory, Jeza was of course collecting material from another autochthonist tradition, the Polish one. The “Sarmatian” and “Scythian” theories had in fact a long tradition in Polish historiography. Due to the lack of an exhaustive bibliography it is hard to deduct which sourced did Jeza use, but the tone and the nature of his theory suggests some influence from the “Scythism” of Wiktor Czarnecki. Cf. Jarmila Kaczmarek, “Megalomania and expansionism. On Polish-German relations within archaeology in the Wielkopolska region”, paper presented at the session "Archaeology, expansion, resistance", organized by the AREA\_III Project (Culture\_2000 programme) in Poznan (Poland), on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003, available at [http://www.muzarp.poznan.pl/archweb/archweb\\_eng/Publications/mega/index\\_meg.html](http://www.muzarp.poznan.pl/archweb/archweb_eng/Publications/mega/index_meg.html) (retrieved on May 31st, 2008).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 229-230.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 230.

and opaque Central Europe”<sup>154</sup> and warned that without the innovative spirit of Socialism the “Slovene culture would fall again in the undefined Central European ambiguity from which it was saved by the revolutionary effort”.<sup>155</sup> Nine years later, the same Javoršek published a book entitled “Dangerous Liaisons” (*Nevarna razmerja*), an epistolary essay composed of imaginary letters from beyond sent to real and imaginary people. Among them, he exchanged several epistles with a sculpture on a famous fountain in the main square of Ljubljana. In one of the fictitious letters, the sculpture addressed the author with the following words:

Many things have changed since you have gone, Jože. Every day I meet new people, different people. There are more and more of them, and they behave in ways as I was not used to. I have been here for long centuries and God knows I have seen a lot, but what can I say, they are different. Ljubljana is not any more the Central European town you used to know.<sup>156</sup>

The short mentioning of the “different people” on the streets and squares of the Slovene capital was of course a careful but unambiguous allusion to the great social changes which took place in Slovenia during the exact period when Franc Jeza forged his theories and which were transforming Slovenia from a traditional land of emigration to a land of immigration. Political changes, such as the frequent tensions between the Slovene political elite and the central government and, in the 1980s, the strife over cultural policies,<sup>157</sup> and changes in the geopolitical settings with the demise of the “German danger”, were rapidly remodeling the collective identity paradigm. Against these new experiences, the notion of Slavic kinship was starting to reveal itself for what it was: a myth.

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<sup>154</sup> Jože Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče?* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1969), 131.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Jože Javoršek, *Nevarna razmerja* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1979), 107.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Nevenka Sreš, *Skupna programska jedra* (Maribor: Univerza v Mariboru, 1996).

With his weird Scandinavian theory, Franc Jeza tried to replace this myth with another one, based on the same or even more accentuated ethnicist deterministic presuppositions. The difference between the two was that the ethnic origin was now not associated with any kind “brotherhood in blood”, as was the case with the old Slavacist nationalist paradigm, but it was framed in cultural terms, as the underlying reason for the *mores*, the mentality, the relationship to nature and the environment, the civil values, the attitude to life which determine a certain people.

The question on how much was Jeza influenced by a similar “Gothic” discourse sponsored during World War Two by the pro-Nazi *Ustaša* regime of the Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945) remains opened. There are no direct evidences to confirm such an influence. There is however an interesting anecdote, largely unknown to the wide public. The “Gothic theory” of the origins of Croats, invented by the radical anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serb Croatian chauvinists in the 1930s, had a lonely and highly uncharacteristic supporter in Slovenia: the geographer and historian Jože Rus (1888-1945), a leftist liberal intellectual, known in the interwar period as an opponent of Yugoslav centralism and nationalist integralism from democratic and federalist positions. Rus, who is famous for having been one of the eight founding members of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian People – a left-wing platform under the hegemony of the Slovene branch of Tito’s Communist Party which launched and led the armed anti-Fascist resistance in Slovenia during World War Two – and who died in the Nazi concentration camp in Buchenwald in March 1945, wrote several articles in the early 1930s in support of the theory, extending it to the Slovenes.<sup>158</sup>

It is difficult to assess to which extent Rus influenced Jeza in his Scandinavianism, although there can be no doubt that the two knew each other, if not before, from the

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<sup>158</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, op. cit., “Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje” in *Paulus Diaconus: Zgodovina Langobardov - Historia Langobardorum* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1988), 419.

underground activities of the early anti-Fascist resistance in 1941. The case however shows that these “Germanic” theories, popular among many pro-Fascist subcultures in the Slavic nations, were in no way restricted to the far right. In Rus’ case, it was very probably a symptom of his democratic autonomism and of his rejection of a centralist discourse which emphasized the indissoluble “Balkanic and Slavic unity” of the South Slav peoples. In Jeza, a similar theory was a logical corollary of his anti-Yugoslavism and on his focus on the “cultural differences” between the Slavic peoples.

More than from any kind of autochthonism, the discourse of the Venetic theory was influenced by the Scandinavianism of Franc Jeza. Despite the completely different content, everything else was already there: the direct confrontation with the notion of Slavic kinship; the openly anti-Yugoslav connotation; the polemic tone against Romantic nationalist conjectures; the accusations against the academic establishment of serving the interest of the big, hegemonic nations; the ethnically deterministic focus on culture. The crucial difference was that Jeza’s theories were unknown to the wider public, mostly circulating as a rare intellectual peculiarity, while the Venetic theory was a regular cultural, discursive and historical *event*. With a slightly indecent analogy, it can be said that Franc Jeza was the John the Baptist of the Venetologists; the *vox in deserto clamantis* announcing the good news: the Slovenes are the oldest people in Europe.

## 4. The Venetic Controversy

In 1985, a book entitled “Veneti: Our Ancient Forefather” (*Veneti: naši davni predniki*) was issued by the Slovene cultural center *Korotan* in Vienna.<sup>159</sup> The book was a collection of articles and essays written by three Slovene authors, Matej Bor, Jožko Šavli and Ivan Tomažič, in which they maintained to have discovered a shocking truth: the ethnogenesis of the Slovenes proclaimed by the “official historiography” – as they referred to it – and taught in schools was wrong. As was wrong also the prevailing image on the pre-Roman history of the European continent. The Slovenes were in fact the direct descendants of a Slavic-speaking people that settled in Central Europe already at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. According to ancient sources, they were called *Veneti*. The theory soon stimulated the interest of the general public. The first critiques, somehow skeptic but mostly favourable,<sup>160</sup> started filling the Slovene media, and the book became a bestseller. The theory, launched by the three authors, mobilized much of the reading public and eventually developed in a proper cultural movement, with its own symbology and discourse. The first reactions from the academia came already in 1985 and a long controversy, which continued to be present on the pages of Slovene newspapers for the next ten years, started.

### **4.1 Approaching Autochthonism from the Left: The Case of Matej Bor**

The big “boom” of the Venetic theory was preceded by another book advancing autochthonist theories, published in 1984. The book, entitled “Were the Etruscans

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<sup>159</sup> Matej Bor, Jožko Šavli, Ivan Tomažič, *Veneti: naši davni predniki* (Vienna: Glas Korotana, 1985).

<sup>160</sup> See for example the critique published in the journal *Razgledi* in the Autumn of 1985.

Slavs?”,<sup>161</sup> was written by two elderly gentlemen from western Slovenia who used decipherment methods to prove the Slavic nature of the ancient Etruscan language. One of them (a certain Anton Berlot, born in Trieste in 1897) was a former partisan and a retired major of the Yugoslav People’s Army with some experience in military decipherment, who became an enthusiast in cryptology; the other one (a certain Ivan Rebec, born in 1908 in a small Slovene town in what was then the Austrian Littoral) was a retired high-ranking clerk in a Yugoslav import-export state agency, who used his extensive language knowledge and travel experiences in order to study ancient cultures, especially the ones on the Italian peninsula.<sup>162</sup>

The book was the amplification of several articles which the two authors had published between 1976 and 1977 as a feuilleton in one of the magazines with largest circulation in Slovenia.<sup>163</sup> The reaction of the academic public was of course negative and the authors spent the next seven years in order to find a publisher for their book.<sup>164</sup> When it was published, the book provoked scornful and negative reactions from the major Slovene archeologists and linguists,<sup>165</sup> but was well received by the reading public – a sign of the times. To be sure, the book was written in a rather sensationalist tone, but it lacked any ideological implication. The story about Berlot’s and Remec’s theory would have been an just another chapter in the history of historical and archeological sensationalism – which keeps finding in the Etruscans a favorite subject for its fancy ruminations –, if it hadn’t had an eminent sponsor: the poet, playwright, translator and member of the arts section of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts Matej Bor (1913-1993).

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<sup>161</sup> Anton Berlot and Ivan Rebec, *So bili Etruščani Slovani?* (Koper: Založba Lipa, 1984).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, “Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje.” In *Paulus Diaconus: Zgodovina Langobardov - Historia Langobardorum*. (Maribor: Obzorja, 1988), 383.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Jože Kastelic, “So bili Etruščani Slovani?”, *Delo*, 27 December 1984, 15.

Georg G. Iggers, review of *Volksgeschichte: methodische Innovationen un völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft*, by Willi Oberkrome, *History and Theory* 33, no. 3 (October 1994): 395-400.

Matej Bor, with the true name Vladimir Pavšič, was born in a village near the town of Gorizia in what was then the Austrian Littoral. After the rise of the Fascist regime in Italy, his family emigrated to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Bor studied Slavic linguistics at the University of Ljubljana, soon involving himself in the Communist underground. During World War Two, he joined the partisan resistance and became one of the most prominent revolutionary poets of the Slovene resistance. Many of his poems were transformed into extremely famous revolutionary fighting songs. After the war, the “court poet of the Revolution”, as he was dubbed,<sup>166</sup> became a renowned translator of Shakespeare and author of several inspired poetic collections. His undoubtedly most famous poetic achievement after 1945 was the poetry collection “A Wanderer in the Atomic Age” (*Šel je popotnik skozi atomski vek*) from 1958, an allegorical contemplation of the modern wasteland created by pollution and the negative consequences of technological advance.<sup>167</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he was among the founding members of the environmental movement in Slovenia, one of the first and most influential offshoots of the civil society in Slovenia.<sup>168</sup>

During all the Socialist period, Bor was considered as some kind of *enfant terrible* of the Communist regime: always loyal to the Socialist ideal and to the official party line, but often criticizing the smaller and bigger misdeeds of the regime.<sup>169</sup> As the president of the Slovene section of the International P.E.N., he often voiced his support for the intellectuals and writers persecuted by the Yugoslav regime.<sup>170</sup> All this unorthodox behavior was very likely permitted to him due to the legendary status of his war poetry which had become one

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<sup>166</sup> Janko Kos, *Pregled slovenskega slovstva* (Ljubljana: DZS, 2002), 359.

<sup>167</sup> Matej Bor, *A Wanderer Went through the Atom Age* (London: Adam Books, 1959). All the English translation thereafter bear the title “A Wanderer through the Atomic Age”.

<sup>168</sup> Viktor Blažič, *Svinčena leta* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1999).

<sup>169</sup> Ciril Zlobec, *Spomin kot zgodba* (Ljubljana: Prešernova družba, 1998). Among others, he intervened in favour of the writer Igor Torkar, victim of a Stalinist show trial in 1949, in order to enable him to publish his memoirs from a Titoist concentration camp. Cf. Igor Torkar, *Umiranje na obroke* (Zagreb: Globus, 1984), preface by Matej Bor.

<sup>170</sup> Slobodan Stanković, “Mihajlov’s Shadow Over Pen Club Congress in Bled”, available at <http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/300/8/3/text/76-3-230.shtml> (retrieved on May 31st 2008).

of the very symbols of the anti-Fascist resistance movement in Slovenia. For his specific role in the Communist times, he was sometimes dubbed as “the guardian angel of Slovene dissidents”.<sup>171</sup>

In the early 1970s, Bor apparently decided to lift his guardian wing over the two gentlemen who were trying to prove the Slavic origin of the Etruscans – and therefore the Etruscan origin of the Slovenes, although the narrative of the theory was rather ambiguous in this matter. It seems that the two gentlemen inspired Bor’s curiosity and imagination: between 1970 and 1972, he arranged several presentations of their theories at the meetings of the Slovene section of the International P.E.N and even at a linguistic symposium organized by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences of Arts.<sup>172</sup> Apparently, the response was fairly negative in all cases and by the time the two gentlemen started publishing the results of their research, Bor had already distanced himself from their “Etruscanism”.<sup>173</sup> He embarked on a new research, incentivized by Berlot’s and Rebec’s Etruscan theory: the decipherment of the inscriptions on the so-called “Atestine Table”, a collection of ancient Venetic plates kept in the archeological museum of the northern Italian town of Este.

#### ***4.2 Approaching Autochthonism from the Right: The Cases of Jožko Šavli and Ivan Tomažič***

In the meantime, another revival of autochthonism was happening in Vienna. There, a priest named Ivan Tomažič (b. 1919), like Bor native from the so-called Littoral region of

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<sup>171</sup> Viktor Blažič, op. cit.

<sup>172</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, op. cit., 383.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 383-384.

western Slovenia, had established a Slovene cultural center called *Korotan*.<sup>174</sup> Since the early 1980s, the gazette of the cultural home, *Glas Korotana* (“The Voice of the *Korotan*” or “The Voice of Carantania”) published several articles of a largely unknown Slovene professor of economy at a Slovene-language secondary school in the Italian border town of Gorizia (Gorica in Slovene). The professor’s name was Jožko Šavli. He was born in 1943 in the western Slovenian Alpine town of Tolmin, he studied economy at the University of Ljubljana and later obtained a PhD in economic and social sciences at the University of Vienna. Since the late 1970s, Šavli has been an active contributor to local magazines and journals of the Slovene minority in Italy. His political ideals were very close to those propagated by Franc Jeza’s “Group Epsilon of Slovene Academians”, the membership of which was, and has remained up to today, to a large extent unknown. In any case, the style and the content of the group’s manifestos were very akin to Šavli’s writings.

In his articles, Šavli showed a great intellectual sensibility in treating issues from local history and folklore. He focused on issues left aside by the grand narrative of Slovene historiography, dominated on one side by the decrepit ideological phraseology of the official Marxist and semi-Marxist textbook discourse, and by the ethnically prejudiced social history of the Ljubljana School on the other. Šavli’s articles rehabilitated the interest in the traditions and heraldry of the local nobility, in the symbolic practices of the peasant tradition, in the legal history of rural self-government which had remained strong in the regions of his birth.<sup>175</sup> All of it, to be sure, through an identitarian perspective.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> “Korotan” is an archaic Slovene name for the region of Carinthia (“Koroška” in modern Slovene); since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it has mostly although not exclusively been used with solemnly patriotic connotations. It is also the original Slovene name for the early medieval duchy of Carantania.

<sup>175</sup> In the sub-Alpine regions of western Slovenia (the County of Tolmin) the rural municipal self-government remained much of its medieval privileges until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the neighbouring Slovene-inhabited territories of north-eastern Friuli (known in Venetian documents as “Schiavonia Veneta”), the rural village self-government with its own judicial system based on common law was abolished only in 1797 with the Austrian annexation of the Venetian Republic. The tradition of village self-government remained however strong in both regions and its efficiency was admired by Count Franz Stadion (1806-1853), the statesman who promulgated the Gemeinde legislation that granted autonomy to the municipalities in the Austrian Empire in

Šavli complained that mainstream Slovene historians had failed to narrate a comprehensive story of Slovene identity. They failed to dig out and valorize the autochthonous legal and symbolic traditions of the countryside; they neglected the role of the nobility by identifying them as “Germans”, which amounted to foreigners and oppressors. With their ethnicist preconception identifying the Slovene ethnic community with the Slovene speakers, he claimed, they transposed a linguistic model of identity formed in the Romantic period to the Middle Ages, when it made no sense. In this way, they impoverished Slovene history in order to fit their notion of a “nation of serfs”. Consequently, the Slovene historical identity had been hindered. The whole discourse of Slovene identity was flawed because it was based on the idiosyncrasies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “national revivers”: it was Slavacist and folklorist, simplifying and formed from a petit-bourgeois perspective, which means that it was patronizing towards the rural culture and hostile towards the nobility. But worst of all, it was not Slovene-centered, but imported common Slavic symbology and mythology, not bothering to uncover the real local traditions and integrate them into a comprehensive identitarian discourse that would include all the traces of history left by the variegated and millennial historical development of the region.

Šavli’s discourse thus departed radically from the demotic-genealogical treatment of history, as it had been established in both the popular and scientific treatments of Slovene history. He was also one of the first Slovene intellectuals to openly challenge a historical identity based on the inherent presuppositions of the national revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the identification of the Slovene nation with the native speakers of the Slovene language. This identity model, typical for the development of the national consciousnesses in the western

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1849, and who had been governor of the Austrian Littoral from 1841-1847. Sergij Vilfan, *Pravna zgodovina Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1961). Franc Rozman, “Franz Stadion,” in *Enciklopedija Slovenije* (1998).

<sup>176</sup> I am basing my analysis of Šavli’s discourse on several of his the articles published between 1980 and 1985 in the publications *Glas Korotana* and *Koledar*, published by the prestigious Catholic publishing house St. Hermagoras Society (Mohorjeva družba) from Gorizia.

part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, achieved very late – only in the 1850s – the self-evidence characteristic of hegemonic phenomena, but soon developed into an iron paradigm which was difficult to transcend. It is however a symptomatic that the region in which this identity model had the least impact – besides the marginal Prekmurje (also known as Muravidék or Vendvidék) region in the Kingdom of Hungary – was precisely Šavli's homeland, the former Princely County of Gorizia and Gradisca.<sup>177</sup>

The Austrian County of Gorizia and Gradisca was the only non-marginal part of the Slovene Lands where in the fin-de-siècle period one could still find prominent public figures – one can think of the famous art nouveau architect and Max Fabiani (1865-1962) or the mountaineer and author Julius Kugy (1858-1844) – who escaped the logic of national differentiation on linguistic lines. Fabiani, for example, regarded himself as Slovene and even actively participated in the design of Slovene public architecture (such as the regulation plan for Ljubljana and the Slovene “National Home” in Trieste) without seeing any contradiction with his full integration in the Austrian Italian cultural and linguistic milieu. In the 1920s, he was chosen by the Italian authorities to lead the reconstruction of the settlements damaged during World War One, built several monuments for the Italian military and in the 1930s even accepted the nomination by the Fascist authorities as mayor of one of the smaller villages in the region. None of these actions apparently in any way shook his Slovene identity, nor did they endanger – strangely enough – Fabiani's full integration in the Slovene national canon.<sup>178</sup>

Fabiani's case is of course an exceptional one – most likely, anybody who had followed the same actions, would have automatically opted himself out from the Slovene national community –, but it shows the persistence of a different identity logic in the region

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Branko Marušič, *Gli sloveni nel Goriziano dalla fine del medioevo ai giorni nostri* (Udine: Forum, 2005).

<sup>178</sup> Marco Pozzetto, *Maks Fabiani* (Trieste: MGS Press, 1998).

in which Šavli was born and raised. Furthermore, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Slovenes in the County of Gorizia and Gradisca were not subjected to any kind of Germanization process, which means that the German language retained its social role of a *lingua franca* and a means for upward mobility without the danger, always present elsewhere in the Slovene Lands, to lead into assimilation to the German-speaking community. Nor did the divide between Slovene and Italian speakers in the region coincide with a social divide, as was largely the case in Trieste and Istria where it led into an exacerbation of the nationality issue. What is more, the ethnic “other” of the Slovenes in the region were not the proper Italian speakers, but Friulians which maintained their own linguistic and cultural identity.<sup>179</sup>

To put it shortly, Gorizia and Gradisca was the one Slovene region in which the idyllic pastoral image of a tolerant, multicultural and supra-national Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had all the reasons to survive in the collective memory; and interested intellectuals like Šavli, who bothered to check it against the facts, could establish its essential veracity.<sup>180</sup> This was even more the case since this Central European arcadia was followed by a period of brutal Fascist repression of all national and regional particularisms. It was thus all too easy to identify the enemy not so much in the ethnic “other”, as with the centralizing and homogenizing national state which crushed ruthlessly all particular identities in the name of his evil ideological conjectures.

In the region, one of the main defenders of the old multi-national identity of the region was the local lower clergy, until 1929 fully supported by a largely Slovene-Friulian Church hierarchy formed in the spirit of Habsburg legitimism.<sup>181</sup> This Catholic tradition remained alive also under Communist times and in the parts of the region that remained under Italy after World War Two, it was this same Catholic community, aided by the anti-Fascist

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<sup>179</sup> Ferruccio Tassin, *Cultura friulana nel Goriziano* (Udine: Forum, 2003).

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Branko Marušič, *Il vicino come amico realtà o utopia? La convivenza lungo il confine italo-sloveno* (Gorizia: Goriška Mohorjeva družba, 2007).

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Edo Škulj et.al., eds., *Sedejev simpozij v Rimu* (Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 1988).

clergy, that helped to re-establish the cultural and political institutions of the Slovene minority. It was into this *milieu*, in which national identity was understood not so much in terms of nationalism as in terms of national *particularism*, that Šavli socialized himself after the return from Vienna in 1975. It was in the Catholic journals of the Slovene minority of Gorizia that he wrote his first articles, and later in the journal edited by his mentor from Vienna, the priest Ivan Tomažič who was accidentally also a native from the former County of Gorizia and Gradisca.

In his writings, Šavli conformed to the main trend of the historical articles in the Catholic journals of the Slovene minority in Italy for which he wrote: rather than truly historical matters, they consisted mostly of “antiquities” and what in the German cultural sphere is called *Landeskunde*, appreciations of particularities and valorizations of local traditions. These features were however not presented as curiosities but as precious memories from the past that have to be preserved against the homogenizing pressures of the central state and the superficiality of modern popular culture; pieces in the mosaic of a particular identity. Šavli was however clearly aiming higher than the other authors. After all, he had a PhD in social and economic studies from the University of Vienna, had a good knowledge of the Austrian historiographic tradition and was acutely aware of the existence of paradigms which structure the collective perceptions of people. The extent of his ambition can be seen in an article written in 1983, in which he proposed a radical re-interpretation of Slovene national symbology, claiming that the way in which Slovenes had framed their historical identity until then was flawed: between the lines, he proposed nothing less than a turn from an ethnicist to historicist perception of the historical identity; or at least *less* ethnicist and *more* historicist.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Jožko Šavli, “Črni panter: zgodovinski simbol Slovencev,” *Koledar Goriške Mohorjeve družbe* (1983): 82-83.

The article shows Šavli's boldness: he was prepared to challenge the very core of the historical identity of the Slovenes. He was clearly inspired by the Catholic tradition of the localist *Landeskund.*. In the re-interpretation of the national history, he wanted to focus more on the territory than on the ethnic community. His concept was closer to a regional history than to a commemoration of the national ascension. There was however a "catch" in this twist: for Šavli, the *territory itself* was ethnically determined. The history of the region was the history of a *Slovene* region. Many "foreigners" have found their home there, have contributed to its development with their endeavours, have left traces on its identity with their deeds and misdeeds, but the land remained essentially Slovene. The visual structure of the countryside, the customs, the toponomy, the legal habits; everything which can be called culture or civilization was expressing a Slovene spirit. The inner logic of Šavli's conception of historical identity was already autochthonist. His focus on the landscape as a fruit of millennial collaboration of nature and man, on the territory as inseparable from the destiny of the people, on history as an inventory of innumerable traces left on the land, on the traditions, on the memory of the people:<sup>183</sup> all these features reveal a conception of what we can call "territorial autochthonism" or an "ecological" vision of history.

Even if Šavli had decided not to step into explicit autochthonism, his narrative would have still been, so to say, "structurally" autochthonist. The insistence of the official narrative on the break in continuity between the late antiquity and the Middle Ages however directly confronted him with the issue. Confronted with the official narrative which insisted on the settlement as the "birth hour of the nation", he must have felt all the aberration over the notion of the territory becoming nothing more than loot of barbarian plunderers. He also noticed the interesting detail how vividly the mainstream historians tried to describe an event which they in fact had a very difficult time in reconstructing from diverse and

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<sup>183</sup> The best example of this kind of conception of identitarian history is his *Slovenia: discovering a European nation* (Bilje: Humar, 2003).

deficient sources.<sup>184</sup> In Yugoslav history textbooks of the time, much space was dedicated to the reconstruction of “how our ancient forefathers used to live”, which supposedly represented an important information for the overall national identity.<sup>185</sup> According to his own account, all these details arose suspicion in him, precisely because they were fitting perfectly the Slavacist Romantic paradigm of Slovene history.<sup>186</sup>

The first autochthonist theory Šavli encountered was Henrik Tuma's.<sup>187</sup> Not unusually, since Tuma had remained a canonic figure during Communist times due to his Marxism, maximalist Socialism and Yugoslavism. He was also an important source for the local traditions and the toponymy of the Alpine areas of western Slovenia which particularly interested Šavli in his early writings. In Tuma, Šavli discovered an “ecologic” and “territorial” type of autochthonism which largely conformed to his own views. However, these were the only features that the two had in common. Tuma was in fact not only a “Slavacist”,<sup>188</sup> albeit not an ethnically nationalistic one; his territorially and culturally determined autochthonism theory had some similarities with the geographical determinism of the Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927), the founder of Balkanist and Yugoslavist geopolitical discourse which focused on anthropogeography, that is on the ancestral connections between human and physical geography, proving the connections of the mentality of peoples with the geographical features of the land they inhabited.<sup>189</sup> Cvijić's work had an important influence on Fernand Braudel's geographical determinism;<sup>190</sup> we can find some truly “Braudelian” geographical descriptions and reflections in Tuma and one is

<sup>184</sup> Matej Bor et al., *Veneti: naši davni predniki*, op. cit., 16-20.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. I can myself confirm that Šavli's accounts on the emphatic representations of ancient Slavs in history textbooks for elementary schools were exact, at least for the period in the mid 1980s.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>187</sup> I got this information from a private conversation with Mr. Šavli in July 2004.

<sup>188</sup> It's interesting to mention that of Tuma's ten children, eight were given typically Slavic names, six of those completely absent from the Slovene rural traditions.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Jovan Cvijić, *Jedinstvo i psihički tipovi dinarskih južnih Slovena* (Belgrade: Slobodna knjiga, 1999).

<sup>190</sup> See the introductory chapters of the first volume of Fernand Braudel's, *Civilization and capitalism, 15th-18th century* (London: Fontana, 1985), where Cvijić is extensively referred to.

tempted to attribute them to the same source, since Tuma also knew and thoroughly read Cvijić's work, as it is clear from the analysis of Tuma's large library made by the young Slovene scholar Petra Kolenc.<sup>191</sup>

It is clear that Tuma could not have been the one who provided the ideological framework of Šavli's autochthonism. One of the main features of Šavli's writings was in fact his anti-Yugoslavism or, to be more exact, the rejection of the notion of the Slovenes as a Balkan nation; a rejection which had by the time become very widespread in the Slovene public. In this sense, the Scandinavianism of Franc Jeza was much more influential for Šavli's intellectual development. There is no doubt that Šavli knew about Jeza's theories; he is not only quoted in those sections of the first Veneti monograph Šavli wrote.<sup>192</sup> Many of Jeza's suppositions are found in Šavli's writings: the notion that the western Slavs – to whom he included the Slovenes – form a different cultural sphere from the southern and the eastern ones; the rejection of the idea of Slavic kinship as a myth based on the misconception of equating language affinity with the ethnological one; that the Pan-ideologies manipulated science in order to spread such theories on ethnogeneses which suited their imperialistic political purposes. Šavli must have been captivated by Jeza's theory that the Slavic nations form only a linguistic unity, but not an ethnic and ethnographic one, since they descend from different peoples.

The final element which enabled Šavli to formulate a coherent alternative theory on Slovene ethnogenesis however came from completely different sources. He found it in the tradition of Polish autochthonism, especially in the works of the archeologist Józef Kostrzewski (1885-1969), linguist Tadeusz Lehr-Splawiński (1891-1965) and the

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<sup>191</sup> Cvijić's book *Balkansko poluostrvo i južnoslovenske zemlje: osnove antropogeografije* ("The Balkan Peninsula and the Yugoslav Lands: the Bases of Anthropogeography") is found in Tuma's library, as are several works of the anthropologist and ethnologist Niko Zupanič (1876-1961), one of the main Slovene supporters of Cvijić's Balkanic anthropogeography. Petra Kolenc, op. cit.

<sup>192</sup> Matej Bor et. al., *Veneti: naši davni predniki*, op. cit., 20.

anthropologist and linguist Jan Czekanowski (1882-1965).<sup>193</sup> These scholars, especially Kostrzewski, framed their theories in reaction to the German expansionism; they insisted that the Slavs were the autochthonous settlers of the wider northern Baltic area and identified the Baltic Veneti with Slavs. Furthermore, they adopted the theories of the Czech archeologist and paleontologist Josef Ladislav Píč (1847-1911), who saw in the ancient Lusatian culture which emerged around the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the genesis of a proto-Slavic people.

Evidently, this was the piece Šavli was missing in his historical reconstruction. Now everything was finally making sense. He was now armed with a consistent historical narrative, something that all the previous autochthonists had lacked. There was however still not a decisive proof that the ancient language of the Veneti was in fact a Slavic one. I have not been able to reconstruct how the encounter between Jožko Šavli and the Matej Bor happened. Slovenia is however a small nation and to an attentive coordinator, skilled in social networking as was Ivan Tomažič – the director of the Slovene home in Vienna who had been in the meantime completely persuaded by Šavli's autochthonism – nothing which happens in the public sphere can remain hidden. Very probably it was the publishing of Berlot's and Rebec's "Etruscan" book in 1984 that put in motion the whole thing. In any case, by 1985 Bor, Šavli and Tomažič were already a team ready to publish a sensational book. In later interviews they emphasized that they had come to their conclusions separately. In reality, Bor provided its final and most sensational part, the decipherment of the Atestine Tables; the theory that put his discovery in the right place, the historical narrative that gave it a meaning and the discourse that placed it in the "proper place" in history was all the product of the effort of Jožko Šavli.

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<sup>193</sup> Matej Bor et. al., *Veneti: naši davni predniki*, 91-92.

### 4.3 The Venetic Theory

The content of the Venetic theory was rather simple. The proofs supporting it were quite easily rejected by the scholars. Indeed, the historical narrative of the theory was coherent and logic, but was far from being complex. An Italian scholar who reacted to it the 1990s, was perplexed by the fact that in Slovenia the discussions around it had been going on for a decade: he could not understand how it was possible to debate so long about a theory “that can be explained in two minutes and rejected in one”.<sup>194</sup> There is indeed much truth in this verdict. The success of the theory cannot be understood from itself, but only through the insight on the discursive breakthrough it achieved. In its turn, this breakthrough could have difficultly be appreciated from the debate lifted by the theory – which was nothing more than a repetitive and rather uninteresting dialogue of the deaf –: it can be understood only by taking into account the prevailing trends and traditions in the conceptualization of Slovene identity. To someone unacquainted with this tradition, the whole debate must have sounded absurd.

Three layers can be identified in the Venetic theory. All of them are simple in their content, but carry a powerful identitarian message. Only the first two are innovative and represent a challenge to the established historiography in their content; the last one is essentially only a shift in the narrative. The first layer is what can be called Venetic theory proper; the second one is represented by its expansion in the so-called “substratum theory”; the last layer is represented by the myth of Carantanian continuity. The gradual shift of the

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<sup>194</sup> Tummolo, Manlio. *L'arrivo degli sloveni nelle Venezie. Due miti in discussione*. (Udine: Edizioni Goliardiche, 1995), 5. He nevertheless wrote a book about it: but the Venetic theory was just a pretext, the real “enemy” of the author, a hard-core Italian cultural and anti-ethnicist nationalist of the old school, was the traditional Slovene historiography and its treaty of the “Slovene national question” in Italy. Despite his obvious bias, the statement is quite felicitous.

focus from the first layer to the others was a sign of the growing influence of the views of one person in the Venetic movement: Jožko Šavli.

The Venetic theory claims that the ethnogenesis of the Slavic peoples started in the Lusatian culture in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>195</sup> Their name was *Sloveneti* which later evolved in the ethonyms \**Sloventi*, *Slovinci* (Slovenes) and *Sloveni*, *Slovani* (Slavs). These proto-Slavs were also the bearers of the urnfield culture which at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century spread throughout Central Europe and into the Apennine Peninsula; with the spread of the culture, the people also spread their Slavic language. In some regions, such as in central Italy, they got assimilated or merged into other indigenous people in new ethnicities, such as the Etruscans. In the ancient Greek language, where the phonetic combination *-slo-* was unknown, they were called simply as *Venetoi* or *Enetoi*, an ethonym that would later enter also the Latin tradition and from there into the Germanic designation for their eastern neighbours: *Wende*, or *Winde* (adj. *windisch*), a name that remained in use for the Slovenes until the very eve of the Slovene national revival, when the Slovene linguists invented the German neologisms *Slowenen* and *slowenisch*.

Some waves of the *Sloveneti* reached also the coast of the Atlantic, where they left their ethonym *Venetes* would later be recalled in Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, the lower

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<sup>195</sup> I base my reconstruction of the Venetic theory on the quoted book by Matej Bor, Jožko Šavli and Ivan Tomažič, as well as on several books and booklets published thereafter. All of them were edited by Ivan Tomažič: *Z Veneti v novi čas* (Vienna - Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 1990); *Etruščani in Veneti* (Vienna - Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 1995); *Razstava Veneti na Slovenskem* (Vienna: Ivan Tomažič, 1998); *Slovinci. Kdo smo? Od kod prihajamo in odkod izviramo?* (Vienna - Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 1999); *V nova slovenska obzorja z Veneti v Evropi 2000* (Vienna - Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 2000); *Veneti na Slovenskem* (Škofja Loka: Loški muzej, 2003). *Slovenske korenine* (Ljubljana: Ivan Tomažič, 2003). *Bog živi deželo pod Triglavom* (Vienna: Ivan Tomažič, 2007). Other books defending the theory which I consulted in my research include Leopold Verbovšek, *Komu (ni)smo tujci?* (Ljubljana: Jutro, 1995); Lucijan Vuga, *Jantarska pot: odgrinjanje tančic z našedavne preteklosti* (Bilje: Založba Humar, 2000); Lucijan Vuga, *Davnina govori: Slovenci že od kamene dobe na sedanjih ozemljih. Teorija kontinuitete* (ova Gorica: Založba Branko, 2003); Beti Jarc, ed., *Zbornik o Venetih* (Ljubljana: Slovenian World Congress, 2003); Leopold Sever, *Iskal sem prednamce : dokazi in razmišljanje o starožitnosti Slovencev na dolenskem zahodu* (Turjak: Samozaložba, 2003); Lucijan Vuga, *Megalitski jeziki* (Ljubljana: Revija SRP, 2004); Leopold Verbovšek, *Danes, iz včeraj za jutri* (Ljubljana: Založba Jutro, 2004); Lucijan Vuga, *Prah preteklosti* (Ljubljana: Revija SRP, 2005); Ivo Petkovšek, *Belinov kodeks* (Ljubljana: Založba Jutro, 2005); Mirko Škrbin, *Etruščani so bili Slovani* (Nova Gorica: Mirko Škrbin, 2005); Leopold Verbovšek, *Sto kamenčkov za nov slovenski mozaik* (Ljubljana: L.V., 2008).

Danube in today's Bulgaria and the Pontus where some ancient sources also recall the Venetic people. The bulk of their settlement area was however Central Europe: the Venetic homeland extended from Northern Italy, the Swiss Alps throughout southern and eastern Germany, Slovenia, Austria, the western Pannonian plain including the modern region of Slavonia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. They also settled the central regions of modern Sweden which explains the resemblances between the Slovene and Scandinavian culture which had been so well and prophetically pointed out by the late Franc Jeza. To the present day, the name of the region bears the Slovene name – Svealand – as distinct from the southern Götaland and the northern Norrland.

It was the Veneti that established the Hallstatt culture which flourished until the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and was transmitted also to the neighbouring Celts. Soon afterwards, the Celtic expansion shrunk the territory of the Veneti, especially in the western parts of the Po plain, in modern Swabia and in the western Swiss Alps. The Venetologists however claimed that the extent of the Celtic colonization had been overestimated by the scholarship: many populations ascribed to the Celts (such as the Carni or the Pannonians) were in fact of Venetic ethnicity although they had accepted the Celtic technological innovations. In many other regions, where the Celts are explicitly mentioned, one had to understand, they maintained, that the Celts only represented the upper layers of the society, while the peasant substratum remained the same, Slo-venetic. Such was the case of the Noricum realm in the Eastern Alps which was in fact a Venetic polity which maintained a direct continuity with the later Carantanian principality. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. several centers of Venetic culture existed: the northern Italian Venetia, Noricum, Reatia in the Swiss Alps and the Tyrol, Pannonia and Vindelicia in modern southern Bavaria. Further to the north, the Veneti (Slo-veneti or Slovenes) inhabited the settlement areas of modern west Slavic languages,

while the Ventic island in present-day Sweden was probably already linguistically Germanized.

Not surprisingly, the mentioned territories of Venetic settlement corresponded with the areas in which Slavic toponyms, scrupulously collected already from the previous generations of autochthonists, were to be found. More importantly however, the same territory bore witness of their ancient settlers also in another sense: the common landscape, the common folk traditions, the common way of life and mentality, the same attitude to the world, the same legal traditions of small rural municipal self-government, the common mythology, even the common veneration of the linden tree (as opposed to the Germanic oak) was an additional proof that the population infra-structure had remained the same through the ages, although many of the peoples had in the meantime accepted a different language.

#### **4.4. The Continuity Theory**

From this first phase of the Venetic theory the evolution into a second phase, dominated what I call the “substratum theory” was almost natural. Indeed, I prefer to refer to “layers” rather than “phases” of Venetic discourse precisely because they represent different features of the same inherent logic, although some of them were fully articulated in a later period.<sup>196</sup> The complete articulation of the substratum theory came relatively late, only with

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<sup>196</sup> In this sense, another feature of the Venetic discourse might be mentioned, namely the scattered nature of the “Venetic” books. In most of them, the argument is not presented in an integral narrative flow, but is presented in fragments which reveal the comprehensive picture only through a gradual and attentive reading. This feature, which one would expect to hinder the reception of the books in a wider audience, is in fact very effective. It enables, so to say, the condensation of the discourse from the very beginning. The transliterations of ancient inscription, the assertion of the cultural affinity of the populations in Central Europe, the imagery of pre-Roman artifacts, cartographical reconstructions of settlement areas, the philippics against the “pan-Germanist” and “pan-Slavist” bias of the official sciences, sarcasm directed against the Romantic conjectures,

the book “Etruscans and Veneti” (*Etruščani in Veneti*) which was published only in 1995 and roused the last massive wave of the Venetic controversy.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, it made manifest an underlying latent conviction present already in the early stages. According to the substratum theory, the Veneti who colonized the Central European area in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. represented only a rather thin layer of *Kulturträgers*. The populations that accepted the Slavic language were of what Šavli called Afro-European descent.<sup>198</sup> They belonged to the same stock of population as the ancient inhabitants of northern Africa and the Middle East who had lived in most of Europe prior to the arrival of the Indo-Europeans. According to Šavli, their foremost cultural expression was the linear pottery culture. They engaged in a nonviolent way of life, contrary to the violent Indo-Europeans which arrived later and whose cultural expression was the corded ware culture, alternatively characterized with what Šavli called “the eloquent name”<sup>199</sup> of battle axe culture.

The substratum theory was a highly sophisticated, intelligent and handy way to solve what was a major inconsistency of the original Venetic theory. The initial theory had in fact only one problem, besides the fact that it was wrong. The problem was in what one might call the “parallax” between its implicit ideological message – the *differentia specifica* of the Slovenes in regard to other South Slavs – and the unfortunate fact that the theory in no way explained the reasons for such a difference. Nor it explained the genesis of the Slavs in general or reasons for the affinity of the South Slavic languages. With the substratum theory, this open issue was now solved. According to the substratum innovation, the proto-

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assertion of national pride, appeals for the protection of the cultural heritage, attacks against the serfdom myth: all these otherwise divergent elements are moulded together conveying an immediate and direct image of the discourse. The Venetic discourse is very honest in this sense; it immediately shows its cards to the reader, as if it was to say: “Here is where we stand. Accept us if you want, otherwise reject us.”

<sup>197</sup> Base my analysis on the corpus of newspaper and journal articles I identified two major waves of Venetic controversy: the first one happened immediately after the publication of the first book and reached its height in the years 1989 and 1990. The second one was around the year 1995 and 1996. Interestingly, the great majority of monographs advocating the theory was published only after the controversy had subsided.

<sup>198</sup> Jožko Šavli, “Veneti in vprašanje podstati,” in *Etruščani in Veneti*, Ivan Tomažič, ed. (Vienna: Editiones Veneti, 1995), 85.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Slavs of the Lusatian culture that moved eastwards and became the ancestors of modern eastern and southern Slavs (but not of Slovenes, of course) continued their developed in the sense of the battle axe culture. The Lusatian proto-Slavs that settled Central Europe, on the other hand, settled the Afro-European substratum represented by the linear pottery culture. Significantly, only the latter were traditionally referred to as Veneti.<sup>200</sup>

According to the substratum theory, the Veneti were in reality a population whose material and spiritual culture was pre-Indo-European and could be seen as parallel to the Basque one. Contrary to the bellicose Indo-Europeans, the Veneti were a peace-loving people, whose social structure was not based on the collectivism of tribal unity, but on the settled and individualized culture of family nuclei. In the following quotes we can see how Šavli juxtaposes the two social models:

The tribal organization among nations with a predominantly Indo-European character reveals their shepherd origins from the steppes, for example the large family which until the 19<sup>th</sup> century maintained itself in the Balkans under the name of *zadruga*. A similar example is the Celtic and especially the Germanic *sipa* which existed until the Middle Ages. The latter is not based any more on a real, but also on an imagined blood i.e. familiar bond. An example of such a community is the Roman **familia** and the Greek **ergasterion** which were forms of a productional family. In these forms of large families the authority of the patriarch is almost total (**patria potestas**). The medieval familia under the authority of the feudal lord is also a reflection of the Roman productional family.

In this case [the case of the Veneti], the substratum became the element which determined the national character. The basis of the national community is the **family**, in which the father and the mother are the ones who decide. [...] The family with its dwelling and with its estate (the fields, etc.) forms a legal institution known under the concept of **house**. The house has its own

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<sup>200</sup> The theory is essentially explained between pages 81 and 112 of the above quoted monograph.

name, representing an institution which is maintained even if another family moves in. A group of houses forms a **village** [vas], which etymologically means community.<sup>201</sup>

The last image carries an implicit, but very clear identitarian message and its connotation cannot be overlooked by anyone who is familiar with the Slovene rural traditions. In most of rural Slovenia, in fact, the tradition of house names as ascribed by Šavli to the pre-Indo-European stratum has survived until the present days. It is also not the case that the same tradition of house names is present in the Basque countries where it used to function, unlike in the Slovene case, as a legally sanctioned and integrated system of social organization until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. After its demise in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Basque *etxea* (house or home) has emerged as a major *topos* in the Basque identity discourse. In order to see what the type of discourse framed around the *etxea* I am referring to, let me quote a short passage from the marvelous poem *Nire aitaren etxea* (The House of My Father) written in 1963 by the foremost Basque left-nationalist poet Gabriel Aresti (1933-1975), whose verses have become one of the most known expressions of modern Basque nationalism:

I shall defend the house of my father.

Against wolves, against drought,

Against usury, against the Justice,

I shall defend the house of my father.

[...]

They will take away my weapons

And with my hands I shall defend

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<sup>201</sup> Jožko Šavli, op. cit., 100.

The house of my father;  
They will cut off my hands  
And with my arms I shall defend  
The house of my father;  
[...]  
I shall die, my soul will be lost,  
My descendance will be lost,  
But the house of my father  
Will remain standing.<sup>202</sup>

If I have quoted the above example is because I believe that Šavli was consciously resorting to the Basque identitarian frame as a possible model for his new Slovene autochthonism. In the book “Slovenes. Who Are We? Where are Our Origins?” written by Šavli’s close collaborator Ivan Tomažič as a reflection on Slovene identity, an entire chapter is dedicated to the Basques of whom the author writes:

According to the opinion of researchers, the Basques have existed as a specific national community for at least 10,000 years. Not only does their language have many words in common with Slovenes [which are of course, the author explains, the legacy of a common pre-Indo-European origin], they also share many common character features and even customs, such as very similar carnival customs or the traditional sawing contests.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Translated by Toni Strubell. Retrieved from <http://www.basquepoetry.net/poemak-i/0004.htm> (accessed June 1st 2008).

<sup>203</sup> Ivan Tomažič, *Slovinci. Kdo smo? Od kdaj in odkod izvirmo?* (Vienna-Ljubljana: Editiones Veneti, 1999), 22.

It is not surprising that the authors of an autochthonist discourse would resort to the probably most autochthonist of all identity discourses in Europe, the modern Basque one. This attempt to “Basquisize” the Slovene identity has however also another, quite evident implication. The Basque discourse of national identity is in fact, quite logically, a self-centered one, focused on the ancient history of a nation with no ethnic or linguistic affiliation. This feature must have been extremely appealing to Šavli who used autochthonism as an aim of breaking the Slavic frame of Slovene identity. To be sure, he did not aim at tearing down the notion of kinship between Slovenes and the western Slavs (and, to a certain extent, with the Croats); he did however want to re-frame it in terms of “culture” rather than language or blood, expanding it to the whole Central European area, as it can be seen from the continuation of his previous quote:

The house in the sense of a family fireside, to which we also have an emotional relationship, is called **home**. The land in which the members of its people have their homes, is the **homeland**. The origin of this word is completely different from the concept of fatherland and it is clearly a legacy of the matriarchal principle from the period of the linear pottery culture and from the Veneti. It is therefore not a coincidence that the concept has maintained itself in the former Venetic space, among Slovenes, Czechs, and the Sorbs of Lusatia. But also, let us not forget, among the Germans as **Heimat** as opposed to the Germanic Vaterland. Most of the contemporary German territory was in fact inhabited by the Veneti and their substratum has maintained itself in the rural population.<sup>204</sup>

The above quote shows the unsustainable conjectures of the Venetologists in terms of historical reconstructions. The academic establishment that reacted to the theory focused itself only on the preposterous conjectures of the contents, but failed to see the clear discursive shift in such kind of identitarian framing. It is in fact more than obvious that in

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<sup>204</sup> Jožko Šavli, op. Cit., 100.

this case we are dealing with one might call a “post-modern” turn in the nationalist discourse. Let us look at two other examples from the same book: the first one is the assertion of gender equality, the other one shows a clear shift from ethnicism to territoriality:

The legal equality of women in the [west Slavic] tribal law also comes from the Venetic substratum; differently from the Indo-European tribal organization which is based on patriarchal authority. The Slovene legal system in Carantania, known as **institutio Sclavenica**, enabled the women to legal and administrative freedom. It was on the bases of this legal tradition that the countess Wichburga was able to establish the first monastery in Carinthia in 1010. In 1275, the authors of the *Sachsenspiegel* wrote this about for the Polabian Wends (III 73, 53): “Man sagt, dasz alle Wendinen vri sind.” (They say that all Wend women are free). A document from 1136 [...] states about a woman named Gothelindis: “she is free, as it is the habit among the Slavs” (*sicut Sclavi solent esse*).<sup>205</sup>

The legacy of the linear pottery culture is certainly also a higher stage of social organization than the tribal one: first, there is the **country** [dežela] (from “držela”– a territory where the population holds together) and then the wider area of community, the **state** [država] as it is hinted by the suffix **-ava** denoting an enlargement. In this sense, one cannot in any way agree with the [Slovene] linguist Bezljaj who wrote in his etymological dictionary that the Slovenes borrowed the word “state” (first mentioned as *derschaua*) from other Slavic languages in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This is yet another case of submission to the Belgrade centralism that terrorized Slovene science forcing the Yugoslavist ideology upon it; an ideology that could not allow admitting the Slovenes had their own statehood before the Serbs. The latter know neither the

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 101.

concept of state nor province nor country in their language, to them everything is just “zemalja” [land, soil].<sup>206</sup>

Needless to say that Šavli’s etymologies were flawed, although they might sound convincing to inexperienced ears. The most interesting in the above quoted passage is again the discourse. I do not mean so much the philippic against the Belgrade centralism as the concept of statehood that Šavli is trying to frame. This concept represents in fact the third layer of the Venetic theory, the one which is most centered on a narrative shift rather than a shift in content. As we have seen from the quotes above, Šavli insisted on a specific Slovene legal tradition whose features had been inherited already from pre Indo-European times. This legal tradition, he claimed, had remained alive in two senses: first, as the legal framework of the rural communities, many of which have maintained their self-government long into the Middle Ages and in some cases – as in Šavli’s native region – until the very dawn of the modern state;<sup>207</sup> second, as the legal continuity of the medieval Slavic principality of Carantania.

#### ***4.5. The Attempt of a Historical Turn in the National Identity and the Clash with the Official Narrative***

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>207</sup> The existence of such communities has in fact been documented by historians, especially in the mountainous areas of western and northern-western Slovenia. It is however unlikely that they had any direct continuity with the early medieval Slavic self-governing communities, although some parallels, mostly in symbolism and terminology, suggest that some elements of older traditions have been incorporated into their structure. Cf. Sergij Vilfan, op. cit. Bogo Grafenauer, *Samouprava Beneške Slovenije - The Autonomy of Venetian Slovenia* (Ljubljana-Koper-Trieste: Cankarjeva založba- Primorski tisk- Založništvo tržaškega tiska, 1975). Any continuity with pre-historic times is of course pure fiction.

Proving the legal legacy of Carantania has undoubtedly been one of Jožko Šavli's major elements in his life project of re-framing the Slovene historical identity. Already in the first book on the Veneti, he had claimed that the Medieval Slavic principality of Carantania, seen since the Enlightenment as the first Slovene state, was in reality nothing less than the re-emergence of the old Venetian Noricum kingdom from the ruins of the Roman Empire on renewed bases. In 1990, he published a book entitled "The Slovene State of Carantania. *Institutio Sclavenica*."<sup>208</sup> The book was a very clever attempt of historiographical re-interpretation. Based on several mentions from the high Middle Ages and the early modern period, Šavli wanted to show how the Slavic – *Slovene*, as he wrote – principality of Carantania naturally evolved in the feudal Duchy of Carinthia, from which the other Slovene historical provinces, namely Carniola and Styria, had evolved. This was of course something which was on the factual level recognized by the historiography. The very Bogo Grafenauer, the "doyen" of the Ljubljana School of Historiography, whom Šavli framed as his main ideological opponent, had put many efforts in order to prove this fact against the German nationalist historiography trying to obfuscate it.<sup>209</sup> The question at stake were however not the facts, but the identity discourse.

With some exceptions (one of whom was the already mentioned Josip Mal), the classical Slovene historiographical tradition was based on an implicit narrative in which the "freedom of the Slovenes" had been lost in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century with the dismantling of the Slavic tribal asset of Carantania, after a failed attempt of anti-Frankish rebellion. Of course, many traditions of the Slavic principality were incorporated in the new feudal duchy, among them the uninterrupted tradition of the ritual usage of Slovene language in several legal and public ceremonies in the Middle Ages, the assertion of the Slovene legal character of

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<sup>208</sup> Jožko Šavli, *Slovenska država Karantanija: institutio Sclavenica* (Vienna- Ljubljana- Koper: Editiones Veneti- Založba Karantanija- Založba Lipa, 1990).

<sup>209</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, *Karantanija: izbrane razprave in članki* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2000).

Carinthia by the local nobility in the early modern period, etc.;<sup>210</sup> The prevalent narrative was however structured around the serfdom myth: the notion that the Slovenes had in some sense participated to a common feudal history was alien to it.

Šavli, on the other side, rejected such a vision of history. For him, the Middle Ages were a common historical legacy in which “only one land existed, one state, without the German and the Slovene element coming in contrast”.<sup>211</sup> The trick, so to say, was that Šavli identified this common land with the Slovene tradition, according to the same logic of his substratum theory: although the nobility and the upper strata of the society belonged to the German cultural area, the “infrastructure” of the territory were Slovene: *ergo*, the whole history of the region belongs to the Slovene historical identity. One can barely overemphasize the rupture such a conception of historical identity brought to the classical frame of Slovene identity. To a great surprise of the academic establishment, such a conception of history started gaining ground at an extremely high pace.

In 1983, when he was still an anonymous contributor to Slovene Catholic journals in Italy and Austria, Šavli had published an article in which he introduced a new symbol and boldly dubbed it “the historical symbol of Slovenes”.<sup>212</sup> The symbol, which nobody had ever seen before, was a black panther on a silver shield: an image recognized today by every Slovene, although only a handful know what is its genesis. In his study of old medieval documents in search of confirmations for the Slovene legal character of the Carantanian/Carinthian polity, Šavli came increasingly came across the symbol of the black panther which was featured in the coats of arms of several high medieval noble families from the

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<sup>210</sup> As already mentioned, all these elements had been already fully studied by Slovene historians before. See the reference above and Sergij Vilfan, *Pravna zgodovina Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1961).

<sup>211</sup> The statement is taken from an interview for the popular liberal conservative political magazine *Mag*, September 1999, 43.

<sup>212</sup> <sup>212</sup> Jožko Šavli, “Črni panter: zgodovinski simbol Slovencev,” *Koledar Goriške Mohorjeve družbe* (1983): 82-83.

Carinthian space. He thus realized that the symbol had to be connected to the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, which vaguely mentioned a dispute in which the Styrian duke was prohibited to use the black panther on a silver shield as it was the prerogative of the Carinthian dukes.<sup>213</sup> Šavli persevered in his search and found numerous other mentions of the symbol, including one by Wolfram von Eschenbach.<sup>214</sup> Following the descriptions and images he found in the documents, he himself created a reconstruction of how the original design, which he identified with the symbolic legacy of the early Carolingian Duchy of Carantania, could have looked like. The result was the symbol of the black panther which he presented in the article.

To be sure, Šavli never claimed that the black panther was the coat of arms of Carantania. He only claimed that it was part of the symbolic legacy of early Carantania and as such the only appropriate symbol for representing the Slovene identity. The success of the design –which Šavli openly admitted it was a reconstruction and not a discovery – was enormous. By 1990, it had become a widely recognized and used symbol. In the process of Slovene secession from Yugoslavia, several very serious proposals were advanced to make it the coat of arms of Slovenia. One of the most serious proposals in this sense was made in June 1990 by the youth section of the Slovenian Democratic Union, a national liberal party which at the time controlled the key positions in the Slovenian Government. Not more than two weeks later, the Milko Kos Historical Institute of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts which was then the most representative institution of Slovene historiography, published a short communiqué which stated:

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<sup>213</sup> Jožko Šavli, *Slovenska znamenja* (Gorizia-Bilje: Založba Humar, 1994), 131.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

We cannot oppose the initiative [of the Young Initiative of the Slovenian Democratic Union], but we condemn the abuse of historical facts which are being wrongly and arbitrarily interpreted. We are therefore surprised by the editorial policy of the media, which devoted so much time and space to their argumentations. By doing so, they have only brought confusion among the people, especially because they propose to accept as a Slovene national symbol colours and a figure of an animal creature which had traditionally been, until 1918 and still during World War Two, symbols of a power which was among the carriers of Germanization and fight against Slovene unity and freedom. Nothing of this has any link with Carantania.<sup>215</sup>

The document was signed by the manager of the Institute Stane Granda, one of its senior councilors Božo Otoperc, and – Bogo Grafenauer, president of the Scientific board of the institute. How could “the figure of an animal creature” which had been designed for the first time in 1983 have served as a “symbols of a power which was among the carriers of Germanization and fight against Slovene unity and freedom” was not explained by the gentlemen. The communiqué was nothing more than a nervous and rather stupid reaction of an otherwise very subtle and intelligent intellectual elite of historians. It was a reaction against the re-framing of Slovene national consciousness. When provoked, the historical establishment revealed the implicit conviction in all their writings: framing a historicist perspective of Slovene identity, which would incorporate any kind of feudal symbology, was tantamount to national treason. An image symbolizing a medieval political community equaled a symbol of Germanization in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The German yoke of the Middle Ages was nothing but an *umbra futurorum* of the Nazi genocide policies.

At the end of 1987, the historian Bogo Grafenauer published a volume of his early political writings, written in the years 1938 and 1939 for a Christian left and nationalist

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<sup>215</sup> Izjava Zgodovinskega inštituta Milka Kosa ob pobudah za nove slovenske simbole, n. 11-128/90 (21<sup>st</sup> June 1990).

journal.<sup>216</sup> The title of the volume had a significant title: “The Slovene National Question and the Slovene Historical Position”. In the preface, the eminent historian expressed the wish that his reflections formulated in the difficult historical hour at the eve of World War Two could in some way serve as an inspiration for the younger generation of Slovenes, faced with new uncertainties at the horizon.<sup>217</sup> In the volume, which he had himself edited and which was published by a publishing house of which he was the chief editor, an article with a very strange paragraph appeared:

The position of the German national minority in Slovenia is in many aspects similar to the position of the Jews in Germany before 1933. In both cases the essence of the problem is that a foreign moneyed stratum is living on the account of the property of the native people; the only difference is that the verdict against the Germans must be even more severe. The current German treatment of the Jews [the article was originally published in June 1939] is the most evident proof of how unjustifiable the German claims [to be authorized to dominate over Slovenia] are.<sup>218</sup>

I do not want to claim that Grafenauer’s decision to re-publish such a terribly infelicitous analogy, which he could have easily omitted, testifies to his raucous nationalism or even anti-Semitism; my point is rather different. I claim that the very mental paradigm which made this preposterous statement meaningful in 1939, had vanished in 1987. The set of interconnected self-evidences according to which the internal logic of Grafenauer’s analogy was structured had collapsed in the meantime. In the 1980s, such a statement could not make sense to anybody anymore. Grafenauer’s belief that historical reflections structured according to such a mentality could serve as an inspiration for political reflection

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<sup>216</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, *Slovensko narodno vprašanje in slovenski zgodovinski položaj* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1987).

<sup>217</sup> 1987 was of course the year in which Milošević rose to power.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

to anyone in 1987 was the symptom of his inability to sense the paradigm shifts in Slovene collective identity that had occurred in the previous decades. He was not alone. Most of the historiographic academic community failed to realize that a deep structural change in Slovene identity had taken place and that the phenomenon they were fighting against in the same years – the Venetic theory – played a crucial role in this process.

#### **4.6 The “Cultural Turn” of the Venetic Theory**

In 1999 Jožko Šavli published a book entitled “Slovene Saints”. The very title of the book was highly provocative, challenging the narrative according to which the first Slovene saint was the 19<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Maribor Anton Martin Slomšek (1800-1862) who was to be beatified by John Paul II. the very same year. In an interview for a popular right-liberal weekly magazine shortly after the publication of the book, Šavli was asked to explain the title of his book, which was clearly in contradiction with the official celebrations preceding the beatification of the “first Slovene saint”. He answered:

This is what I have been bothered with for quite some time now. We actually already had a recognized saint, the missionary and auxiliary bishop at the first church at Maria Saal in Carinthia, St. Modest, who was of Irish descent but was considered the apostle of Carantania, thus a Slovene saint. We cannot just accept the notion that somebody “is ours” only if he is of Slovene stock and blood, which was still the case in the last century, in the Romantic era. We have to make a historical assessment in order to establish who had an important role in our land and was connected to Slovene history in a specific way, in this case through Christianization. From this point of view St. Modest was the first Slovene saint.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Horvat, Jože. “Jožko Šavli – intervju.” *Mag*, September 1999, 41.

In the same interview the journalist brought up Šavli's role in the Venetic controversy asking:

What about the theory of the Venetic origin of Slovenes that stirred up many polemics some years ago? Where it is now? It seems it has retrieved from public attention.<sup>220</sup>

Šavli's answer was somehow surprising:

I don't think that was a scientific, but an ideological discussion. It has been claimed that by ancestry and blood we belong to the South Slavs and to the Balkans; already the historian Kos stated somewhere that until the 9<sup>th</sup> century we weren't any different from our "brothers" in the area. According my research, which is of inter-disciplinary nature, we has always been a differentiation among us, many things suggest that we are dealing with two worlds; nothing suggests that the Slovenes started differentiating from some southern Balkanic sphere only in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. I think, however, that we will continue to have vivid discussions about it. There has to be an open debate about the question of our national roots instead of covering the whole issue with ideological and political labels and putting an end to any discussion.<sup>221</sup>

The above quotes are very revealing, both Šavli's reflection on the issue of "taxonomy" in the canonization of national figures and the smart remarks with which he pushed the Venetic theory in the background. They confirm that Jožko Šavli had used autochthonism as a means to assert what had arguably been his main goal since the very beginning: the replacement of an ethnicist model of identity based on natural right and supported by an exclusivit demotic-genealogical treatment of history with one based on

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

historic rights and supported by an incorporative, territorial and historicistic vision of the past. In the core of Šavli's neo-conservative historical re-interpretation was the myth of Carantanian continuity, symbolically expressed by the symbol of the black panther which in the 1990s emerged as one of the most popular images representing Slovene identity.

This hijacking of autochthonism was also possible because of the advanced age and the early death of the other column of the Venetic theory, Matej Bor, whose poetically inspired linguistic interpretations of the Atestine Tables gave the theory its initial resonance. Bor's autochthonism was in fact very much linked to the Romantic tradition of Trstenjak and his pendants. After his death, Šavli published a touching eulogy of his late collaborator where he, as a true intellectual gentleman, also acknowledged the differences between their respective views:

Since Slavdom still meant a lot to him, he did not accept my discoveries on the unbroken continuity of Slovene statehood from Carantania through Austria until our times. [...] His historical image of Austria was that of a German entity in the sense of the modern conception of nation as a linguistic community. He understood that the nation is also a historical, legal, cultural and economic community; but to him, as a Slavist, such an image of the nation was never really able to capture his imagination. He thought that such a conception of nation, and consequently the perception of the Slovene historical statehood, could never prevail. In the same way he imagined the Veneti, our ancestors. As an ancient Slav people. I could not agree with this, insisting that the Veneti were not so much a linguistic group as they were a cultural one, and that their ancient culture, despite the Slavic language, has not had any continuation in the East and South Slavs, but only in the West Slavs, as well as in about two thirds of modern German speakers and in a large proportion of Italian speakers. All Central Europe, with its ancestral countryside culture, still reveals itself as the homeland on the ancient Veneti and their culture. This is manifested in the system of village self-government, the distribution of the fields, in old customs – from carnival masks to maypoles etc. – regardless the linguistic

divides. Already Cankar noticed that in his culture, a Slovene is much closer to a Tyrolean than to a South Slav...<sup>222</sup>

It has to be however emphasized that this conceptual difference between Bor and Šavli remained hidden throughout the Venetic controversy. Publicly, Bor completely conformed to the Venetic discourse framed by Šavli, which was also something he had been reproached by Bogo Grafenauer:

It is even more puzzling to me how could have Bor become involved in these kinds of theories. [...] Bor of course insists that the Veneti were Slavs and even uses this claim as a defence against my reproof that he has implicated himself in theories which clearly dislike the historical and ethnical closeness [of the Slovenes] with other South Slavs [...]. But at the same time he directly and explicitly defends Šavli's *argumentation and his conceptions* (the first is still somehow compatible with Bor's defence against my reproaches, but not the second). It is however true that former theories on Slovene autochthonism (Venetic and others) in the past have always been made in the name of all South Slavs and even wider, not only in the name of Slovenes, arguing their separate arrival in our present homeland. This difference is as little accidental as is the emergence of similar theories among other South Slavic nations in recent times. But as far as I know, nowhere else do similar historiographical eccentricities have such a wide echo as among the Slovenes. Here, I can really not understand why and to what end.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Ivan Tomažič, ed., *Etruščani in Veneti*, op. cit., 148-149. The reference in the last sentence is to the Slovene writer, essayist and political activist Ivan Cankar (1876-1918) who in a lecture delivered 1913 voiced his full support for the project of South Slav political unification, but added: "For me, any Yugoslav question in the cultural or even linguistic sense does not exist at all. Maybe it used to exist, but it was solved when the South Slav tribe split into four nations with four completely autonomous cultural lives. In blood we are brothers, in language at least cousins – but in culture which is the fruit of a centuries-long separate education we are much more different from one another than our peasant from Upper Carniola is to his counterpart from Tyrol, or our vinedresser from Gorizia to his Friulian neighbor." Ivan Cankar, "Slovenci in Jugoslovani," in *Ivan Cankar: Bela krizantema. Kritični in polemčni spisi*, ed. Boris Merhar (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1966), 154.

<sup>223</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, "Ob tisočtristoletnici slovanske naselitve na današnje slovensko narodnostno ozemlje," 421.

I do not think that Grafenauer's perplexities expressed in the last quote above should be taken as a rhetorical device; I believe they were genuine. It was however symptomatic and, to a certain extent, part of the problem. The "ecological" implications of Venetic autochthonism were in fact so pronounced that it is hardly possible to overlook them, as is its emphasis on the "historical legacy" as a key element of the national consciousness. And yet they have been overlooked by the academic establishment, until the very present day. I tend to believe that they nevertheless represent one of the essential keys for the understanding of the success of the Venetic theory. This narrative was in fact reasserting national identity not as a "void" subjectivity, not as a pure fact of being Slovene, but as the fullness of historical and cultural legacy.

This was an extremely powerful and mobilizing discourse. In the mid 1980s, after all the deeds and misdeeds of Socialist modernization, asserting the historical legacy was not any more a contemplative or poetic statement, it was already a cry for battle: a battle for the defence of the environment, of the cultural heritage, of the landscape, of the "Central European" character of the towns endangered both by anonymous and hegemonizing modernization and by cultural patterns brought by the massive immigration. One cannot and must not separate Matej Bor the poetic contemplator of the cataclysmic effects of modernization and industrialization from Matej Bor the autochthonist who fell under the spell of a captivating neo-conservative narrative of "historical legacy".

Bogo Grafenauer's failure to see this feature of the post-modern Slovene autochthonism – I take Grafenauer as an example of a wider generational phenomenon – was preceded by a failure to see the very real challenges and problems to which it reacted. To make an example. After 1945, the traditional landscape of Slovenia went through several radical (and sometimes brutal) transformations, one of which was the almost complete disappearance of what had been one of its most characteristic features: the

astonishingly numerous medieval and early modern castles and fortresses built in a border area of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>224</sup> Only a handful of these monuments of medieval culture survived the criminal cultural policies of the Communist regime in this regard.<sup>225</sup> Bogo Grafenauer was a *medievalist* who actively participated in the public debates and did not lose a chance to express his opinion about the most variegated matters – he even polemicized against linguists who supported the loosening of the rigid 19<sup>th</sup> century norms in Slovene standard pronunciation –<sup>226</sup>: not once did he voice his opposition, or even opinion, against such policies.

At the same time, as we have seen, Grafenauer thought that his pre-WWII reflections about the Nazi danger could in any way contribute in the reflection against the contemporary challenges facing the Slovenes in the late 1980s. He was the prototypical representative of all those who did not realize that in the meantime the nature of the dangers posed to the national identity had structurally changed. The danger was not anymore any ethnical Other, but by political, economic or demographic processes or trends that threatened – not the “ethnical substance” or subjectivity of the nation, but its *cultural and historical legacy* and its *way of life*. This, what we might call the “cultural turn” in national identity, was a phenomenon happening throughout Europe. Slovenia was not the only case where autochthonist or similar conjectures were part of this transformation (suffice it to recall the emergence of the Padanian regionalist and secessionist movement in Northern Italy), although it was probably one of the few cases where their role was so important in the redefinitions of the national identity.

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Ivan Stopar, *Gradovi na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1989).

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Mateja Kos et al., eds., *Gradovi minevajo, fabrike nastajajo* (Ljubljana: Narodni muzej, 1991).

<sup>226</sup> Bogo Grafenauer, “Zgodovinsko gledanje na spreminjanje narodnega značaja,” *Sodobnost* 34, no. 12 (1986).

## Conclusions

It seems to me that those who (regardless of their lucidity) ignore the explosive power generated by the contact between the unhealed mental wounds, no matter what caused them, and the image of the nation as a society of the living, the dead and those yet unborn (as sinister as it may be when pushed to the point of pathological desperation), lack understanding of social reality.

Isaiah Berlin

The aim of my thesis was to write a yet unwritten chapter in Slovene intellectual history. In the 1980s and early 1990s, autochthonism represented an extremely powerful and influential subculture in Slovenia. This subculture has largely evaporated since, but the results of its endeavours are omnipresent in the collective imagery. Today, every Slovene and also every foreigner who visits the country only for a short period is bound to encounter a visual symbology which is the direct consequence of the autochthonist cultural movement in the 1980s. In my thesis, I was not interested so much in the description and definition of this movement; such a task awaits other scholars, sociologists and researchers of nationalist movements in the first place. As an intellectual historian, I was interested mainly in the question of how and why such a movement emerged, what were its intellectual sources, how did it position itself in reference to the intellectual traditions; and mostly, what was it reacting against and what purposes did it want to achieve.

In my analysis I have come to the conclusion that the autochthonist theory of the 1980s was some kind of “disappearing bridge” from a modern to a post-modern frame of collective national and historical identity. In the Slovene case, the modern frame had emerged in the Romantic period and was centered on the notion of the national community as a largely a-historical entity based on language as its main mark of identity. Through most of the period, the shared language was not understood, with important exceptions, so much

as a system structuring a common symbolic field, but as an inherent characteristic of a specific *genus* – the Slavic one. From this perception, the notion that the identity of the Slovenes was essentially the identity of Slavs living in certain territories – that of the traditional provinces of Carniola, Carinthia, Styria, etc. – emerged. This notion, articulated in the period of Romantic nationalism, structured a paradigm that would survive until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Within this paradigm, in which the idea of Slavic kinship and a demotic-genealogical treatment of history were tightly interconnected, autochthonism had played a prominent role. Its tradition was largely forgotten after it had been doomed by the emergence of scientific historiography in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward, an interesting shift happened in this regard: over and over again, autochthonism was picked up by individuals who wanted to frame an alternative discourse. This trend reached its height in the Venetic controversy in which autochthonism was finally employed to cast a blow on the old paradigm of Slovene identity.

It is impossible to understand the contemporary manifestations of Slovene nationalism without taking into account the shift created by the Venetic theory. Although many elements from the older traditions are incorporated in its discourse, the way in which it is national identity is framed has little resemblance to them. If the old paradigm equated the ethnos with the language, the new one equates it with the territory. If the old one was based on the concept of natural right, the new one emphasizes historical rights. But most importantly, the “other”, the implicit enemy against whom it is structured, is radically different. Not only empirically different – changes in the empirical enemies are something every discourse is prepared to – but structurally different.

The old “other” was the national neighbor with whom the nation had to compete: either compete for members – the everyday plebiscite – or compete for territory. The new enemy has become the loss of legacy itself, the fear of losing the sense of rootedness and connection with history and territory. I do not think it is a case that its two major propagators were a sensible trans-nationalist neo-conservative and a radical leftist environmentalist. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the cultural and ecological connotations of the contemporary Slovene autochthonist discourse.

In this sense I believe that the model of nationalism inaugurated by the Slovene Venetic theory is in many ways paradigmatic for the wider European context. All over Europe, we are witnessing a sometimes strange complicity of particularisms which until yesterday used to compete with each other and are now forming a new front to defend “the common European legacy”. This front is set up at the borders of the continent, containing those who threaten the recently discovered European legacy from the outside, and in its very core, against the homogenizing processes of globalization that are threatening to annihilate *every* particularism.

In 1990, assessing the success of the Venetic theory, one of its three authors, Ivan Tomažič, wrote an article entitled “We Have Unmasked the Theory of the Migration of Peoples!” If it is true that every mythomaniac’s statement about the past is a camouflage of a project for the future, Tomažič’s statement could be re-interpreted in: “from now on, we shall stop every migration of the peoples.” Or as an opened invitation to the neighbours, until recently competitors or even enemies: from now on, let us pretend we are all autochthonous; the real enemy is the one outside trying to force his way in.

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