# Perceptions of the Eastern Adriatic in the travel literature of the Early Modern period

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# Abstract

Since ancient times, the Eastern Adriatic has been the intersection of routes from different regions of Europe and one of the main maritime hubs for trade with the East. Many officials, foreign travellers and travel writers left their written testimonies in the form of manuscripts, various accounts and travelogues about the places they had visited, the people who lived there, their customs, occupations, and other matters of interest. In creating perceptions of the Eastern Adriatic, a special role was certainly played by travel books, due to their interesting contents and availability to the general public. Although the introduction of printing made exchanges of information more widespread and faster, and the conditions for improving knowledge of the observed areas had arisen, the quality of information in them did not improve significantly. There were several reasons for this: the negative legacy from earlier periods, the uncritical assumption of information from other authors, and the existence of ingrained distorted images, misconceptions and stereotypes. The aim of this paper is to refer to some aspects of perceptions of the Eastern Adriatic and its population, and to highlight certain incorrect interpretations and stereotypes that resulted from them. This article will mainly focus on Italian travel books, as they were most numerous among this form of literature and contributed most to the expansion of knowledge about the Eastern Adriatic in Early Modern Age.\*

Keywords: Eastern Adriatic, travel books, identities, stereotypes

<sup>\*</sup> This paper is largely based on the research used in the author's dissertation, "Istočni Jadran u talijanskim tiskanim geografskim priručnicima XVI.-XVIII. stoljeća", which is why Italian travel books were used here to a considerable extent.

# Settlements

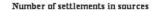
The greatest significance of the Eastern Adriatic in the early modern period arose from its maritime orientation. The existence of many settlements on its coast as logistics centres was a predictable result under such circumstances. These centres, due to their character and location, became the focal points of their natural surroundings and contributed to greater cohesion in their wider area, but this cannot be always inferred from the texts in travelogues. Their descriptions testify primarily to the importance of each settlement in their time through a number of aspects, but also about its recent and more distant past, thus providing insight into their origin, growth and significance at a specific stage of their development. In the absence of adequate data about certain aspects, authors often reached for the descriptions of their predecessors, combining this data with their own. In this way, genuine insight into the current importance of a particular settlement was often impossible, which led to the emergence of certain stereotypes, with consequences in terms of credibility, regardless of whether they were meant to embellish or distort the overall impression.

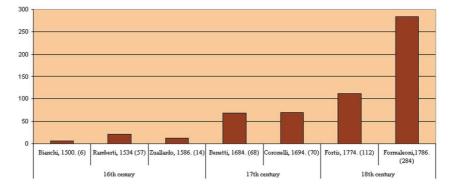
During analysis of content on settlements, it was necessary to reduce the amount of information in order to facilitate generalization, which was the most necessary and most notable for just this example; finally, identities and stereotypes are normally created by simply generalizing content.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the end of early modern period, based on the increasing amount of information contained in travel books, constant growth in number of settlements is noticeable, as presented in the chart below.

Despite the high number of these Adriatic coastal settlements in the travel books, they mainly focused on approximately a dozen major points in the Eastern Adriatic. All of these were good ports, important to support of Venetian maritime transport to the Levant. On the west coast of Istria there were four undoubtedly important centres: Koper, Poreč, Rovinj and Pula. Poreč and Rovinj were "ports of Venice," with pilot service, without which successful voyages to the city on the lagoon would not have been possible (Pavić 2006: 108, 171, 223, 242; Levental 1989: 44, 57-58, 73; Kužić 2013: 506, 518). The importance of Pula as a port was partly overshadowed, as it is a city with the most ancient landmarks, and these were given much greater consideration. The greatest emphasis was undoubtedly placed on the famous arena, but the Orlando Palace and the Golden Gate, next to the remains of numerous other magnificent buildings, were not neglected.

## 104 |





(chart 1) Increase in the number of settlements during the early modern period<sup>1</sup>

Among the Istrian towns mentioned, Koper should be emphasized. Although this city was the main political centre of the Venetian part of Istria as of the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is mentioned less often than other major Istrian centres primarily due to its location outside of the primary navigation route, so the authors mainly referred to its past.

A similar status was accorded to Zadar, which was the capital of the province of Dalmatia, but also an important and unavoidable port on voyages along the Adriatic. It was partly in the background, largely because of its fortifications, which had been repeatedly proven as decisive in order to halt the Ottoman incursions into the city and its surroundings.

Šibenik, often incorrectly designated as the ancient settlement Sicum (*Siculi*), is a city with the most detached fortified structures (Ramberti 1541: 3; Freschot 1687: 292). Aside from St. Nicholas and St. Andrew, which were referred to as the gateway to the St. Anthony Channel, there are also other fortresses worth mentioning: St. Ann, St. John and the Baron. Šibenik's port, besides its importance to seafaring, was additionally vital to inland navigation to the town of Skradin. Depending on the choice of routes, the city of Trogir was one of the last mainland centres for vessels before they moved on to interinsular

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Such a large discrepancy in the number of settlements described or mentioned in travel books, between *Viaggio* by Fortis and Formaleoni's *Topografia*, was due to the fact that Fortis only covered the province of Dalmatia, while Formaleoni wrote about Venetian possessions in the Eastern Adriatic, including Venetian Istria and Venetian Albania.

navigational routes. The city was important both because the island on which it stood almost abutted the mainland shore and because it was an economic hub.

The city of Split, no less important than Trogir, saved from its peripheral location and potential isolation by Venetian trade in which goods were brought from the hinterland, also had much to show travellers (Freschot 1687: 310). Together with the numerous ancient monuments in nearby Salona, there is also Diocletian's Palace, which became the urban core of the city long ago. On the way to Dubrovnik, there were no truly significant settlements except for Omiš and Makarska. The rare appearance of these two towns in the manuals was closely tied to their peripheral position along navigation routes. The town and port of Hvar on eponymous island was the most important among the insular settlements in the Eastern Adriatic; its port was also used to dock the Venetian naval fleet.

Dubrovnik, a heavily fortified city with a strong merchant fleet and extensive maritime trade, was deemed the finest city in the Eastern Adriatic throughout this entire period. This city-state could dictate its own development, which it largely did, although it paid a price for its privileges. The annual tribute to the Sultan was just one of the many fees which it paid for its liberty.

In the nearby of Bay of Kotor, there were two settlements which particularly stood out: strongly fortified Herceg Novi, which was most often held by the Ottomans, and Venetian Kotor, which was the capital of Venetian Albania. The descriptions of these two settlements bring to light the many antagonisms of the past, influenced primarily by their strategic significance in that part of the Adriatic. The remaining settlements on the remainder of the eastern coastline most frequently mentioned in the manuals (Budva, Bar, Ulcinj, Durres, Vlora) were only a faint image of the aforementioned. The significance of many island settlements – both villages and towns (Osor, Cres, Pag, Hvar, Korčula) – were usually related to the importance of the islands themselves.

#### Provinces

In their texts, travel book writers accorded special attention to spatial perceptions, which was reflected in descriptions of provinces and regions. Istria was the northernmost geographical and administrative-political area in the Eastern Adriatic. Its dual character – as peninsula and province – was recognized by most of these writers. What remained incomplete in this regard were its borders in the early modern centuries and the discrepancy between geographical

and administrative territories. Istria in geographical terms could be placed between the Gulf of Trieste, Kvarner Bay and the Ćićarija Plateau, which extends to Mount Učka and constitutes the peninsula's land border.

However, not all writers agreed when they delineated the early modern western border of Istria. Most of them set it on the Isonzo (Soča) River (Zuallardo: 1587: 67; Manzuoli 1611: 10; Formaleoni 1786: 84), but there are authors who claimed that its border was on the Rižana River (Rosaccio 1604: 110; Angeli 1737: 2). This view was a holdover from Antiquity, when the administrative border between Italy and Istria, before its enlargement to encompass the Raša River, was on the *Formium*, today's Rižana (Manzuoli 1611: 10). In rare travel books, like one by the German traveller Georg Christoph von Nietzsche, Istria's western border is placed next to the city of Rijeka (Kužić 2013: 553).

Among the Eastern Adriatic political and geographic territories under consideration, the name of the province of Dalmatia has certainly been used in the most diverse contexts. Benetti noted this well when he wrote that Dalmatia had different borders at different times and under different rulers (Benetti 1688: 38). Referring to the era of Roman rule, writers mostly agree that the area of Illyria was divided into Liburnia and Dalmatia, with the Krka River as a border. Some authors in the contemporary context considered Dalmatia a geographic term, which was equated with Sclavony. Henry Blount was among those authors who entirely identified the areas of Dalmatia with Illyricum or Sclavony from different periods, overlooking the fact that every one of these areas arose as a result of specific historical developments (Levental 1989: 74). Although the Venetian geographer Coronelli viewed Venetian Albania separately from Dalmatia, one could have expected that he would have simultaneously considered the remaining space as well. However, it is obvious that Coronelli's presentation of different parts of the Eastern Adriatic, and thus the presentation of Dalmatia, are completely independent of each other. Despite the fact that the Bay of Kotor was counted as a part of Albania, the same territory was also included in Dalmatia (Coronelli 1694: 30). According to his modern division of Dalmatia, which, when viewed as a whole, extended from the area between the Raša and Drin Rivers, it may be concluded that he also deemed it a part of Sclavony.

It is obvious that different contexts of Dalmatia and Albania coexisted simultaneously. Writers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century had a slightly different outlook on political areas. In his *Viaggio*, Fortis considered Dalmatia an exclusively Venetian possession, starting from Zadar to Primorje and Makarska, where he also

travelled, and including the Dalmatian islands. Formaleoni, writing about Dalmatia somewhat later in his *Topografia*, described the same area as Fortis.<sup>2</sup> He did not avoid describing even those parts of Venetian possessions that Fortis did not present in *Viaggoio*, but on the other hand he did not describe any non-Venetian lands (Formaleoni 1786: 242-243; 1787, 303). There is no doubt that these authors presented Dalmatia in the context of Venetian Dalmatia.

The Republic of Ragusa completed its territorial expansion already at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and it maintained this same scope throughout the early modern period. In the same way, the political structure of the Republic remained unchanged in its general outlines, so the descriptions by different writers remain quite similar.

Sclavony, as viewed in the travel books of the early modern period, was simply a geographical term without any political connotations. The Venetian Republic, Austria, the Republic of Ragusa and the Ottoman Empire all had their possessions in this territory. This designation encompassed the area from the Raša River in Istria down to the Drin River. At the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Rosaccio situated Sclavony in the territory from the Raša to Boyana or Drin Rivers, not making any distinction between the latter two (Rosaccio 1598: 11, 25). Nevertheless, some authors like Zuallardo demonstrated complete ignorance of geographic knowledge about the Eastern Adriatic and the boundaries of the provinces therein. On the map, we can see that the area marked with the name Sclavony covers only the southern part of modern Dalmatia and the Republic of Ragusa, while the space designated as Dalmatia covers all of the remaining territory up to the Istrian province.

As in the case of Dalmatia, the province of Albania appears in multiple contexts. And as in the case of Dalmatia's southern border, there is a problem with the Albanian northern border. Angeli placed Albania in that part of ancient Macedonia which bordered Dalmatia in the north, with Achaia (Livadia) in the east, the Adriatic Sea to the west and the Ionian Sea to the south (Angeli 1737: 5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In *Viaggio in Dalmatia*, Fortis described only the territories where he had travelled, so he omitted a description of the islands of Korčula, Pag and Krk, while Cres and Lošinj had been extensively described in his earlier work, Alberto Fortis, *Saggio d'osservazioni sopra l'isola di Cherso et Ossero*, Venice 1771.



#### (map 1) Adriatic Sea (Zuallardo 1587: 66)

Coronelli, like Formaleoni after him, placed sets the settlements Kotor, Perast and Budva in Albania (Coronelli 1694: 4). Based on this demarcation, it is clear that in the first case, with the Drin River as a border, it is a modern concept of Albania, indicating the area predominantly populated by Albanians. In the second case, it is Venetian Albania, a political-administrative unit physically separated from Venetian Dalmatia, under the command of the same regent who bear the title of governor general.

## **Population**

In the abundance of the information about the Eastern Adriatic seaboard in numerous travel books, the greatest attention has undoubtedly been accorded to observations about the area's population. The acquired image of people who inhabited this area also reflected other aspects, and indirectly created either an aversion or affinity toward a particular place. In general, the manuals had insufficient information about the Slavs set in the proper contemporary context. Most of these books agreed only on their large build and that the Slavic language was spoken from the Adriatic to the North Seas. They also noted that the Slavs were quite valuable when it came to seafaring, and that they were among the best rowers in the world.

Information about the Albanians can often be found in travel books. They were believed to have originated in Asia, whence they were banished by the Tatars, so they came to the area of today's Albania, which was then named after them. It is alleged that they were formidable warriors, especially on horseback, and their combat skills and assault tactics were praised the most. It is not difficult to conclude that this admiration was due mostly to their leader George Kastriot Skenderbeg, who successfully waged battles against the Ottomans (Rosaccio 1598: 26).

There are many more observations about specific categories of inhabitants of the Slavic area, such as the Uskoks, the Morlachs and the citizens of Dubrovnik. These writers' descriptions of the members of various ethnic and socio-economic groups were quite often politically coloured, particularly during the time of frequent conflicts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which also influenced the content of the travel books on these matters.

This can easily be seen in the example of Morlachs. There are no specific notes about them as a separate ethnic group, but they were mentioned in a negative context together with the Uskoks and *martolos* (armatoles). The latter were deemed capable of robbery and murder and described as intractable, rash and savage and prone to banditry in the forests and mountains of Albania, Slavonia and Bosnia. They were accustomed to distress, hardship and hunger, and prepared for any kind of military service.

Antonio Benetti viewed the Morlachs separately from the other categories, but nonetheless in a similar fashion. According to him, the Morlachs were refugees from Albania, now Venetian vassals; steadfast in action, fearsome in battle and unyielding in hardship. He located them on the Velebit massif (*montagna Morlacca*), which was named after them (Benetti 1688: 53). Freschot went one step further than Benetti. He linked the etymology of the Morlach name to their darker complexion. However, he did not agree with every point of previous description. According to Freschot, the Morlachs were not vassals at all, and they fiercely resisted Ottoman attempts to subjugate them. Freschot asserted that his own information was up to date based on the most recent history (Freschot 1687: 268-269):

## 110 |

"The Morlachs did, when compelled by circumstances, acknowledge the suzerainty of the Porte, but when the emperor launched a war in Croatia, or the Republic of Venice in Dalmatia, against their common Christian enemy, the Morlachs duly took advantage of this with the aim of quelling the war. They established a force with robust military detachments, which, in terms of their courage and zeal, did not bow down before any nation. Conducting diversions in different areas of Ottoman rule under the leadership of their national chiefs, they held these border-area infidels in a constant fear of their terrible incursions."

Information about these predominantly Morlach population in travel books are mutually contradictory. Fortis' reference to these people in *Viaggio in Dalmatia* (Travels into Dalmatia) was primarily a response to what had previously been written about the Morlachs in the literature, and his main points did not differ much from what was contained in other manuals. Fortis engaged in a sociological analysis of their character, finding a moral justification for their negative behaviour. He attributed the negative view of the Morlachs to the pretentiousness of many writers. He believed such writers sought to magnify the perils they had confronted, and tended to ascribe some mischief or cruelty in the perpetration of robbery and looting to individuals rather than the entire nation. Formaleoni held views similar to Fortis, who did not transcribe this part ("On the Customs of the Morlachs"), but largely recounted it.

Fortis' efforts to represent Morlachs in the best way light triggered some reactions on this point,<sup>3</sup> but in fact one cannot fault with the salient facts of his discourse on this socio-economic and ethnic group, primarily in his description of their character.

In travel books, the Uskoks were portrayed in a negative context together with the Morlachs and others, who were blamed for violence, looting and armed campaigns. Zuallardo declared that they were people prone to robbery, killing and accosting travellers, primarily the Ottomans and Jews residing near the archduke's territory (Zuallardo 1587: 69). Other writers continued providing historiographic information about the Uskoks with a negative context.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ivan Lovrić, a Croat writer, best known for his book *Osservazioni sopra diversi pezzi del Viaggio in Dalmazia del signor abate Alberto Fortis, Coll'aggiunta della Vita di Sicivicza,* Venice 1776, in which he tended to portray the life of these people in a somewhat different, realistic tone.

It is no coincidence that this negative attitude predominated among writers who were subjects of the Serenissima. The only "mitigating" circumstance in the eyes of the European public which may have lessened animosity toward the Uskoks were their clashes with the Ottomans. However, only a few writers attempted to delve into the core of the problems that could explain their conduct. The Uskoks were in fact the long arm of Austria in the Adriatic, and they were used to implement an Austrian two-track policy. Once they were centred in the area of Senj, they had to represent the "antemurale Christianitatis" confronting Ottoman expansion. But by attacking ships in the Adriatic, despite the fact that they mostly belonged to the Ottomans and those who collaborated with them, they inflicted damage on Venice, which was obliged to ensure the safety of navigation because it had authority over the sea. The aim of Austria was to demonstrate and prove that Venice, no matter how much it boasted about its dominance over the Adriatic, was not able to secure free navigation. Venice tried as much as possible to pursue them, but was unable to prevent such attacks from repeating because the Uskoks were under protection of their ruler, Austria, and in fact resided in Austrian territory. But the news of these callous, fearless opponents of the Ottomans and their collaborators continued to appear - at the very least in the historic information contained in geography textbooks.

Freschot quite deftly handled this issue in his writings, somehow observing the problem of Uskoks in the proper perspective (Freschot 1687: 275-281). Emphasis was placed on the unresolved problems concerning the Austrian emperor, the grand duke, and the Venetian Republic. It did not fully contrast to the impressions of earlier writers, so the source of Uskok bellicosity was attributed to their inheritance of the pirate legacy of the ancient Liburnians, and the misery and privation of life in the nearby rugged mountains. However, Freschot viewed the Uskoks less as a nationality and more as a sociocultural category.

The citizens of Dubrovnik should not be considered in the same context as previously mentioned categories in the manuals where this pertains to the description of the local population and presentations about them. In the midfourteenth century, they had already gone down the path of independent development, quickly took advantage of the advantages of their position, skilfully using clever diplomacy in politically intricate relations. Although the Republic of Ragusa was encompassed in the territory of Sclavony, its inhabitants were portrayed separately from the Slavic people. The Venetian Republic did not conceal its hostility to its major competitors, but it also could not deny their achievements. This opinion was also shared by writers from the Venetian Republic. Ramberti described them as wealthy and parsimonious, and not very sociable, not even to their relatives (Ramberti 1541: 4-5). His negative attitude toward Dubrovnik's residents was influenced by the fact that the majority of them were merchants. Unfortunately, however, Ramberti's writings do not provide any insight as to whether he had the same view of the Venetians, who were also trade-oriented. Nevertheless, he lauded their diligence and ability to develop their activities and organize their operations on such a barren and small territory. Giuseppe Rosaccio, however, did not miss an opportunity to say that Dubrovnik owed its progress to the tribute it paid to the Ottomans.

Such stereotypical views of the local population in certain parts of the Adriatic continued over the entire period. The intention of some writers (Fortis, Formaleoni) was to attribute most of the differences in their anthropological traits to natural and economic resources. In their descriptions, writers often went down to the level of smaller geographic areas and even villages. Some of these descriptions had farther-reaching significance than that intended by the given writer. This is most apparent in the example of relationship between the populations of villages and towns in Formaleoni's *Topografia*. When speaking of Istria, Formaleoni's (Venetian) prejudice against Slavs was on full display, as the rural populations were presented as rowdy and lazy with a Slav-like culture and customs similar, in contrast to the gentile urban citizens, who spoke a dialect similar to that of Venice and whose society had a multi-faceted and worldly structure (Formaleoni 1786: 95).

There is a marked presence of ethnographic and other characteristics of the populations included in the manuals, which pertain to their cultural heritage: language, customs, costumes, dances and so forth. It is noticeable that in earlier travel books, the elements of folklore are quite rarely present and are overly generalized. On the other hand, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing interest in all aspects of everyday life, in which Fortis certainly went the furthest with his presentation of the Morlachs. It would be unfair and wrong to claim that all of his attention concerning ethnographic features was limited to the Morlachs. The illustrations of the folk attire of inhabitants from different parts of Dalmatia presented in his *Viaggio* best testifies to this.

| 113

Finally, it is not difficult to conclude that the image of the population of the Eastern Adriatic seaboard that could be obtained by a stranger was far from ideal. The population of the Eastern Adriatic seaboard in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was mainly portrayed as primitive, militant and coarse, living under harsh social and economic conditions. Any exceptions were attributed to contacts with other nations with a higher level of culture. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when wars in these areas began to subside, individual categories of the society, "blessed in their ignorance", began to acquire a different image. Acceptance differences and emphasis on moral, unspoiled values were closely related to the development of civil society, especially in the time of Enlightenment and pre-Romanticism.<sup>4</sup>

# Conclusion

In the end, it may be concluded that the perception of the Eastern Adriatic depended on many factors. Despite of frequent traffic along the Eastern Adriatic coast, ingrained stereotypes were present in the eyes of foreigners who travelled there, not only about the area, but also the people who lived there.

At the beginning of the early modern period, the amount of knowledge about the Eastern Adriatic seaboard and its population was quite meagre, which created opportunities for writers to manipulate any information. As time passed, the amount of information kept increasing, although it remained descriptive level. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Enlightenment adopted a critical attitude towards information, when former stereotypes were subjected to scrutiny, leading to the discarding of former misconceptions and stereotypes of the Eastern Adriatic.

Only a small portion in the wealth of information contained in the travel books is presented herein, but this is still sufficient to demonstrate their role in the creation of identities in the Eastern Adriatic.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For a better understanding of the imagological approach and theoretical foundation of imaging or perceptions of "otherness" in of Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Adriatic therein, see the recent works in: *Kako vidimo strane zemlje: uvod u imagologiju*, edited by Davor Dukić et al., Zagreb 2009; *History as Foreign Country. Historical Imagery in the South-eastern Europe/Geschichte als ein fremdes Land. Historische Bilder in Südost Europa*, edited by Zrinka Blažević, Ivana Brković, Davor Dukić, Bonn 2014.

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