

*In obsidione Constantinopolitana... mortem oppetiisse – Uses of the Past and the Reconstruction of Social Knowledge: The Case of the Oršić Family**

According to 19th century Croatian historiography, a certain John was the forefather of the Oršić family, one of the most distinguished Croatian noble families during the 18th century. As expected, John was no ordinary person, but rather one of the renowned defenders of besieged Constantinople in 1453. He stood by Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos during the final charge against the Ottomans, and was even among the few at the emperor's deathbed as the Ottomans stormed the city, after which his wife and juvenile son miraculously escaped. Most of modern historians consider John and his life as a fabricated story, but was this the case for 19th century historians? The paper will show the dynamic transformation of local social knowledge through the process of narrativisation of the past and – in given social and situational constructions – the benefit of such a transformation for rebranding the normative and political community. At the same time, certain issues pertaining to the historiographical understanding of the past and the role of historian in the creation of history will be explored.

Introduction

In 1846, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski wrote a history of the Oršić noble family,¹ one of the first works of modern Croatian historiography. Besides having a career in the civil service and being actively involved in politics as an ardent champion of the Illyrian movement and an advocate for the modern Croatian nation, even in his time Kukuljević was considered a distinguished historian and writer.² Although present-day historians dismiss many of Kukuljević's conclusions as historiographic

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¹ KUKULJEVIĆ SAKCINSKI 1846.

² For a brief introduction to Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski's life and work, see MANDUŠIĆ & FLEGO 2013; KURELAC 1994; ANTOLJAK 1992: 13-39; MARKUS 2009.

fiction, due to his contributions to the historical profession he is celebrated as one of the fathers of Croatian historiography. Nevertheless, his history of the Oršići, or at least some aspects of it, serves as a nice case study.

The central point of my case study will be an episode from Kukuljević's history of the Oršići, that of their forefather. By doing so, I aim to show how the social use of the past, on the one hand, could become the focal point in the transformation of a political community, and on the other, how confirmation of a shadowy past transformed that past into acceptable social knowledge and even, over time, into scholarly knowledge. This line of inquiry, though indirectly, raises the question of the understanding of history, and its importance to (both 19th-century and present-day) historians. At the same time, it confronts historians with the even more vital problem of relativity and historicity. Consistent with all that has been said, the central hypothesis is that the past is always used for the purposes of the present, and in every present the presented version of the past is correct. To confirm this hypothesis, I shall examine several timelines below.

The timeline of Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski

Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski identified certain distant ancestors of the Oršići in the 11th century, during the reign of the “national dynasty”. At the time, according to Kukuljević, they were known as the Lapsanovići, and only four centuries later the descendants of the Lapsanovići became known as Oršići. Kukuljević noted that a certain John (I will call him the Defender)³ was a son of Count John Nelipić, a famed late medieval Croatian nobleman, and that the son's nickname was Oršić. Not only was John the forefather of the Oršići, he was also a renowned defender of besieged Constantinople in 1453. John did not just happen to be in Constantinople at the time, as Kukuljević explained: he was there due to Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos, who was, just like John, “the son of an Illyrian mother”. Furthermore, the emperor was “the last pillar of Eastern Christendom and in the event of his downfall, the darkest of nights loomed.”⁴ John became one of the emperor's military commanders, and stood by his side in one last charge against the Ottomans. He miraculously survived the conflict and was among the few who bravely remained at the emperor's deathbed while the Ottomans stormed the city. His fate was sealed, but his wife – Giuliana Olympia Scaligeri, from the ruling family of Verona – and

³ The name is solely my design, and I will primarily use it below to identify John more easily. At the same time, the name can also be considered my contribution to the further narrativization of John's figure in the footsteps of Kukuljević, especially since the role of the heroic (military) defender was central to the dominant historiographic genre of the 19th century and John was first and foremost imprinted in memory because of his military prowess. I will discuss this genre in greater detail below.

⁴ KUKULJEVIĆ SAKCINSKI 1846: 37.

his underage son Michael somehow managed to flee the great slaughter and found refuge by sailing to Rome. Once in Rome, none other than Pope Nicholas V gave his blessing to the grieving widow and, praising John's act of sacrifice, sent her to the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III. The emperor took pity on the widow and endowed her with the Štatenberg (Stattenberg) fortress, but after a while Michael, already a grown man, decided to take his mother back to Croatia, where he built the Oršić fortress, also known as Slavetić.⁵

Kukuljević's conclusion that John was the son of Count John Nelipić was already rejected in the latter half of the 19th century, when detailed examination of the relevant sources showed that Count Nelipić had died without a male heir.⁶ Probably after this refutation of John's historicity, his feats at Constantinople never came under close scrutiny by historians. Most 20th-century professional historians saw the episode as Kukuljević's narrative supplemented by fabricated facts, and not worthy of any particular attention. In fact, there is no credible evidence (or 15th century sources) to support any of Kukuljević's claims. The story about the Lapsanovići was a product of the 14th century misinterpreted in later centuries,⁷ and there have been many different reports of the exact manner in which Emperor Constantine died, but none mentioned his deathbed,⁸ just as none of the sources mention Giuliana Olympia Scaligeri. It is safe to conclude that Kukuljević incorporated fictional characters into historical events and connected them to historical figures. What the model for Kukuljević's narration was and whether he had any historical template for John's character remain open questions.

But is it possible to dismiss Kukuljević's account so easily? Was John just a product of his imagination and literary talent, combined with the need to present the past in a linear manner, where meaningful and morally instructive stories bridged the gap between documented facts? Is it sufficient to conclude that historians today know more than their 19th century predecessors?

One aspect of the answer to these questions was provided by Kukuljević himself. In the introduction to the history of the Oršići, he clearly states the reasons for his work: "without historical knowledge about certain kindreds, we shall never be able to know the history of our people ... that they are of Slavic blood and Croatian origin."⁹ Kukuljević's teleological understanding of history clearly determined

⁵ Cf. KUKULJEVIĆ SAKCINSKI 1846: 4-5, 36-39.

⁶ KLAIĆ 1898. For recent study on Nelipići see BIRIN 2006.

⁷ Cf. MAJNARIĆ 2018: 114-116, 260-273; MAJNARIĆ 2009. For some elements in the construction of this 14th century story, see also the case of 1360 below.

⁸ For detailed analyses of these reports, see NICOL 1992: 74-94. It is also noteworthy that in later centuries many tales and legends developed around the emperor's death and his descendants, but none of them mention John; see NICOL 1992: 95-128.

⁹ KUKULJEVIĆ SAKCINSKI 1846: 3.

his scope for writing a family history. In his opinion, the family's history had to begin almost at the same time as the history of the Croatian people, so some of the family's ancestors had to be found in the early Middle Ages. It was also the most glorious period of Croatian history, so the most distinguished kindreds and families – and among them the Oršići – had to be a part of that glory. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that Kukuljević dedicated the history of the Oršići to Count George Oršić, one of the champions of the Illyrian movement.¹⁰ It was probably George who somehow gave Kukuljević the impetus to write this history. The two were political comrades and shared the movement's views on the importance of educating and enlightening the common people with the aim of “awakening of patriotic souls”.¹¹ In this process of integration of the modern Croatian nation, Romantic-nationalists considered the early medieval “national dynasty” to be indisputable proof of Croatian statehood, so medievalism became the core of the newly created master narrative used to forge the modern Croatian community.¹² Kukuljević was a central figure in the creation of this master narrative as the Croatian exponent of the enthusiasm for publishing historical sources that swept Europe in the first part of the 19th century, beginning with the publication of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.¹³ He began to compile a collection of relevant historical documents on statehood from the earliest times, which was first entrusted to him by the Croatian Sabor (Parliament) in 1847, and then, due to altered political circumstances, he continued to act independently without state support.¹⁴ The result was the first published Croatian collection of historical documents *Jura regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae* (vol. 1-3, Zagreb 1861-62). Among other things, in 1851 he founded the *Društvo za jugoslavensku povjestnicu i starine* (the Society for South Slavic History and Antiquities) and began publishing its periodical *Arhiv za povjesnicu jugoslavensku* (Archives of South Slavic History), which signified the professionalization and institutionalization of history in Croatia. In his literary works he also disseminated the ideas of the Illyrian movement – especially that of Croatian and Slavic linguistic unity¹⁵ – mainly through topics embedded in the Croatian historical environment.¹⁶

¹⁰ For the Count's involvement in the Illyrian movement see FILIPČIĆ 1996.

¹¹ For a concise overview of the Illyrian movement's main ideas see STANČIĆ 2008; STANČIĆ 2007.

¹² For the place of the early medieval Croatian history in the ideology of national romanticism see the case study of Franjo Rački (ANČIĆ 2009) and Ljudevit Gaj (STANČIĆ 2004).

¹³ For the contextualization of this publishing enthusiasm see GEARY 2002: 23-29. Also, for introduction into Romantic-nationalism see HROCH 2007; LEERSSEN 2013; cf. HROCH 1985: 3-30, 127-174.

¹⁴ On Kukuljević's activity in publishing historical sources see KURELAC 1994.

¹⁵ On the role of language in the ideology of Romantic-nationalism, see MATASOVIĆ 2016: 243-268.

¹⁶ On Kukuljević's literary works, see ŠICEL 1998.

Heroism, sacrifice, patriotism, and community were the basic elements of the *Volkgeist* for Kukuljević, and according to the intellectual understanding of the time, he was the one who was chosen, through cultural education, to “wake the slumbering dormant people.” Such an understanding history and literature, as two sides of the same coin, was the best means to an end. It did not matter greatly where history stopped and literature began if both carried the message of one, eternal and distinctive community (nation) and contributed to the construction of the master narrative of the Croatian past. The educational message and moral lesson were crucial even if a degree of historical accuracy suffered in the process. For the best explanation of Kukuljević’s specific view of the past, I will use Reinhart Koselleck’s well-known concept of temporalization.¹⁷ In short, Kukuljević was halfway between understanding the past as a collection of exemplary events with an unchanging timeless character that directed the certain future and an understanding the past in terms of the integrity and cohesion of consecutive historical processes that led to future uncertainty. However, he was still more in favour of the former understanding in which exemplary events strengthened the position of the present in the teleology of salvation.

Looking back at professional historiography in Croatia in the latter half of the 19th century, its genre may be characterized as national. The genre – if Umut Özkırımlı’s thoughts on primordialism and nationalism are applied to historiography – was shaped by several basic themes: (1) the antiquity of the people/nation and its golden age (with cultural and often military superiority), (2) the dormant age of the people/nation caused by foreign exploiters who sowed discord, thus diminishing mutual understanding, unity and prosperity, (3) attempts to awaken the people/nation by the action of various heroes, (4) the final awakening of the people/nation at the end of the decadent age, and the rejection the exploiters. Almost all of these literary topoi can be found in 19th century European and Croatian historiography.

Although Kukuljević undoubtedly saw history primarily as the main means of shaping the present, he nevertheless followed the usual norms of historical work. Therefore, as this was (and still is) the norm, in the case of John the Defender he consulted the sources (although he added many details, which do not exist in any source). The problem was that he trusted sources that were not reliable. But what kind of sources was he to trust if not documents originating in the imperial chancery of Maria Theresa?

¹⁷ There is extensive literature on the relationship between time, the past and history, including a critique of Koselleck. For some useful aspects of his claims pertinent to this paper, see KOSELLECK 2004: 26-42, 128-151. For Koselleck’s understanding of history, see the very solid analysis in GERBER 2006.

The timeline of Maria Theresa

In 1744, the empress Maria Theresa conferred the title of *graf* (count) to Christopher Oršić.¹⁸ The patent granting the title thoroughly documented the famous deeds of Christopher's ancestors, including John the Defender of Constantinople.¹⁹ It was one of the most important steps in increasing Christopher's social prestige, followed by prominent military and administrative functions in the Banal Military Border and Croatia.²⁰

In the context of this paper, the following question is more important: if John the Defender's historicity was indisputable for the empress, why should Kukuljević have disputed it? The previously mentioned immutable and timeless character, central to Kukuljević's understanding of the past, is also clearly recognizable in Maria Theresa's patent. Precisely because of this, Kukuljević never questioned it. And it is precisely due to the shift in understanding the past that occurred during the 19th century, that collective memory supposedly became insufficient to explain the past, which was now reconstructed through a critical process.²¹

For a better understanding of the figure of John the Defender, another important question is: who or what was the main source for the accounts mentioned in the patent? It is very likely that Maria Theresa's source were the Oršići themselves. The main argument for this can be found in the administrative process of ennoblement. Only the ruler, by his or her grace, had the power to bestow noble titles (accompanied by free possession of property), but the procedure for obtaining a patent of nobility had to be followed. In the first half of the 18th century, this process had several formal steps. Before formally applying for the procedure, it was usually very helpful to have some patrons or agents close to court circles advocate for your case. The application with proper documentation – which included a proposed coat of arms – had to be submitted to the appropriate Chancellery and

¹⁸ For an overview of his military and administrative career and the development of his family's social reputation, see ŠTEFANEK 2016a.

¹⁹ Cf. MNL, OL, Magyar Kancelláriai Levéltár, Libri regii, vol. 39: 579-586. *Nec minorem esse memoriam Ioannis quondam Orsich, Comitatus Cetinae Domini, qui in obsidione Constantinopolitana pro clementissimo principe ac domino suo Constantino Paleologo mortem oppetiisse talique pacto egregiae et plane haeroicae virtutis ac fortitudinis suae laudem retulisse dicitur.* It is important to note that in 1675 Leopold I endowed the Oršići with *Freiherrstand* (MNL, OL, Magyar Kancelláriai Levéltár, Libri regii, vol. 16: 11-13), and in 1682 with the title of hereditary counts of Modruš County (MNL, OL, Magyar Kancelláriai Levéltár, Libri regii, vol. 17: 266). Neither of these two charters mentions John the Defender.

²⁰ In the context of this paper, it is noteworthy that Christopher was the grandfather of Kukuljević's colleague, Count George Oršić, and one may speculate that Kukuljević learned of the patent primarily due to their friendship.

²¹ On the relationship between collective memory and history, see HUTTON 2013; KATTAGO 2015; SCHWARTZ 2016; OLICK, VINITZKY-SEROUSSI & LEVY 2011.

various taxes paid. After the documentation was inspected, the Chancellery made a proposal to the ruler, who made the final decision. If the ruler agreed with the proposal, the Chancellery prepared the patent of ennoblement for the applicant, while the same act had to be transcribed in the *Libri regii*.²² Finally, the patent had to be confirmed by the Croatian Sabor as an act of acceptance of the applicant to the ranks of the nobility.²³

Battlefield prowess and extensive financial resources were always beneficial to the achievement of the applicant's desired goal. Christopher Oršić had both and, it would appear at very least, was in the ruler's good graces. The creation of the necessary documentation appears to have been in the hands of the applicants, and they did so themselves or at least sought out professional assistance.

The possibilities presented by such creation are most vividly described in the words of another fictional character, Ser Bronn of the Blackwater, widely known from the television series *Game of Thrones*. In an episode of the show's final season, an unscrupulously direct and witty cynic – who was always willing to use his elite warrior skills for a more generous reward – responded to the accusation of being a cutthroat by posing a rhetorical question about the ancestors of prominent families. He went on to say that such ancestors were murderers and concluded that some “hard bastard” skilled in killing played a key role in the social rise of all prominent families. However – Bronn bemoaned – the descendants would find a way to destroy the prominence of such a family.²⁴ Bronn's words, although very simplified and one-dimensional, strike at the very core of social mobility from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period. But Bronn was partially wrong, the descendants of the elite could not so easily destroy the prominence of the family, primarily because they had at their disposal the “use of the past.” This was precisely the case with the Oršići, and the practice of inventing the identity of a

²² This procedure is well described in the case of the Bohemian Chancellery; see BRŇOVJÁK 2018: 47-52. It seems that procedure was mostly the same in the case of the Hungarian Chancellery; for example, see the case study of Peter Troilo Sermage in ŠTEFANEC 2016b. For the broader context of the formation of a new aristocratic elite in Hungary see CSERPES & SZIJÁRTÓ 2014, for a change in ennoblement practices during the reign of Maria Theresa and the formation of the institution of a military nobility, see HOCHEDLINGER 1999; and for the transformation of the nobility during the 17th and 18th centuries see MARGREITER 2019. I also wish to thank Nataša Štefanec, Ph.D., and Ivana Horbec, Ph.D., for their constructive advice regarding procedures in the case of the Hungarian Chancellery.

²³ This was also the case with Christopher Oršić; see BUTURAC et al. 1966: 60.

²⁴ *GAME OF THRONES* 2019: *Jaime Lannister*: Highgarden will never belong to a cutthroat! *Bronn*: No? Who were your ancestors? The ones who made your family rich? Fancy lads in silk? They were fucking cutthroats! That's how all the Great Houses started, isn't it? With a hard bastard who was good at killing people. Kill a few hundred people, they make you a lord. Kill a few thousand, they make you king. And then all your cocksucking grandsons can ruin the family with their cocksucking ways.

family had been quite common since the Late Middle Ages. For the latter, it is sufficient to mention the private mythology in the cases of the Frankapani and Zrinski families.²⁵ But there are also numerous examples from the Late Middle Ages when state administrative procedures were used to legitimize a family history. On this occasion, I will single out only two of them.

The most instructive case is that of the nobles of Lapac from 1360.²⁶ A few of them were defendants before a special commission under the king's authority, headed by the queen herself. To prove their possession of Karin, they resorted to claims that they were successors of the early medieval Croatian King Zvonimir, who gave Karin as a wedding gift to their ancestor when he married Zvonimir's daughter. Besides their word, they did not present any written evidence, which was very unusual given the normative practices of the time. Nevertheless, the commission accepted their claims and confirmed their possession of Karin. Needless to say, these nobles were among the most ardent royal supporters in Croatia.

Another similar example is that of the famous Blagajski noble family.²⁷ In 1486, two brothers from the family filed their claims before the banal court against George Mikuličić of Bužim, a prominent Slavonian noble.²⁸ In fact, in 1483, after the death of the third brother, King Mathias Corvinus had confiscated the family fortress of Ostrožac and turned it over to George Mikuličić.²⁹ The king had accused the brothers of disloyalty (also confirmed at the *congregatione generali* in 1481)³⁰ and invoked the royal right to freely dispose of the fortress based on the *defectus seminis*. Three years later, the brothers approached the banal court with new evidence of their incontestable rights. Suddenly they had two alleged charters, the Ostrožac grant issued by King Charles I in 1330,³¹ and a confirmation of that grant issued by King Louis I in 1364.³² In 1330, the grant was issued for the contributions of the Blagajski/Babonići during King Charles' campaign against

²⁵ For the private mythology of the Frankapani, see ŠPOLJARIĆ 2016; and of the Zrinski see BENE 2012.

²⁶ For a detailed analyses of the case, see MAJNARIĆ 2018: 104-107; cf. SMIČIKLAS 1911, 69-71.

²⁷ For this episode from the history of the Blagajskis, see THALLÓCZY 1898: 104; KRNIĆ 1907: 63-64; ŠUFFLAY 1906; KEKEZ 2016: 156. The authors, except, to some extent, Šufflay, accepted the episode of the Battle of Posada as a historical fact. However, the concept of using of the past opens some new perspectives on the episode. I wish to thank Mladen Ančić, Ph.D., for his constructive advice regarding the Babonići and the Battle of Posada.

²⁸ THALLÓCZY & BARABÁS 1897: 416-423.

²⁹ STIPIŠIĆ & ŠAMŠALOVIĆ 1960/3: 632 .

³⁰ THALLÓCZY & BARABÁS 1897: 388-392.

³¹ SMIČIKLAS 1911, 534.

³² SMIČIKLAS 1915, 371-372.

Besarab, the disloyal ruler of Wallachia. During the disastrous Battle of Posada, one of the Blagajski ancestors saved the king from certain death and eventually died in his place after being mortally wounded. Based on that story, the banal court eventually returned Ostrožac to the Blagajski family. Finally, in 1503, the banal court of John Corvinus convicted the Blagajski for forging various charters and confiscated all of their estates.³³ Unfortunately, the banal court did not specify which charters were forged.³⁴ Nevertheless, their famous historical deeds, confirmed by a state authority, supported their false claim to affiliation with the Roman Orsini family. This well-known 15th-century tactic of appropriating kinship with prominent Roman families eventually bore fruit. In 1571, Emperor Maximilian II confirmed the story of the Blagajski being Orsinis by origin through his Hungarian chancery, and they were henceforth known as the Blagajski-Ursinis.³⁵

The aforementioned examples clearly show that the families at some point mediated the story of their famous past deeds by themselves, probably by using certain forged documents, family histories (narrated with the help of skilled intellectuals), or simply by acquiring a reputation in the local community. If it was acceptable to the central government, that history could eventually become common knowledge.

The origin of the Oršići: sources

Unlike the timelines of Maria Theresa and Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, sources from the 15th century tell a completely different, more modest story about the origin of the Oršići. Their first ancestors were probably petty nobles, or more likely king's retainers as castle warriors,³⁶ from the territory of Udrinich in medieval Pset County. The earliest member mentioned in the sources was a certain Vlatco (*Wlathko Orsyeh de Udrinich*) from the first half of the 15th century.³⁷ Due to the Ottoman threat, his relatives relocated to safer territories, initially to the southern

³³ THALLÓCZY & BARABÁS 1897: 441-442.

³⁴ Further argumentation that calls into question the role of Babonići in the Battle of Posada, and even their participation in it, as well as the context of the banal court proceedings in 1503, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

³⁵ On the false Orsini see further MAŤA 2013: 167-171.

³⁶ There is an extensive literature on the castle warriors (*iobagiones castri*) in the medieval Kingdom of Croatia. See, for example, ANČIĆ 2019. Comparative examples of the social rise of certain noble families – for example the Konjski (see SZEBERÉNYI 2012) – could indicate a similar development in the case of the Oršići. Although this argument goes beyond the scope of this paper, the rise of distinctive family name – with the help of royal grace – from the name used to denote the affiliation of a population to a territory could be a decisive factor indicating social rise.

³⁷ THALLÓCZY & HORVÁTH 1897: 322-323.

parts of Zagreb County. It seems likely that at least some of them distinguished themselves in skirmishes with the Ottomans, as they had been in the good graces of King Mathias Corvinus since 1480. The king endowed the brothers George, Paul, Peter, John, and Jacob, sons of Ladislav, with several estates throughout Zagreb County in 1481³⁸ and 1484.³⁹ Finally, in 1487, he granted Peter and his brothers possession of Slavetić (*Zlawethyth*).⁴⁰ It is important to notice that the king's deed of gift labels Peter as a Croat (*Petrus Horuoath Orsiith dictus*). This means that the Oršići were a somewhat alien element in the society of Zagreb County.⁴¹ Nevertheless, they were the king's men, and Slavetić soon became their central estate, so that they appropriated it as their nobiliary particle *de Slavetić* for centuries to come. The early history of the Oršići confirms that battlefield prowess was one of the quickest avenues to social advancement. On the other hand, it also shows that the ruler was always looking for new social strata upon whom to rely, as opposed to the established (noble) elite.⁴² In accordance with such social circumstances and the social status of the Oršići in the mid-15th century, the existence of John the Defender and his story is unrealistic.

The timeline of the 21st century historian: relativity and historicity

But where all of what has been mentioned above leave us historians? Was John the Defender a historical figure or not? The answer is not that simple.

At least a part of the answer seems simple enough. For different family stories to enter the royal chancery, the families had to be socially, politically, and above all situationally acceptable to the central government. Thus, the appropriation of social knowledge by the ruler transformed that knowledge into a new form of interpersonal connection and turned the recipients of that transformed knowledge into anointed subjects, worthy of special consideration in the community. It was a common procedure that rulers resorted to certain social and situational constructions to take advantage of the normative and political community's rebranding.⁴³ And that was exactly the case with the Oršići and Maria Theresa. The figure of John the Defender served as a way to promote familial renown, probably at a time

³⁸ MNL, OL, DI, 49383.

³⁹ MNL, OL, DI, 49384.

⁴⁰ MNL, OL, DI, 49501.

⁴¹ On the different ways of incorporating the Croatian nobility into the new social environment after their displacement due to the Ottoman advance, see JURKOVIĆ 2005.

⁴² On social mobility during the Middle Ages, see the still very useful review study HERLIHY 1973; cf. BROWN 2019.

⁴³ On this occasion the phrase "normative community" is used according to the conclusions in COBB 1996. Although he predominantly considers modern societies, his conclusions, with due caution, can be applied to the pre-modern age.

when the Oršići experienced a steep ascent on the social ladder during the latter half of the 17th century. Furthermore, it seems that their humble origins were quite well known among the Oršići in 17th and 18th centuries, as the famous ancestor was placed at precisely the time when the roots of the family tree became obscure. And he served the purpose of bridging the family's obscure origin and filling in the family gallery of brave soldiers imbued with *heroica virtutis*. Just as John defended Christendom, his example was followed by Christopher Oršić, who defended the most Catholic dynasty in Europe in the War of the Austrian Succession. At the same time, Christopher's services to the dynasty were more than enough to view John's story through the prism of the unchanging timeless character of a certain future.

The other part of the answer consequently leads the historian to yet another question: what is the historicity about? Collective memory, and consequently 19th-century historiography, considered John a real person. And this memory had real effects at a specific time. Did Kukuljević and the officials of Maria Theresa's chancery make a mistake then? Are present-day historians right when they point out these mistakes? A guide to some answers is given by the recent television miniseries *Devs*. Its main themes are free will and determinism, and the plot follows a team of tech geniuses and a laboratory called *Devs*. With the help of a powerful computer and quantum physics theory, they can stream past and future events, but in the beginning at least the stream is unclear and there is no sound. By using one of many multiverse hypotheses, one team member manages to project crystal clear sound and image from 2000 years ago. Although their problem seems to be solved, the solution infuriates the head of the team and he shouts: it's not *our history*, it's from *a history*.⁴⁴ Almost the same question is posed by Arthur Chapman about whether history is "multiplying its versions with its authors."⁴⁵ He advocated "virtuous relativity" and explained that although the past exists in the present, by applying the practice of history, some answers can be reached within the cognitive self-determination of every historian. Although difficult to disagree with, the historian is deeply marked by the culture of his time and the needs of his society.⁴⁶ Therefore, multiple versions of history seem inevitable, so despite the

⁴⁴ *DEVs* 2020:

Forest: 'But let's all just be clear. It's not actually Jesus talking, is it?'

Lyndon: 'No, it is Jesus talking.'

Forest: 'But not our Jesus, from our history. It's a Jesus, from a history. And every time you run the system you'll get a different outcome.'

Lyndon: 'But the difference might be a single hair on Jesus' head.'

Forest: 'No, it will be that difference. And three hairs difference. And four. And a thousand. And all points in between and either side.'

⁴⁵ CHAPMAN 2018.

⁴⁶ One of the most recent examples is the discussion of the role of historian in the post-truth era, see GUDONIS & JONES 2021.

transference of historical knowledge and consistent adherence to the practice of discipline, some of these versions do not have to clash. In fact, they can coexist as relativistic or non-relativistic without any interaction.

The problem with John the Defender is the same. From a present-day perspective, John's historicity and non-existence are equally real, and they do not interact with each other. But in a given social and situational construct, there is always a possibility of *a history* becoming *our history*. The task of historians seems to be a constant negotiation between the two.

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*In obsidione Constantinopolitana... mortem oppetiisse –
uporaba prošlosti i rekonstrukcija društvenog znanja:
slučaj obitelji Oršić*

Hrvatska historiografija 19. stoljeća doživljavala je stanovitog Ivana kao rodonačelnika obitelji Oršić, jedne od najuglednijih hrvatskih velikaških obitelji 18. stoljeća. Ivan nije dijelio uobičajenu sudbinu suvremenika iz 15. stoljeća, bio jedan od proslavljenih branitelja opkoljenog Carigrada 1453. Stajao je uz bok cara Konstantina XI. Paleologa tijekom posljednje navale na Osmanlije i bio jedan od rijetkih uz carev odar dok su Osmanlije pustošili carski grad. Pritom su mu supruga i maloljetni sin bijegom utekli smrtnoj sudbi. Većina suvremenih povjesničara Ivanov život drže izmišljenom pričom, no je li to bio slučaj i za povjesničare iz 19. stoljeća? Rad prati dinamičnu transformaciju lokalnog društvenog znanja kroz proces narativizacije prošlosti i – u stanovitim socijalnom i situacijskom konstruktivnom konstruktivama – korist takve transformacije za preoblikovanje normativne i političke zajednice. Uz to istodobno će otvoriti i neka pitanja vezana uz historiografsko razumijevanje prošlosti i ulogu historičara u stvaranju povijesti.

Ključne riječi: historiografija, historičari, plemićka obitelj Oršić, društveno znanje, razumijevanje prošlosti

Keywords: historiography, historians, Oršić noble family, social knowledge, understanding of the past

Ivan Majnarić
History Department
Catholic University of Croatia
Ilica 242
10000 Zagreb
ivan.majnaric@unicath.hr

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