

LATE MEDIEVAL VLACHS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, 13TH TO 15TH CENTURIES: ORALITY, SOCIETY AND THE LIMITS OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES¹

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the social structures of late medieval Vlachs – particularly the ones inhabiting the Western Balkans (the Dinaric Alps) – in order to determine how collective identities were shaped and reproduced in medieval oral cultures. Southeast European historiographies have often portrayed the Balkan Vlachs as a unitary group and the label “Vlach” as representing a single, homogenous social entity during most of the Middle Ages. Still, social groups cannot exist and function without regular communication – oral or written – between their members. Oral cultures are based on verbal communication and are therefore bound by its specific nature, given that it requires continuous personal contact and oral transfer of information for communication and society to function properly. Literate cultures on the other hand tend to rely on written communication to a considerable extent and given that it allows for information to be conveyed impersonally (by text) its range is (at least in theory) almost limitless – as it is the level of (il)literacy that represents the main communicative and social limit in literate societies. Having in mind the abovementioned communicative and social limits of orality and the fact that it was the predominant if not exclusive form of communication among transhumant pastoralists such as the medieval Balkan Vlachs this paper argues that the range/scope of their group identities and collective identifications was rather limited. Furthermore, this paper discusses the types of collective identities utilized by Vlachs, questioning whether they ever shared a common “Vlach identity” given the fact that the social identity of the medieval people known as “the Vlachs” was primarily shaped and defined from the “outside” and “above” – by state intervention and a legal frame that was forced upon them. The Vlachs in the Medieval Balkans, and particularly in its western part, generally did not possess political authority and power, nor did they have the material resources and literary traditions allowing them to form more complex and enduring communication networks that would in turn have resulted in group identity formation on a larger scale. During the Early Middle Ages the Vlachs were “Vlachs” primarily because they were labelled as such and considered to be a distinct category of population by their Slavic (and later Byzantine) neighbours and overlords, and not necessarily because they originally defined themselves as such. This is not to say that gradually, during the course of the Middle Ages, the bearers of the “Vlach” name could not have started to identify themselves as “Vlachs” by accepting this foreign name (xenonym) as their preferred group name (autonym). Still, when this finally did happen it did not imply a “universal” Vlach identity in the medieval Balkans. Given the communicative limits of oral cultures as well as the Vlachs’ position as legal and political “objects” rather than “subjects” it seems most likely that the medieval Balkans witnessed a simultaneous existence of a multitude of “Vlachnesses” which were usually unrelated and unaware of each other.

Keywords: Vlachs, Middle Ages, social communication, orality and literacy, group identity, transhumant pastoralism, Southeastern Europe

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¹ I would like to dedicate this paper to a very dear friend of mine, Dr Michael T. Clanchy, who shared many of his ideas on medieval literacy with me during my studies at the University of Oxford in 2014 and 2015, and whose comments on this topic changed the way I thought of the Middle Ages.

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INTRODUCTION²

During the early medieval period the label “Vlach” was used by Slavs to denote Romance-speaking “foreigners” in different parts of Southeastern Europe (the Balkans).³ The majority of the early medieval Vlachs engaged in transhumant pastoralism and were scattered throughout the mountainous areas of the Central and Eastern Balkans from where a part of them probably started migrating to neighbouring regions during the expansion of the First Bulgarian Empire, particularly during the late 9th and 10th centuries.⁴ Such migrations, usually state controlled and sponsored,

² This paper was first presented in shorter form as a conference talk under the title *The Anatomy and Range of Collective Identities and Identifications in the Past: The Example of Medieval Vlachs*, at an academic conference *Colloquia Mediaevalia Croatica III – National Ideas and Ethnic Loyalties in Renaissance Croatia*, organised in Zagreb at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences on 24 February 2017.

³ Nada Klaić, *Položaj Vlaha u XIV i XV stoljeću u hrvatskim zemljama*, “Radovi ANUBiH” 1983, vol. 73, p. 107; Snježana Buzov, *Vlaško pitanje i osmanlijski izvori*, “Povijesni Prilozi” 1992, vol. 11, p. 48; Marko Pijović, *Nekoliko misli o mogućem podrijetlu naziva „Vlah”*, “Studia Mythologica Slavica” 2010, vol. 13, p. 199–210; Sorin Paliga, *The Problem of Slavic Vlach̃ and Medieval Latin Blachus, Which Ethnic Group(s) do These Forms Refer to?*, in: *Anca Irina Ionescu: Omagiu la 70 de Primaveri*, ed. Octavia Nedelcu, Bucuresti: Lider, 2016, p. 396–404. The “Vlachs” were also known to Slavs in Central and Eastern Europe and one of the first Slavic sources mentioning this label is the 9th century *Life of St. Methodius*: Franciscus Grivec and Franciscus Tomšić, *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses, Fontes*, “Studies of the Old Church Slavonic Institute” 1960, vol. 4, no. 4, p. 155, 273. Still, this source seems to be referring to people from Italy, while the oldest known records on Balkan Vlachs are the late-10th and early-11th century imperial letters that mention the Vlachs in Byzantine themes of Hellas and Bulgaria during the reign of Emperor Basil II (976–1025): Franz Dölger, ed., *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches, 1. teil: Regesten von 565–1025*, München–Berlin: C.H. Beck, 1924, p. 98, 104. These Vlachs inhabited the areas of present-day Greece and Macedonia and are also mentioned in the writings of two 11th century Byzantine authors, Kekaumenos and John Skylitzes: Georgije Ostrogorski and Franjo Barišić (eds.), *Fontes Byzantini historiam populorum Jugoslaviae spectantes*, vol. 3, Beograd: SANU, 1966, p. 71–76, 214–216.

⁴ In this context it is indicative that the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus’ work known as *De Administrando Imperio*, composed roughly during the first half and the middle of the 10th century, talks only of “Romans” when discussing the Latinophone groups in the Balkans such as the “Romanoi” of the East Adriatic coastal cities (the label “Ρωμανοῦ/Romanoi” was used for Latin-speaking subjects of the Roman/Byzantine Empire and the label “Ρωμαῖοι/Romaioi” for the Greek-speaking population of the Empire). See Gyula Moravcsik and Romilly James Heald Jenkins (eds.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De Administrando Imperio*, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967, p. 125. Still, by the late 10th century the terminology had changed and the Slavic (Bulgarian) influence on the Byzantine perception of local populations and their chanceries was becoming obvious, as the late 10th and early 11th century Byzantine documents speak only of “the Vlachs” when discussing the originally Latin-speaking mountain dwellers from the central and southern Balkans: Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, p. 98, 104. It remains unclear though, whether all south Balkan Vlachs had originally

gradually continued westward during the course of the Middle Ages – after the Serbs had incorporated parts of the Central Balkans together with local Vlach groups into their principality during the 12th century.⁵ The Vlach colonizations originating in medieval Serbia eventually reached as far as present-day west Bosnia and west Croatia by the mid-15th century.⁶ It would seem that the general impression among most historians is that the Vlachs constituted a single social group with a shared sense of (Vlach) identity during both this and later periods of history.⁷ Still there are many reasons to doubt such a view and this paper will point to some of the key elements that make it a very unlikely scenario.

The Vlachs did not exist as a distinct social group under that name before the appearance of Slavic peoples in the Balkans during the Early Middle Ages as it was only after the Slavs had settled here that the label “Vlach” was introduced in this region.⁸ What seems to have “united” the early “Vlachs” from a Slavic standpoint was

migrated to this region from the central and eastern Balkans, or whether perhaps a part of them were the descendants of the local Romanized groups who became known as “Vlachs” simply because of the growing Slavic (Bulgarian) influence on Byzantine terminology. As far as transhumance is concerned the early Slavs practiced cattle breeding but they do not seem to have been familiar with transhumant pastoralism, and during the Early Middle Ages this seems to have been practiced mostly by non-Slavs in highland areas of central, eastern and southern Balkans. See Drago Roksandić, *Dinarski Vlasi/Morlaci od 14. do 16. stoljeća: koliko identiteta?*, “Godišnjak Titius” 2008, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 9; Ilona Czamańska, *Vlachs and Slavs in the Middle Ages and Modern Era*, “Res Historica – Czasopismo Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej” 2016, vol. 41, p. 12.

⁵ See the 1198 Charter of Hilandar monastery on Mt. Athos, the earliest Serb source mentioning the Vlachs in this land: Slobodan Prodić, Prodić Slobodan, *Osnivačka Povelja Manastira Hilandara kao izvor za istraživanje vladarske ideologije Nemanjića*, “Kultura Polisa” 2011, vol. 8, no. 16, p. 107. Judging from the distribution of the monastic estates listed in the charter these Vlachs probably lived in the medieval “župa” (county) of Hvosno near the present-day city of Peć. See for the territorial distribution of Vlachs in 12th–13th century Serbia: Marko Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources Until the 14th Century* (doctoral thesis), Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 2018, p. 63–83.

⁶ See below in footnotes 22, 43, 59. As mentioned above, in footnote 4, except for the central, eastern and southern Balkan Vlachs who were transhumant pastoralists and made up the majority of Vlachs in medieval Southeastern Europe, there were also small groups of Romance-speakers living in coastal cities of the medieval Eastern Adriatic (Western Balkans) but given that their origin and their historic development was somewhat different than that of the continental pastoralist Balkan Vlachs, the coastal city dwellers are not in the focus of this paper. Furthermore, these non-pastoralist city dwellers never called themselves “Vlachs” and the neighbouring Slavs ceased calling them that by the late 13th century. The last known Slavic source referring to a part of the coastal populations from the East Adriatic as “Vlachs” and the label “Vlach” as denoting something opposite of Slavic language traditions is the 1288 *Vinodol Statute* written in present-day Novi Vinodolski, a coastal town in western Croatia. In its Paragraph 1 the Statute talks of the “Croatian” and “Vlach” expressions for Church personnel attending local baptism ceremonies Marko Kostrenčić, *Vinodolski zakon*, “Rad JAZU” 1923, vol. 227, p. 146. See a detailed discussion of the 13th century primary sources from the East Adriatic in Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 31–62.

⁷ For more details see: Karel Kadlec, *Valaši a valašské právo v zemích slovanských a uherských*, Prag: Naklada Češke Akademie, 1916; Petar Skok, *Češka knjiga o vlaškom pravu*, “Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja” 1918, vol. 30, p. 295–316; Nedim Filipović, *Simpozijum o srednjovjekovnom katunu*, Sarajevo: Naučno Društvo BiH, 1963, p. 73–177; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, London: Pan Books, 2002, p. 22–40; Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, London: Pan Books, 2002, p. 75–77.

⁸ See above, in footnote 3 for the earliest sources mentioning “Vlachs” in Southeast Europe.

their “foreignness/otherness” as well as their link to Roman/Latin political and linguistic traditions, but they were only gradually formed as a separate population category through the permeation of pre-Slavic and Slavic groups in this part of Europe.⁹ Still, this paper will not primarily focus on the socio-political and legal frames within which the medieval Vlachs functioned and how the external factors such as the Slavs and later the Byzantines perceived the people whom they labelled “Vlachs”, given that these issues have already been studied in detail.¹⁰ Instead I will focus on neglected

⁹ Marko Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 31–41, 54–62. Substantial differences exist between self-identified and self-aware social entities on the one hand, and social categories whose boundaries are being defined by the outside world on the other: (...) *social categorization – the identification of others as a collectivity – is no less a routine social process than the collective self-identification of the group. Whereas social groups define themselves, their name(s), their nature(s) and their boundary(ies), social categories are identified, defined and delineated by others* (Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, London: Sage, 2008, p. 56). See further on differences between groups and categories: Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 12–13. Thus, it was through a process of external delineation and identification that the Vlachs were shaped during the Early and High Middle Ages. For a somewhat similar approach to explaining the emergence of early Slavs (6th through 7th centuries) see Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001. It should be noted though, that a certain difference exists here because name “Slav” originated in a Slavic language milieu and was originally used for self-labelling by at least a part of the Slavic-speaking population (see Ivan Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 183; M. Pijović, *Još malo o proučavanju identiteta u prošlosti*, “Historijska Traganja” 2014, vol. 14, p. 170–187.) – regardless of whether or not this label was also disseminated by non-Slavs during a part of the Early Middle Ages, before Slavic literary traditions evolved (see further in Curta’s book on early Slavs). The label “Vlach” on the other hand was a xenonym, a foreign word of non-Romanic origin that was “forced” upon the “Vlachs” by their Slavic and later Byzantine neighbours and overlords during the medieval period. See details in M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 31–41, 43–62.

¹⁰ The early medieval Vlachs were predominantly transhumant pastoralists with occasional “semi-military” duties, and their status was regulated by rules and customs that became known as “Vlach Laws/Vlach Rights”: (...) *it was the Bulgarians who first introduced a permanent border guard by shepherds in the Haemus Mountains. (...) In the 11th century using Vlachian shepherds to guard borders was in the Byzantium common practice, to be used later in all the states where the Vlachs had settled. The Vlachian Right became the foundations for the development of settlements in the mountains, and not only of the Vlachs but also people of different ethnic origins.* (Ilona Czamańska, *The Vlachs – several research problems*, “Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia” 2015, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 12). As centuries passed and Vlachs migrated and/or were colonized to different regions of Southeastern Europe *the growing importance of (...) military service led to the use of the Vlachian Right in typical military settlements not only of the ethnic Vlachs and not only in the mountains.* (I. Czamańska, *The Vlachs*, p. 12). See further in Neven Isailović, *Legislation Concerning the Vlachs of the Balkans Before and After Ottoman Conquest: An Overview*, in: *State and Society in the Balkans Before and After Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, ed. Srđan Rudić, Selim Aslantaş, Belgrade: The Institute of History – Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, 2017, p. 25–42. As a result by the Late Middle Ages the label “Vlach” had lost its linguistic note, at least in the central and western Balkans, and it was the legal frame that mattered most during this period (as opposed to the mainly geopolitical and linguistic distinction that this label represented in the Early Middle Ages), while the issue of what dialect or language the Vlachs spoke gradually became *irrelevant* for their social and legal status: Sima Ćirković, *Unutrašnja politika kralja Milutina*, in: *Istorija Srpskog Naroda – Prva Knjiga*, ed. Sima Ćirković, Beograd: SKZ, 1981, p. 470–471; N. Klaić, *Diskusija*, “Radovi ANUBiH” 1983, vol. 73, p. 153, 170. There are many examples from 13th–14th century Serbia of Vlach laws and Vlach status being extended to individuals and groups that were originally non-Vlachs. See for some of them in: Milenko S. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija srednjovekovnog katuna*, in: *Simpozijum o srednjovekovnom ka-*

elements of Vlach social history and organisation, such as discussing the scope of the Vlachs' (self)identification with their name, as well as the non-Vlach ("sub-Vlach") identities that they might have practiced and participated in.¹¹ This is not an easy task given that the label "Vlach" was originally an exonym, and during the Late Middle Ages it was occasionally even used as a generic label for transhumant pastoralists.¹² Therefore it is not always clear whether it primarily functioned as an externally imposed name or if and when it was also used for self-identification by the Vlachs themselves – though it would seem that the bearers of the "Vlach" name, or at least a significant part of them gradually did begin to accept this label as their own and started identifying with it during the late medieval period.¹³

VLACH IDENTITY OR VLACH IDENTITIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES?

Even though each of the many different pastoralist groups that were named "Vlachs" and were dispersed throughout the medieval Balkans could have used the same name ("Vlach") for self-labelling, this does not imply that all of them shared a single Vlach

tumu, ed. Milenko S. Filipović, Sarajevo: Naučno Društvo BiH, 1963, p. 45–112; Đurđica Petrović, *Mataruge u kasnom Srednjem veku*, "Glasnik Cetinjskih Muzeja" 1977, vol. 10, p. 97–129; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 39–41, 63–65, 88–92, 115–119, 123–129, 136–144, 171–173, 178–181, 244–254, 321–334. This is not to say that there are no documents that would testify to a part of the Vlachs still speaking Romance dialects during the late medieval period, but rather that no documents exist that would allow the conclusion that someone in late medieval Western Balkans would have been considered a "Vlach" or would have become a "Vlach" just because of their language. It is indicative in this context that out of hundreds of known medieval charters, royal letters and diplomas, as well as law codes from 13th to 15th century Serbia and Bosnia, in which hundreds of Vlach individuals and groups are mentioned, not one document discusses the issue of language as being of any relevance for becoming a Vlach or simply being a part of the Vlach category of population in these states. Hence, it was not language that made the Vlachs what they were in this period, but rather their way of life (transhumance and auxiliary military service) and their social and legal position: Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 31–42; M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 50–75. See further below in footnote 38 for linguistic issues and footnote 21 for social organisation and the legal status of the late medieval Vlachs.

¹¹ I prefer not to talk of "having" an identity but rather of "practicing" an identity and "participating in" mechanisms of collective identification.

¹² Dragoslav Antonijević, *Obredi i običaju balkanskih stočara*, Beograd: SANU, 1982, p. 21; Ivan Botica, *Prilog istraživanju najstarijeg spomena vlaškog imena u hrvatskoj historiografiji*, "Radovi – Zavod za hrvatsku povijest" 2005, vol. 37, p. 43; Zef Mirdita, *Vlasi – starobalkanski narod*, Zagreb: HIP, 2009, p. 257.

¹³ Medieval documents created by the Vlachs that would contain information about them in their own words and about how they understood and perceived their own societies are extremely rare. Still, thousands of documents produced by chanceries and notarial offices in late medieval Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Dubrovnik (Ragusa) and other parts of the Eastern Adriatic (Western Balkans) exist that do testify to numerous everyday Vlach activities, and allow for some convincing conclusions to be made about the late medieval Vlach societies in this part of Southeast Europe. For an overview of medieval archives and documents (diplomatic and narrative sources as well as notary records) containing information about Vlachs in the central and western part of the Balkans see: Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 2–17, 346–350, 351–358.

(group) identity and formed a “universal” Vlach identification mechanism. For all the Vlachs to function as a single and self-aware social entity throughout the Balkans (at least at the level of the Vlach elites) not only would they have had to bear the same name (identity label), but all the dispersed and unconnected groups of Vlachs living in different medieval Balkan polities would also have had to have been aware of each other’s existence. Such a scenario would have required different groups of Vlachs to develop permanent communication networks and create social links allowing them to come to know each other, identify with each other, and eventually form some sort of an inter-Vlach sense of solidarity.¹⁴ However, nothing of this sort has been recorded in medieval documents. Different groups of Vlachs were scattered over a wide area controlled by different states with most of them functioning for centuries without any communication or contact with each other.¹⁵ Furthermore, just as many other mountain-dwelling transhumant pastoralists throughout the medieval Mediterranean, Vlach societies were oral societies in which verbal forms of communication were either the predominant or exclusive way of building and developing interpersonal relationships.¹⁶ This is important to keep in mind because the nature of oral communication usually only allows for the existence of spatially and demographically limited social entities.¹⁷ For such narrow communicative and social limits to be surpassed the

¹⁴ *It is common knowledge that without communication human society is inconceivable. A society presupposes collaboration, and to enable this, communication, the exchange of information, is essential* (Marco Mostert, *New Approaches to Medieval Communication?*, in: *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert, Turnhout: Brepols, 1999, p. 18). Long-term communication between people may result in the creation of a sense of collective identity that these people share. Collective identity is a sense of community and sameness that some people develop, and it is usually the result of the process of identification among them. It is through communication and interaction that people begin to identify with each other and with traits or beliefs that are considered desirable in a particular society and common to the members of a given group (...) *A social identity is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to (...) a group. A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification* (Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, *Identity theory and social identity theory*, “*Social Psychology Quarterly*” 2000, vol. 63, no. 3, p. 224–225). See further in: Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 61–88, 112–129.

¹⁵ Konstantin Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, vol. 1, Beograd: Neven, 2006, p. 87–88.

¹⁶ I. Botica, *Prilog istraživanju*, p. 45. See for everyday life, mentality and social organisation of mountain cattle breeders in the Balkans: Sreten V. Vukosavljević, *Organizacija Dinarskih Plemena*, Beograd: SAN, 1957; Jovan Vuković (ed.), *Savjetovanje o terminologijama narodne materijalne i duhovne culture*, Sarajevo: ANUBIH, 1977; Đoko Pejović (ed.), *Predmet i metod izučavanja patrijarhalnih zajednica u Jugoslaviji*, Titograd: CANU, 1981; D. Antonijević, *Obredi i običaju balkanskih stočara*. See further on transhumant pastoralists and their societies in: Claudia Chang, Perry Tourtellotte, *Ethnoarchaeological Survey of Pastoral Transhumance Sites in the Grevena Region, Greece*, “*Journal of Field Archaeology*” 1993, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 249–264; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, vol. 1, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 25–59, 85–102; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, p. 53–89, 175–298; Ioan Myrddin Lewis, *Literacy in a Nomadic Society: the Somali Case*, in: *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 265–276.

¹⁷ Such entities have “narrow limits to their size” and “tend to be unstable and have a rather short life”; Arved Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia*, Turnhout:

utilization of a different and more efficient communication media – writing and literacy – is necessary.¹⁸ As the Vlachs (or rather their elites) rarely utilized literacy during the medieval period it is highly unlikely that they ever could have formed a widespread and complex social network, and a single, united and self-aware social entity in the medieval Balkans. Needless to say there are examples of illiterate societies and oral cultures eventually utilizing writing and literacy in various ways to achieve different social and political goals.¹⁹ Still, material resources coupled with social and political interest were general prerequisites for written communication (or any other type of communication for that matter) to be utilized in such a way.²⁰ A motive for establishing, maintaining and expanding complex communication (and social) networks could be expected among social groups (such as medieval Croats, Serbs, Bulgars, etc.) that held power over (or at least participated in governing) a certain territory, and/or among groups and institutions with strong ideological, material and political reasons for promoting and utilizing literacy for their own benefit (medieval Church and Christianity). On the other hand, social groups or rather social categories which never possessed any political power, nor any complex social institutions could hardly have been motivated to behave this way. Therefore, subject categories of medieval population such as the Vlachs – who functioned without any firm and large-scale autonomous social institutions in most medieval Balkan states – can hardly be imagined as building, maintaining and expanding complex and long-term communication networks that might have produced a self-defined and self-aware collective identity and a large unified social entity in medieval Southeastern Europe.²¹ When one adds the

Brepols, 2004, p. 13.

¹⁸ A. Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences*, p. 13. Numerous social, political, cultural and cognitive consequences of the transition “from memory to written record”, as the British medievalist Michael T. Clanchy called it, are discussed in studies such as: Eric Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982; Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications*, Victoria/Toronto: Press Porcépic, 1986; Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997, p. 190–412; Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 41–49; A. Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences*, p. 13, 245–248, 254–255; Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, München: C.H. Beck, 2007; Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 23–45, 226–328; Alexander H. Pack, “Writing a Revolution: From Oral to Literate Cultural Transmission in Ancient Athens” (Bachelor’s Thesis, Middletown: Wesleyan University, 2014), p. 22–51.

¹⁹ Such activities would usually commence by hiring different literate “agents” to do this. For example, the word *clerc* is derived from Latin *clericus* (a priest) as it was mostly clergymen who were employed by rulers and feudal lords as their chancellors during the Early Middle Ages, and only slowly did a literate, non-cleric “class” develop in medieval societies.

²⁰ A. Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences*, p. 13–14, 254–255.

²¹ The lack of institutions and institutional memory makes it difficult for social groups to maintain cohesion and survive in the long run, especially if dispersed over a large area. See several studies that discuss the importance of social institutions: Donald J. Kagay and Theresa M. Vann (eds.), *On the Social Origins of Medieval Institutions: Essays in Honor of Joseph F. O’Callaghan*, Leiden: Brill, 1998; Alan Harding, *Medieval Law and the Foundations of the State*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; John Hudson and Ana Rodríguez (eds.), *Diverging Paths? The Shapes of Power and Institutions in Medieval Christendom and Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2014. See for the social organisation of medieval Vlachs in: Miloš

continuous territorial, political and communicative separateness of different groups of Vlachs to this lack of motive for utilizing literacy for political and social purposes, it should come as no surprise that there are no medieval sources that would testify to medieval Vlachs ever creating mechanisms of collective identification aimed at gathering all, or at least most Balkan Vlachs under a “universal” Vlach identity.

Even though some of the different Vlach groups occasionally came in contact with each other under various circumstances – for example when a medieval state (Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, etc.) extended its borders to include a portion of a competing state that was partially inhabited by Vlachs – such *ad hoc* communication networks created between different and otherwise unrelated Vlach groups often did not last long enough, or were not stable enough to lead to their unification into a single, large and self-aware Vlach social entity. Therefore, it is most likely that several Vlach collective identities (or simply “Vlachnesses”) existed simultaneously in different parts of the medieval Balkans (rather than one large-scale and “universal” Vlach identity). Furthermore, it is even questionable whether Vlach populations (or their elites) living in different political entities such as the late medieval Byzantium, Serbia, Bosnia, or Croatia thought of themselves as being members of a single Vlach group/community in each of these countries. It seems more probable that there were several simultaneously existing Vlach collective identities (“Vlachnesses”) functioning separately in every state. Still, the Vlachs in medieval Croatia were rather small in numbers during most of the 14th century and were located in a relatively limited region (mostly in the hinterland of the Dalmatian city-communes such as Split, Trogir, and Zadar). As such, they probably could have constituted a single social entity and could have shared a sense of group solidarity during the mid and late 14th century.²² However, a similar

Blagojević, *Zakon Svetoga Simeona i Svetoga Save*, in: *Sava Nemanjić – Sveti Sava: istorija i predanje*, ed. Vojislav Đurić, Beograd: SANU, 1979, p. 129–166; M. Blagojević, *Vlaški knezovi, premijuri i čelnici u državi Nemanjića i Kotromanića (XIII–XIV vek)*, in: *Spomenica Milana Vasića*, ed. Rade Mihaljević, Banja Luka: ANURS, 2005, p. 43–75; Miloš Luković, *Katun a katunská organizace středověkých Vlachů v centrálních a západních oblastech Balkánu*, “Slovanský přehled – Review for the History of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe” 2013, vol. 99, no. 5, p. 387–416; M. Luković, *Zakon vlahom (Ius Valachicum) in the charters issued to Serbian medieval monasteries and Kanuns regarding Vlachs in the early Ottoman tax registers (defters)*, “Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia” 2015, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 29–46; M. Luković, *Self-Government Institutions of Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Livestock Breeders in the Balkans and in the Carpathian Regions in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, “Res Historica – Czasopismo Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej” 2016, vol. 41, p. 51–65.

²² The Vlachs first appeared in Croatia in 1322 as an army detachment fighting for the Croatian ban (prince) Mladin II. Šubić: Miha Madijev de Barbazanis, *De Gestis Romanorum Imperatorum et Summorum Pontificum*, in: *Legende i Kronike*, ed. Nikola Disopra et al., Split: Književni krug, 1977, p. 159–183. These Vlachs originated from the then westernmost part of medieval Serbia, i.e. eastern Hum, and they seem to have started permanently settling in parts of Croatia by the mid-14th century: Mladen Ančić, *Gospodarski aspekti stočarstva cetinskog komitata u XIV. st.*, “Acta Historico-Oeconomica Iugoslaviae” 1987, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 73; M. Ančić, *Srednjovjekovni Vlasi kontinentalne Dalmacije*, in: *Dalmatinska Zagora – Nepoznata Zemlja*, ed. Vesna Kusin, Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi Dvori, 2007, p. 162; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 6, 143, 253–255. See for basic information on Vlachs in medieval Croatia: M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 97–108; N. Klaić, *Položaj Vlahu*, p. 107–111.

scenario is highly unlikely for Serbia of this period, given that the Vlachs in Serbia were much more numerous and were at the same time highly dispersed throughout an empire extending from present-day central Herzegovina, eastern Bosnia and the Danube basin, all the way to southern Epirus and the Gulf of Corinth. It is rather unrealistic to expect that many different groups of Vlachs scattered throughout a land of that size could have somehow initiated the making and maintaining of an enormous communication network which would eventually have produced a single, unified “Vlachness” in the mid and late 14th century Serbia.²³ Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the chances for the Vlachs in a particular medieval state to form a self-aware social entity and a unified group declined as the complexity of the organisation and structure of a given state grew, as its territory expanded, as the number of Vlachs increased, and as they became more territorially dispersed.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-VLACH (“SUB-VLACH”) IDENTITIES AMONG VLACHS

This section of the paper will focus on *self-created* collective identities (identification patterns) that the Vlachs could have developed, or rather could have participated in. There are clear indications that beside the “Vlach” label and framework that was largely determined and regulated by non-“Vlach” political authorities, there were also other, self-defined and self-determined mechanisms of group identification present in late medieval Vlach societies in the East Adriatic/Western Balkans region. Such smaller and more sustainable collective identification mechanisms functioned at the level of micro-groups which existed within the “Vlach” population category, for example: families, clans and katuns (usually numbering from several dozen up to two hundred people), groups of katuns and tribes (numbering from several hundred up to a thousand or so people), and sometimes (though rarely) even “supra-tribal” entities (consisting of up to several thousand people).²⁴ Most such “sub-Vlach” entities were self-sustainable communication networks and social groups that were the easiest to maintain both demographically and spatially considering the oral forms of communication characterizing the life and culture of transhumant pastoralists and mountain

²³ (...) there is no mention in documents of Vlachs in Nemanjić Serbia ever functioning and being organized as a unified/single entity (...) nor of the emperor of Serbia ever appointing a common voivode/commander for all the Vlachs. It would seem that the Vlachs of Serbia (...) were not politically significant and were not organised as a single group, given that no medieval sources testify to this; M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 99.

²⁴ Vlach societies were largely tribal and patriarchal, and their basic social units were called “katuns”. The term “katun” usually denotes two things: 1) a group of people consisting of approximately 10–30 families engaged in cattle breeding, 2) a settlement (a village or a hamlet) in which such a group lived. Depending on the circumstances medieval katuns could function as social, economic/fiscal and administrative units. See M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, 45; N. Isailović, *Legislation Concerning the Vlachs*, p. 28–39.

cattle breeders.²⁵ However, often even the microsocial (“sub-Vlach”) level of organisation among the Vlachs was manipulated and influenced by feudal authorities and therefore katuns and other “clannish” or tribal social entities existing among medieval Vlachs were not necessarily self-created and self-maintained either.²⁶ Still, on a “sub-Vlach” organisational level it was at least possible to create and maintain the identity of a particular social group (be it a clan, a katun or a group of katuns) using the group’s own resources and skills, while due to the predominance of oral forms of communication as well as the absence of larger, more complex and firm social institutions, this was impossible to achieve on a “common-Vlach” (or simply “Vlach”) level.

²⁵ Most such Vlach groups (clans, katuns and tribes) lived in the area between the lower Neretva region in the west and Lake Skadar region in the east and have been well documented in late medieval archives from this region, such as the archives from 13th to 15th century Kotor (Cattaro) and Dubrovnik (Ragusa). See for clans, katuns and tribes (such as Drobnjaci, Burmazi, Banjani, Plešćići, Žurovići, Predojevići, Zupci, Riđani, Nikšići, Bjelice, etc.) from the eastern part of the Dinaric Alps (roughly the area between present-day central Herzegovina and the Montenegrin-Albanian borderland): Bogumil Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna i stvaranje grupe katuna odnosno plemena u nekadašnjoj Hercegovini (XIII–XV vek)*, in: *Predmet i metod izučavanja patrijarhalnih zajednica u Jugoslaviji*, ed. Đoko Pejović, Titograd: CANU, 1981, p. 181–201; Desanka Kovačević, *Srednjovjekovni katun po dubrovačkim izvorima*, in: *Simpozijum o srednjovjekovnom katunu*, ed. Milenko S. Filipović, Sarajevo: Naučno Društvo BiH, 1963, p. 121–140; Ivan Božić, *Doba Balšića, Zeta u despotovini, vladavina Crnojevića*, in: *Istorija Crne Gore*, ed. Milinko Đurović, CG, vol. 2, Titograd: Redakcija za istoriju, 1970, p. 49–370; Risto Kovijanić, *Pomeni crnogorskih plemena u kotorskim spomenicima (XIV–XVI vijek)*, vol. 1–2. Titograd: Istorijski Institut, 1963–1974, vol. 1–2; Ivan Božić, *Nemirno Pomorje XV veka*, Beograd: SKZ, 1979; Ivan Božić, *Uloga i Organizacija ratničkih družina u Zeti XV veka*, “Radovi ANUBiH” 1983, vol. 73, p. 93–105; Konstantin Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, vol. 2, Beograd: Neven, 2006, p. 33–51; Špiro Kulišić, *O etnogenezi Crnogoraca*, Titograd: Pobjeda, 1980; Branislav Đurđev, *Postanak i razvitak brdskih, crnogorskih i hercegovačkih plemena*, Titograd: CANU, 1984.

²⁶ See some examples from different parts of 14th century Serbia of state intervention in the basic Vlach social structures such as katuns: M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 50–75; Đurđica Petrović, *Mataruge*, p. 97–129. See further in: M. Pijović, Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources, p. 39–41, 63–65, 88–92, 115–119, 123–129, 136–144, 171–173, 178–181, 244–254, 321–334. Such interventions included dividing larger katuns into smaller ones or merging different smaller katuns/clans into larger ones for various military or economic purposes. Furthermore, examples have been recorded of different individuals and/or families being brought together in order to establish completely new katuns by state authorities or the Church in medieval Serbia. An example of individual Vlachs or Vlach nuclear families from different regions being donated to ecclesiastical estates and joined together in order to form basic Vlach social units such as katuns, can be found in king Stephen Milutin’s 1282 Charter for the Hilandar monastery on Mt. Athos. Here, among many Vlachs several individuals are mentioned who were colonized into the Serb heartland all the way from Byzantium (“iz Grka”): Vladimir Mošin, Sima Ćirković and Dušan Sindik (eds.), *Zbornik srednjovjekovnih ćirilskih povelja i pisama Srbije, Bosne i Dubrovnika*, vol. 1 (1186–1321), Beograd: Istorijski institut, 2011, p. 279. Also see king Milutin’s 1314–1316 Charter for the monastery of St. Stephen in Banjska, near the town of Zvečan, where individual Vlachs are mentioned without any family (which is unusual for this particular Charter), who seem to have been brought together in order to form a new Vlach katun called “Proilovci”: Mošin, Ćirković and Sindik (eds.), *Zbornik Srednjovjekovnih*, p. 466. It seems that a similar conclusion can be drawn for the “Smudirog” katun which is listed in the same charter: Mošin, Ćirković and Sindik (eds.), *Zbornik Srednjovjekovnih*, 467. See further on this issue: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 137–138, 299–300. Another example of such interventions into Vlach social structures can be found below in this text, in footnote 60.

A. THE INFLUENCE OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ON VLACH SOCIETIES

As opposed to economic, political and military matters, references to which are often to be found in medieval records, the natural environment and its influence on human societies are seldom discussed in historical documents. Still, some elementary conclusions can be made by combining contemporary scientific knowledge on Ecology and Environmental history with our source material that does speak, albeit indirectly, of these matters. Any activity that led various small “sub-Vlach” groups (clans and small katuns) to initiate frequent and regular social relations with other similar groups could in theory bring about the creation of long-term communication and social networks and the integration of such small entities into somewhat larger “sub-Vlach” entities (large katuns, groups of katuns and/or even tribes). One of the most important elements that influenced the joining of smaller groups into larger ones, as well as the breaking up of larger groups into smaller ones was the influence that the ecosystem had on basic Vlach activities such as transhumance. Transhumance implies regular seasonal movements of cattle breeders and their herds between summer pastures (in higher altitude areas, usually the mountains) and winter pastures (in lower altitude areas, usually in plains, river valleys and coastal regions).²⁷ Given that larger numbers of people can be concentrated in the lowlands than the highlands (particularly the Dinaric Alps), spending time in the lowland regions during the winter pastures (winter grazing season) could have been particularly beneficial for linking different smaller pastoral communities and bringing them closer together.²⁸ On such occasions

²⁷ See maps showing the main seasonal movement routes of transhumant pastoralists in the Balkans during the Medieval and Early Modern periods: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 427–434. Sufficient resources that would have allowed medieval cattle breeders to cultivate large numbers of animals were not to be found in single regions and they were forced to move around horizontally with their animals in search of new pastures. At the same time the climate forced them to “migrate” vertically with their flocks between seasonal pastures: during the winter season the cattle cannot survive in high altitude areas as the temperatures are low and pastures are impossible to find. The summer season on the other hand, with its high temperatures causes grass to dry off and water sources to run dry in the lowlands, and therefore larger herds must move to the highlands in search of resources. See B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 181–201; F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, p. 85–102; Roger Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 9–10, 16; Frank Hole, *Pastoral Mobility as an Adaptation*, in: *Nomads, Tribes, and the State in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jeffrey Szuchman, Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2009, p. 267. See for different models of seasonal movements of pastoralists: F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, p. 85–102; S. Vukosavljević, *Orgnizacija Dinarskih Plemena*, p. 26–45. See for everyday activities of transhumant pastoralist highlanders in the Dinaric Alps: Marijana Heneberg-Gušić, *Etnografski prikaz Pive i Drobnjaka*, “Narodna starina” 1930, vol. 9, no. 22, p. 191–205; Mirko Marković, *Stočarska kretanja na dinarskim planinama*, Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2003; Wayne Vucinich, *Transhumanca u Hercegovini (XIV–XVIII vek)*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak, Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 57–77; Vasilije M. Spasojević, *Crnogorski Katuni*, Zagreb–Split: NZCH-ZC, 2006, p. 9–64.

²⁸ Given the limited resources in the mountains and the fact that there is much more space and resources in lowland zones, pastoralists could only get together after the summer grazing period in the mountains was over. It was in the lowlands, during the winter grazing season that different pastoralist groups, or

many unrelated clans and katuns would arrive from mountainous areas and gather in lowland regions and pasturelands where they would spend the winter with their cattle.²⁹ Regularly participating in such activities during the course of several generations could have generated a sense of solidarity among these micro-groups and could have produced somewhat larger communities. Of course, this was not an irreversible process but rather a cyclical one, as different pastoralist groups merged and increased in size, or separated and decreased in size during the course of several centuries, depending on various local circumstances.³⁰

One important element that played a significant role in the social life and organisation of medieval Vlachs in the long run and prevented the creation of significantly larger communities among them was the somewhat specific geomorphology and anthropogeography of the Western Balkans.³¹ This region was much less suitable for the creation and maintenance of large communication networks between micro-groups of Vlachs during the grazing season than other, more eastern regions of the Balkans. The terrain along the Dinaric Alps and adjacent areas in the East Adriatic hinterland is “broken up” into numerous micro-regions and territories of different size, often quite small, where transhumant pastoralism was practiced. Here the Dinaric mountains, mountain wreaths and highland pastures are often separated and scattered, holding only modest resources when compared to the mountainous regions in the central, east and south Balkans. At the same time the Dinaric lowland pastures, plains and karst fields are also more dispersed, separated and smaller in size as compared to lowland resources that can be found in the eastern and southern Balkans. For example, only quite limited lowland pasture resources are to be found in Konavle, Slansko Primorje (Slano littoral), Pelješac, or the Cetina river valley in present-day southern Croatia, Popovo polje (Popovo field) in Herzegovina, or the Zeta Plain in Montenegro where herdsmen from the neighbouring mountain regions would gather in the winter. On the

different parts of a single group could all be concentrated in one region, while in the mountains they were usually divided and scattered: B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 186, 190, 194; B. Hrabak, *Diskusija*, “Radovi ANUBiH” 1983, vol. 73, p. 150; B. Hrabak, *Transhumanca u Hercegovini (XIV–XVIII vek)*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak, Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 40–41.

²⁹ For example, they would descend from southernmost parts of Rascia (present-day north Montenegro) to the Zeta Plain and Lake Skadar region (present-day central and southeast Montenegro), or from the interior of east Hum and Travunia (present-day central and east Herzegovina and west Montenegro) to the southernmost parts of east Hum and Travunia (present-day south Croatia). See for some of the winter grazing season areas in the vicinity of late medieval Dubrovnik: B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 181–201; B. Hrabak, *Diskusija*, 149–150; B. Hrabak, *Transhumanca u Hercegovini*, p. 39–43; Desanka Kovačević-Kojić, *Privredni razvoj srednjovjekovne bosanske države*, in: *Prilozi za Istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine I – Društvo i Privreda Srednjovjekovne Bosanske Države*, ed. Enver Redžić, Sarajevo: ANUBiH, 1987, p. 142. See the notary records from 14th century Kotor regarding the pastoralist activities in the vicinity of this coastal city: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 107–132.

³⁰ B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 190.

³¹ See for anthropogeography in: Jovan Cvijić, *Antropogeografski Spisi*, Beograd: SANU, 1987. Anthropogeographical and geomorphological characteristics of the Balkans have been discussed in: J. Cvijić, *Balkansko Poluostrvo i Južnoslovenske Zemlje: Osnove Antropogeografije, Knjiga Prva*, Beograd: Državna Štamparija, 1922.

other hand there are vast plains in Thrace, along the Marica (Maritza) river in present-day Greece and Bulgaria, and there is also Thessaly with its significant cattle breeding resources.³² Furthermore there are the large Thessaloniki plain in northern Greece as well as the Lower Danube Basin in Romania and Bulgaria with its enormous winter grazing grounds stretching between the Stara Planina (Balkan mountain range) and the South Carpatians. Finally, there is also the large south-Albanian plain between the Shkumbi and Vojusha rivers. Owing to their vastness these territories in present-day Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Albania enabled a far greater concentration of pastoralists in the lowlands during the winter season.³³ Over the course of several generations and centuries such continuous seasonal gatherings of numerous smaller groups of herdsmen could have produced far larger social entities than the ones that could have emerged in the western Balkans as the result of similar seasonal pastoral activities.³⁴ The distinctiveness of the terrain, with its “broken up”, often highly dispersed and mutually isolated micro-regions suitable for pastures in the western part of the Balkans, as well as the relatively limited resources that this region could offer caused the local pastoral groups to be much more physically dispersed and smaller in average size than their eastern Balkan counterparts.³⁵ Furthermore, the depletion of natural resources such as pastures often caused local Vlach groups to split into smaller, more

³² Seasonal migrations of Vlachs from the lowlands in present-day central Greece (Thessaly) to the mountains of present-day Macedonia were first recorded by Byzantine authors such as Kekaumenos in the 11th century: Ostrogorski and Barišić, *Fontes Byzantini*, p. 214–215. See also Jacques Lefort, *The Rural economy, seventh–twelfth centuries*, in: *The Economic history of Byzantium: from the seventh through the fifteenth century*, vol. I., ed. Angeliki E. Laiou, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002, p. 265–266. See further on historic transhumance in present-day Greece: C. Chang, P. Tourtellotte, *Ethnoarchaeological Survey*, p. 249–264.

³³ See for important observations about the differences between the Western, Eastern and Southern Balkans with regards to available resources for pastoralists: S. Vukosavljević, *Organizacija Dinarskih Plemena*, p. 30–32.

³⁴ Probably up to several thousand families and tens of thousands of heads of livestock on average were to be found in at least a part of the abovementioned lowland regions of the Eastern and Southern Balkans, as opposed to probably not more than several hundred families with several thousand heads of livestock on average in each of the abovementioned lowland pasturelands along the mid-east Adriatic coast in the western Balkans region.

³⁵ There were never as much Vlachs in the Western Balkans as in other parts of the Balkans during most of the Middle Ages, and this is to a large extent a reflection of lesser resources that the Dinaric Alps and adjacent lowland areas can offer for transhumance when compared to the rest of the Balkans. Another result of the geomorphology and the modest resources in the Western Balkans was a small size of basic Vlach social cells, the katuns. Medieval katuns usually consisted of between 20 and 50 families. Still, the terrain configuration and life conditions in the Dinaric karst caused the katuns in this region to be smaller than the ones in the rest of the Balkans. For example, an average katun in present-day central and south Serbia (including Kosovo) and the Central Balkans in the mid-14th century consisted of 45 to 50 families: Radomir Ivanović, *Katunska naselja na manastirskim vlastelinstvima*, “Istoriski Časopis – Organ Istoriskog Instituta” 1954–1955, vol. 5, p. 407–408. On the other hand, an average katun in the eastern half of the Dinarides (in the Western Balkans), for example in central and east Herzegovina, consisted of about 20 to 30 families during most of the Late Middle Ages: M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 47–48; B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 194. Similar conclusion can be deduced from the late medieval Early Ottoman population censuses, such as the 1475–1477 Ottoman defter for the san-

sustainable groups with less cattle, and then disperse over a greater area or even migrate further, to neighbouring regions so that they could find and exploit new resources more easily if they wanted to continue with transhumance.³⁶ All of this made it even less possible for large-scale social entities of Vlachs to be formed and survive in the long run in this region, given the oral nature of their communication and the growing physical distance between such groups.³⁷

Finally, the abovementioned geomorphological and anthropogeographical elements that are characteristic of the Western Balkans helped facilitate and accelerated the linguistic Slavization of the Vlachs in this region. Although a portion of the Vlachs who started colonizing the mountainous hinterland of the Mid-East Adriatic (the southern part of medieval Serbia, between the Neretva and Drim rivers) during the mid-13th century were still bilingual (both Slavic and Romanic-speaking) at the time of their arrival in this region, during the course of the next two centuries this changed and most of the local Vlachs were Slavic-speaking populations by the end of the Middle Ages.³⁸ Beside demographic elements such as occasional population mix-

jak of Herzegovina: Ahmed S. Aličić (ed.), *Poimenični popis Sandžaka Vilajeta Hercegovina*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut, 1985, p. 26–161.

³⁶ B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 190; M. Ančić, *Gospodarski aspekti*, p. 90–91. The alternative was to start adapting to a sedentary way of life and engage in farming and/or crafts and trades while gradually neglecting and/or completely abandoning pastoralism.

³⁷ See maps showing migratory routes of transhumant pastoralists in Southeastern Europe during the last three to four centuries in: Miloš Luković, *Sezonowe migracije pasterzy na Balkanach: charakter, historia, transformacje*, “Res Historica – Czasopismo Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej” 2015, vol. 40, p. 61–95. A map depicting seasonal migrations of pastoralists in the Dinaric Alps during the previous two centuries can be found in: M. Marković, *Stočarska kretanja*, p. 203–204. See for similar seasonal migration routes of medieval Vlachs: Jovan Trifunovski, *Geografske karakteristike srednjovekovnih katuna*, in: *Simpozijum o srednjovekovnom katunu*, ed. Milenko S. Filipović, Sarajevo: Naučno Društvo BiH, 1963, p. 29. The main zones of transhumance in the western Balkans are discussed in: Bogumil Hrabak, *Vlasi starinci i doseljenici u porečju Zapadne Morave, do 1570. godine*, “Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja (Čačak)” 1990, vol. 8–9, p. 8; M. Marković, *Stočarska kretanja*, p. 27.

³⁸ Bilingualism seems to have been a widespread phenomenon among the Vlachs by the late 11th century, and the earliest recorded (mid and late-11th century) Vlachs from present-day Thessaly and central Bulgaria all had Slavic personal names: Berivoj, Slavota and Budilo. See in G. Ostrogorski and F. Barišić (eds.), *Fontes Byzantini*, p. 214–216; Άννα Κομνηνή, *Αλεξιάς*, p. 156. See on bilingualism of the largest part of the Balkan Vlachs during the High Middle Ages and the linguistic assimilation of a significant part of them by the Late Middle Ages: P. Skok, *Češka knjiga*, p. 306–310. See further on bilingualism of the western Balkan Vlachs: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 22–23, 37, 88–91, 116, 125–129, 149–150, 164–170, 201, 208–211, 215–216, 243–252. See an example from Ragusan (Dubrovnik) medieval notary records of Slavic speaking Vlachs (who were settled in southwestern part of medieval Serbia, in the hinterland of Ragusa) who were attacked and robbed by several Ragusans in 1284: Gregor Čremošnik (ed.), *Kancelariski i notarski spisi, 1278–1301*, Beograd: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1932, p. 125–131. See a detailed analysis of this source in: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 164–170. Ragusan notary records from 1312 offer another example of Ragusans attacking several Vlachs from nearby Serbia: Nella Lonza and Zdenka Janeković-Römer, *Dubrovački “Liber de meleficiis” iz 1312–1313. godine*, “Radovi Zavoda za Hrvatsku Povijest” 1992, vol. 25, no. 1, p. 183. These Vlachs seem to have used Slavic (Serb) language as their first and only language because the chancery records interchangeably label them both “Vlachs” and “Slavs” as there must have been no linguistic difference between these Vlachs and their Slavic (Serb) neighbours at this time: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan*

ing of Vlachs with non-Vlachs, as well as socio-political circumstances such as the division of Vlachs among several neighbouring and often conflicting states during the Late Middle Ages, it was the distinctive physical features of the Western Balkans (and the fact that there were fewer Vlachs here than in other parts of Southeastern Europe) that largely contributed to the linguistic assimilation of those Vlachs who were still speaking Romance dialects when they first appeared in the Western Balkans during the 13th century. As already emphasized in present-day southern Albania, northern and central Greece, parts of Bulgaria and southern Romania the medieval Vlachs could find vast grazing grounds and an abundance of resources for their herds. They could arrive in large numbers to such spacious territories and regions, and during their seasonal winter gatherings these masses of Vlachs could communicate regularly in their original dialects, which enabled a significant part of them to preserve their non-Slavic dialects for longer periods of time. The western part of the Balkans did not witness such massive “assemblies” taking place and large communication networks being formed as the local Vlachs were more politically divided, far less numerous, and scattered in hundreds of groups and micro-groups over dozens of smaller grazing grounds. The smaller the number of speakers of a particular language or dialect, and the bigger the physical distance between them, the harder it was for such groups to create and maintain large communication and social networks, and the easier it was for them to assimilate and adopt the predominant language of the society they were part of. This is why the linguistic slavization of Vlachs in the Western Balkans seems to have,

Sources, p. 208–211. The conclusion that the majority of Vlachs in the East Adriatic (Western Balkans) region were linguistically Slavicized by the end of the Middle Ages is based on data from the numerous late medieval documents produced in Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and the early Ottoman Empire. These documents contain detailed information on Vlachs such as thousands of personal names, hundreds of katun/village names, as well as other valuable linguistic data. The linguistic Slavization of Vlachs in the late medieval Western Balkans has been both explained and illustrated by numerous examples from different 12th to 15th century records in: M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 45–112; E. П. Наумов, Наумов, Е. П., *Валканские Влахы и Формирование Древнесербской Народности*, in: *Этническая История Восточных Романцев: Древность и Средние Века*, ed. В. В. Иванов, *et al.*, Москва: Наука, 1979, p. 18–60; Mitar Pešikan, *Zetsko-humsko-raška imena na početku turskog doba*, “Onomatološki Prilozi SANU” 1982, vol. 3, p. 23–27; B. Hrabak, *Diskusija*, p. 159–160; B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 192; Đurđica Petrović, *Popis Vlaha Plješč(ev)ića iz 1371. Godine*, “Onomatološki Prilozi” 1986, vol. 7, p. 147–155. Many of these 12th to 15th century records containing hundreds of Vlach personal and clan names have also been extensively cited and discussed in: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 107–341. See observations on the influence of terrain configuration and the distribution of human groups with regards to population mixing and assimilation in this region: Hrabak, “Vlasi starinci i doseljenici”, 8. See 13th–15th century examples of population mixing and of non-Vlachs such as Serbs and even Albanians becoming Vlachs for economic, military and other purposes in the late medieval Western Balkans: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 39–41, 63–65, 88–92, 115–119, 123–129, 136–144, 171–173, 178–181, 244–254, 321–334. It should be noted here that the linguistic Slavization of Vlachs should not automatically be linked to their social position and identity, given that the issue of how they spoke was rather irrelevant for their social and legal status during the late medieval period: S. Ćirković, *Unutrašnja politika*, p. 470–471; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 37–41. Hence, the linguistic assimilation itself did not have immediate social consequences for them, as they did not cease to be considered “Vlachs” just by speaking Slavic.

for the most part, been completed by the late medieval period,³⁹ while a large part of the Vlachs in the southern and southeastern Balkans, and particularly in the Lower Danube region, managed to preserve their dialects up to this day.⁴⁰

B. THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMY ON IDENTITY BUILDING AMONG VLACHS

Economy was another important factor that influenced the creation and occasionally the successful reproduction of larger communication networks and social groups out of small social groups among a part of the Vlachs during the Late Middle Ages. The economies of western Balkan states began expanding rapidly during the 13th century owing to population growth and the increase of mining and trade, and this is especially true of Serbia and later Bosnia. These two countries became the most important southeast European producers of precious metals between the mid-13th and mid-15th centuries, and a very large portion of their metal exports was organised via coastal city communes such as Dubrovnik and Kotor.⁴¹ As the vast majority of trade routes between the interior of Serbia and Bosnia and the aforementioned coastal cities passed through the eastern Dinarides (mountainous areas of present-day central and east Herzegovina, southeast Bosnia, western and northern Montenegro and southwestern Serbia) most of the local trade could only be carried out by caravans.⁴² By the mid-14th century Vlach settlements were dispersed throughout the hinterland of Dubrovnik and Kotor,⁴³ and even though they were not the only inhabitants of this

³⁹ I. Botica, *Prilog istraživanju*, p. 39–40.

⁴⁰ See further on south Balkan and Lower Danubian Vlachs in: Tom Winnifrith, *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan people*, London: Duckworth, 1987; Istvan Vasary, *Cumans and Tatars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 13–53, 134–165.

⁴¹ See further in Konstantin Jireček, *Važnost Dubrovnika u trgovačkoj povijesti Srednjega vijeka*, Dubrovnik: Dubrovačka hrvatska tiskara, 1915), 24–52, 67–104; Antun Dabinović, *Statutarne odredbe za kotorski karavanski saobraćaj*, “Godišnjak Pomorskog Muzeja u Kotoru” 1958, vol. 7, p. 263–266; Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808. – Prvi dio*, Zagreb: MH, 1980, p. 81–241. For economic matters and trade in this region during the Late Middle Ages see: D. Kovačević, *Trgovina u Srednjovjekovnoj Bosni*, Sarajevo: Naučno društvo BiH, 1961, p. 22–40; Bariša Krekić, *Dubrovnik, Italy, and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1980; D. Kovačević-Kojić, *Privredni razvoj srednjovjekovne bosanske države*, p. 84–190; S. Ćirković (ed.), *Rabotnici, Vojnici, Duhovnici – Društva srednjovjekovnog Balkana*, Beograd: Equilibrium, 1997; Desanka Kovačević-Kojić (ed.), *Gradski Život u Srbiji i Bosni (XIV–XV vijek)*, Beograd: Istorijski institut, 2007. See on mining and precious metals: Mihailo Dinić, *Za istoriju rudarstva u srednjovjekovnoj Srbiji i Bosni*, vol. 1–2, Beograd: SANU, 1955–1962; S. Ćirković *et al.*, *Staro srpsko rudarstvo*, Beograd: Vukova zadužbina, 2002, p. 1–32.

⁴² See further on trade routes and caravans in: Konstantin Jireček, *Trgovački putevi i rudnici Srbije i Bosne u Srednjem vijeku*, in: *Zbornik Konstantina Jirečeka I*, ed. Mihailo Dinić, Beograd: SAN, 1959, p. 205–304; Mihailo Dinić (ed.), *Srpske Zemlje u Srednjem Veku*, Beograd: SKZ, 1978, p. 305–330.

⁴³ During the mid-12th century the Vlachs were still living in the interior of Serbia and were only gradually colonised to its southern regions (the hinterland of Dubrovnik, Kotor, etc.) by the kings of Serbia, starting with the mid-13th century. Subsequently (during the 14th century and later) a part of these Vlachs migrated under different circumstances to Croatia as well as Bosnia. See B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katu-*

mountainous region they specialised in livestock breeding (mostly sheep, but also mules and horses that were used in caravans) and often accompanied local trade caravans going from Dubrovnik, Kotor and other coastal cities to their destinations in Serbia and Bosnia.⁴⁴ The importance of Vlachs for this region's trade and economy gradually grew during the 14th and 15th centuries with the increase in the volume of trade, and this had a significant impact on their social structures. For example, the growing quantity of trade goods required the engagement of more caravans as well as larger caravans for transport, and as a result smaller Vlach groups would have occasionally been forced to closely work together to form larger caravan companies in order to meet the demands of the growing market. Furthermore, the market growth also resulted in the growing demand for livestock products, and as their herds increased small pastoralist groups (such as clans and small katuns) would occasionally have had to join forces with other such groups in order to manage seasonal migrations (transhumance) with their herds.⁴⁵

Even though this economically motivated cooperation of small groups (clans and katuns) sometimes had no particular social consequences and sometimes only led to the development of *ad hoc* social entities, as years and decades passed such activities occasionally did produce more stable communication structures among the Vlachs, and eventually larger Vlach communities (katuns, groups of katuns, and occasionally tribes) emerged as a result.⁴⁶ Even though such larger entities were formed primarily

na, p. 181–201; B. Hrabak, *Naseljavanje hercegovačkih i bosanskih Vlaha u Dalmatinsku Zagoru u XIV, XV i XVI veku*, in: *Vlasi u Starijoj Hrvatskoj Historiografiji*, ed. Ivan Mužić, Split: MHAS, 2010, p. 197–213; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 58–106, 159–164, 247–254. See several maps depicting the distribution of Vlach settlements in the central and western Balkans between the 12th and 15th centuries: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 415–426.

⁴⁴ M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 81. See for horse breeding in the hinterland of Dubrovnik: Esad Kurtović, *Konj u srednjovjekovnoj Bosni*, Sarajevo: Univerzitet u Sarajevu, 2014. During the mid-13th century the Vlachs were only a fragment of the local populations that were engaged in caravan activities, but by the mid-15th century they had become one of the most important groups to participate in caravan transport in this region. See D. Kovačević, *Srednjovjekovni katun*, p. 121–140.

⁴⁵ See on Vlachs and their trade with livestock and livestock products: M. Ančić, *Gospodarski aspekti*, p. 69–98; D. Kovačević-Kojić, *Privredni razvoj*, p. 138–144; Siniša Mišić, *Humska Zemlja u Srednjem Veku*, Beograd: DBR International Publishing, 1996, p. 208–228.

⁴⁶ See a detailed discussion on these issues in: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 58–106, 136–145, 170–190, 247–254. The hinterland of Dubrovnik, especially Travunia (southwestern part of medieval Serbia in present-day east Herzegovina and west Montenegro) was very suitable for such networking between different Vlach groups because some of the most important trade routes in this part of the Western Balkans passed through it. See further in: Đ. Petrović, *Mataruge*, p. 97–129; Đurđica Petrović, *Srednjovjekovni Vlasi na teritoriji današnje Crne Gore – primer Ridani*, in: *Srednjovjekovna Istorija Crne Gore kao Polje Istraživanja*, ed. Branislav Kovačević, Podgorica: Istorijski Institut CG, 1999, p. 229–264; Bogumil Hrabak, *Drobnjaci*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak, Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 90; Bogumil Hrabak, *Drobnjaci*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak, Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 90–129; Bogumil Hrabak, *Banjani*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak, Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 130–129; idem, *Banjani*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak, Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 130–143.

through continuous oral communication that was maintained between Vlach groups and their elites during their regular economic activities such as seasonal transhumant movements and participation in caravan transport, by the late 14th century a portion of the local Vlach “aristocracy” occasionally also began utilizing literacy for both economic and private purposes.⁴⁷ Still, this was not a widespread phenomenon at this time as only a small minority of the Western Balkan Vlachs were actually involved in large-scale caravan transport resulting in high profits during the Late Middle Ages.⁴⁸

C. THE INFLUENCE OF WAR AND POLITICS ON VLACH SOCIAL STRUCTURES

The periodical gathering of various “sub-Vlach” groups with an aim to participate in military activities sometimes also affected the social structure of Vlach societies and influenced the creation of larger (though often only temporary) communicative and social networks among them.⁴⁹ The Vlachs living in east Hum and Travunia – the westernmost regions of late medieval Serbia (in present-day south Croatia, central and east Herzegovina, and west Montenegro) surrounding the city commune of

⁴⁷ See for Vlach elites in the hinterland of Dubrovnik: M. Blagojević, *Vlaški knezovi*, p. 43–75; B. Hrabak, *Čelnici Stočarskih Zajednica u Istočnoj Hercegovini u XIII–XV Veku*, in: *Iz Starije Prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Knj. II*, ed. Bogumil Hrabak. Beograd: Arhivar, 2003, p. 44–76; Esad Kurtović, *Seniori Hercegovačkih Vlaha*, in: *Hum i Hercegovina Kroz Povijest – Zbornik Radova, Knj. I.*, ed. Ivica Lučić, Zagreb: HIP, 2011, p. 647–695; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 133–279. For example members of the Vlach “aristocracy” could have corresponded with businessmen from Dubrovnik or Kotor to negotiate basic terms and prices of caravan transport. A part of them occasionally also hired artisans to decorate their tombstones (“stećci”) and stonecutters to inscribe them. Such activities have not been recorded before the late 14th and early 15th centuries and they primarily witness the growth of wealth among a part of the Vlach elites. See I. Botica, *Prilog istraživanju*, p. 39. It is important to remember that the stećci tombstones rarely included epitaphs and only 0.5% of them actually have inscriptions (almost exclusively Cyrillic): Šefik Bešliagić, *Stećci – kultura i umjetnost*, Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1982, p. 418–458. Furthermore, a large part of the stećci were not even built for Vlach notables but rather for the local Serb, Bosnian, etc. aristocracy. See on medieval “stećci” tombstones: S. Ćirković, *Istorija Srednjovekovne Bosanske Države*, Beograd: SKZ, 1964, p. 219, 233–235; Ante Milošević, *Stećci i Vlasi: Stećci i vlaške migracije 14. i 15. stoljeća u Dalmaciji i jugozapadnoj Bosni*, Split: RZZSK, 1991; Š. Bešliagić, *Leksikon Stećaka*, Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 2004, p. 113–162; Dubravko Lovrenović, *Stećci – Bosansko i Humsko Mrmorje Srednjeg Vijeka*, Sarajevo: Rabić, 2009, p. 68–71; I. Mužić, *Vlasi i Starobalkanska Pretkršćanska Simbolika Jelena na Stećcima*, in: *Vlasi u Starijoj Hrvatskoj Historiografiji*, ed. Ivan Mužić, Split: MHAS, 2010, p. 237; Branka Purgarić-Kužić, *Dosadašnja istraživanja o stećcima*, “Radovi – Zavod za hrvatsku povijest” 1995, vol. 28, p. 242–253.

⁴⁸ Basic information about salaries paid to the Vlachs accompanying caravans from and to Dubrovnik (as well as the average size of such caravans) during the 15th century can be found in: M. Dinić, *Srpske zemlje*, p. 322, 329.

⁴⁹ Military activities and warfare have been utilized on numerous occasions in history for strengthening group cohesion and creating larger social entities out of smaller ones. Examples of this include the Huns under Atilla and Mongols under Chinggis Khaan: Paul D. Buell, *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire*, Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2003, p. 4–7; Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War*, Barnsley: Pen&Sword, 2007; Ronald Findlay and Mats Lundahl, *The Economics of the Frontier: Conquest and Settlement*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 173–222.

Dubrovnik – had an economic as well as military function, both during periods of Serb (mid-12th to late 14th centuries) and later Bosnian rule (late 14th century onwards); and the same goes for the Vlachs in late medieval Zeta, in the hinterland of Kotor, Budva (Budua), Bar (Antivari) and Ulcinj (Ulcinium) during the Serb rule (12th to 15th centuries).⁵⁰ For example, following the decline of the Serb Empire in the late 14th century dozens of different Vlach and non-Vlach groups – pastoralist clans and katuns as well as various military companies, village communes, etc., from Zeta (parts of present-day central and east Montenegro and northwest Albania) – participated in occasional armed conflicts and clashes between local Serb magnates, Albanian lords, the Venetians and the Ottomans.⁵¹ As the result of political turmoil and the gradual militarization of this region a supra-tribal entity (though a temporary one as it seems) had emerged here by the mid-15th century whose leaders were in Venetian service.⁵² These Serb, Vlach and even some Albanian groups and micro-groups, more than fifty of them, were scattered all over western and central Zeta, and rarely consisted of more than a few hundred people each – but when joined together they could have amounted to perhaps between eight and nine thousand people. A very similar, fairly massive social entity (whose formation was also influenced by local government structures) was to be found in present-day east Herzegovina from the late 15th century onward when an administrative-territorial entity named “Donji Vlasi” (Lower Vlachs) was recorded – and it consisted of some two dozen Vlach katuns numbering up to roughly five thousand people.⁵³

⁵⁰ Đ. Petrović, *Mataruge*, p. 97–129; Miloš Blagojević, *Državna Uprava u Srpskim Srednjovekovnim Zemljama*, Beograd: Službeni list, 2001, p. 53–55; B. Hrabak, *Čelnici stočarskih zajednica*, p. 70–73; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 63–83, 136–280, 320–335.

⁵¹ I. Božić, *Uloga i Organizacija*, p. 96–97.

⁵² See a document from 1455 in which the “convent of Zeta” (as the Venetians named the heads of 51 different groups under the nominal overlordship of duke Stephen Crnojević) acknowledges the Venetian supreme authority over their lands: Šime Ljubić (ed.), *Listine o Odnosajih Između Južnoga Slavenstva i Mletačke Republike, Knjiga X., od godine 1453 do 1469*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1891, p. 67–68. The formation of various clans and tribes in parts of late medieval Zeta is thoroughly discussed in: I. Božić, *Uloga i Organizacija*, p. 93–105. See for demographic and political changes in present-day east Montenegro and northwest Albania during the Middle Ages: Jovan R. Bojović (ed.), *Stanovništvo slovenskog porekla u Albaniji – Zbornik Radova*, Titograd: Istorijski Institut, 1991.

⁵³ Lower Vlachs were first mentioned in a 1456–1479 book of business records belonging to a Ragusan merchant Dživan Pripčinović: Bogumil Hrabak, *O hercegovačkim vlaškim katunima prema poslovnoj knjizi Dživana Pripčinovića*, “Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja, nova serija” 1956, vol. 11, p. 29–39. It would seem that the “Lower Vlachs” were formed as an administrative and military structure by the lords of Herzegovina, the local Kosača magnate family, in the years preceding the Ottoman seizure of this principality. There were some 23 katuns of Lower Vlachs with probably around 30 families per katon on average, and this amounts to perhaps 5000 people. See further on Lower Vlachs: D. Kovačević-Kojić, *Privredni razvoj*, p. 140–141; Đuro Tošić, *Prilog Proučavanju “Donjih Vlaha” u Istočnoj Hercegovini*, “Zbornik za Istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine” 2004, vol. 4, p. 81–132. The full list of Vlach katuns and households in late medieval Herzegovina can be found in the first Ottoman population register for this region, 1475–1477: A. Aličić, *Poimenični popis*, p. 26–161. See an extensive analysis of demographic matters related to the Vlachs together with an assessment of their numbers in the Central and Western Balkans re-

It should be noted that both the breaking up of larger (sub)Vlach groups into smaller ones and the integration of smaller groups into larger entities was very often a matter of state intervention, or was at least done under the auspices of feudal authorities – either for military, economic, or administrative purposes.⁵⁴ Some forms of administrative structures and offices intended to govern the Vlachs and integrate them in local Southeast European states have been documented as early as the 10th century. The Byzantine emperors sometimes appointed individual commanders responsible for governing the Vlachs in certain regions of the Empire.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Vlach “administrators” who bore Slavic titles such as “knez” (count), “vojvoda”, “sudac” (judge) and “čelnik” (chief/head) have been documented in medieval charters and notarial records from several South Slavic countries. For example Vlach counts were first mentioned in medieval Serbia during the 13th and 14th centuries (both in the interior and in its westernmost parts such as Hum and Travunia), and they were usually commanders of several Vlach katuns on ecclesiastical and royal estates.⁵⁶ The custom of appointing commanders of several Vlach katuns was retained when parts of Serbia surrounding Dubrovnik became possessions of the “bans” (princes) of Bosnia and their magnates in the late 14th century,⁵⁷ and even after these regions were conquered by the Ottomans during the second half of the 15th century.⁵⁸ Finally, Vlach counts, voivodes and judges were also to be found in present-day Dalmatia and Lika

gion during the period between the late 13th and 15th centuries: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 136–144, 315–341.

⁵⁴ See for numerous such cases in: M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 45–112; Đ. Petrović, *Mataruge*, p. 97–129; Dušanka Bojanić, *Diskusija*, “Radovi ANUBiH” 1983, vol. 73, p. 156–158, 164–167. See also above in footnote 26 and below in footnote 60.

⁵⁵ It is likely that the commanders of Vlachs, particularly the ones who commanded supra-tribal structures were sometimes chosen among non-Vlach individuals, such as local aristocrats, as was the case with a Byzantine official named Nikolica (Nikolitza) who was commanding the Vlachs in Helada/Hellas, in present-day central Greece during the late 10th century. See the sources mentioning Nikolica: F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden*, p. 98; G. Ostrogorski and F. Barišić, *Fontes Byzantini*, p. 213–216. See on Vlachs in medieval Byzantium: Miloš Antonović, *Vlasi u grčkim oblastima Dušanovog Carstva*, “Braničevski glasnik” 2010, vol. 7, p. 31; Милош Цветковић, *О статусу Влаха Хеладе у тематском систему*, “Зборник радова Византолошког института” 2018, vol. 55, p. 45–64. Even though not all Vlach commanders were Vlachs it seems reasonable to think that in most cases they would have been chosen among the Vlachs because it was more practical to appoint a local man to govern a particular community as he was best acquainted with its customs and traditions as well as its members.

⁵⁶ See a discussion of the primary sources (chancery and notarial records) in M. Blagojević, *Vlaški knezovi*, p. 43–77; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 221–279. As an average katun in the western Balkans numbered between 100 and 200 people, a group of katuns usually consisted of no less than several hundred and no more than a 1000 people.

⁵⁷ D. Kovačević, *Srednjovjekovni katun*, p. 134–135; M. Blagojević, *Vlaški knezovi*, p. 63–68; Esad Kurtović, *Iz historije vlahu Pliščića*, “Godišnjak ANUBiH” 2008, vol. 37, p. 223.

⁵⁸ Đ. Tošić, *Prilog Proučavanju*, p. 81–132; D. Bojanić, *Diskusija*, p. 157; Ema Miljković, *Opširni defter Smederevskog sandžaka iz 1476. Godine*, “Istorijski Časopis” 1991, vol. 38, p. 36. See further in several early-Ottoman sources for South Slavic lands: Dušanka Bojanić, *Turski Zakoni i Zakonski Propisi iz XV i XVI veka za Smederevsku, Kruševačku i Vidinsku Oblast*, Beograd: Istorijski institut, 1974; A. Aličić, *Poimenični popis*, p. 3–612; E. Miljković, *Opširni defter*, p. 31–42.

in Croatia, where different Vlach groups from Serbia (and later Bosnia) migrated during the 14th and 15th centuries.⁵⁹

All of this points to the fact that the functioning of Vlach societies – particularly on a level that surpassed their basic social cells such as clans and katuns – was often decisively influenced by external interventions.⁶⁰ The more often these interventions occurred the less stable such social structures were, given that frequent interventions were not beneficial for the creation and maintenance of larger communication networks and the stabilisation of social structures that might have evolved out of such networks. Hence, the existence of titles such as “knez”, “vojvoda”, etc. among a part of the Vlachs should not automatically be seen as an indicator that larger social entities (and collective identities) normally existed among them – as this often depended on the social and political context in a given region. Furthermore, the abovementioned titles and “offices” among Vlachs in the late medieval Central and Western Balkans were not so much the result of a “bottom-up” political process (such as the evolution of Vlach societies and their group self-awareness) but rather a “top-down” political imposition (because such administrative offices were usually created by the Vlachs’ political masters in order to govern them more efficiently). The creation of an administrative frame for governing theretofore unrelated “sub-Vlach” micro-groups as a single “group” – or rather a single administrative “unit” – was at best a starting point for connecting and binding together different “sub-Vlach” social entities. Such administrative interventions could have occasionally led to the gradual growth of a sense of collectivism/groupness among different “sub-Vlach” groups, but for this to have happened such social and administrative frames would have had to have been stable for

⁵⁹ N. Klaić, *Položaj Vlaha*, p. 107–111. See several charters that mention Vlachs in 14th–15th century Croatia: Radoslav Lopašić, *Cetinski i Lički Vlasi*, in: *Vlasi u Starijoj Hrvatskoj Historiografiji*, ed. Ivan Mužić, Split: MHAS, 2010, p. 19–42; Mladen Ančić, *Registar Splitskog kaptola*, “Fontes – Izvori za Hrvatsku Povijest” 2014, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 89–91.

⁶⁰ M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 58–106, 221–232, 247–254. One can deduce this not only from the explicit evidence provided by medieval documents but also from the fact that the titles of such Vlach officials were of Slavic origin (*knez*, *vojvoda*, etc.) and they were a way of projecting medieval Slavic political and administrative ideas and concepts on Vlach societies. The Vlachs’ social structures and legal frames within which they functioned were largely shaped according to the Slavic institutional logic, as Vlachs themselves did not have large-scale political and/or social institutions they could have reproduced on their own – except for clans and similar small-scale social cells such as katuns (and later tribes). This of course does not mean there was no state intervention even in such small Vlach social entities. As mentioned in footnote 26 there are examples of Vlach micro-groups being modelled and influenced by the state as well. See in M. Filipović, *Struktura i organizacija*, p. 45–112; M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 63–105, 136–280, 320–335. An example of this are the Đuraševci Vlachs who are mentioned in the 14th century Serb Charters (Chrysobulls) issued for the Dečane monastery (near the present-day city of Peć). In the first, 1330 Charter, two katuns of Đuraševci Vlachs (with 16 and 20 households) were mentioned, but by 1336 the two Đuraševci katuns had been merged into one katun and additional 10 households were added to the new katun. This newly created katun was renamed Sremljane and a “knez” was placed at the head of the new Sremljane katun. See M. S. Filipović, “Struktura i organizacija”, 47, 64, 67–68. See the complete Dečane Chrysobulls in Pavle Ivić and Milica Grković, *Dečanske Hrisovulje*, Novi Sad: Institut za lingvistiku, 1976, p. 59–299; M. Grković, *Prva Hrisovulja Manastira Dečani*, Beograd: Mnemosyne, 2004, p. 64–103.

decades, if not generations. Even though external interventions sometimes did help create larger social entities that gradually started behaving as self-aware groups, very often this did not happen – either because of the social instabilities caused by such frequent external interventions, or because of the broader political instability in this region, especially in the period from the late 14th century onward.⁶¹ As far as the Western Balkans are concerned, the abovementioned larger social entities that could and did last for longer periods of time, and did (at least partially) function as self-delineated and self-aware communities usually consisted of not more than several thousand people – with the regions they controlled usually stretching over an area of several hundred and up to, very rarely, several thousand square kilometres.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the formation and reproduction of collective identities of late medieval Vlachs, particularly those inhabiting the Dinaric Alps (the hinterland of the Eastern Adriatic coast) in the Western Balkans. As the Vlachs' culture was overwhelmingly oral – and there are significant social and political differences between oral and literary cultures and their development – this paper focused on the relatively narrow scope of collective identification(s) in oral societies and a rather simple social structure and organisation of oral communities in contrast to larger, far more complex and more stable literary cultures. A key issue discussed within this context was whether there ever existed a single, “universal” Vlach identification mechanism in the Middle Ages which included all of the Balkan Vlachs (or rather their elites). The paper's argument was that the medieval people we know of as “Vlachs” were fragmented be-

⁶¹ D. Kovačević, *Srednjovjekovni katun*, p. 137–138. The late medieval Eastern Adriatic/Western Balkans region was divided between different, often competing states, and beside Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, by the late 14th and early 15th centuries the Venetians and the Ottomans started playing an aggressive role in local politics as well. As political relations became more complicated in the region and new borders were drawn, the Vlachs often found themselves on opposing sides. Furthermore, transhumant pastoralists were often prevented from continuing their economic activities in a usual manner once new political borders were established, and the impossibility of carrying out their habitual seasonal movements with livestock forced the Vlachs to either limit their transhumance to a narrower area with lesser resources and start getting accustomed to a more sedentary way of life, or to divide themselves into smaller groups and (especially in case of wars and frequent border changes) to migrate in hope of finding a new home (and such a scenario made it even less possible for large-scale social institutions and entities to be formed among them and survive in the long run). See for the influence of political borders on transhumance in the Balkans: D. Kovačević-Kojić, *Privredni razvoj*, p. 142; J. Trifunovski, *Geografske karakteristike*, p. 34–38; Konstantin Jireček, *Vlasi i Mavrovlasi u dubrovačkim spomenicima*, in: *Zbornik Konstantina Jirečeka I*, ed. Mihailo Dinić, Beograd: SAN, 1959, p. 197–198; B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 185; George L. Vlachos, *A Complicated Relationship: The Transhumant Pastoralists of Macedonia and the Greek State, 1913–1936*, “Arcadia: Explorations in Environmental History” 2020, no. 29. As already mentioned, the influence of the relief as well as the distribution of grazing grounds also affected the size and social cohesion of Vlach groups. See further in: B. Hrabak, *Razgranavanje katuna*, p. 183, 190, 194; B. Hrabak, *Diskusija*, p. 150.

tween several states and dispersed over a territory too large for oral communication to “cover” on a regular basis. Furthermore, the Vlachs were ruled by other peoples and they lacked the socio-political institutions as well as cultural tools such as literacy that would have enabled their elites to create and maintain regular long-term relations between numerous scattered groups of Vlachs – which would in turn have allowed them to develop a shared sense of Vlach community. Therefore, a “universal” Vlach collective identity did not exist in the medieval Balkans.

Nevertheless, the people who were called “Vlachs” by others gradually adopted this name for self-labelling, and we know of many “Vlachnesses” (groups that were labelled and labelled themselves “Vlachs” and functioned according to the “Vlach Laws/Customs”) that existed during the Middle Ages. Still, these “Vlachnesses” were simultaneously present in different medieval Balkan states and were usually socially unrelated and unaware of each other’s existence. Furthermore, given that the “Vlachs” were externally shaped as a distinct legal and social category (and were defined as “Vlachs” primarily (but not exclusively) by the “outside” world), the collective identification mechanisms that were indeed self-defined and internally shaped by the Vlachs themselves primarily functioned on (and from) a “sub-Vlach” level (from “inside” the “Vlach” population category). Different external factors influenced the creation and/or dissolution of such “sub-Vlach” social entities, with the most common being ecology and geomorphology, economy and politics. As far as the Eastern Adriatic/Western Balkans region is concerned such self-aware social networks (groups) and collective identification mechanisms that could be self-reproduced and self-maintained by the late medieval Vlachs (primarily through oral forms of communication) were not smaller than several dozen people and were rarely ever larger than several thousand. The existence of both the smallest and largest such groups (clans, katuns and tribes) as well as their distribution throughout this region has been well documented in numerous late medieval records from Serbia, Dubrovnik (Ragusa), Bosnia, Croatia, the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire.⁶²

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⁶² See details on published and unpublished archival records concerning the Vlachs in this region: M. Pijović, *Vlachs in the Ragusan Sources*, p. 2–17, 346–350, 351–358.

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