

Wojciech Sajkowski
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
wojciech.sajkowski@amu.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-8585-4149

Morlachs, or Slavs from Dalmatia in French Encyclopedias and Dictionaries of the 18th and 19th Century¹

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The Western view of the Balkans is, according to many researchers, synonymous with a stereotypical approach and ignorance regarding the history and culture of the nations inhabiting the Balkan Peninsula. The controversies could even refer to the names of individual Balkan communities that were and still are understood very differently. One example of such ambiguity is the name "Morlachs" i.e. "Black Vlachs", which in reality was used to describe the Slavs of Dalmatia. This paper investigates the abovementioned issue on the example of the French encyclopedic sources, which are representative of the times in which they were created, as they were synthetic, and were intended for a wide audience. The form of the encyclopedic definition assumed synthesis, the gathering and summarizing the existing information. However, the French dictionaries and encyclopedias in the 18th and 19th century were not really able to synthesize known information about Dalmatian Slavs called by the name of Morlachs. Besides few exceptions, the explanations given by the dictionaries were imprecise, sometimes erroneous, referring to the past rather than to the present. In the light of the above, the statement that the French Enlightenment was one of the foundations on which the later stereotypical image of the Balkans emerged, seems justified.

KEYWORDS: Balkans; Morlachs; Dalmatia; imagology; Enlightenment; stereotypes

The Western view of the Balkans is, according to many researchers, synonymous with a stereotypical approach and ignorance regarding the history and culture of the nations inhabiting the Balkan Peninsula (Jezernik,

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2004, IX)². The controversies could even refer to the names of individual Balkan communities that were and still are understood very differently, as Paul Garde aptly pointed out in his study *Le discours balkanique*. One example of such ambiguity is the name “Morlachs” i.e. “Black Vlachs” (Greek *Maurovlakhi*) (Garde, 2004, 167). At first, this term meant Vlach pioneers who were settling in the Dinaric mountains since the Middle Ages, and then the Vlach military colonists of Krajina (Rapacka, 1997, 128, 194). Later also the Slavic settlers, coming e.g. from Serbia were named as Vlachs, because the difference between the shepherd peoples of Romance and Slav origin was often hard to be noticed (Stojanović, 1994, 152). It was the consequence of the slavification of the majority of the Vlachs: the Slavs were merging with them, and becoming shepherds themselves, while the Vlachs were often becoming farmers like Slavs, while losing their Romance language (Czamańska, 2015). In the 17th and 18th centuries, this name could mean any border guard or shepherd in the Balkans, regardless of his ethnicity or religion. Gradually, the name of the Morlachs became synonymous with the Slavs engaged in shepherding, with which the Vlachs were traditionally associated (Skok, 1971, 606; Wolff, 2001, 13). These observations would indicate that the term “Morlach” was used without taking into account ethnic and linguistic differences and the living conditions of individual communities. On the other hand, the French researcher Paul Garde observed, that the terms “Morlachs” and “Vlachs” could have many more concrete meanings. The Croatian population called in such way the Serbian military settlers, for the inhabitants of Dalmatian towns it was an inland population leading a semi-nomadic and shepherd life, while the Venetians could use those names to call all the Dalmatians who were of Slavic origin (Garde, 2004, 168). Whatever the explanation of the term “Morlachs” may be, it is obvious, that its ambiguity is a perfect example of the relativity of the socionyms and ethnonyms associated with the space of the Balkans.

It is not without significance that this paper investigates the abovementioned issue on the example of the French encyclopedic sources. According

²This stereotypical approach might be regarded by some as similar to the Orientalist perspective (Mitchell, 1992; Said, 2009), although as it was described by Maria Todorova, the idea of the Balkans can be also considered without this background (Todorova, 2008, 19–55).

to the eminent expert on the subject of Balkan stereotypes, Maria Todorova, it was the French Enlightenment that led “to a fundamental change in the attitude towards the non-Turkish people living in the Balkan Peninsula” (Todorova, 2008, 172). Encyclopedic sources are representative of the times in which they were created, are synthetic, and were intended for a wide audience. Thus, they shaped stereotypes about the “uncivilized” Europe which, according to the Enlightenment thinkers, such as Voltaire, also included Dalmatia. The philosopher of Ferney called the Morlachs “the most savage people on earth” and stated that the Dalmatian Slavs were essentially the uncontrollable barbarians which did not managed to civilize themselves through ages (Voltaire, 1784, 254).

The term “Morlach” (*Morlaque*) appears in the tenth volume of the Encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alembert published in 1765. Interestingly, it does not concern explicitly the Morlachs, but the geographical region they inhabit:

Morlachia – (Geog.) Country of Croatia, of which it occupies the southern part along the Gulf of Venice, between Istria & Dalmatia. The Morlachs are subjects of the republic of Venice and inhabit the mountain which is called *Morlaque*. They are refugees from Albania, determined, robust, warriors, always armed, who speak Slavic, and mostly follow the religion of the Greeks³ (Diderot, d’Alembert, 1765, 715).

This definition was, of course, internally contradictory, because Croatia was at that time part of the Habsburg Empire. As a result, the readers learned that the Morlachs live in an area that is a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, but they are subjects of Venice at the same time. This mistake resulted from the fact that this population inhabited the whole area of *Triples Confinium*, i.e. the border of Ottoman Turkey, Habsburg Monarchy, and Venice, which additionally underwent considerable changes at the beginning of the 18th century, after the treaties in Karlowitz (1799) and Požarevac (1718). The editor of the definition did not bother to explain the etymology of the term (the Black Vlachs),

³“MORLAQUIE, (Géog.) contrée de la Croatie, dont elle occupe la partie méridionale le long du golfe de Venise, entre l’Istrie & la Dalmatie. Les Morlaques sont sujets de la république de Venise, & habitent la montagne qu’on nomme Morlaque. Ce sont des fugitifs d’Albanie, gens déterminés, robustes, guerriers, toujours armés, qui parlent esclavon, & suivent la plupart la religion des Grecs”.

which was mentioned, inter alia, by the *Journal des Savants* in 1749 (*Journal des savants*, 1749).

Those characteristics of the Morlachs were taken from the travelogue of Jacob Spon, a French medic and an amateur of antiquity, who in 1665 made a trip to the countries. He mentioned the “mountain called *Morlaque*, which dominates over Dalmatia and is inhabited by the Morlachs, the refugees from Albania and the subjects of the Venetian Republic, who are determined and tireless, who did not ask for more during the war than to come to grips with the Turks”⁴ (Spon, 1724, 54). From the accounts of his travel companion, George Wheler, it is known that the *Morlaque* summit was in fact the Velebit mountain range that separates Croatia from Dalmatia (Wheler 1723: 15) which was called by the Venetians the “Morlach Mountains” (*Montagne Della Morlacca*) (Fürst-Bjeliš, 1999–2000, 349). The description of the Morlachs presented by Jacob Spon and quoted by the *Encyclopédie* focused on their physical strength and belligerence, which perfectly matched the stereotype of the barbarian Morlach.

Diderot and d’Alembert’s encyclopedia was not the only compendium quoting the information given by Jacob Spon. Earlier the same definition was cited by *Le grand dictionnaire géographique et critique* by La Martinière in 1735 (La Martinière, 1735, 564), *Le grand vocabulaire français*, edited by Sébastien Chamforta (Chamfort, 1771, 364), and different editions of *Dictionnaire géographique-portatif*, e.g. from the year 1748, 1758 and 1786, originally published by English historian Lawrence Echard (Echard, 1748, 106; 1758, 306; 1795, 474). This dictionary was published since 1715, the twentieth French edition from 1806, revised and enriched with new information, still cited Jacob Spon’s observation that the Morlachs are “refugees from Albania” (Echard, 1806, 648). Other dictionaries which cited such explanation of the term *les Morlaques* which were published in the last decades of the 18th century were e.g. *Géographie moderne* edited by Louis-Antoine de Lacroix (Lacroix, 1788, 100), *Les usages de la sphère* by Charles Delamarche (Delamarche, 1799, 260), and more detailed geographical study of the Eastern coast of the Adriatic made

⁴“La montagne appelée la Morlaque qui règne le long de la Dalmatie est habitée des Morlaques sujets de la République, autrefois fugitifs d’Albanie, gens déterminés & infatigables, qui ne demandaient pas mieux pendant la guerre, que de venir aux mains avec les Turcs”.

by Jacques Nicolas Belin from the year 1771 (Belin, 1771, 70). The latter work which wasn't in fact a dictionary was a testimony of the growing political and economic interest of the French with the space of the Balkans.

However, four years after the publication of the tenth volume of the *Encyclopedia* in 1765, which defined the term "Morlach" according to Jacob Spon's hundred-year testimony, French readers were allowed to become familiar with the more correct explanation. The French edition of the *Neue Erdbeschreibung*, geographical compendium authored by Anton Friedrich Büsching, and published originally in the years 1754–1761, explained the term as follows:

The name of the Morlachs was introduced by the Venetians and later became popular among other Italians. The term derives from the Latin-Slavic term *Maurovlahi*, meaning Mauro-Italians [Mauro-latins], or Vlachs. All inhabitants of the mountains were named Morlachs, because they – like the Vlachs – were engaged in shepherding, but they are not really Vlachs, and the Italians call with the name of the Morlachs all the inhabitants of Rascia, Bosnia and Croatia, although their language has nothing to do with Italian [Latin/Romance language]⁵ (Busching, 1769, 188).

The deliberations of Anton Friedrich Büsching surprise with remarkably accurate observations regarding the relativity of the term "Morlach". This definition could be put next to the modern considerations of Paul Garde regarding the relativism of the Balkan discourse. However, the explanation published in 1769 by French Büsching's French edition of *Neue Erdbeschreibung* was not used by the dictionaries' editors in France. The previously mentioned definition of Jacob Spon was still cited by the *Encyclopedia*, also in its edition from 1778 (Diderot, d'Alembert, 1778, 226). Büsching's accurate observations were ignored also by *Dictionnaire portatif* published by François Morénas in 1761 (Morénas 1761: 440) and *Le grand vocabulaire français* by Chamfort and Guyot from 1771 (Chamfort, Guyot, 1771, 365).

⁵“Le nom de Morlaques a été introduit par les Vénitiens, & il est ensuite devenu commun chez les autres Italiens. Ils l'ont fait de Mauro Vlahi qui est à moitié grec & à moitié esclavon, & désigne des Italiens maures ou noirs ou des valaques. On a donné le nom de Morlaques à tous ceux qui demeurent sur les montagnes, & qui sont bergers comme les Valaques, quoiqu'ils ne soient proprement point Valaques: car les Italiens appellent Morlaques tous les habitants des montagnes de la Rascie, de la Bosnie & de la Croatie, quoique leur langue n'ait absolument point de rapport avec l'Italienne”.

It's only in 1784, in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* published by Panckoucke (the second volume devoted to geography edited by Robert and Masson de Morvilliers), when the French lexicographers found that the explanation proposed by Anton Friedrich Büsching deserved to be taken into consideration. Following the example of German geographer, the term "Morlach" was presented as a very general and relative name. According to the author of the encyclopedic definition, the etymological origin of the term ("Black Vlachs") did not match his current meaning, which referred to the Slavs living in Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Serbia. The new definition was also updated in relation to the changes that took place on the political map of *Triplex Confinium* in the 18th century, as it stressed that the Morlach population inhabited both the Habsburg Monarchy and the Venetian Dalmatia (Robert, Masson de Mrovilliers, 1784, 406). Hence, the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* was the first French encyclopedia, which explained the term *les Morlaques* correctly.

Another volume of the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, devoted to "political and diplomatic economics" and edited by Dêmeunier, also resigned from referring to Jacob Spon's definition and the theory of the Albanian origin of the Morlachs. The compendium only mentioned that their physical strength and hard character resulted from the necessity to adapt to the difficult living conditions in the mountains. Because of that, they were to be desired in the Venetian and Austrian garrisons: "They are tall and strong people, hardened by life in the mountains [...]. Currently, they are protected by Hungary and Venice, there is actually no Dalmatian citadel in which the garrison does not have Morlachs" (Dêmeunier, 1786, 3)⁶.

The *Encyclopédie méthodique* published by Panckoucke in the years 1782–1792 is considered a qualitative leap compared to Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*⁷ and the new definition of the term "Morlach"

⁶"Ce sont des hommes grands & robustes, dont le tempérament s'est fortifié par l'habitude de vivre dans les montagnes (...). Aujourd'hui ils sont sous la protection de la Hongrie, ou sous celle des vénitiens, & il n'a presque point de place forte en Dalmatie, où on ne trouve des morlaques en garnison".

⁷Many definitions have been improved, and many new ones have appeared. The entire compendium consisted of 157 volumes, which were thematically divided. For comparison – the edition of the first *Encyclopedia* from Lucca contained 28 volumes, and the edition published in Neuchâtel had 39 volumes (Pinault-Sorensen, 1997, 453–456).

authenticates this theory. However the term “Morlachs” was still very briefly explained by the French lexicographers, although *les Morlaques* were sometimes regarded as the name of the majority of the Slavic population living in the south of Europe. Only in a few cases a separate article was devoted to Morlachs, as in the *Dictionnaire portatif* edited by François Morénas (Morénas, 1761, 440). Most often, the meaning of this term was explained under the geographical term of *Morlaquie*. It should also be noted that despite the clear definition in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, some dictionaries still copied the information about the Albanian origin of this population and suggested that the region of Morlachia which it inhabits belongs to Venice, e.g. *Dictionnaire géographique-portatif* of Laurence Echard from 1806 (Echard, 1806, 648).

Although, after Anton Friedrich Büsching, French lexicographers and encyclopedists began to define the term “Morlach” as a general and relative term imposed by the Venetians, this does not mean that for the latter ones the Morlachs were not a more consolidated group. On the contrary, the then Italian literature provided arguments for the thesis that the Morlachs constituted one nation, and not many different groups mistakenly called in the same way. Italian traveler Alberto Fortis who visited Dalmatia in 1770s recognized the Morlachs as one of the Slavic peoples, which “because of the similarity when it comes to language and customs, seem to form one nation, inhabiting from the Gulf of Venice, up to the Ice Ocean”⁸ (Fortis, 1778, 67).

This artificial definition, which was omitting the ambiguity and relativity of the term has been made verisimilar by an extensive description of Morlachian customs which constituted the considerable part of his travelogue. Alberto Fortis presented the information he gathered in a modern way, adapting his narrative to a form which characterized scientific dissertations of the Enlightenment era. Because of that French dictionaries and encyclopedias began to use the work of Alberto Fortis while writing about Dalmatian Slavs. In the volume of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* of 1791 devoted to the music, the Morlach instrument called *guzla*, mentioned by

⁸“Il en est de même à l’égard de celle de plusieurs peuples, qui, à cause de leur ressemblance avec les Morlaques dans la langue & dans les mœurs, paraissent composer une seule nation, étendue depuis le Golfe de Vénise jusqu’à la mer Glaciale”.

an Italian traveler, was already recalled (Framery, 1791, 760). In the *Encyclopédie des voyages*, published in 1796 by Jacques Grasset de Saint Saver, the Morlachs' description was also based on the remarks of Alberto Fortis. The reader learned about Morlachian hospitality, lack of beggars in Morlachia (Fortis 1778, 82–85) and lack of hygiene of the Morlachian women who got married (Fortis, 1778, 101). The *Encyclopédie des voyages* mentioned that the Morlach women “tend to grease their hair with butter like a savages from Canada, and the butter is rancid, giving off a disgusting smell that is smelled even far away”⁹ (Grasset de Saint Saver, 1796, 4). The Dalmatian Slavs thus became savages, although the comparison of Morlachs and Iroquois appears already at the end of the 17th century in the work of *La Politique Civile Et Militaire Des Venitiens* by Paul Du Chastelet (1670, 103).

According to the *Encyclopédie des voyages* the simplicity of Morlach customs went hand in hand with a natural lack of achievements in the field of craft and art. The Morlachs, devoted to tradition and reluctant to new inventions, could not cultivate plants or care for cattle, they only traded to satisfy their current and basic physical needs: “The commerce of the Morlachs of so little consequence that it is not spoken of; they trade with their neighbors wood, skins, wool, little wooden works, & c. In return they are given sheets, stockings, canvases; in a word, all that is relative to the physical needs of humanity”¹⁰ (Grasset de Saint Saver, 1796, 4). The *Encyclopédie des voyages* was a perfect example of how the work of Albert Fortis became a breeding ground for the stereotype that built the image of the Morlachs on the literary and aesthetic basis of the antinomy between animal brutality and primordial morality.

Although the French troops entered Dalmatian in 1806, and the Morlachs became French subjects controlled by French military and civil administration of the Illyrian Provinces (1809–1813), the short episode of the

⁹“Il ne faut pas cependant s’attendre à des émanations douces à l’approche des femmes Morlaques; elles ont la coutume, à la manière des Sauvages du Canada, d’oindre leurs cheveux avec du beurre, qui, devenu rance, exhale, même de loin, l’odeur la plus détestable”.

¹⁰“Le commerce que font les Morlaques est de si peu de conséquence qu’on n’en parle pas; ils trafiquent avec leurs voisins du bois, des peaux, des laines, des petits ouvrages en bois, etc. On leur donne en retour des draps, des bas, des toiles ; en un mot, tout ce qui est relatif aux besoins physiques de l’humanité”.

Napoleonic reign in the Balkans did not influenced much the image of the Morlachs which existed before (Sajkowski 2016). This lack of change of the previous patterns of description is visible in the publications appearing at the end of the 1820s. Noteworthy is, for example, a fragment of the definition of geographical region of Dalmatia which appeared in the same shape in several editions of the *Encyclopédie moderne, ou Dictionnaire abrégé des hommes et des choses, des sciences et des arts* (editions form 1826, 1828) and in the *Encyclopédie moderne, ou bibliothèque universelle de toutes les connaissances humaines* (1841).

The Morlachs, who compose the mass of the population, are generous, hospitable, frank, very brave, constant in friendship, but vindictive to excess, and adept at theft. They have quick and enterprising minds, and a lot of skill. The Morlachian women embroider with great skill; their clothes are elegant and rich; before their marriage, they keep themselves very clean; when they are united to the husband who looks at them and treats them almost like slaves, they become very dirty. The Morlachs are generally sober. At weddings and funerals, they practice all sorts of odd customs which are similar to those of uncivilized people¹¹ (Courtin, 1826, 321; Courtin, 1828, 77; Duménil, 1841, 197).

The authors of the definition did not get beyond the information presented in Fortis travelogue, but contrary to the *Encyclopédie des voyages* from 1796, the representation, the Morlach's image they drew was almost devoid of positive aspects. For example, the opinion about the allegedly tragic situation of Morlachian women who were often beaten by men and performed the hardest work was strongly emphasized (Duménil, 1841, 197). According to the *Encyclopédie des gens du monde* (1843), every Morlach was of "a cunning character, they have a strong disposition for robbery and drunkenness". Their evil character went hand in hand with backwardness: "each Morlach is armed with a knife, which also serves him as a cutlery, they sleep on the ground, or straw, in huts full of vermin,

¹¹ "Les Morlaques, qui composent la masse de la population, sont généreux, hospitaliers, francs, très braves, constants en amitié, mais vindicatifs à l'excès et adonnés au vol. Ils ont l'esprit vif et entreprenant, et beaucoup d'adresse. Les femmes morlaques brodent avec beaucoup d'habileté; leur vêtement est élégant et riche; avant leur mariage, elles se tiennent très propres; quand elles sont unies à l'époux qui les regarde et les traite à peu près comme des esclaves, elles deviennent fort sales. Les Morlaques sont généralement sobres. Ils pratiquent aux noces et aux funérailles toutes sortes d'usages bizarres qui se rapprochent d'eux des peuples peu civilisés. Leur costume ressemble à celui des hussards; ils sont toujours armés".

smoked due to the lack of a chimney". While describing the customs of the Morlachs, the authors of the definition suggested that those people cultivated traditions derived from Asia which were associated with Europe in any way. They ate bread prepared in an Arabian way, baked on a baking tray, placed above the fire. According to the editors of the *Encyclopédie des gens du monde*, the Venetians were not able to tame the anarchic nature of the Morlachs. It was only the Habsburgs, after joining Dalmatia to the Empire, who managed to partially control this population. They managed to force Morlach to respect the rules governing the civilized world (*Encyclopédie des gens du monde*, 1843)¹².

The form of the encyclopedic definition assumed an overview which was gathering and summarizing the existing information (Clark, 1992, 105). However, the French dictionaries and encyclopedias were not really able to synthesize known information about Dalmatian Slavs. Besides the partial progress which is possible to observe in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, the explanations given by the dictionaries were imprecise, sometimes erroneous, referring to the past rather than to the present. An excellent example of this state of affairs may be the fact that Jacob Spon's travelogue has been used for over one hundred years. The information provided in the definitions also preserved the image of the barbarian Morlach and disseminated the observations of Alberto Fortis, which also contributed to this stereotype. In the light of the above, the statement that the French Enlightenment was one of the foundations on which the later stereotypical image of the Balkans emerged, seems justified.

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¹²"Tout Morlaque est armé d'un coutelas dont il se sert aussi à table; il couche sur la terre ou sur la paille, dans des cabanes remplies de vermine et enfumées faute de cheminée. La religion de cette peuplade est la catholique, mais mêlée de superstitions grossières: aussi les prêtres pratiquent-ils beaucoup d'exorcismes. A l'exemple d'autres peuples slaves, les Morlaques traitent leurs femmes comme leurs servantes, et mettent à leur charge les travaux les plus rudes".

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