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The Memory of the Battle of Krbava (1493) and the Collective Identity of the Croats

The article deals with the construction of the narrative of the battle of Krbava Field, where many Croatian noblemen perished in 1493. The accounts of the battle began to spread immediately after the fighting had come to an end, giving rise to various versions of the events. The second part of the article is devoted to the rhetoric of the various retellings with which the memory of the calamity was preserved from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. The article then examines the circumstances leading to the increase in the political and social importance of the narrative in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The final part of the article focuses on the history of the narrative of the battle within the framework of the various Croatian state formations of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia, Battle of Krbava, Ottoman expansion, social memory, collective identity of Croats

Introduction

On September 9, 1493, the military contingent led by Ban Emeric Derencsényi of Croatia suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the Ottoman army on Krbava Field in present-day central Croatia. The long-lasting defensive war waged by the Kingdoms of Hungary and Croatia against the Ottomans became one of the formative factors of the collective identity of Croats in the early modern period, as well as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More than 300 years of continuous armed conflicts with the Ottomans provoked the interest of both contemporaries and modern historians. Therefore, in this article we will examine how narratives of the battle of Krbava were created, tracing writings ranging from fifteenth-century accounts to works of modern scholarship. The main questions will concern how the story was transferred, where, and why, with special emphasis on the issue of when the narratives were created and used in the construction of a collective Croatian identity.

The Battle of Krbava—A Historical Overview

Although there were some sporadic Ottoman raids on Croatia and Slavonia before the middle of the fifteenth century, Croatian lands did not become a main target of Ottoman military and political strategy until the fall of the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia in 1463. The events that preceded the battle of Krbava include the conquering of most of the Bosnian towns and castles (including the royal city of Jajce), the death of King Stephen Tomašević of Bosnia, and the foundation of the Jajce and Srebrenica Banats, followed by the Senj Captaincy in 1469 under the rule of the King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary.¹

In subsequent decades, the Ottoman raids continued, and in the early spring of 1493 Hadum Jakub-pasha gathered his army in order to raid Croatian and Austrian lands once again.² In the very beginning of his campaign, Jakub-pasha besieged Jajce in central Bosnia, but he very quickly abandoned this attempt and continued his raids in central Slavonia and Styria. At the same time, dissatisfied with the royal politics of King Wladislas II Jagiellon of Hungary, Count Hans (Anž) Frankapan of Brinje and Count Charles Kurjaković of Krbava rose up against the king. The Frankapani wanted to recover their castles in the County of Vinodol and the city of Senj, a very important port on the northern Adriatic. These cities and estates had earlier been confiscated by King Matthias. Similarly, Count Charles Kurjaković wanted to regain Obrovac, one of the most important emporia on the Zrmanja River.

1 On the Ottoman occupation of Bosnia in 1463 and Corvinus' counterattack and establishment of military zones on the borders with the Ottoman Empire, see for example: Borislav Grgin, *Počeci rasapa: Kralj Matijaš Korvin i srednjovjekovna Hrvatska* (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest, 2002), 31–33, 171–89. See also: Borislav Grgin, "Južne granice Ugarsko–Hrvatskog Kraljevstva u vrijeme Stjepana Tomaševića," in *Stjepan Tomašević (1461.–1463.) – slom srednjovjekovnoga Bosanskog Kraljevstva*, ed. Ante Birin (Zagreb–Sarajevo: Hrvatski institut za povijest–Katolički bogoslovni fakultet u Sarajevu, 2013), 69–78; Tamás Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background in Hungary of the Campaign of Jajce in 1463," in idem, 79–88; Richárd Horváth, "The Castle of Jajce in the Organization of the Hungarian Border Defense System under Matthias Corvinus," in idem, 89–98.

2 So far, Croatian historiography has produced several scholarly papers and books on the battle of Krbava Field. For this short overview, we used the following papers and books: Ferdo Šišić, *Bitka na Krbavskom polju (11. rujna 1493.). U spomen četristogodišnjice toga događaja. Istorijska rasprava* (Zagreb: Knjižara Dioničke tiskare, 1893); Milan Kruhek, "Sraz kršćanstva i islama na Krbavskom polju 9. rujna 1493," *Riječki teološki časopis* 1/2 (1993): 243–48; Anđelko Mijatović, *Bitka na Krbavskom polju 1493. godine* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2005); Hrvoje Kekez, "Bernardin Frankapan i Krbavska bitka: Je li spasio sebe i malobrojne ili je pobjegao iz boja?," *Modruški zbornik* 3 (2009): 65–101; Krešimir Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata – bitka na Krbavskom polju 1493. – strategija, taktika, psihologija," *Historijski zbornik* 67, no. 1 (2014): 11–63.

Very soon after he received news that rebels had besieged the royal city of Senj, king Wladislas sent Bans Emeric Derencsényi and John Both of Bajna at the head of an army to crush the rebellion. The bans decided to direct their campaign towards the estates of Count Hans Frankapan, so they besieged Hans' castle of Brinje. Meanwhile, they received news that Jakub-pasha has plundered the areas around the Modruš castle and that he had burned outlying settlements to the ground. Without hesitation, Ban Emeric Derencsényi invited rebels to join him in the ensuing battle against the Ottomans and granted them royal pardon. The majority of the Croatian noblemen who had participated in the uprising decided to accept this proposal, with the exceptions of Hans Frankapan and Charles Kurjaković, who very soon died, most probably because of wounds that were inflicted during the battle around the Brinje castle. The accusation that Count Hans Frankapan invited Ottomans to help him in his campaign against Ban Emeric Derencsényi cannot be dismissed beyond any doubt, and that may be why he did not join the Christian army.

Nevertheless, Ban Emeric Derencsényi and Croatian noblemen slowly gathered their army on Krbava Field below the Udbina castle. According to the surviving written testimonies, Jakub-pasha initiated negotiations for free passage to his strongholds in Bosnia. The ban rejected this proposal, most probably because he wanted to demonstrate the power of the Ban's army (i.e. the royal army) in a battle with the Ottomans on the open field. The goal of this decision was also to prevent any future collaboration between Croatian noblemen and the Ottomans or the Venetians. Although the Croatian army outnumbered Jakub-pasha's army, the Ottomans had more cavalry and their army was composed of experienced soldiers. Knowing this, and having experience in conflicts with the Ottomans, Count John Frankapan of Cetin encouraged the ban to trap the Ottomans in one of the numerous passes in the area, but the ban rejected this suggestion and arranged his army on the open field below the Udbina castle.

The battle began with an Ottoman decoy and did not last long. Jakub-pasha had sent some of his troops to surround the Croatian army and attack them from behind. The decoy was very successful, and the left wing of the Croatian army, consisting primarily of the infantry led by Count Bernardin Frankapan, was annihilated. Very soon, the rest of the Croatian army was destroyed. Although the Ottoman victory was complete, Jakub-pasha hastened his army to leave the area and went back to Bosnia. The Ottomans took only the most important noblemen as prisoners to be ransomed, while the rest were slaughtered.

Although the Croatian defeat at the battle of Krbava Field in 1493 was devastating, it should be noted that the Ottomans did not occupy the county of Krbava, because it is situated far from the Bosnian border, and it was conquered only some 30 years later, in 1527.³ The explanation for this may lie in the political and military strategy of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was concerned more with the Pannonian basin, i.e. Hungary, than Croatia.⁴ Nevertheless, the battle had two important consequences. First, the defeat at Krbava Field accelerated the emigration of the inhabitants of Krbava and neighboring areas into safer regions.⁵ Second, the great loss of members of the leading Croatian noble families in the battle of Krbava Field was a severe blow to contemporary society. The noblemen were missed not only by their own families, but also as organizers of the defense of the Croatian lands against the Ottoman threat. This loss of an important element of the Croatian defense forces was clearly a factor in the subsequent events of the wars against the Ottomans and in the everyday life of the kingdom.

The Spread of News Immediately after the Battle

Immediately after the battle, news of the disastrous defeat at Krbava Field spread not only in the neighboring areas within the Kingdom of Hungary, but also beyond its borders. Accounts of the dramatic events of the conflict were presented in the most important political centers of contemporary Europe by various political emissaries and figures, such as the Counts of the Frankapani or Kurjakovići families. News also spread quickly among the lower strata of society in medieval Croatia and its neighboring lands.

An anonymous short record of the battle composed in September 1493 (that is, immediately after the battle) survives.⁶ In all likelihood it was written by Count Hans Frankapan of Brinje personally, who, unlike his kinsmen, decided not to participate in the battle. It was originally written in Latin, but it is extant in a mid-sixteenth-century German translation, and it was probably sent to Emperor

3 Ivo Goldstein, “Značaj Krbavske bitke 1493. godine u hrvatskoj povijesti,” in *Krbavska bitka i njezine posljedice*, ed. Dragutin Pavličević (Zagreb: Hrvatska matica iseljenika, 1997), 22–24.

4 Kruhek, “Sraz kršćanstva i islama,” 267; Kekez, “Bernardin Frankapan,” 67.

5 Ivan Jurković emphasized that in the period from 1463 to 1593 Croatian lands suffered the loss of approximately 60 percent of their inhabitants. Ivan Jurković, “Osmanska ugroza, plemeniti raseljenici i hrvatski identitet,” *Povijesni prilozi* 25 (2006): 39.

6 Ferdo Šišić, “Rukovet spomenika o hercegu Ivanišu Korvinu i o borbama Hrvata s Turcima (1473–1496) s ‘dodatkom’ (1491–1498),” *Starine* 38 (1937): 121–22.

Maximilian I Habsburg in order to inform him of the events on Krbava Field. The author of the record knew the exact date of the battle, described the leaders of the army, gave the almost exact numbers of the participants, and, finally, underlined the severity of the defeat.

Pope Alexander VI also received information concerning the battle very soon after the event. Only four days after the battle, Antonio Fabregues, a papal envoy who permanently lived in Senj and whose permanent mission was to collect information about the Ottomans in Croatia, sent his rather long report to the Roman Curia.⁷ He described the battle in detail on the basis of an account of a cavalryman who managed to escape. Another, substantially more vivid and upsetting account of the battle was sent to Pope Alexander VI by Bishop George Divnić of Nin.⁸ After he had personally visited Krbava Field, Divnić wrote the pope an extensive letter, typical for contemporary diplomacy, dated September 27, 1493. In his letter the bishop emphasized the danger of the Ottoman threat and stressed that they had easy access to Italy because of the destruction of the nobility in parts of Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Pannonia (meaning Hungary).

Certainly, news of the capture of Ban Emeric Derencsényi and the great defeat of the Croatian army soon reached the royal court in Buda. The writings of Antonio Bonfini, the official chronicler of King Matthias and his successor, King Wladislas II Jagiellon, indicate that the royal court was well informed of the calamity. In his book *Rerum Hungaricum decades*, Bonfini provides an even more detailed account of the Krbava Field battle.⁹ Bonfini described the movements of both armies, before and during the battle, but his writing is rather partial because of his personal and royal agenda. King Wladislas II was angry at Count Bernardin Frankapan because the rebellion that had preceded the battle.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Bonfini's writing was often used as a source for subsequent royal and other chronicles in their presentations of the battle.

News of the Krbava battle spread rapidly within the Holy Roman Empire in large part because of the circulation of a leaflet published by Johann Winterburger

7 Ibid., 35–36.

8 Juraj Divnić, "Pismo papi Aleksandru VI," ed. Vedran Gligo (Split: Splitski književni krug, 1983), 313–20.

9 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 125–29.

10 Kekez, "Bernardin Frankapan," 89.

in Vienna in the autumn of 1493.¹¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that it was one of the topics at the summit held after the funeral of the Emperor Frederick III in Vienna in December 1493.¹²

Other political centers of contemporary Europe were mostly informed about the battle of Krbava Field by papal diplomacy. Several letters were sent by Pope Alexander VI to various European royal courts,¹³ including the one to King Henry VII Tudor of England, who in his response (January 12, 1494) emphasized his concern for Croatia, which was suffering the Ottoman raids, and also underlining the danger for neighboring countries, especially Italy.¹⁴

News of the disastrous defeat at Krbava Field spread rather quickly among the people in Croatia. A few days after the battle, accounts of the events were very well-known among the residents of the coastal city of Senj. As noted above, the news was apparently spread by a cavalryman, hence news of the battle had reached Senj just a couple of days after the event.

News of the battle reached the city of Zadar, the most important seaport on the eastern Adriatic coast, very quickly. Two accounts recorded by two pilgrims traveling with a larger group to the Holy Land make mention of the Krbava battle. Due to the significant differences between the two, one could argue that they used different sources, although they traveled with the same group of pilgrims.¹⁵ Jan Hasišteinsky, the pilgrim from Bohemia, wrote in his travelogue *Putování k Svatému hrobu* [The Pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre] about how he had heard the story about the battle from a nobleman from the county of Lika. That anonymous lesser nobleman had underlined the misfortunes of the local inhabitants and had emphasized that he had lost several of his kinsmen in the battle.¹⁶ Heinrich von Zedlitz, a knight from Silesia, did not name his source, but he emphasized the atmosphere of mourning in Zadar because of the devastating defeat on Krbava Field, a place only one day on horseback from the

11 Walther Dolch, "Trient – Wien – Schrottenthal I. Band, 1. Heft," in *Bibliographie der österreichischen Drucke des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Eduard Langer (Vienna: Herausgegeben Eduard Langer, 1913), 35; Neven Jovanović, "Antonio Fabregues o Krbavskoj bici," *Povijesni prilozi* 41 (2012): 176.

12 Jakob Unrest, "Österreichische Chronik," *Monumenta Germaniae historica – Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, new series 11 (1957): 220–28; Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," 5.

13 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 43–46, 56–57.

14 Rawdon L. Brown, ed., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 1: 1202–1509* (London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), 219; Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," 4.

15 Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," 4. The group of pilgrims stayed in Zadar for a very short period of time, from September 23 to September 25, 1493.

16 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 123–25.

city.¹⁷ Other pilgrims described a similar atmosphere of fear of new Ottoman raids in subsequent years, for instance Konrad von Parsberg in 1494¹⁸ and Hans Schürpfen in 1497.¹⁹ Yet, it is best recorded in the account of Martinac, the parish priest of Grobnik, written in 1494.²⁰ Priest Martinac had compared that fear with the atmosphere that existed during the time of the raids of Mongols, Huns and Goths.²¹ He was emotional about the event, because he was a member of the Lapčani kindred and his kinsmen have participated in the battle, from whom he most likely gained the information.

Rumors of the catastrophic defeat at Krbava Field spread rather fast among contemporaries, becoming familiar to people across vast areas of land. It is therefore not surprising that an anonymous chronicler of the orthodox monastery in Cetinje, Montenegro, briefly recorded the event of the Krbava battle in the monastery's annals: *Pljeni Jagu-paša Harvate i bana Derenžula živa uhvati na Krbave*.²² A similar record in German is found in the annals of the Franciscan monastery in Thann in Alsace in the Holy Roman Empire: *9. Septemb. wurde unser christliche Armée in Orient, auf den libernicensischen Feldern, von den Türckben geschlagen und seind bey 5000 Mann tod geblieben*.²³

The Narratives of the Battle of Krbava in Folk Poetry and High Literature

The news of the battle of Krbava spread rapidly in areas inhabited by the Croats in the late fifteenth century. The story of how the noble Christian knights and the leaders of the Croatian army had fallen in the battle against the infidels and how they had been slaughtered while fighting in the defense of Christendom had

17 Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," App. 1, 54–55; Originally published as Reinhold Röhrich, "Die Jerusalemfahrt des Heinrich von Zedlitz (1493)," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins* 17 (1894): 98–114.

18 Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," App. 5, 59.

19 Ibid., App. 6, 59; Originally published as Jost V. Ostertag, "Hans Schürpfen des Raths zu Lucern, Pilgerfahrt nach Jerusalem 1497," *Der Geschichtsfreund, Mittheilungen des historischen Vereins der fünf Orte Lucern, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden und Zug* 8 (1852): 190.

20 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 119.

21 ... *I togda načеше cviliti rođivšie i vdovi mnoge i proči ini. I bis(t) sker'ba velič n' v'sihb živančih v strahb sikh, êka že nest' bila ot vr(è)m(e)ne Tatarov' i Gotov' i Atel' nečist'vihb ...* [... And then started mourning those who were born and widowed and many others. And, there was great concern and fear among all the living, as there had not been since the times of the impure Tatars, Goths and Attila ...]. Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 119. See also: Kekez, "Bernardin Frankapan," 66.

22 Ljubomir Stojanović, "Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi," *Zbornik za istoriju, jezik i književnost srpskog naroda* 16 (1927): 258; Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," 15.

23 Malachia Tschamser, *Annales oder Jahrs-Geschichten der Baarfüreren oder Minderen Brüdern* (Colmar: Buchdruckerrei von R. M. Hoffmann, 1864), 680; Kužić, "Bitka Hrvata," 15.

a significant impact on the common people and on members of the educated classes. Various stories and poems were presumably composed soon after the calamity in which the battle of Krbava was presented as one of the cornerstones in the long defensive war of the Croats against the Ottomans. These stories and poems most probably circulated among the common people for centuries before being written down in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

One of the first recorded folk poems about the Krbava battle is “Ban Derenčin boja bije” [Ban Derencsényi Fighting the Fight], which was put in writing by Paul Ritter Vitezović, a famous Croatian polyhistor, in 1682.²⁴ In the poem, Krbava is presented as a mythical place where the voices and traces of fallen Croatian noblemen could be still found. The poem also vividly shows how even centuries later the names of the noblemen were still known to the population of the region. However, it should be noted that the title of the poem is a clear allusion to the Bible, since it paraphrases the words of St. Paul: “I have fought a good fight, ... I have kept my faith” (2 Tim 4, 7).

Another folk poem on the Krbava battle was recorded in the middle of the eighteenth century in the Dubrovnik area. It was the poem entitled “Kako je Hodžulo, ban skradinski, poginuo sa ostalim Skradinjanima” [How Hodžulo, the ban of Skradin, perished together with his Skradinians]. It was first published in printed form by Baltazar Bogišić in 1878.²⁵ However, he did not realize that it deals with the Krbava battle. After conducting a detailed linguistic and onomastic analysis, in the 1930s Ante Šimičik argued persuasively that the poem actually concerns the battle of Krbava Field.²⁶ The poem vividly shows how the narratives of the battle had a very important place in the anti-Ottoman narrative and how, after a couple of centuries of circulation of the narratives among the people, many details had been lost, but the importance of the battle remained.

Friar Andrija Kačić Miošić, the guardian of the Franciscan convent in Zastrog near Makarska, played a significant role in preserving a narrative of the Krbava battle. He composed a narrative entitled “Razgovor ugodni naroda Slovinskoga: pismarica starca Milovana” [A Leisurely Conversation of the Slavic Folk: A Song Book of the Old Man Milovan] in the manner of traditional folk poetry in 1756.

24 “Ban Derenčin boja bije,” in *Bugaršćice: starinske hrvatske narodne pjesme*, ed. Josip Kekez (Split: Čakavski sabor, 1978), 104–05.

25 “Kako je Hodžulo, ban skradinski, poginuo sa ostalim Skradinjanima,” in *Narodne pjesme iz starijih najviše primorskih zapisa*, ed. Valtazar Bogišić (Belgrade: Odeljenje Srpskog učenog društva, 1878), 218–20.

26 Ante Šimičik, “Dubrovačka bugarštica o Krbavskom Razboju,” *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena* 28 (1932): 2, 45–63.

Kačić wanted to present Croatian and South Slavic history (mostly in the period of wars against the Ottomans), so he wrote 136 poems in the typical folk rhyme (*deseterac*) in order to ensure that his work would be as accessible as possible to the wider public. It is therefore not surprising that his poems were generally well-known (sung at the folk meetings called *sjelo*)²⁷ and that it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that “Razgovor” was identified as his work. Kačić’s writing had a significant influence on the compilation of narratives of the anti-Ottoman wars. It is therefore not surprising that in one of his songs Kačić mentioned the battle of Krbava Field. It is worth noting that Kačić has erroneously described the Krbava battle as a victory for the Croatian army.²⁸

Several folk poems on the Krbava battle were recorded in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when these songs were still sung. The first one, “Prevareni ban Derenčin” [Misguided Ban Derencsényi], was recorded in Novi Vinodolski in 1889 by Antun Mažuranić. With the exception of the main character, the poem has nothing to do with the battle.²⁹ Nevertheless, it is interesting that one of the leading participants in the battle, Ban Emeric Derencsényi, remained a popular character in folk poetry, especially as a tragic figure.

In contrast to that poem, the poem “Smrt bana Derenčina” [The Death of Ban Derencsényi], recorded by Luka Bervaldi Lucić on the island of Vis in 1890, has the battle of Krbava as its essential theme.³⁰ It underlines the disastrous outcome of the battle as the beginning of the fall of the Kingdom of Croatia. It is interesting how the anonymous folk poet presented the reason for Derencsényi’s death as a result of ill fortune: his beautiful blue hair had fallen on his eyes and blinded him, causing his death.³¹

The second version of the same poem was recorded by Ante Petravić, a priest in Komiža on the island of Vis, in 1909. With the exception of having a modified title – “Pisma o Derenčinu banu” [The Song of Ban Derencsényi] – and a slightly different introduction, the poem is the same as the poem recorded

27 Similar to the Welsh *Eisteddfod*.

28 Andrija Kačić Miošić, *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga: pismarica starca Milovana*, ed. Stipe Botica and Josip Vončina (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), 560–61.

29 Anđelko Mijatović, “Krbavska bitka u hrvatskoj usmenoj književnosti,” in *Krbavska bitka i njezine posljedice*, ed. Dragutin Pavličević (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1997), 183.

30 Ibid.

31 Dragutin Pavličević, “Uz hrvatsku narodnu pjesmu ‘Smrt bana Derenčina,’” in *Krbavska bitka i njezine posljedice*, 186–87.

by Bervaldi Lucić in 1890.³² Perhaps more interesting is the fact that the poem survived there until the middle of the twentieth century, only to be recorded again by poet Olinko Delorko in 1962.³³

As these examples make clear, the Krbava battle was a theme of Croatian folk poetry for many centuries after the event. The narratives were shaped in various manners according to the historical moments in which they were composed, but they always underlined the sufferings of the wars against the Ottomans and always presented the battle of Krbava as the first and the most disastrous defeat of the Croats, a defeat that shaped future events. Furthermore, the principal actors of the battle, in particular Ban Emeric Derencsényi, were very popular characters in many folk poems, even if some of the poems did not deal specifically with the battle. It should be emphasized that the narratives of the Krbava battle were part of the folk culture of the people of the hinterland, who passed them on to the wider area of the Adriatic coast and the islands. From there, the narratives “traveled” with the migration of people in the period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries beyond the borders of the medieval Kingdom of Croatia to central Italy. It is therefore not surprising that the anti-Ottoman narratives were part of the culture of the Croats of Molise centuries after they had decided to flee the Ottoman threat and abandon their homeland.³⁴

On the other hand, very soon after the disastrous defeat, the Krbava battle became a popular topic of high literature. Mavro Vetranović (1482/1483–1576), an early sixteenth-century Renaissance poet from Dubrovnik, first recorded a narrative of the Krbava battle in one of his poems. Vetranović, in his poem “Tužba grada Budima” [The Lament of the City of Buda], stressed the loss of Croatian glory at the battle of Krbava Field and compared the Krbava battle

32 Mijatović, “Krbavska bitka u hrvatskoj usmenoј,” 184.

33 Ibid., 184.

34 Although the narrative of the Krbava battle itself was not recorded among the Croats of Molise, the songs about John Torquatus (Karlović) Kurjaković, the ban of Croatia and a zealous fighter against the Ottomans from the beginning of the sixteenth century, were recorded by Milan Rešetar at the beginning of the twentieth century. See: Milan Rešetar, *Die Serbokroatischen Kolonien Südtaliens* (Vienna: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1911), 282–83, 320. One can easily assume that narratives of the Krbava battle were known earlier by members of the Croatian diaspora, especially those who originated from Lika and Krbava.

with the battle of Kosovo field in 1448.³⁵ Although Vetranović's poetry was extant only in a seventeenth-century manuscript and was published for the first time only in the late nineteenth century, the author was very popular in his lifetime and his poetry was disseminated within the elite circles of his city.³⁶ His writing therefore contributed to the presence of the narrative of the Krbava battle there.

After Vetranović, Hanibal Lucić from Hvar popularized a narrative of the Krbava battle by making Ban Derencsényi the main male protagonist of his play "Robinja" [The Slave Girl]. Although Lucić did not mention the battle of Krbava Field itself, he glorified the role of the ban in facing the Ottoman threat.³⁷ Moreover, his composition represented the first play that spread anti-Ottoman sentiment among wider audiences. The play was performed for the first time most probably before 1530, but was only published for the first time in Venice not much before 1638. Lučić's "Robinja" was the most popular of his plays, and during his lifetime it was performed not only in Hvar, but also in Split and Dubrovnik. It is also interesting to note that one version of Lučić's "Robinja" continued to be performed in a folk version on the island of Pag in the northern part of the east Adriatic up to the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁸

Thus narratives of the Krbava battle were familiar to the common people and were also part of high literature, even in the coastal area of present-day Croatia, which were rather distant from the Krbava region, as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century. Despite the distance between the site of the battle and the area where the narratives were recorded, one can argue that the accounts were very informative and preserved the general idea of the importance of the retellings of the battle as part of the Croatian national corpus, especially considering the fact that they were written in vernacular Croatian (Čakavian dialect) and thus were understandable to the widest possible audience.

35 Mavro Vetranović Čavčić, Tužba grada Budima [The Lament of the City of Buda], Pjesme Mavra Vetranovića Čavčića, in *Stari pisci hrvatski*, vol. 3, ed. V. Jagić and I. A. Kaznačić (Zagreb: JAZU, 1871), verse 80–84; 131–38, pp. 54–56. Later scholarship has wrongly noted that Vetranović compared the battle of Krbava Field with the 1389 battle of Kosovo. Since he mentions János Hunyadi in the folk poem referred to as *Janko Sibinjanin*, it is clear that Vetranović is actually referring to the other battle of Kosovo, the one of 1448 (verse 155, p. 56).

36 "Mavro Vetranović – biografija," in *Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti: Zbornik stihova XV. i XVI. stoljeća*, vol. 5, ed. Ivo Frangeš (Zagreb: Zora and Matica hrvatska, 1968), 173–76.

37 Hanibal Lucić, *Robinja s posvetom Fr. Paladiniću*, Pjesme Petra Hektorovića i Hanibala Lucića, in *Stari pisci hrvatski*, vol. 6, ed. Š. Ljubić and F. Rački (Zagreb: JAZU, 1874), 223–65.

38 "Lucić, Hanibal" in *Hrvatska enciklopedija*, vol. 5 (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2004), 667.

The Development of the Narratives in Chronicles and Historical Works from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century

Over the course of the sixteenth century, narratives of the battle were incorporated in chronicles and historical works. Two sixteenth-century German chronicles dating from more or less the same period merit mention. Jacob Unrest, a priest in a parish near Wörtersee in the Duchy of Carinthia, wrote his work *Die Österreichische Chronik* in the period between 1500 and 1509. His account of the Krbava battle is very brief, and the names of the participants and toponyms are misspelled. He was interested in the events, because the raids of the Ottomans advanced all the way to Carniola and Carinthia.³⁹ Another old-German chronicle played a more important role in the dissemination of an account of the battle of Krbava Field to the West. Knight Florian Waldauf von Waldenstein, a protonotary of Emperor Maximilian I Habsburg, was also one of the envoys to the court of King Wladislas II of Hungary in Buda, charged with the task of reaching a truce with the Ottomans.⁴⁰ His chronicle remained in manuscript form, kept at the court in Innsbruck until the early twentieth century, and it does not explicitly mention the battle. However, it is important to stress that evidently a narrative of the battle of Krbava was known at the court because the struggle had been depicted on a relief on the cenotaph of Emperor Maximilian in the Hofkirche in Innsbruck (Tyrol).⁴¹ It is not surprising that accounts of the events of the battle were known because the aforementioned envoy Waldenstein was in the service of the emperor. In addition, since the battle was depicted in a relief in a church that was a center of a famous pilgrimage site, clearly accounts of the events spread in virtually innumerable directions from here.

Another major European force was also interested in the development of warfare against the Ottomans, namely the Republic of Venice. The *Historia Turchesca*, which was written between 1509 and 1514 by Donado da Lezze, represented one step in that direction.⁴² The author was a Venetian patrician and an amateur chronicler, whose main purpose was to write a chronology of the Ottoman Empire, since he was, while he was writing this work, the Venetian Count Provisor on the Greek island of Zante, and he had just spent some time in Cyprus. Donado da Lezze provided a very picturesque and detailed account of

39 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 130–32.

40 Ibid., 133–35.

41 Cf. Appendix 1.

42 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 135–39.

the battle, but he made many mistakes in the names, toponyms and chronology of the events. Historians have hypothesized that he may have been using an unknown (and no longer extant) report, or that he may have drawn on various different accounts. His retelling was widely received since it had been written in Italian. It was read not only in Italy, but also in other areas of Western Europe. Consequently even today two copies are extant (both of them kept in Paris). It should be noted that, in general, when dealing with other matters in the work, the author incorporated accounts of his contemporaries, so it is possible that he was doing the same thing when writing about the battle of Krbava. Historians have also conjectured that, when describing the events of the Krbava battle, da Lezze most probably used a report that was circulating in Croatia at the time, thus his work should be regarded as more indicative of the reception of this unknown (and thus hypothetical) record, yet one should also keep in mind that his work was used later by Italian and Croatian chroniclers. We do not know what sources he used, but one fact is significant: da Lezze was connected by marriage to the counts of Krbava. Katherine, sister of Ban John Karlović, was married to Bernardo da Lezze, so Donado might have heard the story from her, but this is merely a hypothesis for which the source materials offer no corroboration.⁴³

Paolo Giovio, a member of the Roman Curia and a university professor in Rome, also used an unknown Croatian report that was circulating in the mid-sixteenth century. His account of the Krbava battle is short and many of the alleged facts he mentions are wrong. His work, entitled *Commentario delle Cose di Turchi*, certainly was widely read, as it was published in 1532 in Basel in Italian (and some sources indicate that one edition was published in Venice a year before) and a Latin translation was published in Strasbourg in 1537.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it was published in different publishing centers of Christian Europe, and, finally, it was used later by many chroniclers.

Other versions of the events which are told from the perspective of the Ottomans began to emerge in the sixteenth century. The oldest work, known as “the Ottoman Anonym,” was written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, but the earliest surviving manuscript is the one kept in Sarajevo from the end of the sixteenth century or perhaps the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ The author is unknown, but it may have been written by one of the Ottoman

43 Petar Grgec, *Hrvatski Job šesnaestoga vijeka. Ban Ivan Karlović* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko književno društvo sv. Jeronima, 1932), 25.

44 Šišić, “Rukovet spomenika,” 144–46.

45 *Ibid.*, 157–58.

courtiers. The main purpose of the text is to give a chronology of the history of the Ottoman Empire from 1295 to 1519, but the principal value is the fact that the author has put to paper what he had heard at the court. The reception of the text was relatively limited because it spread only in the inner circles of the Ottoman court. The work entitled the *Crown chronicle* by Sa'd-ud-din Mehmed ben Hasan hafiz Jemal ud-din, a high court official and teacher of Prince Murat, was more widely read. The author wrote a chronology of the Ottoman Empire using older Ottoman sources, which were available to him at the Sultan's court.⁴⁶ The account is written in a very typical Ottoman style for chronicles, with many references to the Qur'an and emphasis on the idea that the Christians suffered defeats because they were infidels, but it provides a good and accurate account of the battle and the events that preceded it. The main value of the work for Croatian scholarship was that many manuscripts were copied from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. Also, it was used by the court officials and members of the aristocracy, and a lithography was published in Istanbul in 1863. Both of these Ottoman sources are important because they depict Ottoman versions of the events, according to Ottoman traditions, thus they enable one to examine the development of the narrative from the other side. But they did not influence the construction of the narrative on the Croatian side until the late nineteenth century, when they were published by Šišić.

Ottoman sources were used by Rabbi Joseph ben Jehosea ben Meir ha Cohen ha Sefardi, a pharmacist who lived in Genoa and Voltaggio and who wrote a chronicle of the French kings and Ottoman emperors in Hebrew.⁴⁷ His work, in contrast to the Ottoman accounts, was published in Venice as early as 1554. Almost two centuries later, a second edition was published in Amsterdam. Since he was using Ottoman sources with different orthography, he got the names of the Christian leaders wrong. His work was written in Hebrew and was part of Jewish historiography, which put emphasis on the conflicts between the Muslims (Arabs and Ottomans) and the Christian world from the time of the first Crusade up to the mid-sixteenth century. It was not widely read outside of the Jewish communities, even though it was published in Venice. Therefore, it became part of Croatian historiography only after it had been translated into Hungarian in the late nineteenth century. The Ottoman and Jewish accounts

46 Ibid., 163–74.

47 Ibid., 160–61.

have entered into Croatian historiography due to the source collection of Ferdo Šišić, on which we touch in a moment.

Another source was written on the basis of the Ottoman sources, yet this time of German provenience. Johannes Löwenklau, a courtier in Savoy and teacher of Greek in Heidelberg, published a work entitled *Historiae Musulmanae Turcorum de monumentis ipsorum* in Frankfurt in 1591.⁴⁸ The author traveled through the Kingdom of Hungary and the Ottoman Empire because of his personal interest in the history of Ottoman Empire. Löwenklau's work is important because it describes the events before and after the battle. Also, his chronology is more precise, though it was written according to the Muslim calendar. The work was more widely read since it was published in German and the book circulated among members of the educated classes.

* * *

Of the chronicles originating in the Croatian historical lands, three sixteenth-century ones merit mention. The first, entitled *Commentarii de temporibus suis*, was written in 1522 by Louis Crijević Tubero, a well-educated Benedictine monk from Dubrovnik.⁴⁹ When Tubero has traveled to Hungary, he stayed in the bishop's palace in Bács as a guest of Archbishop Gregory Frankapan of Kalocsa, brother of the late Count George Frankapan, one of the Croatian magnates who perished in the battle of Krbava Field.⁵⁰ Although Tubero gave only a brief account with incorrectly spelled names, he was the first author to explain the failure of the Christian army as a result of the misguided tactics of Ban Emeric Derencsényi. His account was well received among the nobility of Dubrovnik, and it was later incorporated in other writings. Tubero had heard the story in the north and then transferred it to the south of Dalmatia. The work was published in Frankfurt in 1603, and it was read by members of the educated classes in Dubrovnik. It is presumed that another chronicler, Friar John Tomašić, was also well connected with the Frankapan family. His work, *Chronicon breve regni Croatiae*, was written around 1561.⁵¹ The book was written in Latin, but with inserted dialogues in Croatian. Tomašić continued the work of

48 Ibid., 161–63.

49 Ludovik Crijević Tuberon, *Comentarii de temporibus suis*, ed. Vlado Rezar (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001) 98–102; Šišić, “Rukovet spomenika,” 140–42.

50 Ibid., 143.

51 Ibid., 147–49.

an anonymous predecessor, using the documents from the Frankapan archives and their oral family history. Historians have also hypothesized that Tomašić may have been using a Croatian source from the beginning of the sixteenth century that today is unknown, in addition to the aforementioned work of Paolo Giovio. Tomašić's work was preserved in the archive of the Counts Auersperg in Logensteinleiten in Upper Austria. The story was known in Austria at that time in part because it was the period of the most aggressive Ottoman raids in the country, and so people took a greater interest in the events that had taken place in Croatia. However, in Croatia, Tomašić's work was not widely known until it was published in 1868 by Ivan Kukuljević.⁵² In regard to its content, it is similar to Tubero's account, since Tomašić also contended that the defeat was a consequence of the bad tactics of Ban Emeric Derencsényi.

At more or less the same time, the narrative of the battle of Krbava had only limited echoes in northern Croatia. Antun Vramec, a canon of the Chapter of Zagreb and a parish priest in Zagreb and later in Varaždin, wrote a short chronology in order to incorporate the history of the South Slavs into a general history entitled *Kronika vezda znovich zpravljena Kratka Szlouenzkim ieziikom* [A Short Chronicle Newly Prepared in the Slavonic Language], which was published in 1578.⁵³ In his work, Vramec completely omitted information regarding the battle of Krbava, though he mentioned the battle of the Vrpile pass of 1491, which, in contrast to the Krbava battle, was a huge victory for Christian forces led by Ban Ladislav Egervári. It was widely read in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia at the time, in part because it was published in vernacular Croatian (the Kajkavian dialect) and, possibly, because it was distributed in many parishes of the region.⁵⁴ Later, his work was used by Paul Ritter Vitezović, a point to which we shall return.

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52 See more: *ibid.*, 149.

53 Antun Vramec, *Kronika vezda znovich zpravljena Kratka Szlouenzkim ieziikom*, ed. Alojz Jembrih (Varaždin–Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti–Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1992).

54 The area where one would expect the most direct influence of Vramec's works in the Middle Ages was an integral part of medieval Slavonia. However, in Vramec's period the process of the political integration of Croatia and Slavonia was mostly finished, hence the first joint diet of Croatia and Slavonia was held in 1558. For more details, see Géza Pálffy, "Jedan od temeljnih izvora hrvatske povijesti: pozivnica zajedničkog Hrvatsko-Slavonskog Sabora iz 1558. godine," *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 23 (2005): 47–61.

One of the most influential seventeenth-century historical works, the influence of which was massive in the early-modern world, was the *Regni Hungarici historia libris XXXIV exacte descripta* by Nicholas Istvánffy, the royal chancellor and vice-palatine of the Kingdom of Hungary.⁵⁵ Istvánffy's primary intention was to write in chronological order the history of the kingdom from the death of King Matthias Corvinus in 1490 up to 1605, the year in which it was written. He wrote in the manner of the historians of the antiquity. His style is learned and picturesque and rather objective. His primary source is Bonfini's work. In his writings, he gives many details concerning the events preceding the battle (i.e. a description of the conflict between the Frankapani and Ban Emeric Derencsényi). Thus, his writings, like Bonfini's, were anti-Frankapan. The work was published in Cologne in 1622 by Peter Pázmány, the archbishop of Esztergom, and was widely circulated among members of the educated classes of the Kingdom. Later, Istvánffy had an influence on Rattkay, Vitezović, and Krčelić.

The first historian who was influenced by Istvánffy was Francis Rattkay, a canon of the Chapter of Zagreb, who wrote his work *Memoria Regum et Banorum Regnorum Dalmatiae, Croatiae et Slavoniae* (published in 1652).⁵⁶ Rattkay was writing the history of the Kingdom of Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia in order to present its political peculiarity to the Habsburg court with the purpose of propagating a war against the Ottomans and bringing about the liberation of the occupied parts of the kingdom. Hence, Rattkay provides a detailed description of the events (the siege of the Brinje castle, the course of the battle itself, and, finally, although he emphasized the role of Ban Emeric Derencsényi, he stated that only Count Bernardin Frankapan bore responsibility for the defeat). Because of some of his ideas Rattkay was accused of being anti-protestant, so his work was not welcomed in Germany (some exemplars of it were even burned). Nevertheless, in Croatia it was widely read by members of the educated classes.⁵⁷

The last seventeenth-century work that is going to be discussed here is the chronicle of Paul Ritter Vitezović, published in 1696 in Zagreb. Vitezović wanted to compile a short history of the world in which he incorporated the

55 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," 150–55.

56 Franjo Rattkay, *Memoria regum et banorum regnorum Dalmatiae, Croatiae & Slavoniae. Spomen na kraljeve i banove Kraljevstva Dalmacije, Hrvatske i Slavonije*, trans. Zrinka Blažević, 2 vols. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001).

57 Sandor Bene, "Ideološke koncepcije o staleškoj državi zagrebačkoga kanonika," in Juraj Rattkay, *Spomen na kraljeve i banove kraljevstva Dalmacije, Hrvatske i Slavonije*, ed. Mirko Valentić (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001), 4–103.

history of the Croats.⁵⁸ With regards to 1493, he simply noted that Ban Emeric Derencsényi, Charles of Corbavia and Bernardin Frankapan fought a battle against the Ottomans. He emphasized the enormity of the losses and the death of many noblemen in the battle. Written in Croatian, Vitezović's work was intended to be read by a large audience. It was published in Zagreb (as were his other works) as a political project by decision of Croatian Diet, and accordingly it was distributed among the intelligentsia in Croatia.⁵⁹ For these purposes he founded a printing office in Zagreb with the financial help of Bishop Alexander Ignatius Mikulić of Zagreb. However, an account of the battle of Krbava as short as his could hardly do much to spread knowledge of the narrative among the Croatian people (his work focused primarily on other topics).

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In the eighteenth century, the narrative of the battle of Krbava Field was limited to the work of Balthazar Adam Krčelić. In 1754, his work, entitled *Povijest stolne zagrebačke crkve* [The history of the Zagreb Cathedral], was published, but it was soon censored and only a few copies were distributed. Because of this, the reception of the work was relatively narrow, and it also contained many quotes and statements that do not correspond with the accounts found in other sources. It was republished only in 1770.⁶⁰ Krčelić used the work of Bonfini to articulate his account of the Ottoman threat, but he made only passing mention of the calamities and pointed out that further information on the events could be found in Istvánffy's work.

The Narratives in the Long Nineteenth Century

The mid-nineteenth century and the second half of the century were a period in which the processes of the national integration and unification of the historical Croatian lands came to its culmination. The same development was visible

58 Pavao Ritter Vitezović, *Kronika aliti szpomen vsega szvieta vikov u dva dela razredyen, koterih prvi dersbi od pocetka szvieta do Kristusevoga porojenja, druggi od Kristusevoga porojenja do izpunjenja letta 1690* (Zagreb: n.p., 1696).

59 Zrinka Blažević, *Vitezovićeva Hrvatska između stvarnosti i utopije. Ideološka koncepcija u djelima postkarlonačkog ciklusa Pavla Rittera Vitezovića (1652.–1713.)* (Zagreb: Barbat, 2002), 177.

60 Baltazar Adam Krčelić, *Historiarum cathedralis ecclesiae Zagrabiensis. Povijest stolne zagrebačke crkve*, 2 vols. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 1994).

among other Central European nations as well, thus it is not surprising that their histories were also used for the purpose of forging national identity.

The first modern Croatian historical narrative with a synthetic nature was *Hrvati na izmaku srednjega vijeka* [Croats at the End of the Middle Ages] by Matija Mesić, who was, together with Franjo Rački, Šime Ljubić and Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, one of the leading figures in the formation of modern historical scholarship.⁶¹ His work was published in the mid-nineteenth century in Croatian in the journal *Književnik* [The Man of Letters], one of the two major journals that were publishing historical articles. His view on the events before and after the battle is based on the sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century historical works, such as those of Bonfini, Tubero, Istvánffy, Krčelić, and so on. His main goal was to provide an overview of the Croatian-Ottoman wars, focusing on the reaction of the royal court of king Wladislas II after the battle. Matija Mesić was a professional historian and the first rector of the newly founded university of Zagreb. He wanted to present the history of the Croats at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Possible reception of his work was limited, of course, to the circle of the nineteenth-century intellectuals and the educated public, at a time when history was used for the purpose of strengthening national identity and politics. The work of Tadija Smičiklas, also one of the central figures of late nineteenth-century scholarship, should also be interpreted from the perspective of the formation of national identity, especially his narrative entitled *Poviest hrvatska* [Croatian History].⁶² It should be noted that his work was published by the *Matica hrvatska* in a large number of copies, as it was the first modern comprehensive survey of Croatian history. Smičiklas' work underlined the role of Bishop Divnić and his mission at the Roman *curia*, thus exploiting his account of the massive defeat of the Christian army and the annihilation of the population in the area around the site of the battle.

The opus of Vjekoslav Klaić had an even greater impact on the diffusion of the narrative of the battle of Krbava.⁶³ The general idea of his work was to produce an expansive history of the Croats from the Middle Ages up to his time, the end of the nineteenth century. As a professor of general history at the University of Zagreb, he was one of the leading figures of positivist

61 Matija Mesić, *Hrvati na izmaku srednjega vijeka: izabrane rasprave* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Odjel za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 1996), 407–09.

62 Tadija Smičiklas, *Poviest hrvatska*, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1879), 674–77.

63 Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena do svršetka XIX. stoljeća*, vol 3 (Zagreb: L. Hartman, 1899–1904), 189–94.

historiography, and his account of the Krbava battle was intended to explain the role the battle had in the history of the fifteenth-century Kingdom. Klaić gave his opinion about the accuracy and reliability of his sources. Thus, he classified Bonfini's and Tubero's work as not reliable, yet in his assessment a letter of bishop Divnić was reliable. It is important to stress that Klaić emphasized that the battle was the beginning of the disintegration of the Kingdom of Croatia by using the words of Divnić: "this is the first destruction of Croatia, where all the Croatian nobility has perished (*Hec est prima destructio regni Corvatie ibique tota nobilitas corruit Corvatie*)." One of the distinctive features of this publication was that it contained a large number of visual sources, such as a woodcut by Hans Burgkmair, which was originally done for the "Weisskunig," a poetical allegory for Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg.⁶⁴ The strong impact of the woodcut is noticeable in the fact that it depicts the Ottomans in the classical topoi of the barbarians who have been so violent to the enemy that they have cut off the noses of the Christian knights at Krbava Field. The work of Klaić almost immediately sold out, and it acquired a cult status among both scholars and the wider population. It is therefore not surprising that a new edition was issued in the 1980s, although the first edition had been published more than eighty years earlier.

A special place within the historiography of the battle of Krbava goes to Ferdo Šišić, a historian who was active at the turn of the century. Šišić's first work on the battle of Krbava was written with the purpose of commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of the battle. It was published by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts.⁶⁵ Šišić wrote a historical discussion in which for the first time he compared the battle of Krbava with the battle of Kosovo of 1389.⁶⁶ In the appendix, he included the first translation of the account of the aforementioned Ottoman historian Sa'd-ud-din, in all likelihood based on the Hungarian translation, since it was published by the Hungarian Academy under the title *Turkish History* some time earlier. In doing so, he began to publish source material connected with the battle of Krbava. The final result was that he published a critical edition of all available sources on the battle in 1937.⁶⁷ Šišić's work and source publication has served as the basis for all subsequent scholarship.

64 Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, 191.

65 Šišić, *Bitka na Krbavskom polju*, pass.

66 Ibid., 5.

67 Šišić, "Rukovet spomenika," pass.

Twentieth-Century Narratives

In the period of the First Yugoslavia (1918–41), especially after the establishment of the dictatorship of King Alexander I Karađorđević on January 6, 1929, the political climate encouraged the unity of the artificially created Yugoslav nation, that is, the particularities of the South Slavic nations of Croats, Slovenians, Serbs and others were downplayed or denied. The narrative of the Krbava battle once again became rather important in maintaining the national identity of the Croats. Hence, in the first year of the daily newspaper *Hrvatska straža* [Croatian Guard], Petar Grgec, one of the key figures and ideologists of the Croatian Catholic movement, published a work entitled *Žrtve Krbavskog polja. Što o tome kaže povijest* [The Casualties of Krbava Field. What History Tells Us About Them].⁶⁸ Several years later, the same author wrote a popular account of the history of Ban John Karlović of Krbava entitled *Hrvatski Job šesnaestoga vijeka* [Croatian Job of the Sixteenth Century] as a special edition of the series established by the Literary Society of St. Jerome, the main purpose of which was to publish in a popular manner booklets of romanticized histories from the “old Croatian history” for the wider public (at first, for the peasantry). Although the account is based on the life of John Karlović, who was later ban of Croatia, Grgec interprets the legacy of his family as a symbol of the Croatian struggle in the defense of Christianity against the Ottomans. In the booklet, Ban Karlović is compared with the biblical character of Job, because he was referred to by this name on his grave inscription in Remete near Zagreb. Grgec also uses fictional characters to present the story and as a personification of the Croatian people in the form of the young noblewoman Dorothy, the fiancé of a certain Count Perazović (also fictional). The bride-to-be falls down dead when she hears of the defeat at Krbava Field: “Then, when this had heard young Dorothy, her heart was rent with sadness, she fell on the dirty soil of sorrow.”⁶⁹ The price of the book was very low and very acceptable and accessible for a general reader. It should also be stressed that publishing during the period of the dictatorship of King Alexander was very unfriendly to publications of the Croatian opposition, thus giving Grgec greater importance.

Accounts of the battle have also figured in encyclopedias since the period of the First Yugoslavia, with differences in interpretation according to the prevailing

68 Petar Grgec, “Žrtve Krbavskog polja. Što o tome kaže povijest,” *Hrvatska straža* 1 (1929): 1.

69 Grgec, *Hrvatski Job*, 16.

state formation, though essentially consistent from the perspective of their content. Hence, in the *Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka* [National Encyclopadia of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians] the battle of Krbava is presented in connection with the official political view, which proclaimed the unity of South Slavic peoples against “others.”⁷⁰ A parallel is drawn between the battle of Krbava Field (1493) and the battle that took place in Kosovo (1389), which were both great defeats of Christian armies against the Ottomans. The author, Josip Modestin, makes the inaccurate contention that in the early sixteenth century the aforementioned Renaissance poet Mavro Vetranović had connected both battles, as this contention harmonized with and buttressed the political idea of Yugoslav unity.

In the period of World War II, another political system existed in the Independent State of Croatia, a puppet state of the Third Reich, and in this period another encyclopedia was published, or to be precise, a couple of volumes of another encyclopedia were published.⁷¹ Although the volumes were mostly published in that period, the project itself had started earlier and the articles were not directly influenced by fascist ideology. However, the war slowed down the enterprise, and the edition did not reach the letter K (in fact, only five volumes were published, up to the letter E). Yet, there is mention of the battle of Krbava under the entry on Ban Emeric Derencsényi, which gives an account of the contemporary or semi-contemporary sources. In the end, it was not widely read, because after the war the project came to an abrupt halt, as it was designated as a pro-Nazi enterprise by the new communist regime.

In the period of the second, socialist Yugoslavia, *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* [Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia], which was published in 1963, brought a new element into the narrative of the battle of Krbava, since it began from the reference point of the classical Marxist concept of clashes of social classes and struggles of the lower layers of society.⁷² Thus, the author, Lieutenant Colonel Dragoljub Joksimović, interprets the battle of Krbava as an event in which the “peasants fought with axes and hayforks,” and makes only short mention of the detail that numerous prominent members of the Croatian nobility

70 Josip Modestin, “Krbava,” in vol. 2 of *Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka* (Zagreb: Bibliografski zavod, 1928), 502.

71 Stjepan Antoljak, “Ban Derenčin,” in vol. 4 of *Hrvatska enciklopedija* (Zagreb: Hrvatski izdavački bibliografski zavod, 1942), 662–63.

72 Dragoljub Joksimović, “Krbavka bitka 9. rujna 1493,” in vol 5 of *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod FNRJ, 1962), 387–88.

perished as well. In the present-day encyclopedia, *Hrvatska enciklopedija* [Croatian Encyclopedia],⁷³ which was published after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the entry on the Krbava battle is short and offers only a hasty summary of the course of the events and their aftermath, without any political pretensions.⁷⁴

Historiography in the twentieth century has dealt with the battle of Krbava in comprehensive surveys of the history of the historical Croatian lands, usually with interpretations that are adapted to the prevailing political system, whatever it happened to be. In 1916, shortly before the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy, the aforementioned Croatian historian Ferdo Šišić, in addition to his book and source collection on the battle, noted that a survey of Croatian history “is demanded not only by Croatian intelligentsia, but also by Croatian youth, in order to use it as a handbook for studying Croatian history in higher grades of mid-education.” He himself responded to this demand.⁷⁵ The edition was so widely read that it went through two subsequent editions, one in 1920 and one in 1962. Although Šišić gives only a brief account of the battle, it is interesting that he notes that, because of the events that took place during the battle, people in Krbava Field refer to it as “Krvavo polje” [Bloody field]. Meanwhile, in 1953 the first official history of the constitutive countries of the Second Yugoslavia was published as a two-volume edition entitled *Historija naroda Jugoslavije* [The History of the Peoples of Yugoslavia]. It contains a narrative of the battle of Krbava that adhered to contemporaneous movements within both the historiography and the prevailing political situation.⁷⁶ It is also worth noting that it conveys the principles of class struggle and stresses the unity of South Slavic “brotherly nations.”

During the war of Croatian independence (1991–95) following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, there again emerged the need for a revived national narrative and thus the battle of Krbava was employed to strengthen the sense

73 N.N., “Krbavska bitka,” in vol. 6 of *Hrvatska enciklopedija* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod “Miroslav Krleža,” 2004), 238–39.

74 The Croatian encyclopedia is not the first encyclopedic volume to make mention of the battle of Krbava, since the “Hrvatski biografski leksikon” [Croatian Biographical Lexicon], an ongoing project of the Miroslav Krleža Lexicography Institute which was begun approximately ten years before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, i.e., in the early 1980s, briefly describes the course of the events of the battle under the entry on Ban Emeric Derencsényi, without any political implications.

75 Ferdo Šišić, *Pregled povijesti hrvatskoga naroda* (Zagreb: n.p. 1916).

76 *Historija naroda Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1953), 757–59.

of the collective identity of the Croats.⁷⁷ Once again, the anniversary of the battle of Krbava in 1993, this time the five-hundredth, was used to push to the foreground of people's sense of communal identity the events that took place at Krbava Field. A conference was held in Novi Vinodolski, because Udbina, at Krbava Field, was under Serbian occupation at the time. In 1997, the conference proceedings were published in a collective volume, which contains 15 articles on the battle of Krbava from various perspectives, including history, archaeology, the social sciences and, finally, collective memory.⁷⁸

Narratives of the battle of Krbava are also found in surveys of Croatian history by two regular members of the Croatian Academy, both educated in the manner of the school of French *Annales*, Tomislav Raukar⁷⁹ and Franjo Šanjek.⁸⁰ In both of these monographs, since the emphasis is put more on the social aspects of Croatian history, the authors refer only briefly to the battle of Krbava, depicting it without any political connotations.⁸¹

In 2002, when a new bishopric was established in the area of Lika and Krbava (under the joint title of Gospić and Senj), an idea was inspired by a speech and the endeavors of the bishop, Monsignor Mile Bogović, by profession also a historian. The idea was to build a new church in Udbina at Krbava Field

77 At the gathering of Gazimestan in Kosovo in 1989, Slobodan Milošević used the narrative and anniversary of the battle of Kosovo of 1389 while trying to promote an assertive version of Serbian national and collective identity, with emphasis on the unity of the nation against the “others.” Even though the causes and consequences of both battles are not comparable, it is interesting to see how in the 1990s historical events were used to strengthen modern national identities. There are, of course, many other examples.

78 *Krbavska bitka i njezine posljedice*, passim.

79 Tomislav Raukar, *Hrvatsko srednjovjekovlje. Prostor, ljudi, ideje* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu, 1977), 97–99; 479–84.

80 *Povijest Hrvata. Prva knjiga. Srednji vijek*, ed. Franjo Šanjek (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2003), 359–61.

81 The question of the use of narratives of the Krbava battle in school textbooks has already been addressed by Srećko Lipovčan, so we do not discuss it here. Lipovčan's conclusion was that the prevailing ideology influenced the accounts found in school textbooks: “U udžbeničkim su tekstovima vidljive ideologijske intervencije u tumačenju prošlosti, pri čemu je odlučnu ulogu imala i činjenica da li se radilo o školskim knjigama koje su pisane u jugoslavenskim ili hrvatskim državnim okvirima, što je posebno karakteristično za razdoblje nakon 1945. godine” [In the texts published in textbooks ideological interventions in the interpretations of the past are noticeable. In this, the question of whether the school books were written within the Yugoslav or Croatian state formations and framework had a significant role, and this is exceptionally characteristic for the period after 1945]. See more in: Srećko Lipovčan, “Razlozi i posljedice katastrofe 1493. godine. Prikaz Krbavskog boja u srednjoškolskim udžbenicima u Hrvatskoj nakon 1918.”, in vol. 1 of *Identitet Like: Korijeni i razvitak*, ed. Željko Holjevac (Zagreb–Gospić: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2009), 297–322.

consecrated to the “Croatian martyrs.”⁸² Udbina was chosen as a *lieu de mémoire* of the defeat and massacre of the Croatian nobility and the destruction of the medieval Kingdom of Croatia. The initiative was elevated to the national level, since in 2003 the Croatian parliament gave its support to the project. In the end, the church was consecrated in 2011, exactly on the 518th anniversary of the battle of Krbava. Following the parliamentary decision of 2003, a survey of the history of the battle of Krbava by Anđelko Mijatović was published in 2005.⁸³ The book was written in both a scholarly and a more widely accessible manner. It was well-illustrated with depictions of the events and was widely distributed, thus making the narrative of the battle of Krbava Field once again very much present in the public mind.

Conclusions

The battle of the Krbava had a devastating effect on the ability of the Christian army to resist Ottoman incursions and expansion. Numerous Croatian noblemen lost their lives, and the calamity sparked the flight of the population from the surrounding area. Narratives of the battle of Krbava spread immediately after the event. One can trace two versions, an “official” royal version and an “anti-royal” version, which most probably was promoted by the noble family of the Frankapani. The first emphasized the role of the Frankapani and their alleged betrayal, while the second put the blame for the defeat on the military strategy of a royal officer, Ban Emeric Derencsényi of Croatia. The second version was spread by papal envoys, who took the story to the area of the Holy Roman Empire, which is not surprising since the area of the Frankapani was directly threatened and thus required the assistance of the Pope. For this reason, in the period beginning in the sixteenth century and ending in the eighteenth one finds sporadic and not very detailed reports conveyed by foreign and Croatian chronicles, except those connected predominately with the cultural circle of the noble Frankapani family. It is important to emphasize that while the loss of life was great and certainly made a deep impression on people at the time, the battle was hardly regarded as a total catastrophe. Thus, writings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries do not mention the battle at all, and when they do, they offer only a vague account or short mention of the fact that it happened.

82 Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.hrvatski-mucenici.net/2012-09-07-01-34-38/martirologij/1207-medunarodni-znanstveni-skup-o-zrtvama-komunisticke-vladavine.html>.

83 Mijatović, *Bitka na Krbavskom poju*, pass.

The spread of the narrative among the people can be traced directly from the writings of pilgrims and travelers after the battle, who emphasized that they had heard accounts of the battle from people who had witnessed it personally. Folktales in which the battle is the main focus were recorded primarily in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, but since their language has not been sufficiently analyzed by the linguists, it is not possible to claim that they were spread much before they were recorded, though this cannot be disregarded as a possibility either. However, they were recorded and popularized at a moment when the topos of the battle of Krbava became one of the important elements in the formation of the Croatian national identity. At the turn of the century, professional historians, in connection with placing the focus of their research on the battle of Krbava, started to publish all the source material for further research. Within the framework of various Croatian state formations of the twentieth century, narratives of the battle of the Krbava conveyed the prevailing political climate, and scholarship emphasized various factors that were regarded as important at the given moment. The second revival of the narrative appeared during the war of Croatian independence in the 1990s, when once again historical events were used to strengthen national identity of the Croats. Scholarship and conferences were influenced by this, with the climax in the construction of a Church in Udbina at Krbava Field consecrated to the “Croatian martyrs.”

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Appendix 1. The Fight Against the Turks in Croatia – cenotaph of Maximilian I in Hofkirche in Innsbruck (Tyrol), by Alexander Colyn, tabl. 9 (detail)*

* Accessed March 23, 2015, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Reliefs_on_the_Sarcophagus_of_Maximilian#/media/File:Innsbruck_1_339.jpg